

## COLCHESTER SCHOOL DISTRICT

Board of Education Meeting, Special Meeting  
Colchester High School Library

Tuesday, January 9, 2024  
7:00 p.m.

### MINUTES

The Colchester Board of Education held a Special Board Meeting on Tuesday, January 9, 2024. Board members in attendance included Board Chair Lindsey Cox, Directors Nic Longo, Felix Anderson, Laurie Kigonya, Ben Yousey-Hindes, and Student Representative Pheobe Richardson. District administrators included Superintendent Amy Minor, Business and Operations Manager George Trieb, Director of Curriculum Gwen Carmolli, and Director of Student Support Services Carrie Lutz.

#### I. Call to Order

Board Chair Lindsey Cox called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. and led in the Pledge of Allegiance.

#### II. Citizens Participation

None.

#### III. FY'25 Budget Discussion

#### Information

Superintendent Amy Minor provided a recap of student enrollment including tuition students from surrounding towns, and both current and projected class sizes. She highlighted some strengths of the district which included stable enrollment and committed, qualified employees; noting that 82% of teachers in Colchester hold a master's degree. She summarized the comparison of spending per equalized pupil with regional districts, highlighting that Colchester has historically show fiscal restraint and spends considerably less than neighboring districts. Both administrators and board members noted that there are two ways to perceive that data. They recognized that while they aim to lessen the financial burden on taxpayers, they also want to meet the growing needs of students and provide excellent opportunities and learning environments. Director of Curriculum Gwen Carmolli emphasized that low spending does not directly correlate to the district's academic testing data. While they are focused on closing achievement gaps, Colchester students regularly achieve at or above the statewide average and have been showing gains in the past few years in a number of content areas. Turning to needs, Superintendent Minor stated that administrators are focused on closing achievement gaps and increasing behavioral, mental health, and medical support. She cited that the district is monitoring an increasing trend in the number of students eligible for support based on an anxiety, depression, or an ADHD diagnosis. She also showed the increase in the number of families experiencing poverty. In the 2008-09 school year the poverty level was at 23% and last year it was up to 38%. Director of Student Support Services Carrie Lutz noted the current challenge of meeting the needs of new American students and their families. The number of new American students enrolling in the district with little or no English proficiency increased from six students two years ago to 31 students so far this year. When asked for another area of immediate need, Superintendent Minor highlighted 504 data at Colchester Middle School. Students identified with a disability are eligible for a 504 Plan and ideally, plans are managed by employees with specialized training in disability law and with educational knowledge of each disability area.

Currently, 20 of the 39 plans at the middle school are being managed by the school's counselors. No other school counselors in the district oversee 504 case management.

During the fiscal part of the presentation, Superintendent Minor and Business and Operations Manager George Trieb listed the primary expenditures for next year's estimated budget. The 2.5%-3.0% inflation rate is causing upward pressure on non-compensation expenses such as supplies, professional services, transportation, and equipment. They also noted the combined impact of the negotiated compensation agreements and the increase in the statewide healthcare package for employees. The district's working draft budget would generate a residential homestead tax rate increase of 5.00% using the state's new funding formula before the Common Level of Appraisal (CLA) is applied. The announcement by Colchester's CLA, which is set by the state, has become a huge amplifier to the increase in estimated taxes because the town has not been reappraised since 2011. The board discussed the CLA's impact on educational taxes and the process the Town of Colchester needs to complete to reappraise and subsequently get the CLA to a reasonable rate.

Superintendent Amy Minor showed four examples of Act 127's impact to the school budget. The examples were as follows: \$150K in reductions, no reductions and no additions, \$105K in additions to support identified needs, or add \$205K in additions to support identified needs. In all four examples, the estimated tax increase would be 15.50%.

The board had a lengthy discussion about the information presented. Acknowledging that the 15.5% increase would only impact the 30% of Colchester taxpayers that do not qualify for the property tax credit, they ask administrators to calculate the impact for the 70% majority of taxpayers who will pay based on income instead of property value. They questioned if Colchester will still be considered a low spending district using the new funding formula and were told that was likely and that many districts are also seeing double-digit tax increases with Act 127.

Director Yousey-Hindes pointed out the ramifications of being a low spending district while also trying to grow the budget to address achievement gaps and support the most vulnerable children in our community. He stated he was willing to invest more to have better outcomes for students with the biggest needs. The board and district administrators continued the discussion, pointing to additions that have been made in the past few budget cycles like academic interventionists in math and literacy. Superintendent Minor and Director of Curriculum Gwen Caromolli stated since those initiatives are new, it will take time to see outcomes but they are confident they will show gains. Director of Student Support Services Carrie Lutz praised administrators, teachers, and support staff for coming up with ways to support our students with the resources provided. She emphasized that it is a hard task to balance student need with fiscal responsibility but that administrators will always advocate for what is best for students.

Director Longo pointed out that it might be a good year to infuse the budget with the financial resources to take care of the immediate needs outlined in the presentation since the district qualifies for the 5% tax cap and the new funding formula will keep the estimated education tax increase at the same percentage, regardless of how much money was added or removed from the baseline budget. The other board members agreed. Director Anderson prompted further discussion about how decisions made by the board this year could have tax implications for future years. Superintendent stated while that is largely unknown, she does believe this will be a multi-year process and it is likely there will be a sizeable tax increase next year due to the CLA since it will take time for the town to complete the reappraisal. She noted that the CLA impact is not specific to Colchester and many districts are being negatively impacted. Many superintendents, including Ms. Minor have

provided testimony to the legislature and/or written letters to their representatives about how the change in law is impacting tax rates in their communities.

**IV. Adjournment**

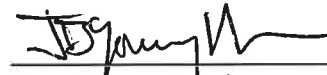
*Director Yousey-Hindes moved to adjourn at 7:56 p.m. The motion passed unanimously.*

Recorder:



Meghan Baule  
Recording Secretary

Board Clerk:



Ben Yousey-Hindes  
Board Clerk

**COLCHESTER SCHOOL DISTRICT**

Board of Education Meeting, Special Meeting  
Colchester High School – Room 114B

Tuesday, January 2, 2024  
8:30 p.m.

**MINUTES**

The Colchester Board of Education held a Special Board Meeting on Tuesday, January 2, 2024. Board members in attendance included Board Chair Lindsey Cox, Directors Nic Longo, Felix Anderson, Laurie Kigonya and Ben Yousey-Hindes. District administrators included Superintendent Amy Minor and and Director of Communication Meghan Baule.

**I. Call to Order**

Board Chair Lindsey Cox called the meeting to order at 8:20 p.m.

**II. Work Session: Facilities**

The board met to continue assessing and planning for work pertaining to the district’s facilities.

**III. Adjournment**

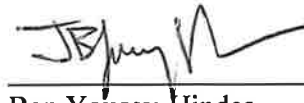
*Director Yousey-Hindes moved to adjourn at 8:45 p.m. The motion passed unanimously.*

Recorder:



Meghan Baule  
Recording Secretary

Board Clerk:



Ben Yousey-Hindes  
Board Clerk