

COLCHESTER SCHOOL DISTRICT

Board of Education Meeting
Colchester High School Media Center

Tuesday, February 6, 2024
7:00 p.m.

MINUTES (General Session)

The Colchester Board of Education held a regular board meeting on Tuesday, February 6, 2024, in the Colchester High School Media Center. Board members in attendance were Board Chair Lindsey Cox, Directors Nic Longo, Ben Yousey-Hindes, Felix Anderson, Laurie Kigonya, and Student Representative Phoebe Richardson. District administrators and employees in attendance included Superintendent Amy Minor, Business and Operations Manager George Trieb, Director of Curriculum Gwen Carmolli, and Director of Student Support Services Carrie Lutz. There were no audience members.

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. Citizen Participation

None.

III. Second and Final Reading of the Animals in the Classroom or on School Property Policy: F29 Action

As explained during the first reading of this policy, the Vermont School Board Association does not require or recommend school districts have a policy on this topic, nor do they have it on their list to consider. District administrators recommended transitioning this policy to a set of procedures.

Director Yousey-Hindes moved to approve the removal of the Animals in the Classroom or on School Property Policy: F29 from the CSD policy manual. The motion passed unanimously.

IV. Second and Final Reading of Harassment of Employees Policy: D12 Action

The opening paragraph was updated to align directly with the Vermont School Board Association's model policy. No other changes were made.

Director Longo moved to approve the second and final reading of Harassment of Employees Policy: D12. The motion passed unanimously.

V. Quarterly Financial Update Information

Business and Operations Manager George Trieb provided an overview of the year-to-date financial report for the period ending December 2023. He summarized that revenue and expenditures are tracking mostly as expected and noted that if the current spending trend continues, the district could expect a surplus of \$634,941. The board asked some clarifying questions about specific line items.

VI. FY'25 Budget Discussion

Information

The board warned the FY'25 budget at the last meeting. Since then, the legislature has signaled that they may be making changes to the law that would impact the tax rate. Superintendent Minor provided an overview of the warned budget and the educational tax components that create the estimated tax rate. She highlighted how the district compares with other regional districts in per-pupil spending, showing that Colchester is consistently one of the lowest-spending districts. She further noted that Colchester taxpayers have averaged an annual tax rate increase of 1.53% over the past decade. She went over the communication plan that is in motion to inform residents about the district's current successes, areas they are working to improve, and how the FY'25 budget will impact taxpayers.

Superintendent Minor provided a legislative update, noting that there have been a lot of meetings between legislators, committees, and associations to share information regarding Act 127, the state's new education funding formula. Legislators have stated there have been unintended consequences from Act 127. They have committed to making amendments to the law that will affect budgets already warned but not yet approved by voters. Ultimately, the House Committee on Ways and Means is considering removing the universal 5% pre-CLA tax cap included initially in Act 127 and instead giving districts an individual-based cent discount. The Committee is also considering removing the 10% per pupil spending cap and subsequently the need for a tax review committee. Nothing is final yet, and Superintendent Minor noted that information continues to evolve, making it challenging to inform the community what they are voting on. To meet the print and mailing deadline for the Annual Report to the Community, the report includes the estimated tax increase as the law is currently written and a disclaimer to let taxpayers know that changes may come. She stated it felt essential to provide a barometer to the community and a link to find up-to-date information in case legislatures pass law changes.

The board discussed how to best inform the community of Colchester's situation and how it differs from some of the narratives being told statewide. They noted how little control the school board and district have over the estimated tax rate this year. The overwhelming majority of the estimated tax increase can be attributed to Colchester's Common Level of Appraisal, which makes up for out-of-date property value appraisals and is not something the district can alter.

The board asked administrators how much would have to be cut from the budget to lower the estimated tax rate. Superintendent Minor stated it would have to be a profound reduction in staffing that would significantly impact students. For example, to get the estimated tax rate from 15% to about 9%, they would look at eliminating 67 teachers - a quarter of the teaching staff and equivalent to seven million dollars. The district is currently right at the recommended class size set through the AOE's Education Quality Standards. Reducing the teaching staff by that much would substantially increase class sizes and not only put the district out of compliance with the AOE but also lower the quality of education provided to children in Colchester. Director Yousey-Hindes noted that Colchester has historically operated already trimmed and been very fiscally conservative, it makes this year challenging because the district does not have extra staff to reduce or extra room to play with in the budget.

VII. Approval of Consent Agenda

Action

The board reviewed the following consent agenda.

CONSENT AGENDA

Board Meeting Date: February 6, 2024

Revised

Licensed Employees (Teacher/Administrator)

Contract Type	First Name	Last Name	Category	Position	FTE/Hours	Building	Agenda Information	Person Replacing	Budgeted	Admin Support
Teacher	Nicole	Hamblet	Resignation	Elementary Teacher	1.0 MBS		Request to End Employment -End of School Year 23/24			

Non-Licensed Employees (Support Staff), Board Approval Required

Contract Type	First Name	Last Name	Category	Position	FTE/Hours	Building	Agenda Information	Person Replacing	Budgeted	Admin Support
Non-Licensed Employees (Support Staff), Informational										
Support Staff	Tyler	Willard	New Hire	Paraeducator	32.5 CHS		Notice of Hire	Open Position		
Support Staff	Linda	Neitzer	New Hire	Food Service	7.0 CHS		Notice of Hire	Andre Jordao		
Support Staff	Andre	Jordao	Termination	Food Service	8.0 CHS		Notice of Termination			
support Staff	Julie	Brigante	New Hire	Food Service	30.0 CHS		Notice of Hire	Open Position		
support Staff	Sidney	Martinez	New Hire	Paraeducator	32.5 CHS		Notice of Hire	Open Position		
support Staff	Melissa	Bushell	Termination	Paraeducator	32.5 PPS		Notice of Termination			
support Staff	Melissa	Payne-Vilmor	New Hire	Administrative Assistant II	40.0 CHS		Notice of Hire	Gabriel Brooks		

Director Kigonya moved to approve the consent agenda as presented. The motion passed unanimously.

VIII. Approval of Meeting Minutes Action
• January 16, 2024 (general)

Director Anderson moved to approve the minutes from the meeting held on January 16, 2024.

IX. Board/Administration Communication, Correspondence, Committee Reports Information

- The district is working to get budget information out to community members. The Annual Report is at the printers and should be mailed to residents next week. The Your Vote Matters video series is being filmed and will be posted over the coming weeks.
- Carmel Quinn was selected as the Vermont Educational Support Staff Professional of the Year, and she has been moved forward as one of the five national finalists.
- At the end of January, the district worked with CESO to engage students, employees, families, and community members in discussing long-term facility needs. It was a successful week, and the district expects to receive a formal report from CESO soon.

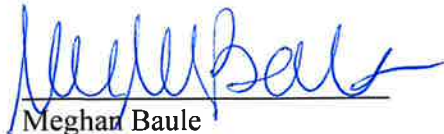
X. Future Agenda Items Information

- FY'25 Budget Discussion
- Continuation of the Policy Review Cycle
- NEASC Report from CHS
- NELMS Report from CMS
- 2024-25 School Calendar

XI. Adjournment

Director Yousey-Hindes moved to adjourn at 7:58 p.m. The motion passed unanimously.

Recorder:



Meghan Baule
Recording Secretary

Board Clerk:



Ben Yousey-Hindes
Board Clerk