



Northbridge Public Schools

Northbridge School Committee

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Northbridge Public Schools School Committee Meeting Agenda Tuesday, March 26, 2024 7:00PM Northbridge High School Media Center

- I. Call to Order (7:00PM)
- II. Pledge of Allegiance
- III. Attendance
 - Jill Leonard Present
 - Jonathan Canoy Present
 - Heather Alden Present
 - Shannon Canoy Present
 - Carl Cowen Present

Also present were Superintendent Amy McKinstry and Director of Business and Finance Melissa Walker.

- IV. Statement of Audio and Video Recording
- V. Statement of Mission:

Northbridge Public Schools is a proud community focused on the education and wellbeing of all students. We recognize each student as an individual, and we provide creative and innovative learning opportunities that encourage them to use their unique voices and personal strengths to achieve success both academically and personally.

- VI. Open Public Hearing for FY25 Budget (7:05)
 - A. FY25 Budget Presentation

Amy and Melissa gave an abbreviated version of the previous presentation. Provided an overview of a 5 year increase in Special Population enrollments and overall decrease in student enrollment. Provided comparisons to the other Blackstone Valley Districts, we are in

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the top two in terms of High Needs and Low Income populations, top four for Students with Disabilities, and in the middle of the group in terms of Students who are English Learners. Special Populations require more money to educate due to the additional support outside of the regular classroom requirements the students need, including additional supplies and staff.

Provided the overview of Boston Public Schools and how they determine allocations of funds per student. They have a base allocation level, plus additions for student grade level, Low Income Status, English Learner Status, Disability severity status, High Risk for Dropping out status, as well as Programmatic Supports. Used this as an example to show the cost differentiation between teaching different students with different needs.

Northbridge only has one cost that is applied to all students in the district, rather than one price per student. Northbridge spends the second lowest per student within the Blackstone Valley, only spending more than Grafton. Grafton only has a Special Population of 31.9%, while Northbridge has a Special Population of 50%.

The Focus of the new Budget is: To maintain the ESSER positions even with the grant going away, because the needs are still there; Maintain a strong academic core at all of the schools; Maintain appropriate levels of support for all of the High Needs students; Develop and Implement a new Strategic Plan with new Initiatives; and to maintain a Safe and Healthy Teaching and Learning environment.

The Challenges the district is facing with the upcoming budget: Financially supporting a new District Strategic Plan; Keeping students in the district rather than going out of district through school choice; The unknown Out of District tuition and transportation costs; and the unknown costs of the upcoming contract negotiations.

In order to keep full level services next year, the budget would increase by 2.99% (\$958,470).

District Revenue: The main part is the Appropriations, which is made up of 2 parts:

Chapter 70 State Aid: \$15,963,421. This is the 12th year in a row that the Chapter 70 aid has only increased by the minimum.

Town Contribution: \$10,358,290. This is an increase of \$315,327.

Total Appropriation increasing by 1.67% (\$432,777), which is the smallest percentage increase and second smallest dollar increase since 2015.

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Grants: \$1,165,701. The district used \$2,088,711 in FY24. ESSER funds are expiring in September of 2024. Many positions have been added from ESSER funds, but the needs for the positions are still there, even without the funds.

Revolvers: \$4,763,567 used to balance the budget while still leaving \$1 million in the accounts to cover any unexpected costs. Additionally, the revolver income comes in over the course of the year, not all at once, so the district cannot commit to spending more than the district is receiving. Additionally, it is not all guaranteed to come in.

District is left with a Budget Gap of \$794,275. The three options the district had to close the gap:

Get an increase of Appropriations. Unlikely as the anticipated appropriation increase was reduced due to education adjacent costs.

Use more Revolver funds. Reduces safety net of \$1 million and will mean future budgets have less Revolver funds available.

Make Budget Reductions: reduce the increase in level services by reducing services. Mainly through cutting positions and personnel.

Budget Reductions: While some cuts were in supplies and small programs across the district, the main cuts came in the reduction of 9.4 Full time positions, the reorganization of some to a decrease of 0.9 Full time positions, and an increase of 1 Full time position (Additional Vice Principal at NES), for an overall decrease of 9.3 Full Time Positions.

Some teacher positions were moved to accommodate different class sizes and needs, while others were cut, increasing class sizes slightly. Restructured Title 1 positions to provide more of the funding and support to NES.

Additional needs for the district that were not proposed in the Budget:

Athletic Trainer for the district

Middle School Guidance Counselor

Separate Full Time Dean of Students and Vocational Coordinator at high school

Culinary/Home Economics classes for the Middle and High Schools.

With the adjustments, the budget is \$32,337,452. This is a reduction from level services and the budget increase is 0.78% (\$250,749) compared to FY24.

The FY25 Budget is made up of:

Salaries: 69.7%

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Special Education (including out of district tuition and transportation): 14.2%

In-District Transportation: 5.5%

Utilities: 3.2%

Athletics: 1.3%

Custodial/Maintenance: 1.2%

Title 1: 1%

Technology: 0.9%

All other: 2.8%

The Appropriation is only about 80% of the Budget, and the gap between the Appropriation and the Budget only gets larger every year. Over the past 10 years, the Budget has increased even though, excepting for the addition of the positions from the ESSER Grant, the district has been operating at Level or Reduced Services.

Compared to the other districts in the Blackstone Valley, Northbridge spends the lowest of all the districts, only spending 1% over the minimum required by law. All of the other towns fund their districts between 8% and 40% above the minimum required.

The state is requiring that the district increase the Net school spending by \$793,101 in FY25 (\$57K from Chapter 70, \$735K from Town Contribution). However, the district's appropriation is only going up by \$432K, which is \$360K less than the requirement.

Projected that additional funds will be spent on indirect expenses, such as School Unemployment and School Property Liability insurance premiums. If the town does not spend the minimum required amount on education, it could result in non-approval of the municipality tax rate, enforcement action by the Attorney General, or loss of State Aid.

Projections for FY26, the district will only be able to spend \$2,113,445 from reserves in order to keep the \$1 Million in reserve. This is about \$2.7 Million lower than FY25, and that amount will be a deficit in the budget, before factoring in any increases in expenditure and appropriations.

Having the appropriations increase by an additional 10% over the minimum required would cover the \$2.7 Million. Additionally, savings from the rest of FY24 and any from FY25 will lessen the gap in funding, but will not be enough to erase it.

School Committee will be voting on the Budget April 9, 2024, and the Budget will be presented to the town at the Annual Spring Town Meeting May 7, 2024.

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B. Public Comment on Budget

Heather Alden thanked the Admin for their diligence in accommodating the bleak looking budget. Stated that the town and community needed to step up with funding the schools, because only a 1% over minimum, when some of Northbridge's sister communities spend up to 47% over minimum, is very disappointing. As the number of high needs students is increasing and not going down, we need to be able to fund their services. If we cannot meet their services, those students going out of district or to therapeutic schools could break the district. Tax increase is what needs to happen in the town. She will look into what it takes to do an Override in Northbridge, because the current funding system is not sustainable. The hopes of savings from one year funding the next year is a bandage. What is the town going to do, long term, to fix the issues in the school's funding? She does not want a bare bones education for her children in this town, which is what the budget deficit is heading towards. The Schools, Students, Staff, and Community deserve better. Being \$2,000 below on per-pupil expenditure funding is unacceptable, and the town and community need to figure out how to fund the Northbridge Public Schools.

C. Close Public Hearing (7:25)

VII. Student Representative Report (7:25PM)

Unified track starts this week. Mr. Kozik is still looking for new players. Several High School Spring Sports have also started. Prom tickets are still being sold through March 28 and are available to Juniors and Seniors. As Class 2026 President, wanted to inform everyone that the Volleyball fundraiser is back on April 9. More information will be in the RAMs report, emails from Admin, and on Social Media. S.A.D.D. is having their "Random Acts of Kindness Fundraiser". Students can pay \$2 to write a friendly message to someone and have it delivered April 4 with a bag of chips as a surprise.

This week, students had the opportunity and guidance during math classes to choose classes for next year on Infinite Campus. Enrollment will be open for the next two weeks. New classes offered include Woodshop, 21st century communications, and Italian 1, amongst others. Internships will also be coming back to the high school with local businesses. Match 26, Sophomores took first of two ELA MCAS tests. March 27 will have the second test. Math MCAS is in May. There will be no School Friday.

VIII. Superintendent's Report (7:30PM)

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Congratulate the High School Drama department, crew, and band for their production of High School Musical. It was a new group of students and it was wonderful, if smaller, production overall. They had a packed house.

At NES, the PTA has provided the students with some NASA approved safety glasses for a school wide viewing of the solar eclipse on April 8. They are also sponsoring the Harlem Wizards to come. They are doing a School Assembly on April 2, and will be playing about the Northbridge Rams staff on May 5 at the field house at NHS.

Welcoming back Mr. Hoffman, coming off a 4 week recovery from knee surgery.

At Middle School, Unified basketball started last week. They have 2 games. Last week they went to the Unified Jamboree in Webster. 18 students at NMS participated, both buddies and students. Emily Flauto, the NMS Project 351 ambassador, is conducting a cradle to crayons drive as part of her service project. Donation boxes have been set up to take anything new or gently used from newborn to adult medium sized. Socks and undergarments can only be new. The boxes will be there until April 5. Scholastic Book Fair is happening between April 8 and April 10 in the Middle School Library. Looking for Parent Volunteers for both the fair and for other school wide events.

April 3 is an Early Release Day. High School Band and Chorus will have Spring Concert that night at 7PM in the Auditorium.

April 2 is NHS Honors Society induction at 5PM. Third Quarter Ends that day too. Grades will be available to students and families the following week.

April 9 Blackstone Valley superintendents are hosting a job fair at Milford Highschool. Shared open positions with nearly 30 colleges in the area.

April 10 Celebration of Learning and Belonging combined with Evening of the Arts.

IX. Presentations (7:35 PM)

A. Technology Department Update

Thanked the Committee for supporting the article submitted to the town for the Tech department. Upgrading the Wifi access points in the Middle School and High School will help support the increase of devices and the ever-changing requirements of the devices. In past years, were able to update the network infrastructure at the High School and Middle School, allowing for the updated access points. For 2nd year in a row, awarded a cyber security awareness grant. First trainings came out recently, and more are to come.

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The Tech department was able to purchase 180 new Chromebooks for next year. 3 additional carts will go to the high school and 6 will go to the middle school. This will mean that almost every classroom will have a cart next year. Will use ESSer funds to purchase additional Smartboards, 4 going to the Middle School and 1 to the High School. Have selected a vendor to come and fix the sound system in the NHS auditorium over April Break. Over the summer, will be updating all of the computers from Windows 10 to Windows 11, starting with the High School and Middle School, then the Elementary School, then the Admin building. New website for the district will be launching July 1st. While each school will have its own page, the layout will be the same for each of the schools, and all of their calendars will be synched to the district calendar. The website has an in-page translation, allowing the entire website to be translated. There will also be an app for phones and smart devices. It is also far more streamlined to allow all updates to be seen in one place. The documents will also be cleaned and up to date, so that when people search for information, it is the most up to date information.

X. Consent Agenda (8:00PM)

A. School Committee Minutes

B. Warrant 24-37 3/14/2024 \$234,613.16

C. Warrant 24-38 3/21/2024 \$200,795.73

A motion was made by Heather Alden to approve the Consent Agenda. It was seconded by Jonathan Canoy.

Jill Leonard	Yes
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Heather Alden	Yes
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Shannon Canoy	Yes
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Jonathan Canoy	Yes
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Carl Cowen	Yes
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The motion was passed with a vote of 5-0

XI. Discussion (8:05PM)

A. FY25 Superintendent's Recommended Budget

Chairperson Shannon Canoy stated that this is the last time the School Committee will be able to speak about the proposed budget before the vote next Meeting. He polled everyone

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to see if they had anything to add that had not already been said the previous week or at the end of the Open Public Hearing.

Before the vote at the next meeting, Amy and Melissa will be hosting meetings to educate anyone who wants to come on how the budget is made and what goes into making it and voice their concerns.

Heather Alden stated that people are not looking at the numbers and are not wanting to act until they are in crisis mode, and that is a place no one should want to be.

Shannon Canoy said after looking at the report and what we spend compared to what other towns spend over the required minimum, along with how many of our students are choicing out of district, it raises the question as to why students are not staying here, but school choicing to other districts.

XII. Public Comment (8:30 PM)

XIII. Action

1. 2024-2025 School Calendar

A suggestion was presented that, in the future, when the calendar is still in draft state and has not been approved, that it should have a watermark or clear wording stating that it is only a draft and not the final calendar so that people cannot take it out of context.

A motion was made by Heather Alden to approve the School Calendar. It was seconded by Jonathan Canoy.

Jill Leonard	Yes
Heather Alden	Yes
Shannon Canoy	Yes
Jonathan Canoy	Yes
Carl Cowen	Yes

The motion was passed with a vote of 5-0

XIV. Information

A. School Attending Reports

Shows where the students who live in-district are when attending out of district. Includes out of district public schools, homeschool students, in-state private/parochial, out of state private/parochial, and a summary.

Homeschool initially increased right after COVID, but it has leveled off. It is mostly families in small Homeschool consortiums.

XV. Adjournment (8:45 PM)

A motion was made by Heather Alden to adjourn. It was seconded by Jonathan Canoy.

Jill Leonard	Yes
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Heather Alden	Yes
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Shannon Canoy	Yes
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Jonathan Canoy	Yes
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Carl Cowen	Yes
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The motion was passed with a vote of 5-0

Note: The listing of matters are those reasonably anticipated by the Chair which may be discussed at the meeting. Not all items listed may in fact be discussed and other items not listed may also be brought up for discussion to the extent permitted by law. Also, the timeframe for each topic is a general guideline and may not be strictly adhered to.

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