

**Mansfield School Committee Meeting
Minutes for Tuesday, April 11, 2023
In Person & Virtual Meeting using GoToWebinar**

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An **Open Meeting** of the Mansfield School Committee was held in person and virtually on Tuesday, April 11, 2023. The open meeting session was called to order by Chair Kiera O'Neil at 6:00 p.m.

MASSACHUSETTS

Members Present:

Kiera O'Neil, Chair
Lynn Cavicchi, Vice Chair
(at 6:05 pm)
Lauren Scher
Jenn Walsh
Vivian Webster (at 6:08 pm)

Administration Present:

Teresa Murphy, Superintendent
Michael Connolly, Assistant Superintendent (Teaching / Learning)
Ed Donoghue, Assistant Superintendent (Finance/ Operations)

Members Absent:

All members attended in person; roll call votes are not required tonight.

Three members were present to start the meeting: Kiera O'Neil, Jenn Walsh and Lauren Scher. Chair O'Neil called for a motion to open the Public Hearing on the FY24 School Budget.

Motion to open the Public Hearing by Jenn Walsh / Lauren Scher at 6:03 p.m.

Motion Carries 3 - 0

Assistant Superintendent Donoghue and Superintendent Murphy reviewed the latest budget for FY24 including a timeline of the amounts removed from the budget over the past 6 months. The new budget amount is \$57,601,994 or a 3.14% increase over last year. Kiera O'Neil asked if there would be any impact due to the recent 20% electric rate decreases that were voted on last night. Ed Donoghue noted that we may be able to adjust the budget and it may be that the town will use less free cash. This is something that will be discussed over the next few days.

Assistant Superintendent Donoghue also noted that we were fortunate this year that we are in a down cycle for textbooks and chromebooks. We do not need a lot of replacements this year. The Central Services budget is down since we plan to use a large portion of the Pay-N-Ride Revolving fund to offset the Connolly Bus contract.

On the budget reconciliation page, it was noted that \$300,818 is moved back into our budget due to grants that have ended. Reductions of \$889,000 are due to retirements, and some cuts across the district. Ed emphasized that it is our job to minimize the impact of cuts and the district has been working diligently to manage the cuts. The tuition regional assessment increased due to a new building effort at Bristol County Agricultural School. Lauren Scher asked if we had a good sense of the circuit breaker reimbursement. Ed feels that we should continue to receive approximately 75% of our expenses as in years past.

Ed ended his presentation by addressing a letter received by Mansfield citizens concerning the budget. Most of their concerns pertain to the town side. Throughout this presentation Ed has addressed items specific to the schools. Kiera O'Neil asked if there is any impact to our Capital Expenditures. We will discuss this after the public hearing.

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Superintendent Teresa Murphy noted that there are no plans to reduce any extracurricular activities. Regarding staffing concerns expressed in the letter, we are not looking at sizeable increases in class size. Our reductions are manageable based on the budget and the decreasing enrollment. We are very happy with our elementary school class sizes and plan to keep them at approximately the same number. There are approximately 4 classes at 23 students, 1 class at 24 students and 61 classes with 18 – 22 students with the smaller amounts at kindergarten. During our post COVID return to school, the district added interventionists to assist with the learning lost. We have found significant benefit with these positions and plan to keep these as part of our budget. At all schools, our staffing will be responsible and manageable. Am I satisfied? Any Superintendent would love to have many positions on site. However, we are responsible for fiscal management and thus comfortable with what we are proposing. Kiera reiterated that the School Committee charge is to be an advocate for schools and be fiscally responsible. Lynn Cavicchi noted we have seen the enrollment bubble come and go. We already have seen responsible staff reductions (example the reduction of 4 teams per grade to 3 teams per grade at the Qualters Middle School.) We must continue to have the ability to shift resources long term and we need to have a budget that provides us with this flexibility.

Chair O'Neil asked if there are any citizens comments regarding the public hearing.

Steve Schoonveld, 21 Newton Street:

Mr. Schoonveld noted through a math problem that there will be a reduction of less than 3% of staff. He felt that this was manageable. He asked how the Pay-N-Ride funds will be used. Ed noted that we receive approximately 10% of the total bus contract funds from Pay-N-Ride and it does go toward the contract. We are in the first year of a new contract. Typically, our commitment from this fund is \$200,000 - \$300,000 but this year we will be using an additional amount which still leaves us with more to use next year. Mr. Schoonveld asked if we anticipate further cuts for next year. Superintendent Murphy noted that as soon as this budget is finalized we begin looking at next year's budget. One thing we are trying to do to build enrollment is to expand school choice. Steve asked if we are concerned with next year's potential financial cliff. Kiera noted that in her 12 years on the School Committee she has seen it all. There have been easy and difficult years. Every year is different and presents its own set of challenges which will be addressed when the time comes. We have also worked very hard in recent years to obtain as much state funding as possible. Teresa Murphy had a recent conversation with Senator Feeney and he hinted at possible new funding opportunities to help cover the increases in special education costs. If this funding happens, it will be very beneficial for us. Lauren Scher noted it is important to start thinking about next year's budget as soon as possible. Create a plan, timeline and recognize potential challenges. Lynn Cavicchi noted that there is already a budget subcommittee planned for the end of April to discuss next year.

Steve asked if this budget was built with padding. Teresa explained that we start each year with a zero-based budget then build up based on school and district needs. There is not a lot of padding in our budgets. Lauren noted that she appreciates the collaboration of each school as at times school are asked to allow the district to shift funds from one school to another.

Chair O'Neil called for a motion to close the Public Hearing on the FY24 School Budget.

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Motion to close the Public Hearing by Jenn Walsh / Lauren Scher
Motion Carries 5 - 0

Public Speak: None

Communications:

Letter from a group of citizens who have concerns and questions regarding the town budget. Items pertaining to the schools were addressed during the public hearing.

Letter from a parent expressing extreme disappointment that the senior parade will no longer be held. This is a high school administration decision and will be directed to the staff at MHS. Superintendent Murphy noted that Principal Russ Booth is already scheduled to call the parent.

Letter from a parent expressing concern about student behavior (received just prior to the start of the meeting.) She felt that it has become extremely poor and concerning. A group of parent volunteers would like to work with administration. This is not under School Committee purview; Kiera has asked that Teresa or Mike reach out to the parent.

Administrative Reports:

Teresa Murphy: This morning Teresa attended the MHS model senate program, now in its 54th year. Towns participating with Mansfield included Foxboro, Oliver Ames (Easton), and Attleboro. It was very refreshing to see these students who were well dressed; well spoken and enthusiastic about the senate process. The group broke up into sub committees to propose, document and present bill. Tomorrow these bills will be brought to the main "senate committee" to see which "bills" can be passed. Thank you to Ben Caisse who runs the model senate in Mansfield.

Teresa took this time to discuss her decision to close school this past Friday due to low attendance. It was NOT what Teresa wanted to do. She monitored planned staff absences daily and by late Tuesday, the number of staff requesting time off was too much for the district to handle. In the past our office assistants and administrators worked extremely hard in the weeks leading up to this Friday in order to provide the best coverage possible. Those staff members who are in the building on this Friday work hard to cover for others. Unfortunately, this year we have had a lot of difficulty finding subs on ANY day. The number of staff expected to be out had grown beyond any prior school year (110 unfilled positions by Tuesday night) Teresa did emphasize that it is the employees' right to take the day off as a religious holiday due to Good Friday. Teresa understands the challenges of child care as well as the feelings and emotions regarding a religious holiday. This was not a religious decision. It was deemed a day of low attendance (staff and projected for students.) Safety is her first priority. A few weeks ago, we had a hoax active shooter all. It would be unacceptable to our staff and students to try to manage an emergency of kind with an extremely low number of staff on campus. Teresa did receive several emails regarding her decision which were mixed with frustration and appreciation. Teresa would like the committee to reconsider this day going forward.

Vivian Webster noted that Teresa did the best she could even though it was an unpopular decision. She suggested that we look at our district policies and contracts to avoid a notice only 48 hours ahead of time. She asked if having a half day would help. Teresa noted that we tried to go this

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route in the past but it was not effective. Kiera noted that Teresa is never afraid of deciding on what is best for our students. In the past the district was able to “hold it together” on Good Friday. Lynn Cavicchi noted that student attendance on this day is always far worse at the high school and improves from QMS through Robinson. Parents typically make sure their younger children attend on this day.

Regarding the Educational Space study, Teresa reported good progress at last weeks meeting. Overall, the initial comments from the draft study indicate we have well maintained buildings. Roland Green must be looked at which is no surprise. Teresa had hoped that we could move the preschool to Robinson but the study has proved we cannot do so. The modulars at QMS are in bad shape as we knew. The science labs at the high school need work as we expected but appears to be easier in scope than we thought. We will present a final report to the committee in May or June.

Michael Connolly: In May, the district will administer the annual perception survey. We are required to complete this survey as an expectation of DESE, civil rights compliance, various grants and the Student Opportunities Act. Additionally, it provides us with information that is very beneficial to us. Families will be notified the week of May 8th through school newsletters. Staff will be surveyed in May and June. Grade 6 – 12 students will be surveyed in school on May 18th and 19th but are given the opportunity to opt out if they so choose. It has been a few years since we have done this survey. In 2020 and 2021 we were heavily surveying due to COVID. Last year, we administered the equity perception survey. We anticipate that it will take approximately 10 minutes to complete. Responses are anonymous. Vivian Webster noted that with surveys some students do not feel comfortable choosing a race as they may be a multi race family. Mike noted that we do have the option of multi-race and participants can also “check all that apply.” Lauren asked if we question families on their access to district information. Do they feel that they get what they need? Mike had not included this question but is willing to add it. Vivian stated that parents don’t always open emails from school because they are too busy so other alternatives are needed. Lauren thought the question could be posed as “Do I know who to reach out to if I need information? What is the best communication method to reach me?”

Ed Donoghue: Although CIP has been approved and moved forward to the town, he has been in constant touch with Kevin Dumas and Barry LaCasse to prioritize based on the most recent information on funding. Right now it does not make sense to bring the full playground project forward. However, we will work this summer to remove the oil tank and purchase all of the playground equipment. We will go out to bid and then place the completion of the project on the fall town meeting. The district recommends the following for this spring: keep the special education mini bus, put paving on hold, focus only on the MHS elevator rather than all district elevators, complete an architectural study on the gym floor with plans to move ahead with the full gym project at another time. Lynn asked for this information be put in writing. Kiera and Vivian are not available for Thursday’s CIP meeting so Jenn and Lauren will go in their place.

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Approval of Minutes:

Date	1st	2nd	Discuss Y/N	Vote	Roll Call /comments
Open Meeting 03-28-23	Jenn Walsh	Lauren Scher	None	4-0-1	Lynn was absent and abstained.
Executive Session 03-28-23	Jenn Walsh	Lauren Scher	Correct motion which erroneously includes Lynn	4-0-1	Lynn abstained
Tri-Board Meeting 03-29-23	Jenn Walsh	Lauren Scher	None	5-0	

Old Business: None

New Business:

Consideration of QMS Field Trip to Canobie Lake Park:

Principal David McGovern presented the details of this trip. He is very happy to see its return after several years without it. This is a big middle school trip which has evolved from a science/physics trip to a social/emotional skill development opportunity. The 7th grade teachers have worked very hard at building the trip as an important skill development. It should be noted that Canobie has since changed the date on us so the new date is June 21st with no rain date. Dave intends to use the gift fund to pay for the bus cost with hopes to bring the total cost down to approximately \$30 per student. Scholarship money is also available as needed. It is a big volunteer effort on our staff as they plan for this then stay late on the day of the trip as we do not get back to Mansfield until dinner time. Kiera is very excited to see the return of this trip.

Motion to approve the June 21th trip to Salem, NH by Jenn Walsh / Lauren Scher

Motion Carries 5-0

Consideration of the revised FY24 School Budget:

This vote will reflect the recent changes that were presented and discussed during the public hearing.

Motion to approve the revised FY24 School Budget of \$57,601,994 by Jenn Walsh / Lauren Scher

Motion Carries 4-0-1 with Vivian Webster abstaining.

Consideration of School Choice Spots for 2023-24:

Superintendent Murphy discussed the proposed numbers of 10 spots for grade 6, 20 spots for grade 9 and 10 spots for grade 10. At the last meeting, the committee asked us to consider kindergarten and elementary. Teresa and Ed feel that the classroom sizes are well balanced now and we do not want to add. With the kindergarten projected enrollment for next year we are looking at cutting one classroom. In order to keep that position we would need at least 20-25 new enrollments with school choice and we do not anticipate that happening. Teresa is open to this request for the future.

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A question was also posed regarding the behaviors at QMS and whether or not new students should be added. We do not see a concern with the behavior component and feel that the extra students will benefit the enrollment numbers as there is a big drop from this year's grade 6 (268) to next year's class (241.)

Vivian is comfortable with our proposal, adding that it will improve equity and the feeling of belonging for our students. It will help to fill empty seats. Lauren asked if we typically see a big drop from grade 5 to grade 6 (perhaps students attending private school?) No, this is not usually the case. Lynn asked about the timing for scheduling classes so Teresa reviewed the timeline. Applications are due by May 12th, Completion of paperwork due by June 9. High School meetings with guidance counselors will occur the week of August 21st. Middle school scheduling will occur in late August. Lynn asked that we make sure to include information on JumpStart 6th grade when we register those students.

Motion to approve school choice openings for 2023-24 as follows:
Grade 6: 10; Grade 9: 20; Grade 10: 10 by Jenn Walsh / Lauren Scher
Motion Carries 5-0

The applications will be opened and the website will be updated tomorrow.

School Committee Business:

Discussion on upcoming meeting dates.

Other- Items not anticipated by the Chair 48 hours prior to this meeting: None

Documents Referenced:

FY24 Revised Budget
Field Trip documents
School Choice / Enrollment numbers

Motion to adjourn: At 8:02 p.m., Kiera O'Neil asked for a motion to adjourn to executive session **Under Exception No. 3.** To discuss strategy with respect to collective bargaining or litigation if an open meeting may have a detrimental effect on the bargaining or litigating position of the public body and the chair so declares

Motion to enter into executive session and not return to open session by Jenn Walsh / Lauren Scher at 8:02 p.m.

Roll Call Vote:

Lynn Cavicchi	aye
Jenn Walsh	aye
Kiera O'Neil	aye
Vivian Webster	aye
Lauren Scher	aye

Motion Carries 5 - 0

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Respectfully Submitted,
Diane Nugent, Administrative Assistant to
Superintendent & School Committee