



## SCHOOL COMMITTEE

### BUSINESS MEETING OPEN SESSION MINUTES Draft *December 6, 2022*

<b>Meeting:</b>	School Committee
<b>Date:</b>	December 6, 2022
<b>Location:</b>	MERMHS Learning Commons and WebEx
<b>Attendees:</b>	Pamela Beaudoin, Superintendent Avi Urbas, Director of Finance Theresa Whitman, Chairperson Jake Foster Matt Harrington Kate Koch-Sundquist Anna Lin Mitchell Erica Spencer
<b>Absent:</b>	Chris Reed
<b>Guests:</b>	
<b>Recorded by:</b>	Maria Schmidt
<b>Link to Reports and Presentations</b>	<a href="https://www.mersd.org/domain/818">https://www.mersd.org/domain/818</a>

**A. Call to Order** – Ms. Whitman called the School Committee Business meeting to order at 6:08 p.m.

- 1) Public Comment** – Ms. Whitman advised participants that policies for public participation are found in section BEDH of the policy menu and are limited to three minutes per person. Mr. Davis Bradford of 128 Old Essex Road spoke as the treasurer of the Friends of Manchester Essex Performing Arts, the local non-profit advocating for the performing arts in our community. Mr. Bradford expressed the group's hope that the district will create an Arts Director position for the 2023-2024 school year. Among the roles that the director could fill are to: help set district goals in the performing arts; ensure space and equipment for productions; coordinate year-end awards; assist with scheduling to ensure maximum enrollment; advocate for the middle school program, including scheduling that allows students to continue with

[Type here]

both chorus and band; management of equipment and space across the three campuses; and provide regular and proactive communication to our community. Their recent survey of students and community members demonstrated community support for the position. Mr. Bradford stated that most districts have an art director.

- 2) **Student Report** – Diego Sanson: Mr. Sanson raved about the recent high school musical production of Mama Mia. He said it has been particularly impressive to watch his peers progress from ensemble roles when younger to holding leads this year. He also discussed the opening of winter sports and shared insight into a few clubs: Reefing Club, led by Mr. Novak, is all about the setup and maintenance of aquariums. Students are learning a lot about the intricacies and the science behind a successful habitat. The Science Team was able to compete, in-person, at North Andover. They regularly bring in guest speakers, including college STEM students and local adults working in the sciences. Mr. Sanson was particularly grateful for the insight from current college students on their path into the STEM fields, noting that there is not a single, linear roadmap to finding a place in the field. The local HOSA chapter (Future Health Care Professionals of America) was awarded a grant last year thanks to the work of MERHS alum Lucas Shan. They also bring in health care professionals to share insight, and the club will be organizing an upcoming blood drive. Mr. Sanson reiterated how lucky our community is to have so many local professionals in the STEM and health fields who are willing to connect with our student organizations.

- 3) **Chairman's Report** – Ms. Whitman attended the most recent student advisory meeting and participated in walk-throughs of the Essex Elementary and Middle School buildings. A tour of Memorial Elementary is pending and a time will be set up for all School Committee members to walk through.

Mr. Harrington read the following excerpt from the School Committee Operating Protocol: Recognize that authority rests only with majority decisions of the Committee and make no independent commitments or take any independent actions that may compromise the Committee as a whole.

4) **Consent Agenda** –

- Acceptance of Warrants: AP Vouchers: V1022 and V1023
- Out of State Travel
- Minutes for approval: *November 15, 2022*

*Ms. Koch-Sundquist moved to approve the Consent Agenda; Mr. Harrington seconded the motion.*

Discussion: Superintendent Beaudoin presented approval requests for out-of-state travel for two proposed high school trips this year, one to France and the other to England, expected to run during April vacation. Mr. Foster asked if the trips are typically tied to the curriculum. The superintendent clarified that, while there is some connection to material provided, it is not linked to one class. It is more an opportunity to travel. Ms. Spencer commented that in her experience

travel has been linked to the foreign language programs, with students journeying to French or Spanish speaking countries. Superintendent Beaudoin stated that the trips have been approved by Principal Puglisi and are linked to the foreign language and English literature programs. However, the trip is not part of the curriculum. Approval from the School Committee grants the tour company, EF Tours, permission to solicit trip participants at MERHS. MERSD staff are chaperones. Mr. Foster asked if the district ensures that kids that cannot afford the expense are still able to attend. Superintendent Beaudoin replied that there has not been an issue with this in the past, particularly as this trip is not part of the curriculum. However, the district has a process for any programs that are self-selecting for helping families that come forward. Ms. Mitchell asked if the SC normally votes on issues of out of state travel and received an affirmative response. Superintendent Beaudoin clarified that we are only voting to grant the tour company permission to solicit participants. The SC provides its approval as there is an assumption of liability. Mr. Foster stated that he would appreciate seeing more of the school side of the trip, versus the tour company side. The superintendent clarified that although the trip has curriculum connections, it is not designed to be part of the curriculum. Mr. Harrington stated that by endorsing the trip, the SC assumes some level of liability. Superintendent Beaudoin stated that the MERSD code of conduct will apply to participants while on the trip and violation could result in being sent home early. The SC would be made aware of this occurrence. Although the trip is educational, it is vacation-based.

*Mr. Foster moved to amend the motion to separate approval of out-of-state travel from the vote on the warrants. Ms. Whitman seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.*

*Ms. Whitman moved to approve the warrants without the out-of-state travel approval. Mr. Harrington seconded the motion.*

Discussion: Ms. Spencer asked for information about the Van Loan School. Mr. Urbas stated that MERSD engages in a fellowship project with Endicott's Van Loan Division of Professional Studies. Fellows are in the process of obtaining a master's degree. They can be assigned to the classroom in place of a teaching assistant. This program affords the students experience and provides the district with highly trained professionals at a significant cost savings to the district, both in salary and in unpaid benefits. They are hired as contracted services at \$18K per year. Ms. Koch-Sundquist asked about the DESE circuit reimbursement program for special education expenses and how that would show up on the vouchers given that some expenses are labeled "out-of-district" (OOD) and others have other reasons. Mr. Urbas clarified that reasons for OOD are not listed in the vouchers report. All items that qualify for the program can be submitted for reimbursement. Ms. Koch-Sundquist asked if the district is usually reimbursed for expenses labeled "per legal agreement." Superintendent Beaudoin replied that is likely not the case because it is usually a cost-share circumstance.

*The motion carried unanimously.*

*Ms. Whitman moved to pass the out-of-state travel request. Mr. Harrington seconded the motion. Mr. Foster stated that he is uncomfortable taking on any liability for a program that may not have a tie to the curriculum and is not proactive in helping students that require financial*

*assistance. The vote was five in favor and one opposed, with Mr. Foster voting against. The motion carried.*

## **5) Sub-Committee Reports**

- **Elementary Facilities/MSBC Sub-Committee** (Theresa Whitman/Matt Harrington) – Ms. Whitman reported that the sub-committee has not met since the last SC meeting. Superintendent Beaudoin noted that the new Memorial Elementary is finishing on-time and under budget. Mr. Urbas updated the committee that they are finalizing turf field replacement bid specs for release in one to two weeks. Recent analyses of Brook Street field usage was sent to the town for consideration in the determination of cost splitting between the two entities. Jason Waldron coordinated with our athletic director, Cami Molinare, and Cheryl Marshall of MBTS Parks & Recreation on usage analysis. Factors included both which entity has the field booked at a given time and which entity has first right of refusal at a given time. The analysis revealed a fairly even split between the town and the school district. Highland Field is the sole responsibility of the district. Once bids are in, Mr. Urbas will share them with the SC. Of the two locations, Highland Field has more near-term needs. Work on both fields will strain the reserve funds.

Discussion: Mr. Foster asked for an update on when the final Habeeb Report will be presented. Mr. Urbas said the goal is to have it completed by the end of December.

- **Finance Sub-Committee** (Anna Linn Mitchell/Theresa Whitman) – Ms. Whitman stated that the Finance sub-committee had a collaboration meeting with the town boards and examined the upcoming timing for looking at EES, the middle/high school, and the field replacement. The details of the finance subcommittee meeting will be covered in further detail tonight.
- **Policy/Communication Sub-Committee** (Erica Spencer/Jake Foster) – Ms. Spencer reported that the sub-committee did not meet and that they will post-pone the second read of the MASC Financial Policy Update.
- **Negotiation Team Sub-Committee** (Kate Koch-Sundquist/Chris Reed) – Ms. Koch-Sundquist reported that the next meeting would be the following day and that progress continues.

- 6) **Superintendent's Report** – Superintendent Beaudoin shared that the middle school has revived its Green Team program and will be featured in an upcoming article in The Cricket. The high school Green Team recently placed third in the region and won a small grant from Planet Aid for their collection efforts. In addition, Superintendent Beaudoin praised the Essex community walkabout that happened just before Thanksgiving and the return of beloved traditions.

- 7) **Continued Business** – FY 24 Tentative Budget presentation and discussion of FY 24 preliminary budget and timeline. Superintendent Beaudoin stated that the current

presentation provides an outlook of where the FY 24 budget will land. Although the numbers presented are sound based on currently available data, they will need to be updated as more concrete numbers are obtained.

The district works to build the budget to support programs and create a stable and predictable spending and assessment growth rate from which apportionment is factored. Growth at 3.5 percent is the target for any given year. Historically, the operational budget is developed to provide level services. This means providing the same program scope, class size, course offerings, and services from one year to the next. It is possible to require additional staff in a special education program to meet increased need for small group or one-to-one assistance. To reduce general education staffing, an approximately 20 student-decrease in a particular grade level is needed. Even within level services, the district continues to grow its programs and look to make increased efficiencies. Spending Growth is the increase in spending per year. Assessment Growth is the bill passed to the towns after removing other revenue. Fluctuation in enrollment by each town impacts apportionment to each community. The apportionment split is based on the formula defined in the Regional Agreement. How each town meets this obligation is up to them. Reference to the 2.5 percent levy limit is referring to Proposition 2 ½ that legally limits the amount that taxes can go up without a required town approval vote. Ms. Whitman encouraged all SC members to be cognizant of the work and meetings of their town's finance committee. Mr. Urbas stated that the levy limit is 2.5% plus any development of new properties, called new growth. The towns may decide to stay at 2.5.

**Budget Goals:** In creating a budget, Superintendent Beaudoin said the district strives to maintain educational quality, support strategic goals, and align to multi-year budget goals. All goals do not have to have a price tag. The district strives to re-organize to invest in new ideas. For example, the current IRWL (Intensive Reading and Written Language) program for students with dyslexia was seeded through a state community innovation grant. This program avoided out of district placements for these students and is now paying for itself. Managing class size is another budget priority. Maintaining small class size has been a consistent priority. With specialty programs, there is the need to decide if access to courses outweighs fiscal necessities. The district is also seeing an increase in diversity of the student body, particularly as regards mental health. We are seeing student needs broaden beyond reading, writing, etc. This will necessitate moving general education investments to meet student needs in other areas. Consequently, although the total population is decreasing, staffing needs are not diminishing. Finally, budget goals must meet unfunded local, state, and federal mandates while controlling growth. Ms. Mitchell asked for insight into the "multi-year budget goals." Superintendent Beaudoin stated that the district tries to project and track future needs and investments and uses a model designed by Mr. Urbas. Ms. Mitchell asked for it to be shared with the SC and asked if SC class size guidelines are set in stone and how they compare to other towns. Superintendent Beaudoin replied that size bench-marks precede her appointment to superintendent. However, they are an informal guideline, not set by the state. Ms. Mitchell asked if it might be time to re-

examine the guideline because it affects the budget. Ms. Whitman stated that would be done through SC policy work. Superintendent Beaudoin recommended looking to NESDEC (New England School Development Council) for comparison guidance, if needed. Ms. Mitchell asked for additional information about serving diverse students and stated that she would like to see Chinese offered in the language department, in line with what she sees in other districts. Superintendent Beaudoin stated that student interest drives elective course selection. Pre-Covid, adding a section of Mandarin was explored, including online options. However, there was not enough student interest to drive it forward. In examining this kind of change, we have to examine whether it is a curriculum or enrichment issue. To include another language in our curriculum, K-12, would be a job for the curriculum director when world languages come up in the curriculum cycle and would include exploring the foreign language approach of other districts. In the past, our small size has limited some of our aspirations. Regarding how we have diversified our program to meet increased student diversity, Superintendent Beaudoin stated that the district has engaged in a multi-year transition from a guidance to an adjustment counseling approach so that they can support student emotional needs.

Budget architecture is divided into two categories.

The Capital Budget includes debt service for the Middle/High School and Memorial Elementary projects. By town vote, it is excluded from prop 2 ½ limits. It is a known, pre-fixed, multi-year payment for both towns and structured to decline each year.

The Operating Budget is divided into investment and program enhancements, preventative spending and common practices, and required spending. Ms. Spencer asked for clarification regarding the term “managing enrollment” and asked if it is associated with the enrollment decline seen between middle school and high school as students opt for private institutions. Superintendent Beaudoin stated that enrollment decline is demographic. The largest contributor to decline is not an exit to private school. It is largely about students moving in or out of the district. The exit to private school holds fairly steady over time. The large bubble of students is now moving out of high school. We have retired out staff and are not replacing them. The middle school has physical building constraints that make it more challenging to reconfigure staff. Mr. Harrington asked about how enrollment numbers are estimated each year. Superintendent Beaudoin replied that census data provides a ballpark estimate and that incoming numbers are more solid by February. Ms. Spencer stated that the private school exodus impacts apportionment. Superintendent Beaudoin replied that she believes the solution to private school attrition lies in a different area. She also stated apportionment is cyclical; six years ago the positions were reversed. Critical components of the current budget include right sizing staffing and eliminating use of reserves as an income source. Reduction of four FTE positions is expected to be met through attrition of retiring staff. The tentative budget does not include MERSD reserves as a revenue source. Instead, these monies will be ear-marked for one-time planned capital expenditures (including the turf field replacements), maintaining our

bond rating, and funding the EES feasibility study. The current budget projections yield a deficit of \$756K between spending and revenue. This gap will need to be covered by cuts at the district level or new funding from the towns. The proposed budget does not include reinstatements, (including the late bus and terminated programs like elementary school Spanish), stabilization contributions (capital fund dedicated to meeting long-term capital needs), or reserve replenishment for funds used between FY20-23. Ms. Mitchell asked how the personnel cuts would be managed without attrition and from where they would come. These positions would need to come from other areas, most likely core classes.

Operating Budget Overview: Mr. Urbas underlined the impact of health insurance as the largest cost driver in the FY 24 gap with preliminary health insurance growth projected at 12 percent. In addition, out of district student placements (OOD) are anticipated to rise by \$300K, due to the state's increase in allowable program rates, and can vary from anticipated costs if students move into district with high needs. Currently, district expenses are offset by Circuit Breaker reimbursements. Drivers of the operating budget include staff compensation, health insurance and non-META pension, and OOD tuition and transportation. We are currently negotiating a new contract with the Manchester Essex Teachers' Association for FY24-26. The proposed budget includes estimates of cost of living and other adjustments for META and non-META staff. These estimates will be updated following negotiation completions. Our health broker, USI Benefits, recommends budgeting for a 12% increase in expense due to the inflationary economy. Basic utilization is tracking well and we could see savings if the final percentage is lower. Systemically, this is an area whose growth rate is far out-pacing our levy limit guideline. OOD expenses are driven not only by the state-approved 14% growth rate for private tuition but also by the driver shortage for OOD transportation. Projections for the FY24 budget are up 146% since FY21. The Circuit Breaker reimbursement program, which pays for expenses in the previous year, will offset expenses and is anticipated to top \$750K this year. In-district special education programs continue to save the district \$1.8 million per year, serving 61 students. The remaining students have more significant needs. Ms. Spencer asked about the impact of transportation on Circuit Breaker previously. Mr. Urbas emphasized the sharp increase in transportation costs due to driver shortage. Circuit Breaker now allows for transportation costs to be included. Those costs have increased 145% over three years. In order to meet requirements, transportation services must be skilled at recruiting and must maintain a stable of substitute drivers to meet staffing gaps and changing school needs. Mr. Urbas stated that it would be a complex operation to take on ourselves.

FY 24 Budget Overview has a tentative operating budget of \$30.14 million, with a 4.21% spending increase from FY 23. Because MERSD reserve funds have been removed as a revenue source, the assessment to towns would increase 6.53%. Absent a revenue correction for FY24, MERSD would need to make minimum of \$75K in cuts to bring assessments back to 3.5% target level.

Budget Highlights: Revenue – Non-assessment revenue includes Chapter 70 income growth of \$60 per pupil. Route consolidation for transportation is expected to result in a transportation level-aid award with FY 23, and School Choice is expected to remain flat.

Ms. Mitchell asked whether the multi-year budget plan includes no longer using reserve funds or is it a reduction in use per year. Superintendent Beaudoin said that the policy had originally been not to use reserve funds and there had been extensive debate about making an exception that could snowball. That is where the district finds itself now. Although MERSD still lacks a best policy of not using reserves, that is the intent, and the multi-year model is trying to move away from it. Ms. Whitman asked, as we make yearly OPEB contributions, at what point do we hit a place that we can draw from that fund. Mr. Urbas responded money is set aside for cost growth and existing balance sheet liability. Full-funding could be 25 years. However, there are some recent downward trends in cost that mean we could look at using funds to pay current year retiree health care, because that it is what it is set aside for. Ms. Whitman expressed her concern regarding a lack of policy around that issue, and Superintendent Beaudoin expressed that we may be approaching a timeframe for starting those discussions. She stressed the necessity of it going to support retiree health and the district's goals, being mindful of its intended use. Ms. Koch-Sundquist asked about how reserve funds are usually used. Mr. Urbas replied that they are earmarked for one-time capital investments, like the replacement of the turf fields currently pending. We are also learning that a healthy reserve fund contributes to more favorable lending rates, and we want to have good practices particularly as we look to borrow for the Essex project in 12-18 months. Ms. Spencer asked whether the 6.53% assessment increase would carry into future years. Mr. Urbas clarified that it would only be for this year. After plugging the hole, future year assessments should grow in-step. Mr. Harrington asked about the length of the bus contract and for insight into the rise in utilities expenses. Mr. Urbas said that the contract for bus transportation is three years. The growing utility rates are reflective of the war in the Ukraine and the current inflationary climate. The 6.7% growth of non-personnel expenses is primarily utilities. Ms. Mitchell asked about the apportionment split between Manchester and Essex. Mr. Urbas stated that the preliminary projection is 63% Manchester/ 37% Essex. Ms. Mitchell asked when final numbers would be placed into the budget template, and Mr. Urbas said mid-January.

Financial Reserves Update: The total \$3.09 million estimated FY22 ending balance includes School Choice monies, the Stabilization fund, E&D, and facilities rental. There are no plans to spend the school choice reserves in FY23. The stabilization fund had an initial balance of \$970K generated from interest income on the Memorial School bond funds awaiting deployment. These funds were committed to capital improvement projects and used to fund the EES playground, EES Technology, security enhancements at EES and MSHS, the Habeeb facilities status report, and the Gale contract for turf field design. Remaining funds are fully committed through summer 2023. Reserve funds are available to fund the replacement of turf, near-term



facilities issues as highlighted in the Habeeb report, and may be needed without a revenue correction for FY24.

**The Challenge:** Superintendent Beaudoin summarized the challenge facing the district. The cost of level services grows at an average of 3.5-4%, faster than the 2.5% levy limit. This creates a recurring budget cycle of cutting to meet the budget number, resulting in a cycle of extreme need every seven to ten year necessitating significant program reduction or the need for an override. MERSD must determine the path forward. Without an income correction from the towns, that would mean additional reserves depletion; a combination of reserves use plus program cuts; or all program cuts. The district is seeking direction from the SC. Should we prepare a budget that reduces us to 3.5% or below. Instead, should the budget ask be expanded to consider open items? Should we consider funding a stabilization account and replenishing reserves?

**Next Steps:** Public input will be taken at two upcoming SC budget hearings. Through January, the budget will be fine-tuned. The finalized budget will be presented at the February SC meeting. The district administration is looking to the School Committee for direction in how to handle the conversation with the public.

**Discussion:** Ms. Whitman stated that while there has to be a correction, the SC could vote to support different approaches. She suggested that the viewpoint of the SC would inform the town partners ahead of the budget hearing on December 14. Ms. Koch-Sundquist stated that gap has snowballed and the district cannot absorb it on its own while maintaining programs. Ms. Spencer added that there is the additional concern, given the current state of the building facilities in Essex and the MS/HS that reserves will be required in the near-term to meet those needs. Ms. Whitman pointed out that, while many communities throughout the commonwealth asked the towns to assist with steep covid-related expenses, MERSD absorbed unfunded costs as a district. Mr. Harrington stated that asking the towns to fund the correction is the right thing to do. Cuts are last on his list and he would advocate for reinstatement of programs like the elementary language program. Mr. Foster echoed the sentiments of his colleagues. Further, he emphasized the importance of asking the community for input. He stressed the importance of communicating the district's story and its successes, challenges, and needs. He advocated for crafting this story before others did so for us. Ms. Mitchell spoke of the need to understand the perspective of the townspeople and asked how the towns have recently been forced to use their own reserves. She wondered about their current appetite for the ask. Ms. Whitman stated that there has been dialogue with the town boards. She attends collaboration meetings. Her reports out to the SC are the process for sharing insight into town boards. Mr. Foster asked for clarification about the purpose of the public budget hearing, as it seems that we are mainly looking for the town leadership's input. Ms. Whitman stressed that policy-wise the hearing is for the entire public but it has tended to be the case that it is the forum for feedback from town leadership. Ms. Koch-Sundquist stressed that it is important for leadership to hear from community members at that

time. Mr. Foster shared that he has attended these hearings before joining the SC and found it hard to contribute as a community member because the numbers do not have meaning. Mr. Foster suggested re-framing the conversation as level services versus cut services versus growth services and fleshing out what each would look like as a budget. Superintendent Beaudoin said that it is not until the January 24 meeting when we would consider the three scenarios, but that decisions tonight would inform what goes into those three scenarios. Mr. Harrington stated that he would like to see the cut-services proposal. Ms. Whitman stated that use of reserves is not sustainable and that she would like to see the cuts package, without reserve fund usage, carried forward over three and five years. She asked if anyone is in favor of using reserve funds. Ms. Koch-Sundquist emphasized that her opposition to reserve use includes the need for these funds to be available for facilities issues outlined in the Habeeb report. She asked how these issues would be funded, for example if the boiler failed in Essex, without reserves. Superintendent Beaudoin said that the mechanism would be to go to a special town meeting to ask for the funding. Mr. Urbas confirmed that it would require a town meeting vote and referendum. Ms. Whitman stated that she is prioritizing three “bucket” items: reinstatement to fully fund small capital lines, stabilization contribution, and reserves replenishment. She feels that the reserve fund is the lowest priority when asking the town for so much. Mr. Harrington stated that stabilization is a practical priority and that he also supports reinstatement of programs because the best schools have the best programs. Ms. Koch-Sundquist asked that members are mindful that we are a regional district. While speaking to each communities desires, she does not want to foster the sense that one community is holding the other back. For priorities, Ms. Koch-Sundquist emphasized stabilization. Ms. Spencer echoed Mr. Harrington’s sentiment that the best schools have the best programs and stated that the benefits of strong schools positively affect property values and pride of community. She prioritized reinstatement. Ms. Whitman raised the idea that the conversation about re-instatement could be broader to outline the specifics of re-instatement. Ms. Koch-Sundquist said that foreign language is a hot item and a tangible way to talk about cuts. If re-instating the elementary foreign language program is under consideration, she asked if the district would also be looking at implementing the most effective model rather than just hiring back a teacher. Superintendent Beaudoin stated that while there was a lot of emotion around the language program, there was not necessarily a lot of evidence for the strength of the program. Foreign language is in cycle for curriculum review. Reinstatement would not have to mean putting back the exact same program model. Ms. Mitchell said that if a key audience at the budget hearing is the community, a list of affected programs may push people to think about what is important to them. The superintendent agreed, but stated that discussing specific programs would be done at the January 24 meeting. The first hearing is a big picture presentation, and the audience is primarily those heavily invested budget wise. Ms. Whitman asked if the SC should have questions for the community. The superintendent suggested reading the room and, if there are many parents in attendance, surveying them about growth. What is on their mind when thinking about building forward? Mr. Foster stressed that it is not about the thing we cut but about the nature of the program we are trying to move toward. That brings us back to the

Strategic Plan. He stressed the necessity of looking at which programs help the district to achieve the vision of the graduate. He is interested in framing this as how we get excellent education and outcomes for our students. Superintendent Beaudoin said that she was hearing two different avenues that the SC would like to pursue – identifying things that would be cut or talking in broad concepts about investment. Ms. Koch-Sundquist stated that there are not many programs that remain to be cut. She mentioned that although language was cut, it is not required by the state. Mr. Foster made a point of clarification that while there are eight frameworks, there are few requirements. For instance, music is not *required* by the state. The superintendent stated that we are talking about best practices. Superintendent Beaudoin expressed that the SC has big strategy decisions to make. The group needs to decide whom the target audience is and determine whether they favor a broad outreach beyond town boards to the community. Ms. Whitman said that her sense, from the collaboration meetings, of where the towns are is that they are not surprised by the current school district budget situation. Both communities are facing significant financial pressures and are looking at how to absorb this ask while waiting to see what the final numbers will be. Essex was clear that they have worked to maintain flexibility for meeting this challenge. Ms. Whitman proposed that the upcoming hearing be targeted toward the town boards and that January would be a good time to focus on the general population. Mr. Foster stated that as a new board member entering during a unique ask, he has felt challenged, but that he now has a growing sense of where the collaboration is. He stated it would be helpful to understand where the tipping point would be for the towns. Superintendent Beaudoin stated that at town meeting, the SC lead from each town (Ms. Whitman in Essex and Mr. Reed in Manchester) have three minutes each to present the position of the School Committee. Then a spokesperson from each board will speak, hopefully to offer their endorsement. This endorsement is critical to our success. Mrs. Whitman recommended that SC members reach out to town board members with questions and then arrive at the budget hearing with questions. Mr. Foster asked about how we are presenting the budget story. Superintendent Beaudoin outlined the budget story as communicating 1) How the budget is built, 2) Key variables, 3) What the implications are on our deficit and, 4) What direction we will take to balance the budget. Ms. Mitchell asked about the multiyear plan used by the district. Superintendent Beaudoin clarified that the district uses a long-term budget model, not a plan, used to predict future needs and investments. Mr. Urbas stated a three to five year projection could help us to see what a FY24 deficit would look like going forward and said it may be possible to incorporate it into the January work. Further discussion explored the difference between the ask and “the challenge” as presented by Superintendent Beaudoin. She clarified that the items listed are those completely under the control of the SC and will be doing additional presentation work to reflect the SC’s input on the presentation.

## **8) School Committee Comment - none**

## **9) Adjourn**

*Mr. Harrington moved to adjourn the meeting; Ms. Spencer seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.*

### **School Committee Future Meetings**

- December 14, 2022 Budget Hearing
- December 20, 2022
- January 10, 2023