

RSU 54/MSAD 54
Educational Policy/Program Committee
Minutes
March 18 and March 25, 2025
6:00PM
Skowhegan Area High School - Library

March 18, 2025

MEMBERS PRESENT: Sarah Bunker, Jeannie Conley, Valerie Coulombe, Karyn Curran, Peggy Lovejoy, Amy Rouse and Michelle Taylor

ALSO PRESENT: Jon Moody, Mark Hatch, Jason Bellerose, Zachary Longyear, David Dorr, Christy Johnson, Deidre Mitchell, Myla Kreider, Rob Rodrigue, Erin Madore, Dan Frey, Lynda Quinn and Melannie Keister

The Superintendent reviewed the individual budgets for Regular Instruction, Somerset Career and Technical Center Instruction, Extra & Co-Curricular Activities, and School Administration. Mr. Moody shared that this is a status quo budget which means that it is maintaining the programs we have, and it does not contain new programming. Areas like supplies are essentially flat. Increased costs in the budget are predominantly the result of negotiated salaries and benefits, increases to contracted services, utilities, fuel, and other fixed costs that have gone up both regionally and nationally. The largest increase to the overall budget is due to increases in CTE and Debt Service which are both pass through items that are fully funded by the state and do not impact the local taxpayers.

The Superintendent presented the first draft of a Status Quo Budget. The total budget as presented was \$51,365,445 which is up just under 5.07%. The majority of the \$2,479,237 budget increase has no impact on local taxpayers as it is comprised of non-local funds. Budget increases include \$867,937 for the new school bond, and \$435,952 for CTE programming, both of which (\$1,520,452) have no impact to local taxes as they represent non-local state dollars. The budget includes \$958,785 in additional spending that has an impact locally; this increase represents a 1.942% increase from the prior year. The Superintendent explained

that the district has been incredibly fortunate to receive additional state funding for the new school and CTE, but that because those are dedicated funding streams, the funding formula requires this to be included in the overall budget calculation (hence the 5.07% overall budget increase). He noted that it will be imperative that the district help voters understand that the budget increase without those funds is 1.942%. Finally, the Superintendent reviewed the Board's effort to keep the local impact down over the past six or seven years, where the District's local impact to towns has been just over 2%, significantly below inflation. He noted that this impact is not felt equally as each community's valuation is set by the state and as a result, some towns have had more significant increases and others have had very minimal increases.

The Superintendent reminded the Committee that like the current budget year, the proposed budget for FY26 has no impact (\$0), from the new school project, and thanked our local community fundraisers as well as Maine's Congressional Delegation including Senator Collins, Senator King and Congressman Golden, who each supported the federal CDS grant of 1.94 Million dollars that the district was awarded in the spring of 2024.

The Committee asked questions about sections of the budget and discussed areas of the budget that increased or were reduced. The Superintendent indicated that the budget as presented includes \$1,233,466 in reductions from the original budget reviewed by the Board in February.

The Committee discussed health insurance, which is flat in the current budget. The District anticipates FY26 health insurance rates to be released in early April.

The Committee will meet again on March 25 to continue reviewing the FY26 budget.

March 25, 2025

MEMBERS PRESENT: Karyn Curran, Sarah Bunker, Jeannie Conley, Valerie Coulombe, Michelle Kelso, Michael Lambke, Peggy Lovejoy, Amy Rouse, Michelle Taylor, Wayne Wofford

ALSO PRESENT: Lynda Quinn, Olivia Huff, Jon Moody, Mark Hatch, Renee Stevens, Erica Thompson, Melannie Keister, Zach Longyear, Rob Rodrigue, Jeremy Lehan, Leigh Hawes, Julian Payne

Discussion of Title IX:

The Committee discussed the current Federal and State laws that impact Title IX. Committee members shared a desire to ensure district students were safe and that the district was following Federal law. Superintendent Moody shared that legal counsel has reviewed the district's policies and currently the district is not in violation of any state or federal laws. The Committee discussed safety concerns around potential disparities that may exist between female athletes if they compete with transgender athletes. Committee members also discussed the idea of equity and fairness in sports. The Committee discussed the need for and implication of, taking a perceived preventative action now and what that might mean if that action is in violation of state law - including potential legal liability, the impact to students and mixed messages that could be perceived, and the potential impact of forfeiting competitions as a result of the Maine Principals Association rules. The Committee agreed that it was important for all students to be safe and to be protected from harm, but felt that since the issue was playing out in both the courts and through state legislation, that it was prudent to revisit the topic at a future program and policy meeting in June.

The Superintendent highlighted the updated budget numbers including the Board's effort to utilize fund balance, increased revenues and significant cuts to reduce the local-only impact of the budget to 1.891%. Mr. Moody reviewed the increased costs from SCTC and the Margaret Chase Smith Community School Bond (\$1,520,452) had no impact on the local budget as it was 100% state funded. He shared that the new school actually provided cost savings as a result of efficiencies gained by moving staff and students from four schools into one. The Superintendent asked the Committee if they supported a Board Workshop on April 15th to review the overall budget and the impact of health insurance (expected out the week of April 7th); the Committee supported the idea of a workshop.

Mr. Moody reviewed the individual budgets for special education and student and staff support. Mr. Moody shared that budget supplies are flat and that cost increases are a result of negotiated salaries and benefits as well as several unfunded state mandates including a mandated increase to support staff salaries (125% of minimum wage for educational technicians) as well as the introduction of mandated state paid family medical leave.

Mr. Lehan shared the Adult Education budget, which is a separate warrant article from the district budget, is up \$10,000 locally. He explained that the Adult Education budget itself is up over \$50,000 but is offset by significant grants and state and federal dollars for workforce options like expanded CDL training which the program has been able to provide to the community for free. Director Lehan shared that he has seen increases in Adult High School Completion resulting in many community members receiving their diplomas and is a revenue for the program. Mr. Lehan shared that the funding formula for Adult Education is based on spending, and as a result he anticipates increased state funding for the program for next year. Mr. Lehan shared that he has met with area districts and towns to request funding from those towns to support adult education.

The Committee asked questions and discussed the budget. The Superintendent reiterated that the budget was called “Draft Status Quo Budget” for a reason and should mandated health increases significantly increase the local impact he anticipates looking at significant additional cuts to reduce the budget.

Superintendent Moody proposed that the full Board next meet in a budget workshop on April 15th to discuss the impact of health insurance and provide guidance on additional cuts ahead of an anticipated budget approval on April 17th. The Superintendent indicated he would share this proposal with Support Services at their next meeting on April 3rd.