



Northbridge Public Schools

Northbridge School Committee

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Heather Alden, halden@nps.org, Jonathan Canoy, jcanoy@nps.org, Carl Cowen,
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Northbridge Public Schools School Committee Meeting Agenda Tuesday, March 12, 2024 7:00PM Northbridge High School Media Center

- I. Call to Order (7:00PM)
- II. Pledge of Allegiance
- III. Attendance
- IV. Statement of Audio and Video Recording
- V. Statement of Mission
- VI. Mr. Mac's Energy Bus

Chairperson Shannon Canoy moved this to before the Reports as there were a lot of family members for the students present. Bob McLaughlin (5th Grade) and Neil Oullette (5th Grade Inclusion Teacher) are the two staff supervisors of the club. All of the students introduced themselves to the Committee:

The students who presented to the School Committee:

Dani Germain
Chloe Clemente
Maddie Townsend
Allan Bacon
Ava Frye
Malia Gibson
Trevor Gordon
Isabell Grandmaison
Trevor Greenberg
Ayla Johnson
Riley Koopman
Nora Madera
Eli Miche

Mr. McLaughlin led the introduction with the axion: Life is hard. But after reading the book *The Energy Bus* by Jon Gordon about 6 years ago, he decided to change it to: Life is hard,

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but worth changing to make it better. A Teacher in the Culture club at NES brought in *The Energy Bus for Kids*, and Mr. McLaughlin read it and presented it to his homeroom. After listening, the students wanted to be the pioneers of bringing this idea and culture to the rest of the school and district. They wanted to build a positive culture based around being the driver of your own bus.

The five rules of The Energy Bus:

Create a Positive Vision

Fuel your bus with Positive Energy

No Bullies allowed on your bus

Love your passengers

Enjoy your ride

The students wanted to inspire the principals, teachers, and other students in the district with the rules and tools to help create a greater school culture, both personal and communal. Be able to face the reality of situations, but be able to work together and make the best decisions for those involved.

Everyone creates learning for our students in the district, whether it is academic or social emotional. Anyone who enters the building will impact someone's life, whether it is one person or hundreds. This learning is centered around: Creating a Positive Attitude, making meaningful relationships with everyone around, shared collaboration and resources, creating a shared common language, creating more positive and connected buildings in the district. The students started by making and hanging Energy Bus posters around the school in Early November. Around Mid-December, the 5th Grade Team invited all of the NES Staff to learn and join the Energy Bus. While all of the teachers were given 'tickets' to ride the bus, they were told to not just be a rider, but to be their own driver.

They are still in the early stages of bringing the Energy Bus to the Middle School.

After introducing all of the teachers to the Energy Bus, the 5th graders decided they wanted to invite the rest of the students in the elementary school. Each filled out ticket is added to the large posters. They have 2 completely full in the hallway and one more that is almost full in Mr. McLaughlin's room. They are waiting for the pre-school tickets. Everyone at the Elementary School, including all students and all staff, are part of the Energy Bus.

They even got to have a Zoom meeting with the author of *The Energy Bus for Schools*. The students, and Mr. McLaughlin, want to keep the Bus going and have it be a continuing thing in the district, even when they have graduated high school, and beyond.

To help demonstrate the culture they want to see: Mr. McLaughlin had everyone turn to their neighbors to their right and left and introduce themselves as if it was the first time you have seen them in a long time and you have something wonderful to tell them about yourself. Explained that this helped everyone feel welcome.

The students who started the Energy Bus at the Elementary School stood to present to the School Committee and invite them to join the Energy Bus. The students presented the rules of the Energy Bus to the Committee and had them all agree to it. They sang a song about the Energy Bus.

The future that Mr. McLaughlin sees includes Assemblies, Turning the schools into Energy Bus schools with resources and trainings for staff, Providing Easy to use and turnkey activities for all of the students of various grade levels, and with the continuation of the program, and easily sustainable culture.

The same students have done this presentation to all of the Elementary School students, over 900 students total. Additionally, a Teacher from Hopkinton visited one of the PK rooms before vacation and saw the bouquet of flowers they had provided each of the Teachers with in alignment with the Energy Bus. Has brought the Energy Busa back to Hopkinton, and the teachers there are currently engaged in reading *The Energy Bus* to try and implement it there.

The School Committee was presented with Tickets to put their names on.

VII. Student Representative Report (7:05PM)

Last weekend DECA and Student Council had their overnight field trips. DECA students collaborated and competed with over 4000 students from around the state. Spring Season of sports will be starting next week. The Mr. NHS Competition is March 14th at 7PM, the School Store will also be open at that time. The Drama Club will be having performances of “High School Musical” on March 21st, 22nd, and 23rd, all shows will be at 7PM. Tickets can be purchased during school or at the door.

Juniors will be able to take the SATs on April 11th.

Prom will be April 27th from 5:30PM to 9:30PM

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The deadline for the Freshman class Krispy Kream fundraiser is March 15. Donuts are \$15 a dozen.

VIII. Superintendent's Report (7:10PM)

Last week, 13 Students from the National Art Honors society went to Framingham State to see the art department there and have a print of their woodcutting printed. The woodcutting is the size of one of the Library cork boards, and the students had been working on this for months. Two prints were made. One will be on display at an art show in Framingham in May, and one will be on display in the lobby of the High School soon. Commends both the two art teachers and all of the students on their diligence.

There is still room for groups and individuals of the community who want to rent a table at the Celebration of Learning and Belonging. The Celebration is April 10th, and the Festival of Arts is also that night. Any community group can reach out to Jill Healy in the Central Administration Office to sign up.

Spring Sports Family ID are opening up for sign ups for Middle School Baseball and Softball, Boys and Girls Track, and Unified Sports. Basketball, Best buddies, and Families can still go to the NPS Athletics Page.

March 15th, 5 students from the Middle School and 5 students from the High School will be going to Sutton High School for the Connections Conference. It is a Social Justice Event that explore issues of bias, privilege, and prejudice. There are over 40 different events. Last year, there were over 700 students attending from around Massachusetts.

The district has gained access to the "Screenagers" project. It gives 12 month access to the 3 documentary films of the project that talk about: Vaping, substance abuse, Social media, internet addiction, anxiety, depression, and Peer Pressure. In addition to the films, there is also curriculum activities and clips based on the films to help introduce the topics and talk over them with students. The hope it to be able to share the 3rd film some time in April, the one focused on vaping, with both the students during the school day, and with the parents afterschool. Amy had a parent contact her recently asking about what the district is doing about vaping and vaping diversion. All of this has been paid with grant funding.

Strategic planning starts tomorrow with the Leadership Team. On March 21st will be the Strategic Planning around the "Portrait of a Graduate" which will also include parents. The Strategic Plan will be presented to the School Committee on May 14th to be approved. Amy

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said she would send the meeting calendar to the School Committee, should any of them wish to join.

IX. Presentations (7:15 PM)

A. Mr. Mac's Energy Bus

Moved to Earlier

B. FY2025 Superintendent's Proposed Budget

Moved to after Consent Agenda.

X. Consent Agenda (7:45PM)

A. School Committee Minutes 2-27-2024

B. Warrant 24-35 2/29/2024 \$ 76,390.71

C. Warrant 24-36 3/07/2024 \$281,947.99

A motion was made by Heather Alden to approve the Consent Agenda. 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

XI. Discussion (7:50PM)

A. FY 25 Budget Presentation

The budget was developed to support the Academic and Social/Emotional needs of the students in the district, as well as providing a safe and healthy learning environment. For the upcoming year, there is some staff reduction, but there has been reduced enrollment, so this should not have a major impact on the educational program. Overall, there will be a slight increase in class sizes next year due to the reduction in teachers, but these numbers will be well within the average from around the state within each grade.

Melissa and Amy showed an enrollment trend compared to student age children in the district over the last 10 years. There has been a decrease, leading to this year having had about 750 students less than the district did 10 years ago. However, there are also less student age children, approximately 650, in the district than there were 10 years ago. The

difference is representing students going to private school, tech school, out of district, and homeschool.

They showed a trend over the past 5 years of special populations in the district to see the growth. English Language Learners has increased by +27, Students with Disabilities has increased by +71, Students from Low Income families has increased by +136, and other High Needs students has increased by +145. However, there has been an overall decrease in Total Enrollment by -134. 50% of our students over the past few years have been identified as being High Needs students.

Compared to the other Blackstone Valley schools, we are in the top 4 (in terms of student body percentage) of Students with Disabilities, top 2 of Students from Low Income households, and top 2 of overall percentage of Students with High Needs. For the last two only Milford has a higher percentage, but they are also over twice our size.

It costs more money to educate students who are in these categories than those who are not, and the percentage of students in the district who fall into a high needs category is only growing each year. Additionally, the lower age groups are often more expensive to educate, as more teachers, personnel, and supplies are needed as those are high needs for milestones. Additionally, 9th and 10th graders are a higher cost, as they are more likely to drop out and more supports are required to keep them in school and caught up.

Currently, Boston Public Schools have a weighted funding system for determining how expensive it is to teach a student, which they base their funding on: Base cost per student + Grade level + Low income Status, + English language learner + Students with Disabilities + High Risk of Drop-Out + Programmatic Supports. (Example: 8th grader who is low income: Expenditure is \$11,513.00 / Kindergartener who is low income with high severity of both vision impairment and intellectual disability: Expenditure is \$37,763.00)

Compared to other districts in our area for In District Per Pupil Expense, only Grafton has a lower amount, but their percentage of High Needs students is far lower as well. Grafton has 31.9% High needs students compared to our 50%. Research shows that Higher spending per pupil leads to higher achievement. Based on the needs of our students and the amount of our population higher needs students make up, we are being funded too low per student.

Focus of the Budget:

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Maintaining positions that were funded through ERRER grants, even though the ESSER Grant is ending, the social support and special educational needs are still there.

Keep a strong Core academic program that focuses on providing students with engaging and varied learning opportunities to set them up for success beyond school.

Maintain appropriate levels of support for students with high needs.

Maintain a staffing level that will allow us to develop and implement new strategic goals and initiatives aligned to a new vision for our NPS students.

Ensure a safe and healthy teaching environment in NPS.

Challenges faced with the new budget:

Financially supporting the goals of a new Strategic Plan and Initiative. The District does not want to stagnate and not move forwards, but also does not want to start an initiative only to drop it or not be able to fund it.

The unknown Out of District costs and Contract renegotiations for next year also make it hard to accurately make the budget.

The Timeline for generating a new Budget is: The School Committee gives the parameters of a Level Service Budget in November of 2023. In December of 2023, Principals, Directors, and on-site Admin submit a detailed budget of their departments to the Superintendent's office. In January of 2024 Meetings with on-site admin happens to refine their budgets to align with their priorities. February 2024 they met with the Town Manager to review the estimated amount of available funding. School Committee then met with site based managers to review the budgets and make any changes needed to keep Level Services while staying within the funding level. There was also a budget sub-committee to answer any further questions. In March of 2024, the district was informed that it would be getting less money than they were told in February from the town, and the budget had to be adjusted accordingly.

With only keeping a Level Services Budget, there is still an increase in the budget of 2.99%, about \$958,000 increase. A majority of this increase comes from Salary increase, Out of District tuition and transportation, and in district transportation.

Salary increases which amount to around \$103,896, as we have a lot of newer teachers and aides, and their increase next year will not be as much as previously anticipated with the

former staff in their positions, which is reducing the increase from what it was anticipated to be.

Out of District tuition (of around \$395k increase) and Transportation of \$605,513 (of around \$210k increase). 34 Students budgeted Out of District for FY25 over the 28 registered in FY24. OSD set inflation rate for this coming year at 4.69%. Much better than the 14% increase OSD set last year, but is still over double the annual inflation rate OSD has been approving over the last 10 years, and is still on top of the 14% increase.

In-District Transportation of \$134,986. The transportation increase represents a 5% increase in the Daily Transportation cost for regular, as well as lift and specialized, buses. We are still one of the lowest bus rates in the area, but this will be the last year of the current contract.

Fy25 Revenue:

Chapter 70 State Aid: \$15,963,42. This will be the 12th year in a row that our Ch.70 aid has not increased beyond the minimum required amount per student. For FY23 and FY24, the minimum increase was set at \$60, but for FY25, it has been set back down to \$30 per student.

Town Contribution: \$10,358,209. Increasing by \$325,327 in FY25. This is the second smallest increase in recent years percentage wise, and smallest dollar wise since 2015.

Appropriations total: \$26,321,630

Additionally, we are loosing Grant Funding for FY25. Grants for FY25 are totaled at \$1,165,701. FY24 budget utilized \$2,088,711 in Grant Funding. Allocations will not be known until closer to July 1st. There is a potential reduction in Title 1 funding too.

ESSER funding was originally made to help re-open schools safely, additional funds were made available to help address learning loss, and to support the social and emotional needs of the students. While the funds are going away, the needs that the funds supported have not. ESSER funds provided 14.2 positions added in 2022, and they have been sustained throughout the ESSER funds over 3 years. Allocated ESSER funds last year to maintain 13.5 other positions covered by other grants or general funds. Three positions are being dropped and others are being changed and shifted to help accommodate the loss of ESSER Funds.

Revolver Funding: \$4,763,567. Based on calculations of how much we will take in next year. Based using that much on maintaining a reserve of \$1,000,000.

Taking those into account, to keep level services, we are short by \$794,275. The options to close the gap are:

Increase in appropriation: Unlikely as the appropriation increase was already reduced for this year. Chapter 70 may increase back to \$60 minimum, which would only provide \$57,540.

Utilize Additional Revolver funds and reduce the safety net to under \$1M. Increase deficit for future years.

Budget Reductions: Reduce the cost of the services by reducing services. Most reductions will be reductions in personnel. This was the one that was chosen. First, the district reduces supply budget to save money and reduced technology hardware replacements as there is a reduction in staff. Reducing the additional night shift custodian substitute position and it will be filled in as needed across the district. At High School, the BRIDGE Adjustment counselor BRYT Program will be going back to part time rather than full time. 3 Days a week rather than 5 days a week. The days the counselor is not working, the other counselors at the school will be supporting the students.

Three positions that the district is getting rid of are currently vacant. The Social Worker position that was hired with ESSER funds. Was only filled for 3 months in FY22 and FY23, but not at all in FY24. Instructional Technologist resigned in December of 2023, and the position has not been filled since then. The Middle School Spanish Teacher has been partially filled through FY21 through FY24. With the revised Middle School and High School Schedules, Spanish 1 at the Middle School can be taught by a High School Teacher, which will serve as a pathway for advanced language progression in High School.

Positions being lost at Middle School and High School are enrollment driven. At Middle School, 1 Grade 6 Teacher will transfer to 5th grade to cover larger class size. Grade 6 will go down an additional teacher to 6 teachers. Grade 7 and 8 will share Science and Social Studies teachers, reducing each grade from 8 teachers to 7 teachers. This will still leave the classes at just under 20 students. At the High School, reducing one each of ELA, Science, and Social Studies teachers. Current student/teacher ratio is about 13, and with the change will be 14.1, still well below the MA state average. Math was not cut because it is a smaller

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department, and while they do not teach electives right now, the student survey had said they wanted more classes on financial literacy, and this can help make an opening for that.

Current Occupational Therapy and Physical Therapy:

1.6 Full Time OT and 0.6 Full Time COTA

1.0 Full Time PT

Proposed Occupational Therapy and Physical Therapy:

1.0 Full Time OT and 0.8 Full Time COTA

3 Days Contracted Service Provider PT

Proposing changing the BCaBA to a BCBA position, as a BCaBA is required to be supervised by a BCBA, they can transfer one of the BCBA to NES, and share the other between the Middle and High School.

Currently have a 1.0FT District Lead Nurse and 0.5 FT Middle School Perm Sub. The change will be a combined position of 0.5 FT Nurse Leader combined with 0.5 FT School Nurse.

Changing the Photography Teacher position into a Woodshop/Vocational Skills Teacher, and Dean of Students into a combined Dean of Students and Vocational Coordinator.

At the Middle School, Title 1 Interventionist will become NES Title 1

Academic/Instructional Coach. The Title 1 ELA specialist will become two Title 1 ELA/Math Tutors.

They are also requesting an additional Assistant Principal at NES, as there are only 4 admin there compared to the three at each of the other schools. NES has more students than both schools combined, and nearly three times the staff of each school that require evaluations, but they do not have the administrative capacity to carry that out.

Additional Needs, but not in the FY25 Proposed Budget: Athletic Trainer, Middle School Guidance Counselor, Full Time Dean at the High School, Full Time Vocational Coordinator at High School, Culinary/Home Economics courses at Middle and High School.

Total reductions, including the addition of the assistant Principal, comes to \$707K.

The Total recommended budget is \$32,337,425. This is reduced from Level Services and is a \$250,749 (0.78%) increase over the FY24 Approved Budget. 69.7% for Salaries, 14.2% for Special Education, Out of District Transport and Tuition, 5.5% for In District

Transportation, 10.5% making up Athletics, Utilities, Custodial/Maintenance, Title 1, Technology, and all others.

Out of District costs are increasing. When making the budget, we have to pay the full amount for Tuition and Transportation for the year, and the next year, the state will reimburse the district from part of the expenditure. There were 28 OOD students in '14-'15 and there are going to be 34 OOD students in '24-'25, but the cost is double what it was 10 years ago. The percentage of cost has gone from around 8.5% in FY14 to 14.2% in FY24. Our Appropriation only covers about 80% of our actual budget. The rest is made up from Grants and Revolvers to fill the Budget Gap. This gap continues to grow year after year, and is why the district always states that there needs to be a change to the revenue structure to be able to close the gap. Despite the yearly increase in service cost, for the last 10 years, with the exception of positions added solely with the ESSER grant, the district has only been operating at Level Services or reducing services. More and more of the funding has needed to come from grants and revolvers.

Net School Spending is the required amount that must be spent by the town on Education. This is only calculated from the appropriations, not grants and revolvers. Our budget issues are not expenditure issues, as we are barely funding the minimum. The issue is a revenue issue, and that not enough funds are being allocated. Northbridge is only spending about 1% above the required minimum on education, while the other districts around us spend between 8% and 40% above the minimum.

For FY25, the State is requiring that the school spending increase by \$793,000. The District's appropriation is only going up by \$432,777. That is \$360k less than required. If the town does not meet school spending, the failure to comply may lead to non-approval of the municipality's tax rate and force action by the Attorney General or loss of State Aid. Looking at FY26, while using \$4.8M in the Revolvers in FY25 to balance the budget, there will only be about \$2.2M coming in, meaning that to keep an emergency \$1M in the balance, the district will only be able to use \$2.1M for the budget next year, less than half being spent in FY25. FY24 is coming in under budget, so the district is hoping that it will not drop below the \$1M. There will be a major funding issue if there is not a significant change to the sustainable revenue stream for FY26 and beyond.

Presentation to Finance Committee March 20th, Public Hearing March 26th, School Committee Votes on Budget, April 9th, and Annual Spring Town Meeting May 7th. School Committee agrees this is a scary situation, and thanks everyone for looking everywhere we can. Agrees that the district needs a new revenue plan, and that we have to look forward to the future. Town decreased funding because of an increase in unemployment bills related to the School this year. Funding also going to insurance premiums, which are higher. Town only receives \$1.1M in new revenue in any given year. There are also 13 additional students going to BVT. The money that was left was allocated between the other town departments and the school department.

B. 2024-2025 School Calendar

Only big changes are Professional Development on September 3rd (normally earlier). Town asked if district could reallocate the normal PD day at the school for Voting. NTS has okayed it. Will put it on next agenda to vote on it so School Committee can look over the calendar.

XII. Public Comment (8:10 PM)

XIII. Action

XIV. Information

XV. Adjournment (8:30 PM)

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

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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