

Greenfield School Committee
Budget & Finance Sub-Committee
Meeting Minutes
December 9, 2024

1. Roll Call/Call to Order:

Present: Kathryn Martini (KM) (Sub-Committee Chair), Elizabeth DeNeeve (ED), Ann Childs (AC)

Also present: Karin Patenaude, Superintendent of Schools (KP), Andy Paquette, Business Manager (AP)

The meeting was called to order at 12:34 p.m.

2. Public Comment:

There were no public members present for comment.

3. Approval of Minutes: September 24, 2024:

On a motion by KM, 2nd by AC, the sub-committee unanimously approved the meeting minutes as presented.

4. Discussion regarding recommended language for the approval of warrants:

KM noted this item was delegated to this sub-committee at the recent GPS School Committee meeting for discussion and recommendation. She noted this is a GPS School Committee policy, so it may be returned to the full committee with recommendation for review by the policy sub-committee.

KM shared some recalled history on this matter as well as information she researched from the MASC policy database:

Prior procedure was to require a majority of members (4) to sign the warrants. That procedure later changed to allow any 1 member to sign due to the difficulty of obtaining 4 signatures in a timely manner. In her research on the MASC database, KM found many other school committees in Massachusetts using our same method with a similar policy. She noted a few districts delegate the role to their chair, one delegates to their budget and finance sub-committee, some approve their warrants at meetings, etc.

ED shared her recollection of the process aligned with that of KM's recollection. She also noted it was her opinion the warrant should be included on each monthly GPS School Committee agenda to allow for questions and discussion.

AC inquired how we would handle the timeline if putting warrants on the agenda and only meeting once a month, as warrants require quick turnaround to pay bills.

KM reviewed scenarios relative to the process of including the warrants on the agendas:

- We receive warrants more frequently than we meet so it may not be possible to put the warrants on our monthly agenda for approval. They wouldn't be approved in time, especially if there are questions with answers not immediately available.
- How would we post on the agenda? Need language other than "warrant" as this is vague and the public has the right to know specifically what we will be discussing.

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- How much time would this add to meetings? We were doing well early this year by keeping meetings to about 2 hours. Lately, meetings have been 3 to 4 hours.

Consensus emerged on recommendation to have members forward any warrant questions to the superintendent/business manager at least 7 days prior to the scheduled monthly meeting. The superintendent/business manager would answer within 4 days, leaving 3 days before the meeting to request the Chair place an item on the agenda and post accordingly. KM will present this as suggested practice to the committee on Wednesday as opposed to making a formal motion.

5. Fiscal Year 2026 Budget discussion from information gathered by members during outreach listening sessions over the past several weeks. Feedback themes were:
 1. Improve staffing (substitute teachers, special education teachers, etc.)
 2. SEL (social/emotional learning) needs for students and teachers, i.e. anti-bullying program, counseling access, etc.
 3. Expression of being happy with the high quality, instructional materials implemented in the past 2 years, need for continued support
 4. Need for consistent K-5 science curriculum/instructional resources
 5. Desire to bring foreign language instruction back to the middle school
 6. Desire for additional arts and music opportunities (bringing specials to AEL, funding for instrument repair, music, and non-performance related electives, theater and music extracurriculars, etc.
 7. Desire for school enrichment events and additional field trips
 8. Technology needs: ELlevation platform to support English learners, smartboards and document cameras, spare iPads to ensure backup for students with disabilities for communication purposes, spare laptops for teachers
 9. Desire for more librarians and books in our libraries
 10. Desire to develop parent capacity for understanding their rights in special education and to support ELPAC and inter-group activities
 11. Transportation: Support co-op sports and extra-curricular activities, ELPAC intra and inter-group activities and field trips
 12. Desire for a volunteer coordinator or community resource support for parents

KM also shared responses for other needs that might not necessarily fall under the operating budget (building repair/capital requests):

1. Federal Street School: Elevator, stair, flooring, railing and sidewalk repairs, brick wall in the playground, door and window issues
2. Academy of Early Learning (AEL): need to close gaps in fence, wishes for preK size play structure and cafeteria tables, adaptive swings for playground
3. Discovery School at Four Corners: Address classroom heat issue (capability to adjust the high heat in a classroom)

ED reported positive feedback from PTOs on recent communications with the administration and School Committee. Consistent topic at PTO meetings was field trips.

AC acknowledged positive comments at meetings and in the community on the superintendent's leadership. She commended KP for hard work creating positive culture.

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Another frequent feedback topic was low pay for instructional assistants. KP suggested discussing with member Sexton as negotiating representative of the School Committee.

Lack of substitutes and IAs being pulled to sub was also raised. KP shared the sub rate was increased last year. She will research the minutes to confirm the rate and vote.

KM also inquired if there were any suggestions to increase/improve staffing, especially of instructional assistants, substitute teachers, and special education staff. This is a widespread issue. KP noted we are constantly trying to find creative ways to fill positions, including working with the community colleges. “It truly is a struggle... and affects daily operations,” she stated.

KM inquired if it would be feasible to hire a recruiter and/or reinstate the volunteer coordinator. KP noted she isn’t sure another person trying to recruit is what is needed, as there are few applicants and potentially doesn’t change the outcome.

Discussion relative to SEL needs was put forth. KP noted we are committed to SEL programs and a 5 year plan for this is in development.

An inquiry was made on bringing foreign language instruction back to middle school. KP stated she would provide an update on that at the December 11 GPS School Committee meeting. It was noted this was discussed previously in context of coinciding with changing to full-year science and social studies at the middle school. Staffing needs will be discussed with the union and clarified with them prior to any shifts. We will solidify enrollment numbers at the high school first, then the rest will fall into place.

Also discussed was the desire to have a full-time band teacher at the high school and another at the middle school. KP reminded members that in this instance we could have a staff member with nothing to do for half the day, based on schedules and enrollments.

KP also noted we were able to update our district-wide technology using ESSER funds, while taking advantage of other grants. Technology upgrades were added to capital requests for FY27.

KP shared the school building walkthroughs with the School Committee and City Council are scheduled to take place on January 31, 2025.

ED left the meeting at 1:30 p.m.

AC mentioned feedback requesting weekend backpacks for food at Newton School. KP will speak to our food service director and obtain information about such funding.

6. On a motion by KM, 2nd by AC, the meeting adjourned at 1:39 p.m. The vote was unanimous.

Approved: 7/28/25