

**GREENFIELD PUBLIC SCHOOLS  
SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING  
MINUTES: Wednesday, April 12, 2023**  
Jon Zon Community Center, 35 Pleasant St., Greenfield MA

**Present:** Elizabeth Deneve (ED); Susan Eckstrom (SE); Glenn Johnson-Mussad; (GJM) (arrived 6:06); Kathryn Martini (KM); Amy Proietti (AP); Jean Wall (JW)

**Absent:** Roxann Wedegartner (RW)

**Also present:** Christine DeBarge, Superintendent; Andy Paquette, TMS Business Manager; Karin Patenaude, Assistant Superintendent; other school staff & citizens.

### **I. Call to Order**

With a quorum present (ED, SE, GJM, KM, AP, JW), Chair Proietti called the meeting to order at 6:01 p.m.

### **II. Settlement Agreements**

#### **A. Unit A**

**KM moved to approve the settlement agreement for Unit A for FY22 and FY23-24-25. SE 2nd.** Jean Wall read a statement re: negotiations (*included as attachment to minutes*). **Motion passed unanimously.**

#### **B. Unit C**

**KM moved to approve the settlement agreement with Unit C FY23 through FY25. SE 2nd.** **Motion passed unanimously.**

#### **C. Cafeteria Workers**

**KM moved to approve the settlement agreement with the Cafeteria Workers FY24-25-26, as presented. SE 2nd.** **Motion passed unanimously.**

#### **D. Custodial/Maintenance Workers**

**KM moved to approve the settlement agreement with the Custodial/Maintenance Workers for FY24-25-26, as presented. SE 2nd.** **Motion passed unanimously.**

### **III. Approval of Minutes from March 8, 2023 meeting**

KM moved to approve draft minutes of March 8, 2023. JW 2nd. Motion passed unanimously.

### **IV. Public Comment**

*Expressing thanks for contract approval:* Susan Voss, IA at AEL and GEA Unit C representative; Raymond Paquette, GHS teacher and GEA treasurer; Doug Selwyn, Greenfield.

Doug Selwyn also recommended stronger funding for education at city and state levels; asked for costs and rationales for choices in redistricting; encouraged opting out of MCAS tests by students in grades 3-8.

### **V. Reports**

#### **A. Student Representatives**

S.T. and N.J. reported on GHS Student Council & club activities and community service projects, class competitions, MCAS testing. New bathroom rules and restrictions have been enacted in response to vandalism.

## **B. Budget Update**

### **1. FY23 update**

Andy Paquette presented budget reports as of April 6. Current work includes encumbering expenses to allow year-end projections. Unanticipated special education costs still possible.

### **2. FY24 Budget**

AP reviewed budget process. Mayor's budget for schools, presented last week, is approx. \$1.5million lower than proposed School Committee/Superintendent's budget. Members commented on impacts of reduction and recommendations to improve the City-School budget outcomes. *(Statements included as attachment to minutes.)*

ED moved to provide written statements from the School Committee members to the Chair in their entirety to be accepted into the minutes of today's meeting. KM 2nd. Motion passed unanimously.

KM moved to charge the Chair with providing these written statements to the City Council before their meeting on April 19. ED 2nd. Motion passed unanimously.

## **VI. Business**

### **A. Policies**

#### **1. Second and final reading of Section G**

**GJM moved to amend Policy Section G, Personnel Policies, as presented on second reading. ED 2nd. Motion passed unanimously.**

#### **2. Homeschool policy**

Revision was approved at last meeting on emergency basis to allow homeschool students to access extracurricular activities. **GJM moved that we affirm our amendment of Policy IHBG, Home Schooling, from March 8, 2023. AP 2nd. Motion passed unanimously.**

#### **3. First reading of condom availability policy**

**SE moved that we approve the first reading of Policy JLCDA, Condom Availability Policy, as presented. KM 2nd.**

Implementation would include choice for families to opt-out. ED noted 1996 landmark case on parental approval; Dr. DeBarge will follow up with legal counsel.

Suggestion: change "may" to "will."

**Motion passed unanimously.**

#### **4. First reading of cell phone policy**

**AP moved to approve the first reading of the Cell Phone Policy as presented. JW 2nd. Motion passed unanimously.**

### **B. 2023-2024 Academic Calendar**

Dr. DeBarge presented next year's calendar, noted change from current year's: removed open house at high school, not well attended; added parent conference time at high school. Successful open house at elementary schools this year continues in next year's calendar.

**KM to approve the GPS 2023-2034 academic calendar, as presented. GJM 2nd.**

Dr. DeBarge explained benefits for young students and for staff of first day of school as half day.  
**Motion passed unanimously.**

### **C. Director of Pupil Services**

**GJM approve the job description for the Director of Pupil Services, as presented. KM 2nd. Motion passed unanimously.**

### **D. GHS Baseball Team Field Trip to Baseball Hall of Fame**

**SE moved that the School Committee approve the trip to the Baseball Hall of Fame for Greenfield High School baseball team, as presented. GJM 2nd. Motion passed unanimously.**

### **E. Requests for New Agenda Items**

Items in process: Revised superintendent evaluation tool (coming May meeting); School Committee calendar.

MASC Advocacy Day with legislators, May 4. Support for KM to attend. AP will find out whether approval vote is needed to use School Committee PD funding.

### **V. Reports *continued***

#### **C. Administration Reports**

##### **1. Assistant Superintendent of Teaching and Learning**

Karin Patenaude summarized recent work including professional development; high school math professional learning network; grant-funded projects. Noted that Title I funding is available for transportation to school events; families can request from principal or Patenaude's office. (*Details in written report.*)

##### **2. Superintendent**

Dr. DeBarge reviewed budget process and presented spreadsheet of choices, created with administrative team, for cutting \$1.5million from budget.

- Reminder that Superintendent's Budget was already reduced, including removing positions of academic coaches, float nurse, float custodian, assistant special education director, registrar.
- Concern re: using temporary grant funding like ESSR for staff salaries, creating "cliff edge" in FY25.
- Possibility of capital funding for textbooks.
- This revised budget still needs \$80K additional reduction. Work to identify cuts will continue.

#### **D. School Committee Reports**

##### **1. Report of the Chair *None***

##### **2. Subcommittee Reports**

###### **a. Policy Subcommittee (GJM)**

Continuing overhaul of existing sections. Subcommittee meets First Thursdays at 11am; all are welcome; meetings include public comment section to hear policy suggestions.

###### **b. Redistricting (JW)**

Subcommittee invites questions from public. Current work:

- reviewing obligations re: Green River School
- transportation costs for Option 1
- new Option 2b, moving 5th grade to elementary schools and re-drawing lines for which students attend which schools

Recording of most recent meeting is available online.

### **VIII. Adjournment**

SE moved to adjourn. ED 2nd. Motion passed unanimously. Meeting adjourned at 8:37 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,  
 Susan Farber  
 Recording Secretary

### **Attachments:**

Jean Wall: Statement on Union Negotiations and the FY24 Budget

Kate Martini: Statement on the FY24 Budget

Elizabeth DeNeeve: Statement on the FY24 Budget

Susan Eckstrom: Statement on the FY24 Budget

### **Meeting Materials**

1. Agenda: April 12, 2023
2. Draft minutes: March 8, 2023
3. Superintendent's Update, April 12, 2023
4. Assistant Superintendent Update, April 12, 2023
5. Financial Reports, April 6, 2023
6. Draft GPS Calendar 2023-2024
7. GHS Field Trip Request: Baseball Hall of Fame
8. Draft Director of Pupil Services Job Description
9. FY 24 Potential Budget Reductions
10. School Newsletters
11. Letter of commendation for Addison Massa, April 7, 2023
12. Policies:
  - a. IHBG: Home Schooling
  - b. Section G: Personnel
  - c. Cell Phones
  - d. JLCDA: Condom Availability

**A Statement on Union Negotiations and the FY24 Budget**  
**School Committee Member Jean Wall**  
**4-12-23**

First of all, I want to assure all Greenfield Education Association members employed by the school system that we negotiated in good faith the contracts that you ratified. The School Committee relies on the expertise of the Superintendent and her administrative team to craft a budget fitting the priorities established for student learning. And of course, that budget must accommodate wages paid to all staff.

While COVID did irreparable harm to the schools, the children, and the community, it brought a windfall of one-time money to the schools. This money has been allocated toward priorities related to student learning and student safety. As the COVID funds (called ESSER) can be spent over multiple fiscal years, the Superintendent planned for district expenditures in several key areas, through FY 24. Details of these plans have been shared with the School Committee, since their inception. They include enhanced security systems in the schools, improving student and staff safety. It has been used to clean out the libraries in each school and bring the inventory up-to-date so every child has access to quality supplemental reading materials. It was used to hire professionals to help combat the trauma created by the pandemic, and critically, funds were set aside to bring the technology in all the schools up to date.

The School Committee also agreed that our staff needed to be paid wages that reflected those of the surrounding communities, reducing the occurrence of educators leaving our school system for more compensation elsewhere. The Committee committed to not using COVID money for wages, because it is a temporary windfall and would not be available for future salaries. This is planful and responsible budgeting.

The union negotiations took so long because we had to make sure we would have the money to pay any salaries that were negotiated. The first stumbling block was the fact that the teachers would have to be paid for any time they didn't have a contract. That meant paying any raises in a lump sum for last year and for this year's negotiated settlement, until the contract was signed by all parties. The amount agreed upon was 2% for FY22, 3% for FY23, and 3% in FY24. The Mayor shared what she was willing to contribute from the City's Contract Stabilization Fund, as well as from Medicaid reimbursement dollars. This required the School Department to contribute an estimated \$500,000 to pay retroactive wages due to GEA members. It is important to note that the only City Department being asked to fund retroactive and first-contract-year salary increases from their own budget, is the School Department.

There is a persistent rumor that the schools hide and sit on funds that might be used for other purposes. This is not supported by facts. In actuality, the money to pay for this settlement was taken from the money that was going to be spent on technology for our students and staff, with the goal of improving access to high quality resources and instruction. In the Mayor's budget, Mayor Wedegartner decided to reduce the School Department budget, thereby forcing the schools to use funds now, for wages, that were previously allocated for the critical projects I already mentioned.

As the only retired person on the School Committee, I had the time and flexibility to attend the many hours of negotiations on behalf of the School Committee. No monetary decisions were ever made without bringing the School Committee up to date in Executive Session after each public meeting. This is standard operating procedure, and guided by Committee policy. This is responsible planning and a requirement of good faith bargaining. What the Mayor's budget did instead circumvents School Committee priorities and planning that her past public votes suggest she supports.

As a School Committee we are committed to paying staff wages comparable to neighboring districts. We are committed to using one-time resources for improving educational equity and student opportunities. We are strongly committed to working as one body to achieve this, as our work has shown over my time as a School Committee member. It is incredibly unfortunate to see all this hard work be undone unilaterally and without recourse for our students.

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**Statement on the FY24 Budget**  
**School Committee member Kate Martini**  
**4-12-23**

Greenfield voters have made it clear that it is of utmost importance that our students learn to read, write and numerate proficiently; this is one of those precious shared values that cuts across politics, and as such every person who holds elected office here should pay close attention to it. This year, our teachers and staff K-7 have done the heavy lift of implementing new, evidence-supported instructional materials, practices and professional development, which is a major step in improving student literacy outcomes. They did this while working without a contract and through the massively challenging adjustment our students have been struggling with due to the pandemic. Now that contracts have been settled with our teachers and paraprofessionals – which are not even as much as we would like to do for them after this period of unprecedented stress and high inflation – to grossly underfund the school department as proposed in the Mayor’s budget would be to insult to those who have stuck with our students during the worst of times. Even more importantly, this will cause painful cuts that will ultimately fall on students whose education has been disrupted by a pandemic just when they are starting to get their bearings again. As always, these cuts will hurt disadvantaged students the most, including those with fewer socio-economic resources and disabled students. We talk a lot about equity in this city – there is no such thing as equity with a quality education. Academic outcomes, particularly literacy, are tied to virtually every life outcome. Now is the time for Greenfield to show commitment to all our students and do what’s right by them – fully fund their schools.

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**Statement on the FY24 Budget**  
**School Committee Member Elizabeth DeNeeve**  
**4-12-23**

The Mayor's budget cut sends a really strong message to all of us and to future residents. It says don't move here. Don't send your kids here. It says in Greenfield, our priorities are entirely out of whack.

This is irresponsible and unacceptable.

The money is available.

We have well educated citizens who have published blogs, and disseminated information about the FY24 detailing what is possible.

Check out [peoplesbudgetgreenfield.com](http://peoplesbudgetgreenfield.com) and see Member Eckstrom’s statement.

The real question is whether the Mayor has the will to support our educators and our students.

Massively overfunded police and chronically underfunded schools are linked. I'm not sure if the Mayor's intention is to strengthen the school to prison pipeline but it sure seems that way.

Underfunded schools create higher crime rates and rates of incarceration are directly related to education levels.

We need to shield our youth from disinvestment during downturns.

So it is time for the city council to demand an alternate budget that fully funds the schools.

Demand justification for every penny diverted.

If not now when?

Next year when it's worse?

The year after when more educators leave?

Or when we top 200 students who have left for better districts?

It is neither disrespectful or subversive to say no to this. It is time for the council to exercise its full powers of oversight.

Exercise your full ability to protect this community from poor decision making.

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**Statement on FY24 Budget**  
**School Committee Member Susan Eckstrom**  
**4-12-2023**

*The budget, which will be voted on in the coming months, would cut the school committee's budget by \$1.5 million dollars. But the mayor said education remains one of the city's top priorities. "The school budget is our top priority if you are only looking at money. It's more than 37% of our budget," said Mayor Wedegartner.*

The city's department of schools employs approximately, based on the FY 2024 budget book, 52% of all city employees. When you take into account that in any setting, employees are the largest expense of an organization, I'd expect the percentage of dedicated funds to the School Department to be higher than 37% of a budget, as would anyone who has experience in municipal or business budgeting.

According to the FY24 Governors budget proposal, Greenfield will receive from the state (Chapter 70 Funds) \$16,203,247 for education, the remainder, or approximate required amount the city must contribute, for 2024 is \$11m, for a total of approximately \$27 million dollars. That must be spent on education. The School Department isn't asking the city for money to spend. The state has identified that \$27 million is the lowest amount that must be spent. To be fair, the city typically contributes more than the state identifies, as do most if not all other cities in Massachusetts. However there has been a steady decline in the percentage beyond what is required.

The Proposed Fiscal Year 2024 Budget Book, from the Mayor, states on page 14 "In all years, the city uses a portion of the Chapter 70 dollars to cover benefits that go toward school employees." What that means is things like health insurance, pension, Medicare, life insurance, etc.

Between 2018 and 2022 the city has encumbered (aka taken from the Chapter 70 funds) \$16,958,936 to cover these costs. If it indeed has used those funds for only school employees, then the actual amount of funds necessary was \$14,971,365. That's a difference of \$1,987,571. Those remaining Chapter 70

funds, identified by the state for education purposes only, were never returned to the Department. We'd like it back please.

Between 2017 and 2022, the city has been reimbursed by Medicaid (meaning federal funding), for expenses that the School Department pays for (things like mental/behavioral health services, skilled nursing care, occupational therapy, physical therapy, physical and behavioral health screenings, and speech therapy within the schools), for a total of \$1,861,995. According to the FY 2024 budget book, page 56, "Insurance reimbursements are to offset the cost for repairing or replacing buildings, vehicles or equipment". While it is legal for the City to keep those funds, it certainly feels unethical/immoral to do so. Those funds were reimbursed to assist the most vulnerable students/individuals in our community. Appalling. Particularly given that each year the city undercuts the school budget.

With those two items, between 2017 and 2022, the schools have not received a total of \$3,849,566. Imagine what a difference that would have made.

The mayor has identified school enrollment is down significantly, which impacts the amount of state funding they receive. The "funding they receive," which is \$500,000 more than last year, is for schools. It isn't for 'the city.' That said, and following that same reasoning, as I look at the number of empty business properties in town, and the likelihood of others leaving, I'm hard pressed to understand why there would be an increase in the Economic Development and Marketing department of 55.97%. If enrollment is down, spending is cut. If there's a lack of businesses in town, then wouldn't a cut to that department make sense? The answer is no; nothing is improved by tearing it down to the bare minimum. To even suggest that a way to improve our schools is to cut spending is embarrassing and indicative of the ignorance of the importance of education. I'd like the real reason please.

Something else that should be mentioned is what limited involvement Mayors have in setting the School Department budget. The Mayor is a member of the School Committee, only by charter designation. They are not elected to the committee, nor do they have any more or less voice than any other single member of the committee. The Committee works as a whole, votes as a whole and sets its budget based on need and priorities, which by the way, were agreed upon by the full committee. The information that is submitted for inclusion in the Budget Book from the School Department, is not required; in fact the only thing that is required is the submission of the whole dollar amount, in the case of 2024, \$23,151,624. We submit in the manner we do to ensure transparency and for community understanding.

In my 6 years as a member of the School Committee, mayors have attended few, if any budget subcommittee meetings. While in general I don't object to that, after all I don't think a mayor needs to understand school finance completely, however I do believe that they should work to, or at the very least ask questions related to how the Superintendent, Business Manager, and Budget Subcommittee came to their conclusions. To my knowledge, and having been the chair of the Budget Subcommittee for 4 years, that rarely happens. What I have experienced is multiple meetings where Mayors look at the bottom line and say "you can't have that much" without any questions being asked. Step 2 is to look at line items, decide where 'too much' has been allocated, and cut until they meet the amount they've individually decided the schools can spend. Typically around 3%. Interestingly enough, that's what I've been told the increase of the department budget would be, even before the budget process began, multiple times, over multiple years.

The School Department, acting as steward of funds, plans years ahead for increases, inclusive of contracts. The last response I received, in a city/schools meeting when trying to broach the subject of pending contract negotiations was "We're not talking about that. You have to find it in your own budget". As the negotiations draw to a close, I've watched mayors feigning obliviousness and shock to find the dollar amounts that are necessary, despite attendance at multiple full committee meetings



through the duration of negotiations, where increases are routinely discussed. I've witnessed this with 2 mayors. Shameful.

We are now being told to find money in the departmental budget for contracts; As a person with 20+ years of bookkeeping and budget experience, I find that preferable. However, in attempts to sustain our schools, the budget is cut yearly, by a single person. Not only does this discourage long-term planning, but in many cases requires a shrinking of the schools. I'm curious if any other departments experience this inequality, discrimination, and bias. From what I can see, they do not. Given that as the mayor has said, the schools are the largest department, and can no longer access the contract stabilization account, I expect it can be closed. Since I can't imagine the city would want to demonstrate ongoing discrimination and bias by allowing any other department to access those funds.

In reviewing the Budget Book, I noted how very little information is given by other departments. To be clear, I take no issue with that, what is included is exactly what is required. However, I note a lack of nitpicking of those departmental budgets, something that clearly happens with the School Department each year; I've attended multiple meetings where mayors have accused the schools of hiding money. I want to be very clear, underline, very clear, my speech isn't about the funds departments other than the School Department receive and steward, rather to identify at the very least the respect that other departments are given, while the School Department is seemingly viewed as a cash cow. Perhaps our transparency is being punished.

We are in an election year. Pay attention to what those running for mayor identify as their priorities. Every single one identifies schools as a top priority, and then treats them as a bank. In my opinion, the culture of the City of Greenfield is to deprive the School Department, then to follow up with fabrications in ways expectations fall short. To be accusatory while presenting no data to inform accusations. To defund the schools.