

SHUTESBURY SCHOOL COMMITTEE
Thursday, March 20, 2025
FINAL MINUTES

Present: Nate Longcope, Anna Heard, Jen Taylor, Leah Jack, Members; Jeremy Mailloux, Chair; Caitlin Sheridan, Director of Finance & Operations; Anne Magill, Principal; Shannon White-Cleveland, Superintendent; Public Guests.

A. Meeting Called to Order by Jeremy at 7:03 P.M.

B. Public Hearings: None.

C. Review of Agenda and Perpetual Calendar:

Jeremy updated the perpetual calendar with several reporting items. He reviewed upcoming events, including presenting the budget at Town Meeting. Anna noted Town Meeting might be rescheduled; Fin Com member Susie Mosher added this is due to timing with spring break as well as not having all the financial data we need just yet. The Town budget isn't looking good at this point, and there's a lot of uncertainty about the state budget as well. There's a lot of Fin Com work happening now until Town Meeting. Jen added that there are several conferences and public meetings with legislators coming up soon.

D. Warrants and Gifts:

Accounts Payable:

3017	2/18/2025	\$6,307.67
3018	3/4/2025	\$17,037.51
3019	3/18/2025	\$45,223.39

Payroll:

317	2/18/2025	\$90,221.78
318	3/4/2025	\$91,654.06
319	3/18/2025	\$89,256.34

Gifts: None.

Grants: None.

E. Approval of Minutes from February 13, 2025:

**LEAH MOVED TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF FEBRUARY 13, 2025. NATE SECONDED.
UNANIMOUS.**

F. Unfinished Business / Updates:

1. Capital Projects/Building Process –Update:

Nate updated SSC. DPW is interested in working out driveway paving, so Bob, Anne and I had a meeting to discuss it. Next step is to come up with a design for what's needed. Nate also reached out to a number of other people about finding a design consultant. The brick is problematic, so we hope to get rid of it in the design. Paving up to the emergency exits is important too. We'll also get rid of the bins and move the dumpster to make room for Pre-K parking and drop-off. We had a tour through the back tunnels of the school to see the antifreeze coil too. All this would be in the 2026 budget. Bob was very encouraging, and we're going to try to work it so it's very low cost to us.

Jeremy added that he also met with the Fin Com about the coil. The Town Administrator has some reservations about upcoming costs. The plan now is to cover that with our funds, and we'll be made whole sometime during the year. They want to keep Free Cash liquid right now, and Susie added Towns can transfer among lines after May 1, which is what we'll do.

Jen asked whether we issued a letter to families about what's happening: Yes, we did.

G. New Business / Discussion Items: None.

H. Reports:

1. Superintendent's Report:

Shannon reported that she held an informal coffee hour at each of the schools. She wants to be intentional about relationships with staff, sharing accomplishments as well as worries (such as about budget). She wants to make this a regular event during the year. Conversations about budgetary needs are going on continually. EES is finishing its Principal search, so we're looking forward to having a full Leadership Team again. Dr. Ablon did a workshop on supporting students with behavior issues with families from every school. Great events. JSC met Monday, and Shannon presented her Entry Plan findings. Tomorrow is Curriculum Day and will include a keynote speaker, Sarah Brigney from the Brookline Center, offering PD on supporting students with mental health issues. We'll end by hosting a screening of *Counted Out*, a math documentary that speaks to the need to reimagine math education in our highly technologized era. Shannon also participated as a panelist in a DESE-sponsored roundtable to discuss equity, rural leadership and transitioning into a superintendency. On the legislative front, the Joint Ways and Means Committee is holding a public hearing on Monday, March 24 at UMass. Also, DESE voted to expand some charter school programs that might impact U#28.

2. Director of Finance and Operations:

Caitlin said we've rolled out our staff absence-management system, Frontline, instead of dealing with a cumbersome, paper-based process. Staff can now see their PTO balances in real time as well.

There's a shortfall in FY25 due to settling the staff contract after the budget was passed. We anticipated this, and FY26 already has this increase to offset this shortfall. She reviewed where we are in FY25. We're trying to really limit spending until the end of the school year. Some transitions in staffing have helped, but

not eliminated the shortfall entirely. The projected shortfall at this time is around \$22.4K. Susie asked if the \$10K the Town approved for fuel is included; Catilin doesn't think so. Shannon said staff are well aware the budget is tight. She told them we need to be mindful; this is happening to a lot of municipalities. We're looking at doing things like putting off technology purchases. We're trying to be transparent without setting off unnecessary alarms. Susie said the Town's Reserve Fund has been taxed this year, and we put a placeholder in for the contractual raises. This is raising all kinds of questions about how the school's budget serves the whole Town, and how we're a community together; the end of federal support from USDA for local produce is an impact. We'll see where everything is at in a couple of months. Jen said as far as she knows, free lunches for all students is continuing.

As for Town Meeting, we used to provide childcare for it, and that seems to have had an impact on how many attendees we have. Could we organize that again? Working with CNC or with local teens who are certified to do childcare, perhaps. Shannon said there was discussion around free school lunch at a Superintendents meeting recently. We don't think free lunches will be cut this year, but we don't know what will happen next year. Will DESE go back to only providing free lunch to students who qualify for it? Shutesbury is a rural town, but it's growing, and SES is a strong attractor for families. SSC discussed more aspects of the uncertainties ahead.

3. Principal's Report:

Anne said we're now doing two Talent Shows since we had so many talented students try out! April, May, and June will be three amazing months. Grade 6 are taking field trips to museums, for which they're very excited, and the PTO has helped arranged for a planetarium to come visit us. We have a tentative string concert coming up in May as well as Kindergarten orientation. Hoping to accommodate as many kindergarteners as possible. PTO has been really hopping with events lately, including a video game event at Quarters. We've increased Kindergarten attendance hours, and we've had the same rate since 2016; based on that, rates in the area, and time of attendance, we're looking to increase daily rates by \$5. The MCBA celebration was absolutely terrific, a testament to collaboration among U#28 schools and communities. Shannon added Anne kicked off the event singing some classic rock karaoke!

4. Amherst-Pelham Representative's Report:

Anna reported the last couple of meetings have focused on the budget. The last Four Towns meeting resulted in some agreement about the regional assessment method and the budget shortfall. When the Superintendent presented details of what the deficits mean (positions cut), which is upsetting. If you keep having deficit budgets and cutting positions, you just don't have the same school anymore. The proposals for the cuts were unacceptable, so the RSC voted for a much higher budget. The end result is that our budget is getting further and further away from the regional assessment method, so we need to resolve that. We heard from DESE that they're frustrated with us that we send these updated budgets regularly. That's been the biggest issue; we've passed some policies too. There was also an investigation of some complaints about the Superintendent. We investigated the ones that we were required to (a threat, retaliation), and the investigation found there was no evidence supporting the claims. At the end of the day, we're spending tens of thousands of dollars on investigations like this. Litigation expenses accumulating for the district certainly aren't improving the budget. Susie added that yes, this has made Fin Com's work busier, and we're trying to advocate for level budgets across the Town as well as in the region, but it's really hard to

advocate for both. We believe in the equitable assessment method; Amherst is already paying well over their equitable share. We're looking at using a lot of moves that should only be used rarely.

5. Joint Supervisory Committee Report, including Budget & Personnel:

Advisory Focus Group Update: Leah reported that JSC went over Shannon's Entry Plan findings as well as talked about the Superintendent review, which we plan to complete by June. We shared the recommendations from the Advisory Focus Group on efficiencies U#28 might pursue. The Star program serving students with autism and other special needs is going well at EES, and there's some talk about introducing a similar life skills program. Curriculum Day and the Student Opportunity Act report were both explained. Leah was able to share out on school updates thanks to the newsletter that goes out.

- Next Meeting Date: Monday, May 19, 2025

6. CES Report: None.

I. Policy Review:

First Read On:

JKAA – Physical Restraint of Students
JLCB – Immunization of Students
KCD – Public Gifts to the Schools

First Read and Vote on Deletion:

KCDA – Public Gifts to the School District

Final Vote On:

JICFA-E – Hazing
JICH – Alcohol, Tobacco and Drug Use by Students Prohibited
JICFB – Bullying Prevention

ANNA MOVED TO DELETE KCDA – PUBLIC GIFTS TO THE SCHOOL DISTRICT. JEN SECONDED. UNANIMOUS.

Leah asked about removing the language about secondary education institutions from JICFA-E – Hazing. SSC agreed that the vote to excise Section 19 should stand.

LEAH MOVED TO APPROVE POLICY JICFA-E – HAZING WITH SECTION 19 EXCISED. NATE SECONDED. UNANIMOUS.

ANNA MOVED TO APPROVE POLICY JICH – ALCOHOL, TOBACCO AND DRUG USE BY STUDENTS PROHIBITED. JEN SECONDED. UNANIMOUS.

ANNA MOVED TO APPROVE POLICY JICFB – BULLYING PREVENTION. JEN SECONDED. UNANIMOUS.

J. Executive Session: Not necessary.

K. Future Business:

Jeremy will push to have access to the Town Zoom account to run meetings from in the future.

Jen asked what policies we have in place to protect LGBTQIA+ students as well as undocumented students. SSC discussed some of those policies. Shannon weighed in that we do need to have a policy about protecting undocumented students, and we do have a process in place for responding to ICE agents coming to the school. We will exercise all the safeguards the state has put into place as well.

- Shutesbury Policy Committee – Thursday, April 17, 2025 at 6:30 p.m.
- Shutesbury School Committee – Thursday, April 17, 2025 at 7:00 p.m.
- Budget & Personnel Committee – TBD
- Union #28 Joint Supervisory – Monday, May 19, 2025 at 7:00 p.m.
- Future agenda items –

L. Adjournment at 8:37

ANNA MOVED TO ADJOURN. NATE SECONDED. VOICE VOTES ALL AYE.