Regular Board of Education Meeting – Minutes *(Subject to Approval)*
Wednesday, September 16, 2026, 7:00 p.m.
Town Hall Meeting Room – 15 N Granby Rd, Granby, CT 06035

Present Board Members: Heather Lombardo, Ann Woods, Jessica Diglio-Tsapsinos, Andrew Billig, John Limeburner, and Joel Danke. **Absent Board Members:** David Pelig

Student Representatives: Madison Schantz and Teagan Hall

Also Present: Superintendent Cheri Burke, Assistant Superintendent Jennifer Parsons and Director of Finance and Operations, Nicole Stevenson.

Call to Order and Welcome:
Board Chair, Heather Lombardo, called the meeting to order at 7:01 p.m.

Chairperson's Report:
Ms. Lombardo started the meeting with a welcome to all in attendance. Jessica Diglio-Tsapsinos was welcomed to the Board, as she fills a vacancy on the board from the summer resignation of Donna Nolan. In addition to serving on the board, Ms. Nolan also served as the Finance Subcommittee Chair. She was thanked for her years of service and Ms. Lombardo noted she stepped down due to family obligations.

Ms. Lombardo touched on upcoming teacher contract negotiations; which occur every 3 years in Connecticut. It is approximately a 50-day negotiation, and she hopes it ends in a settlement by the end of that period. Wages, insurance, and working conditions are some of the items discussed and ultimately agreed upon.

The board has met with the Granby Board of Finance, prior to negotiations, to understand the town's fiscal constraints and what can realistically be supported. Throughout the process, academic achievement is the Board's, "North Star." Ms. Lombardo highlighted that research and data show that there is a strong connection between staffing consistency and student achievement. Ms. Lombardo acknowledged the responsibility to taxpayers and the boards' goal of striking a balance between fiscal sustainability and compensation. Ms. Lombardo emphasized the board's desire to attract and retain excellent teachers, while being cognizant of the taxpayer.

Additionally, Ms. Lombardo spoke about the Capital Project Vote which will take place in December 2026. She mentioned past discussions have heavily focused on the football field and the running track at Granby Memorial High School, which has experienced recurring sinkholes that have been consistently patched up for several years. Having been installed in 2012, with a life expectancy of 8 to 10 years, the field is in need of replacement and past its life expectancy. Additionally, one of the bond questions on referendum will include the baseball field, which has never had an upgrade, and hopes are to upgrade it to a multi-purpose turf field to allow for improved use. Granby Memorial Middle School remains structurally sound, but at 34 years old with no major renovations, the facility requires immediate HVAC, electrical, and plumbing upgrades to meet current codes and to pursue state grant and funding for a future, larger renovation. A workshop for the community and more information will be on the town website regarding these projects. Voters are asked to consider these two projects amongst five questions in December.

Ms. Lombardo was excited to learn more about the new Strategic Plan that establishes a clear vision for Granby Public Schools. The vision is to empower every student to become a confident, capable learner, and reach their highest potential. The plan centers on four strategic goals, and includes metrics for measuring success and allows adaptation to changing conditions.

Lastly, Ms. Lombardo mentioned the 2027-28 district budget. The board is calling for community engagement well in advance of budget conversations. Multiple opportunities will be provided for residents to share their priorities and vision for spending. The first budget workshop will be held October 21, 2026 at 7 p.m.

Awards and Recognition:
The Board of Education Chair, Heather Lombardo celebrated Jessica Foskitt. Ms. Foskitt is Granby Public Schools' teacher of the year. Ms. Foskitt is the District Orchestra Director and Strings Teacher. Ms. Foskitt has created opportunities for students across the district to experience high-level learning opportunities in the area of Orchestra.

Superintendents Report:
The Superintendent provided a detailed review of summer operations, had conversation on personnel retention, upgrades to safety protocols, and student success metrics.

Ms. Burke welcomed Ms. Teagan Hall, a junior at the high school, who joined Madison Shantz as the new Student Representative this year. Teagan is on the track team and is very engaged at the high school.

Ms. Burke went on to note the board has received budget books. Ms. Burke gave an overview of the process on final decisions where reductions and movements are made after the taxpayers vote on the budget. The budget book can be found on the district website for those who wish to view it. It was highly recommended by Ms. Burke that the books be brought to the meetings so board members can make notes for future budget discussions.

Ms. Burke acknowledged the district experienced a challenging, higher-than-average turnover of about 25 certified staff members prior to the new school year. Ms. Burke informed that exit interviews are held to gain perspective and she found that there were two primary drivers in staff exits. One being salary is greater in neighboring communities, where increases in salary of over nine to twenty-two-thousand dollars for identical roles exist. Others left the profession completely due to stressful challenges within the profession and, even within the community. Ms. Burke expressed the importance of publicly sharing salary and retention challenges in Granby Public Schools. Ms. Burke emphasized the importance of recognizing the impact on student achievement when investments in staff mentoring and training over several years are lost due to staff leaving for neighboring districts offering more competitive salaries and where the community provides a more desirable interaction.

Ms. Burke welcomed Granby Memorial Middle School's new principal, Ashly Darnell. Having recently moved back from Texas, Ms. Darnell brings many years of experience as a secondary administrator at both the high school and middle school level. Ms. Burke also welcomed, Dean of Students at the High School, Ryan McCormack. Mrs. Jenny Arnold was also introduced by Ms. Burke. Serving as the Board of Education meeting clerk, supporting the superintendent and assistant superintendent part-time, as well as general duties within the office.

Ms. Burke moved on to provide Curriculum night information, which provides parents and guardians the opportunity to learn more about the schools, staff and expectations for their students during the school year.

Ms. Burke then acknowledged the activity at the state level over the summer. State-level updates are always received and it was noted that this year, hundreds of new legislative orders and policies were included. Ms. Burke is working to become informed on the new legislation to share with the policy and curriculum committees. Serving in a leadership role for the Hartford Area Superintendents, Ms. Burke hopes to gain more insight to the considerable policy changes in the coming 1-to-3 years.

Ms. Burke brought into conversation grant opportunities available over the summer and a Spring, Special Education High Quality Incentive Grant that was applied for through a 25-page application to expand the RISE program at Kelly Lane. The grant incentivized districts to have in-house special education programming. Granby Public Schools has already explored in-district programming, which has brought back three students through the BEAR Gap Program. The program has allowed students to return from out-of-district placement, which can be costly. The grant applied for missed the funding threshold by 1-point on the rubric and the disappointment was shared. Despite the lack of funding, the district is moving forward with hiring a second RISE teacher, as a critical cost-savings strategy. Ms. Burke expressed her desire to meet with state representatives to further understand the selection process for funding and strong representation for the district during those discussions.

Ms. Burke ended with praising the amount of updates to the safety and security system over the summer and the staff that worked to implement the upgrades; particularly Mr. Chris DeGray and School Resource Officer, Chris Dufresne. Together, they worked to implement the last phases of a multi-year commitment to upgrade the safety and security components. Ms. Burke acknowledged the false lockdown alarm at the high school from September 8, 2026 due to a faulty component and took the opportunity to praise the immediate and collaborative response from the School Resource Officer, who was on-site, and the Police Department. Ms. Burke also shared that though the event was initially concerning, the event presented an opportunity for real-time training to improve future responses and provided the ability to debrief on the overall process for future improvements, she announced that the planned lock down drill would be cancelled in lieu of the false alarm.

Mr. Joel Danke rounded out the Superintendent's report by commenting that he had attended the Finance Subcommittee meeting where they provided an update on upgrades and underlined the expanded coverage added to safety and security at the schools. He emphasized that some of the improvements make an incredible difference on police response time.

Student Representative Report:
Student Representative, Madison Schantz, mentioned it is already a very exciting year. The E-Sports Club, which is both casual and competitive, is up and running. Ms. Schantz highlighted the club being inclusive and that many have expressed interest, particularly freshmen. Excitement centered on increased participation spread amongst many other clubs, particularly the Model UN Club having 32 participants! Ms. Schantz mentioned that the Student Orientation went well and she feels freshmen are feeling comfortable with navigating the high school floor plan, better than in previous years. College visits are starting up, with U-Hart visiting during lunch periods. Ms. Schantz highlighted the PSAT is taking place in October and that many language students are looking forward to attending a field trip to The Met in the City. Previous years only allowed one language class to attend a field trip, and this year, the opportunity was expanded to include all language students. Ms. Schantz ended with expressing her excitement for the Homecoming Dance and Game as well as for Puff's, the school play.
New Student Representative, Teagan Hall added the year is off to a very strong start. Fall sports are getting into session and everyone seems to be looking forward to a competitive season. Volleyball is off to an exciting start, having beat Coventry in their home opener. Girls Soccer and Field Hockey have also done well. The Bears Football team had their first home game, with a huge win and many students attended in excitement. The drama club has held auditions for the fall production of Puffs, which is a popular comedic play that is a fast-paced and a spin-off parody of Harry Potter. They are beginning to work towards a very exciting show in November.

Teagan and Madison both shared the first in-school assembly went well.

Public Comment: The Board of Education heard from the public in-person and via Zoom.
Michael Kramenko: Presented in-person and expressed positivity in his interaction with new staff at Central Office, which resulted in a prompt call back from the Dean of Students in regard to his concern. His main concern was that Oliver Wolcott Technical School students have group bus stops, instead of individual stops and safety concerning those points. Focus was also placed on the distance students were walking to school, and a specific stop where the building is closed on specific days and the concern for inclement weather for students waiting for a ride. Disappointment with a survey from an English teacher regarding religious holidays and traditions celebrated and felt questions regarding religious holidays fall outside of the standard academic curriculum. Concerns over the board's spending and the source of funds were also expressed.

Wendy Cubic: Presented in person to express her support for teachers and schools. She expressed that staff should be properly compensated for their dedication to the students of the community.

Maureen Eberly: Ms. Eberly, via Zoom, referred to questions on enrollment sent via email to the Chairperson, Heather Lombardo. Questions were in regard to a specific bus stop and safety concerns for students at the stop. Her third question was in relation to educational goals. She is wanting to become more familiar with the process and measurements of success, such as evaluations and metrics for such goals.

Denise Dombrowski: Via Zoom, thanked the Board for having meetings on Zoom and providing access to parents of young children who may otherwise not be able to attend. She posed the question of prioritizing education over a pivot towards the focus on lower taxes knowing the tradeoff could be faltering schools and reputation. She expressed her concerns for staff retention and ensuring compensation is adequate to remain appealing and competitive, which in her belief, also support the home values.

Sarah Esthus: Granby resident, via Zoom, who wanted to express her feelings for staff compensation being more in line with neighboring districts and the impact it can have on teacher-climate within the buildings. Expressed support for wanting staff to feel valued.

Lynn Krauss: Spoke via Zoom, and acknowledged that staff retention is important. Expressed her hopes in finding a better balance between funding for education and those who are on a fixed income in the community during this year's budget process.

Reports and Discussion

Strategic Plan First Read: **Click Here to view the presentation and attachments.**

Superintendent Cheri Burke presented the 5-Year Strategic Plan and introduced the mission, "Learn with Purpose, Lead with Passion, Succeed Together." The updated plan, which was in need of revitalization after first being introduced during COVID, utilizes a "Theory of Action" framework centered on four pillars: Connect, Believe, Achieve, and Operations. The plan was created through visionary work. Ms. Burke advised the board that the plan would come in for a vote on October 7, 2026.

Summative Testing Report: **Click Here to view the report and attachments.**

Assistant Superintendent, Jennifer Parsons, presented her annual snapshot of student achievement and provided her report through a presentation on Summative Testing, which included proficiency scores on SBAC, in-school PSAT and SAT. She added that a deep dive into performance on every student, in every school was made to help identify trends in proficiencies. Ms. Parsons noted the Strategic Plan served as a, "North Star," for the direction in helping students reach proficiency.

Ms. Parsons closed her presentation with providing action steps for how interventions will be implemented to boost achievement on assessments for the upcoming school year and how it coincides with the overall, Strategic Plan.

Business Requiring Action:

Approval of June 17, 2026 Meeting Minutes. Heather Lombardo moved to approve the Board of Education meeting minutes from June 17, 2026. John Limeburner seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Ms. Nicole Stevenson presented the FY2026 Year-End Budget Expense Report, July/August 2026 Budget Expense Report and highlighted costs-savings, as well as discussed funding positioning for the new fiscal year. Ms. Stevenson noted that the year ended with more funds than anticipated due to several factors, including, but not limited to, an excess costs grant, special education tuition savings, and additional funds not anticipated. The Board of Education voted to approve the FY2026 Year-End Budget Expense Report. Joel Danke moved to approve the Year-End 2026 Budget Expense Report, Ann Woods seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously with votes of those in attendance.

A motion to Transfer savings to the Non-Lapsing Account was made, John Limeburner moved to approve the transfer of Board of Education savings to the non-lapsing account in the amount of $72,521.09. Andrew Billig seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously with votes of those in attendance.

A motion to Approve the July–August 2026 Budget Expense Report was made, Ann Woods moved to approve the July–August 2026 Budget Expense Report. John Limeburner seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously with votes from those in attendance.

Adjournment
There being no other business to come before the board, as the planned executive session was cancelled, Heather Lombardo requested to adjourn the meeting at 9:43 p.m. John Limeburner moved to adjourn the meeting, and Joel Danke seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously, and the meeting was adjourned.

Submitted and Recorded By:

Jennifer Arnold

Jennifer Arnold,
Assistant to the Superintendent and Assistant Superintendent