

Somers Board of Education Regular Meeting
Somers Board of Education Chambers
Monday, June 8, 2026
7:00 PM

(The recorded livestream may be viewed on SPS' YouTube channel on the school website)

Present BOE Members: Mike Briggs, Dr. Ed DePeau, JT Galloway (via phone), Dr. Sharon Goulet, Anne Kirkpatrick, Shane Manning, Gina Olearczyk, Kim Radziewicz, Derek Zelek

Others: Dr. Sam Galloway, Dr. Jaime Rechenberg, Margot Martello, Melissa Mucci, Stephanie Levin, Kevin Nichols, Lisa Horan, Aja Drammeh, Chris Mangini, Kevin Gridley, Brandy Gridley, Alyssa Gridley, Dr. Michael Dietter, Kyanalis Torres, Tatiana Errar, Chris Cromwell, Maria Peterson, Michelle Nowakowski, Paul Hart

1. CALL TO ORDER

The regular Board of Education meeting was called to order by Chair Briggs at 7:00 p.m. in the Board of Education Chambers.

2. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

3. AWARDS AND RECOGNITIONS

3.1. Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents (CAPSS) Certificate of Excellence Awards

Rationale: Dr. Galloway will present the CAPSS Certificate of Excellence Awards to Alyssa Gridley from SES, Kyanalis Torres from MBA, and Aja Drammeh from SHS.

Discussion: Superintendent Galloway introduced the CAPSS Certificate of Excellence Award. He explained that the award recognizes students who demonstrate outstanding service, academic commitment, leadership, and dedication to their school communities.

Principal Mucci recognized Alyssa Gridley as a role model who consistently supports others, demonstrates empathy, takes responsibility for her learning, and contributes positively to the SES community. Alyssa was joined by her family and teachers and received her certificate, flowers, a yard sign, and the first Somers Challenge Coin.

Superintendent Galloway introduced the Somers Challenge Coins, which will be used to recognize students and staff for outstanding work, perseverance, and contributions to the school community.

Principal Martello recognized Kyanalis Torres as a dedicated student and quiet leader who holds herself to high standards, demonstrates kindness and inclusivity,

and is involved as a peer mentor, book club member, and volleyball club member. Kyanalis received her award and challenge coin.

Dr. Rechenberg recognized Aja Drammeh for her leadership, determination, advocacy, and commitment to improving the school community. She highlighted Aja's positive energy, willingness to speak up for others, and role in advocating for the SHS culinary program. Aja received her award and challenge coin.

Board Recognition of Ashley Guerra

Rationale: Dr. Galloway will introduce Ashley Guerra, MBA's Administrative Assistant, to the Board for her Westover Airlift Wing 2025 Key Support Liaison of the Year Award, which recognizes a volunteer who has demonstrated exceptional dedication to the Commander's Key Support Program. Ashley acted as a vital link between the squadron leadership and military families, specifically ensuring families are supported during deployments and separations, allowing service members to focus on the mission.

Discussion: The Board recognized Ashley Guerra, MBA Administrative Assistant, for her outstanding service to the district, students, and community. Ashley is a vital part of the MBA community, consistently going above and beyond to support students and staff. Ashley was recognized by the Westover Airlift Wing as the 2025 Key Support Liaison of the Year, serving as an important link between squadron leadership and military families. As a proud military wife from a family dedicated to service, Ashley brings that same dedication to Somers Public Schools. Superintendent Galloway presented Ashley with a Somers Challenge Coin in recognition of her service.

4. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

4.1. Approval of the May 26, 2026 Meeting Minutes

Rationale: The Board to review and approve the minutes from the May 26, 2026 Board meeting.

Motion to approve minutes from May 26, 2026 Regular Meeting. This motion, made by Shane Manning and seconded by Derek Zelek, Carried. **Yea: 9, Nay: 0**

4.2. Approval of the May 28, 2026 Special Meeting Minutes

Rationale: The Board to review and approve the Special Meeting minutes from May 28, 2026.

Motion to approve minutes from May 28, 2026 Special Meeting. This motion, made by Gina Olearczyk and seconded by Kim Radziewicz, Carried. **Yea: 8, Nay: 0, Abstain: 1 (Ed DePeau)**

5. ADMINISTRATIVE REPORTS

5.1. Superintendent Update

Superintendent Galloway shared that the budget did not pass at the most recent referendum. The Central Office team has developed a plan for reductions. The team has met multiple times, including with building leaders, to respond in a thoughtful and meaningful way. Details will be discussed later in the meeting.

SHS Graduation will be held on 6/10/26 at 6:00 p.m. on the SHS turf.

5.2. Morgan Stanley Update

Rationale: Kevin Nichols from Morgan Stanley will update the Board.

Discussion: Kevin Nichols from Morgan Stanley provided the Board with an update on the district's pension portfolio. He shared that the market has been unusual and unpredictable this year, with frequent shifts in which types of investments are performing well. He noted that higher-risk, more volatile stocks have recently outperformed, while broader economic expectations, including GDP growth, have been lowered. Mr. Nichols explained that this has created a challenging environment for active investment managers. He also noted that emerging markets continue to look attractive and that recent portfolio changes have had a positive impact. In response to a question about rising interest rates, Mr. Nichols explained that the portfolio is positioned to limit exposure to interest rate changes. The average bond maturity is less than two years, meaning the portfolio is less vulnerable to shifts in interest rates than it would be with longer-term bonds. Mr. Nichols reviewed the past three years of performance and discussed potential manager changes. The goal of these changes is to reduce volatility within the portfolio. Mr. Nichols also noted that the OPEB portfolio has performed above the assumed rate of return.

5.3. Monthly Budget Report

Rationale: Stephanie Levin, Director of Business Services, will update the Board on the monthly budget report.

Discussion: Stephanie Levin presented the May monthly financial report. As of 5/31/26, the balance was approximately \$241,000, which includes the excess cost reimbursement. She noted that the district has begun using some of these funds due to the budget situation, but plans to freeze and not spend approximately \$100,000. During June, the district will continue closing out purchase orders and final bills. As that process is completed, the projected year-end balance will become more precise. The final number will be confirmed through the audit in December, but is currently expected to be around \$100,000.

6. OPPORTUNITY TO ADD/DELETE AGENDA ITEMS

7. CONSENT AGENDA

Motion to approve Consent Agenda. This motion, made by Ed DePeau and seconded by Anne Kirkpatrick, Carried. **Yea: 9, Nay: 0**

7.1. Warrant of June 8, 2026

Rationale: The Board to review and consent to the warrant of June 8, 2026.

7.2. 2nd Posting DBS Code 5112.01 - Kindergarten Enrollment and Early Entry Waiver (2026-2027)

7.3. 2nd Posting DBS Code 5131.81 - Use of Electronic Devices

7.4. 2nd Posting DBS Code 9120.1 - Officers - Election

7.5. 2nd Posting DBS Code 9231.4 - Minor Matters

8. OLD BUSINESS

9. NEW BUSINESS

9.1. Puerto Rico Field Trip

Rationale: Chris Mangini, SHS Spanish Teacher, will present the Puerto Rico Trip to the Board for their approval.

Motion to approve Puerto Rico Field Trip. This motion, made by Ed DePeau and seconded by Gina Olearczyk, Carried. **Yea: 9, Nay: 0**

Discussion: Chris Mangini, SHS Spanish teacher, presented a proposal for a Somers High School World Languages field trip to Puerto Rico from 1/27/27-1/31/27. The timing was selected to fall at the end of semester one and beginning of semester two, minimizing the impact on exams, half-year courses, and extracurricular activities. The trip will provide students with a meaningful cultural and language-learning experience while remaining within the United States. Students will explore Puerto Rico's culture, history, geography, geopolitics, ecological tourism, and environmental impact, helping them better understand their role as global citizens.

The trip will be organized by EF Tours, the same company used for the Spain trip. EF has more than 50 years of experience, provides 24/7 security and medical support, and includes travel insurance. Students will depart from Bradley International Airport and fly directly to San Juan, where they will be met by a tour director who will remain with the group throughout the trip. Hotels are expected to have four-star accommodations or higher.

The estimated cost is approximately \$2,600-\$2,800 for 20-24 students. Payment plans are available, and EF offers some financial assistance options. Fundraising opportunities may also be explored if the trip is approved.

Board members asked about weather contingencies, chaperones, and parent participation. Mr. Mangini explained that EF's travel insurance would assist with accommodations and related issues if weather causes disruptions. The trip would include one chaperon for every eight students, with at least three certified staff members. Parents of participating students may also choose to pay to attend as chaperones.

Board members thanked Mr. Mangini for the organization and thoughtfulness of the proposal. Members noted the thoughtful timing of the trip and appreciated that it was presented early to allow families time to plan.

9.2. FY27 Budget Discussion

Rationale: Discussion and possible action regarding the FY27 budget.

Motion to approve FY27 Budget Reduction. This motion, made by Shane Manning and seconded by Anne Kirkpatrick, Carried. **Yea: 9, Nay: 0**

Discussion: The Board discussed the latest budget reductions following direction from the Board of Finance to reduce the proposed budget by \$474,510. Superintendent Galloway, Stephanie Levin, the Central Office team, and building leaders reviewed the budget and identified areas that would have the least direct impact on students.

Reductions include savings from unfilled or reduced positions, including retirements, resignations, and hiring at lower salary levels. The district also reduced funding for some stipends, clubs that have not been running, professional development wages and registration fees, building and maintenance repairs, supplies, textbooks, educational software, technology hardware, and capital outlay items. Some planned purchases, such as science lab furniture, furniture replacements, emergency preparedness directories, and technology refresh cycles, will be delayed or eliminated.

These reductions remove much of the district's remaining cushion. Cuts to areas such as Social Security, Medicare, unemployment, and benefits could create shortfalls if actual costs come in higher than projected. Additional budget freezes may be needed during the year, which would mean limiting purchases to essential expenses such as payroll and utilities, while deferring supplies, non-emergency repairs, and other needs.

Board members expressed concern about the long-term impact of repeated reductions, noting that this is the third budget reduction. Ms. Levin later noted the total amount of three reductions totals \$894,164. While the district has worked hard to protect daily student learning, many of the removed items may need to be added back to future budgets as new costs. Concerns were also raised about reductions to paraeducator positions, especially given the district's efforts to support students in-district and avoid more costly outplacements.

Superintendent Galloway stated that the district has operated responsibly and has already made significant reductions in recent years, including positions and programs at multiple levels. He noted that the district has continued to improve performance while reducing costs, but warned that there will eventually be a tipping point.

If no budget is adopted by 7/1/26, the current year's budget will continue while the town proceeds to another referendum. Stephanie Levin noted that,

based on current conversations, the district may not be asked for additional cuts, but a legal opinion may be needed if further reductions are requested.

Several Board members emphasized the importance of community engagement and accurate information. They noted that taxes may increase regardless due to revaluation, and expressed concern that the broader budget conversation has been affected by confusion and misinformation. Members encouraged residents to follow Board of Finance, Board of Education, and Board of Selectmen meetings directly rather than relying only on social media. The next referendum is scheduled for 6/16/26 before the end of the school year.

10. COMMITTEE REPORTS

10.1. Curriculum

The next meeting will be held at the start of next school year.

10.2. Policy

This committee met on 6/8/26. The next meeting will be held on 8/24/26 at 6 p.m.

10.3. Planning/Finance

There is no report for this committee.

10.4. Salary & Negotiations

The Nurses' contract is completed. A meeting with the Maintenance unit will be held on 6/17/26.

10.5. Building

There are no updates. The next meeting will be held on 6/10/26.

11. CIP/CREC/SEF

There are no CIP, CREC or SEF reports.

12. ADVANCE CALENDAR

Upcoming district and community events include:

SHS Graduation will be held on 6/10/26 at 6:00 p.m. on the SHS turf. A decision about moving the ceremony indoors will be made by noon that day.

The 8th Grade Promotion Ceremony will be held on 6/16/26 at 9:00 a.m. on the SHS turf.

The Budget Referendum will take place on 6/16/26 from 6:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. at Town Hall.

The last day of school for students is 6/17/26. The 5th Grade Promotion Ceremony will also be held that day at 9:30 a.m. on the SHS turf.

Teachers will have a full professional development day on 6/18/26.

National Night Out, a free community event presented by Somers Police and Prevention Services, will be held on 8/4/26 from 5:00-7:30 p.m. at Field Road.

13. AUDIENCE TO CITIZENS/STAFF/STUDENTS

Community member Lisa Horan spoke in support of the school budget, stating that the proposed reductions are "penny wise and pound foolish." Although she does not currently have students in Somers Public Schools, she expressed concern that continued cuts could lead to long-term costs, reduced educational quality, and negative impacts on students, the community, and property values. Ms. Horan also raised concerns about misinformation and the need for clear, easily accessible budget information. She suggested providing an accurate public explanation, including FAQs, budget history, trends, and calculations.

Superintendent Galloway explained that, based on legal guidance, the district cannot use public funds or school communication platforms to advocate for the budget. Staff may speak as private citizens but may not use district email or resources. Board members noted their own efforts to share information with the community.

Ms. Horan asked whether deferred maintenance could become more costly later. The district noted that DRIP funds have been used for repairs, with some funds carrying over for future needs.

14. EXECUTIVE SESSION

Rationale: The Board to enter into Executive Session to discuss the Non-Union staff wage adjustments for the 2026-2027 school year and to discuss the Superintendent Evaluation. The Board will invite Dr. Galloway into Executive Session.

Motion to enter into Executive Session and invite Dr. Galloway to discuss Non-Union staff wage adjustments and the Superintendent Evaluation at 8:29 p.m. This motion, made by Gina Olearczyk and seconded by Shane Manning, Carried. **Yea: 9, Nay: 0**

The Board entered Executive Session at 8:29 p.m.

The Board exited Executive Session at 9:14 p.m.

Motion to accept the recommendations of the Superintendent on the proposed salary adjustments for non-union staff for the 2026-2027 school year. This motion, made by Kim Radziewicz and seconded by Derek Zelek, Carried. **Yea: 9, Nay: 0**

15. ADJOURNMENT

Motion to adjourn the meeting at 9:15 p.m. This motion, made by Shane Manning and seconded by Derek Zelek, Carried. **Yea: 9, Nay: 0**

Dr. Sharon Goulet, BOE Secretary Date
Jenna McDermott, BOE Recording Secretary