

Somers Board of Education Regular Meeting
Somers Board of Education Chambers
Monday, March 9, 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, Dr. Sharon Goulet, Anne Kirkpatrick, Shane Manning, Gina Olearczyk, Kim Radziewicz

Absent BOE Member: Derek Zelek

Others: Dr. Sam Galloway, Stephanie Levin, Caroline Hargraves, Margot Martello, Sharon Remington, Becky Joyal, Lisa Horan

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. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

3.1. Approval of the February 25, 2026 BOE Special Meeting Minutes

Rationale: The Board to review and approve the minutes from the February 25, 2026 Special Board meeting.

Motion to approve minutes from February 25, 2026 Special Meeting. This motion, made by Kim Radziewicz and seconded by Shane Manning, Carried.

Yea: 8, Nay: 0, Absent: 1 (Derek Zelek)

4. ADMINISTRATIVE REPORTS

4.1. Superintendent Update

Superintendent Galloway provided the Superintendent Update. SPS has submitted an application for a collaborative, district-level accreditation offered through The New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) and the Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents (CAPSS). The accreditation distinction is designed to align district practices with rigorous standards and district goals of strengthening coherence, alignment, and consistent instructional delivery across all schools. Somers has applied to be an "early adopter" of the program. The process will require both individual schools and the district to reflect on current practices and their impact on student outcomes. Superintendent Galloway noted that he will attend upcoming informational webinars and believes the process will support future district strategic planning. He also expressed interest in collaborating with other participating districts.

Superintendent Galloway submitted written testimony opposing proposed state House Bill 5468. Connecticut House Bill 5468 would require families who homeschool to officially register with their local school district, submit yearly confirmation that they are providing "equivalent instruction," and show evidence of a student's academic progress through testing, portfolios, or similar records. Superintendent Galloway expressed concern that the proposal could further limit interaction between school personnel and homeschooling families, and that some parents have expressed concern that the bill represents an overreach regarding requirements for families to report information to the district or state. Currently, homeschooled students may enroll in up to two district classes and participate in athletics if they meet student-athlete eligibility standards.

4.2. Excess Cost and SEED Grants

Rationale: Dr. Galloway, Stephanie Levin, and Caroline Hargraves will update the Board on the 2025-2026 Excess Cost and SEED Grants.

Discussion: Ms. Stephanie Levin and Ms. Caroline Hargraves presented an overview of the 2025-2026 Excess Cost Grant and the new SEED Grant for Special Education. Stephanie Levin explained that the Excess Cost Grant is a three-tiered state reimbursement program designed to assist with special education costs for students with extraordinary needs requiring high-cost and intensive services. Tiering is based on the median wealth of the town, which is assessed annually. Historically, districts have only been partially reimbursed. Somers has been 88-91% funded. Eligibility is determined once a student's costs exceed 4.5 times the district's prior-year per pupil expenditure. For Somers, the per pupil expenditure is \$21,716.72, meaning costs must exceed approximately \$97,725 before reimbursement is considered. Historically, Somers has received between \$185,158 and \$273,313 in reimbursement, though the district never budgets the full expected amount because state funding levels vary.

Districts must submit anticipated expenditures for students expected to exceed the \$97,725 threshold in December. These students must be enrolled in the district by October 1st to be included. Subsequent submissions in March and September include updated projections and actual expenditures.

The district reports \$451,235 for uncapped reimbursement and \$328,142 in capped reimbursement (73% of the uncapped amount). The state will distribute 75% of this amount, approximately \$246,107, in February 2026 and an additional 20%, approximately \$65,628, in May 2026. The remaining 5% will be adjusted after final expenditures are submitted on 9/1/26.

Ms. Levin noted that excess cost funds are used to offset special education expenses that exceed what is initially budgeted. The district typically assumes a 3% increase in special education costs based on current IEPs, but recent increases in tuition and service costs are exceeding that rate. Approximately eleven students are currently tracked as potentially eligible for excess cost reimbursement, though

two are currently below the threshold and would not generate reimbursement unless costs increase.

Caroline Hargraves added that tuition rates for outplacement programs have recently increased by as much as 10%. Historically, districts were not required to provide advance notice of tuition increases, and there is still no cap on those increases. A recent state task force recommendation now requires districts to notify others of tuition changes by 12/15.

Ms. Hargraves explained that outplacement costs include both tuition and transportation and are combined when calculating the excess cost threshold. Funds may also support in-district services if reimbursement exceeds outplacement costs, including additional paraprofessional or medical support, contracted services, or expanded transition programming for students through age 23.

The presentation included several scenarios illustrating how the district budgets for high-cost students, including known placements, mid-year outplacements, and students who move into the district with existing placements. Ms. Levin explained that reimbursement from high-cost students often offsets unexpected placements or other unbudgeted expenses. Conversely, if a student leaves the district, the district may lose expected reimbursement. Ms. Levin led the Board through a variety of scenarios to highlight what could occur under different ECS funding conditions.

Board member Sharon Goulet thanked the presenters for providing clear scenarios that helped explain the complexity of special education funding and the legal obligations districts must meet. She asked what strategies could help keep more students in district. Administrators explained that the district has expanded from three to six in-district programs and currently serves 43 students in those programs, allowing Somers to meet more student needs locally. They noted that continued program development, staff training, and potential partnerships or cooperative programs with other districts may further expand in-district capacity.

Board member Gina Olearczyk added that some students currently placed out of district may have required services that Somers did not previously offer, and the district should continue evaluating whether students could return if appropriate supports are now available.

Caroline Hargraves then presented the new SEED Grant, a state-funded initiative intended to support the expansion and development of special education programming. Somers received \$61,181 through this one-time grant. Ms. Hargraves emphasized that the district prioritized one-time investments that expand programming rather than ongoing expenses that would require future funding.

Part of the grant will fund the creation of an adaptive playground at Somers Elementary School. The playground will include a rubberized surface, sensory stations, and equipment accessible to students with varying mobility needs. The playground will also encourage interaction between students with and without

disabilities. The district is working with Creative Recreation on the installation, and the Department of Public Works will assist with excavation to reduce costs. The district anticipates completing the project in the spring.

Additional SEED Grant funds will be used to purchase digital assessment tools and licensing to modernize special education evaluations, which are currently conducted primarily with paper-based tools that the district sometimes borrows from neighboring districts. Funds will also support materials to strengthen the academic rigor of life skills and transition programming, including resources aligned with the RISE program at MBA and its planned expansion to SHS. These materials will support instruction in daily living and transition skills for students through age 23.

Other purchases will include adaptive physical education equipment, standing desks, and specialized mobility equipment to enhance accessibility and student choice in programming. Of the total grant, \$7,469 will support instructional supplies, \$44,877 will fund equipment purchases, and \$8,835 will be used for technology hardware. The grant must be fully expended by 6/30/26.

Board members expressed appreciation for the thoughtful planning behind the use of the grant funds. Board Member Shane Manning asked about the factors that drive outplacement decisions and the rising tuition costs associated with them. Ms. Hargraves explained that outplacement decisions involve complex legal and educational considerations, including a student's progress, implementation of the IEP, mental health and safety concerns, and the district's ability to meet the student's needs.

Board Member Anne Kirkpatrick asked whether adding additional staff positions would significantly reduce outplacements. Administrators explained that while staffing increases can support programming, the complexity of student needs continues to grow and additional staff alone would not necessarily eliminate outplacements.

Board Member Ed DePeau asked about the capacity of the in-district programs. Administrators explained that the current programs are operating at a comfortable caseload level and could potentially expand with additional staffing if the district chose to serve students from other districts in the future.

4.3. Monthly Budget Report

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

Discussion: Stephanie Levin presented the monthly budget report, noting an increase in 'Other Instructional Salaries' due to a long-term substitute who began work in February. The salary has been encumbered for the remainder of the school year. An increase in health insurance costs was also noted. Two staff members newly enrolled in the district's health plan following qualifying life events, including one employee aging out of previous coverage.

5. OPPORTUNITY TO ADD/DELETE AGENDA ITEMS

6. CONSENT AGENDA

Motion to approve Consent Agenda. This motion, made by Anne Kirkpatrick and seconded by Gina Olearczyk, Carried. **Yea: 8, Nay: 0, Absent: 1 (Derek Zelek)**

6.1. Warrant of March 9, 2026

Rationale: The Board to review and consent to the warrant of March 9, 2026.

6.2. Resignations

Rationale:

- Gabrielle Tullock, MBA Paraeducator, will be resigning with her last day being April 10, 2026.
- Anthony Dzen, SHS Custodian, resigned effective March 2, 2026.

7. OLD BUSINESS

8. NEW BUSINESS

8.1. Proposed SPS 2026-2027 Budget to Board of Finance

Rationale: The Board to approve the proposed 2026-2027 budget to go to the Board of Finance.

Motion to approve the proposed 2026/2027 budget to go to the Board of Finance. This motion, made by JT Galloway and seconded by Kim Radziewicz, Carried. **Yea: 8, Nay: 0, Absent: 1 (Derek Zelek)**

9. COMMITTEE REPORTS

9.1. Curriculum

This committee met on 3/9/26 and approved the Explorations in Algebra 1 course. This course compresses a two-year Algebra 1 experience into one year. The course will help prepare students for the SAT and help move students toward higher math courses.

9.2. Policy

This committee will meet on 3/23/26 at 6 p.m. The committee will begin reviewing all BOE policies for potential updates. There are 12 BOE policies that are more than 20 years old.

9.3. Planning/Finance

This committee is on hold.

9.4. Salary & Negotiations (next meeting 3/16/26, 5 p.m.)

This committee will meet on 3/16/26 at 5 p.m. to discuss the custodial contract.

9.5. Building

Regarding the SES HVAC Project, state-required hazmat testing was completed without issue. CES will reduce its fees and scope of services. The grant application for the project was approved on 3/9/26. The town will receive \$7.87 million toward the HVAC project through the grant. Once the state approves the proposed plan, the project can go out to bid. The project is on track to begin this summer. Chair Briggs thanked Superintendent Galloway and Stephanie Levin for their work throughout the process.

Board Member Kim Radziewicz requested the total cost of the project. Ms. Levin shared that the cost estimate for the project is approximately \$12 million. The town previously approved \$15 million in December 2024.

Board Member JT Galloway requested clarification about the reduction of services by CES. Ms. Levin explained that CES fees and services will be reduced.

10. CIP/CREC/SEF

Stephanie Levin reviewed updates to the CIP. The only changes involve items previously requested by the Board. The \$120,000 Phase 2 boiler project at SES will no longer move forward through the CIP operating budget because the work will be incorporated into the HVAC project. Since the referendum approved \$15 million in December 2024 and the HVAC project is currently estimated at approximately \$12 million, the remaining referendum funds are expected to cover the boiler work. The project includes replacement of three banks of boilers and the heat exchanger at SES.

Other CIP items remain unchanged. The MBA gym curtain and the field mower will remain on the CIP list. The \$3,500 asphalt project at MBA will be incorporated into the town roads and sidewalks project and removed from CIP. The Phase 2 Somers High School library project has already been approved.

The next CREC meeting will take place on 3/18/26. Board Member Sharon Goulet will provide an update to the Board at the 3/23/26 BOE meeting.

Board Member Shane Manning reported that SEF's endowment has exceeded \$1.3 million. A recommendation was made for SEF to receive recognition for equipment and resources it has donated to the district through labeling. The foundation is planning an upcoming spring fundraiser.

11. ADVANCE CALENDAR

The Board of Finance budget meeting will take place on 3/10/26 at 7:00 p.m. Chair Briggs, Kim Radziewicz, Anne Kirkpatrick, and Superintendent Galloway will attend.

A PTO meeting will be held on 3/11/26 at 5:30 p.m. The Trade Fair will take place on 4/2/26 at 7:30 a.m. in the SHS gym. The district-wide art show will be held at the Somers Library on 4/27/26 at 6:00 p.m. The Spring Capstone

