

Budget Workshop – Approved Minutes
Wednesday, March 12, 2025, 7:00 p.m.
Central Services

Present Board Members: Liz Barlow, Monica Logan, Heather Lombardo, Donna Nolan, David Peling, and Karen Richmond-Godard.

Absent Board Members: Ali Zafar

I. Call to Order and Welcome

Board Chair, Monica Logan, called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. She welcomed all of those in attendance as well as on Zoom and extended a special welcome to Board of Finance members in attendance. She stated there is a great deal of interest in this meeting and the budget that has been suggested. The Board received many emails and heard from many residents. All emails are taken under great consideration and advisement. She stated she wanted to be clear and set the tone of the meeting stating the goal of the budget workshop tonight is to preserve both the Library Media Specialist position and the SRO Program. After spending a great deal of time in multiple meetings this week, Board Chair Logan stated she feels this can be accomplished. The BOE is facing a lot of challenges and is doing their best to remain steady during these challenges. The Town also faces challenges as a dip in revenue is anticipated in the upcoming year. She informed those in attendance and online that there is a change in the format for tonight's meeting with public comment offered prior to the presentation and again afterwards.

II. Public Comment

There were no public comments at this point in the meeting.

III. FY26 Superintendent's Budget Discussion

The Board continued its discussion of the FY26 Superintendent's Proposed Budget. Superintendent Burke stated this is an opportunity to dig a little deeper into the presentation given last week. The process moves rapidly with the Board voting on the budget next week. She shared what the Superintendent's Budget increase was when presented last week at 3.67% and explained what cuts were already made from the Plus One budget to get to that point.

Questions from Board members were reviewed and categorized, with the first category being enrollment. Superintendent Burke stated a careful eye is kept on enrollment especially with new building developments in town and homes being sold, etc. Jennifer Parsons, Assistant Superintendent, reviewed class sizes and class size guidelines stating the current Kindergarten class is one of the smallest classes in Granby in many years. Natural adjustments are made whenever possible to the class sizes as students move up in grades. Based on class size, there will be two less sections in total at the elementary level next year. For the secondary level, she stated it is harder to predict but it is the expectation that 1.8 FTE will be reduced based on World Language programming roll-up and enrollment numbers. Next, Ms. Parsons reviewed current enrollment vs. projected enrollment for next year. At the PK-2 level there is only an increase of one student; however, decreases are anticipated of 11 students in Grades 3-5 and 16 students in Grades 9-12. Overall, enrollment is expected to decline 22 students from this year. A question was raised with regard to the decline in enrollment but the increase in personnel. Superintendent Burke shared that over a 10-year period, administrative positions declined by 1; certified teacher positions declined by 1 and non-certified positions have increased by 12 during over the 10-year period. Student need has increased nationwide significantly over the same time period requiring additional needs for support personnel.

The next category of questions related to staffing. Superintendent Burke shared that the majority of the BOE budget is personnel (salary and benefits). A question was raised about the addition of 5 Teaching Assistants (TAs) to the budget. The B.E.A.R. Transition Academy will have 8 students

attending next year and 4 TAs are necessary to support adult supervision on a 2:1 ratio. The other TA will be assigned to the RISE Program at Kelly Lane Primary School. In the long-term, this addition saves the district \$880K, the cost of out-of-district tuition and transportation if those students were outplaced. . Another question raised was with regard to the possible elimination of an administrative position. Superintendent Burke stated this school year, the Assistant Principal position at the high school which was vacated due to a retirement, was replaced with a Dean of Students position which is a 10-month position. This was a savings to the District, and our number of administrators is in-line or less than many neighboring districts. A question regarding the number of certified staff members who left Granby Public Schools in the last 3 years was submitted. A chart was shared showing 10 teachers resigned in 2021-22; 18 in 2022-23; and, 24 in 2023-24. Karen Richmond-Godard inquired what the percentage is of the 24 resignations in 2023-24 and it was calculated to be 13%. Next, a question was submitted about consolidating the role of Instructional Coaches to cover multiple schools. Ms. Parsons stated that coaches are essential for the instructional and achievement goals of the District and a chart was shared showing the number of teachers served by a Coaches as well as highlights of their roles/responsibilities. Regarding what the impact would be if a Library Media Specialist (LMS) was not replaced, it was shared that there would be no change at the elementary level; however, one LMS would be shared across two schools at the secondary level. Additionally, a question was raised about the impact on students if the Tech Ed Teacher at the high school is not replaced. Ms. Parsons stated that several courses could be transferred to teachers with related certifications, such as Art and Math and that there is currently room within the department to absorb at least one technology course as well as the Business Department regaining 0.3 FTE next year and the addition of 0.6 FTE staffing to round out current positions. David Peling stated he does not support this change noting the importance of tech ed classes. A question regarding elective courses and the percentage of students who cannot fit them in their schedule was submitted. In Family & Consumer Science (F&CS), for example, 34% of students were not able to take classes in F&CS. Ms. Parsons stated with the new alignment of the middle and high school schedules, this may be realized. Superintendent Burke added the shared schedule is the foundation to open more options for students.

The last category of questions submitted were regarding revenue and funding. Nickie Stevenson, Director of Finance & Operations, stated a question was raised regarding funding of the SRO being shared with the town. She shared there are a variety of ways this can be done. Many districts use different avenues to fund SROs; however, it is up to each district as to how they want to do it. A question was also raised regarding revenue sent directly to the town for the B.E.A.R. Transition Academy, pay-for-participation, preschool, and Hartford/Hartland tuition. Ms. Stevenson shared that preschool tuition is revenue received which is deposited into the Q&D Fund but that revenue offsets expenses; however, other revenue streams go directly to the town and do not offset BOE expenses. If revenue was kept by the BOE, the BOE would actually reduce the expenses on the BOE side by the amount anticipated to be received, thereby lowering the overall budget ask.

Superintendent Burke stated the goal of the BOE is to add the LMS back into the budget as well as the SRO Program. She shared this can be accomplished by shifting funding sources. Nickie Stevenson explained shifting of the funding sources in Q&D, Small Cap and the General Fund allows for an SRO and LMS by moving technology equipment from Q&D to Small Cap (which will support the salary for the SRO); reducing/postponing the replacement of teacher laptops as well as reducing the cost of the required HVAC testing in Small Cap (which will support the benefits for the SRO); and, reducing line items in the General Fund, such as software and custodial supplies and moving purchased services for special education to a grant (which will support the Library/Media Specialist). These changes would result in a budget at 3.41% which is below 3.67% but above the 3.25% BOF guideline. This is zero impact to the taxpayers because this amount is already allocated.

Board Chair Logan inquired if there were any questions from the Board. Donna Nolan commented this is a hard process and taxpayers bear the burden. The Board wants to give our students the best education possible. She thanked the audience, taxpayers, BOS and BOF. Heather Lombardo stated she is appreciative of the level of transparency and that sharing information is one of the most important things the Board can do related to the budget. She inquired if this budget does not include anything that might be kicking a can down the road. Superintendent Burke stated she is comfortable with the budget put before the Board and feels the right priorities are highlighted; however, eyes must always be kept on the future. David Peling commented he is shocked at the number of students who have an IEP as well as the number of teacher resignations which should continue to be addressed. With regard to the SRO, he stated he feels a lot is being given up in order to have this program and he does not feel it is a good trade. Board Chair Logan shared that she initially was not in favor of the SRO Program; however, with 80% of survey takers in favor of the program, especially students who want the program, she is in support of it. Karen Richmond-Godard also shared her support for the program.

BOF member, Bill Kennedy, inquired about annual tuition charged for Agriscience and Asnuntuck programs. Nickie Stevenson shared the cost of magnet, Agriscience and Asnuntuck programming for next year to be approximately \$206K which is paid out of the Q&D Fund. Legally we cannot cap the number of students who can attend these programs. This year, per State legislation, tuition charged is capped at 58% of what the total cost of tuition was in 2023-2024, which helps with costs. BOF member Kevin Hobson stated he appreciates the work done on the budget as well as the creative solutions to the challenges set. BOF member Ben Perron reiterated what Mr. Hobson stated and shared the tightening of funds at the state and federal level is a gauge of what could happen during the year as time proceeds. Superintendent Burke stated this will be discussed at the BOE Meeting next week.

IV. Public Comment (Second Opportunity)

Board Chair Logan opened the floor to public comment once again following the presentation.

Bob Smith, 24 Oakwood Drive, thanked the Board for listening and inquired if something happens and adjustments are necessary, when would this information be communicated. Superintendent Burke stated the District is committed to communicating. There are a few more opportunities for engagement. Next Wednesday at the Board of Education Meeting there will be an additional opportunity for budget discussion and public comment and the Board will vote. There will also be a public hearing on April 7th then the town vote on April 21st.

Michael Fitzgerald, Strawberry Fields, expressed the good work on the budget. He commented on the Per Pupil Expenditure cost stating Granby is 9% above average (3rd quartile) which is not impressive. He also commented on the loss of 42 teachers over the past 3 years and stated exit interviews are important. With regard to the retirement of the Tech Ed Teacher, the courses currently taught sound technical in nature and he does not feel it is optimal for Art and Math Teachers to fill in. He shared at the last Board Meeting it was presented that this is the lowest budget increase since 2021 even with the adjustments. He stated Granby has to protect our local education system and be assertive and aggressive around providing the highest quality education.

Kerry Brady, Barkhamsted Road, inquired if the B.E.A.R. Transition Academy is proactive in nature and that the benefits of using this program is to offset the outplacement of students and it was confirmed that this is the case. Ms. Brady also inquired about the RISE Program at the PK-2 level and if that will only serve Kelly Lane students at this time. Superintendent Burke stated, yes, it will only be at Kelly Lane and it is proactive to meet needs of the District. Additionally, Ms. Brady inquired if the teacher resignations were mainly on the general or special education side. Superintendent Burke stated she does not have that information handy; however, exit interviews are given and she feels it is sprinkled across the board. Trends are being seen as to why teachers are leaving (change of career and change to another district for salary or leadership opportunity).

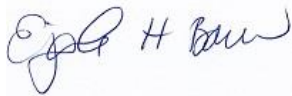
Lastly, Ms. Brady inquired about the average caseload of a special education teachers and Superintendent Burke stated this data is not at her fingertips; however, caseloads are smaller in Granby than other districts.

Board Chair Logan stated she received more emails from the public in the last week versus the last year and encouraged everyone to email any questions on the budget. She thanked all who attended the meeting in person and online and stated any questions from the Board should be emailed to the Board Chair and Linda Powell for next week's meeting.

IV. Adjournment

A motion was made by Donna Nolan and seconded by David Peling that the Granby Board of Education adjourn the Budget Workshop. This motion passed unanimously at 9:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Elizabeth H. Barlow", is written over a light blue rectangular background.

Elizabeth H. Barlow
Board Secretary