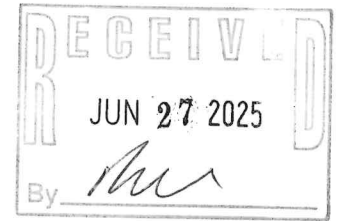


REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT No. 20
BOARD OF EDUCATION
SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES
June 17, 2025



Budget Meeting #3

1. Call to Order The Board of Education Budget Meeting #3 held at Lakeview High School and via teleconference was called to order at 6:32 p.m. by Tiffany Parkhouse.

Members present: Tiffany Parkhouse, Chair, Rob DeLayo, Vice Chair, Ashley Hall Daddona, Secretary, Matt Terzian, Treasurer, Krista Rizzo, Susan Wheeler, John Morosani, Margaret Hunt, and Diane Barnes.

Also present: Jeffrey Villar, Ph.D., Superintendent.

Absent: Scott Pottbecker, Tracy Martin, and Ashley Westfall.

2. Pledge of Allegiance Partway through the presentation the meeting was stopped and Tiffany Parkhouse invited everyone to stand and recite the Pledge of Allegiance.
3. To present and discuss a District amended budget of \$42,744,083 for the District's fiscal year beginning July 1, 2025 and ending June 30, 2026. Following discussion of the District amended budget, the District Meeting will adjourn to a "yes" or "no" vote on the budget to take place on the voting tabulators in each of the member towns on the day following the District Meeting – Wednesday, June 18, 2025, from 6:00 A.M. to 8:00 P.M.

Tiffany Parkhouse welcomed everyone to the meeting and commented Dr. Villar will be providing the FY26 presentation once more before the meeting adjourns to a vote in member towns tomorrow. She added there will be Public Comment this evening.

Dr. Villar presented the FY26 Amended Budget that included the Budget Calendar, Enrollment Projections, Revenues, Expense Projections, Variances by Cost Centers, and Summary of what the proposed Fiscal Year (FY) 26 Budget supports. Additional information presented was by date FY26 Budget Proposals starting with the 'turnkey' budget of \$45,776,466 (11.22%) and the subsequent budgets leading up to the current proposal of \$42,744,083 (3.86%) increase. A 'by location' staff reduction charts, Region 20 start-up costs, and suggested reductions should the district get to July 1, 2025, without a budget was also discussed.

Additionally, when presenting information on the *Merger Savings* slide, Dr. Villar pointed out that it is important to note the district received a million dollars in COVID relief funds that was used toward funding the schools.

4. Public Comment
Individuals offering public comment should please state their first and last name and the town where they reside. Remarks should be limited to no more than three minutes. A maximum time

limit of 30 minutes will be allocated for public comment at any one meeting. Individuals representing a common interest or topic may be asked to have one individual speak for the group. Public comments must be relevant to the meeting's agenda. Speakers shall direct all comments to the Board, not to individual BOE members or administrators. Profane or vulgar language, partisan political statements, and comments related to the conduct or performance of staff are not permitted. Public comment is received without Board comment or response, the Board is to keep comments "under advisement." However, BOE members may seek clarification or additional information from speakers through the Chairman.

Tiffany Parkhouse was asked to read a letter from First Selectmen Greg LaCava of Warren who is out of town and could not attend the meeting. His letter was in support of the Chair and Vice Chair of the Board of Education, Superintendent and Chief Financial Officer of Region 20 schools in support of the revised school budget. He appreciates the efforts made on behalf of the students, staff, and residents and respects the good faith efforts. He added it is not an easy undertaking, appreciates the compromises and for allowing the towns to address the debt through the necessary means. He applauds the efforts on providing more oversight going forward and working with representatives from the towns. He respects the controls put in place and looks forward to continuing the work started and closed with, we must do all we can to provide the best education possible for children.

Casey Burke, from Goshen Center School spoke as a tenured teacher and talked about her commitment to the district and the number of personal, life changing challenges she has faced and the importance of showing up as her students mean the world to her. She acknowledged the support she received from her Principal, Tracy Keilty and colleagues and spoke about the curriculum positions being eliminated, and the essential paraprofessional positions. She complimented the Curriculum team and specifically Karen Brady. She added, with the budget crisis she cannot risk losing her position and has sought employment elsewhere. She understands the budget crisis cannot be solved overnight and there is a need to stop looking backward but forward and begin rebuilding the Region 20 district.

Stephen Tracy, Goshen thanked the Board and the Superintendent for their continued efforts to somehow bring forward a responsible and sustainable budget in the face of some daunting financial circumstances. He added despite the efforts there are some who will still vote 'no' and that is their right. He would like to know specifically what it would take for a 'yes' vote and said we are running out of time.

Karen Brady of Morris introduced herself as a Region 20 veteran educator reading public comments on behalf of Becky Hubschman who is also an educator, parent, and community member. Due to the budget cuts, she will be losing her elementary teaching position and likely be teaching at the secondary level as she holds many certifications. She left school today, as many of her colleagues with uncertainty hanging over them as to where they will be teaching in the fall. Educators are planners and want to be prepared to give the best to the students. She is asking the communities to vote 'yes' to provide for a stable start to the next school year. This budget may not be everything we hoped for, but it's what we need to stop the bleeding.

Cindy Birkin, Litchfield is voting 'no' tomorrow. To get her to a 'yes' she would like clarity on expenses and accountability. There are a number of people still upset about the merger and unexpected expenses, and she is also inquiring about capital. Dr. Villar referred her to the

website to find the list on the accounting of unpaid invoices for both Region 6 and Litchfield Public Schools. This information was released about a month ago. Cindy Birkin also inquired about whether projects had gone out to bid as she has a concern about someone who was awarded a project and also holds a position in the district. She questioned if there is favoritism? She would hate to see the athletics eliminated and wonders if there were any chance coaches would work pro bono. She closed by wishing everyone good luck for tomorrow's vote.

Alice Fillie introduced herself as a Grade 10 student from Warren. She commented it is 'crucial' for the budget to pass in order to maintain a positive school experience. She has concerns that if the budget fails there would be cuts to athletic and music programs. These programs are important; not all students are solely academically minded and rely on music and sports to thrive, they help with escaping from external pressures of life, scholarships and help shape student futures.

Landen Ewers is a rising third grader at Goshen Center School who recently moved to Goshen, and he loves his teachers, his specials teachers and school principal. His mother recently told him his music teacher may not be coming back next year, and he spoke about all the fun things he learned from her in class. He spoke about his second-grade experience that while his teacher can teach with all the students in the classroom it is better when she has a helper. He hopes to go to college one day and become an architect and knows he has to go to good schools to get into college. He says Goshen Center is a good school. He hopes everyone votes 'yes' so teachers don't get cut.

Gretchen Ewers of Goshen thanked the Board and Superintendent and commented to please take the next three years to build trust with the community, make everything transparent, post information for all Board meetings, purposefully inform the community of all Board of Education meetings and upcoming Board seat elections. She is wondering how the district will deliver curriculum without the interventionist or instructional specialists. She hopes everyone will vote 'yes' so there are no more cuts.

Billie Jean Sideris of Morris spoke about contracts; Teachers, Administrators, Superintendent, Assistant Superintendents, CFO but also that each person at Central Office has a contract. She commented that she searched other district websites, and it is unusual to have a CFO or more than one Executive Assistant. She provided salary details about some of the Central Office contracts, an Annuity, a 403b with a percentage match, vacation, sick and personal days. She added information about life insurance, long term disability, percentage payments toward insurance premiums and HSA balance and funds toward continuing education. She added these are more like public sector contracts.

Tiffany Parkhouse commented Ms. Sideris was over the three-minute time limit and suggested she email the Board of Education members with her further concerns.

Billie Jean Sideris added some of these contracts are expiring soon and asks the Board to commit to non-renewing them and she will email the Board as well.

Kass Mullen thanked Julia Cardillo and Dr. Villar for putting Region 20 on a better path, including putting quality education programming first. She spoke that her message tonight is

mostly for the community members. She commented she is a believer in 'transformative powers of public education,' listening to one another and investing in our youth. She added this is no longer about who is at fault in the past but the future and carrying forward the legacies of Litchfield Public Schools and Region 6 and providing an education that the students deserve. It's time for the voters to step up and support students, teachers, and schools and vote yes.

Kristy Santiago of Litchfield, Jennifer Johnson an employee, Melanie O'Leary an employee from Litchfield, and Kelly Leifert an employee ceded their three minutes of public comment time to Lynn Rice Scozzafava.

Lynn Rice Scozzafava said she was speaking as an employee and President of the Region 20 Education Association (R20 EA) and said since the district's financial troubles have come to light the R20 EA, Administrators union, and Certified Staff union (ASFCME) have stood in solidarity. Not one union leader makes a decision without conferring with the other two union leaders. She spoke specifically about the R20 EA contract being negotiated in good faith with the Board of Education Negotiating Committee and the contract has been reviewed several times by attorneys. She added over the first year they noticed some inconsistencies but have to live with them. She shared statistics of when she surveyed her membership about taking furloughs days. She then went on to explain the reasons why they will continue to say 'no' to reopening contracts; negotiated in good faith; deserve what they bargained for, two plus years provided quality instruction while not knowing where they would be placed at Region 20, due to the financial stress of this year, 43 teachers did not submit hours for payment that were contractually obligated to be paid to them, and teachers have continued to work at the highest level of professionalism even after learning that some would be losing their jobs. It is unfair to ask school employees to fund education. Lynn Rice Scozzafava closed her comments saying this district deserves the very best teachers. The very best teachers are the ones that she has had the distinct honor to serve, and the students deserve a 'yes' vote to tomorrow.

Wendy Costa of Goshen said she and her family lived in Litchfield, her children went through Litchfield Public Schools, and it was a good district. She is a retired art teacher who worked at Region 6 and has been following the merger closely. She really hopes for the sake of the community and students this budget passes. The children and communities deserve better. She thanked the Board of Education and Dr. Villar.

Lynette Miller of Goshen commented this is a complicated issue and understands why teachers are advocating for their jobs, but the taxpayers got saddled with a very expensive contract. Many people are on fixed incomes and young families are struggling to make it each week. She would like to see the Board do their due diligence as they are elected representatives of the taxpayers. At each vote, the majority of people said the budget was too high, even 'yes' voters. She believes closing Litchfield Intermediate School could show cost savings. The Board needs to make tough decisions and get a little more creative to find budget savings.

Eileen of Litchfield is a member of Litchfield's Class of 1995 and moved back to Litchfield because of the schools and the opportunities they have for her children. She has a rising junior at Lakeview. She commended the Board of Education and the administration as the rate of increase of school budgets has outperformed inflation. When looking at teacher contracts and the inflation number that Connecticut used to adjust minimum wage, 4.5% is under that number and teachers aren't actually getting too much of an increase compared to what's happening out in the world. Her daughter is in this three-year transition period for Region 20. Her class was warned

about this last year; that her class was going to feel the brunt of the transition and they really have. She also said they have risen to the occasion. She added accountability and trust and rebuilding a sense of actual long-term vision for the district is really important. When discussing closing a school, this needs to be done thoughtfully, shouldn't be done as the easiest solution but also looking 5 to 10 years ahead to deliver on the savings that were once promised through this merger. She will be voting 'yes' tomorrow for all children and teachers so we can move forward and think about the future and long-term planning.

5. Adjournment There being no further business to come before the Board the meeting adjourned at 7:58 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Christine Escobar
Secretary, pro-tem