

REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT No. 20
BOARD OF EDUCATION
MEETING MINUTES
April 10, 2025

1. Call to Order The Board of Education meeting held at Lakeview High School and via teleconference was called to order at 7:01p.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, Diane Barnes, Tracy Martin, and Ashley Westfall.

Also present: Jeffrey Villar, Superintendent, Kristen Della Volpe, Acting Superintendent, Julia Cardillo, Chief Financial Officer, and Tom Ariola, Consultant CFO Services.

Absent: Scott Pottbecker

2. Pledge of Allegiance Tiffany Parkhouse invited everyone to stand and recite the Pledge of Allegiance.

3. Committee Reports
None

4. Student Council Update/FFA Update
FFA President Gyandev Phinney and Class of 2025 Presidents Nicki Robillard and Ailyn Tiul gave the FFA and Student Council Updates.

The FFA Updated included but was not limited to students from Goshen Center School attended a FFA Chapter meeting, members visited the Morris Senior Center to do floral designs, and a Woof Wash was held on April 5, 2025.

The Student Council Update and other activities happening at Lakeview High School included but was not limited to a Tag Sale being held on April 26, 2025, as a Senior Class fundraiser, the Junior Class will be holding a Krispy Kreme fundraiser, and the Sophomore Class planned a successful Masquerade semi-formal with over 100 students attending. Also noted was the music department returned from a successful trip to New York City, seeing The Great Gatsby, having a Q&A with actress Samantha Paulie and participated in a choral and instrumental master class.

5. Chairman's Report & Update

Upcoming Board of Education Meetings

- April 21 – Budget Hearing Presentation – Lakeview High School - 7:00pm
- May 5 – Budget Meeting – Lakeview High School – 7:00pm
- May 22 – Board of Education Meeting – Lakeview High School – 7:00pm
-

6. Communications to the Board
None

7. Approval of Minutes

Tracy Martin made a motion to combine the Board of Education minutes for approval, Items 7.1, 7.2 and 7.3. John Morosani seconded the motion.

During discussion John Morosani requested his name be removed on the March 27, 2025, minutes as he was not in attendance.

Tiffany Parkhouse called for a vote.

The motion passed unanimously.

Ashley Hall Daddona made a motion to approve the minutes of 7.1, 7.2, and 7.3 with the edits to the Minute of March 27, 2025, removing John Morosani from being present and Action Item 10.8 Discussion to Set Public Hearing. Ashley Westfall made the motion, and Ashley Hall Daddona seconded the motion. John Morsani seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

7.1 Board of Education Meeting Minutes of March 13, 2025

7.2 Board of Education Special Meeting Minutes of March 20, 2025

7.3 Board of Education Meeting Minutes of March 27, 2025

8. Superintendent Update

Prior to the Personnel and Enrollment Report updates, Kristen Della Volpe shared there was a surprise visit from Governor Lamont. The Governor met with Lakeview High School students and field impromptu questions from the students. Dr. Villar commented he was very impressed with the Lakeview students.

7.1 Personnel Report

Kristen Della Volpe presented the April Personnel Report commenting on vacancies, a resignation and new hires.

7.2 Enrollment Report

Kristen Della Volpe presented the April Enrollment Report sharing there are no significant changes over the prior month.

9. 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.

Nadene Stevenson of Bantam spoke as a parent, taxpayer, and teacher in the district. She expressed her deep concern about the potential decision to cut our literacy instructional specialists. She gave an overview of the new ELA program and the role the specialists are playing in assisting teachers and the impact if these positions are eliminated.

Cindy Birkins of Litchfield welcomed Dr. Villar, suggested Board of Education members introduce themselves at each meeting as name plates are hard to read from the audience, and she

appreciated the improvement with the audio in the auditorium. She then went on to speak about her father who was in construction and about his working relationship with former Region 6 Superintendent James Eisenhauere. She said she voted for the merger and now regrets it. Hearing there are safety, security, and infrastructure issues concerns her and wonders why funds were spent for cosmetic upgrades, merchandise, senior lounge furniture, and mascot costumes over fixing faulty sidewalks. She wonders where the priorities are. Students should be safe, and security should be a number one priority.

Fern Begley of Torrington spoke about Bill 541 not moving out of the Education Committee and asked what strategies will be used to combat this. She has concerns if Bill 541 does not get approved there will be cuts to honors classes, STEM classes and extracurriculars. She added that she hopes to attend an Ivy school one day and these schools expect more than just good grades. She quoted statistics of students who participate in Fine Arts averaging higher SAT scores than their counterparts and also spoke about the financial contributions of agricultural program. Cutting non-curriculum programs is not the answer and wants to understand what is being done to prevent these cuts.

Kallyn Gangell, a Region 20 Special Education teacher expressed her concerns about teacher cuts. She was first hired as a Litchfield Public Schools teacher in 2016 and continues to witness diminishing programming occurring in our schools. As an LPS teacher she spoke about the reading and math interventional programs working with students. And now, Region 20 is looking to cut the reading intervention program. She shared statistics on referral rates to special education when these positions are cut and spoke about increasing class sizes. She added now is the time to rally behind students and staff and support them rather than make cuts.

Becky Hubschman of Goshen opened by talking about her anxiety to speak in public but will do so in support of her children and students. She expressed her concern and difficulty it would be to vote for a budget that has a number of teacher position cuts, literary specialist cuts and not the inclusion of a math interventionalist at the elementary level. At the same time, she questions if she votes against the budget, will there be bigger cuts if it does not pass. The community needs to know what's truly at stake with the proposed cuts and the Board needs to understand that many people are willing to pay more in taxes to support our schools. The district needs to invest in what is good for kids.

Lynn Rice Scozzafava spoke as a member of the faculty at Lakeview High School, a veteran English teacher of 34 years and supporter of the performing arts. She expressed her concerns about cuts to humanities programming, where students learn about the world, how to express themselves creatively, develop skills and talents, and find their home at schools and "their people." She is concerned about the proposed cuts to the music programs at Plum Hill and Lakeview and how they will affect the students in school and personally. She listed some of the courses that may be cut and encourages the Board to fully fund the music positions.

Kass Mullen of Litchfield spoke as a parent and teacher commenting she was discouraged as she presented a petition to the Board that garnered over 100 signatures to support a budget increase greater than 6% for student education and it was only mentioned in passing at last month's Board meeting. She had hoped there would be some discussion about it. The programs and positions are fundamental at every level for student readiness, to develop core skills, and building foundational knowledge for success. As a teacher she has seen firsthand the improvements in engagement and

reading fluency of her students with the support of interventionist and is concerned about these cuts. She has been a champion of the merger and is now disheartened. She asks the community of taxpayers willing to pay more to maintain programming to join the coalition, continue to show up at meetings and encourage the Board to maintain the quality of education each child deserves.

Heather Nypert of Goshen spoke as a parent and teacher in the district. She echoes the comments her colleagues have said earlier this evening. She is concerned about the impact of the removal of the instructional specialist. She added they will move back into the classrooms, bump other teachers and she could be one of them. She understands there is a budget crisis but wanted to present the human side; a teacher the district has invested, a concerned community member who wants the children to continue to be supported in the best possible way.

Kristin Newton of Warren spoke as a parent of three children in the district and commented about the wonderful teachers that are shaping their lives. For months she has heard parents implore the Board that they do not want their children's teachers affected by budget cuts. People have asked for cuts on redundant administrative positions, and this has not been done. She refuses to believe cutting the very people we should be supporting is the only option. She has concerns that the community speaks about teacher salaries being too high, that we alienated the dedicated professional who support our kids, and if these teachers leave the district will be left with "bottom of the barrel" candidates. The merger was supposed to improve educational opportunities but is now the opposite. Does the district need two assistant superintendents, one executive assistant to the superintendent and two executive assistants to the assistant superintendent. That is redundancy. The Board needs to come back with a brand new budget proposal with the input of our new superintendent and preserve teacher jobs, as a nonnegotiable even if that means a fiscal increase. This is the only reasonable path forward.

NOTE: At the conclusion of the Board of Education meeting Kristen Newton requested her letter be included with the official Board of Education minutes.

Kristy Santiago of Litchfield is a Region 20 employee, parent of two students in the district and an alumnus. She spoke about teacher cuts and the impact it will have on all of us. Fewer teachers mean larger class sizes that leads to less individualized attention and can have long-term ramifications on children. The lack of investment today, will result in educational disparities tomorrow. By increasing the district budget, the district can provide innovative programs, enhanced curriculum and provide professional development for the educators. She added the district should come together to champion education and consider the impact teacher cuts will have on student education.

10. Action Items

10.1 Discussion and Possible Action for the Last Day of School 2024-2025

Dr. Villar shared the proposed last of day of school for all students will be June 17, 2025. That will include 181 days for students in all schools except Lakeview High School.

Lakeview students will have attended 180 days of school due to the school closure of burst pipes in February. He added the last three days of school will be early dismissal days for students. Lakeview teachers last day of school will be June 18, 2025, due to the school being closed in February because of the burst pipe.

Tracy Martin made a motion for the last day of school to be June 17, 2025. The last three days of school will be early dismissal days. Diane Barnes seconded the motion.

During discussion, Margaret Hunt requested and was provided clarification on the memo versus what is documented on the school calendar.

Tiffany Parkhouse called for a vote.

The motion passed unanimously.

10.2 Approval of Out of State Professional Development

10.2.1 Lexington, KY – June 16-20, 2025 - L. Bennett

Margaret Hunt made a motion for the Approval of Out of State Professional Development. Susan Wheeler seconded the motion.

Margaret Hunt inquired about a line item regarding the need for a 0-1 substitute teacher based on the exam schedule. Kristen Della Volpe explained the professional development will take place during exam week and if a substitute teacher is needed it will only be for a half day due to the early dismissal schedule.

Tiffany Parkhouse called for a vote.

The motion passed unanimously.

10.3 Approval of Out of State Field Trips

10.3.1 Boston, MA – June 3, 2025 – R. Zetye, A. Kosciolk, R. Pope

Matt Terzian made a motion for the Approval of Out of State Field Trips – Boston, MA. Krista Rizzo seconded the motion.

During discussion there were questions that were addressed about chaperones, transportation and costs.

Tiffany Parkhouse called for a vote.

The motion passed unanimously.

10.3.2 Millbrook, NY – May 15, 2025 - L. Bennett

Margaret Hunt made a motion for the Approval of Out of State Field Trips-Millbrook, NY. John Morosani seconded the motion.

Kristen Della Volpe responded to a question regarding transportation and costs.

Tiffany Parkhouse called for a vote.

The motion passed unanimously.

10.4 Discussion and Possible Action on Recommendation for Non-Renewal of Non-Tenured Staff

Margaret Hunt made a motion for the approval of the Recommendation of Non-Renewal of Non-Tenured Staff. Krista Rizzo seconded the motion.

Margaret Hunt requested, and Kristen Della Volpe complied to explain exactly what happens when non-tenured staff receives a non-renewal notice.

Given there were no other questions, Tiffany Parkhouse called for a vote.

The motion passed unanimously.

10.5 Discussion and Possible Action for the Approval of FY26 Budget

Dr. Villar opened the conversation sharing the documents that are being reviewed are on the district website. He added there is also an organizational chart and staffing document that show the full-time equivalent positions of the current district staffing and staffing projections for the next fiscal year. These documents will continue to be refined. The budget in the packet shows a 3.9% projected increase for the next fiscal year and Dr. Villar believes the district can deliver a quality education program with this budget. There are also some alternative scenarios with projected increases should the Board wish to discuss these further.

Discussion opened with Matt Terzian and Margaret Hunt both sharing their support to include two instructional specialist positions in the FY26 budget. Diane Barnes agreed adding these are kids coming out of the COVID years and there is need for additional academic support.

John Morosani commented that given the current budget of \$41,156,724 revenue challenges, the district should be cautious not to cut the budget too low doing damage to the district going forward.

Tracy Martin said Dr. Villar looked at the programming and said this is a good solid base to deliver a quality program. She has concerns about the impact of tax increases on community members. She supports the proposed budget put forward and not going to second guess Dr. Villar's decision.

Ashley Westfall shared that bringing back at least two instructional specialists would be very important, this may help with young family decisions to want to come and live in our communities. She added, by creating a robust school system, people will want their children to attend our schools and pay taxes here. She also asked a clarifying question on what the budget percentage increase would mean to taxpayers and the question was addressed by Julia Cardillo.

Matt Terzian inquired if there is any streamlining on the administrative side for cuts, any redundancy in positions, the current cuts appear to be heavily weighted toward programming.

Dr. Villar responded that he has previously spoken about the two assistant superintendent positions and based on the structure of the contract, there would be no first-year savings and given the budget challenges he hesitates to cut anyone tracking finances.

John Morosani encouraged the people in the room and those online to view the financial documents on the website. He added it is very important we get this budget right and the need for transparency going forward to build back community trust.

Rob DeLayo commented and wanted to ensure everyone at the table realizes there was a meeting with town Selectmen and Boards of Finance, and he is concerned about alienating them by increasing the budget from the 3.9% and wants to be sure everyone understands that this 3.9% does not include capital that the district hopes to bond for. Next year the district will be adding \$1 million in capital back into the budget and looking at a 6% budget increase the following fiscal year.

Dr. Villar commented the increase to the 2026-2027 budget is a very, very rough projection for the following year and it would look like a 6.9% increase but a lot can happen between now and the next budget cycle.

Other discussion included but was not limited to grade 6 Spanish, the music program, what occurs at the April 21, 2025, Budget Hearing after the Board passes a Budget tonight, what will happen if the Budget doesn't pass on May 6, 2025.

Based on the conversation with the Board, Tiffany Parkhouse suggested the Board vote by the proposed budget of 3.9%. If that does not pass, move onto voting on the various scenarios discussed and included in the Board packet.

Ashley Westfall made a motion to approve the \$42,759,906 FY26 Budget which is a 3.9% increase. Susan Wheeler seconded the motion. There was no further discussion. Rob DeLayo (3.01%), Tracy Martin (5.02%), Susan Wheeler (7.02%) voted yes. Ashley Westfall, Tiffany Parkhouse (6.02%), Diane Barnes, Scott Pottbecker-absent (10.06%), Ashley Hall Daddona, Krista Rizzo (14.04%), and Matt Terzian, John Morosani, and Margaret Hunt (56.14%) voted no. The motion did not carry with only 15.06% in the affirmative and 0 affirmatives from Litchfield.

Margaret Hunt made a motion to approve the \$42,942,907 FY26 Budget which is a 4.34% increase retaining two Instructional Area Specialists. Ashley Westfall seconded the motion. There was no discussion. Tiffany Parkhouse (3.01%), Ashley Hall Daddona, Susan Wheeler (14.04%), Margaret Hunt, and Matt Terzian (36.54%) voted yes. Ashley Westfall, Rob DeLayo (6.02%), Diane Barnes, Tracy Martin, Scott Pottbecker-absent (14.31%), Krista Rizzo (7.02%) and John Morosani (18.27%) voted no. The motion did not carry with 53.9% in the affirmative and 0 affirmatives from Morris.

John Morosani made a motion to approve the \$43,075,907 FY26 Budget which is 4.66% increase retaining two Instructional Area Specialists, and a high school math position. Margaret Hunt seconded the motion. There was no discussion. Ashley Westfall, Tiffany Parkhouse (6.02%), Diane Barnes (5.03%), Margaret Hunt, John Morosani, Matt Terzian (56.14%) voted yes. Rob DeLayo (3.01%), Tracy Martin, Scott Pottbecker-absent (10.06%), Ashley Hall Daddona, Susan Wheeler and Krista Rizzo (21.26%) voted no. The motion did not carry with 65.86% affirmative and 0 affirmatives from Goshen.

John Morosani made a motion to approve the \$43,127,907 FY26 Budget which is a 4.79% increase retaining two Instructional Area Specialists, a high school math position, and a music position to eliminate the need for shared staff across schools. Margaret Hunt seconded the motion. There was no discussion. Ashley Westfall, Tiffany Parkhouse (6.02%), Diane Barnes (5.03%), Krista Rizzo (7.02%) Matt Terzian, John Morosani, and Margaret Hunt (56.14%) voted yes. Rob DeLayo (3.01%), Tracy Martin, Scott Pottbecker-absent (10.06%), Ashley Hall Daddona, and Susan Wheeler (14.04%) voted no. The motion carries with 72.88% yes, and meets the 66% in the affirmative inclusive on one vote from each town.

10.6 Approval to Send the Regional School Budget Vote to Referendum in Town Polling Places on May 6, 2025, from 6:00 a.m. -8:00 p.m. in Accordance with CGS 10-51

Margaret Hunt made a motion to submit the 2025-2026 fiscal year budget of Regional School District No. 20 to a referendum to be held in the member towns of Goshen, Litchfield, Morris and Warren on Tuesday, May 6, 2025, from 6:00 A.M. to 8:00 P.M. in accordance with the provisions of Section 10-51(a) of the General Statutes. John Morosani seconded the motion. There was no discussion. The motion passed unanimously.

11. Adjournment There being no further business to come before the Board John Morosani made a motion to adjourn. Krista Rizzo seconded the motion. There was no discussion. The motion passed unanimously. The meeting adjourned at 9:19 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Christine Escobar
Secretary, pro-tem

FROM THE DESK OF

KRISTIN C. NEWTON

April 10, 2025

Region 20 Board of Education
35 Wamogo Road
Litchfield, CT 06759

Dear Region 20 Members of the Board,

I am Kristin Newton, and I am writing this on behalf of my three children, aged 8, 6, and 4 who attend Warren Elementary School, and the wonderful teachers who shape their lives every single day.

For the last several months, you have heard feedback over and over from our community members regarding the proposed budget for Fiscal Year 2026. For months, you have heard parents implore you to take apart the budget and eliminate redundancy and non-imperative items. For months, you have heard feedback from parents that we do not want our children's teachers to be affected. That we do not want our children's schools to be gutted. For months, you have sat at that table and listened to people ask you to cut redundant administrative positions. You have refused. And now, us parents are presented with two options and two options only. Vote to fire 12 teachers, or vote to fire many more than that. How can these be the only two options? How can our educators be the "redundancy and non-imperative items"? I am appalled that THIS is what you came up with.

I refuse to believe that the solution to this district's budget woes is simply to eliminate the very people who we should be supporting the most. The rhetoric that I have heard from the community about teacher salaries being "too high" is abhorrent. The United States is one of the only developed nations in this entire globe that does not value our educators. We do not have an army of quality educators waiting in the wings to take our teachers' places. We will end up alienating the dedicated professionals who educate OUR children. Professionals who put up with our kids' nonsense every day, who put up with hostile community members harassing them and their salaries, who put up with unsupportive administrators and a board of education who are threatening their jobs. Teachers will leave, and we will be left with bottom of the barrel candidates. We were told this merger would improve educational opportunities for our kids. This is the very opposite of that. I refuse to let my kids be victims of a community who would rather not pay the cost of a dozen eggs

PER YEAR in order to keep our teachers' jobs. I refuse to support any agenda that proposes cutting teacher positions. We need our teachers. We do not need two assistant superintendents, one executive assistant to the superintendent, AND two executive assistants to the assistant superintendent. THAT is redundancy— not the teacher that is teaching my kid how to read.

You need to come back with a brand new budget proposal, with the input of our new superintendent, that has the preservation of our teachers' jobs as a Non-Negotiable, even if that means a fiscal increase. This is the only reasonable path forward.

You can do better, and you must.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kristin Newton', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Kristin Newton

Warren
(7 Above All Road)