SAU #20 Board Meeting

Thursday, December 11, 2025

Meeting Minutes

Milan Village School

Board Members Present: Gina Saladino, Taylor Thomas, Keith Moon, Jaime Hussey, Richard Umiker, Benjamin Mayerson Crystal Labrecque, Emma Burnell, Dennis Wade, Timothy Buxton, Victoria Hill, Andrew Mullins, Tiffani Arsenault, Jo Carpenter, Ashley Devost, Peter Donovan, and Michael Waddell

Administration: David Backler, Superintendent SAU 20; Cassandra Micucci, Business Administrator SAU20; Tina Binette, Special Services Director; and Amanda Ramsay, IT Director

Public: Deidre Blair, Paul Bousquet, Amanda Cornish, Eric Cornish, and Shelli Fortin, Minutes (via recording)

Public Hearing

1. **Call to Order –** Gina Saladino opened the Public Hearing at 6:30 pm.

2. **Hearing Handouts**

3. **Review of 2026-2027 Proposed Budget**

   Cassandra Micucci reviewed the 2026-2027 proposed budget section by section, noting that the PDC budget is up $1,456.00. Micucci advised that there is less training via Zoom, so staff is utilizing Professional Development funds to attend trainings in person. The IT Department is up $3,522, part of which is for salaries and benefits, and the rest for the replacement of some equipment. The School Board budget is down $15 as some lines were moved to streamline the budget. The Audit is up $536. Legal has remained the same at $500. Central Office is down $9,387, as they have removed the $10,000 that was used for staff. Superintendent is up $3,505, due to salary and benefits. Student Services has increased by $639, due to salary and benefits. Child Find is flat at $500. Safety Coordinator is also flat at $9,689. The Business Department is up $6,152, of which the majority is salary and benefits, however there is also an increase in Software and Dues and Fees. Operation and Maintenance is up $259, which is the amount paid toward repairs to the building. The total increase is $7,068, or 0.67%.

   A Board member asked what FSA fees are, and Micucci advised that these are part of the health insurance package for staff.

4. **Public Questions and Comments**

   Deidre Blair noted that the School Board is tasked with representing our communities and responsible stewardship of tax money. Ms. Blair noted that each year the taxpayers have been burdened with ever increasing budgets. Ms. Blair asked if there was a cap on the salaries of the Business Administrator and Superintendent, which are the two highest salaries, and noted that the public has been told they cannot afford to lose them. Ms. Blair noted that increases in these salaries each year is unsustainable and unaffordable. Ms. Blair noted that we are not a wealthy area, and that Coos County is the poorest county in NH. Ms. Blair noted that the median income for a 2-income household is still less than the salary for the Superintendent, and the salary is more than twice the median income for a single person in Gorham. Ms. Blair shared concerns for the elderly on fixed incomes in the community, with the increase in Medicare costs being greater than the increase in Social Security payments. Ms. Blair noted the cuts in SNAP benefits which have left local families without enough food. Ms. Blair stated that the cost of living has increased in every category, especially health insurance. Ms. Blair advised that the FRC stated that 350-400 Gorham households need assistance. Ms. Blair shared that concerns seem to fall on deaf ears, as even after the Superintendent and Business Administrator offered to go without raises last year, the Board voted to give them anyway. Ms. Blair noted that the salary expectation is out of touch with the economic reality in our community right now.

Paul Bousquet noted the lack of attendance from the public at the meeting tonight and questioned whether it is due to the weather or due to taxpayer's concerns shared last year not being taken into account.

Deidre Blair noted that concerns are not a personal thing, but an economic one. Ms. Blair noted that she does not make a lot of money, and only has so much to give.

Paul Bousquet noted that a $7,000 increase for a million-dollar budget is good, but it would be better if it was a zero increase or below. Mr. Bousquet also noted the importance of speaking to State Representatives about the school funding issue and Education Freedom Accounts.

5. **Adjournment**

On a motion by Crystal Labrecque, seconded by Peter Donovan, the Board voted to close the Public Hearing at 6:44 pm.

Regular Meeting

1. **Call to Order–** Gina Saladino called the meeting to order at 6:44 pm.

2. **Pledge of Allegiance**

3. **Public Comments**

There were no public comments.

4. **Approval of Minutes**

On a motion by Benjamin Mayerson, seconded by Crystal Labrecque, the Board voted to approve the minutes of November 20, 2025, as presented.

5. **Discussion of 2026-2027 Budget and Board Adoption**

A Board member stated that they need to listen to the public comments and stated that as a taxpayer they cannot afford taxes going up. The Board member noted that even a small increase impacts every town substantially, and they would like to see a flat or decreased budget.

The Chair advised that the Finance Committee met twice before the budget was presented, and reduced the increase from 3% to the 0.67% increase, so they are trying. The Chair noted that each time the budget was presented, it was cut in several different sections, and the only thing not cut was salaries.

David Backler advised that insurance was re-negotiated SAU wide last year, which is significantly lower that what it would have been. However, a Board member noted that there is a 22% increase over what the cost was last year.

A Board member noted that a flat budget means you have made cuts, due to the increase in costs. The Board member also noted that there is a cost to hiring and keeping qualified employees.

A Board member agreed with the public comment that those from the North Country should go to Concord with concerns about funding. It was noted that the SAU will be holding the meeting with State Representatives on January 27, 2026, to discuss concerns.

On a motion by Andrew Mullins, seconded by Crystal Labrecque, the Board voted to approve the 2026-2027 budget as presented. Mayerson – opposed, Hussey - opposed

6. Technology Director's Report

Amanda Ramsay advised the Boards have done a good job with KnowBe4 training, with just a few members left to complete it.

7. Superintendent's Report

The Board voted to appoint the same members to be involved with the Superintendent Evaluation process, and a meeting time will be set up in January.

8. Business Administrator's Report

Cassandra Micucci advised her only report was the budget.

9. Public Comments

There were no public comments.

10. Non-Public Session

There was no non-public session needed.

11. Next Regular Meeting – Thursday, May 7, 2026 6:30 pm Errol Consolidated School

12. Other

Jaime Hussey noted that the Manchester superintendent is overseeing roughly 15,000 students at a salary of $193,000 per year, which is about $12.83 per student. Ms. Hussey stated that our Superintendent is paid $271 per student for this district, to put the numbers in perspective. Ms. Hussey stated that she understands it is difficult, however in the future, the Board needs to be considerate of the public's concerns about the budget. Crystal Labrecque asked how many buildings the Manchester superintendent oversees, and how close those buildings are. It was noted that this example is not comparing apples to apples, even though it is numbers to numbers. Manchester also has two assistant superintendents that would be added to the total salary. David Backler advised that when looking for a Superintendent or a Business Administrator, the first thing they will ask is where you are, along with how many districts you cover. Crystal Labrecque noted that SAU20 has quality teachers and staff compared to other districts, and decisions are made in the best interest of the students. Benjamin Mayerson noted that the Board's mission is to provide the best education that they can afford. Mr. Mayerson stated that he has received many comments from taxpayers that it is not that they don't want to pay, but that they cannot afford to pay their tax bills, and the Board needs to be mindful of that.

13. Adjournment

On a motion by Benjamin Mayerson, the Board voted unanimously to adjourn the meeting at 7:05 pm.