

**DANVERS SCHOOL COMMITTEE
REGULAR MEETING**

March 4, 2024

School Committee Members Present:

Dr. Robin Doherty, Chairperson
Eric Crane
Joshua Kepnes
Gabe Lopes

VOTED: Close Hearing- Mr. Crane motioned to close the public hearing. Mr. Kepnes seconded the motion. The vote was unanimous.

VOTED: Budget- Mr. Crane motioned to approve the proposed \$51,990,348.00 budget. Mr. Kepnes seconded the motion. The vote was unanimous.

VOTED: Adjournment – Mr. Kepnes moved to adjourn the regular meeting at 7:45 p.m. Mr. Lopes seconded the motion. The vote was unanimous.

I. CALL TO ORDER

Regular Meeting Call to Order

Dr. Doherty called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m. The Pledge of Allegiance and the Danvers Public Schools Mission statement were recited. Dr. Doherty inquired whether the meeting was being recorded by audience members and announced that the meeting was being broadcast on DCAT.

II. NEW BUSINESS

A. DPS Budget Hearing:

Dr. Doherty asked the Superintendent to begin the budget presentation. Mr. Bauer started with the overview of how the budget came to tuition. The process has been a collaborative effort between the Principal's, Directors, and Central Administration. As the school department continues to work with the Town, there are a few major budget pressures. Special Education costs and transportation costs are two major factors.

The schools are losing ESSER funding as of September 30, 2024. Through the ESSER grant the district was able to hire support staff. There were initially 30 positions funded through the grant. The ask is to move some positions from grant funded to the budget. Some of the positions can be absorbed through retirements and collapsing positions that were not filled.

Transportation costs for both special education and regular bussing has been another large cost. The district has obtained one van for extracurricular activities as well as athletic runs. There have been two 7D vans purchased - drivers will need to be hired. There is a review of special education in district transportation that is being conducted to reduce the amount of cases needing transportation.

Mr Bauer presented the proposed plan to move forward Student Services' vision of specialized programs into four of the elementary schools. In doing this, this will help to decrease the number of students being outplaced. If the funding is approved, it is the expectation to bring some students back into the community from out of district placements.

Mr. Bauer updated the Committee on the Emergency Assistance Program. This is not being funded through the budget but rather through funding from the state. Currently funding is through June of 2024 and we are awaiting the figures for next year.

Mr. Bauer discussed the vision for the future three year strategic plan and its focus on Special Education as well as assuring the continued education of all students.

School Committee Comments: Mr. Crane stated he found the prior meetings workshop to have been helpful with understanding the requests in the budget. He complimented administrators for the way the process was put into action. Mr. Kepnes reviewed the budget and is pleased with the efforts to try to reduce the out of district expenditures. His one question was if there was any way of recovering any of the funds being asked for the Special Education Program Development? Mr. Lopes inquired what the impact will be by not moving all of the positions from ESSER to the budget. Mr. Bauer explained that through retirements and collapsing positions that were not filled they would be able to capture the positions essential to move the plan forward. As Mr. Bauer explained this is an investment that overtime will save the district in out of district costs. Dr. Doherty had questions related to the support for the elementary Principals. Mr. Bauer explained that they have paused adding another kindergarten class to Smith. The hope is to add team chairs which will provide some relief for the Principals. Dr. Doherty inquired as to the ST Math and Fishtank curriculum. From the links she has looked at it does not appear that they are DESE approved. Mrs. Wermers spoke to her concerns. The curriculum is DESE approved. Dr. Doherty further inquired as to the content of some of the curriculum. She feels that some content maybe a little strong and dark for the age range and she wants to be assured that the teachers are receiving support to teach the curriculum. Mrs. Wermers explained that faculty has received training by both professionals and administrators who have been trained to support the curriculum. Mr. Kepnes asked if at some point the EA program would need to be moved to the budget. Mr. Bauer reiterated that the hope is no. Mr. Bauer has invited Representative Kearns and Senator Lovely to the April meeting.

Public Comments: Mr. Mark Zuberich addressed the Committee on his concerns that most of the proposed budget is about Special Education and the costs to expand programs. He is concerned that the needs of all the students are not being met. Mr. Crane spoke to the concerns. Mr. Lopes added that in order to reduce the costs of out of district expenses and bring students back into their home schools you need to increase the programs in order to support the students.

Mr. Crane moved to close the public hearing. Mr. Kepnes seconded. As voted.

Mr. Crane moved to approve the proposed \$51,990,348.00 budget. Mr. Kepnes seconded. As voted.

The next meeting will be held on March 11, 2024 at 6:30 p.m

Respectfully submitted,
Mrs. Alice Campbell, Secretary
Danvers School Committee