

Seymour Board of Education

Budget Working Session / Public Forum Minutes



March 30, 2026
Seymour Middle School
7:30 pm

Board Members Present:

- Kristen Bruno
- Chris Champagne
- Kristen Harmeling
- Jay Hatfield
- Pete Kubik
- Lori Nespoli
- Jim Garofolo
- Stephan Behuniak
- Ed Strumello

COPY RECEIVED
DATE: 4/6/26
TIME: 2:30 PM
TOWN CLERK'S OFFICE

Others Present:

- Dr. Susan Compton, Superintendent
- Salvatore Bucci, Business Manager
- Shannon Levey, Board Clerk

I. CALL TO ORDER

A. Pledge of Allegiance – Ms. Bruno called the meeting to order at 7:31 PM
Ms. Bruno stated the public can send in questions to the BOE email.

II. PUBLIC COMMENT

Public Comment provides the opportunity for the public to make a comment. It is not a dialogue between the Board and the public. Based upon what is heard during Public Comment, the Board may choose to add a topic to the agenda. If questions are posed that the Chairperson is able to answer, those questions may be addressed under the Chairperson's Comments portion of the agenda. The Board will not discuss personnel matters. Comments should be respectful and no longer than 3 minutes in length so that all who wish to comment may have the opportunity to do so. All the public wanting to comment will need to state their name and address for the record prior to addressing the Board.

- Public comment called three times, no comment

III. PRESENTATION

A. Ms. Bruno presented the same slideshow that was shared with the Board of Finance. She explained that the status quo budget began at 4.9%, and reductions were made to bring it down to 4.7%. She noted that the Board of Finance is required to vote on a single overall budget figure. The district's detailed line item budget is available and posted on the district website. Ms. Bruno also highlighted district accomplishments, emphasizing that they are being achieved at a significantly lower per-pupil cost.

Ms. Harmeling added that the intent of mentioning the per-pupil cost is not necessarily to suggest increasing the budget by large amounts, but rather to recognize the district's efficiency and strong value for the funding provided. She noted, however, that it is still important to examine areas where additional support may be needed. She also pointed out that the state has not increased funding to keep pace with inflation. She clarified that this funding does not appear as a line item in the education budget because it is directed straight to the town.

B. Questions & Answers

Members of the public are encouraged to participate by submitting questions in advance or emailing them live during the meeting

• **Email:** BOEemail@seymourschools.org

• **YouTube Live Stream:** <https://www.youtube.com/live/pOpiuNq-FXY>

Q&A:

1. Board members and administrators discussed regional collaboration efforts with other districts and agencies, including ACES, to explore expanded specialized programming and potential cost savings. Discussions are ongoing, including outreach to town leadership. The district continues efforts to bring students receiving outplacement services back into-district when appropriate in order to reduce costs. It was noted that special education remains the largest driver of cost increases statewide, and that mandated programs such as transition services (ages 18–22) must be provided. Enrollment remains relatively stable; however, increases in special education needs continue to impact staffing and programming needs.
2. Dr. Compton noted that if additional budget cuts are required, staffing and programs could be impacted, potentially resulting in reductions in force affecting positions such as nursing, support staff, counseling, or music. He emphasized that reductions have occurred in prior years and would follow required timelines if necessary. Board members discussed the long-term impact of budget reductions on programs, noting that repeated cuts can affect student services and lead to broader program reductions over time. It was also noted that previous staffing adjustments have been managed through hiring changes and attrition, but future reductions may more directly impact support services. Discussion also included increasing preschool enrollment due to state age requirements and its effect on staffing and class sizes.
3. Enrollment is currently relatively stable, with some fluctuation. Administrators noted that budget pressures are primarily driven by increases in special education enrollment and associated costs rather than overall enrollment growth. Enrollment and class size data are available in the superintendent's presentation on the district website, including a breakdown of elementary classrooms.
4. Joseph Criscuolo, 27 Buckingham Rd – A member of the public who substitutes at the high school commented on the positive school environment at SHS, noting strong staff engagement and student involvement. He expressed concern about the potential loss of programs such as counseling and music and the impact it would have on the schools.

Ms. Bruno responded by highlighting the range of opportunities offered to the community, including performing arts shows, athletic events, and community service initiatives such as Hope Club, Snow Brigade, and Seymour Food to Kids. She noted the importance of these programs to both students and the broader community, and stated that it is not accurate to characterize the schools as only taking from the community. She also emphasized that the school system is a key factor for families moving into town.

5. Administrators noted that budget overruns are not common. Union negotiations were described as a structured, collaborative process involving salary, benefits, and working conditions, with required steps such as mediation or arbitration when needed and guidance from legal counsel and comparable contract data.

Ms. Harmeling stated that a consistent strategy has been increasing employee contributions to benefits and maintaining modest average base salary increases (2.2% on average). It was also noted that collective bargaining agreements are a key tool for managing long-term costs, along with ongoing efforts to identify operational efficiencies within the district budget.

6. The Minimum Budget Requirement (MBR) was described as essentially equal to the prior year's budget, with adjustments for educational cost savings, resulting in a flat year-to-year funding level. It serves as a statutory safeguard to prevent reductions below the prior year's budget.

It was noted that the MBR does not represent the true minimum needed to operate schools, as costs such as inflation, contracts, and services continue to rise. If a municipality were to budget below the MBR, there is a penalty of \$2 for every \$1 below the requirement. Concerns were also raised that reductions could result in staffing and program impacts, including increased out-of-district special education placements and associated costs.

7. It was noted that the Board has representation and advocacy at the state level. First Selectwoman Annmarie Drugonis was identified as actively advocating in Hartford on behalf of education. Mr. Strumello added that regional CAFE representatives also advocate with legislators, particularly regarding increased funding and control of special education outplacement costs. Ms. Harmeling clarified the role and purpose of CAFE and noted that many districts share similar challenges and are seeking additional support. Dr. Compton also noted that State Representative Nicole Klarides Diritia is consistently an advocate for the district.
8. The New Bungay School project is currently on track. Mr. Kubik noted that the district is in the process of going out to RFP for an architect, with May anticipated as a key milestone for project cost estimates. Ms. Bruno stated that the New Bungay School currently has no impact on the school or town operating budgets, and that bonding is expected in 2028, though final project costs and bonding amounts are still being refined.
9. Michael Scheppa, 2 Cross Creek Lane - Approximately 80% of the budget is personnel-related, including salaries and benefits, with union contracts and working conditions excluded from that figure. It was noted that the district's total personnel cost is roughly \$25–26 million, representing the cost of staffing the schools.

Mr. Bucci explained that special education costs continue to rise significantly compared to regular education. While regular education costs increased by about 2.9%, special education costs are approximately \$30,000 per student, up from about \$26,000 per student several years ago, with the amount of special education students increasing from roughly 350 to 400 students. This has created a growing imbalance in per-pupil spending, much of which is driven by mandated services through IEPs that cannot be controlled locally. It was also noted that temporary federal and state pandemic-era funding previously helped offset costs, but that support has since ended. The district noted that the percentage of students identified for special education is slightly below the state average.

10. Edith, Brookdale Rd. – Mr. Behuniak encouraged parents to become informed on the budget issues and share that information with others. Mr. Strumello emphasized the importance of voting. Ms. Bruno explained the budget and public town meeting processes, including the charter provisions that allow for potential budget adjustments through motion at the meeting.
11. The first Seymour Budget Referendum is scheduled for Tuesday, April 21.
12. First Selectwoman Annmarie Drugonis: Noted that the referendum allows voters to increase or decrease the budget total, but cannot change contractual obligations. The town may adjust line items, while the Board of Education budget is considered as a single bottom-line figure.

She noted that CIRMA has potential opportunity for cost savings by combining Board of Education and town insurance coverage. It was stated that this change could be implemented within the current budget year.

once the required paperwork is submitted. The town requested this paperwork from Mr. Bucci on Friday, but it has not been sent over as of today.

IV. REPORTS

A. Board of Education

1. Chairman Comments – Ms. Bruno thanked those in attendance and encouraged continued engagement and viewing of the meeting on YouTube. They emphasized responsible budgeting and the importance of transparency regarding the actual cost of operating the district. They noted that continued year-over-year cuts are not sustainable and encouraged anyone with unanswered questions to reach out.

2. Board Member Comments – Ms. Nespoli: emphasized the importance of involvement at the state level, noting that many funding challenges originate beyond the local level. They encouraged the community to understand the broader state and federal context and cautioned against placing blame solely on the town or the Board of Education.

B. Superintendent's Report

V. ADJOURNMENT:

The meeting adjourned at 8:45 PM

Prepared by Shannon Levey, Board Clerk