

# THETFORD TOWN SCHOOL DISTRICT

February 22, 2024

Thetford Elementary School and Zoom

## Draft Minutes

### PRESENT:

**School board:** Nic Cook, Megan Snider, Mary Chin, Jeff Jamele, Greta Marchesi

**Administration:** Bernice Mills, Caitlyn Toleno, Carrie Brennan

**OESU:** Randy Gawel (5:30 pm)

**Staff:** Kate Hill, Lauren Lacasse

**Community:** Rebecca Holcolme (left 6:15 pm), Bill Huff, Ron Chabot, Ashley Jamele (left 6:20), Donna Steinberg, David Forbes, Jim Masland (left 6:20), Barbara Woodard (5:15-6:20 pm), Keith Merrick (5:25 pm)

### Welcome

Meeting called to order by Snider at 5:00 pm.

### Agenda Review/Approval

**Approve Minutes of:** 01/10/24, motion to approve (Jamele/Chin). Unanimous.

01/26/24, motion to approve (Chin/Jamele). Unanimous. Cook abstained.

**Review Orders-** There were no unusual expenses.

### Correspondence-

Resignation- Lorian Tu, Building Based Substitute- Effective 02/13/24

**Public Comment-** none

### Budget Informational Meeting

#### Summary from Rebecca Holcome

- Reps. Rebecca Holcombe and Jim Masland came to update the community on Act 127 of 2020, which increases student weights, as well as a recently passed bill that modifies Act 127.
- They acknowledged the complexity and challenge school boards face this year because of the changes in how the state funds education. They thanked the Board for hard work in the face of so much uncertainty and so many budget pressures.
- They explained we have a shared education fund, which means that if districts spend more overall, everyone has to pay more to cover the cost. When calculating the number of district students for the purpose of setting tax rates, Act 127 requires the Agency of Education to “weight” (or count as more than one) students who are understood to cost more to educate, including children who are economically disadvantaged and kids who are English Language Learners. This weighted count is called the Long Term Weighted ADM. (The state no longer uses “Equalized Pupils” in its calculation.)
- Districts like Thetford, which have fewer of these children who cost more to educate than most other school districts, will face increasing tax rates over the next five years for the same level of

spending. At the same time, districts with many of these students will receive lower tax rates for the same level of spending.

- Districts like Thetford that were negatively impacted by Act 127 weighting changes are eligible for a rate discount in FY25.
- Initially, Act 127 provided a 5% cap on tax rate increases for districts like Thetford that are losing tax capacity. However, school district spending (school budgets less any funds used to reduce tax rates last year) is reportedly up in FY25 by \$243.4M (a 14.8% increase). An increase of \$65-70M would have been expected. This very large increase statewide was expected to increase overall tax bills across the state by an estimated 20%.
- The legislature removed the 5% cap to encourage districts who increased spending significantly this year to eliminate costs that they could remove, thus ensuring that if they spend more, they pay more. This should reduce the burden on all districts and all Vermonters who pay homestead taxes.
- Each district receiving a rate discount will receive a \$0.01 discount off their pre-CLA rate for each percent of damage. For example, if a district was negatively impacted by 10%, they will receive a \$0.10 rate discount in FY25. In the case of Thetford, which is losing 16% of its tax capacity due to the new weights, it gets a 16 cent discount off its tax rate this year. The size of this discount will then decrease by 20% over each of the following four years, at which point it will be gone.
- To give districts that want to do so a chance to reopen and trim their budgets, given the loss of the 5% cap, the legislature has committed to paying the cost for any district that wants to reopen and re-warn their budget.
- Given the hardship created this year, the legislature is working in the meantime to adjust the funding formula to one that does not drive higher spending and disrupt school budget processes.
- In the meantime, the representatives both stressed that this current challenge is driven by state level changes and increased spending by all districts, not just Thetford. They thanked the Thetford School District for their hard effort to put together a solid budget that takes care of the community's schools and taxpayers.

(data summary provided by Rebecca Holcombe, House Appropriations Committee, Vermont House of Representatives Representing Norwich, Sharon, Strafford and Thetford)

### **Town Meeting**

- **Mills and Toleno**- showed a video to be presented at Town Meeting.
- **Steinberg** gave a preview of the TA presentation for Town Meeting.

### **Reports**

#### **Principal's Report**

#### **Welcome aboard to the following new staff members:**

- Annie Coulter - paraprofessional
- Robert Ratel - Building Operations Supervisor for the 2024/2025 school year

### **2024/2025 Class Configurations**

- Kindergarten - We won't know how many classrooms will be needed until after the kindergarten registration on March 27.
- Grade 1/2 - (3) classrooms
- Grade 3/4 - (3) classrooms
- Grade 5/6 - (4) classrooms

#### **Opportunity for students during the February Vacation -**

- We are pleased to announce that the Upper Valley Circus Collective will be holding a Winter Camp at TES during the February vacation. Currently they have 18 students signed up to attend. The program is designed to provide students with a variety of circus skills.

#### **Summer Projects Major Projects**

- Stripping and repaving the bus loop and the walkway leading to the main entrance and the walkway in the courtyard.
- New floor in the Counseling/Cafeteria Hallway

#### **TA Updates- Jamele**

The last meeting was about the TA Outdoor Program.

#### **Policy Committee Update- Cook**

The TES policy committee did not have much to report this month. They are still waiting to hear from the OESU legal team about the policy on distribution of non-school sponsored literature in our school.

#### **Public Comment**

Stephanie Carter is running for school board.

#### **Executive Session- Tuition Student**

- Move to hold the following discussion in executive session as it could identify a student (Jamele/Cook). Unanimous.
- Move to go into executive session at 6:53 pm (Marchesi/Jamele). Unanimous.
- Exit executive session at 7:00p.
- Motion to accept two students at the stated tuition rate of \$12,000 per student annually for the 2024-5 school year to be paid in two installments in August and January (Marchesi/Jamele). Unanimous.

#### **Adjourn-**

Motion to adjourn the meeting at pm (7:01). Unanimous.

#### **Minutes Prepared By:**

---

Ginni Balch, Board Clerk

**Future Meetings:**

Regular School Board Meetings are held on the second Tuesday of the month during the school year.

4/9/2024

Thetford Town School District Board Meeting

6:00 p.m.

*These minutes are not official until they are approved by the School Board.*