BOARD OF SCHOOL COMMITTEE SPECIAL MEETING
MANCHESTER SCHOOL DISTRICT SAU #37

May 19, 2025 **7:00 p.m.**

1. Mayor Ruais called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

2. Mayor Ruais called for the Pledge of Allegiance.

3. The Clerk called the roll.

Present: Committee Members Turner, Soule, Want, Argeropoulos, O'Connell, Potter, Spillers, Baines, O'Neil, Gonzalez (late 7:22), Mayor Ruais and Student Member Giri.

Absent: Committee Members Parr, Bonilla, Bergeron, Senecal

PUBLIC FORUM

4. The purpose of the public forum is to give the residents of Manchester the opportunity to address the board. All people wishing to speak will have up to three (3) minutes to do so, and any comments must be directed to the chair. Any resident wishing to speak will come forward to the nearest microphone, clearly state their name and address when recognized and give their comments. Public comment must be regarding the proposed recommendations being recommended by the Superintendent to realize the $8 million reduction from the BOSC approved tax cap compliant budget.

Mackenzie Verdier, 539 Silver Street, stated:

I think it's funny, I didn't put my last name on that paper, so you guys know me. Hey. I just wanted to come with some of the concerns from the YOU members. I've spoken to several of you guys. A lot of you guys have met with us, you kind of know, but I just want to make it known. Students main concerns revolve around the bathrooms, specifically at Central and West. I've heard from the boys at West that there's only one bathroom that works. There's urinals falling off. I also heard a story of an entire counter in a bathroom just detaching from the wall and messing up all of the plumbing. And during the meeting, I ask you to please direct your attention to Deepasha, she goes to West, and please ask her questions, as she's your student representatives. Then also feminine hygiene products in the bathrooms, I know we're going under a budget cut, so this is hard, there's going to be cuts all around, but I just want to make sure that it is known that these are what the students want to see. The Appa Level cleanings, if we can try and keep that number the same. And then another issue that the students are talking about is engagement, which we know will be affected by the reduction in staffing. Again, this is something we can't avoid, but

how can we open the conversation to find a solution for some of these engagement issues? I think that's it. Thank you guys.

It was responded to Ms. Verdiner that this matter was discussed at the last Finance meeting and with facilities last week and changes are expected.

a. If there is no one else present wishing to speak, a motion is in order to take all comments under advisement and further to receive and file any written documentation presented and to table the remaining minutes for public comment to the end of the meeting for those that have not already spoken.

*On motion of **Committee Member Soule,** duly seconded by **Committee Member O'Connell,** it was moved to take all comments under advisement and further to receive and file any written documentation presented and to table the remaining minutes for public comment to the end of the meeting for those that have not already spoken. All were in favor and the motion passed.*

5. Action Item: Budget Update 2026 – Superintendent Recommendations – by Dr. Jennifer Chmiel and Karen DeFrancis, Executive Director of Finance

Dr. Chmiel stated she wanted to take a couple minutes and just ground us back into a couple of talking points. First, she wanted to thank all of you for giving her the time this evening to speak about their budget recommendations. She wanted to center everyone and give a few guiding aspects of the work which has yielded these recommendations. This evening, we centered on students first, in particular, adhering to our class size policy. This is even more important as ever as we are now seeing our student outcome data start to move in the right direction. We also know we are striving to close the learning gap exacerbated by the COVID 19 pandemic. In addition, we reflected on our strategic plan, our district goals, department goals and school goals. All that said we believe we have finally invested in our district in a manner that allowed us to develop and implement a solid foundation for our schools. In addition to all of this work, we took an approach to spread reductions across departments and functions within the district. Our goal was not to hit any singular department, function or school with the majority of the reductions in this budget. At this time, there is an average of 1.2% staff reduced at the school level with a range of 0% at some schools upwards of 4.4% at Parkside. Please note we have seven schools with zero reductions, and MST will actually see an increase of 3.9% in their staffing pool. She also wanted to contrast this with our reduction seen at the district office. We held a lion's share of the cuts at 7.8%. She wanted to again thank the district team, all of the team at our office. She has shared this recommendation with the team at their last faculty meeting, and

the rationale for this reduction being our goal of maintaining the lowest class sizes possible. She stated that they will begin to review the areas of consideration in order to meet the $8 million reduction from our Board of School Committee approved tax cap compliant budget, unanimously approved in February of 2025. She asked that everyone allow her to present all of the considerations and then move us to our recommendations before we enter into our discussion. Once we move into discussion, they will be fact checking and telling any ideas that come from Board of School Committee recommendations before we return a comment. This is important, and the reason why is that they will be double checking for funding sources. If the funding comes from a grant there will not be a realized general fund savings and they will need to be sure that we are not entering into a situation of supplanting. We will double check for contract language, so that an idea does not, in fact, contradict contract language. We'll be cross checking for enrollments and projected class sizes, so we can stay as close as possible to our policy. In addition, you will see us keeping a running tally of ideas so we can, in fact, get to the $8 million reduction if we move from the superintendent's recommendations. This evening, you have a great deal of information in your packet before you, from our initial reduction projections to meet the mayor's budget, which was sitting at $9.5 million presented in mid April, to our refined reductions to meet the BMA budget before us this evening. Before she began, she reiterated that they have worked very, very hard over the last few years to build our foundation, our team, our schools, our students and community partners have dug in to lift our district. We are seeing forward progress with that. She wanted to remind everybody in the room and listening this evening, none of these are reductions she wishes to make, given we are at the bottom of the state for per pupil funding, and we have the largest and most diverse district. Reductions are very difficult choices. However, this is where we are, so let's begin with our considerations. This has not shifted from our initial conversations. She reminded everyone that this is not a recommendation she wants to have proposed. They looked at all of the levels of athletics within our district, cutting them by grade level, by activity, and then also provided costs in there. We did add to this document the pay to play estimated costs. That estimation comes from the athletics department looking at the cost for sports and then taking an average across all sports to come up with the $472 per athlete per sport. The reasons why they are not look to move athletics forward remain the same. We want to make sure our students have access to engagement activities. We want to make sure that we are keeping them moving, and we want to keep them connected to their schools. In whole, she is not making any recommendations to athletics. A reduction in force, which is school based. We're looking at 22 school based positions. They have attached a table to the document this evening, which goes through school by school, with two options or scenarios at the middle level. What they sought to do was decrease the impact to any class size increase, and what they believe they have found was the way to do that while keeping the majority of our schools sitting right at or under the class size. She did note, and

wanted to be clear, class size projections today are what governed this document. If we see an increase in enrollment, we will be at or above our class size. In the past, we've been able to flex staff across but with cuts, we will have less staff to be able to move across the district. Reduction in force at the district level. She again wanted to thank the team for supporting her wish to make sure that we were taking a burden of the reductions at the district level. With this reduction of 7.8% or eight positions at the district level, we will save approximately 15 to 17 teachers across all of our schools. This is a huge reduction, and she wanted to caution everyone that with lower staffing at the district office, there is an impact of us having to push activities or responsibilities back into the schools. Our departments have been working hard, but we will continue to work backwards with staffing at the district. There's going to be some impact to transportation. She was not recommending any of this in whole or in any part. She looked to maintain the two mile walk out, not charge for high school riders, and to continue the use of the tap on, tap off system. Currently, we are not using the system but she argued that we should be. It's a system we bought for School Safety. It's a system we bought for accountability, and it's a system that I believe is an asset to our district. She stated that she was advocating that we keep it. In addition, when you think about transportation and increasing the walkout radius, or charging high schoolers to pay to ride, my concerns hit right back to those ABC goals we see at our schools, attendance, behavior and curriculum. Regarding increasing class size, she has heard a few people chat about, why don't we just increase our class sizes? We gave you a model. However, she want to be very clear, this is not something she would recommend. She stated that she noted earlier that we're trying to close our learning gap, which was exacerbated through the COVID pandemic, while we're seeing forward progress the concern is, if we continue to look at erasing our class size policy, we'll see some of that forward progress roll backwards. Regarding facilities, when they started to look at the reduction from the budget, they did reach out to Aramark. We are currently under contract. Aramark did come back with the following ideas that we could consider. Again, these are things that nobody wants to do. But when we think about $400,000 that's about seven positions that we can maintain within our district, this does mean that we have to be more in communication with each other to get things fixed or repaired as they go. It's not going to make things easier on anybody in the building as far as cleanliness goes. But again, it's a savings of seven positions. Regarding supplies, here recommendation was a reduction in this line, but this does not include copy paper or toner, which are two of the high items that we see within the REQ system. It will limit some of the other instructional materials that we can bring into our schools. On average, it sits at about a third of the reduction of the school supply line, again, not including paper and toner. Regarding additional use of one time funds, she stated that she is making this recommendation with a couple caveats, and as we go through the presentation tonight, she will talk a little bit more about some of the areas where they are looking to use savings to reduce this amount. In the

coming year, we are looking to use the additional funds to make sure that we can maintain staffing and functions that we have within the district. Our expendable trust, we have received the recommendations coming in of 10%, this will drop us down considerably, and reduces our reserves to about 6.5% and the recommendation from our auditors is 10% for a district our size. There were some conversation last week about health insurance and what will or will not be covered in the coming year. This will be before you at a coming meeting. Unfortunately, the reduction that was discussed from the savings that we might have last week actually isn't because we had put into the budget a 7% cost for health insurance, and we're actually looking as we're trending closer to 10% so the savings from those medications would actually go to help offset that discrepancy. Regarding our legal reduction, she stated that she is recommending this, which includes our ability to hire someone in house. We looked at all of our bills, looking for ways to clip expenses. The only risk she sees of this would be if we incurred legal costs outside of our average yearly balance, and that average yearly balance includes both in house, the salary that we hold, and external use of Drummond. Regarding opening our retirement window. People have asked if she can give an estimate of what that would look like. Unfortunately, she can't. What we do know is that we have staff in two tiers, two pools within the bargaining unit, who are available for an extended retirement. The recommendation would be that we take advantage of this, and any funds that we actualize from this would go to reduce our one time spending. A reduction of our contract service line. We've seen an increase in our special education numbers. We've seen an increase in our contract service line, and we've seen an increase in our specialized transport. In the coming year, we'll be working to recruit and hire for general fund positions, and as we hire internally, we'll be going one for one, taking one out of the contract service line. We'll be more than happy to give updates on a monthly basis on how that progress is going. She added into this document some of the Board of School Committee ideas from our 5/12 meeting. One idea was to cut the Welcome Center. She reminded everyone that the payment for the Welcome Center is covered through a grant. What we do have over at that location are staff positions, but there is not any room to put the staff that are over at the Welcome Center at the district office. We use the Welcome Center to stretch space a little bit from what we have at our district office. There was a thought of cutting our professional development line that actually comes out to a 00 gain for us two reasons. One, it's part of contract language, and two, it's grant funded. Professional Development is stretched internally, using our internal knowledge from our own staff to make sure that we're sharing the knowledge that we are growing from within. The next idea was to cut or replace our Capital Improvement (CIP) but this does not have an impact to our FY26 school year budget, and it would have an impact to our grounds and building. Over the years, we have placed a high value on making sure we're taking care of our aging buildings and doing this would actually be counterintuitive to that work. The last one was to close the high school and through the work

with SMMA and building our long term master facilities plan, one of the action items in that plan is to develop a high school Visioning team that was slated to begin this summer, that is still on deck. We will be looking at all kinds of ways to look at high school in the coming years, so more to come on that. She stated that she would be remiss if she gave even a hint of what a budget reduction might look like if we closed a high school, because there's a few different variables and combinations. She she can assert, though, is that we will be looking at that, starting this summer again, we can be doing monthly report outs to the board on that action. She stated that she was going to skip over to her recommendations. Her first recommendation is to maintain between 22 school based positions, teachers and administrative assistant roles. Again, this is a 1.2 on average reduction at our schools. This allows us to maintain low class sizes, keeping that policy as a focus, while mitigating the impact on our students. The second reduction is the reduction in force at the district office, while it will increase the burden on the team at the district office, we felt strongly that this maintains approximately 15 to 17 positions within our schools. It lets us continue to focus on lower class sizes and saves teaching positions. Regarding facilities she is making this recommendation as the net is seven teaching positions that we can maintain. Reducing supplies, will again save one to two positions. Opening the retirement window could be a cost savings but is to be determined, and funds generated from this line would go directly to reduce our use of one time spending. Reducing our contract service line saves approximately 18 to 22 positions. Her hope is we exceed the 1.3 million in savings with the targeted recruitment that we're already engaging in. The hope will be to bring that number lower and lower. Use of additional one time funds of $3.7 million allows us to save approximately 57 to 62 teachers. This brings us to a total reduction of $8,000,050 and our key focus in this development was the reduction of the tax cap compliant budget that our Board of School Committee pushed forward to the BMA budget. We stayed committed to the impacts look like for our students. We also sought to construct some balance in the system by not taking one sweep or one cut out of one department in particular. She wanted to remind all of us that we will be taking some time when they hear the board's ideas or your feedback to calculate to cross check back here. She stated that she has members of her team throughout the room with a purpose, and we have some backup sitting behind the front desk as well.

To reiterate:

A. **Superintendent's Budget Recommendations – To Meet the Mayor's Budget with the $9.55 million dollar cut was as follows:**
    1. Staying focusing on students first and adhering to class size policies.
    2. The superintendent highlighted the strategic plan, district goals, and department goals, aiming to spread reductions across departments.

3. Reduction of Force - $2,450,000 – 38 School Based Positions (Teachers and Administrative Assistants). The superintendent details the average 2.1% staff reduction at the school level, with some schools seeing no reductions and others up to 4.4%.
4. Reduction in Force – District - $963,669 – 8 positions. The district office faces a 7.8% reduction, with the goal of maintaining the lowest class sizes possible.
5. Athletics – reduction of $90,090 regarding eliminating the expansion of athletics.

Questions and comments included:

1. Concerns were expressed about the long-term impact of the budget cuts and the depletion of rainy day funds.
2. Criticism of the mayor for not proposing a tax cap compliant budget and calls for more public engagement in budget discussions.
3. It was suggested that pausing the expansion of middle school sports and reconsidering the tap-on, tap-off system for transportation.
4. The importance of middle school coaching positions and suggests cutting elementary basketball and freshman sports to save funds.
5. It was recommended that in the future we increase communication and joint budget conversations with the Board of Mayor and Alderman to address long-term budget planning. There is the need for increased communication and suggests starting budget conversations earlier in the year.
6. The board asked why education is consistently targeted for budget cuts, while other city services are not.
7. Focus on finding ways to balance the budget while minimizing the impact on students and staff.
8. It was indicated that there is support for the superintendent's recommendation, expressing frustration over the use of rainy day funds and the disparity in city reserves.
9. The board highlighted the city's $30 million in reserves compared to the school district's dwindling funds and it was added that the city could have reduced the tax rate increase by tapping their reserves.
10. There is a need to preserve services despite the financial strain.
11. Frustration over the reduction in athletics despite initial plans to increase them was expressed.
12. Prioritizing teaching positions over athletics is important.
13. It was asked about the savings if we eliminate the current use of the "tap on, tap off" system.
14. Frustration was expressed over the using one-time funds and the uncertainty of future positions.

15. It was asked about opening the retirement window and its potential impact on hiring. Information was provided on the retirement tiers and the number of eligible employees.
16. The Board supported retaining the Welcome Center, citing its community value and cost-effectiveness. Maintaining community vibrancy is important.
17. The board indicated that they regret not presenting a needs budget, highlighting the lack of resources for essential services. The board should have advocated for the full budget needed for student services.
18. The disparity in votes between the school board and the board of mayor and aldermen was pointed out.
19. There is a need for a clear budget that reflects the district's actual needs.
20. Specific Cuts and Program Adjustments the board considered were: cutting the tap on, tap off program; reducing the number of SROs; re-evaluating the Aramark contract; delaying maintenance; re-evaluating lunch prices; and the need for community engagement in high school closures.
21. It was suggested that we adjust class size policies to avoid drastic increases.
22. It was asked that the district review the 42 ES positions added during the year.
23. The need for a comprehensive approach to budget cuts.
24. The importance of maintaining quality education despite financial constraints.
25. Support was expressed for the superintendent and mayor, acknowledging the challenges of budgeting, with the need for collaboration and understanding among all city departments.
26. The importance of leadership in navigating tough budget decisions.
27. There was a call to end to political infighting and to focus on the best interests of the city.
28. Clarification on specific positions and cuts was expressed, seeking more detailed explanations.
29. The importance of class size reduction and the impact of transportation cuts.
30. It was suggested that the district work with the city on rec sports and unified sports at the middle school level.
31. There is the need for a thorough review of the Aramark contract.

After the discussion, the administration gave a high level recap of the recommendations brought forward by the Board, which included:

1. The reduction of the $90,000 for athletics, by pausing the middle school athletic expansion.
2. Eliminating the Tap on Tap off on the buses in the amount of $50,000.
3. Adding back the two coaching positions at the middle schools, in the amount of $130,000.

4. Eliminating Elementary School Basketball in the hopes that the City can pick this up, in the amount of $48,000.
5. Reduction of Freshman sports in the amount of $47,727.
6. The board also brought forward recommendation, as listed below, that there was currently not an amount that could be determined:
    a. Looking at Aramark and reducing this contract.
    b. Potential increase in class size.
    c. Looking at the 42 ESSER Positions added during the FY25 school year.
    d. Opening the retirement window.

9:00 p.m.

*On motion of **Committee Member Argeropoulos**, duly seconded by **Committee Member Soule**, it was moved that as this is a special meeting, a 2/3 vote of the board is needed, per the request of the Superintendent, to allow further business, being the need to go into non-public session, under the provisions of RSA 91-A: 3 II (a, b, and c) for the dismissal, promotion or compensation of any public employee or the hiring of any person as a public employee; and, for matters, which if discussed in public, would likely affect adversely the reputation of any person as a public employee.*

Roll Call: Committee Members Turner, Soule, Want, Argeropoulos, O'Connell, Potter, Spillers, Baines, O'Neil, Gonzalez and Mayor Ruais voted yes. Committee Members Parr, Bonilla, Bergeron and Senecal were absent. Motion passed.

Present during non-public session included: Dr. Chmiel, Karen DeFrancis, Attorney Matt Upton, Michelle Evans, and Nicole Doherty.

The non-public discussion included:

1. *The dismissal, promotion or compensation of any public employee or the hiring of any person as a public employee; and, for matters, which if discussed in public, would likely affect adversely the reputation of any person as a public employee.*

9:54 p.m.

*On motion of **Committee Member Baines,** duly seconded by **Committee Member Soule,** it was moved to call the meeting back to order.*

*On motion by **Committee Member Baines** and duly seconded by **Committee Member Gonzalez**, it was moved to approve Superintendent's recommendations regarding the FY26 budget.*

Committee Member Argeropoulos asked for a roll call vote.

Roll Call: Committee Members Potter, Baines, Gonzalez and Mayor Ruais voted yes. Committee Members Argeropoulos, O'Connell, Spillers, O'Neil, Turner, and Want voted no. Committee Member Soule abstained. Committee Members Parr, Bonilla, Bergeron and Senecal were absent. Motion failed.

Committee Member O'Connell recommended a motion with the following items:

1. *Retain the coaching positions at the middle schools;*
2. *Eliminate the middle school sports expansion;*
3. *Eliminate the tap on/tap off system for the buses; and,*
4. *Accept the remainder of the recommendations as submitted by the Superintendent.*
5. *Eliminate the elementary basketball program.*

Committee Member Argeropoulos asked for an amendment to the motion, which would be to remove the elimination of the elementary basketball program. Committee Member O'Connell accepted the amendment. The motion was as follows:

*On motion by **Committee Member O'Connell** and duly seconded by **Committee Member Argeropoulos**, it was moved to approve the Budget Update for FY26, with the following revisions:*

1. *Retain the coaching positions at the middle schools;*
2. *Eliminate the proposed middle school sports expansion;*
3. *Eliminate the tap on/tap off system for the buses; and,*
4. *Accept the remainder of the recommendations as submitted by the Superintendent.*

Superintendent Chmiel stated that she was in agreement with this.

Committee Member Argeropoulos stated that he just wanted to state again that he does not want to lose these reductions and would ask that as we look at money that is coming in, if there is additional funding, that he would like to go forward with the middle school sports expansion.

Roll Call: Committee Members Argeropoulos, O'Connell, Spillers, Baines, O'Neil, Gonzalez, Turner, Want and Mayor Ruais voted yes. Committee Member Potter was opposed. Committee Member Soule abstained. Committee Members Parr, Bonilla, Bergeron and Senecal were absent.

Motion passed.

ADJOURNMENT

6. This being a special meeting of the board, no further business can be presented unless by 2/3 majority and a motion is in order to adjourn.

This being a special meeting, no further business was discussed.

On motion of ***Committee Member Baines,*** *duly seconded by* ***Committee Member Argeropoulos,*** *it was moved to adjourn. All were in favor, meeting adjourned at 9:59 p.m.*

True Copy. Attest.

Respectfully Submitted,

Angela M Carey

Clerk of Committee