

REGULAR MEETING OF THE SOUTH BURLINGTON SCHOOL BOARD

Wednesday, January 7, 2026

Regular Session at 6:00 pm

South Burlington School District Administrative Office

577 Dorset Street, South Burlington, VT

REGULAR MEETING

Present

Seamus Abshire, Laura Williams, Jennifer Lawrence, Dan Boyer, Michelle Boyer, Austin Smith, Ally Leduc, Momin Waqar

Administration/Staff

Dr. Joe Clark, Nicole Carter, Kristin Romick, Monica Desrochers, Jean Marie Clark, Daisy Brayton, Nick Bocchino

Guests

6 in person

17 online

Call to Order

Chair Seamus Abshire called the meeting to order at 6:00 pm. Abshire said the board was originally scheduled to have an executive session at 5:00 pm today, but since there were no topics to discuss, the board did not hold the executive session. The Pledge of Allegiance was said.

ANNOUNCEMENTS AND AMENDMENTS TO THE AGENDA

There were no announcements.

In the discussion item section, the budget presentation was moved to start immediately following the Educators Preferred Corporation (EPC) presentation on the agenda.

Comments and Questions

Gerry Silverstein asked if a student does not make up a summative exam score and was given a 50 when they would normally have gotten a 0, does the summative exam score revert to zero, or does the placeholder score of 50 remain?

Gerry also asked if an employee does not use the full amount of allotted HRA funds assigned to them during the year do the funds rollover or do they revert back to the district? Over the last few years, how many dollars of HRA funds, which were not used by employees, remain with the district?

Student Representative Report

Ally Leduc and Momin Waqar presented the following information:

- SBHS students began mid-years today and will continue this adjusted schedule through January 12. During these four days students engage in extended 2-hour classes with only two classes each day.
- Momin and Ally, in partnership with Student Council, have been working on our kitchen table discussions. These discussions will be held in all advisories in the high school and will be focusing on how to increase student engagement. They start next week.
- Several of the student activities groups have partnered to start a food pantry located at the high school for students in need. Students can freely access non-perishable foods and backpacks to carry it all home. Ally thanked Monica Desrochers for her help with this project.

DISCUSSION ITEMS**Educators Preferred Corporation (EPC) Presentation**

Dr. Clark introduced Katy Rose and Merry Kelly to speak about an early retirement program for the district. ECP is a company that works to provide early retirement incentives to employees to leave the district so they can replace them at a lower level or not replace them. ECP works exclusively with school systems and higher education. Katy and Merry reviewed how the plan works including providing legal documents, counselors, answering questions, reviewing the details of the plan, and reviewing benefits of the plan for all employees interested. They said 53% of the district's 314 teachers are eligible for the plan, so they are near or at the top of the pay scale. Employees are required to have 10 or more years of service or be eligible for retirement under VSTRS by June 30, 2026 for this one-time offer. The plan is available to full and part-time teachers, administrators, and classified employees. They reviewed additional details of the plan including potential cost savings.

The board will review the documents and decide about whether to engage ECP at an upcoming school board meeting. The board thanked Katy and Merry for the presentation.

FY 2027 Budget

Dr. Clark presented a draft of the FY 2027 budget which includes the 3.4% increase in expenditures that the school board approved in November. Dr. Clark said the tax increase with the 3.4% expenditure increase will mean a proposed tax rate for South Burlington of 8.67%.

Lawrence said an almost 9% tax increase is not sustainable. She asked what a flat budget would be for a tax rate. Dr. Clark said the tax rate would still go up just over 4% with a 0% increase in the budget over FY 2026.

Abshire said the board could ask the administration to revise the budget with a 0% increase in expenditures and still have a 4% tax rate. He asked the board what they would like to do.

Williams said that everyone needs to remember what goes on in these buildings is not like running a business, this is human capital we are talking about. She feels like a reduction in the budget is a bad idea.

Lawrence said as a district we need to start looking at more innovative ways, like EPC, and figuring out if we can do other things with other districts and save money that way as well as looking at our footprint. She feels like an almost 9% tax increase is too much.

Michelle Boyer said the current proposed budget is too high.

Dan Boyer agreed that 8.52% is much too high.

Abshire said there is a budget surplus from last year but he does not support using that internally to buy down property tax increases.

Austin Smith said this pushes the problem further down the road and reduces our money available for emergencies. Personally, he thinks that it is reckless and gets the district through one budget cycle at the risk of creating a much bigger liability on the community.

Ally Leduc said during the board retreat Debbie from VSBA said that as a school board you need to do what's best for the school district and your students and she thinks that going for a 0% increase or below would have a drastic impact on the students, and she does not know what our school would look like if we go that far. So, what the taxpayers are going to pass is really important, but some of us should be advocating for what the school district needs from the community.

Abshire said making the hard decision now, feeling the pain now, is the way that you ensure education for future generations.

Williams said you can't zero fund your schools and have them be really excellent. The demand for excellence and rigor can't happen with zero funding.

Dan Boyer said the 8.67% increase in the tax rate is pretty much triple current inflation and it is not sustainable, eventually it is going to collapse. You are going to have to make tough choices and the longer you wait to make them the harder it gets.

Smith said this is obviously a tough situation and nobody enjoys this. He agrees with the desire to have a long-term sustainable budget which would be below 9%. If we care about having young families and students in this district and reversing a declining student population, we need to have a community that is affordable for all families.

Abshire said the board would like the superintendent to come back with a 0% budget. The board is not interested in anything that appears to be a buy-down of property taxes through the surplus.

Redistricting Statement

Abshere spoke about the board making a public statement that we support discussion of consolidation and redistricting.

Dr. Clark agrees. He said in his short time in Vermont, he agrees that there are fundamental funding issues, and thinks the board would be wise to make a statement. He has reached out to area school districts about the idea of redistricting and has not had much response back.

The board had a robust discussion about redistricting and will consider a statement at the January 14 school board meeting.

Policy G8 – Selection of Library Materials

The board reviewed the policy and the policy will be brought back to the January 14 meeting for a third reading and action.

Review Video Surveillance – Draft Revision to Executive Limitation 2.1 (First Reading)

Dr. Clark said the suggested changes came from our District Crisis Committee which includes administrators, principals, and school resource officers. He said the current policy requires emails to him and the chief of police to get approval and to the technology department to look for something on a video. This process takes an incredible amount of time for an administrator to review a video. He would like to change the executive limitations policy. Clark said in speaking with the principals, they do not like the process as it delays response time to situations in some cases.

Williams read the executive limitations policy with the proposed changes. The board agreed with the policy revisions and the proposed changes will be brought back to the next meeting for a second reading.

The board took a three-minute break at 7:44 pm until 7:47 pm.

ACTION ITEMS**FY 2027 Announced Tuition**

Dr. Clark said in accordance with Title 16 V.S.A. Section 826(a), the school district must announce the FY 2027 Tuition Rate. For South Burlington it will be \$23,900 for elementary grades, K-5 and \$22,935 for secondary grades, 6-12.

Abshere called for a motion to approve the FY 2027 announced tuition rate as presented. Michelle Boyer made the motion. Williams seconded the motion. There were no public comments. All were in favor and the motion passes unanimously.

Monitoring Report 1.2 Academic Proficiency

Dr. Clark said that Ends Policy 1.2 Academic Proficiency talks about students actively participating in a full and enriching academic experience and demonstrating proficiency within those courses they take. He said that his interpretation that is in compliance will show

that the district does provide opportunities to our students, and that our students do well. He went on to speak about access and participation across the disciplines and that access for students is real with scheduled courses, staff and resources.

Dr. Clark provided an in-depth presentation on how the district offers these opportunities to our students through Language, Literacy, Mathematics, Science, Social Studies, Arts, Design, Technology, and Health and Wellness at each of the grade levels. He reviewed the different ways in which the district measures student performance including local and state testing and measures.

Dr. Clark reviewed how he feels the district needs to address weaknesses:

1. SBSD needs to stick with STAR as our universal screener and progress-monitoring tool....
2. SBSD needs to complete a district Curriculum and Instruction Audit....
3. SBSD should commit to a research-based instructional framework, such as Marzano, and implement it with fidelity....
4. SBSD needs to strengthen our system for using valid measures over time.
5. To respond to community expectations and avoid "above average isn't enough" remaining a nebulous refrain, we will likely need updated Ends adopted by the Board that more clearly define expectations for academic proficiency....

The full report is available on the school board website.

The board discussed the need to revise the District Ends Policy.

Bridget Burkhart spoke about the Ends Policy and the need for community involvement in any revisions to the policy.

Abshire called for a motion to evaluate Monitoring Report 2.1 based on the rubric provided. Dan Boyer moved and Williams seconded. All were in favor and the motion passes.

The board reviewed the policy monitoring rubric and rated compliance in each of the categories.

Abshire called for a motion to approve Monitoring Report 2.1 based on the rubric. Dan Boyer moved and Williams seconded. All were in favor and the motion passes.

CONSENT AGENDA

Approve School Board Minutes - The minutes of December 13, 15 and 17 were approved as presented.

Approve Account Payables Vouchers (AP):

- 1286 for \$176.83
- 1287 for \$1,925.00
- 1288 for \$2,752.82
- 1289 for \$8,957.10
- 1290 for \$174,434.26

- 1301 for \$1,081.43
- 1302 for \$7,613.72
- 1303 for \$2,957.06
- 1304 for \$57,796.99
- 1305 for \$297,875.82

Approve Payroll Warrant(s) #:

- 11 for \$1,645,954.68
- 12 for \$1,586,296.14
- 13 for \$1,675,724.65

Approve AP Voucher Check to Vermont Mechanical Inc. in the amount of \$65,242.49

Williams moved to approve the AP Voucher check to Vermont Mechanical Inc., Lawrence seconded. All were in favor and the motion passes.

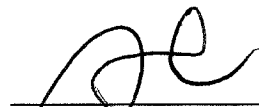
Approve AP Voucher Check to Essex Westford School District in the amount of \$116,684.04

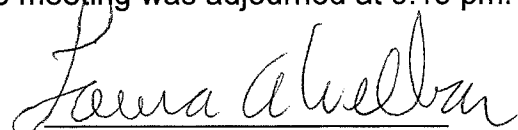
Williams moved to approve the AP Voucher check to Vermont Mechanical on the consent agenda as presented, Michelle Boyer seconded. All were in favor and the motion passes.

Agenda Planning – The board reviewed the agenda for the January 14 school board meeting.

ADJOURNMENT

Abshire called for a motion to adjourn the regular meeting. Williams moved and Dan Boyer seconded. The motion was approved and the meeting was adjourned at 9:15 pm.



Séamus Abshire, Chair

Laura Williams, Clerk