



**Special Joint Meeting of the Town Council, Town Council Finance Subcommittee,
School Committee and School Committee Budget Subcommittee**

Meeting Minutes

Meeting Date: Thursday, May 9, 2024, at 5:30 p.m.

This is a hybrid meeting. The Public is invited to attend this meeting in person or remotely, by telephone or computer access.

Call to Order: Council Vice-President Brewer called the meeting to order.

Roll Call – Council Members Present: Chris Alexopoulos (Via Zoom), William Alexopoulos (Via Zoom), Richard Brewer (In-Person), James F. Burgess, Jr. (In-Person), Jesse Gordon (In-Person), Katrina Huff-Larmond (In-Person), Kevin O’Connell (In-Person), Brandon Thompson (In-Person).

Roll Call - School Committee Members Present: Ida Gordon (In-person), Beverly Coles-Roby (In-Person), Jaime Ackles (In-Person), Andrea Nixon (In-Person), and Lisa Millwood (In-Person)

Old/Unfinished Business:

1. Discussion of FY2025 Annual Operating Budget

Council Vice-President Brewer: The purpose of this joint meeting is to allow the Council and School Committee to discuss the proposed Town of Randolph Fiscal Year 2024 Operating Budget. If it becomes to crowded, there is a room setup downstairs for guests. Before we begin those discussions, the School Committee has requested an opportunity for public comments at this meeting. I will turn that over to the Chair of the School Committee, Lisa Millwood.

Ms. Millwood: Pursuant to the School Committee Policy, we allow public comments at all of our meetings. The Public comments section shall not exceed twenty minutes and each speaker will be allowed up to three minutes to speak.

Public Comments:

Councillor Huff-Larmond entered the meeting, in person, at 5:45 PM.

1. Shauna Rommelmeyer, Co-President of the Randolph Education Association and 1st-grade teacher at Donovan Elementary School: Randolph’s literacy rates have continued to rise over the last challenging four years. We have been visited by the Governor Maura Healey and have been featured in the Boston Globe to highlight the strides Randolph Schools have been making. Without the proper funding, we will not have the staffing or resources we need to give our students the very best. We are urging you to invest in a district that is full of so much talent and dedication.
2. Joe Burke, 54 Hills Street: The town doesn’t have the funds to give the schools what they are asking for. In September, taxes will go up due to the override, and trash fees for residents have also gone up. I hope the Board sticks to the initial proposed budget or we’ll be looking at an override next year.

3. Raymond Bennett, Bridgewater, MA, Preschool Paraprofessional: I feel strongly about advocating for my students and their needs. Our pre-k program has grown over the past three years. We are told that we may not have the funds for enough stuff for the next school year and this is a major concern because our classrooms then become unsafe and unmanageable. We need more help in our schools.
4. Sarah Joncas, Avalon Drive, Randolph, MA: Please fund our schools. The current 3.3% increase to the school department will devastate our schools.
5. Tracey Duguay, Randolph Public School Department Chair for K-12 Music Program: The music program has such a positive impact on our schools and the community. We have eight dedicated music teachers who are committed to providing quality instruction to our students and provided them with opportunities and experiences that they may not otherwise have. Any budget cuts to our program can negatively impact our students.
6. Veronica Hodges, Brockton, MA, Randolph High School Educator: For many of us educators, we are wearing capes in the classrooms. We're trying to fund our own classrooms as well as teach two to three languages a class, provide modifications for special needs, and teach and create life lessons for students. More budget cuts would affect our school as well as our programs. Our students work year and we can't afford to lose any more teachers. We need to be seen and be heard. Thank you for taking all of these things into consideration.
7. Tom Colear, Southeastern, MA: As a dedicated employee within the Randolph School system for the past fourteen years, I have concerns regarding the proposed cuts that may affect our educational institutions. The proposed cuts threaten to undermine the very essence of what makes the Randolph Educational System exceptional. I implore you to prioritize the long-term well-being of our education system and the future of Randolph.
8. Justin Martin, Randolph, MA, Parent of Randolph student: I am deeply concerned with our the budget cuts will impact my children and the schools overall. We need to invest in our schools. I implore you to reconsider the proposed budget.
9. Cecil Garcia, Randolph, MA: I am a resident of the community. I believe the most important part of any business is quality staff. Education is an investment in the future of the Town. From my perspective and as a property owner, it's a worthwhile investment to fund the schools.
10. Sandy Cohen, 63 Bittersweet Lane: Public education is a right. These children are the foundation of our Town, the State, and our Country. If we don't fund the schools, we not only loose the residents who will move out of Town but the kids.
11. James Forrest, Marlborough, MA: I have been a sixth-grade teacher at Randolph Community Middle School and coach for the past ten years. I attended a coaching clinic and I heard the phrase, "Don't say, 'don't,'" which has stuck with me until today. The purpose is not to dwell on what the athlete did wrong but to emphasize what they should be doing with the correct action. I think that we should apply that phrase to what can be done for the school department instead of what can't be done.

Lisa Millwood: Thank you to the Council for allowing public comments tonight.

Superintendent Dr. Thea Stovel: Happy Teacher's Appreciation Week! I wanted to highlight some of Randolph School System's academic achievements. We have had educators from various schools throughout the Commonwealth visit and learn about our curriculum, including our Randolph Reads Program which has been very successful.

Dr. Stovell gave a presentation regarding many of the population shifts in Randolph Public Schools (RPS) since 2023, and the needs of the students within the district. 1. In the last six months RPS has enrolled an unprecedented 225 new students which is an 8% increase in the total student enrollment. Also in the last six months, low-income families have increased by 10.3% and high-needs students have increased by 10.1%. "High Needs Students" are a combination of students with disabilities, ML, and/or low-income. There has been a 7% increase of pre-k students so we have added an 11th pre-k classroom to keep up with the demand. We have also seen a 6.28% increase in students with IEP (individualized education plan) districtwide, and 10% increase of IEP students at the Pre-K level in the last six months. RPS has the highest mobility rate in Norfolk County and

4th highest in the state with a 16.7% churn of students. One of the things we have noticed about this data is that students entering Randolph and sticking with Randolph are meeting or exceeding MCAS expectations. There has also been an increase of homeless students by 22%. Transportation costs for these students are anticipated to be \$26,19.70.

Councillor Huff-Larmond: What do you mean when you talk about students coming at the beginning of the year for the first time versus other students? Dr. Stovell: When students enter RPS at an early age and get the foundational skills RPS provides, they are meeting expectations. We see that MCAS scores drop in the “churn” aka students who come and go.

Dr. Stovell provided additional information on student enrollment drivers in the budget such as academic performance, social and emotional well-being, attendance and engagement, administrative challenges, teacher and peer relationships, and community impact. All of these things have direct impacts on the budget such as assessment collection and data planning, high-quality tier II and tier III instructional materials and professional development, intervention classes, additional support staff, and out-of-school time learning opportunities.

Councillor Huff-Larmond asked for additional about funding out-of-district students.

Councillor Gordon asked for additional information about the circuit breaker and Chapter 70 funds and how those funds are given to the Community.

Councillor Burgess asked about how the school department will maintain this budget next year if the increase is being given with one-time funds.

Councillor Gordon: The dollar amount reflected per pupil doesn't reflect anything we would get for reimbursement. Town Manager Howard provided clarification concerning Chapter 70 funds which do not work as a reimbursement program, and the circuit breaker which is only a partial reimbursement: Ms. Millwood: The circuit breaker is 70% reimbursement. Town Manager Howard provided data regarding FY2023 per pupil expenditures and highlighted other communities similar to Randolph.

Councillor Huff-Larmond asked about how the school department would be able to keep up with the influx of students next year.

Councillor O'Connell: If we gave you what you asked for in last years budget, why were twenty teachers laid off? I'm trying to figure out why we didn't solve these issues last year, especially with the grant management that cost the Town almost \$2 million. Dr. Stovell: I work with Town Manager Howard behind the scenes to come up with a reasonable number because the percentage we truly want to ask for would be too much. Ms. Millwood: That was an inaccurate grant report given to the Town Council. Many of the grants we work on are reimbursements grants so you have to spend the money first and then submit paperwork to get the funds reimbursed. Town Accountant/Finance Director Janine Smith: The total free cash that was submitted for Fiscal Year 2023 was a deficit of \$1.9 million, which was an accumulation of various school grants. When the revenue eventually comes in from the grants, it does not go back into free cash if the receipts were not received at the end of the fiscal year. Ms. Nixon: So if the grant has revenue how much is went into the grant fund? Town Accountant/Finance Director Ms. Smith: When the grant reimbursement comes in, it goes to the grant account. Although some grants in this scenario were truly just overspent.

Councillor Thompson: How many Unit A employees are there? Dr. Stovell: About 400.

A discussion of the Town Council was held regarding the procedure for Town Attorney Griffin: The Town Manager is the only officer in town who can present a budget. The Town Council can approve, reduce, or reject the budget. Councillor Burgess: If the Town Manager presents a higher budget, does it need to be advertised? Town Attorney Griffin: No, the Town Manager can initiate the increase.

Motion for the Town Manager to prepare alternative budget scenarios to look at during the Public Hearing on May 13, 2024, seconded by Councillor Gordon.

A discussion of the Council and Town Manager was held concerning what exactly is being asked of the Town Manager to consider bringing forward.

Motion present an alternative budget scenario with a 5% increase to the Randolph Public School department with an indication of where the increase in funding would come from, seconded by Councillor Burgess.

Roll Call Vote: 8-0-0 (Absent: Egan)

Motion passes.

Councillor Gordon provided information from the Division of Local Services concerning free cash revenue.

Adjournment:

Motion to adjourn made by Councillor Huff-Larmond, seconded by Councillor Burgess.

Roll Call Vote: 8-0-0 (Absent: Egan)

Meeting adjourned at 8:20 PM.