

# Kearsarge Regional School District

THE STATE OF NEW HAMPSHIRE

ANNUAL DISTRICT MEETING - 1ST SESSION, JANUARY 7, 2023

To the inhabitants of the pre-existing School Districts of Bradford, New London, Newbury, Springfield, Sutton, Warner, and Wilmot, comprising the Kearsarge Regional School District, qualified to vote in Kearsarge Regional School District affairs.

## Annual Meeting: Deliberative Session Minutes

Kearsarge Regional High School, North Road, N. Sutton

January 7, 2023

9:00 AM

**KEARSARGE REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT**

**2023 WARRANT**

**ANNUAL DISTRICT MEETING - 1ST SESSION (Deliberative), JANUARY 7, 2023**

**Attendees Representing the Kearsarge Regional School District -**

Mr. Winfried Feneberg, Superintendent  
Mr. Michael Bessette, Assistant Superintendent  
Mr. Larry LeBoeuf, Business Administrator

**Attendees Representing the Kearsarge Regional School Board -**

Mr. Kenneth Bartholomew, Chair - Warner  
Ms. Alison Mastin, Vice-Chair - Wilmot  
Ms. Emma Bates - Warner  
Dr. Arthur Bobruff - Springfield  
Mr. Ben Cushing - New London  
Ms. Bebe Hammond Casey - New London  
Mr. Kyle Lombard - Sutton  
Ms. Kristen Schultz - Newbury

**Attendees Representing the Municipal Budget Committee -**

Mr. Richard Anderson, Chair - New London  
Mr. James Bibbo - Bradford  
Ms. Lyndsay Lund Harkins - New London  
Mr. Robert Hemenway - Newbury  
Mr. Luke Gorman - Springfield

Mr. Lick called the meeting to order at 9:01 a.m.

Mr. Bartholomew acknowledged Mr. Rupert Leeming and Mr. Michael Lacross, two teachers who are retiring from the District after 20 years of service each. He thanked them for their dedication to the District and wished them a happy retirement.

Mr Lick read Article 1 and recognized Mr. Bartholomew to discuss the Article.

**Article 1** To see if the School District will vote to raise and appropriate the **Municipal Budget Committee's recommended amount \$51,144,587** for the support of schools, for the payment of salaries for the school district officials and agents, and for the payment for the statutory obligations of the District. The **School Board** recommends **\$51,144,587**. This article does not include appropriations voted in other warrant articles. This warrant article asks the voters to raise and appropriate for the support of schools, the salaries of School District Officials and Agents, and for the statutory obligations of said District, and to authorize the application against said appropriation of such sums as are estimated to be received from the State sources, together with other income, the School Board to certify to the Selectmen of each of the Towns of Bradford, New London, Newbury, Springfield, Sutton, Warner, and Wilmot, the amount to be raised by taxation by said towns. **(School Board Recommends 7-0) (Municipal Budget Committee Recommends 8-0)**

***School Board Explanation:** The 2023-24 Operating Budget proposed by the Kearsarge Regional School Board and the Municipal Budget Committee of \$51,144,587 is an increase of approximately \$3,539,526 or 7.44% from the 2022-23 budget.*

*The areas of increase within the school boards operating budget are a result of a variety of factors that are explained in the following paragraphs.*

***Wages and Fringe** - The requested budget for 2023-24 reflects a net increase of 1 teacher FTE's. Added were 2 FTE's for the new Bradford Pre-K location. Reduced (1) FTE for a nurse at Simonds elementary. Increased .2 FTE for an elementary school counselor. Reduced (.2) FTE for the High School Art. In addition, 1 FTE custodian was added for the New London elementary school and PDC center. As a result, the wage line for employees requires an increase of approximately \$803,381 or 22.70% of the budget increase.*

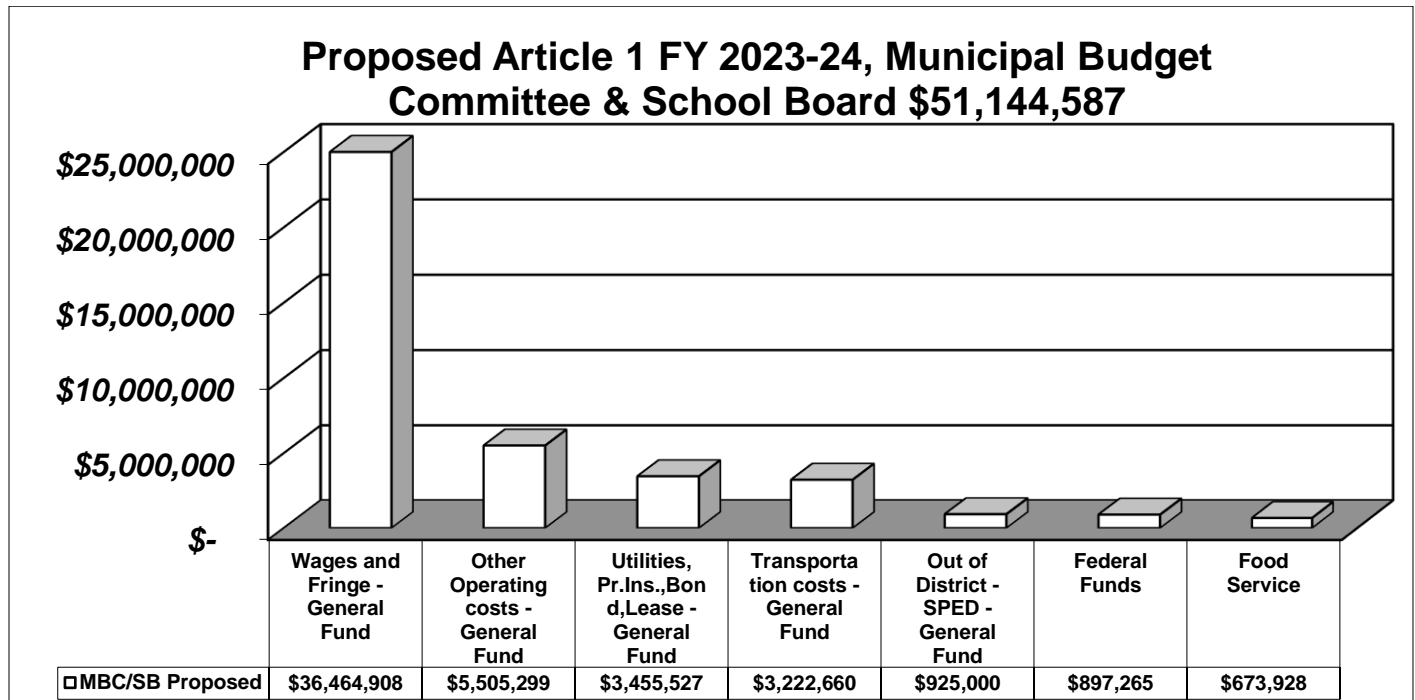
*The actual increase in health benefit costs for (23-24) was a 14% increase from the current (22-23) health effective rates. Based on this increase, health benefits alone represent 18.24% of the total budget increase or \$645,616.*

*Included under "Other payroll benefits" are dental, life, long term disability, workers compensation insurances, taxes, workshops, and tax sheltered annuities. The overall other payroll benefits increase represents 1.85% of the total budget increase or \$65,328. New Hampshire State Retirement decreased (3.08%) or (\$108,953) due to a one year reduction in employer percentages paid to the New Hampshire State Retirement system.*

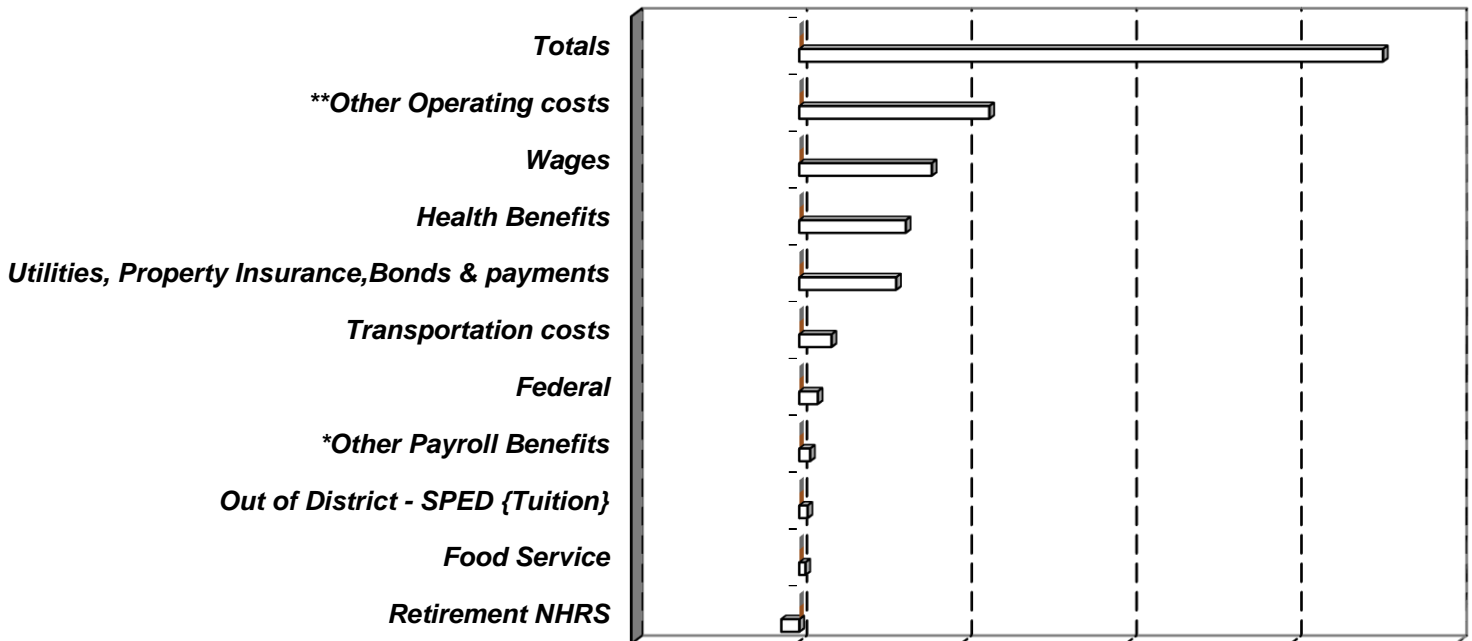
***Out of District** - Our out of district costs for 2023-24 school year are estimated to be an increase of \$50,000 or 1.41% of the budget increase at this point in time. Each year, Out of District Special Education costs are very fluid and are driven by a variety of factors. Those factors include: the ability of our local staff to meet the needs of intensive behaviorally or medically challenged students, families who move into the district, and the costs associated with delivering highly specialized services in environments outside of the district whose costs keep rising. We make every attempt to meet each child's needs in the least restrictive educational environment here at the local level. There are times, however, when the child's special needs exceed our local capacity to meet them. In addition, federal law also requires us to provide for those needs until the age of 22. Placements for out of district services can range from \$80,000 per student to upwards of \$300,000 depending on the residential requirements.*

**Other Operating Costs** - Included in this area are textbooks, technology, contracted services, supplies, repairs, replacement equipment, capital improvements, new equipment, furniture, dues and fees, printing, telephone, copiers, assessment, and others. These costs reflect a total budget increase of approximately 32.57% or \$1,152,771.

**Other Expenses** - Transportation represents a 5.52% or \$195,392 budget increase, and Utilities, Bonds, Lease payments and Property Insurance budget increased by approximately 16.59% or \$587,384. Food Service represents an increase in budget of 1.04% or \$36,842. Federal funds represents an increase of 3.16% or \$111,765 of the increase. Note, all federal dollars appropriated are offset by matching federal funds. The result is no effect to the local tax rate.



**Article 1, Operating differences 2023/2024 - Muncipal Budget Committee and School Board increase of 7.44% or \$3,539,526**



*\*Other Payroll Benefits {Dental, Life, LTD, Taxes, Workshops, TSA's}*

*\*\*Other Operating {Books, Technology, Communications, Contract Services, Supplies, Repairs and Services, Equipment, Dues/Fees, Travel, Printing, Voc, etc}*

	Retirement NHRS	Food Service	Out of District - SPED {Tuition}	*Other Payroll Benefits	Federal	Transportation costs	Utilities, Property Insurance, Bonds & payments	Health Benefits	Wages	**Other Operating costs	Totals
■ % to Prior Year Budget	-0.23%	0.08%	0.11%	0.14%	0.23%	0.41%	1.23%	1.36%	1.69%	2.42%	7.44%
■ % of Total Increase	-3.08%	1.04%	1.41%	1.85%	3.16%	5.52%	16.59%	18.24%	22.70%	32.57%	100%
□ School Board/MBC	\$(108,953)	\$36,842	\$50,000	\$65,328	\$111,765	\$195,392	\$587,384	\$645,616	\$803,381	\$1,152,771	\$3,539,526

Mr. Lick opened the meeting for discussion on Article 1.

**Andrew Pinard - Bradford**

Mr. Pinard stated that he would like to thank all of the elected officials for the work that they've done preparing these budgets and providing for our students. These are challenging times even post-pandemic, as some would call it, and the funding issues are rather substantial. He stated that he had two points, one that is specific to this question and one that is related to this question. He wanted to draw, or highlight attention to, the New Hampshire State Retirement reduction. The state, despite historic revenue coming into the state from a variety of sources, made the choice to decrease public funding of public education, specifically in this area the retirement system, which is a significant portion of the growth of this budget. He expressed to other voters that when they go to the polls they should bear in mind that the state is continuing not to appropriately fund education in a way that supports local property taxes. He stated that taxpayers are being asked to do more with less every year, not just specifically in the retirement aspect here, but that they may also notice that the school choice options went from a funding level that was very, very conservative at less than a million dollars to 8 million dollars. Funds are being diverted on a regular basis away from public education. It is having a significant impact on local schools. Kearsarge, thankfully, is one of the more self-sustaining Districts in some ways than others in our State. Mr. Pinard stated that he works in Claremont, and has friends who work in Franklin and are seeing portions of the student population in this state, suffering with significant mental health issues as a result of the disproportionate

funding in this state. He expressed that it's not enough to be aware of what happens in Kearsarge. It's really important that everyone keep an eye on what's happening statewide with education funding, because this is going to be a continued process unless state legislators and elected officials in the corner office are held accountable for making sure that they fund equitably all of the Districts in the State. He thanked the Boards for their service and their time.

**Charles Forsberg - Sutton**

Mr. Forsberg stated that he had one quick comment, stating that he has been in the habit of parking out here and when he came up to the door it was locked, so he had to walk all the way around the building. A little bit of an effort for some people he noticed to walk that far at that distance. He stated that he wasn't sure if it was good planning on somebody's part to make it difficult for people to get here. He noted that he understood that there's more parking down here, but there's no signs telling people where to park. That's just a comment.

Mr. Forsberg asked if there had been any bonds paid off this year that reduced the budget in any way whatsoever. He stated he wasn't sure where the bond issues were.

Mr. Bartholomew noted that no bonds have been paid off this year and that the next bonds will be paid off in three years which would be the HVAC bond and the next year would be the Middle School bond. Mr. Forsberg asked if that would be the last bond paid off as far as we know at this time. Mr. Bartholomew noted that is correct.

Mr. Forsberg asked, has the student population changed any in the District and just more or less what it is right now? It was about 1,800 last year. The Superintendent noted that the 10-year projections have been very stable, noting that to the extent the District can predict 10 years out, the student population is predicted to see a fluctuation of 100 students, up or down. Mr. Forsberg stated that he noticed under wages and fringe that there were some increases that are usually driven by a population increase.

Mr. Forsberg stated that he always thought that the age of responsibility for the Special Education program was 21, it's now 22. Mr. Bartholomew noted that it changed last year noting that it was a vote by the legislature. Mr. Forsberg asked if that was at the Federal level. Mr. Bartholomew noted that each state decides for itself. Mr. Forsberg noted that they have increased the age to 22 yet have decreased some of the benefits to the retirement program. Mr. Bartholomew noted that there is a one year state contribution to the state retirement. It used to be 45% at the highest point. It has been reduced over the years to 0%, but there is a 1 time contribution for this budget of 7.5%. The District does get the benefit of a state contribution of 7.5% of the District's costs for state retirement which is why it's a decrease for this budget. Mr. Forsberg asked if that varies year-to-year in terms of the number of retirements that occur. Is it just sort of a standard percentage across the board regardless? Mr. Bartholomew noted that the District is told what they need to contribute based on the performance of the New Hampshire Retirement System. Mr. Forsberg stated that the state does poorly investing its funds.

Mr. Forsberg stated that the operating costs seem a little on the high side. Mr. Bartholomew explained that is true and that it's unfortunate, but stated that if you recall last year in the high school renovation bond that was proposed, we said that there were several items that needed to be fixed that were included in the project price. There are boilers to be replaced that can be from \$300,000 to \$500,000 each. There's a lot of maintenance that needs to be done. There's fire suppression systems that need to be done in two of the schools that the District has committed to correct at the urging of the local fire departments. We really don't have any choice with regard to these things. We can't run a School District without heat. He noted that the District will likely be taking money out of budget savings and out of the trust funds to cover some costs. That helped to reduce this operating budget.

Mr. Forsberg asked what the name of the company used is. Mr. Bartholomew stated that it used to be Honeywell, but the company now used is Siemens.

**Mark Dowd - Bradford**

Mr. Dowd asked about the capital expense of the school from last year. He stated that he is a facility manager and understands some about the fire suppression systems, the fire code, and the boilers. He asked if capital expenses have been rolled into the budget. Mr. Bartholomew noted that last year, the District had a bond proposal for the High School renovation that also included a lot of renovations for infrastructure and underlying reservations. He noted that the bond did not pass and, therefore, there is no money from a bond to cover the repairs, so the repairs need to be made out of the operating budget or trust funds, or both. Mr. Dowd stated that typically capital expenses are for new construction not repairs. Mr. Bartholomew noted that these are repairs and asked the Superintendent if there is any new construction that is a part of this budget. The Superintendent noted that the construction of a new playground in Bradford with the new preschool program for the Southern part of the District is a part of the budget. Mr. Bartholomew noted that the building itself is paid for with federal ESSER funds. Mr. Dowd stated that he wanted clarity on how the fire suppression system was in a new construction versus a repair of the old. Mr. Bartholomew noted that they are both in existing elementary schools: New London Elementary and Simonds Elementary in Warner.

**Bob Wright - Sutton**

Mr. Wright asked a procedural question. He noted that towns usually use capital reserves and the term “trust funds” was used. He asked what the difference was between the two. Mr. Bartholomew stated that he didn’t believe that there really was a difference, just nomenclature. Mr. Wright stated that the reason he asked is because with a capital reserve, it’s allocated for specific projects. Mr. Bartholomew noted that the trust funds for building repairs is just that broad. It’s for building repairs. The terms of the trust are set by the voters when the trust is created or amended and that is what it’s limited to. Mr. Wright stated that his concern is the broadness. He stated that he would like to address that over the years a little bit so we can follow. Mr. Bartholomew read the purpose of the School Building’s Maintenance Expendable Trust Fund stating the purpose is for repairs, unanticipated utility costs, and maintaining the school building and equipment. He noted that’s what the voters approved.

Mr. Wright stated that he was reading statistics from the United States Department of Education that stated that there has been an increase in students by 7.6% with an increase in teachers of 8.7% and an increase in administrators of 87.6%. He asked what administrators do. Superintendent Feneberg thanked Mr. Wright for the question and noted that he’s seen similar articles. He stated that he thinks in part that, this being the Department of Education for the whole country, he cannot confirm that the state has an 87% increase in administrators noting that the only administrative position in this District that has been created was created to look at the curriculum area which is a half time position. Last year, the only net increase was an Assistant Principal and an Elementary Curriculum Administrator in New London. He noted that New London has about twice the population of the remaining elementary schools in the District. The District felt it was needed to get a second administrator into the New London school, but they also did not put a full time position there. He noted that the District did restructure the facilities department and used existing personnel to change functions. So you could argue that there is now an Assistant Director of Facilities, but that’s not a net increase. That is a reassignment of functions and responsibilities. Mr. Bartholomew noted that last year when there were discussions about the Assistant Principal position, the District did a benchmark study to compare this District to other Districts. He noted that the District was in line with the administrative burden compared to the total number of staff of other Districts.



Supt. Feneberg addressed what administrators do, noting that the role of administrators has changed dramatically over the last 20 years. He stated that he believes that there are many more obligations to produce programs, report accountability, responsibility to supervise, to administer programs, to write reports for the state, and oversee the special education department. He stated that many more responsibilities are being put on public schools. These responsibilities cannot be put all on teachers, administrators are needed to be responsible for the operation of buildings, for curriculum accountability, etc. Mr. Wright asked if that would be accountability to the state predominantly or to the federal government. The Superintendent stated that is accountability to the parents, the students, and the local communities along with the state and federal requirements. Mr. Wright stated that if you look at the wages and fringe of this budget, over \$36 million goes directly out of a budget of a little over \$51 million. He stated that without New London, we would not be here. The District would not be able to afford this budget without New London. He stated that even now, the increase of the budget this year is equal to the budget of a number of towns in this area. He expressed that it is scary.

Mr. Wright shared a concern of students wearing masks. He stated that students learn from adults. He stated that if you do not give them any tells, there's no way they can grow, expressing that he believes we have paid an awfully high price on this. Mr. Wright discussed a past School Board meeting he attended and said there was a gentleman there who had two sons who were very good football players. The gentleman had asked that football be a contact sport that would be allowed. Mr. Wright noted that a member of the Board on Zoom was concerned about the fact that this was a contact sport. The problem is that I equate with everybody else my age. He stated that it's one of the problems that you have because we all see ourselves as ourselves. He stated that he hoped that all the limitations that used to be there for students would be a major consideration. Mr. Bartholomew noted that the District does not have a masking requirement anymore. He stated that it is not so much the choice of the District, but the choice to follow the state guidance for public health.

### **Charlie Forsberg - Sutton**

Mr. Forsberg stated that there are a number of activities in the school system that cost a lot of money, mentioning sports, entertainment, and theater. He asked what activity fee the District charges to students for their participation in these activities that are paid for by the taxpayers.

Mr. Bartholomew stated that the District does not have activities fees like some colleges do. The District tries to cover a lot of activities through the budget for equity reasons, but that doesn't mean that there isn't a cost for various things that are going on in the schools. He gave the example of his recent writing of a check for his daughter to attend a traveling Broadway show coming to Boston that the theater program will be attending. He noted that parents are still contributing to funding parts of all sorts of activities, like the rental of instruments, field trips, sports equipment, etc. Mr. Bartholomew noted that fundraising is done as well for all of these activities. The District tries to minimize costs for equity reasons, noting that while it is true that the District offers scholarships and contributions to families who can't afford it, there are many families who will not ask for that and would rather not engage in that back and forth process even though it is kept completely confidential. In past years, there have been school building leaders who have chosen not to engage in activities if there was a cost to students because of the high inequities. Mr. Bartholomew discussed surveys done a few years ago relating to student voice, noting that it was clear that the biggest discrepancy in how children viewed how their school day went and whether they were comfortable coming to school, was economic inequity. Those from disadvantaged families felt less safe in school, less engaged, and they felt like they didn't have as much of a voice. We tried to bring that into our deliberations as a School Board to minimize that impact as best as we can. He noted that the District is really not able to pass along all the costs of activities to the District taxpayers. Mr. Bartholomew noted that when the activity is closely connected to the curriculum, like the Nature's Classroom trip and the trip to Washington D.C., that the District does cover as much of that cost as it can because it is part of the curriculum.

**Diana Dowd - Bradford**

Ms. Dowd stated that she keeps hearing about the mental health of students and special education. She asked how many counselors and full time social workers the District employs per school. The Superintendent stated that there are 3 social workers District wide, one at the High School, Middle School, and at the Elementary level. There are 5 psychologists and there is a guidance counselor at every school, 2 at the Middle School and 3 at the High School.<sup>1</sup> There are a lot of mental health, social-emotional services that are available for students. He noted that there is also guidance for college and career at the High School. The School Counselor's roles are really to assess help with small problems and are not meant to be mental health counselors that would be done with the parents and the community. Mr. Bartholomew added that the District does try to facilitate help when students are in need of mental health counseling within the community. With telehealth, space and resources are made available to students. That's allowed more access as there is not the responsibility and obligation of leaving work to pick up your child during the day and taking them to a counselor.

Ms. Dowd asked how much of the budget is taken up by these services, stating that there are a lot of counselors throughout the District. The Superintendent noted that there are 4 elementary schools with one counselor each, 2 at the Middle School, and 3 at the High School. He noted that there are minimum requirements that the District has to fulfill in terms of school approval and that the District needs to have for these positions for the minimum requirements. The Superintendent also said that the teachers in large part do a lot of this social-emotional mental health support in their classrooms. What teachers do is much more than just teach the academics. They are the first line of defense. The provision of those services is really driven by student needs.

Ms. Dowd asked the Superintendent if these needs of students have increased. He stated that the needs have significantly increased. All of our teachers and principals will clearly say that the pandemic has had a significant impact on kids' ability to socialize, deal with issues in school and in their lives. Overall, he stated that he believes the needs of kids at all ages have significantly increased over time. Ms. Dowd stated that's concerning. She asked Supt. Feneberg what he thinks is wrong. He stated that he would rather not speculate. The District has to really look at what comes into the school. Students are handled on an individual basis based on their needs, working closely with families. There has been a large push for more services to be provided at the schools. Community health centers have gone away. The state is trying to recreate and provide for some of the services. There was a recent discussion about exploring more of a mobile unit that the state would be supporting where support can be received via telehealth or counseling hotlines.

Ms. Dowd asked if there is a way that the schools can incorporate people's insurance into certain counseling that's beyond what the school should be responsible for and what the taxpayers should take on. Mr. Bartholomew noted that this would only be the case with identified special needs students who may qualify for Medicaid. Mr. Bartholomew asked the Superintendent to discuss the social-emotional learning curriculum. Supt. Feneberg noted that a few years ago, in order to be proactive, the District has adopted a whole curriculum from elementary through Middle School that addresses social-emotional learning needs of kids. He stated that this includes things like how do students play with other kids, how do students express their needs, how do students work in a group, take turns, be a friend, etc. A lot of kids struggle with that and the District has taken that on through the curriculum. He stated that schools have really seen an increase in what they need to provide. Mr. Bartholomew mentioned that in the High School the District has taken advantage of opportunities to provide resources to students and parents on student mental health needs. He discussed a presentation that was given to students by Justice Broderick on student mental health.

Mr. Lick closed discussion on Article 1.

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<sup>1</sup> The Superintendent corrected his comment later in the session to note that the District employs 3 psychologists, not 5.



Mr. Lick read Article 2 and recognized Ms. Mastin to discuss the Article.

**Article 2** To see if the School District will vote to approve the cost item included in the Collective Bargaining Agreement reached between the Kearsarge Regional School Board and Paraeducators Association of Kearsarge (PEAK), which calls for the following increases in salaries and benefits:

<i>Year</i>	<i>Estimated Increase</i>
2023-2024	\$207,818
2024-2025	\$193,048
2025-2026	\$172,993

And further to raise and appropriate the sum of **\$207,818** for the 2023-24 fiscal year, such sum representing the additional costs attributable to the increase in salaries and benefits required by the new agreement over those that would be paid at current staffing levels.

**(School Board Recommends 7-0) (Municipal Budget Committee Recommends 8-0)**

**School Board Explanation:** *The School Board and the Para Educators at Kearsarge have reached an agreement on a three-year contract for 2023-2026. The proposed agreement continues to provide modest, but competitive salary increases and benefits covered under the Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA). The agreement makes changes to retirement eligibility by slightly reducing work hours for some employees, thus resulting in significant savings for both employees and the district. Additional higher deductible health insurance options will be available along with phased adjustments in employee insurance contributions for individual, two-person, and family plans. The agreement also introduces a 3-year pilot program for potential savings via an insurance buyout incentive. Another 3-year pilot effort creates a professional development fund for a limited number of Para Educators to pursue teacher certification with district support.*

Mr. Lick opened the meeting for discussion on Article 2.

**Andrew Pinard - Bradford**

Mr. Pinard, thanked the Board and the Municipal Budget Committee and the Administration for their work to address a very significant issue which is staffing. He noted that there have been significant problems in education retaining employees and encouraging new educators and support staff in our Districts. We've been very fortunate in this District to be able to retain as many as we have. He stated that the state is approaching a crisis situation in terms of being able to fill positions being vacated. Mr. Pinard applauded the creativity and collaboration of the paraeducators and the Board in terms of finding creative solutions to address the cost increases that could have been much higher. He also thanked the Board for addressing the significant needs and support that the paraeducators provide, noting that they are very important. He applauded both Boards for their ability to contain increases in this area. Mr. Bartholomew thanked the negotiating teams for PEAK and the District.

**Charles Forsberg - Sutton**

Mr. Forsberg stated that it is puzzling to him that over the next three years the increase actually goes down in the amount of money to be made available for the salaries. He referenced Article 1, noting that there are additional teachers that have been added and two more teachers for the Bradford Preschool location. Mr. Forsberg stated that he doesn't understand the preschool and asked how early the District is responsible for these students.

Mr. Lick asked Mr. Forsberg if he had any questions relating to Article 2. Mr. Forsberg stated that his concern is the decreases over the next three years stating that it would be the opposite of what he would think. Mr. Bartholomew noted that it's the increase that gets lower over three years. Mr. Forsberg asked for an explanation for that. Supt. Feneberg noted that the first year is the highest number because the District needed to adjust those entry level salaries for paraprofessionals. The District has had a significant difficulty attracting people to work for the kids and to work in the schools as a paraprofessional. The salaries for this kind of job were really not competitive with Dunkin Donuts or Home Depot. He stated that he's not making light of that, but people have actually left the District because they couldn't afford to work for us. On the bargaining agreement groups for the Board and for the paraprofessionals, there was an understanding that the salaries needed to be raised significantly. He stated that's why the first year is the highest increase and the subsequent increases are smaller.

Mr. Bartholomew explained that the District needed to catch up the first year and then provide the cost of living salary benefit increases. It's the catchup amount that makes the first year much higher. He also noted that the cost of health insurance goes down percentage wise over the years.

The Superintendent noted that it goes up for two person plans to get closer to where teachers are, but goes down for individual plans. He also mentioned a buyout option offered for those who do not need the insurance. This saves the District a lot of money. It was in the salary area that the District needed to make most of the adjustments, quickly, in order to attract people. Supt. Feneberg stated that he was proud that the District was able to include in this agreement a provision that encourages paraprofessionals to go on to get teacher certification. This puts some money into professional development for people already in our schools and love the work. As Mr. Pinard said, the recruitment of teachers is significantly more difficult than it was even five or ten years ago. The Superintendent stated that the ability of the paraprofessionals to get their teacher certification is a major feature of the agreement.

Mr. Forsberg stated that this is a complicated area. He stated that the district may be stuck with the same problem next year and request an increase in wages and fringes. He asked if they could talk about the Kearsarge Preschool in Bradford. Mr. Forsberg noted that there are 2 FTEs added to that school, but stated that the District isn't paying for the building. He stated that the District will be paying for the salary of the teachers and the operating costs. He asked if this preschool is going to apply to the entire School District. Mr. Bartholomew explained that the District currently has the James House Preschool in New London, but the District is required to provide services for special needs students from the age of 3. The best way to do that is to combine the special needs population with a cohort of non-special needs students to help model behavior. He noted that in the preschool class, due to an increase in the number of special needs students, the ratio of special needs to non-special needs students has shifted. He noted that there are more special needs students than the current preschool can handle. In order to regain the balance of special needs to non-special needs students for those age groups, the District needs additional space. He stated that having all the space in New London would be a disservice to the families in the Southern part of the District. The District provides transportation for the special needs students; however, for non-special needs students, parents provide the transportation. He gave an example of a family living in Warner who works in Concord, noting that having to transport a student to New London for preschool is difficult. The goal was to add that space, not in New London, but in a different location in the Southern part of the District. He noted that the District tried to do this in Warner; however, the potential property had contamination, so it was decided to build in Bradford. The building is being built with ESSER funding; however, there will be operating costs added. It does help the District to meet the requirements needed

for special needs students and provides an opportunity for non-special needs students to attend those schools by paying tuition.

Mr. Forsberg asked if this would be the same thing as the James House. Mr. Bartholomew noted that it would be. Mr. Forsberg stated that ten years ago preschool was introduced to the District. Mr. Bessette pointed out that sometimes you have to spend money in order to save money, noting that this is one of those examples. He stated that it is important to recognize that those students with special needs have to have those services met, which costs money. Regardless of whether those services are provided in the District, those requirements need to be met. If the program was not in the District, a significantly greater amount of money would be spent to either contract services or to send students out of the District, even triple or quadruple the cost. Beyond that, he stated that it's the wrong thing to do, saying that we want the students here in our community with their peer groups. He also noted that having the students in the District helps the teachers to get knowledge about those students early and are then able to weave those kids into response intervention programming. Mr. Bessette stated that keeping the money low prevents the District from having to spend more outside the District.

Mr. Forsberg asked what the ESSER grant is. He also stated that he was thrown off by the word preschool. He expressed his belief that this should have been clearer. Supt. Feneberg stated that ESSER funding is the third round of COVID and the American Rescue Plan funding that comes from the Federal Government to schools, communities, and the state. The District gets the money to address needs that come from COVID learning loss and pandemic related issues. Every School District gets those funds. The District utilized those funds to construct the preschool in Bradford. The Superintendent stated that preschool is an early learning program for students three through five.

### **Barbara Cooper - Springfield**

Ms. Cooper expressed, as a voter and a taxpayer, that she really appreciates the Board's attention to those in the community that are the least of us. She stated that she believed that when we pay attention in a thoughtful and careful manner, that the benefits extend to us as a society as a whole.

### **Chris Beauchemin - Warner**

Mr. Beauchemin stated that his son is affected with autism and goes through this program. He has had a number of different conversations with administration and Mr. Bartholomew in different situations. As far as paraprofessionals go, he stated that they do an outstanding job. He stated that his son has gone from Kindergarten now through to Middle School with a one-on-one paraprofessional. They are beginning to move his son away from a one-on-one paraprofessional, not that they feel that benefit continues to help him, but to cultivate an independence for their son. He stated that as an older parent, he expects that at some time he will be able to work independently within the community because of what people in the school system have done. He thanked the District for their efforts.

Mr. Beauchemin asked if the number of paraprofessionals is currently where the District should be or where the District would expect to be. He asked where the District would hope to be with this number. He also asked if the only qualification was a high school diploma and a certification in paraprofessional work. He commended the District for allowing the paraprofessionals to pursue getting their teaching credentials. Supt. Feneberg stated that a high school diploma is required. The certification as a paraprofessional is optional and is offered by the state. It is not mandatory. As for the number of paraprofessionals, the District has not been able to fill all the openings that are needed and budget for. He stated that was one of the incentives to improve that for the upcoming years. Larry Elliott, the District's Special Education Administrator, and other administrators are

working very hard to make sure that every need is met. Mr. Beauchemin stated that he believed that the District is doing a great job.

### **Bob Wright - Sutton**

Mr. Wright stated that in the Board's explanation for the Article, there is a statement that the agreement makes changes to retirement eligibility by slightly reducing work hours for some employees, thus resulting in significant savings for both the employees in the District. He asked the Board to explain. The Superintendent noted that three years ago in the current contract, the District tried to provide additional time for a smaller number of paraprofessionals to service kids before and after the school day. Helping the students get on the bus and extending the day to a level that became mandatory to pay into the retirement system. He stated that the District has analyzed that group of paraprofessionals and found that it did not really fulfill the expectations the District had. There are other ways to meet those student needs. By reducing the work hours, there is no longer a need to pay into the retirement system on both the District and the employee's part.

Mr. Lick closed discussion on Article 2.

Mr. Lick read Article 3 and recognized Ms. Casey to discuss the Article.

**Article 3** To see if the School District will vote to raise and appropriate up to **\$12,000** to be placed in the Special Education Expendable Trust Fund, established in 2008 within the provisions of RSA 198:20-c for the purpose of emergency funding of unforeseen Special Education costs incurred by the District, with such amount to be funded **from unassigned fund balance (surplus funds) remaining** on hand as of June 30, 2023. **(School Board Recommends 7-0) (Municipal Budget Committee Recommends 8-0)**

***School Board Explanation:** In 2008, the voters established an expendable trust fund for the purpose of providing funds for unforeseen emergency circumstances in Special Education that may arise in a year after the budget has been adopted. If approved, this article will add up to \$12,000 to that fund from operating surplus remaining on hand as of June 30, 2023. The balance of the fund as of July 31, 2022, is approximately \$360,386, the target amount to be raised is \$372,139.*

Mr. Lick opened the meeting for discussion on Article 3.

### **Charles Forberg - Sutton**

Mr. Forsberg noted that the District has asked for about \$50,000.00 under Article 1. This is for a trust fund. He stated that under this Article, there is a request for more money to bring the total amount in the trust fund up. He stated that it isn't clear to him how what is requested in Article 1 is actually coming out of the trust fund or whether it is an additional amount. Mr. Forsberg stated that no comment that he makes is meant to degrade, but to clarify things for taxpayers. Mr. Bartholomew explained that the fund created by the voters is for unforeseen emergency circumstances in Special Education that may arise in the year after the budget has been adopted. The \$50,000.00 increase in the budget is anticipated based on the current needs of the District. The trust fund money is set aside, for example, for if a family moves into the District who has an out-of-District placement that the District would become responsible for. The money would have to be covered either by any surplus or the trust fund. He stated that the District doesn't feel it appropriate or permissible to put the \$50,000.00 that is anticipated as costs that will be paid out of the trust fund that is established for unanticipated emergency out-of-District special needs costs.

Mr. Lick closed discussion on Article 3

Mr. Lick read Article 4 and recognized Mr. Lombard to discuss the Article.

**Article 4** To see if the School District will vote to raise and appropriate up to **\$100,000** to be placed in the School Buildings Maintenance Expendable Trust Fund for the purpose of repair, unanticipated utility costs, and maintaining the school buildings and equipment, with such amount to be funded **from unassigned fund balance (surplus funds) remaining** on hand as of June 30, 2023.  
**(School Board Recommends 7-0) (Municipal Budget Committee Recommends 7-1)**

***School Board Explanation:** In 2009 the voters established an expendable trust fund for the purpose of repairs, unanticipated utility costs, and maintaining school buildings and equipment. If approved, this article will set aside up to \$100,000 toward that purpose from operating surplus funds remaining on hand as of June 30, 2023. The balance of the fund as of July 31, 2022, is approximately \$500,345.*

Mr. Lick opened the meeting for discussion on Article 4.

**Charles Forsberg - Sutton**

Mr. Forsberg stated that if this is going to be used as a trust fund to repair things that have to be repaired while looking at a \$1 million cost, should this not be increased now. He asked that some of the building maintenance expenses that have come up this year be explained and what the real problems are. He asked what is causing the big expense maintenance wise. He also asked if Siemens contributes to that. Mr. Lombard asked that Mr. Paré, Director of Facilities, speak to that.

Mr. Paré noted that since he started with the District in April, there has been a significant amount of repairs in aging infrastructure. He stated that a lot of the equipment is from 1996 and has exceeded its useful life. A lot of this infrastructure are things that keep the schools running: boilers, HVAC, fire suppression systems, etc.

Mr. Bessette pointed out that this Article is not about things that are in the budget, but things that may hit the budget next year that are unanticipated. The purpose of the \$100,000.00 is to take money that is unencumbered at the end of the year and get that trust fund up to \$600,000.00. He stated that it's not because the District isn't seeing the cost of things that are coming, like the boilers for example, but the Board and the MBC have been working hard to find alternative means and funding to get those projects taken care of, some of which were a part of the STEAM project that was voted down. Part of the switch from Honeywell to Siemens was seeing things in the District that needed to be addressed. He noted that some of the costs that are being talked about, may be able to be covered through unencumbered funds through the end of the year, municipal leases, and other things that will happen to keep the budget down. But if there are unanticipated costs, it could be a lot of money. Having that extra \$100,000.00 for unanticipated costs gives the District flexibility in being able to cover those costs in the event that something unanticipated occurs. He stated that this is about the unanticipated, not anticipated. There is a whole facilities plan in place to address the anticipated repairs.

**Mark Dowd - Bradford**

Mr. Dowd asked if the District started with an assessment of the facilities and if preventative maintenance is done. He asked if there has been a lot of maintenance that has been put off. He noted that the unknown maintenance is



always an issue when you have aged equipment. He stated that he understands that and asked about a preventative maintenance plan.

Supt. Feneberg noted that there has always been a capital improvement plan as a part of the strategic plan for that exact reason. The District attempts to determine what may break in the future so there are no surprises. When Mr. Paré started, it was at the time that the District switched from Honeywell and a new vendor was chosen. At that time, the District did a comprehensive assessment of all seven buildings in the District. Some issues were found that need to be dealt with fairly quickly and others need to be addressed within the next three or four years. That is what the capital improvement plan addresses. He stated that the boilers need to be taken care of during the upcoming summer. It is an immediate need. It is anticipated that the District takes about \$200,000.00 from the expendable trust fund to address part of that expense. The \$100,000.00 listed here comes out of the unexpended fund balance at the end of the year and would replenish the fund to 50% of what would be taken out.

Mr. Paré stated that, in regards to preventative maintenance, the District works with a lot of great vendors. The vast majority of the District's equipment is on a preventative maintenance plan.

### **Joe Cardillo - New London**

Mr. Cardillo noted that in Articles 3 and 4, unexpected situations are being dealt with. He noted that a target is mentioned in Article 3, but no target is set in Article 4. He asked, when are the targets set and how often are they reevaluated.

Mr. Bartholomew explained that the Board had a Finance and Audit Committee that meets regularly along with the Business Administrator. He stated that the Committee just looked at the fund balances. The Committee takes into account the likely cost of unanticipated needs, for example the average cost of an out-of-District placement or the historical cost of the use of the funds. The District does its best to set a reasonable target. He stated that the District did not see a need to adjust the target for the Special Education trust fund. The roof trust fund's target was set over 20-years ago and the District needs to come up with a new target for that based on the changes of the expense. In order to do that, the District needs to have an evaluation done on the envelopes of the building. One of the things the District looks at is how much has been used out of the trust fund in recent years or since it's been established. He noted that the District has been very fortunate because of the recent history of this District reducing the out-of-District placements. The District has also not had a lot of families move into the District with students who have out-of-District placements.

Mr. Bartholomew noted that the District has had to use money from the building repair fund in the past and more will need to be used. \$500,000.00 was the target and the District is at that target, but there will likely be \$200,000.00 of that pulled out. If another boiler went unexpectedly, there wouldn't be enough in there to cover it. If that were the case, money would have to be moved in the budget from other sources or the District would need to come back to the voters for a special session to appropriate more funds. He noted that in 2008, this was the reason for the establishment of the Special Education trust fund. At that time, the District had to come back to the voters for unexpected out-of-District placement expenses. He stated that the District tries to make that cushion through unanticipated revenue at the end of the year as opposed to coming to the voters to ask for additional appropriations. Mr. Bartholomew noted that the District will likely have surplus funds as there are a number of unfilled staffing positions. The budget is based on what the needs are in the hopes of being able to hire paraprofessionals, custodians, and bus drivers. The District anticipates that a number of positions will be unfilled leaving a surplus.

Mr. Lick closed discussion on Article 4.



**Article 5** To transact any other business that may legally come before the meeting.

No additional business was brought forward.

**Diana Dowd - Bradford**

Ms. Dowd stated that she has a number of elderly neighbors. She noted that there were not many people at the session. She asked how people vote if they are not present at the meeting. Mr. Lick noted that the Deliberative Session is only a discussion; however, all of the Warrant Articles will be on the ballot for all of the town meetings and town votes. Everyone will have an opportunity to vote on them, but not to participate in this discussion. Mr. Bartholomew noted that the session is being recorded. He explained that if an amendment on something had been put forward, then there would have been a vote. The Articles will be voted on the second Tuesday of March.

Ms. Dowd asked if the schools financials are public and if voters could see how the budget is spent year-to-year. Mr. Bartholomew stated that it absolutely is, down to the penny. As a public School District, the budget decisions and expenditure decisions are made in public. The budget sessions that create the budget are all public meetings and are all available through Zoom participation as well. Mr. Bartholomew strongly encouraged people to participate. The Board wants to hear your voice, your thoughts, and your concerns. He stated that putting together a budget for the District is not an easy task. He expressed that the Board feels very strongly for where the taxpayer money goes. Ms. Dowd asked where that information can be found. Supt. Feneberg noted that it is on the District website, but he or the Business Administrator's office can also be contacted. Supt. Feneberg also corrected a statement from earlier in the meeting, noting that the District has 3 psychologists, not 5.

**Charles Forsberg - Sutton**

Mr. Forsberg stated that the public has no vote on this budget, saying that all can be done is vote yes. He stated that this was put upon the District by the New Hampshire Supreme Court and said that it has been a fraud upon the District all of these years that it doesn't let the District voters express their true sentiment about how the District is operated. He expressed that he believes that is a tragedy. Mr. Bartholomew stated that the District sets its budget and sets up the Article in the way that it is with a number form the School Board and the MBC based on the District charter. He noted that the charter can be amended by petition or by action of the School Board to bring before the voters. He stated that the system was set up by the voters of the District when the Articles of Incorporation were adopted.

Mr. Forsberg stated that he doesn't disagree with Mr. Bartholomew; however, when the charter was created to create this independent form of government by authorization of the General Court, they did not know what they were doing. He stated that they did not, and could not, anticipate what the true effects would be of how the charter was written and carried out.

He expressed that it is unfortunate that to change the charter it is such a long

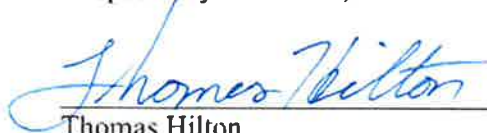
and tedious process. He stated that he stands by what he said and that the School Board could authorize another committee to change the charter.

Mr. Lick thanked those who attended and asked questions.

Mr. Bartholomew thanked the volunteers from the 7 towns who attended the meeting to check in voters.

Mr. Lick adjourned the meeting at 10:30 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Thomas Hilton  
School Board Note Taker

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Doreen Salera  
School District Clerk

### **Kearsarge Regional School District/SAU 65**

Superintendent of Schools - Winfried Feneberg  
Assistant Superintendent - Michael Bessette  
Business Administrator - Larry LeBoeuf

Moderator - Derek Lick  
District Clerk - Doreen Salera  
Note Taker - Thomas Hilton

<b>School Board</b>	<b>Term Expires</b>
Ken Bartholomew (09), <i>Chair</i> - Warner	2024
Alison Mastin (10), <i>Vice Chair</i> - Wilmot	2025
Emma Bates (20) - Warner	2023
Art Bobruff (15) - Springfield	2024
Ben Cushing (16) - New London	2025
Eric Gregoire (20) - Bradford	2023
Bebe Hammond Casey (17) - New London	2023

Kyle Lombard (22) - Sutton	2025
Kristen Schultz (21) - Newbury	2024

**Municipal Budget Committee**

Richard G. Anderson (08) <i>Chair</i> - New London	2023
David Bates (19) - Warner	2023
James Bibbo (13) - Bradford	2023
Robert DeFelice (13) - Sutton	2025
Lyndsay Lund Harkins - New London	2025
Robert Hemenway (13) - Newbury	2024
Luke Gorman (19) - Springfield	2024
Michelle Kendrick (21) - Warner	2024
Thomas Schamberg (19) - Wilmot	2025