

HOPATCONG BOARD OF EDUCATION

REGULAR MEETING MINUTES

March 17, 2025

6:00 pm. Open the Meeting and enter Executive Session in the Administration Building: Room 21

Public Portion will begin at 7:00 p.m in the Board Meeting Room

2 Windsor Avenue, Hopatcong, NJ 07843

CALL TO ORDER

Time: 7:04 pm

1. **FLAG SALUTE**

2. **OPENING STATEMENT**

In accordance with Section 5 of the Open Public Meetings Act, Chapter 231, P.L. 1975, this public body, the Hopatcong Board of Education hereby announces that The New Jersey Herald and the Daily Record have been notified by email that this Board of Education Regular Meeting will take place at 7:00 p.m following the Executive Session (in room 21) which starts at 6:00 p.m. on March 17, 2025 at the Hopatcong Board of Education, Board meeting room in the Administration Building.

3. **ROLL CALL**

Present	Natalia Cappello	Present	Kevin Daviau	Present	Veronica Schram
Present	James Chaffee, Jr.	Absent	Philip DiStefano	Present	Jennifer Polowchena
Present	Jayson Cittrich	Present	Jayna Gulan	Present	Nicole Falconi-Shubert

4. **EXECUTIVE SESSION**

A motion will be made that the Hopatcong Board of Education will enter Executive Session in room 21 to discuss personnel and attorney/client privilege, which are exempt from public participation pursuant to New Jersey Public Law 1975, Chapter 231, Open Public Meetings Act. Any discussions held by the Board which need not remain confidential will be made public when appropriate. Minutes of the Executive Session will not be disclosed until the need for confidentiality no longer exists. The Board will reconvene in public session at 7:00 p.m. following the executive session.

Motion to enter executive session:

(ACTION) Motion by Polowchena. seconded by Chaffee

Yes	Natalia Cappello	Yes	Kevin Daviau	Yes	Veronica Schram
Yes	James Chaffee, Jr.	Absent	Philip DiStefano	Yes	Jennifer Polowchena
Absent	Jayson Cittrich ^	Absent	Jayna Gulan %	Yes	Nicole Falconi-Shubert

^ Arrived 6:11pm % Arrived 6:28pm

5. **RECONVENE**

Motion to Reconvene

(ACTION) Motion by Polowchena seconded by Cappello

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Yes	Natalia Cappello	Yes	Kevin Daviau	Yes	Veronica Schram
Yes	James Chaffee, Jr.	Absent	Philip DiStefano	Yes	Jennifer Polowchena
Yes	Jayson Cittrich	Yes	Jayna Gulan	Yes	Nicole Falconi-Shubert

6. **APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

Approval of the minutes of the following meetings, as reported by the Board Secretary reviewed by the Board President and members of the Board:

- February 24, 2025 - Executive Session
- February 24, 2025 - Regular Meeting

Motion to approve 6a-6b:

((ACTION)) Motion by Chaffee. Seconded by Schram

Yes	Natalia Cappello	Yes	Kevin Daviau	Yes	Veronica Schram
Yes	James Chaffee, Jr.	Absent	Philip DiStefano	Yes	Jennifer Polowchena
Yes	Jayson Cittrich	Yes	Jayna Gulan	Yes	Nicole Falconi-Shubert

7. **SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT AND HIB REPORT**

- Superintendent's Report – **Mr. Jeffery Hallenbeck, Superintendent of Schools** reports that February we had two HIBs and this is the second reading for both. The first was determined not to be a HIB nor a code of conduct violation because it took place at an event outside of school. The second event was an HIB which resulted in consequences for improper comments and behaviors in school. Tonight, the board will be adopting the preliminary 2025/2026 budget. Revenues are down \$925,000 including \$250,000 less of ESSER aid. In addition, the reduction of use of excess surplus to 2%, which needs to be paid back. In the last 5 years our district has lost \$8.4 million in state aid. In preparation for this budget we were already \$3.5 million short due to anticipated increases in salaries, our health insurance cost increase of \$900,000, and a 14% increase in our premium for casualty, property and auto insurance. Those premiums are expected to rise again this year by 11% - 12% on casualty, property and auto insurance. Going into the development of the 2025/2026 budget we were \$3.5m short, which forced us to look at staff cuts. Our goal is to not impact classroom instruction or class size. We will need to make cuts to extracurricular activities, coaching staff, advisors, clubs and some services. The tax increase of 3.62%, which is in line with the CPI of 3.5%, will only be on the tax levy, not the total budget. We are also owed over \$500,000 by the state for state aid, which we are not sure we will ever receive.

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- b. A second reading and approval of the Superintendent's HIB Report for February 2025 as presented to the Board at the February meeting on February 24, 2025.

- c. Student Representatives: **Natalia Gerena-Roman & Lilyanne Zinsli**

Lilyanne – We are at the end of winter sports and the beginning of spring sports. We had a very successful winter with Cheerleading, Basketball, Esports and Wrestling. The High School Drama Club is in full swing with their spring show, "The Lightening Thief." They are almost off script for the show which will be presented May 1-4.

Natalia Gerena-Roman – Tri-M visited a Homeless shelter in Morristown and plans to go back every month to play. They also performed at a NJ Devils Hockey game. In addition, two of our students have submitted artwork to the NJ State Teen Arts Festival

Motion to approve 7a –7c:

((ACTION))Motion by Polowchena. Seconded by Gulan

Yes	Natalia Cappello	Yes	Kevin Daviau	Yes	Veronica Schram
Yes	James Chaffee, Jr.	Absent	Philip DiStefano	Yes	Jennifer Polowchena
Yes	Jayson Cittrich	Yes	Jayna Gulan	Yes	Nicole Falconi-Shubert

8. **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS/CORRESPONDENCE**

- a. Congratulations to the following students who were chosen as **Hopatcong Middle School's Students-of-the-Month** for their outstanding performance in February 2025:

Grade 4 - Sofia Andonova

Grade 5 - Dora Bonilla Dominquez

Grade 6 - Kinsley Arace

Grade 7 - Rosenid Perez

9. **PARENT/TEACHER ORGANIZATION REPRESENTATIVES**

Suzanne Zinsli – of HEPTO reported that Books & Beyond is going great. They also sponsored a free wild exotic animal show. They have had one dance are planning another. They coordinated Teacher Appreciation events in the schools and a Fun Run with PTSO. The Tricky Tray is Saturday, May 22, 2025 which is a huge hit every year.

10. **PUBLIC COMMENT – GENERAL DISCUSSION**

Steve Renaud (Former Board member) – is grateful that the referendum passed and thankful for Superintendent Hallenbeck's hard work. Mr. Renaud extended an invitation to Mr. Hallenbeck to the April meeting of the Democratic Club so he can provide an overview of the budget to their members.

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March 17, 2025

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2 Windsor Avenue, Hopatcong, NJ 07843

11. FINANCE

Approval of the following Finance items as recommended by the Superintendent of Schools:

- a. It is recommended by the Superintendent that bills for the General Fund and Special Revenues (Grants) account, February 24, 2025, through March 17, 2025 be approved in the following amounts:
General Fund and Special Revenue (Grants) account - \$2,196,628.27
Cafeteria account - \$195.00
Fund 30 - \$41,850.00
- b. It is recommended by the Superintendent that the board approve the Treasurer's Report for the month of February 2025.
- c. It is recommended by the Superintendent that the board approve the Board Secretary's Report for the month of February 2025.
- d. It is recommended by the Superintendent that the board approve the Transfer Report for the month of February 2025.
- e. Motion to approve the certification by the Board Secretary that the Account Balance Report, pursuant to N.J.S.A. 18A:17-9, as of March 17, 2025, no line item account has encumbrances and expenditures, which in total exceed the line item appropriation in violation of N.J.A.C. 6A:23-2.11(a).
- f. Motion to certify, in accordance with N.J.A.C. 6A:23-2.11(c), as of March 17, 2025, after review of the Board Secretary's and Treasurer's Monthly Financial Reports and upon consultation with the appropriate district officials, to the best of our knowledge no major account or fund has been over-expended in violation of N.J.A.C. 6A:23-2.11(b), and sufficient funds are available to meet the district's financial obligations for the remainder of the fiscal year.
- g. It is recommended that the Board approve the acceptance of the following donations:

AMOUNT	DONOR	CHECK NUMBER	DONATED TO:
\$1000	Hopatcong Elks Club #782	3552	Special Services
\$1000	Lee A Pellingier	1437	Gregory Pellingier Scholarship

- h. Approval of the following resolution for submission of the tentative 2025/2026 school budget to the Sussex County Superintendent:

"WHEREAS, the Superintendent has presented to the Finance Committee and other members of the Hopatcong Board of Education, a recommended 2025/2026 School District Budget in the total amount of \$ 42,915,084 as follows;
and

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March 17, 2025

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WHEREAS, the Board approves a Local Tax Levy of \$29,741,657;

WHEREAS, the local tax levy will increase by a total of 3.62% composed of a 2% increase of \$574,073.78 and a 1.62% banked cap exception in the amount of \$463,894.22 for a total local tax levy increase of \$1,037,968; and

WHEREAS, the budget includes the withdrawal of \$1,369,296 from Capital Reserve for the purposes of paying down referendum bonds; and

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED the Hopatcong School District preliminary 2025/2026 budget for submission to the Sussex County Superintendent's Office is approved as follows on the Meeting Agenda of March 17, 2025."

<u>General Fund</u>		
Fund 10	Charter School Tuition	\$665,481
Fund 10-606	Interest Maintenance Reserve	\$200
Fund 11	General Operating Fund	\$35,024,807
Fund 12	Debt Services Assessment	\$1,370,410
	Capital Reserve Interest	\$500

Special Revenue Fund

Fund 20	Federal/State Grants	\$808,473
	PEA Funding	\$2,970,522
Fund 40	Debt Service Bonds	\$2,074,691
<u>Total Budget</u>		\$42,915,084

Motion to approve 11a – 11h:

(ACTION) Motion by **Chaffee**. Seconded by **Gulan**

Yes	Natalia Cappello	Yes	Kevin Daviau	Yes	Veronica Schram
Yes	James Chaffee, Jr.	Absent	Philip DiStefano	Yes	Jennifer Polowchena
Yes	Jayson Cittrich	Yes	Jayna Gulan	Yes	Nicole Falconi-Shubert

HOPATCONG BOARD OF EDUCATION

REGULAR MEETING MINUTES

March 17, 2025

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2 Windsor Avenue, Hopatcong, NJ 07843

12. PERSONNEL

Approval of the following personnel items, **12a – 12g**, as recommended by the Superintendent of Schools and the Student Achievement Committee of the Board:

- a. Approval of **Julie Wilson** as High School English Financial Literacy Temporary Assistance Position, for the purpose of lesson planning and grading at a rate of \$35 per hour for 1-2 hours per week/per class period as needed.
- b. Approval of **Sonia Scovil** to work as Middle School Resource Room ELA Grades 6 & 7 Temporary Assistance Position, for the purpose of lesson planning and grading at a rate of \$35 per hour for 1-2 hours per week/per class period as needed.
- c. Approval of **Nancy Drury** to work as Middle School Science Temporary Assistance Position, for the purpose of lesson planning and grading at a rate of \$35 per hour for 1-2 hours per week/per class period as needed.
- d. Approval of **Susan Pallotta** to work extra duty/work from April 20, 2025 through the end of the 2024-2025 school year as needed per the HEA Sidebar-01.
- e. Approval of **Neil Pallotta** to work as the HS door monitor from March 17, 2025 through the end of the 2024-2025 school year per the HEA Sidebar-03.
- f. Approval of **Employee #80217** to take a leave of absence beginning March 26, 2025 using 19 days of earned sick time followed by 16 total days of unpaid intermittent FMLA leave with an anticipated return date of May 22, 2025.
- g. Approval of the following substitutes:
Aaliyah Ansari, Substitute Paraprofessional
Joan Marshall and Monika Ramsey, Substitute Custodian

Motion to approve 12a-12g:

(ACTION) Motion by Polowchena seconded by Cappello

Yes	Natalia Cappello	Yes	Kevin Daviau	Yes	Veronica Schram
Yes	James Chaffee, Jr.	Absent	Philip DiStefano	Yes	Jennifer Polowchena
Yes	Jayson Cittrich	Yes	Jayna Gulan	Yes	Nicole Falconi-Shubert

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REGULAR MEETING MINUTES

March 17, 2025

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13. TRAVEL AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Resolved, that the Hopatcong Board of Education approve travel costs as related in this resolution which are educationally necessary and fiscally prudent and are related to and within the scope of the employee's current responsibilities and promotes the delivery of instruction or furthers the efficient operation of the school district. The reimbursement listed in this resolution are in compliance with the state travel reimbursement guidelines as established by the Department of Treasury and Board of Education policy in accordance with N.J.A.C. 6A:23B-1.1. seq

Approval of the following staff to attend Professional Development/Conference*

Name	Title	Cost	Date
Ken Olsen	North Jersey Transition	\$0	3/19/25
Hank Fattorusso	Partnership		

****Cost will be reimbursed upon completion of attendance and all documentation has been provided.***

14. POLICY & REGULATIONS

Approval of item 14a as recommended by the Superintendent of Schools and the Student Achievement and Operations Committees of the Board:

a. Approval of modifications and additions to the policies and regulations of the Hopatcong Board of Education in accordance with statutory and regulatory changes for approval, as revised, for **SECOND READING**:

P 8540	School Nutrition Programs (abolished)
P 8550	Outstanding Food Service Charges (abolished)

15. STUDENTS AND SERVICES

Approval of the following items, 15a-15c as recommended by the Superintendent of Schools and Student Achievement Committee of the Board:

- Approval for educational instruction services for student no. 413062 for 5 hours per week beginning February 21, 2025. Instruction will be provided by Saint Clare's Hospital at a rate of \$55.00 per hour.
- Approval for educational instruction services for student no. 14015 for 5 hours per week beginning March 12, 2025. Instruction will be provided by Saint Clare's Hospital at a rate of \$55.00 per hour.
- Approval of the following field trip requests:

SCHOOL	TRIP
Middle School	Skylands - Sussex County Miners
Middle School	NJ Sea Grant Consortium - Sandy Hook
Durban	Ort Farms
Durban	Space Farms Zoo

HOPATCONG BOARD OF EDUCATION

REGULAR MEETING MINUTES

March 17, 2025

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2 Windsor Avenue, Hopatcong, NJ 07843

Tulsa	Turtle Back Zoo
Middle School	Dorney Park

16. **RESOLUTIONS**

Approval of the following resolutions as per the recommendation of the Superintendent of Schools.

- a. It is recommended by the Superintendent that the Board of Education approve April 21, 2025 as the first giveback day since all snow days were not used that were built into the school calendar. If there are any more giveback days they will be board approved on the April agenda.
- b. It is recommended by the Superintendent that the Board of Education approve the submission of the 2025-2026 Preschool Education Aid (PEA) budget to the NJDOE, Division of Early Childhood Services, in the amount of \$2,970,522. The budget includes \$2,323,740 in 25-26 grant aid, \$551,106 in prior year grant carryover funds, and a \$95,676 general fund contribution from the district general budget as required by the NJDOE.
- c. It is recommended by the Superintendent that the Board of Education approve the HEA sidebar-03 for the remainder of the school year.
- d. Approval for the Chief School Administrator to approve and authorize all travel and related expenses for employees and Board Members in accordance with Board Policy No. 6423, up to a maximum of \$75,000 for the 2025/2026 school year.

17. **SUSSEX COUNTY REGIONAL COOPERATIVE**

- a. The Superintendent and the Director of Transportation recommend the ***approval of bills*** for the Sussex County Regional Cooperative Operating account for February 25, 2025 through March 17, 2025 in the amount of \$27,736.07 for Regular bills and \$4,917,052.49 for Contractor bills.
- b. The Superintendent and the Director of Transportation recommend **the approval of the following new member district** for the 2024-2025 school year:
American Christian School
- c. The Superintendent and the Director of Transportation recommend **the approval of the following new member districts** for the 2025-2026 school year:
American Christian School
Bridgewater-Raritan School District
- d. The Superintendent and the Director of Transportation recommend the ***approval of Janine Byrnes to attend the NJ Association of School Business Officials 2025 Annual Conference*** June 4-6, 2025 in Atlantic City New Jersey at a cost not to exceed \$1,145.00 for registration fee, lodging, mileage and incidentals

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- e. The Superintendent and the Director of Transportation recommend the **approval of the Resolution for Participation in Coordinated Transportation** with Warren County Special Services School District for the 2025-2026 school year in consideration of pro-rated contract costs plus a 2% administration fee.
- f.
 - 1. The Superintendent and the Director of Transportation recommend the **acceptance** of student transportation **quotations for Special Education School Year Routes** for the 2024-2025 School Year as listed on Exhibit A.
 - 2. The Superintendent and the Director of Transportation recommend the **award** of student transportation **quotations for Special Education School Year Routes** to the lowest, responsible and responsive bus contractor companies for the 2024-2025 School Year as listed on Exhibit A.
 - 3. The Superintendent and the Director of Transportation recommend the **approval of route contract addendums** for the 2024-2025 School Year as listed on Exhibit A.
 - 4. The Superintendent and the Director of Transportation recommend the **acceptance** of student transportation **quotations for Athletic/Class/Field Trips** for the 2024-2025 School Year as listed on Exhibit A.
 - 5. The Superintendent and the Director of Transportation recommend the **award** of student transportation **contracts for quoted Athletic/Class/Field Trips** to the lowest, responsible and responsive bus contractor companies for the 2024-2025 School Year as listed on Exhibit A.
 - 6. The Superintendent and the Director of Transportation recommend the **acceptance of bids submitted from the February 4, 2025 Bid #2024-25-07** for the 2024-2025 School Year as listed on Exhibit A.
 - 7. The Superintendent and the Director of Transportation recommend the **award of bids submitted from the February 4, 2025 Bid #2024-25-07** to the lowest, responsible and responsive bus contractor company for the 2024-2025 School Year as listed on Exhibit A.
 - 8. The Superintendent and the Director of Transportation recommend the **rejection of bids submitted from the February 4, 2025 Bid #2024-25-07** due to cost exceeding allowable amount, non-compliance or termination of the routes as listed on Exhibit A.

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REGULAR MEETING MINUTES

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9. The Superintendent and the Director of **Transportation recommend the acceptance of bids submitted from the February 11, 2025 Bid #2024-25-08** for the 2024-2025 School Year as listed on Exhibit A.
10. The Superintendent and the Director of Transportation recommend the **award of bids submitted from the February 11, 2025 Bid #2024-25-08** to the lowest, responsible and responsive bus contractor company for the 2024-2025 School Year as listed on Exhibit A.
11. The Superintendent and the Director of Transportation recommend the **rejection of bids submitted from the February 11, 2025 Bid #2024-25-08** due to cost exceeding allowable amount, non-compliance or termination of the routes as listed on Exhibit A.

Motion to approve items 13 – 17:

(ACTION) Motion by Chaffee. seconded by Schram

Yes	Natalia Cappello	Yes	Kevin Daviau	Yes	Veronica Schram
Yes	James Chaffee, Jr.	Absent	Philip DiStefano	Yes	Jennifer Polowchena
Yes	Jayson Cittrich	Yes	Jayna Gulan	Yes	Nicole Falconi-Shubert

18. **BOARD OF EDUCATION MEMBER COMMENTS**
Mr. James Chaffee wished everyone a Happy St. Patty's Day!
Mrs. Nicole Falconi-Shubert thanks everyone for coming. Board member Veronica Schram will be our Municipal Alliance with the town.
Sussex County school districts are owed \$8.4m in state funding.

19. **ADJOURNMENT**

Motion to adjourn:

(ACTION) Motion by Polowchena. seconded by Gulan

All in favor: Yes Choose an item. Time: 7:32pm

Respectfully submitted,



Jeff Hallenbeck, Board Secretary