

# HOPATCONG BOARD OF EDUCATION

## REGULAR MEETING MINUTES

March 23, 2026

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: 7:02 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 23, 2026 at the Hopatcong Board of Education, Board meeting room in the Administration Building.

3. **ROLL CALL**

Yes	Natalia Cappello	Absent	Kevin Daviau	Yes	Veronica Schram
Yes	James Chaffee, Jr.	Yes	James Warin	Yes	Jennifer Polowchena
Yes	Jayson Cittrich	Yes	Jayna Gulan	Yes	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 Chaffee. seconded by Polowchena

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

5. **RECONVENE**

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**Motion to Reconvene**

(ACTION) Motion by Polowchenaseconded byCappello

Yes	Natalia Cappello	Absent	Kevin Daviau	Yes	Veronica Schram
Yes	James Chaffee, Jr.	Yes	James Warin	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:

- a. February 23, 2026 - Regular Meeting
- b. February 23, 2026 - Executive Meeting

**Motion to approve 6a-6b:**

(ACTION) Motion by Schram. Seconded by Cappello

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

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

Mr. Robinson asked for a moment of silence to reflect on the loss of our student, Amira Sanchez.

- a. Student Representative: Lilyanne Zinsli reported that the HHSPTSO Tricky Tray was a great success. The Drama Club and Greek Mythology class will be seeing *Hadestown* on Broadway and everyone is very excited. The High School will be having a field day with a modified Powder Puff game at the end of the school year. The Drama Club will also be presenting *Mamma Mia* April 16, 18 at 7:00pm and a matinee at 2:00pm on Sunday, April 19, 2026. The Hopatcong Hockey team were in the state sectional finals and had a great season.
- b. Superintendent's Report – **Mr. Matt Robinson, Assistant Superintendent of Schools** thanked the community for its outpouring of compassion, support and fundraising efforts for Amira's family. He also commended the guidance team and administrators for helping our student's cope with her loss. Mr. Robinson also reported on our successful QSAC visit (state monitoring) and the NJGPA testing which went well last week.

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- c. Approval of the Superintendent's HIB report for February 2026 for first reading and review as presented to the Board at the March meeting on March 23, 2026 due to the February 2026 meeting being virtual.

**Motion to approve 7a –7c:**

(ACTION) Motion by Chaffee. Seconded by Cappello

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

8. **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS/CORRESPONDENCE**

Mrs. Falconi-Shubert read the following resolution:

- a. **WHEREAS**, the Sussex County School Boards Association, in collaboration with the New Jersey School Boards Association, recognizes Unsung Heroes from each school district in Sussex County to celebrate those whose character and impact define the heart of our schools; and

**WHEREAS**, the Unsung Hero Award honors students who make outstanding contributions to their schools and communities but are often overlooked by traditional recognition programs—students who have modeled good citizenship, a spirit of quiet strength, and a commitment to **"Elevating Character: Strength Beyond the Spotlight"** that inspires others; and

**WHEREAS**, these Unsung Heroes may have organized community programs, selflessly supported their peers, or achieved significant academic success while overcoming difficult personal challenges, disabilities, or language barriers; and

**WHEREAS**, William Bender has overcome seemingly insurmountable obstacles to reach their full potential, serving both the school community and the community at large as a beacon of resilience and integrity; and

**WHEREAS**, on **Monday, March 23, 2026**, William Bender is formally being recognized for these achievements at the 2026 Sussex County Unsung Hero Awards Ceremony held at **Sparta High School**;

**NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED**, that the Hopatcong Board of Education officially recognizes William Bender as an Unsung Hero of Sussex County and the Hopatcong School District; and

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that this Resolution is presented to William Bender as a sincere token of the Hopatcong Board of Education's

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congratulations and best wishes for continued success as they continue to lead by example.

### 9. **PARENT/TEACHER ORGANIZATION REPRESENTATIVES**

Veronica Schram discussed the Hopatcong Municipal Alliance, Project Graduation, Candy Bar Bingo in the High School cafeteria and movie night in the High School auditorium, proceeds of which go to Project Graduation 2026.

Nicole Falconi-Shubert – spoke about how well the Tricky Tray went and noted that High School principal Mr. Jensen attended. Proceeds from the Tricky Tray support scholarships, grants, competition cheer, cosmetology, Drama club, Student Council and Field days. Next year, the Tricky Tray has been scheduled for April 10, 2027.

### 10. **PUBLIC COMMENT – GENERAL DISCUSSION**

Nancy Rawley – asked the board if the new governor would make up the school funding we have lost.

Mrs. Gravatt – thanked all who responded to her daughter’s medical emergency and was grateful for the support, compassion and teamwork demonstrated.

Mr. and Mrs. Becker – presented their thoughts on adding cameras and more bus aides on the buses.

### 11. **FINANCE**

Approval of the following Finance items, 11a. – 11j, 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 23, 2026, through March 23, 2026 be revised and approved in the following amounts:

General Fund and Special Revenue (Grants) account -	\$1,922,398.84
Cafeteria account	- \$66,513.09
Fund 30	- \$12,800.00
- b. It is recommended by the Superintendent that the board approve the Treasurer’s Report for the month of February 2026.
- c. It is recommended by the Superintendent that the board approve the Board Secretary’s Report for the month of February 2026.
- d. It is recommended by the Superintendent that the board approve the Transfer Report for the month of February 2026.
- 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 23, 2026, 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 23, 2026, 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

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sufficient funds are available to meet the district's financial obligations for the remainder of the fiscal year.

- g. It is recommended by the Superintendent that the board accept the highest bid provided by Hunterdon County ESC March 2, 2026, Bid #TRANS 26-07 from Garas in the amount of \$2,000.00 for the sale of Hopatcong vehicle # H-10, 2010 Chevy/Midbus Small wheelchair lift bus and Sussex County Regional Cooperative vehicle # 118, 2010 Chevy/Midbus Small bus.
- h. It is recommended by the Superintendent that the board approve the development and submission of the Corrective Action Plan required to comply with the finding of our Resource Management Comprehensive Review.
- i. It is recommended by the Superintendent that the board approve the acceptance of the following donations to the Hopatcong High School Gym floor renovation:

DONOR	CHECK NUMBER	AMOUNT
Hopatcong Warriors C. Anderson Memorial Fund	#238	\$2,500.00
Hopatcong Hawks Soccer Club	#2374	\$1,000.00
John F. Young	#248	\$2,500.00

- j. Approval of the following resolution for submission of the tentative 2026/2027 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 2026/2027 School District Budget in the total amount of \$ 44,765,859 as follows; and

**WHEREAS**, the Board approves a Local Tax Levy of \$ 32,020,737 ;

**WHEREAS**, the local tax levy will increase by a total of 6.28 % composed of a 2% tax increase of \$ 602,546, and a 4.28% health care cap exception tax increase of \$ 1,290,889 for a total local tax levy increase of \$ 1,893,435.

**WHEREAS**, the board intends to withdraw \$11,918 from the maintenance reserve account to support the budget and further intends to withdraw 1,410,195 from the capita reserve account to pay bond costs associated with the 2024 referendum project.

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**THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED** the Hopatcong School District preliminary 2026/2027 budget for submission to the Sussex County Superintendent’s Office is approved as follows on the Meeting Agenda of March 23, 2026.”

<u>General Fund</u>		
Fund 10	Charter School Tuition	\$ 635,992
Fund 10-606	Interest Maintenance Reserve	\$ 200
Fund 11	General Operating Fund	\$ 37,626,868
Fund 12	Debt Services Assessment	\$ 1,614
	Capital Reserve	\$ 1,410,195
	Maintenance Reserve	\$ 11,918

### Special Revenue Fund

Fund 20	Federal/State Grants	\$ 655,306
	Debt Service	\$ 2,136,660
	PEA Funding	\$ 2,320,140
<b><u>Total Budget</u></b>		<b>\$ 44,798,893</b>

**Motion to approve 11a – 11j:**

(ACTION) Motion by Polowchena. Seconded by Gulan

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

12. **PERSONNEL**

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

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- a. Approval to accept the resignation of **Joan Cutchis** from her position as a Paraprofessional for the purpose of retirement, effective June 30, 2026. Joan has worked for the Hopatcong School District for 18 years.
- b. Approval to accept the resignation of **Melanie Gabriel** from her position as Paraprofessional effective May 8, 2026.
- c. Approval of **Employee #81785** to take a leave of absence using 12.5 days of earned sick leave beginning May 1, 2026 followed by an unpaid leave of absence using FMLA through the remainder of the 2025-2026 school year.
- d. Approval of **Employee #80270** to take a paid leave of absence beginning March 20, 2026 through December 31, 2026.
- e. Approval of the voluntary transfer of **Megan Riley**, paraprofessional from the Middle School to Tulsa Trail.
- f. Approval of the following **Extra Duty/Extra Pay** Position for the 2025-2026 school year:

Name	Nature of Action	Position	Salary
Susan Pallotta McKenzie Norris Barbara Parichuk	Appoint	CRAAM	\$40/hour
Melissa Stein Craig Vallaro Brian Collins	Appoint	CRAAM Substitutes	\$40/hour

- g. Approval of the following **Fall Coach/Advisor** Positions for the 2026-2027 school year:

Name	Nature of Action	Position	Class	Level	Salary
Mark Certo	Appoint	Head Football Coach	A	4	\$7,712.00
Vincent Marinoni	Appoint	Asst. Football Coach	B	4	\$5,034.00
Austin Brown	Appoint	Asst. Football Coach	B	4	\$5,034.00
Gary Andolena	Appoint	Asst. Football Coach	B	4	\$5,034.00
Michael Strack	Appoint	Asst. Football Coach	B	3	\$4,388.00
Roger White	Appoint	Football Volunteer	-	-	-

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Joe Shubert	Appoint	Football Volunteer	-	-	-
Craig Vallaro	Appoint	Head Girls Soccer Coach	A	4	\$7,712.00
Dave Campagna	Appoint	Asst. Girls Soccer Coach	B	4	\$5,034.00
Alexa McLean	Appoint	Head Boys Soccer Coach	A	4	\$7,712.00
Eric Fajerman	Appoint	Asst. Boys Soccer coach	B	4	\$5,034.00
Heather DelBagno	Appoint	Head Tennis Coach	B	4	\$5,034.00
Jean Marsicovete	Appoint	Head Marching Band Director	A	1	\$4,868.00
Isabel Yarosz	Appoint	Head Fall Cheerleading Coach	B	4	\$5,034.00
Christina Gannon	Appoint	Asst. Fall Cheerleading Coach	B	4	\$3,287.00
Peter Oesen	Appoint	Head Cross Country Coach	A	4	\$7,712.00
Angelo Lipuma	Appoint	Cross Country VOLUNTEER	-	-	-
James McKowen	Appoint	Fall ESports	B	4	\$5,034
Jason Mulvihill	Appoint	Fall Weight Room Instructor	-	-	\$1,100.00

h. Approval of the following substitutes:

1. Elizabetha Pavloska Nikolvska, Substitute Teacher

### 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
Christi Murphy Gabrielle Cardosa-Schnabel	Treatment of Childhood Apraxia: A Practical Guide: WCSLHA	\$100 + mileage	5/12/26
Ken Olsen Susan Pallotta Hank Fattorusso	Breakfast at Tiffany's Showcasing Inclusive Employment	\$0+mileage	4/28/26
Nancy Stephens	Defensible by Design- Would Your NJ IEP Hold Up?	\$0+mileage	4/17/26

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

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### 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:**

<b>Policy/Regulation #</b>	<b>Title</b>
P & R 7510	Use of School Facilities

### 15. STUDENT AND SERVICES

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

- a. Approval for 5 hours of home instruction services per week for student no. 12713. Instruction will be provided by Hopatcong certificated staff at the Board approved rate of \$40.00 per hour beginning 3/12/26 until approximately 6/15/26.
- b. Approval of the following field trips:

<b>Trip</b>	<b>School</b>
Tranquility Farms	Tulsa
Sussex Teen Arts	Middle/High School
Hair Education Beauty Summit	High School
Walter Kerr Theater	High School
CCM	High School

### 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 the adjustment of the 2025-2026 school year calendar to include two additional school days due to exceeding the allotted snow days built into the calendar.
- b. It is recommended by the Superintendent that the Board of Education approve the submission of the 2026-2027 Preschool Education Aid (PEA) budget to the NJDOE, Division of Early Childhood Services, in the amount of \$2,320,140 The budget includes \$2,320,140 in 26-27 grant aid, \$0 in prior year grant carryover funds, and a \$0 general fund contribution from the district general budget as required by the NJDOE.

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- c. It is recommended by the Superintendent that the Board of Education approve AlphaBest Summer Camp which will run from 7am to 6pm from June 29 to August 14, 2026 at the Middle School.
- d. It is recommended by the Superintendent that the Board of Education approve the Maximum Travel Expenditures limit in the amount of \$50,000 for the 2026-2027 school year in accordance with N.J.A.C. 6A:23A-7.3.
- e. It is recommended by the Superintendent that the Board of Education approve Phoenix Advisors as the District's Continuing Compliance Agent for mandated disclosures associated with the 2024 Referendum Bonds in accordance with LFN 2014-9.

### 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 24, 2026 through March 23, 2026 in the amount \$222,513.01 for Regular bills and \$4,262,999.80 for Contractor bills.
- b. The Superintendent and the Director of Transportation recommend the approval to accept the Top Offer provided by Hunterdon County Bid #TRANS 26-07 from Garas Trans, LLC in the amount of \$1,000.00 for Vehicle #118, 2010 Chevy/Midbus.
- c. The Superintendent and the Director of Transportation recommend the **approval of the Transportation Consultation and Advisory Services** agreement with the Hawthorne Public Schools for the 2025-2026 school year.
- d. The Superintendent and the Director of Transportation recommend the approval of **Employee # 81673** to take a leave of absence using 12 weeks of unpaid FMLA effective March 19, 2026 with an anticipated return date of September 1, 2026.
- e.
  1. The Superintendent and the Director of Transportation recommend the **acceptance** of student transportation **quotations for Special Education School Year Routes** for the 2025-2026 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 2025-2026 School Year as listed on Exhibit A.
  3. The Superintendent and the Director of Transportation recommend the **approval of route contract addendums** for the 2025-2026 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 2025-2026 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 2025-2026 School Year as listed on Exhibit A.

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6. The Superintendent and the Director of Transportation recommend the **renewal of the 2024-2025 School Year Routes for the 2025-2026 School Year** at or below the State issued CPI increase of 3.57% or less as listed on Exhibit A.

**Motion to approve items 12 – 17:**

(ACTION) Motion by Cappello. Seconded by Polowchena

Yes	Natalia Cappello	Absent	Kevin Daviau	Yes	Veronica Schram
Yes	James Chaffee, Jr.	Yes	James Warin	Yes	Jennifer Polowchena
Yes	Jayson Cittrich	Yes	Jayna Gulan	Yes	Nicole Falconi-Shubert <b>Abstain – 12g</b>

18. **BOARD OF EDUCATION MEMBER COMMENTS**

James Chaffee - Congratulated Joan Cutchis on her scheduled retirement; she is in his daughter's class. Mr. Chaffee was honored to attend Amira Sanchez's service; she loved Hopatcong Schools and was really excelling.

Natalia Cappello - Thanked the donors and everyone attending the meeting. The board appreciates the support for the work they do as they try to provide what is best for our students.

Jayna Gulan - Enjoyed the Tricky Tray and offered condolences to Amira's family, friends and loved ones.

Jennifer Polowchena - Thanked all for coming.

Nicole Falconi-Shubert – Thanked all for coming. Also thanked everyone for their ideas and appreciated their involvement.

19. **ADJOURNMENT**

**Motion to adjourn:**

(ACTION) Motion by Polowchena. seconded by Gulan

All in favor: Yes Time: 7:42pm

Respectfully submitted,

Matt Robinson, Board Secretary Pro Tem