

## Benton School Board Minutes

January 7, 2026

**Benton School Board:** Dwight Swauger, J.B. Boutin, Brenda Finoia

**Also Present:** Dolores Fox, SAU Superintendent, Kathryn Ducharme, SAU Business Administrator.

**Public:** Amanda Bemis

*These draft minutes of the Town of Benton School Board are believed accurate and correct, but they are subject to additions, deletions, and corrections by the School Board at the next meeting when the Board votes its final approval of the minutes. These minutes are made available at this time to conform to the requirements of New Hampshire RSA 91-A:2.*

Meeting called order by Chair Swauger at 6:02 pm.

Member Boutin made a motion to approve minutes from October 22, 2025, seconded by Member Finoia and passed unanimously.

No public input.

Manifests were signed.

**K. Ducharme, Business Administrator:** End of the year balances were provided with the unassigned fund balance was \$68,008.00 which will be put towards the tax rate for next year. No funds were required from the Education Trust Fund. Discussion ensued highlighting the effect this surplus had on our tax rate and ability to bring the tax rate into alignment. Budget draft #2 was discussed showing for the next school year the total budget for Benton School District may drop by \$111,069.00. This is an estimated unassigned fund balance with state adequacy grants being higher than in Draft #1 resulting in an increase to the unassigned fund balance. Tuition figures reflect a 5% increase by HCSB for the following year, and we are still receiving 11.72% credit for sending 100% of our students to Haverhill schools. Tuition was reduced by \$43,552 due to fewer students and also a reduction in special education funding. Public hearing for this budget was scheduled for January 26, 2026 at Town Hall at 6:00 pm.

**Superintendents Report:** Open Enrollment was discussed further with legal ramifications still being studied as to how it would impact the local district. Since we do not have a school there are loopholes that would possibly exempt Benton from having to participate. As of this meeting it is still not a law. Legislation updates ensued with discussion on SAU consolidation and Education Freedom Accounts. Federal Education grants are under discussion for the next Congressional budget. Executive and House proposals call for elimination of Title IIA and Title IV grants with reductions to Title 1 and IDEA. Senate proposals fund Title IIA and Title IV at current levels. If a budget is not passed, education grants must be a part of the continuing resolution budgets. Benton receives IDEA grants to offset special education costs. Changes in funding could have an impact on FY27 budget.

**Kerri Reilly, Special Education Director:** No report.

**POLICIES:** 2nd read of DAF (This Policy includes "sub-policies" relating to specific provisions of the Uniform Administrative Requirements for Federal Awards issued by the U.S. Office of Budget and Management. Those requirements, which are commonly known as Uniform Grant Guidance ("UGG"), are found in Title 2 of the Code of Federal Regulations ("CFR") part 200.

**1<sup>st</sup> reading JFABE:** Education of Children in Foster Care

It is the Board's intent to remove barriers to the identification, enrollment, and retention in school of children who are in foster care. All staff shall take reasonable steps to ensure that children in foster care are not segregated or stigmatized and that educational decisions are made in the best interests of those students.

**A. Definition.**

Under guidance issued jointly by NHDOE and the N.H. Department of Health and Human Services, and for the purposes of this Policy, "foster care" shall mean "24 hour substitute care for children placed away from their parents or guardians for whom the child welfare agency has placement and care responsibility. This includes children in foster family homes, shelters, relative foster homes, group homes and residential facilities, regardless of whether the foster care facility is licensed or whether payments are made by the state." To the extent required under applicable law, a child in foster care under this policy also includes children whom an appropriate child welfare agency indicates are awaiting a foster care placement. (Note: children awaiting foster care may also qualify as homeless under policy.)

Motion made by Member Finoia to approve the first reading, seconded by Member Boutin and passed unanimously.

Warrant articles to include unassigned fund balance to be captured to the Education Trust Fund in the amount up to \$150,000.00.

Business for next meeting was discussed.

Non-public session not required.

Motion was made by Chair Swauger to adjourn school board meeting at 6:51 pm, seconded by Member Boutin and passed unanimously.

Next meeting date: March 10, 2026 Town Meeting.

Motion to adjourn was made by Member Boutin, seconded by Member Finoia and passed unanimously.

Meeting adjourned at 6:54 pm.

Respectfully submitted by:

Dwight Swauger, Chairman





