

**State of New Hampshire
Benton School District
2024 School Meeting Notes**

The School Moderator, Gil Richardson, opened the meeting on the 12th day of March 2024, at 7:06PM. SAU 23 Superintendent Laurie Melanson and SAU 23 Finance Director Kathy Ducharme were in attendance.

ARTICLE 1: To choose a Moderator for the ensuing year.

Gil Richardson was nominated, seconded and elected with a unanimous voice vote.

ARTICLE 2: To choose a School District Clerk for the ensuing year.

Mike Stiebitz was nominated, seconded and elected with a unanimous voice vote.

ARTICLE 3: To choose one School Board Member for a term of three years to expire in 2027.

Brenda Finoia was nominated, seconded and elected with a unanimous voice vote.

ARTICLE 4: To choose a Treasurer for the ensuing year.

Penny Chicoine was nominated, seconded and elected with a unanimous voice vote.

ARTICLE 5: To hear reports of Agents, Committees, or Officers chosen and pass any vote related thereto.

A motion was made to accept as written, seconded.

Benton School Board member Dwight Swauger stated that during the Special District School Board Meeting in January 2024, he voted “No” on the 2025 Budget, Draft Article 6. (Note: There were only two Benton School Board members in attendance for that meeting.) He said that he then felt pressured into voting “Abstain” even though he wanted to vote “No”, as he believed, and still believes that the budget is too large. Dwight said that the budget needs to be looked at hard for places where it could be cut. He also believes that the State of NH should be stepping up to provide adequate funding for our schools to satisfy the writing in the New Hampshire Constitution that we are not required to fund unfunded mandates from the State nor the Federal Government. Dwight also made the case that all members of the Benton School Board need to attend every meeting in order to provide a viable presence at the SAU 23 meetings.

The article was then passed with a unanimous voice vote.

ARTICLE 6: To see if the school district will vote to raise and appropriate Six Hundred Sixty-Eight Thousand, and Seven Hundred Fifty Dollars (\$668,750) for the support of schools, the payment of salaries of school district officials and agents, and the payments of statutory obligations of the district. This article is exclusive of any other article on the warrant

A motion was made to accept as written, seconded.

Since the Budget Hearing in January, 2 additional students have been enrolled in the school system, resulting in an additional \$31,673 cost to the Town. A motion was made to amend Article 6 to add the additional \$31,673, resulting a new total budget of \$700,423. The motion was passed and seconded. The amended Article 6 appears below:

ARTICLE 6 Amended: To see if the school district will vote to raise and appropriate Seven Hundred Thousand, and Four Hundred Twenty Three Dollars (\$700,423) for the support of schools, the payment of salaries of school district officials and agents, and the payments of statutory obligations of the district. This article is exclusive of any other article on the warrant.

Benton School Board member Joe Boutin stated that he has looked into surrounding area school costs in an effort to determine if Benton has an option to send our students to a lower cost system. He detailed several of the local area school district costs and they were all significantly higher than what we pay per student, plus the transportation costs and distances would make them even more undesirable for our students. Our per student expenses are barebones, according to Joe, no infrastructure charges, just basic tuition, and any Special Needs expenses.

Laurie Melanson, SAU 23 Superintendent announced that this would be the last meeting she would be attending as she is retiring in June of this year. She thanked us for our support over the years. She also admitted that as she travels around to the various districts, the universal complaint is the high cost of tuition, and the lack of adequate funding from the State of NH.

A round of applause was given to Laurie.

The article was then passed with a majority voice vote.

ARTICLE 7: To see if the school district will vote to raise and appropriate up to \$60,000 for tuition and special education expenses and authorize the withdrawal of up to \$60,000 from the Benton School District Expendable Trust Fund created for that purpose. No amount should come from taxation. (The school board recommends this article.) (Majority vote required)

A motion was made to accept as written, seconded.

Benton School Board Chair Joe Boutin stated that there is currently a \$56,228 deficit from last year's budget due to 7 unforeseen students joining the roles in the 2023-2024 school year.

Article 7 covers a projected deficit in the 2024-2025 budget. This means that the Expendable Trust Fund may need to supply up to approximately \$120,000 over the next 12 months.

Trustee of the Trust Funds chair Laura Richardson stated that there is currently approximately \$289,000 in the fund, so we should be good for now.

The article was then passed with a unanimous voice vote.

The Moderator asked for a motion to adjourn the School District Meeting. A motion was made and seconded, and the meeting was adjourned on a unanimous voice vote at 7:36PM.

All newly elected officials were sworn in at the end of the Town Meeting.

A true copy

Attest: Michael P. Stiebitz – Benton School District Clerk – 03/18/2024

Michael P. Stiebitz 

