

**Budget Committee Meeting  
Stafford Board of Education  
Stafford Elementary School Library  
Monday, December 16, 5:00 PM**



**Committee Members Present (in person):**

Ms. Shana Boland  
Ms. Erica Bushior, Committee Chair  
Mr. Chris Paradiso

**Also Present:**

Dr. Laura Norbut, Interim Superintendent of Schools  
Ms. Vicki DeSantis, Director of Finance and Operations  
Mr. William Hoff, Interim Director of Finance and Operations (via Zoom)

**1. Call to Order**

The committee meeting was called to order at 5:01 p.m.

**2. Review of Estimated 2025-2026 Mandated Contractual Increases**

Dr. Norbut led the committee through a presentation on the mandated contractual budget drivers. The categories of budget drivers presented were: Salaries, Benefits, Special Education Cost, Transportation, Building Maintenance and Repairs, and Fuel and Electricity. Dr. Norbut reviewed historic, and current, staffing and enrollment data. She provided a budget overview detailing the budget figures appropriated for 2024-2025, and the proposed budget figures for 2025-2026. She explained that the proposed 2025-2026 budget represents what is needed to maintain the current level of functioning within the district, and that, to do so translates into a 9.88% budget increase over the 2024-2025 budget.

In addition to detailing the individual budget drivers, Dr. Norbut also shared that the Town of Stafford has requested that the Board of Education provide funding for the following: cover half of the cost of an annual audit (approximately \$50,000), cover half of the cost for pension management (approximately \$12,000), and to cover the entire costs of the School Resource Officer (approximately an additional \$36,000). These shared costs total approximately \$100,000. Dr. Norbut also reviewed budget considerations for providing employee benefits and that the district's insurance broker has issued an RFP for companies that may cost less, but have the same or greater coverage levels.

In response to ongoing conversations with the Board about providing in-district specialized programming for students, Dr. Norbut presented detailed information regarding a program that Stafford could utilize in order to meet the needs of students. She provided a summary of the partnership that Effective School Solutions (ESS) can offer to provide in-district therapeutic programs.

Mr. Paradiso asked if a program like ESS would allow for students who are currently outplaced to be returned to the district. Dr. Norbut explained that, in the first year of a program such as this, the focus is on providing proactive services that allow students to remain in Stafford Public Schools instead of being out-placed at a significant cost to the District. She surmised that as this program moves into subsequent years, there is strong potential for cost savings and for providing services to other districts as space is available, for which tuition costs would be assessed.

Dr. Norbut reviewed unfunded mandates from the state that require funding for compliance. She also went over anticipated reductions in IDEA and Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) Educational Cost Share (ECS) Grant funding.

Ms. Bushior asked about the Central Offices renovation at the middle school and its effect on the 2025-2026 budget. Dr. Norbut clarified that this project was covered in large part by the American Rescue Plan (ARP) Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) funding and would be completed in the current fiscal year. Ms. Bushior asked if the School Psychologist position was going to be advertised again in the spring. Dr. Norbut explained that it would, as contracted services are typically more expensive than hiring a district employee. Ms. Bushior asked if districts currently using ESS had been contacted for feedback. Dr. Norbut had contacted another district and shared that the program is successful in South Windsor, Newington, Berlin, and others.

Ms. Bushior asked about the cost of the Amplify program at Stafford Middle School as West Stafford and Stafford Elementary schools were shifting costs of the program continuation from the Curriculum budget to the building budget. Dr. Norbut explained that the Stafford Middle School implementation is primarily a digital program and that budget offsets were being looked at in relation to possibly discontinuing other programs (such as Sadlier and IXL).

There was a lengthy discussion regarding the desire to meet immediate needs of the district, while planning for the long term, while simultaneously being able to present a proposed budget increase that citizens would support through the referendum.

### **3. Discussion Regarding Upcoming Budget Workshop**

Dr. Norbut asked the committee to explain what Administrators should be preparing for the January 13, 2025 Special Meeting Budget Workshop. The committee expressed that they were not comfortable setting a target percent increase for the budget. Committee members expressed the need to review short- and long-term district needs. Mr. Paradiso further requested detailed information about ongoing, and preventative, maintenance needs. Ms. Bushior asked that the Administrative team come to the workshop with educator feedback as to programs that are, and are not, working.

There was a detailed discussion about the need to assess the electricity costs of the district separate from the loan payments being made to Eversource. The committee expressed the desire to have Mr. Hoff further investigate the savings that were promised with the investment of the district lighting projects.

### **4. Adjournment**

Ms. Boland made a motion, seconded by Mr. Paradiso, to adjourn the meeting at 6:25 p.m. Ms. Boland, Ms. Bushior, and Mr. Paradiso all voted for the motion.

Respectfully Submitted,  
Kristy Synnott, Recording Secretary

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Erica Bushior, Committee Chairperson