

Hooksett School Board



Board Chair's Annual Report, 2022-2023
July, 2023

Dear citizens of Hooksett,

Thank you for your support of the Hooksett School District, our school community, and our mission.

During the 2022-23 school year, the Hooksett School Board pursued several initiatives for school infrastructure and personnel. The Board renewed its agreements with several High Schools, persistently sought stakeholder feedback, and responded to a variety of challenges experienced by our school community.

Hooksett School Board Duties, Mission, and Scope

The Hooksett School Board (HSB) is the governing body of the Hooksett School District (HSD). NH State Law, RSA 181:a-1, declares the duty of the school board to:

1. provide, at district expense, elementary and secondary education to all pupils who reside in the district
2. establish the structure, accountability, advocacy, and delivery of instruction in each school operated and governed in its district, and instructional policies that establish instructional goals about the knowledge and skills pupils will need in the future
3. adopt a teacher performance evaluation system

The mission of the Hooksett School District is to develop a community of learners who are intellectually curious, resourceful, creative, and respectful of self and others. Individual growth and academic achievement, through constantly improving standards, is the District's highest priority.

Our District employs 220 staff members, including teachers, paraprofessionals, administrators, maintenance and foodservice staff, nurses, occupational and physical therapists, and information technology specialists. Our schools are also supported by substitute teachers, contracted specialists, bus drivers, and community volunteers such as the PTA.

As of June, 2023, Hooksett Schools had 1,233 students enrolled in preschool through eighth grade. 676 additional students were enrolled in several area high schools, the majority, 452, at Pinkerton Academy, our high school of record.

School Board Meetings and Information

The School Board has regularly scheduled meetings the third Tuesday of each month, typically at 6:00pm at David R. Cawley Middle School. The public is welcome to attend. Meeting agendas, materials, and minutes are posted online. You can find the School Board online at:

<http://hooksettschoolboard.sau15.net>

<http://facebook.com/hooksett.school.board/>

All public meetings are also streamed live and available for later review on YouTube, at the “Hooksett Youtube” channel.

2022-2023 Highlights

Full Day Kindergarten

This program has been on the mind of the Hooksett School Board since a study was commissioned on the topic in 2015. The path to implementing the program was somewhat tumultuous, having been associated with a school expansion bond in 2018 that just missed the required 60% approval threshold.

A new path was started in early 2020. School administration critically reevaluated building usage given changing demographics, and determined that reorganizing existing space would allow for seven full-day classes - without dependency on the portable building units (since removed). The Hooksett School Board approved a pilot full-day K program for 2020-21, one class of full day kindergarten for twenty students, which was filled via lottery.

The proposal for all kindergarten being full-day classes was introduced by the School Board at its Oct, 2021 budget workshop. It was strongly supported by the community, and approved by voters in March, 2022 as part of the Hooksett School District proposed operating budget. It will bring students into first grade with more consistent preparation.

Per attendance reporting in June, 2023, there were 115 Kindergarten students.

Safety

At the end of the prior school year, the Board approved spending up to \$275,000 from fund balance (unspent budgeted money) for various security improvements at all three schools. The details of those improvements are kept vague for reasons of security, but the improvements were implemented over the summer and into this school year. Some of those expenses were eligible for grant funding.

Stakeholder Engagement

One of the School Board goals for 2022-23 was, “increase stakeholder engagement”.

The Board hosted a booth at Hooksett Old Home Day on Sept 17. It was a chance to discuss school topics in a casual environment, demonstrate the BusWhere bus tracking system purchased and installed by the Board in spring, 2022, and children (or adults) could sit and color a picture of the Fred C. Underhill bear mascot. We had so many great conversations and heard many good ideas. We appreciate everyone coming to talk to us.



The Board committed to a monthly survey cadence for our various school community stakeholders: school families, staff, and administration. The survey results were discussed at Board meetings and provided additional inputs into planning and policies.

Finally, the Board hosted “Coffee with the Board” at all three schools in late fall to visit with school staff, and the Board toured the schools in the Spring to gather information for end of year planning.

Renewal of High School MOUs

The Hooksett School Board spent considerable time this year discussing its Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) with districts that provided limited High School alternatives to Hooksett students, as the four current agreements were up for renewal.

The Hooksett School District (HSD) doesn’t have its own High School, so it sends HS students to several remote locations. Our anchor school since 2015-16 is Pinkerton Academy (PA) in Derry, designated Hooksett’s “High School of Record”. PA is a “private, non-profit corporation” with approximately 3,000 students. The district’s current contract with PA makes a commitment to a “minimum financial enrollment” of 63% of eighth graders sent to PA as ninth graders. For example, if there are 150 eighth graders, 63% of that is 95 students; for that class of incoming freshman, Hooksett must pay PA tuition at least equal to its per-student rate (\$15,408 in 2023-24 for regular education) times 95 students, or \$1,463,760. Additional costs of special education and transportation are also HSD’s responsibility.

HSD maintains agreements with several other districts as HS alternatives – a contract with Manchester School District, and Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) with Bow, Goffstown, Londonderry, and Pembroke (“MOU schools”). Currently, Londonderry and Manchester accept the tuition rate paid to Pinkerton Academy, while the other MOU schools charge a higher rate that must be offset by families paying the difference in rates.

Whereas Pinkerton requires a minimum enrollment, MOU agreements dictate Hooksett School District will be informed of the specific number of available spaces each year in October, which may be less than these constraints:

- Bow: shall not exceed ten (10) Hooksett students per grade level
- Londonderry: shall not exceed forty (40) Hooksett students per grade level
- Pembroke: shall not exceed twenty (20) Hooksett students per grade level
- Goffstown: available spaces determined yearly

The contractual “minimum financial enrollment” at Pinkerton Academy prompted some actions by prior Hooksett School Boards to ensure that minimum was met. Until recently, Hooksett paid a “MOU tuition rate” several hundred dollars below the PA rate, intended to incentivize PA attendance. This lower rate had been accepted by Londonderry, but manifested itself as a larger up-charge for attending the other schools. Another action is embodied in Board policy JCB-R, which simply states requests to attend a designated MOU high school are considered if the 63% PA enrollment contractual requirement is met.

There were broad discussions about MOU policies for MOU suitability and alternatives for the scenario of fewer than 63% of eighth graders choosing PA, though nothing new had been codified. The Board approved MOU renewals in May. The next opportunity to amend terms with its Pinkerton Academy contract occurs in 2026.

You can find the various contracts and MOUs on the HSD website under High School >> Agreements & Documents
<https://hooksetthighschoolinfo.sau15.net/agreements/>

Transportation

School Bus Staffing

As many school families know, school bus scheduling has been a challenge the past few school years. Like many industries, busing has been impacted by a shortage of qualified, interested employees nationwide. Our routes, run by our busing provider, Student Transport of America (STA), were short-staffed. Hooksett was typically served by eighteen bus routes, and that had been consolidated to thirteen. Regrettably, our route serving Manchester high schools was only run in the morning, not the afternoon, and the lack of coverage for drivers calling out sick sometimes meant delayed or canceled routes.

School Bus Tracking Software

The BusWhere bus tracking pilot was rolled out to a large portion of school district families in November, 2022. We appreciate HSD administration working through the process and sending invitations to over 1,500 parents/guardians. BusWhere provided up to 5-second bus location accuracy in many areas. Unfortunately, the program was not consistently available on all bus routes.

STA, our bus provider, sometimes adjusted which buses cover which routes, or when, due to driver shortages. Bus routes were sometimes covered by drivers from other depots with buses not tracked by BusWhere devices. Thus, there were days where a route was entirely not tracked, or the software tried to track an incorrect route.

New Transportation Provider

The three school districts of School Administrative Unit 15 - Hooksett, Auburn, and Candia - contracted with a new bus provider starting in July, 2023, First Student. Our contract with First Student also includes provision for bus tracking, so the BusWhere program implemented by the Hooksett School Board will be replaced with another system.

Budget Challenges

Special Education costs have risen significantly, because of an increase in the number of students being identified for services and increases in the cost of services per student. Related transportation costs, such as for travel for out-of-district services, are up, too. School districts in

New Hampshire got a budget shock with New Hampshire passing SB-394 into law in June, 2022 which increased the age range of individuals qualifying for special education but without permitting a year for districts to budget for it.

Special Education costs are part of our default budget, not one of the additional discretionary items in the proposed budget, because they are contractually mandated. Thus, for students identified for these services, the forecasted expenses will be budgeted for the next school year – but this is forecasting a long way out. For 2022-23, additional expenses from SB-394 were not part of any budget, nor other needed services identified since the 2022-23 budget was created in October, 2021.

The Board approved using \$198,000 from the district's fund balance set-aside account, and up to \$300,000 out of the Special Education trust Fund, to address unforeseen special education expenses.

2023-24 Planning

School Staffing and Staff Contracts

Reflecting national trends, the Hooksett School District continued to face challenges this year recruiting substitute teachers, paraprofessionals, and custodians. Our transportation provider, STA, also struggled to retain and recruit bus drivers. These staffing issues impacted school operations throughout the year, and required creative solutions to continue serving Hooksett students and families.

Hooksett Education Association (HEA) Contract

The Hooksett School Board (HSB) and Hooksett Education Association (HEA) both ratified a proposed labor agreement for three years starting July 1, 2023. A total of 107.45 positions, some part time, are covered by the agreement. The contract was on the March, 2023 ballot and was approved by Hooksett voters.

The contract has a total projected cost increase of \$1.3 million over 3 years for salary, the New Hampshire Retirement System (NHRS) employer pension contribution of ~20% of salary, and taxes (FICA) on the salary increases. These costs increase approximately 3.1% per year over the current 2022-23 contract, but are partially offset by increased employee health insurance contributions of up to 4.5% for some plans over three years.

For comparison, the current contract with HEA approved by Hooksett voters in 2020 had a total cost of \$890,000, and increased employee insurance contributions by 3%.

Following analysis of competitive district salaries, and examining the aggregated school salary information for fifteen years for the entire state of New Hampshire available under the NH Dept. of Education's Data Reports, the Hooksett School Board came to learn that contracts over a dozen years evolved to favor senior teaching staff at the expense of staff with fewer than fifteen

years experience. This left some significant gaps in salary competitiveness with neighboring districts for these positions, and was a large factor in the district's challenges in recruiting and retaining staff. Remedying these gaps required some innovative adjustments.

Notably, the contract makes substantial adjustments to the salary step chart to reduce the decades-long 112% pay gap between lowest paid and highest paid employees to 93% by increasing salary steps uniformly from \$1,880 to \$2,112 per year. It also increases employee contributions for the health insurance plan required by the contract, from 15.5% to 20% for Family and Single+1 plans. The Single plan contribution increases to 12%.

Hooksett Education Support Professionals Association (HESPA) Contract Adjustments

The Hooksett School Board (HSB) and Hooksett Education Support Professionals Association (HESPA) both approved a proposed amendment to the final year of the current three-year agreement, starting July 1, 2023. The contract amendment was on the March, 2023 ballot and was approved by Hooksett voters.

The amendment added \$4.00/hour to the hourly rates of these positions, to make the rates competitive in the current job market. The agreement with HESPA covers a variety of school support positions such as paraprofessionals, administrative assistants, tutors, and school nutrition (lunchroom, etc.) and building maintenance staff.

It's impossible to overlook how much salaries for certain positions have increased in the last year or two. For example, a nearby fast-food franchise is advertising positions starting at \$15/hour with retirement incentives. The new hire hourly rate for Nutrition Assistants in the current contract is \$10.92/hour. New hire rates for other positions currently range from \$13.00/hour for Custodian and Paraeducator to \$18.72/hour for a Title 1 Tutor. With Hooksett School District paying rates far below alternative employers, it has been very difficult to retain and recruit staff in these positions. We appreciate the folks who have stayed with us.

The inability to fill open positions has required using contracting agencies, which pay contract staff higher wages and also charge for the service of finding and placing contract employees.

A new contract term will be negotiated with HESPA in 2023-24.

School Budget

The Hooksett School Board and Budget Committee proposed a budget for the next school year, 2023-24, of \$38,442,000, which was approved by voters in March. If this proposed budget was not approved by the voters, a default budget of \$37,787,587 would have been used instead.

The default budget is defined by state law, and is essentially the current (2022-23) budget plus contractual obligations. Notable contractual increases include:

- Special education costs, both in number of students qualifying for services and cost of providing services. Special education plans are legal obligations.
- Health insurance

- Transportation, given dramatic fuel cost increases and a bus driver shortage.
- High School tuition

At our October 25 budget workshop, which followed a presentation the prior week by school administration, the Board went through the 1,200 line budget line-by-line before approving it. The Board appreciates the considerable work by our school administration and staff diligently planning for next year. Budgeting is complicated by post-pandemic challenges finding certain staff and materials, and the concerning inflationary economic environment.

Many people are unaware that about three-quarters of that budget is for staffing in Hooksett or at our High Schools out of town. We have budget lines for building maintenance, textbooks, technology, various supplies, equipment, and curriculum products, but those are the smaller portion of our budget. Quality education is facilitated by people. In the case of Hooksett, outstanding people, among the best educators and support staff in the state.

The approved budget does not include the increased contract costs, as those were separate warrant articles and any combination of warrants could be approved or rejected.

It is worth noting that 2002-23 marked the final payment of the \$20 million bond for building David R. Cawley Middle School and renovating Hooksett Memorial School, which is a \$1,056,000 expense that will not be in subsequent budgets.

March, 2023 Election Results

1. School district officers
 - a. Ms. Godbout, Mr. Goertel, and Mr. Sullivan were reelected as School Board Members
 - b. Ms. Moynihan was written in as School District Moderator
 - c. Ms. DeCampo was elected as School District Clerk
 - d. Mr. Kotlyarsky was written in as School District Treasurer
2. The proposed \$38,442,000 school district operating budget was approved.
3. The \$1.3 million three-year contract with Hooksett Education Association (HEA) was approved.
4. The \$345,000 modification to the third year of the contract with the Hooksett Education Support Professionals Association (HESPA) was approved.
5. The \$75,000 Building Maintenance Expendable Trust Fund contribution was approved, from fund balance.
6. The \$100,000 Special Education Expendable Trust Fund contribution was approved, from fund balance.
7. The \$75,000 Technology Expendable Trust Fund contribution was approved.

End of School Year Budget Updates

The Hooksett School Board approved the following items from unspent fund balance:

1. \$225,796.32 for cameras and other security improvements
2. \$200,337.41 for non-security items

- a. Replacement library shelving
- b. Microphone system
- c. Drain pipe replacement
- d. Replacement tractor for Cawley (lawn and snow removal) and Underhill
- e. Replacement heating wheels at Memorial and at Cawley
- f. Replace concrete entrance to Cawley
- g. \$45,000 for replacement technology

The Board voted to return the remaining fund balance (still estimated, at the date of the meeting), up to \$773,866, to Hooksett taxpayers.

The Board voted to waive two professional development days for staff as an end of year bonus. The Board also increased compensation starting in the next fiscal year for some administrative positions that were not competitive with relevant other districts.

2023-24 Board Goals

At the Hooksett School Board's June, 2023 retreat, four goals were defined for the upcoming school year.

- 1. Develop a strategic plan, utilizing external consulting services
- 2. Address facilities needs
- 3. Improve school safety, wellness and communication
- 4. Enhance staff mentoring programs

Thank You

The entire town of Hooksett appreciates the time, effort, and commitment put forth by the school administration, staff, and community volunteers who supported our students throughout the year. Parents and guardians, thank you for your commitment to supporting our students outside the classroom. Parent involvement in education is a critical factor for student achievement. The School Board appreciated a wealth of constructive input and feedback given by many Hooksett citizens during our meetings and deliberative sessions.

We should all thank the town of Hooksett, who spent \$36 million dollars this year to educate nearly 2,000 students, pre-Kindergarten through High School.

Finally, I would like to thank the School Board Members, and those who supported us this year. This team acted with the utmost concern for our students and staff, operating transparency, fiscal prudence, facilities, and our academic programs. Thank you for your dedication, guidance, and leadership.

School Board Members

- Wayne Goertel, Chair
- Jillian Godbout, Vice Chair
- Amy Tremblay, Secretary
- Lynn Baker
- Jason Hyde
- Alexis Quinlan (-2023)
- James Sullivan

School District Clerk

- Jennifer DeCampo

School District Moderator

- Leeann Moynihan (2023-)

School District Treasurer

- Mike Salvas (-2023)
- Michael Kotlyarsky (2023-)

Administration

- William J. Rearick, Superintendent
- Marge Polak, Assistant Superintendent (-2023)
- Cory Izbicki, Business Administrator (2022-)
- Principals: Matt Benson, Brad Largy, Ben Loi
- Directors: Dean Farmer, Christine Osborne, Meghan Largy, Cindy Nusbaum, Daniel Roma, Justine Thain

School Board Recorder

- Becki McCarthy

Pictured below: The Hooksett School Board, with Superintendent Rearick, at its June, 6, 2023 meeting. Left to right: Jason Hyde, Lynn Baker, Jillian Godbout, Wayne Goertel, William Rearick, Amy Tremblay, Alexis Quinlan, James Sullivan



Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Wayne", written in a cursive style.

Wayne Goertel
Hooksett School Board Chair