

Draft Minutes
Chariho Regional District School Committee
Budget Workshop
Tuesday, February 3, 2026
Chariho High School Library

In attendance for the Committee

Louise D. Dinsmore, Chair
Laura Chapman, Vice Chair
Polly Hopkins
Craig Louzon
Linda Lyall
Larry Phelps
Jessica Purcell
Karen Reynolds
Dianne Tefft

for Administration

Gina M. Picard, Superintendent
Dr. Michael Comella, Asst. Superintendent
Mr. Gregory Zenion, Director of Admn. & Fin.
Ms. Lynn Gouvin, Asst. Dir. Of Adm. & Fin.
Angela Brasil. Clerk

Absent: Donna Chambers and Tyler Champlin

This meeting can be viewed at: [Chariho SC 2.3.36 Budget Workshop and Special Meeting](#)

Call to order: Chair Dinsmore called this meeting to order at 6:00pm and led this body with the Pledge of Allegiance and a moment of silence to reflect on their charge tonight for the budget and moving the district forward.

Chair Dinsmore stated that Superintendent Picard presented her FY 27 budget at our last School Committee on January 13, 2026, and presented it a second time at our OMNIBUS meeting on January 21, 2026. At the February 10, 2026, School Committee meeting, this body will continue the budget discussion and will be charged with approving the budget. The annual district's public hearing on the budget is scheduled for Tuesday, March 3rd and that is the evening where we require 25 registered voters from each of our three member towns (Charlestown, Hopkinton, and Richmond) to be in attendance. We will hear feedback from our regional community on this budget at that time and meet again as a School Committee on March 10, 2026, to adopt the finalized budget.

Committee members were reminded that they can ask questions of the Administration and discuss potential revisions to the budget as presented. Superintendent Picard provided some updated slides pursuant to the meetings in January. If any of the Committee members have questions to ask, they were asked to raise their hand, be recognized by the Chair and she asked that they keep it to one or two pressing questions in the first round for the sake of efficiency. If there are more questions the Chair will open the floor to round two and once the School Committee members have had a full complement of questions, she will open the floor to members of the public who are present this evening. Chair Dinsmore turned the floor over to Superintendent Picard.

Superintendent Picard stated that she has provided a different kind of presentation this year as there seems to have been some confusion and she wants it to be as clear as possible for everyone. She used to provide a copy of her presentation in the budget book but has discontinued that practice as numbers frequently change and she wants everyone to have the most updated information available at any given time. Therefore, each presentation is on our website as well as regular updates to the budget which can be easily accessed by clicking the "subscribe" link to receive them.

Prior to this meeting the Superintendent met with Chair Dinsmore and our budget committee. They tried to home in on the kind of language that would be helpful to make this budget thoughtful and transparent for our community. The Omnibus was a successful meeting as well and helped us collaborate with each other in a single forum. She was pleased with the feedback from everyone. We are making good strides in helping people to understand how school budgets work. We have identified a couple of important areas for discussion this evening. First, Superintendent

Picard stated that she is “not a fan” of the one-pager budget. However, it was created by the finance directors with requests from elected officials as well as members of the school committee. We’ve been asked to make it shorter, etc. and we found there’s a lack of sustainability with something like this when it’s created in Excel. Sometimes, formulas can become corrupted and can throw it all off. She personally does not use this sheet because it’s not necessarily how the budget operates. She called Ms. Gouvin to the podium.

Ms. Gouvin, while the Assistant Director of Administration and Finance is also a Charlestown resident and a proud Mom of Chariho graduates. Ms. Gouvin explained the sheet to the Members. She explained adding an additional column to show additions to the FY26 budget creating an Adjusted FY 26 budget which showed substantial differences from the FY 26 budget we originally created. Some major issues were with staffing changes, out-of-district tuitions, the RES playground that needed funding, and some additional costs for closing and moving out of Hope Valley Elementary School. Therefore, she asked the Committee to think of this sheet, this budget, as fluid. Superintendent Picard stated that this one-pager should not exist at all as it does not represent the fundamental way a school budget works. Ms. Gouvin, via Superintendent Picard’s slides gave an example of a mock town and what it would look like to level fund a school budget, a district level budget. It is important to use audit findings and numbers to get a good “apples to apples” comparison year over year. You cannot simply take the finalized FY26 budget and compare it directly to the new FY 27 proposed budget as too much has occurred in the meantime. Things like school accountability law can change staffing decisions (2019), for instance. This is one reason why a School Committee can’t approve a budget line by line. You approve an example of where we believe we will be, because school hasn’t begun yet and changes will occur. As for State Aid, it’s all preliminary and also changes up until June 1st. The biggest expense for any town is their school district budget, representing approximately 70% of the total town budget. By taking a percentage of the overall budget (multiply by approximately 70%, you’ll identify the school percentage of that budget. Even when you see an increase in the school budget, it doesn’t necessarily mean there will be an increase in the tax base. Chair Dinsmore provided the example of Richmond, RI (town of) and stated with a budget of \$8.2 Million, the tax bill will note the percentage of that bill that goes to the school.

Superintendent Picard stated that Hopkinton Town Administrator, Brian Rosso, gave an excellent explanation of what happens when an increase goes over 4% and Member Purcell followed up with her clarification which was very helpful. If a member of the public is still confused, members of each town council (Charlestown, Hopkinton, and Richmond) were present at Omnibus and gained a good understanding of the process. RIDE formed the UCOA (Uniform Chart of Accounts) to make sure that educational funding was going directly into the schools. For a Town to use that funding for any other purpose, is illegal. For the School district to return funds to the town for reallocation to anything but education, is illegal. The UCOA is a complex system of accounting that allows for checks and balances across the funding. It’s important to understand that if the district has a sum of money left over from a budget year that was allocated, for instance, to staffing and we had unfilled positions, that sum of money goes back into the overall pot, into a fund balance, with internal redistribution into the correct bucket (Charlestown, Hopkinton, or Richmond) for school funding only via each town’s allocation to be reverted back into education spending and lower’s the town’s comparison cost. It is illegal for the district or any town to withhold our education funding or to spend it on any other purpose. Chariho is the only regional district in the state where the state aid goes to the towns and then is allocated back to the district. If the state aid came directly to us it couldn’t be held by the towns. There has been times where she (Superintendent) has had to have conversations with the towns about this. We are not trying to be stingy with this, but we need to follow the law. The towns cannot use dedicated education aid toward paying down the town services. No taxpayer wants taxes to go up, however, for years, Chariho has been asked to reduce the budget every single year. When that happens, it affects services and parents begin to question priorities.

As an example of something we needed to cut from our budget, Superintendent Picard discussed the fields. We had to remove \$1.6 Million dollars from this budget before the Committee even saw it. We are also looking at about seven (7) retirements, but we can’t guarantee the numbers. We have been asked to consider “incentives”; that involves buying out contracts and there is no guarantee that you’ll get a replacement at a cheaper rate, especially a Math or Science teacher or something at a different level. We’ve been asked about Administration too and considering cuts there. The Superintendent stated that she would give the Committee regular updates as the budget evolves and answer any questions they may have. She stated that it’s most important that this is as transparent as possible. We need to align on the one thing that we are here to support, the Chariho students, as we are legislated to do. School

Committee members are legislated to ensure that the budget reflects the student services, not the taxpayers' bottom line. That is a town council job. This was the charge in your oath. We don't forget about the taxpayers of course, we have a responsibility to be fiscally responsible, which we have proven year after year via our audits. This budget, in all honesty, cannot be cut further, that is my recommendation, as it already has risk. I can advise that further cuts will be a reduction in staffing and services for students and my responsibility, our responsibility, first and foremost, is how to best service students. We are proud of the budget before you. Hopkinton scaled down, Richmond went up and I'll be at the General Assembly tomorrow, working with lobbyists to make sure they know I went to the Blue-Ribbon Commission and spoke on the funding formula. I provided information to David Cicilline from the Rhode Island Foundation along with researchers that did the work. I put out a summary in our e-update on this which went out to all families. We fight, every year, for transportation aid. Representative Kennedy has always been amazing at getting us our regional transportation, but it was not fully funded until Governor McKee came in. The last three years, we got more state aid than we ever have and that's a credit to the work we all do. Everyone is well-intended, but we are all fighting over the same pot of money. My fight at the General Assembly is about making sure people understand how we're funding education; remember RI is not funding 35 districts, they're funding 60 (ref: charter schools).

Ms. Gouvin discussed the funds transfer to capital credit for \$641,000.00 and how it relates to this budget. She explained that it was for additional funds from the FY26 budget from the general fund to the capital fund. Superintendent Picard stated that we have had to remove that funding every year in the capital budget because we were always working on a plan and here we are six years later, still working on a plan. After we lost the bond in May 2024, we don't have any capital money – so no projects – no state reimbursement. Therefore, that \$600K was put in for last year because we needed to rebuild the capital fund that the school committee has been moving to zero per the towns' request. We are just one heavy snowstorm away from a roof collapsing. So that \$641K comes out of our fund balance (operating budget) to the other fund balance (capital fund). State law, under the School Building Authority, requires us to make sure that 3% of our operating budget goes into facilities. When the state bond passed, they specifically said, with new construction, they will ensure that districts had a minimum of 3% allocated to facilities. Now that we are re-setting our Stage I to September, we can work on Stage II, but that money is your capital account. In Elementary schools, we can spend \$500,00.00 on repairs, and we're almost at that cap. Member Reynolds asked if we don't have a fund balance, will we then not receive State reimbursement? We would not because if we don't follow the State process, we won't get reimbursement. The Superintendent stated that her understanding from the School Committee has always been "we want every dollar back that we can possibly get" so we have to follow ALL the State rules to do so. We needed to make sure we had enough money for the Stage I and Stage II Elementary applications. If we did not put that \$641,000.00 aside, you would not have been able to pay the architects for Stage II.

Chair Dinsmore reminded this body that Superintendent Picard compiled a memo for the members which went out on Friday. She asked Superintendent Picard to speak to the Pre K tuition topic from that memo and our options for FY27. Superintendent Picard stated that the Pre-K tuition has been an ongoing conversation. We offer the lowest Pre K tuition in the state, the best deal in town. Our Pre-k is not State reimbursed as it is not a State Pre-k program, which does come with additional funding. Our Pre-K, which was required by law for our Special Education students (ages three, four, and five), also has "typical peers" in the same age group. Typical peers are students who have met their benchmark at their respective ages (3, 4, and 5) through our screening. Our Pre-K is still called Hope Valley Annex but is located at Charlestown Elementary School. We are preparing to change it to Chariho Regional Pre-K because that's really what it is. We also have the CHIP program which has no tuition and is a Pre-K classroom at Chariho High School. That was a decision made by the School Committee. It's a great program that supports our educational programming for our career and technical students who work directly in their classroom before they head out into their student teaching, practicum, during the school year. Even if we raise the tuition for Pre-K typical peers by \$50 it would still be a great deal. (Three days a month would cost \$180; Four days a month would cost \$240; Five days a month would cost \$300) and would increase our revenue by \$28,200.00, based on current enrollment.

Chair Dinsmore asked for member input on these increased Pre-K fees. Member Purcell stated that she is in support of this increase; she feels it's still very reasonable. Member Chapman asked Greg about the last time the Pre-K tuition was updated (2016). She also asked how this pricing compares with other districts. Mr. Zenion answered that it's still low. Superintendent Picard stated that we could put in for a 100% increase the numbers would be: Three days at

\$240 per month; Four days at \$320 per month; and Five days at \$400 per month, which breaks down to \$100 a week for a five-day Pre-K and would increase the revenue by \$56,400 based on current enrollment. This puts us in the low-median arena compared to other districts. Member Hopkins asked if we would consider a sliding scale for those parents who might not be able to afford the increased tuition. Mr. Zenion answered that we use the free and reduced lunch forms to determine need of our students and might also use that path for this consideration. At present, 23% of Chariho students qualify for free or reduced lunches. Superintendent Picard would rather defer this question to Atty. Anderson. Mr. Zenion also stated that, in the past, if someone was experiencing hardship, we would work with them individually. Member Purcell doesn't support a 100% increase. She wanted to make a motion to implement the 50% increase discussed.

Motion by Member Purcell, seconded by Member Reynolds to approve a 50% increase in our Pre-K tuition costs.

Discussion: Member stated that the provided memo says it would be paired with a clear access safeguard (for example hardship waivers) or a sliding-scale consideration. Chair Dinsmore added that if we went to 50% increase it would be estimated revenue of \$28,200, and if we went to 100% increase it would go to 56,400. She assumes that if we went to a 75% increase, it would be somewhere in the middle of that. Just from a mathematical perspective, it's not that I'm opposed to the 50% increase. I still think that it's a great deal with a 50% increase if you're saying that we're among the lowest in the state, but I would be in favor of doing something a little bit more than 50%. Member Reynolds stated that since we haven't raised this tuition in ten years, we should probably start lower and revisit it next year. Mr. Zenion stated that a 75% increase would improve revenue by \$42,300.00; He recommends starting at 50% and doing small bump ups each year over a three-year period to reach 75%. Member Hopkins asked if Mr. Zenion could share how many people use the sliding scale to get an idea of how many people in the community (single Moms or Dads) who really need to utilize this and can't pinch out an extra \$100 a month. Superintendent Picard stated that those numbers are smaller but doesn't feel comfortable answering that because with only four classrooms, it's not something we could share. Member Reynolds added that it's likely the same people who are in need now would qualify for need next year, which means they wouldn't necessarily feel the increase. Member Hopkins feels that if there are quite a few people using a sliding scale now it means we are already struggling with current numbers; if it's just a few, we can help them per usual. **Vote:** Nine (9) in favor (Dinsmore, Chapman, Louzon, Lyall, Phelps, Pouliot, Purcell, Reynolds and Tefft); One (1) opposed (Hopkins). **Approved**

Member Reynolds inquired about the oil spill monitoring which is raised in this budget by \$20,000.00. Mr. Zenion stated that he did not realize there was a rebate he could use on that, so he based the information on the original numbers, but will apply for the rebate and adjust. There is a \$20,000.00 (approx.) rebate which has already been taken out and recalculated in the one-page budget have tonight. Member Reynolds asked if the Transportation contract could be split more evenly over the life of the contract (3 years). Mr. Zenion reported that he spoke with Ocean State Transit today, and they are willing to reduce their proposal (bid) to 8% in year one; 7.8% in year two; and 7.8% in year three. This will help us with some savings (approx.. \$116,000 in year one of the contract)- which has already been deducted on the one-page budget as well. Member Chapman inquired about questions she had posed to Mr. Zenion in their (pre-meeting) yesterday, looking to see if he could follow up tonight. Regarding benefit reduction – line 612 “salary reduction” – for FY26 you see \$190,000 and in FY27 that line has nothing. Mr. Zenion stated that we had two teachers budgeted for in FY26 that we did not fill. When we budget for that, we use a “middle” step number. So, \$190,000 represents those two teachers at \$95,000 each. On page three, line 4866 (section 2) there is an amount in benefits for \$133,000 that would have been attached to those two teachers, which may have been a typo, because healthcare is listed at \$88,000 and healthcare for two family members should be about \$44,000. We will not likely have people hired at this point, based on what we know at this moment. She asked if the Administration, when passing the FY26 budget, was aware of those two positions going to be left unfilled (no); it's money that is not being used. Member Chapman asked why the number was much higher in FY25. Superintendent Picard explained that the salary reduction then (\$900,000) was substantially less than that, and includes all benefits (health, dental, retirement etc. – all fringes). Member Chapman asked why the number fluctuates so much. Per Superintendent Picard, it's due to unfilled positions, teacher leaves of absence, us having to employ daily subs, etc. She explained that this is a great example of why this body should be looking at the audit numbers. She asked this body to remember that they will vote on preliminary numbers (an example was provided by Ms. Gouvin) where we work with the towns, through collaboration and negotiation we filled the oil tank at Hope Valley Elementary School before exiting; we updated the fire extinguishers, etc. Using the budget book to make year-over-year comparisons will result

in confusion. We typically transfer funds when emergencies and surprises pop up. It's very volatile and has to be flexible. We have children with significant disabilities, but not academic ones, and may have to hire an additional nurse. We take it as it comes and this changes the budget numbers. We need to follow their IEPs and provide the services they need. The numbers change for teachers who are in more than one school too. Based on student needs and services, our special educators may have to move from one building to another, so they are classified as "district wide" not by school and this changes the numbers. She prefers this body to use the audit for their reference and questions about the budget, not this budget book. Chair Dinsmore inquired why there are salary lines for Hope Valley when we closed that school. Ms. Gouvin explained that we may have an itinerant (art) teacher that travels between schools, and if one of them is the Pre-K, it's listed as Hope Valley Annex. Superintendent Picard stated that excel spreadsheets don't work for this budget. Ms. Gouvin has to manage doing her job twice by using that to explain this budget and it's easy to corrupt formulas and they don't work with UCOA codes. Member Chapman asked how FICA is calculated and Mr. Zenion explained that we follow the law. Member Reynolds asked about the change in percentage for Richmond on the original one-page budget from January 21st, versus today's submission. (On 1/21 it was 8.01 % and today it's listed at 7.91%). Superintendent Picard explained that the difference is caused by the state aid, per pupil allocation – which can change.

Mr. Zenion stated that since this one-page budget has so many fluctuations, he wanted to address the question of where the money went when we closed the Hope Valley Elementary School. Superintendent Picard reminded this body that when the budget is voted on they are not voting on a number (budget allocation) but a percent. This book becomes obsolete as soon as it's printed. It served a purpose that no longer exists. Member Chapman, referring back to the budget and UCOA codes for the teachers assigned at Hope Valley questioned the UCOA codes relative to each school the teachers work in and found a discrepancy. Ms. Gouvin (On the 49-page budget, there are line items showing salaries and proposed budget information for Hope Valley Art Teachers, but the number is not right for the existing Pre K-annex). Superintendent Picard will ask Ms. Gouvin to go back through it to determine if the allocated salaries are not posted in the right schools but reminded this body that it doesn't change the bottom salary line – just how it's broken down in UCOA. Chair Dinsmore, to help explain what Member Chapman's point is stated that there are a number of different line items for Hope Valley (Art, Music teachers, etc.) on that page, row 73 salary, PD, etc. Superintendent Picard stated that it would be looked at again to clear up any discrepancies, but the teacher's salary won't change. Ms. Gouvin explained that part of her job is to convert what we have in these excel worksheets to our financial system (Keystone) and the teachers involved in this discussion do go to a few schools, and that information may not have been updated in your budget book, but it's likely they are correctly assigned to where they are actually teaching. It's still the same salary. Superintendent Picard said that this is why we don't use Excel spreadsheets because they don't translate from the financial system properly. Her recommendation for next year is that we use reports directly from the financial system, so Ms. Gouvin isn't having to do this twice. Also, people like to manipulate the excel document for their reflection on certain things and formulas can be misaligned. Member Chapman wants to be sure we are not budgeting in a position that doesn't exist. Superintendent Picard is confident that our bottom-line numbers are correct and that this budget book and the exercise in creating it just causes more confusion. She suggests that we no longer use it as it's not helpful. There was further discussion about FICA, Pensions, and Social Security amounts and how those are calculated, these all follow federal and state law. Fluctuations in those calculations happen when a teacher moves into a new role, gains a new step increase, etc. It was explained that any sums which are "leftover" due to those changes go back to the pot for educational funding purposes.

Chair Dinsmore stated her appreciation for Gina's presentation and input but feels that she would benefit from more understanding of the two percentage increases at the bottom of the one-page budget. The Richmond percentage rose to 8.01% and she is trying to understand why. It was originally 7.91%. It was explained that their most recently posted state aid didn't change much but did result in a loss of \$228,458. It is important to remember that the towns vote on the budget as a whole (percentages) and not on a specific number, based on preliminary understanding of what the budget was going to be, but you have a legal responsibility to serve the students. Once the budget is in the School Committee's hands (upon approval in February) they can continue to make changes up until adoption. During the course of the school year, we make transfers as requested by the Committee. An example would be the Richmond playground. We just got a phone call right before this meeting because there could be litigation that we need to be able to budget for, and these things don't stop. That's why, once you get this book, it becomes obsolete.

The book is only as good as the minute I print it. We have no control over state aid. The General Assembly has the power to adjust the funding formula. This year, they adjusted in a “success factor” which kicked Richmond up and brought Hopkinton down. A few years ago, the exact opposite happened. This is why it’s better to use the audit for a year over year comparison. We are waiting for DCYF tuition information to roll in too. It goes up every year. Then we’ll come back to a budget workshop and work out those numbers again. It’s currently around \$92,000.00. There’s a new SRO law which means that there’s mandated reporting now for SRO’s, and they’re not school employees, yet they want the school to be able to manage that work. Charlestown graciously pays for one of our SROs (at the Middle school) in full and supports a portion of the High School SRO as well. That MOA comes in front of you. This is why there is a misrepresentation in the budget of exactly what each town provides. Charlestown also provides us with services and collaboration around our EMA Directors. If there’s a problem at the school these EMA Director’s take charge so our kids are safe and they call the shots in those incidents, not the Chief of Police. We currently have a part-time EMA director, and the schools aren’t even mentioned in the job description at the town level. There are Federal dollars out there that can get support to have EMA Directors through FEMA that the towns have not accessed. This budget is very lean. We always look at staffing (every staffing assignment), and make sure we are getting the best ROI (return on investment), and her responsibility to this Committee is to improve every year without infringing on student’s needs. We will be doing some non-renewals on Tuesday, February 10th, which will save us some money (along with retirements). This is why It’s a fluctuating budget.

Chair Dinsmore wants to understand why the overall budget increase comes out to 2.7%. (due to spending) She asks how this translates to the towns’ percentages and their financial impact. Additionally, a number of times, on different line items, you (Superintendent) were very mindful last year, telling us that there are staff that watch the meetings and when we discuss different line items which may impact a person or program, it’s not helpful as it makes them nervous about cuts. So, she is trying to be more respectful and mindful of that this year. She asked that the Administration look at any lines with a 4% increase (not salary or benefits) and cut by half a percentage point. What fiscal impact would that create. (She’s looking for feedback on this for Tuesday’s meeting, 2/10). We all want Chariho to remain in the Quadrant of Success we also want to be mindful of doing the best we can in being a fiscally responsible district, a high-level district. The Superintendent feels the increases are utilities of inflation (services mostly) and the inflated cost of things overall. We’ve removed RISAS (RI Student Assistance Services) – a counseling program, because it’s a vendor and doesn’t impact our Chariho staff but it does impact every student on our main campus. Thankfully, we have a robust set of services that we’ve been lucky to get through project AIA – through the grants that Dr. Comella and Dr. Kirakosian, and myself have worked on with our health and wellness initiative. The only way to reduce this budget further will be through staff and programs. When the town council (Richmond) asks us to bring the fund balance down to 2%, that’s a School Committee decision – the Superintendent has it at 2.25% and that’s already a risk per the auditor. We are just one heavy snowstorm away from a roof emergency. The Superintendent requested some “guardrails” to look at for further cuts (Sports; extracurricular activities; raising class sizes – which was already done at the Elementary level), so I can advise you appropriately.

Chair Dinsmore stated that she’s just trying to come at this a different way this year as there were some missteps and confusion last year, with mistrust and hard feelings. Since they’ve come a long way, she’d like to be mindful of what constituents from Richmond (her district) need. Superintendent Picard said she’s trying to come at this differently as well, instead of line-item by line-item. Mr. Zenion offered that in the 10-page budget, lines 123-384 all have a 5%, or more, increase. There are about 32 % of those with a 4% increase. The Superintendent asked that the School Committee vote on this charge because that’s an exercise that is not necessarily strategic as it doesn’t look at services as whole. It looks at dollar amount, along with her request for “guardrails” to stay clear of cuts. She doesn’t recommend taking one half percent out of everything that is 4% or over. She suggested that this Committee should vote on it, because that that's an exercise that we can do, even though it will not necessarily give you a realistic picture (because we can’t cut contracted vendor services). We do have more teacher assistants than other districts; our supplies are at a minimum; we are not replacing any furniture, etc.; there will always be some push-back but we need to fund the district in the most responsible way while continuing to be a high performing district. to remember that they are currently in negotiations with the NEA ESP as well. Chair Dinsmore said these cuts are just her thoughts, and she’s only one person.

Member Purcell stated that while she doesn't necessarily agree with the idea that there was "push back" she doesn't feel that last year's budget discussions were very productive. She is trying to make sense out of the increase to Richmond to help the Richmond community understand it better and finds it difficult to answer questions when neither the state aid, nor the town budgets are final. Member Purcell also asked if Mr. Zenion could give her the calculation of percent increases if the fund balance is lowered from 2.25% to 2.0%. Also, for clarification, she asked if Chair Dinsmore is asking for the "dollar amount" that would be reduced by taking half a percent off of the 32 line items she mentioned, (Yes), versus cutting one thing or two things entirely, (Yes). As such, Member Purcell agrees with the approach.

Superintendent Picard stated that she and Mr. Zenion will work together to get answers to all these questions asked today, and have a document to the Committee for the February 10th, 2026, meeting. Mr. Zenion did calculate the reduction in the fund balance, however, and moving from 2.25% down to 2.0% would add \$163,522 back to the budget. This change would move the town percentages to: 5.01% at Charlestown; 7.78% at Richmond; and 2.15% for Hopkinton. Member Purcell added a question about TA's (teacher assistants), asking about the 5.5 vacancies we have right now and how they are being filled. They're filled by substitutes, per Superintendent Picard, and we have increased our certified personnel. The Board-Certified Behavior Analyst is on board as well (we had two planned but had to cut one) but we did a change of contract and services and returned the budgeted funds for the contract, along with funds for one personnel resignation, to the budget before it came to you tonight. Member Purcell is worried about the 5.5 TAs. The Superintendent reminded Member Purcell that we must consider our ROI (return on investment) and at providing student services. You have to match time and effort to make sure that students are being serviced. When you assign a teacher assistant we make sure that we are resetting student needs to be sure we are prioritizing those and aligning them to the strategic plan. As of this date, in doing that research, we know we need 5 less TAs.

Member Chapman asked for an overview of the additional items that came to \$76,000.00. He responded that we had \$431,832 go to salaries (NEA) as they received a 3% increase this year; \$114,427 was the benefits packages for those; \$30,000 is the Relay service (which is how we get reimbursement for Medicare) – he then reminded this Committee that he told them last year that we have not budgeted that for this year and this Committee chose not to include it, so we still have to pay it; The next line item is for \$27,200 which represents the move out of Hope Valley Elementary School to finish closing it; The next line item is for \$8,500 which is for the transportation study that this Committee approved; and the last item is for \$95,000 for the Richmond playground that this Committee also approved. This difference came to a total of \$76,959.00 in spending that was not budgeted for the present year. We also put two teachers back into the budget with salaries and benefits that equal \$173,000. Member Chapman asked for a report on this as she was having trouble reconciling the year-to-date amounts with the year-end amounts. She'd like a general overview of the top ten items that would be contributing to unbudgeted spending. Mr. Zenion stated that the jump of going from the "actuals" at the end of 2025 to what is being projected for 2027. Superintendent Picard referred to her presentation slide entitled Budget Impacts which showed unavoidable increases, stating that we did not ask for anything new. She stated the increases are coming in because we were asked two years ago to no longer do a four-year replacement on the Chromebooks, so we moved to a six-year replacement and now they need to be replaced. There's no savings on using textbooks, because they cost more. If we want to move to using textbooks again, that will raise this budget. The contractual obligations resulted in a 3% increase in salary for staff. More parents are (happily) coming in to be in attendance for our programs and the towns have raised the rates for Police and Fire details. At a minimum, we have to cover four hours of that detail, even if our event is only an hour long. Superintendent Picard will work with Kathy Koziol from our Finance office to create a table of UCOA codes with these budget items to give Member Chapman the data she is looking for in one place. As a side note, the Superintendent stated that Chariho Student Ezri Acton will be speaking at the Charlestown Town Council meeting on Waste Management Law on Monday evening. She has suggestions for decreasing waste management for Chariho because we saw an (almost) \$13,000.00 increase there as the Federal Government removed that grant. We've also lost money in our Perkins grant (federal dollars) because the CTE numbers have gone down. The MET and Davies have realized a huge increase (in the millions) and we are seeing less money. All of our CTE assessments and getting students to their clinicals (transportation costs) really hurts us. Mr. Zenion added that there has to be an understanding that when the School Committee took 2.25% of the fund balance last year it was at \$3.1 million; that move caused the fund balance to drop to \$2.1 million. Then, with \$200,000 less in revenue and spending going up \$1.9 million, you

are not going to be able to recoup that. Now you want to cut the fund balance again, but at some point you are going to have to realize that it doesn't replenish. You can make all these charts and tables, but having less money with increased spending hurts this budget. The \$12 Million less that was taken out of this budget last year is now hurting this budget. If you had another \$200,000 in revenue and another \$1 million in the fund balance, we'd be in a better place. Chair Dinsmore referenced the Pre K – while she has respect for the Member's choice to vote for only a 50% increase in the Pre K tuition, it could have generated more revenue, possibly another \$25 to \$50 thousand, but she respects the vote and will move on from it.

Chair Dinsmore thanked the Committee for all their feedback and the Administration for more in-depth insight into all the factors that contribute to this moving target for the bottom-line budget. She asked for a motion to adjourn.

Motion: Member Hopkins made a motion to adjourn, seconded by Member Tefft. Vote: Unanimous in favor.
Approved.

This meeting adjourned at 7:30pm

Respectfully submitted by

Angela Brasil
Clerk for the Chariho Regional District School committee