

CITY OF HOLYOKE  
SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES

SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES  
MONDAY, FEBRUARY 24, 2025  
TIME: 6:00PM

**PRESENT:** Receiver Anthony Soto, Dr. Yadilette Rivera-Colón, Devin Sheehan, Mildred Lefebvre, Rosalee Tensley- Williams, Gladys Lebron-Martinez, Orlando Isaza, John Whelihan, William Collamore, Eleanor Wilson, **Sean Magano** (Finance Director) and Student Representative: None

**1. CALL TO ORDER – ROLL CALL – PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

School Committee Vice-Chair Dr. Rivera-Colón called the meeting to order at **6:04 p.m.** and announced that pursuant to M.G.L. c. 30A, s. 20, attendees are hereby informed that a video and audio recording is being made of the meeting and the meeting is being live-streamed on Zoom.

**Roll call:** Mayor Garcia-**absent**, Dr. Rivera-Colón-present, Mr. Sheehan-present, Ms. Lefebvre-present, Ms. Lebron-Martinez-present, Ms. Tensley-Williams-present, Mr. Isaza-present, Mr. Whelihan – present, Mr. Collamore – present, Mrs. Wilson – present

**Mayor Garcia arrived at 6:08pm**

**2. STUDENT SHOWCASE -** None

**3. PUBLIC COMMENT-** None

**4. COMMUNICATION AND REPORTS**

A. Student Reports

- HHS North- None
- HHS Dean Campus- None

B. Superintendent's Report

- [FY26 Budget Projection](#)
  - Receiver/ Superintendent Soto gave an overview of the budget process. Currently there is about 6.63 million dollars or 5.5% increase in net school spending requirement, which is primarily driven by the implementation of the Student Opportunity Act. This is year 5 of 6 years of another year act and then see a revenue in 2027. There was an increase in city funds within the net school budget, an increase from \$547,000 to \$696,000, which was a commitment 3 years ago regarding the building of the new middle school. This was a \$500,000 contribution from the school district. This is not a direct

payment but a reduction in our appropriation. One significant discussion will be transportation. There was a significant increase due to the cost sharing with Springfield in the McKinney-Vento transportation. Major part is the rate has doubled and we have a significant amount of kids in this transportation. Currently this is close to being reimbursed at 100% from the state. Mr. Sheehan asked if the rate to transport a student from Holyoke to Springfield is the same rate as it is from Springfield to Holyoke? Receiver/ Superintendent Soto responded that it is not as we have 2 different contracts, our contract is lower and theirs is higher. Kids that go to school in Springfield but temporarily placed in Holyoke and are getting bussed to Springfield, that rate went up to \$250, which the district pays half. The Springfield to Holyoke rate is about \$135. Mr. Sheehan commented that we can anticipate a large increase in the future. Mr. Mangano said that in other districts the rate is around \$200. Receiver/ Superintendent Soto commented that the contract was negotiated and would go up 5% every year for the next 5 years. Mayor Garcia remarked that the city budget and the continued increase is what is driving the budget. It's not the overspending in departments but in transportation and health insurance. Ms. Lefebvre asked, "how many students are in the McKinney-Vento?". Mr. Mangano said about 90 routes per day and pay for about 100. The McKinney-Vento allows students to stay in their school origin after permanent placement and then they would need to enroll the new school year. Mr. Mangano followed up that the Charter School transportation is not reimbursable and had an increase of 10% and its expected to continue to increase.

- Mr. Sheehan remarked that the city would have a more competitive bid if the Charter was added to the transportation contract, instead of letting the Charter determine smaller routes and giving a bill to the district. Receiver/ Superintendent Soto said that this was a good idea and something that can be discussed with the state in the future. School Committee members would like to have further discussion about this topic and come up with a plan to better cost saving.
- 88% of our funds are from the state and directly not transportation. State is fully funding the Student Opportunity Act. Governor's budget when released was better than anticipated and used a different inflation formula. The district was looking at a 4 million deficit but now it's 2 million and will be taken up in the budget process development.
- Mr. Mangano projected a 4.9 increase in salaries and salary expenses related. Health insurance has a 5% increase, Charter School/ School Choice increase of 10.5%, Out of District tuition projected increase of 42.8% and utilities 10.3% as the new middle school opens. Retired Teachers expenses Insurance 10.5% increase. Receiver/ Superintendent Soto explained that this will be a

challenging budget year and the district is being fiscally responsible. This is leading to collapsing routes and more kids on the buses. We will continue to find ways to find savings. Difficult conversations are being had about cutting services and we understand that families are upset, but the district is being thorough in trying to find savings. Mr. Whelihan asked about a task force, to which the Receiver responded that this is monitored monthly and hoping to find something that can lead to savings. Ms. Wilson asked why 65% of the transportation is special education and wanted clarification. Receiver/ Superintendent Soto responded that he can put something that he can put together.

**Motion:** Mr. Whelihan made the motion to send the proposed FY26 Budget Projection to the Finance and Operations Subcommittee. 2nd by Mr. Collamore

Mayor Garcia-yes, Dr. Rivera-Colón-yes, Mr. Sheehan-yes, Ms. Lebron-Martinez-yes, Ms. Tensley-Williams - yes, Mr. Isaza-yes, Mr. Whelihan – yes, Mr. Collamore – yes, Mrs. Wilson –yes

**Vote passed unanimously**

**Motion:** Dr. Rivera-Colon made the motion to appoint Jay Whelihan to the Budgetary Advisory Group. 2nd by Mr. Collamore

Mayor Garcia-yes, Dr. Rivera-Colón-yes, Mr. Sheehan-yes, Ms. Lebron-Martinez-yes, Ms. Tensley-Williams - yes, Mr. Isaza-yes, Mr. Whelihan – yes, Mr. Collamore – yes, Mrs. Wilson –yes

**Vote passed unanimously**

- [Metcalf working group report](#)
  - Receiver/ Superintendent Soto summarized the powerpoint in regards to how Metcalf will be used. Members of the group reviewed various options for the school. The recommendation is to move our opportunities academies programs and addition to an alternative program that is looking to launch next year. Currently leasing space on Maple St. which is costing the district about \$50,000 a year. Transition Academy is currently going to stay and will renew its lease at least till the end of the school year. Still having conversations about Transition moving to Dean and this will be reviewed. Central office will also remain and have consolidated from 4 floors to 2 floors. Looking to hire another consultant to look over different possibilities where the Central office can go. In 2016 the district paid \$9,000 to look at Central Office, this will be another cost to do it again and might be more. Alternative program is designing a program, who might be in 8th, 9th or 10th and traditional schooling is not an option for them. This opportunity will allow students to get back on track and not over age and under credit.
  - Mr. Sheehan commented this continuation of the Central Office is tiresome.

There has been so much money and time invested only to have the same outcome where Central Office stays in the same building. Mr. Sheehan went on to say that if there is no order from the City Council and they are willing to fund the study 100%. This is a waste of time for employees of the Holyoke Public Schools. The City Council also has no statutory authority to tell the Superintendent to do anything and needs to come before the School Committee. Mayor Garcia agrees with Mr. Sheehan's statement that it needs to be addressed among the School Committee prior to any commitment. Ms. Lefebvre commented that during a Joint School meeting this was similar to the previous Superintendent. Mayor Garcia said that he wouldn't rule out the Annex or City Hall but that the city needs to look at the funding.

**Motion:** Ms. Wilson made the motion to receive and accept the Metcalf Working Group report. 2nd by Mr. Isaza

Mayor Garcia-yes, Dr. Rivera-Colón-yes, Mr. Sheehan-yes, Ms. Lebron-Martinez-yes, Ms. Tensley-Williams - yes, Mr. Isaza-yes, Mr. Whelihan – yes, Mr. Collamore – yes, Mrs. Wilson –yes

#### **Vote passed unanimously**

- Q1 Receiver Update (Emailed 12/11/24)
  - Receiver/ Superintendent Soto presented Q1 report and Q2 report will be coming out in a few weeks. The report explains the school improvement plan, how we analyze data, how we meet the needs of the schools, and track our progress. Ms. Wilson asked about the special education reorganization plan. Receiver/ Superintendent Soto said that it was part of the Capacity Building Plan which went through and analyzed the benchmarks for the upcoming school year. Currently it's a project plan and it will eventually be presented at a later date to the school committee.

**Motion:** Mr. Whelihan made a motion to receive the Q1 report submitted by the Receiver. 2nd by Ms. Wilson

Mayor Garcia-yes, Dr. Rivera-Colón-yes, Mr. Sheehan, Ms. Lefebvre-yes, Ms. Lebron-Martinez-yes, Ms. Tensley-Williams - yes, Mr. Isaza-yes, Mr. Whelihan – yes, Mr. Collamore – yes, Mrs. Wilson –yes

#### **Vote passed unanimously**

#### **C. Vice Chair Report**

- [Commissioner Communication](#)
  - Dr. Rivera-Colón stated that this was from the previous meeting and a printed version of the new communication has been printed and shared with the committee, this will also be added to the next meeting.

**Motion:** Ms. Wilson made a motion to receive the communication letters from Acting Commissioner Johnston. 2nd by Mr. Sheehan.

Mayor Garcia-yes, Dr. Rivera-Colón-yes, Mr. Sheehan, Ms. Lefebvre-yes, Ms. Lebron-Martinez-yes, Ms. Tensley-Williams -**absent**, Mr. Isaza-yes, Mr. Whelihan – yes, Mr. Collamore – yes, Mrs. Wilson –yes

**Vote passed- Ms. Williams was not present for vote**

## **5. NEW BUSINESS**

A. Out of State Field Trips- International Beauty Show in New York.

**Motion:** Mr. Sheehan made a motion to accept the out-of-state field trip to the International Beauty Show in New York. 2nd by Mr. Whelihan

Mayor Garcia-yes, Dr. Rivera-Colón-yes, Mr. Sheehan, Ms. Lefebvre-yes, Ms. Lebron-Martinez-yes, Ms. Tensley-Williams -**absent**, Mr. Isaza-yes, Mr. Whelihan – yes, Mr. Collamore – yes, Mrs. Wilson –yes

**Vote passed- Ms. Williams was not present for vote**

B. Approval of Meeting Minutes

**Motion:** Ms. Wilson made a motion to accept and approve the meeting minutes of [1.13.25 School Committee Meeting Minutes](#). 2nd by Ms. Lebron-Martinez

Mayor Garcia-yes, Dr. Rivera-Colón-yes, Mr. Sheehan, Ms. Lefebvre-yes, Ms. Lebron-Martinez-yes, Ms. Tensley-Williams -**absent**, Mr. Isaza-yes, Mr. Whelihan – yes, Mr. Collamore – yes, Mrs. Wilson –yes

**Vote passed- Ms. Williams was not present for vote**

C. Updates of Committees

- Policy and Governance Subcommittee
  - Due to unforeseen circumstances the meeting was cancelled. Rescheduled for March 6th, 2025
- Finance and Operations Subcommittee
  - Next meeting Feb 27th at the Central Office. Looking over the budget process
- Joint City Council/School Committee
  - Met on Feb 12th. Topics of discussion were the Metcalf Working Group, immigration policies for the schools and if there had been a rise.
- Local Control Subcommittee
  - Met on Feb 19th via Zoom. Commissioner is impressed with the Capacity Plan being followed and continues to grow. Talked about the lengthy process of policies and this will not be a reflection on local control. Commissioner Johnston will possibly bring forward the exit assurances on March 31st.
- Leadership, Accountability and Measurement Subcommittee

- o Meeting is tomorrow at the Holyoke High School at 4:00pm. Discussions will be competency graduation determination and brief conversation around the superintendent/ receiver evaluation.

## **6. ONGOING BUSINESS**

- None

## **7. ANNOUNCEMENTS**

- 2.24.25 Community Advisory Team Meeting at 4pm
  - o <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/<wbr>85418028230?pwd=<wbr>GEairnL2xBP6qnkba0rwzGF4bl4uJM<wbr>.1> Meeting ID: 854 1802 8230 Passcode: 540990
- 2.25.25 SEPAC at 5pm, Registration Link:  
<https://fcsn.org/event/<wbr>holyoke-evaluation-and-<wbr>eligibility/>

**Motion:** Mr. Sheehan made a motion that the school committee go into executive session because a public session could have a detrimental effect on the public body for the purposes of collective bargaining in regards to the Teachers Association and not to return to open session. 2nd by Mr. Collamore

Roll Call: Mayor Garcia-yes, Dr. Rivera-Colón-yes, Mr. Sheehan, Ms. Lefebvre-yes, Ms. Lebron-Martinez-yes, Ms. Tensley-Williams-yes, Mr. Isaza-yes, Mr. Whelihan – yes, Mr. Collamore – yes, Mrs. Wilson –yes

**Vote passed unanimously**

**Meeting adjourned at 7:48pm**