Minutes
Special Meeting of the Chariho Regional District School Committee
FY26 Budget Workshop - Tuesday, February 25, 2025
CHS Library- 6:00pm

Members Present:
Dinsmore, Louise D. – Chair
Chapman, Laura – Vice Chair
Chambers, Donna
Champlin, Tyler
Superintendent
Louzon, Craig
Lyall, Linda
Phelps, Larry
Pouliot, Patricia
Purcell, Jessica
Reynolds, Karen

Administration Present:
Picard, Gina - Superintendent
Comella, Michael (Dr.) – Assistant Superintendent
Zenion, Gregory – Director of Admin. & Finance
Brasil, Angela – SC Clerk / Admin. Asst. to

Members Absent:
Hopkins, Polly
Tefft, Dianne

I. Meeting Call to Order/Pledge of Allegiance/Silent Meditation: Chair Dinsmore called this meeting to order at 6:00pm, and lead the recitation of the pledge of allegiance, along with a moment of silence, in honor of recently passed, long standing Chariho Coach and community friend, **Michael *"Scotty"* McGuire.** Member Purcell read aloud a memorial in honor of Mr. McGuire that had been shared by the Chariho Administration earlier that day: "*It is with deep sadness that we share the passing of Michael "Scotty" McGuire, a beloved coach, mentor, and Chariho graduate. Coach McGuire dedicated over a decade to coaching, leaving a lasting impact on countless student-athletes and the entire Chariho community. A familiar face on the field and beyond, Scotty brought joy, encouragement, and unwavering support to all who knew him. His passion for the game was only surpassed by his commitment to the students he coached, always leading with kindness, humor, and a deep belief in their potential. His presence will be profoundly missed, but his legacy of sportsmanship, leadership, and dedication will continue to inspire. Our thoughts are with his family, friends, and the many lives he touched throughout his years of service. We hope they find comfort in knowing how much he was loved and respected by the Chariho community We will have counselors available to support students and staff throughout the week. Flags will be lowered to half-staff, and our HS Principal and Athletic Director will meet with the teams/athletes impacted later today. He will be greatly missed".*

II. Business - A. Budget Transfers Motion: Member Louzon made a motion to approve the budget transfers as presented, **seconded** by Member Reynolds. **Discussion:** Chair Dinsmore opened the floor for Mr. Zenion to present some budget transfers this evening. A member of the public, Mr. Cardoza, from Richmond, inquired about the nature and sums of the transfers and they were explained as noted. Supplies and repairs for plumbing and heating at Chariho Career & Tech in the amount of $4,315.75; Funds to pay the district electrician bill for repairs to heating system in the amount of $ 4, 222.84; Funds to pay for repairs to the cafeteria speaker and bell system at Chariho High School, including replacing the amplifier, which posed a school safety issue, in the amount of $3,900.00; and Funds for Encore Fire Protection for labor and materials for repairs needed in the boys room and fitness room at Chariho Middle School in the amount of $2,232.25. **Vote:** Unanimous in favor. ***Approved***

III. Budget FY26 Workshop: Chair Dinsmore asked Superintendent Picard to provide a few short slides as an overview presentation of the Hope Valley Elementary School for the edification and consideration of this Committee, and the public, as they have been getting many questions about the status of Hope Valley Elementary School. Superintendent Picard stated that we have updated numbers and this presentation is available online as well. Many will remember that we had open discussion for Hope Valley Elementary

School, on our agendas for some time, until we pulled it off to concentrate on the budget. We have been phasing out Hope Valley, following declining enrollment trends, operational costs, and sustainability concerns. She reminded this body that the FY26 budget that she presented to the Committee represents continued phase out. The question for the School Committee continues to be are you looking for a closure or a continued phase out?" The School expressed that they are looking for possible further budget reductions and wanted to see what savings could be realized if they chose to close Hope Valley School at the end of this school year.

The Pros and Cons: The Superintendent expressed that there is, of course, a deep emotional attachment to Hope Valley Elementary School, which is wonderful, and these decisions are never easy. She stated the following "pros" for closing Hope Valley Elementary School in June 2025: Cost savings of $875,000; students have the opportunity to meet more friends before entering middle school; will address the declining enrollment and allow the district to utilize the specialized staff for more efficient support services. From a budgetary standpoint, we could identify cost savings on utilities and maintenance. She reminded this body that we have four old elementary schools all in need of maintenance and repairs, especially around our heating HVAC systems, which was explained in the information for our stage two application last year. For parents and guardians, it would be helpful for them to have a definitive date of closure and remove the uncertainty, which has been very difficult on families. Additionally, it would minimize disruptions because it doesn't impact students who are already enrolled, and allows for a smoother transition for the receiving schools, with more time to plan spaces for everyone. The 'cons' are represented by delayed cost savings, prolonged uncertainty, infrastructure concerns, identity loss, continuous need to use resources and plan curriculum and instructional costs across four schools, versus three; Additionally, parents may be opting out of moving their child(ren) later rather than sooner as some already did. The following numbers were updated as of the February 11, 2025 School Committee meeting and represents the savings as of right now:

Area	**Description**	**Cost Savings**
Staffing	4 certified staff: cutting 2 grade one, and 1 grade two teachers, and a nurse	$ 400,000.00
	Custodian	$ 60,000.00
	Teacher Assistant	$ 40,000.00
Maintenance & Utilities	Regular bills – *as long as there are no major emergencies*	$ 195,000.00
Transportation	1 bus	$ 85,000.00
Capital	Light capital costs included	$ 95,000.00
	Total savings with closure this year:	**$ 875,000.00**

*The cost reduction does not include line items relative to supplies, etc. for students as those costs will follow them to their new school.

Enrollment: Superintendent Picard showed the enrollment numbers and what that translated to for other schools if we close Hope Valley in June. To explain the point, she showed that Ashaway's capacity is 258 students, and if Hope Valley closes this year, it would bring their enrollment to 234, which is under the cap. We would only be adding one class there, most likely a grade three class based on the current numbers. We have 107 Preschoolers right now and 128 students in grades 1-4 at Hope Valley. If it stays open, there would be 97 students in grades two through four. PreK is undetermined because we don't have all of those numbers yet. There are a handful that would return to PreK as they are not yet eligible for Kindergarten, others would be coming in newly aged into the classrooms (age 3&4). The other question that keeps coming up is about classroom sizes. The number of classrooms in grade two at Ashaway (going back to that example) are two, with a total of 48 students, 24 per class. In grade four, if Hope Valley Closes, there would be 44 students at Ashaway, two classrooms for grade 4, with 22 students each. You would do the same

thing across the board. Across the board, we have five grade 2 classrooms, with 96 total grade 2 students, and an average class size of 21. Five grade three classrooms, with 99 students across the board, and an average class size of 20. Five grade four classrooms with 103 students across the district, and an average class size of 21. *note: some of these may be self-contained classroom and not matriculating with typical peers all day. She has created a "FAQ" sheet which is on the website as well. We did not identify grade 1 as there is no kindergarten at Hope Valley ES now, so that won't impact the classes in the fall. The next biggest question has been "Where will my child go to school if Hope Valley closes?" The new lines are designed so all students are assigned to the school closest to their home. For teachers and staff, based on the current situation, they will select positions at other schools based on their certifications and contract requirements. Based on our current anticipation of retirements, leaves of absences, etc., we do believe we have enough positions to ensure that everyone can remain on staff who want to be here. Also, PreK will have the required space at Charlestown Elementary School, including bathrooms. Mr. Zenion has walked all the schools and spaces and we know the PreK classrooms will have the facilities for their age group and needs. There is no anticipated change to busing. Every student is assigned transportation, if the parents want that, as long as its for their assigned school, which should be the one closest to their home. Parents are still able to apply for voluntary transfers to a different elementary school, but busing would not be provided, per the School Committee's policy. We typically approve transfers unless the current enrollment is already at max capacity or very close to it. This does not ensure that we will have 'pretty' spaces, all the schools are very old, but they are well maintained and they do have enough classrooms for all the children. We would have the other three elementary schools host a "welcome tour" for all families being reassigned from Hope Valley. The School Improvement teams will meet as a group to be able to plan those events. Chair Dinsmore thanked the Superintendent, citing that she felt the Committee, and public, needed some structure around that conversation tonight.

School Committee questions: The Chair recognized Member Phelps for discussion, who asked about the cost savings prediction of $875,000.00 as he thought it was originally supposed to be at least one million dollars. The Superintendent expressed that the larger cost savings would be realized per the reductions this Committee originally requested regarding lowering the fund balance, removing a World Language teacher (per Member Chapman), postponing a NEASC visit, removing the costs for BCIs (per Ms. Davis, TC Hopkinton), etc. Everything combined comes to $1.45 Million in reductions. Member Pouliot asked the Superintendent to discuss the Chariho Act as it relates to Hope Valley School for a public explanation, regarding enrollment. Superintendent Picard answered that Member Pouliot is referring the area of the Chariho Act which talks about students enrolling and being able to save the school if it exists. If the school no longer exists, they kids can't be enrolled there. What we are saying is that we can't just move all the students to (for instance) Richmond, and keep Hope Valley Elementary open. Member Pouliot mentioned that some of her constituents asked if we can keep some kids at Hope Valley. Superintendent Picard answered that we cannot just move some arbitrarily, that's why this Committee began the phase out because you cannot newly enroll if a school ceases to exist. This has been reviewed with legal services. Member Champlin asked what will happen with the Principal at Hope Valley Elementary School in case it is closed. The Superintendent reminded him that Mr. Scanapieco, the Principal, has a memorandum of agreement as the Director of Multi-Systems of Support and Success (MTSS) as well as the Hope Valley Principal. This shift was already made, it just started sooner when we began to phase out Hope Valley. That position has been a part of our district strategic plan and Member Lyall has been a part of that work, with the CALA redesign, since the Superintendent started at Chariho. She believes it was put into the description two years ago and was finalized last year with the School Committee deciding to make that change, we were able to begin the implementation this year. Member Champlin asked for more information about that position, and the Superintendent replied that all of the job descriptions are online on the Chariho website, but offered that the MTSS person identify resources and the allocation of those resources to ensure students across the district are getting their needs met. Our entire team is working on what we call our "tier one" teams so Mr. Scanapieco is going out, providing coaching feedback and support to those teams to model, share, and support effective work. He brought in a digital dashboard that teachers are learning how to use and make

this more efficient for them. In short, he oversees the support and redesign of the MTSS resources for all schools to be able to perform and show great growth. Member Reynolds inquired if this position is mandated. It's very cumbersome and right now we have eight people juggling a lot of different things, but there needs to be someone who can coordinate this entire initiative for us and that is Mr. Scanapieco. It's a very large initiative and the law passed in 2021.

Member Chapman offered that she's been doing a deep dive into the budget and sees some trends she wanted to address. Referencing the 56- page budget, she identified that there seems to be increases across the board for really small line items. She identified that she found 785 increases, that are less than $995.00 each, which, when you add them all up, come to $275,554.00 worth of increases. She is confused how those small increases are calculated because looking at the actuals for 2024, and noting that the budget construction began approximately 6 months ago, she sees projections for 2026 that are much higher than she would expect them to be. Mr. Zenion asked Member Chapman to identify an example of what she is talking about, but also offered that the numbers in the budget are adjusted estimates because we won't know exactly what we have until the budget closes. Member Chapman asked if Mr. Zenion and the team could revisit the budget and pull all of those numbers for review, and potentially cut those costs in half. Again, Mr. Zenion asked for a pointed example, by line item, so he could properly review. Member Chapman identified Pg. 51, Row 6110, Supplies, Athletic / Medical. Mr. Zenion stated that we are given a list of supplies that we are mandated to have on the field at all times. This involves concussion gear, football shoulders, hockey head gear, etc, based on new legislation, along with supplies for med kits on the field. Member Chapman was looking at the supply line for HS athletics, which can be cut in half, but would leave these athletes without the supplies they need for the year. Our Athletic trainer identifies what is needed and the status of the equipment, etc. She has to be prepared, on the field, in case of an injury. When you look at medical supplies as a whole, you can see a (-82%) increase. In the Middle school in the 2025 adjusted budget, you can see that they did not expend all the supplies they ordered, therefore, we have stock and can cut their FY26 budget almost in half. The High School spent their money and used their supplies therefore, we need to put in money to get them. We also look at the supplies that are in stock, make sure they are viable, and move some from the HS to the MS and vice-versa when needed. We make sure that inventory is done in all the departments. Superintendent Picard stated that Mr. Zenion made multiple reductions in the budget and you will notice increases in some places, but decreases I other places. Many of these things are contractual. For instance, she did not utilize her funds for attending a conference last year, therefore, she asked for it to be transferred to the heating budget for the school. Professional learning is important for us to learn and grow, but we do try to find other ways to do that. Currently, there are greater cyber-security needs, therefore, that line item went up. Sometimes you have a placeholder because certain things are bi-annual, not annual as well. Member Chapman expressed that this is a little confusing and decided that she might not have chosen the best example and decided to look for another one. Mr. Zenion mentioned that Ms. Chapman's last example was over $1,000.00 and her earlier reference was for 785 items under $995.00. He urged her to consider inflation as well since she is identifying costs and projections from 2023 – 2026. The second example provided was: Line 713, Salary for Trainer (not athletic); the actuals for 20234 was $65.79 and in 2024 it was $160.00, then the line goes up to $68,859 projected for 2026. Mr. Zenion stated that this is based on PD (Right to Read) where different trainers are brought in for "the science of reading". Depending on where that person is, that money will be allocated to the correct school. It is a required professional development from the state so it has to be coded the way you see it and yes, it was much lighter in 2024. Chair Dinsmore, citing that Ms. Chapman is very diligent in going through each line, asked if it would be better for Ms. Chapman to send a copy of the line items she is questioning back to Mr. Zenion and the team for further discussion at the March 11th meeting. Mr. Zenion said he is also happy to have her come into the office and go through each line item in person. Member Chapman also noted that there was a pretty significant increase in the heating fuel line item. Mr. Zenion said that we use #2 diesel fuel and over the last couple of years the school department used a three-year rolling average and then cut into it. He did not feel comfortable with the three-year rolling average formula so he increased it by 8%; he cited that we had a "typical" New England winter this year, which we haven't had for four years. From January

11 through January 25, 2025 (a period of two weeks) we spend $997,000.00 on heat and oil to heat our eight buildings. That does not include Ashaway because they use natural gas. If the cold snap continued another two weeks, we'd have spent almost $200,000.00 out of a $640,000.00 budget in a month on heat and oil. We typically run our boilers for five to six months out of the year. You will run out of money if you have a really cold winter and continue budgeting the way you have. You can cut that, but I was not willing to do that myself and put myself in a position where I had to come in front of this board and say we can't heat the buildings for February, March and April. Member Chapman, to provide context for the public, offered that last year we budgeted $990,000.00 for the fuel oil line item for Charlestown, and we're projecting $999,000,00. She asked if he had an actual number to see if we are running ahead or behind on some of the fuel oil items. Mr. Zenion offered that he could run a report for her as he was waiting on our next bill since we were not on campus for February vacation which means one furnace is running, but, when it gets down to 10 or 12 degrees and the wind is blowing around here, you can have both furnaces running at the same time and burn 90 gallons of diesel in an hour. Member Chapman also inquired about the custodians noticing an increase in the line item for Charlestown and the Middle School. She asked if we added a custodian. Mr. Zenion said that we did not "add" one but we did fill open positions, finally, and reminded her that our price index did change, with a starting rate of $20/hr as part of the one-year agreement with the NEA ESP. Superintendent Picard reminded her that while we are seeing increases there, we see a decrease in the line item for outside vendors, who came in at a much greater cost. The overtime last year was incredible as well. Member Chapman asked if we are filling positions now, at a particular school, isn't it rational to assume that overtime would decrease? Superintendent Picard stated it might, if she was told tomorrow that ALL of the open positions would be filled, and stay filled for the year, and it's not going to snow and we might not open up all of our facilities to everyone, for instance. Member Reynolds asked if "overtime" covers more than just filling spots; it covers snow shoveling, pipes bursting and extra cleaning, sporting events, etc. Yes. We've had two weeks of nothing but emergencies and breakages and the custodians have been working to fix things as fast as they can. It's not just over time and we need the stability to happen. Member Purcell asked about line 699, salary overtime, asking if we increased the hourly rate, she'd hoped the overtime would go down as well. She'd like to see a $50,000 decrease in that line item since we've already filled half the vacancies we had. That would bring this number back to the FY23 number. Further, Member Purcell, offered that she does not want level funding. She is also no longer comfortable with closing Hope Valley Elementary School as she had been when there was a long-term strategic vision of three new elementary schools to house all of the elementary students. Now, she's not in a big rush to close it despite some of the "pros". She feels the ripple effect would be very large, especially for Richmond Elementary School which would take over 100 of those kids and the PreK kids would go to Charlestown Elementary School. This is not her goal for this year. She'd like to work on the elementary plan more, separate from the budget which she is aware is happening now, but her number one goal is to show folks what the overall local increase is (2.6%) which comes out to .62% for Charlestown, 3.72% in Richmond, and 3.25% in Hopkinton. As we are all aware, the municipal budget cap is 4%, so my goal with any reductions, would be to get Richmond down a percentage point which is about a $400,000.00 cut from the overall budget. So, a salary reduction in the overtime line was one of the things she was interested in and reducing the fund balance to 2%. She doesn't think it's in the best interest to shut down Hope Valley School at this time, and knows it will close eventually. Cutting the World Language position saves $100,000.00.

Chair Dinsmore inquired if Member Purcell was making a motion. Member Purcell said, no, not at this time, it was just for discussion. Greg Zenion asked Member Purcell to repeat herself to be sure about the math.

Cut World Language Position	$100,000.00
Reduce the fund balance to 2%	
Save on Hope Valley Capital	$ 95,000.00
Reduce OT line (699)	$ 50,000.00

Mr. Zenion replied that if we keep Hope Valley open, you have to remember to keep maintenance costs in the budget – Maintenance and Utilities = $195,000.00. Member Purcell inquired if you need to include Hope Valley Elementary in Capital Improvements if it stays open – he answered, Yes, and you won't get reimbursed because we are phasing out. You would have to pay every single dollar out of pocket. RIDe would want us to ensure that we're going to put their Capital dollars for the reimbursement into a building that we plan to have for at least 20 years. If the bond had passed, we could have used it as a swing space, they don't allow reimbursements on a phase out to close a building. This is why the School Committee chose not to make improvements there, whether or not new buildings were going to be built. If you spend $500,000, RIDE reimburses us $300,000 the following year. If you spend that and close the school, you would get no reimbursement. Member Purcell inquired if that applies to the money spend on the applications as well. Mr. Zenion reminded them that the applications are requirements. Further, Superintendent Picard said she would not advise a decrease in the fund balance as our older elementary schools are continuing to have issues. You should not touch that fund balance, especially after our audit conversations. Superintendent Picard agreed, saying she would be opposed to that but it is up to the Committee. Regarding the salary overtime, she's very happy that we've increased our personnel and has not had consistency with our staffing yet. However, we do have a resolution regarding letting the Chariho Cowboys use our fields. If the Committee decides to allow this, we may need more people, especially a field maintenance person and salary overtime might have to be increased. There is currently no padding there, what you see is exactly what we've spent. Although there are still open positions to fill we have reduced the line from contracted services, therefore, overtime may look like an increase but the contracted services line, which is much more expensive, decreased. Regarding healthcare, the School Committee gambled on that before and it didn't' pay off. You can try and gamble on it again, but I caution you to keep that in mind. Member Lyall mentioned that she is concerned about cutting the World Language person as this will be one of our graduation requirements, and if we cut it, we may not get it back because colleges are just not graduating World Language teachers and they are hard to find.

Chair Dinsmore mentioned that part of the reason for this extra budget workshop tonight was to attack the budget without waiting until the very last moment on March 11th. Member Purcell understands that the public hearing on the budget, scheduled for March 4th, is a pretty big time for public feedback and feels that's part of the reason people wait to add to the discussion. Member Lyall added that she is aware there are Committee Members who floated the idea to pass a flat budget (level funding) but she just doesn't see how we will get there without closing Hope Valley. Member Chapman agreed and added that noticing what's happening at Hope Valley right now, without the High C program etc, shouldn't be happening right now. The Superintendent reminded her that this Ashaway is having the same issue right now. Everything happening at Hope Valley is happening at other schools too. It's very hard to find the mandated Library Media Specialists. She doesn't want people to think we are pulling resources from Hope Valley, it's not true. Member Chapman said we have three other, high performing, elementary schools and as the grades get smaller, she feels it would make more sense to move the kids to (for instance) Charlestown Elementary School, etc. they would have what they need. Member Zenion said that we'd have a very difficult time filling positions at Hope Valley due to the phase out. Member Chapman agreed that this is a good point. He doesn't see these positions filling with the closing of Hope Valley hanging over their heads.

Chair Dinsmore inquired if this Committee is prepared to make a decision about Hope Valley Elementary School for FY26 tonight? Member Louzon said that, although it was mentioned that the public hearing is scheduled for March 4th, he's happy to hear from the taxpayers that are here now. Chair Dinsmore opened this discussion up to the public member present.

Helen Sheen – Richmond

She wants this Committee to be mindful of the renegotiation of contracts and asking the teachers to pay their own PD, like the rest of the world does, including a raise in their cost of health insurance. Also, she encouraged asking for a waiver on some of the mandates and restructuring middle management to save money. She is concerned about the closing of Hope Valley as there is a new housing complex that is supposed to go up in that area. She'd rather see cuts elsewhere vs. closing Hope Valley. She cautions that we can't spend more than we take in, like the government is doing. She'd like to see every part of government look for ways to cut their expenses and consider how much it costs people to live.

Bob Cardoza – Richmond
He sat on this Committee a while ago, for 20+ years, and cautions that this is not a "line item" budget. It's not like the town budget, it's a bottom line budget and that bottom line is too big. How you do it is up to you. Regarding the fund balance, your transfers amount to about $1 million a year, which is a real number, instead of putting it somewhere else, put it in the reserve account instead of the fund balance. The fund balance will self-fix. Send the money back to the towns.

Member Lyall mentioned that she believes this is what we already do. Superintendent Picard said that the money does go back to the towns. Mr. Geary, Hopkinton Town Council President, from the audience disagreed aloud, and Superintendent Picard reiterated that the money goes back into the school section for the towns. Mr. Cardoza said when you are making a transfer in the budget, you are taking it out of an account that no longer needs it, that's why you are taking it. It's a surplus in that account. Instead of putting it in another place, tighten your belt, save it, have it for use when you need it. Right now, the Towns can't afford it. Superintendent Picard, by way of clarification, expressed that we have three budgets (Richmond, Charlestown, and Hopkinton), any district money that is not spent, goes back into those three towns for the Chariho school budget for the following year, it doesn't go back to the towns (revenue), it goes back to the towns through the school budget.

Deb Zonfrilli – Hope Valley School Gr. 3 teacher
She's concerned about class size. The lower the class size, the better the test results. She feels larger classes will affect our scores. Chair Dinsmore reminded her that there was a slide about class sizes – Richmond Elementary Schools, 20-21, Charlestown Elementary School avg. 19-20, Gr. 3 - 24, Gr. 2 - 24, 17, and 22. So there would be some instances of increase class sizes, and in some instances. they would not.

Bill Prince - Hopkinton
He is offering a different point of view. He spent much of his career outside Rhode Island, but grew up in South Kingstown. To be specific, he understands the consternation about closing a school but he remembers having a 25 to 30 minute bus Ride to his class in Kindergarten to Kingston Hill. His wife was a teacher in Virginia and she had 26 students in her class, all of which passed their mandated state assessments. While he understands there is research that smaller class sizes are better, he doesn't feel that a small increase will make a difference. That said, if you are going to even come close to level funding in this budget, I think the way to get there is to rip the band-aid off and close Hope Valley School. I realize this may be an unpopular decision, but as the gentleman before me said, it's your job to make the difficult decisions and take the tough actions. It will also be very difficult on the Superintendent when you can't make these decisions and need to get the people in line and understand the situation.

Jasmine Roy – Hopkinton (Town Council)
She had a comment on etiquette, noticing that some School Committee members are "surfing the web" on their laptops, while we are discussing the budget items. She feels this is not very encouraging. Regarding Hope Valley, if you want to close Hope Valley Elementary School, what happens to the teachers? Are they going to be spread throughout the district? Do they lose their jobs? Where is the security for them? They have dedicated a lot of years and time to this district and if they are going to close, even phase out, and you know they are going to jump ship because it's sinking, are they going to be placed in other elementary

schools? The teachers are important. Superintendent Picard agreed that the teachers are very important, they are our best investment. They also have to follow the contract based on the number of openings and closings. While we would be cutting certain positions, and based on retirements coming up, everyone should have a position. Based on the contract, we use a PFS score which is based in seniority, professional experience, and evaluation scores. They get the jobs from the HR department that are vacant across the district and bid on a job. Each year there is a little bit of a shift and those teachers (not just Hope Valley teachers) would get a position. It may not be the same grade they are in now, but there is a position. As people retire, the longer we keep Hope Valley open, those retirement positions could be filled by someone else. Those people retiring have to wait for six months and we hear whispers and are informed when they go for their appointments (to the retirement office) and then we get the final confirmation, usually in April / May / June. As of now, my budget has Hope Valley in, still phasing out, but to everyone's point, when you keep it open positions like the library media specialist, are very hard to fill and there is not a lot of places to land. We've been through this with attrition, if someone retires, the job is frozen. We don't go outside the district to look to hire because you need spots for these people to land. We want to be sure that we have slots for the Hope Valley teachers to slide into. In the meantime, you hire subs to cover these classes. Some of the Subs last year did get positions due to retirements. We have not had any issues here with general classroom teachers. Our concerns have been around long-standing library media specialists or math positions that are hard to fill; World Language teachers as well, to Member Lyall's point. Once you lose them, they are very hard to fill. A lot of our teachers are at top step too, and interestingly, we found out that we are one of the districts that have the least amount of teachers at top step (70%). While that doesn't seem low, we thought we were one of the higher districts, but we see that others are much higher. We need to look at the next three years to see how many people would be eligible to retire to know how many slots we'd have open. With the change in Social Security – retirement age – more people are working longer and it's really about their individual circumstances. Member Pouliot mentioned that she went through attrition cycles and downsizing in her job (union) and when people retired, they didn't replace those jobs. They used part -time people or temps to fill them until they got down to the numbers they needed. Then the Post Office did a massive buyout to get people out early (back in the 80's). Per Superintendent Picard even though we'd be cutting a nurse from Hope Valley, we have one retiring so that's a neutral issue, and we do need ALL of our Special Educators because our students are going to other schools and will get their services at the new school. They are district teachers and would be reallocated. Only our classroom teachers, specific to Hope Valley will be cut. You are looking at the two first grade teachers, the two second grade teachers, the two third grade teachers, and two fourth grade teachers. We are opening two fourth grades at Richmond, and two third grades at Richmond, and kids will be in those classes, so the teachers are needed. The enrollment in fourth grade is a bit higher than other grades so we know we have to roll up one; they have more third graders there too so we know two positions that will have to be filled. We also have teachers leaving.

Chair Dinsmore, noting that there are Hopkinton Town Council members in the audience, looked at the one-page budget provided for FY26, and if it stays the same, Richmond is looking at a 3.7% increase and Hopkinton is looking at a 3.24% increase. The Towns have not yet considered their Town budget evaluation, but Richmond is meeting tonight to start their FY 26 process and assume it's similar for Hopkinton. If Hopkinton comes back with a proposal for a 3% budget increase and Richmond comes back with a 2% budget increase, isn't there a cap of 4% to consider?

Sharon Davis – Hopkinton Town Council – approached the podium and offered that they only have 20% left and have a lot of Unions in the process of renegotiating, they also need equipment and will not be happy with a 3% point plus increase. She is looking for this Committee to do better. Chair Dinsmore mentioned that this was not the point she was making but appreciated the sentiment and Member Champlin asked what Hopkinton's budget is without the school funding, mentioning that it's relative to size. He said it can't be $20,000.00 otherwise how would they pay their DPW, Police, Etc. It's $20 Million total – so it's relative to size. Therfore, he had a question for Gina and /or Greg - Is there any type of termination clause for

returning the Hope Valley School building? Superintendent Picard said yes, to basically return it in a condition that is better than it was received. Ms. Dinsmore walked Hope Valley today and found it in excellent condition. We make it look good but it's what is "behind the walls". Mr. Zenion offered that we do pay $1.00 for rent. Member Champlin agreed with Mr. Cardoza that we can't nickle and dime this budget. He offered that he has done what Laura (Member Chapman) is trying to do and it didn't work. With that being said, this is a budget of "low hanging fruit" at this moment. There was a statistic given last year during a presentation – contractually we need 44 elementary school classrooms if we max out class sizes. We have 53. So here's the option, which is going to be wildly unpopular, and he feels he is wildly unpopular at the moment anyway. We can cut nine educator positions out of this budget right now, be done, walk away and have a budget we can put forth. He doesn't feel this is the way to go. Once we take Hope Valley offline, it's gone. He can 110% guarantee that the Town isn't giving it back. With that being said, Member **Champlin made a motion to close Hope Valley School in FY2026, Member Louzon seconded the motion.** Member Purcell offered that she feels this vote should wait as two of the Hopkinton School Committee members, representing half of their representation, are not present at this meeting. Member Louzon said that this was a publically announced meeting, we are abiding by the law, and the motion could be shot down. We have a quorum. Member Phelps asked if Mr. Zenion and his team could show a number representation if we close Hope Valley. Mr. Zenion said we only have to subtract the additional maintenance costs of $195,000.00 (to the savings of $875,000) for right now. Member Phelps asked about fuel oil at $163,000.00, etc. Chair Dinsmore said she felt Member Phelps is asking if there are other items, coded Hope Valley, that can be deducted now. Superintendent Picard said there are other items but they are attached to Children and we can only pull out what is not attached to them. Member Champlin added that he felt Mr. Phelps was looking at the wrong line item – noting that the number he mentioned is for Chariho Middle School and the actual fuel oil cost for Hope Valley is $53,625.00. Mr. Zenion said these numbers were run more than once before it was submitted. Member Champlin asked if we could run the $875,000.00 cut right now. She replied Yes. Member Purcell asked about the librarian at Ashaway and Hope Valley, keeping Hope Valley open with three classrooms there, can they share a Librarian? The Librarian at HVES is already shared with CMS. Member Purcell clarified that either way, we'd still need a librarian? Superintendent Picard, speaking to the current legislation to mandate librarian, that Chariho is looking to do more work with the Literacy Teachers (as EWG has done). She confirmed that we still need both positions. Member Purcell is curious how the classrooms for Music, Art, PT, OT, etc. would be affected at the other schools. Superintendent Picard said they all walked the classrooms and mapped it all out. Mr. Zenion said CES has two options: move the self-contained class to the Music Room – in Richmond, she is asking her team for input. For instance, she'd like the fourth grade to be upstairs with the locker – a long standing tradition. The Principal would potentially move two rooms up there. Superintendent Picard came up with the number via the contractual size. To Member Purcell's point, the classrooms exist but they don't look like the design we are hoping for, and it's not perfect. Shared spaces are done in a lot of schools. Extra spaces won't exist. We do have the capacity. Space is always a commodity. The capacity at Richmond is 532, we would be at 432. The bus rides may be longer and I know it's a difficult decision. We've had a lot of HVAC issues, across the district, there is only so much money. Some of you are not completely there yet. Member Purcell asked how many buses will be needed. Per Superintendent Picard, maybe 1.5. A lot of the buses for Hope Valley now are very empty. Per Chair Dinsmore, we would not necessarily see an increase in the transportation line of the budget then. Superintendent Picard said not based on this, however, if the Committee decides to add busses, then maybe.

Chair Dinsmore recognized audience member Jasmin Roy – Hopkinton Town Council who said that she appreciated that Member Purcell brought up that two of the Hopkinton members were absent tonight and Member Tefft is her mother. She offered that the reason Ms. Tefft was absent was due to recent major dental surgery this afternoon and she doesn't know if she needed a "sick note" for not being here, not because she didn't want to be here and she doesn't know why Member Hopkins was absent.

In answer to Member Phelps; Mr. Zenion said if you close HV take the $875,000.00 reduction from the budget the resulting increase / decrease to the towns are as follows:

Charlestown	-1.04 %
Richmond	1.62%
Hopkinton	1.1 %
Overall	.68%

All well below current inflation rates in New England and the country. Member Champlin asked to see the budget sheet to follow the math. Mr. Zenion's team adjusted the slide to present it to the public. Member Champlin asked a clarifying question: Was there an update? Superintendent Picard said we've had one every meeting. Member Champlin said state aid has changed. Superintendent Picard offered that poverty stabilization numbers were not included and, the state was counting the PreK as full day but it's a half day. All districts were affected.

Chair Dinsmore asked for further discussion, noting that we have a motion and a second to close Hope Valley Elementary School at the end of this fiscal year. Member Phelps asked if the $875,000 cut included the change in the fund balance, it did not. The only motion was to close Hope Valley. There were other deductions discussed: Ms. Chapman's request to deduct a World Language teacher; Ms. Purcell's request to lower the fund balance percent, etc.

Chair Dinsmore, for clarification and the edification of the public went through the math:

$875,000 **–** will be deducted due to the closing of Hope Valley. This includes: $85,000 for transportation; $195,000 for maintenance and utilities; Two grade one teachers $200,000; One grade two teacher $100,000; One nurse $100,000; Custodian $60,000; and a Teacher Assistant $40,000. No further discussion.

Vote: 9 in favor (Chambers, Chapman, Champlin, Dinsmore, Louzon, Lyall, Phelps, Pouliot, Reynolds); 1 Opposed (Purcell); 2 absent (Hopkins, Tefft) ***Approved***

Chair Dinsmore offered that this was a very difficult decision and opened the floor for other discussions. Member Purcell mentioned that she would like to have the discussion of adding a bus back to the budget. Superintendent Picard offered to speak with Michele from the bus company for more information. Chair Dinsmore reminded this Committee that they can come back on March 11th to realized further cuts. No votes will be taken at the Annual Public Hearing on March 4th, but they can be taken at the regular meeting on March 11th.

Chair Dinsmore recognized public member Greg Avedesian to the podium, a member of Hopkinton. Mr. Avedesian thanked Member Champlin for finally bringing this issue to the table, it was a long time coming and he knows it was a difficult decision. He doesn't take any joy in closing a school but the decision had to be made. He also thanked the entire Committee for their thoughtful deliberation.

Askin for any further discussion and seeing none, Chair Dinsmore called for a motion to adjourn.

Motion: Member Champlin made the motion to adjourn, seconded by Member Phelps. No further discussion. Vote: Unanimous in favor. ***Approved.***

Meeting adjourned at 7:42 pm

Respectfully submitted by:

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Angela Brasil
School Committee Clerk

For approval at the regular School Committee meeting on March 11, 2025.