

**Town of Norwood
School Committee Meeting
Remote
Wednesday, November 8, 2023**

A remote meeting of the Norwood School Committee was held on Wednesday, November 8, 2023. The meeting was called to order at 8:05 p.m. (The public can access the meetings in person at the Savage Educational Center or live via NCM on cable, as they are live-streamed. For the cable channel guide and on-line link, please visit: <https://norwoodcommunitymedia.org>).

Committee Members Present: Ms. Anne Marie Mazzola, Chair; Ms. Teresa Stewart, Mr. David Hiltz and Ms. Kate Sibbing-Dunn

Committee Member Excused: Dr. Joan Giblin

Administrators Present: Dr. Dave Thomson, Superintendent of Schools; Dr. Charisse Taylor, Assistant Superintendent for Operations and Strategy; Ms. Karin Sheridan, Director of Finance and Operations

Also Present: Mrs. Myev Bodenhofer, Finance Commission Representative

New Business: To Discuss and Vote on Compensated Absences Warrant Article: Chair Mazzola welcomed everyone to this evening's meeting to discuss the Compensated Absences Warrant Article 18. The Chair summarized the situation on the Warrant (Article 18) around Compensated Absences Fund and its potential impact to the school budget. The Chair thanked Ms. Stewart for her notes on this matter.

Chair Mazzola informed that back in October we received a memo from the Town Manager around compensated absences and the liability to the Town based on the compensated absences. She said that this is something that was discussed at Finance Commission Meetings and was mentioned at one point at a Budget Balancing Meeting. She said there was no lengthy discussion about it. She said we received the memo on October 2nd about the compensated absences and what the payouts were for the various departments. It also shared that if we were to go forward with the Warrant Article creating a Compensated Absences Fund, what it would look like and what that would do. The Chair said that, due to a little break down in communication, the Warrant Article was brought forward and was never really directly discussed with the School Committee. This is something that was brought forward and approved by the Selectmen to go on the Town Warrant. The Chair explained that part of the reason for the Compensated Absences Fund was that it would help with the bond/credit rating. The idea was to create a fund that has an amount of money in it that could be paid towards these separation costs if and when they arise. The Chair informed that it will help offset that liability so that our bond rating will be in a much more favourable position as a town. The Chair added that

we did not realize the schools were expected to participate in this until the yellow sheets came out.

Chair Mazzola said that we need to discuss as a School Committee if we are going to participate or not. The Chair reminded that we are not obligated to participate in this and said we do have a mechanism in place to cover separation costs, however, it could be beneficial to the schools and the town. She added that we do need to vote this evening on whether we will support this Article at Town Meeting or not.

Mr. Hiltz shared his thoughts on this, saying that just hearing about this and discussing it a week out from Town Meeting is very frustrating. He said that town funding and funding for public education in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts are like apples and oranges.

Mrs. Bodenhofer said she wants to be clear that the Town is not asking any money at this point to cover any compensated absences. She added that State Law realizes that compensated absences on the town side and the school side vary greatly from year to year.

Mrs. Bodenhofer explained that State Law allows compensated absences to be handled a little differently (Compensated Reserve Fund). If you have a Compensated Absences Reserve Fund, separation costs can be charged to Compensated Reserve Fund for both the Town side and the school side. This is something Mr. Mazzucco mentioned to the Finance Commission years ago. Mrs. Bodenhofer said it became clear this summer that there would be a significant amount of free cash available this year. The Finance Commission asked Meg LeMay how they could use this in a responsible way to set ourselves up to have better, smoother budgets going forward. She said funding a Compensated Reserve Fund would be a good way to do it.

Mrs. Bodenhofer said that the Finance Commission would like to put \$1.5 million dollars into this reserve fund. She said if the schools choose to participate, (they currently have \$56,000 in employee separation costs built into the budget and in FY25 they wouldn't have to put anything into the budget for separation costs), they could just use the compensated reserves fund and draw the money from there.

The Members had an opportunity to share their thoughts and concerns.

The second paragraph is where Ms. Stewart has some concerns. She said she has gone through all the contracts and has compiled for the Members the language from the contracts. She said the Members can reference that sheet which is in their packets and explains all the buy-back and sick-leave language. She also shared the warrant language and the Mass. Gen. Law Chapter 40, Section 13B. She said they also have access to the Shared Costs Allocation Agreement that we currently have. She wants to make sure everyone has looked at the packet material.

Ms. Stewart suggested that at some point we go back to the way the three boards have met in the past (2017-2018), when there were Saturday Meetings scheduled for the School Committee, Selectmen and FinCom to meet and work things out together.

Ms. Sibbing-Dunn made a motion to support Warrant Article 18 and ask that the Chair of FinCom address the language on the yellow sheet for the benefit of Town Meeting and that School Committee will take the time it needs to review and vote on the Compensated Absences Fund, which was seconded by Ms. Stewart. The Members were polled and voted in favor 4-0. (Dr. Giblin was absent)

Executive Session: Chair Mazzola informed that there would be an Executive Session for contract negotiations.

Mr. Hiltz made a motion for Executive Session at 9:08 p.m which was seconded by Ms. Stewart. The Committee Members were polled and voted in favor 4-0 (Dr. Giblin was not present).

Adjournment: Ms. Stewart made a motion for adjournment at 9:30 p.m., which was seconded by Ms. Sibbing-Dunn. The Members were polled and voted unanimously in favor 5-0.

Respectfully Submitted:

Donna G. Doliner, Clerk
Norwood School Committee