

SAU 108 News Brief

The year 2024 was a very intense and busy one. After two years of research, outreach, and legislation, we met as a community last March to determine our future. *“Did we want to control our educational future or remain in the status quo?”*

It resulted in the largest voter turnout in memory. By an overwhelming 90% majority, it was decided to establish our own school district consisting of Bridgewater, Hebron and Groton. Hebron and Bridgewater also had significant turnouts and similar majorities. Since that time, we have been busy establishing the necessary systems as the foundation of the new district. The last time a new cooperative school district was formed was over 50 years ago. The “lift” to transition and create a new school district (SAU108 aka “The Pasquaney School District”) was both exciting and complicated. The upfront costs, as expected, are expensive. That fact was presented during outreach discussions as well as during the final deliberations. Toward that end...

School SAU108: The new school district’s first budget is higher than initially anticipated due to multiple factors. It is still preferable than the projected long-term cost with SAU4, however.

One complicating factor is revenue on the balance sheet. As a startup district we were not eligible for a number of federal funds as they provide reimbursed expenses for the previous year. For example, normally food service is 100% reimbursed by the state and federal government. We will be entitled to funds in 2026-2027 but not 2025-2026. Grants and other sources of government revenue will also be missing this year. We needed to be “in business” to be able to meet filing deadlines to submit those expenses to the state and federal government. We will be able to do so in the second year of operation.

Transportation (busing) increased an unexpected 35% statewide. Unfortunately, there are limited options for companies in terms of competitive bids and all of them had roughly the same increase. This is simply an absorbed cost.

Finally, there are the teacher and staff salaries. In order to retain and attract qualified teachers, to keep the B-HVS academic standards well above state averages, it was recognized that a significant and long deferred adjustment was

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needed. The current staff salaries ranges were substantially out of line with area school districts. A three-year contract has been offered. It is a noteworthy offer beyond any prior union contract. However, it is still in negotiations, and a public hearing on the budget (including the teacher contract) will be held on February 13, 2025 at the Bridgewater Town Hall. The consensus from the Board of Selectman is that the offer is a significant but deserved improvement over the previous pay scales.

We support the current version of the contract. We support the startup budget. We advise you to attend the Budget Hearing on February 13 at the Bridgewater Town Hall and the first annual Pasquaney School District Meeting on March 25 at the Bridgewater-Hebron Village School.

Potential Issues and Concerns: Statewide Property Tax (SWEPT). There are two lawsuits currently under review by the NH Supreme Court. If these are determined in favor of the plaintiffs, our three towns will likely become “Donor Towns.” The impacts could be very expensive. Bridgewater and Hebron, and potentially Groton, would have to “donate” about **1.1 to 1.3 million dollars** each to the state educational trust fund **annually**. Federal funds through the US Department of Education are also at risk. Social Security COLA’s may be suspended for the next few years.

All registered voters need to be present to be heard, just like at our town meeting. From parents and teachers to retired folks, all are encouraged to attend. A low turnout will not necessarily be representative. The School Board and the Boards of Selectmen have been working very hard in this endeavor.

Bridgewater-Hebron Village District. (B-HVD): As most realize, the school building is jointly owned by the towns of Bridgewater and Hebron through B-HVD, and the building is leased to SAU4 for one dollar a year. That lease is being renewed with similar conditions to SAU108.

B-HVD has received a \$500,000 challenge grant to add two classrooms to the school. This grant is a one-time opportunity and is only available if the addition goes forward this year. The cost to expand the building; repave the aging parking lots; purchase furniture; add a bus parking lot; upgrade the analog communication

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and clock systems; and other system repairs will require a short-term bond of 5-6 years. More detail will follow in the near future.

Over the next few weeks, additional information will be forthcoming relative to all the budgets and other relevant matters.

Sincerely,

John Rescigno, Tony Albert and Ron Madan

Groton Selectboard.