



North River Collaborative Board of Directors
Friday, February 2, 2024 - 9:00 AM
Minutes

Present: Peter Schafer, Joe Baeta, Mark Bodwell, Liz Legault, Alan Cron, Matt Ferron, Jeff Szymaniak, Christine Godino, Ryan Powers, Julie Hamilton, Paul Tzovolos, Marie Grable, Ellen George, Kelli O'Brien McKinnon

Call to Order: The meeting was called to order by Chairman Alan Cron at 9:05 AM.

I. Approval of Minutes-December 15, 2023

Motion: Peter Schafer made a motion to approve the minutes of December 15, 2023. Jeff Szymaniak seconded the motion. Motion carried unanimously.

II. Approval of Warrants:

***All presented warrants were signed by a quorum of the Board for approval, no vote was needed.**

III. Discussion/Action Items

A. FY25 Budget Presentation-First Reading-Executive Director Paul Tzovolos presented the FY25 Budget to the Board. Mr. Tzovolos thanked the Board for their support and told the Board that he was confident that the FY25 NRC Budget will have a minimum financial impact on the member districts. Mr. Tzovolos proposed:

- A 2.5% salary increase for all staff except drivers and monitors who will receive 2.75% (collectively bargained). This increase equals the average salary percentage increase of the settled teaching contracts for member districts for FY25.
- A recommended additional percentage due to comparable salaries for the Business Manager, Technology Coordinator, Human Resource Coordinator and Assistant Executive Director is proposed with the total cost of these increases beyond the 2.5% totaling \$8,979.
- An increase of 3% for NRC tuition rates for the North River School, Learning Center ASD and Learning Center MD. Independence Academy will have a 3.95% increase in tuition. In addition, there will no longer be any reciprocity agreements and the FY25 budget reflects a 15% surcharge for non -member districts with no impact to transportation as it is a separate rate calculation.

Mr. Tzovolos highlighted the Collaborative programs over the past year including the addition of a Learning Center classroom at Bryantville, North River School's staff development in the areas of tier two substance use intervention, structured reading intervention, and DEI practices as well as Independence Academy's addition of an outreach consultant and a ten-day and forty-five-day Upper Course program at no cost to the districts all through grant allocations. Mr. Tzovolos also stated that he plans to increase TVI staffing for the Learning Center in FY25 and increase substance use training and stronger reading interventions at North River School.

Marie Grable reviewed the new SAILS Transition Program (Students Achieving Independent Living Skills) for FY25. The tuition will be \$64,165 for the school year. Staffing will include a 1.0 FTE lead teacher/transition specialist, two 1.0 FTE Job Coaches and a .5 FTE Community Outreach and Recruitment Coordinator. Ms.

Grable offered a tuition comparison to other post-graduate transition support programs and North River Collaborative's SAILS program falls in line with similar transition age programs. Ms. Grable also informed the Board that the previous Summer Work and Learning program will be re-booted and incorporated into the SAILS program. The program will need one classroom for the school year and possibly two for the summer. Chairman Cron asked the Board how many member districts currently had transition age programs and 6 out of the 10 member districts responded that they have transition age programs.

Ellen George presented the FY25 District Services rates which will increase by 3% for all services with the exception of Visually Impaired (TVI) and Orientation and Mobility (O&M) which will increase by 8%. Ms. George pointed out that the Collaborative rates are significantly lower than the Carroll Center for the Blind for vision services and told the Board that there will be a .04 FTE increase in TVI staffing for FY25 as well as continued recruitment for TVI and O&M staffing, which is a priority.

Marie Grable presented the MSW Intern rates for FY25:

- 2-day interns for 16 hours per week for 30 weeks with one hour per week for supervision will be \$10,268
- 3-day interns for 24 hours per week for 30 weeks with on hour per week for supervision will be \$14,800
- The BHI Social Worker contracts will have a 3% increase. Ms. Grable offered that there are currently six social work interns in East Bridgewater and West Bridgewater. Superintendent Liz Legault (EB) stated she would like two more interns for next school year. Superintendents Joe Baeta (Stoughton), Jeff Szymaniak (WH) and Matt Ferron (Hanover) are interested in getting interns for next year as well.

Paul Tzovolos advised the Board that School Based Medicaid will remain at 6.5% or 7.5% of cash received for clients depending upon enrollment in the program. New clients will be enrolled at the 7.5% rate. The NRC Professional Development program's rates are individually calculated via a formula and based upon presenter, materials, and administrative fees. Surcharges are applied for non-member districts and vary based on this formula. Mr. Tzovolos went on to state that School Based Medicaid and Professional Development are seeking to add additional clients. Mr. Tzovolos also told the Board that Crisis Prevention and Intervention (CPI) training is now offered to member districts. Title III training is also available to member districts at no charge.

Mr. Tzovolos reviewed the proposed increase of 3% to the Transportation program next year. This rate is based on the individualized formula that accounts for distance, student count, and other factors. Mr. Tzovolos went on to say that salary and bonus updates as well as recruitment and advertising in FY24 is helping to build capacity for FY25. He also advised that \$600,000 will be set aside in FY25 for the purchase of new vans to maintain and build the current fleet.

Ellen George provided the Board with the following:

- Salary Assumptions (increases/steps/lanes) = \$334,159
- OPEB funding set aside = \$175,000
- 10% increase in utilities, and auto insurance
- 15% increase in professional and general liabilities
- 6% increase in health insurance
- Materials, Facilities, SAILS program startup and Professional Development expense adjustments were reviewed

The FY25 Preliminary Budget is \$14,728,379-and increase of 3.3% or \$472,027 from FY24 with the following factors contributed to this increase:

- Addition to SAILS school year and summer program
 - Projected transportation billing due to continued hiring in FY24
 - Increased rates, maintenance, repair and goods/service costs
 - Addition of 1.0 FTE BCBA and 0.4 FTE TVI staff for District Services and Program Support
1. Treasurer Certification of FY 25 Budget- Mr. Tzovolos advised the Board that the Treasurer, Art Sullivan had certified the FY25 budget. Mr. Sullivan's letter of certification is included in the Board packet.
 2. Questions or Feedback:
 - Mr. Tzovolos told the Board that he is developing a loaner program of NRC equipment to help the member districts with their equipment needs for students.
 - Supt. Legault asked about DEI training and/or audits and what the Collaborative could do to assist the member districts with their DEI needs. Mr. Tzovolos offered to create a job description and send it to the members for their input. If NRC hires a DEI Coordinator it will have to be with a pre-commitment from the districts to fund the position. Both Supt. Legault and Supt. Ferron agreed that the Collaborative is the best model for this program.
 - Supt. Joe Baeta would like to see the creation of a 3-to-5-year Capital Plan. Mr. Tzovolos acknowledges that this is an area of need and will be an upcoming task to be taken on by the NRC Admin Team.

- B. FY24 Budget Update-General Fund Revenue and Expense Projection-** Ms. George stated that the governmental report reflected \$380,000 worth of depreciation. She also noted that she is monitoring the number of requested transportation routes in the cue for additional drivers hired.

Motion: Joe Baeta made a motion to accept the FY24 Budget Update-General Fund Revenue and Expense Projection. Ryan Powers seconded the motion. Motion carried unanimously.

- C. Approval of the transfer of \$175,000 from North River Collaborative's general fund to the Retirees Health Insurance Trust for the purpose of paying retirees health insurance and for future payments**

Motion: Liz Legault made a motion to approve the transfer of \$175,000 from the North River Collaborative's general fund to the Retiree's Health Insurance Trust for the purpose of paying retirees health insurance and for future payments. Julie Hamilton second the motion. Motion carried unanimously.

- D. Availability of Space for Classrooms for FY25 –** Mr. Tzovolos told the Board that with the addition of the SAILS program, the Collaborative is in need of one classroom for the school year and 2 for the summer SAILS program. Mr. Tzovolos also said that he would like to combine the East Bridgewater and West Bridgewater programs under the same roof.
- E. Communication and Board Input on Unanticipated Program Expansions-**Mr. Tzovolos advised the Board of an amendment to the FY24 budget to prepare for an earlier start to the SAILS program. He also noted that there was a change to the North River School budget which is a budget neutral change. Mr. Tzovolos told the Board he wants to make sure that NRC is balancing their responsibilities to the Board while not overstepping. Chairman Cron stated that he wants the board to have flexibility. Supt.

Schafer said that he appreciates the communication with the districts to know what is coming up through the pipeline.

- F. Job Description Approval-** Mr. Tzovolos reviewed the job descriptions created for the new SAILS program.
- 1. Transition Specialist Teacher**
 - 2. Job Coach**

Motion: Liz Legault made a motion to accept the SAILS job description for the Transition Specialist Teacher and a Job Coach. Jeff Szymaniak seconded the motion. Motion carried unanimously.

- G. FY24 Budget Amendment-SAILS Program Implementation Plan-**Mr. Tzovolos explained the FY24 budget amendment reflects the prorated tuition for 4 students, is level budgeted and budget neutral against the tuition. If the positions posted for the program cannot be filled, then the amendment to the budget will not be carried out.

Motion: Jeff Szymaniak made a motion to approve the FY24 Budget Amendment for the SAILS program provided the positions to start the program are filled. Liz Legault seconded the motion. Motion carried unanimously.

H. Acceptance of Staff Resignations, Hires, Terminations, and Changes in Contract

Motion: Peter Schafer made a motion to accept the staff resignations, hires, terminations, and changes to contract. Liz Legault seconded the motion. Motion carried unanimously.

- I. Other Matters of Interest to the Board Members:**
1. Chairman Alan Cron would like to see continued emphasis for DEI training for districts, specifically the district point people and special education teachers. He would also like continued IEP training, especially as to what clarifies an IEP.

IV. Informational

- A. Professional Development Listing
- B. March 1, 2024 at 11:30 AM Central Office Staff Budget Presentation-Virtual

Motion to adjourn: Joe Baeta made a motion to adjourn. Jeff Szymaniak seconded the motion. Motion carried unanimously.

Meeting adjourned at 10:15 AM.

Respectfully submitted by:
Julie Hamilton, Board Secretary
NRC Board of Directors