

HOPATCONG BOARD OF EDUCATION

REGULAR MEETING MINUTES

December 15, 2025

6:00 pm. Open the Meeting and enter Executive Session in the Administration Building: Room 21

Public Portion will begin at 7:00 p.m in the Board Meeting Room

2 Windsor Avenue, Hopatcong, NJ 07843

CALL TO ORDER

Time: 7:08 pm

1. **FLAG SALUTE**

2. **OPENING STATEMENT**

In accordance with Section 5 of the Open Public Meetings Act, Chapter 231, P.L. 1975, this public body, the Hopatcong Board of Education hereby announces that The New Jersey Herald and the Daily Record have been notified by email that this Board of Education Regular Meeting will take place at 7:00 p.m following the Executive Session (in room 21) which starts at 6:00 p.m. on December 15, 2025 at the Hopatcong Board of Education, Board meeting room in the Administration Building.

3. **ROLL CALL**

Present	Natalia Cappello	Absent	Kevin Daviau	Present	Veronica Schram
Present	James Chaffee, Jr.	Present	Philip DiStefano	Present	Jennifer Polowchena
Absent	Jayson Cittrich	Present	Jayna Gulan	Present	Nicole Falconi-Shubert

4. **EXECUTIVE SESSION**

A motion will be made that the Hopatcong Board of Education will enter Executive Session in room 21 to discuss personnel and attorney/client privilege, which are exempt from public participation pursuant to New Jersey Public Law 1975, Chapter 231, Open Public Meetings Act. Any discussions held by the Board which need not remain confidential will be made public when appropriate. Minutes of the Executive Session will not be disclosed until the need for confidentiality no longer exists. The Board will reconvene in public session at 7:00 p.m. following the executive session.

Motion to enter executive session:

(ACTION) Motion by Polowchena. seconded by DiStefano

Yes	Natalia Cappello	Absent	Kevin Daviau	Yes	Veronica Schram
Yes	James Chaffee, Jr.	Yes	Philip DiStefano	Yes	Jennifer Polowchena
Absent	Jayson Cittrich	Yes	Jayna Gulan	Yes	Nicole Falconi-Shubert

5. **RECONVENE**

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Motion to Reconvene

(ACTION) Motion by Polowchenaseconded by Cappello

Yes	Natalia Cappello	Absent	Kevin Daviau	Yes	Veronica Schram
Yes	James Chaffee, Jr.	Yes	Philip DiStefano	Yes	Jennifer Polowchena
Absent	Jayson Cittrich	Yes	Jayna Gulan	Yes	Nicole Falconi-Shubert

6. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Approval of the minutes of the following meetings, as reported by the Board Secretary reviewed by the Board President and members of the Board:

- November 24, 2025 - Regular Meeting
- November 24, 2025 - Executive Meeting

Motion to approve 6a-6b:

(ACTION) Motion by Polowchena. Seconded by Schram

Yes	Natalia Cappello	Absent	Kevin Daviau	Yes	Veronica Schram
Yes	James Chaffee, Jr.	Abstain	Philip DiStefano	Yes	Jennifer Polowchena
Absent	Jayson Cittrich	Yes	Jayna Gulan	Yes	Nicole Falconi-Shubert

7. SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT AND HIB REPORT

- Student Representatives, **Natalia Gerena-Roman** congratulated all who auditioned for and made the NJ Area Band: 7 out of 9 Hopatcong students were placed and 5 out of those 7 were placed in the selective wind ensemble. On 12/6 the Holiday Ensemble performed at the town tree lighting and at 8:45am this morning they were live on WSUS. There will be a total of 5 auditions for Region 1 Honors Band which is for the top 1/3 of High schools in NJ and they are hoping for a good turnout. The Holiday Door decorating contest is going on at the HS this week and the NHS Giving Tree is looking for donations for families. **Reagan Gravatt** noted that Spirit Week is this week with the Pep Rally on Friday. Some events are Cookie Eating contest, Tug of War and a Rock, Paper, Scissors Tournament whose winner will be announced at the Pep Rally. Winter Sports photos were last Friday. Competition Cheer had their pocket book bingo last Saturday. Hockey and Boys and Girls basketball games are ongoing. Basketball Madness was a great event!
- Superintendent's Report – **Mr. Jeffrey Hallenbeck, Superintendent of Schools** noted that there was 1 HIB report on 2nd reading and a case that is not a verified HIB case for 1st reading. Mr. Hallenbeck congratulated Mr. DiStefano on his 9

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years on the Hopatcong Board of Education and wished him well. This is Phil's last meeting. Mr. Hallenbeck then wished all a wonderful holiday

- c. A second reading and approval of the Superintendent's HIB Report for November 2025 as presented to the Board at the November meeting on November 24, 2025. Approval of the Superintendent's HIB report for December 2025 for first reading and review as presented to the Board at the December meeting on December 15, 2025.

Motion to approve 7a –7c:

(ACTION) Motion by Chaffee. Seconded by Gulan

Yes	Natalia Cappello	Absent	Kevin Daviau	Yes	Veronica Schram
Yes	James Chaffee, Jr.	Yes	Philip DiStefano	Yes	Jennifer Polowchena
Absent	Jayson Cittrich	Yes	Jayna Gulan	Yes	Nicole Falconi-Shubert

8. **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS/CORRESPONDENCE**

- a. Congratulations to **Hopatcong High School Students** who made **High Honor Roll and Honor Roll** for the first marking period of the 2025 – 2026 school year
- b. Congratulations to **Hopatcong Middle School Students** who made **High Honor Roll and Honor Roll** for the first marking period of the 2025-2026 school year.
- c. Congratulations to the following students who were chosen as **Hopatcong Middle School's Students-of-the-Month** for their outstanding performance in November 2025:
Grade 4- Evelyn Kreusch
Grade 5- Sofia Andonova
Grade 6- Elyse Santa
Grade 7- Alexa Emblem

9. **PARENT/TEACHER ORGANIZATION REPRESENTATIVES**

Nicole Roman-Gerena noted that the Music Boosters are selling Marching Chiefs Blankets for \$20 which will make lovely Christmas gifts. The Holiday Ensemble at the Tree lighting was successful. "Hundreds of students from schools in Northern NJ auditioned for the North Jersey Area Honors Band. Natalia Gerena-Roman placed 1st on Piccolo and 2nd on Flute; Natalie Leybov placed 4th on Clarinet; Ashlynn Loven placed 1st on Bass Clarinet; Sofia Leybov placed 4th on Trumpet. Their high chair placements earned them a spot in the highly prestigious Wind Ensemble. For the symphonic Band: Emily O'Hern placed on Clarinet and Dominick Amella placed on trumpet (first chair on Trumpet."

Nicole Falconi-Shubert noted that the PTSO Tricky Tray will be March 21, 2026 and will be partnered with Project Graduation 26'. The Boosters Basketball Madness was a great event and it was great to see the Rec players and school players interact at all age levels! Concession stand proceeds from all basketball games will go to Scholar/Athlete

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scholarships. Last year they were able to provide five, \$1,000 scholarships and would love to increase that amount this year.

Jennifer Polowchena reported that Project Graduation is looking for donations of water bottles, gift cards, snacks, etc.; The Wizards will be here on January 20, 2026 and there will be an assembly for students on January 12. The axe throwing fundraiser will be held on December 27, 2025 and flyers will be going out shortly.

10. **PUBLIC COMMENT – GENERAL DISCUSSION**

Stacy Yanko Thanked Mr. Philip DiStefano for his years of service on the board and felt privileged to work with him over many years, especially in his position in the Rotary. He offered that this would continue as he will remain a member. Mrs. Yanko then read a statement regarding Equity and Fairness in this district and the disparate or absence of compensation for the growing demands on school staff between teaching and support staff and administrators. In addition, she implored the board for the replacement of a crisis counselor for the high school.

11. **FINANCE**

Approval of the following Finance items, 11a. – 11i, as recommended by the Superintendent of Schools:

- a. It is recommended by the Superintendent that bills for the General Fund and Special Revenues (Grants) account, November 24, 2025, through December 15, 2025 be revised and approved in the following amounts:

General Fund and Special Revenue (Grants) account -	\$1,259,387.62
Cafeteria account -	\$0
Fund 30 -	\$17,050.00
- b. It is recommended by the Superintendent that the board approve the Treasurer's Report for the month of November 2025.
- c. It is recommended by the Superintendent that the board approve the Board Secretary's Report for the month of November 2025.
- d. It is recommended by the Superintendent that the board approve the Transfer Report for the month of November 2025.
- e. Motion to approve the certification by the Board Secretary that the Account Balance Report, pursuant to N.J.S.A. 18A:17-9, as of December 15, 2025, no line item account has encumbrances and expenditures, which in total exceed the line item appropriation in violation of N.J.A.C. 6A:23-2.11(a).
- f. Motion to certify, in accordance with N.J.A.C. 6A:23-2.11(c), as of December 15, 2025, after review of the Board Secretary's and Treasurer's Monthly Financial Reports and upon consultation with the appropriate district officials, to the best of our knowledge no major account or fund has been over-expended in violation of N.J.A.C. 6A:23-2.11(b), and sufficient funds are available to meet the district's financial obligations for the remainder of the fiscal year.
- g. It is recommended by the Superintendent that Mrs. Susan Dykstra be appointed as Treasurer of School Monies January 1, 2026 through June 30, 2026.
- h. Acceptance of the Annual Comprehensive Financial Report (ACFR) and the Auditor's Management Report (AMR) for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2025, as

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recommended by the Superintendent and as reviewed by the Operations Committee.

- i. It is recommended by the Superintendent that the board accept the donation of \$25.00, (check no. 8520) from Ron Chas Inc. for the Hopatcong High School Holiday Fundraiser.

Motion to approve 11a – 11i:

(ACTION) Motion by Polowchena. Seconded by Cappello

Yes	Natalia Cappello	Absent	Kevin Daviau	Yes	Veronica Schram
Yes	James Chaffee, Jr.	Yes	Philip DiStefano	Yes	Jennifer Polowchena
Absent	Jayson Cittrich	Yes	Jayna Gulan	Yes	Nicole Falconi-Shubert

12. **PERSONNEL**

Approval of the following personnel items, **12a – 12j**, as recommended by the Superintendent of Schools and the Student Achievement Committee of the Board:

- a. Approval of employment of **Michael Strack** as Part-Time Custodian effective December 16, 2026, with a prorated salary of \$28,587.50, minus \$400 for not having a black seal, which reflects step 1 of the 2025-2026 HEA custodian guide.
- b. Approval of **Employee #80064** to take a leave of absence using earned sick leave effective January 5, 2026 with an estimated return date of February 16, 2026.
- c. Approval of a stipend for **Matthew Robinson** in the amount of \$100 per day for fulfilling the role of Acting Director of Special Services, effective January 5, 2026, for the remainder of the 2025–2026 school year.
- d. Approval of **Mike Farrell** and **Kelcey Russo** as High School Portfolio Instructors at a rate of \$35/hour up to 60 hours each. (Title I Funds)
- e. Approval of **Nancy Drury** as Middle School Science Temporary Assistance Position, for the purpose of lesson planning and grading at a rate of \$35 per hour for 1-2 hours per week/per class period.
- f. Approval of **Hilary Martin** as Middle School Physical Education Temporary Assistance Position, for the purpose of lesson planning and grading at a rate of \$35 per hour for 1-2 hours per week/per class period.
- g. Approval of **Hannah Schulz** to conduct observation hours at the Middle School in conjunction with TCNJ.

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- h. Approval of the following **Extra Duty/Extra Pay** Positions for the 2025-2026 school year:

Name	Nature of Action	Position	Salary
Susan Pallotta Alexa McLean	Appoint	High School Saturday Detention	\$100/day

- i. Approval of the following **Coach/Advisor** Positions for the 2025-2026 school year:

Name	Nature of Action	Position	Class	Level	Salary
Kristen O'Shea	Rescind	HS Chorus	C	3	\$2,332

- j. Approval of the following substitutes:
1. Victoria Takach, Substitute Teacher
 2. Mitchell Meyer, Substitute Teacher
 3. Haley Emerling, Substitute Paraprofessional
 4. Elislaine Dos Santos, Substitute Paraprofessional
 5. Grace Waldron, Substitute Paraprofessional

Motion to approve 12a-12j:

(ACTION) Motion by Cappello seconded by Polowchena

Yes	Natalia Cappello	Absent	Kevin Daviau	Yes	Veronica Schram
Yes	James Chaffee, Jr.	Yes	Philip DiStefano	Yes	Jennifer Polowchena
Absent	Jayson Cittrich	Yes	Jayna Gulan	Yes	Nicole Falconi-Shubert

13. **TRAVEL AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

Resolved, that the Hopatcong Board of Education approve travel costs as related in this resolution which are educationally necessary and fiscally prudent and are related to and within the scope of the employee's current responsibilities and promotes the delivery of instruction or furthers the efficient operation of the school district. The reimbursement listed in this resolution are in compliance with the state travel reimbursement guidelines as established by the Department of Treasury and Board of Education policy in accordance with N.J.A.C. 6A:23B-1.1. seq

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Approval of the following staff to attend Professional Development/Conference*

Name	Title	Cost	Date
Ken Olsen Hank Fattorusso	North Jersey Transition Partnership	\$0	1/8/2026

****Cost will be reimbursed upon completion of attendance and all documentation has been provided.***

14. POLICY & REGULATIONS

Approval of item 14a as recommended by the Superintendent of Schools and the Student Achievement and Operations Committees of the Board:

- a. Approval of modifications and additions to the policies and regulations of the Hopatcong Board of Education in accordance with statutory and regulatory changes for approval, as revised, for **SECOND READING:**

Policy/Regulation #

Title

P&R 9130
P&R 2535
P&R 2530

Public Complaints
Library Material
Resource materials

Motion to approve items 13 and 14a:

(ACTION) Motion by Chaffee seconded by Schram

Yes	Natalia Cappello	Absent	Kevin Daviau	Yes	Veronica Schram
Yes	James Chaffee, Jr.	Yes	Philip DiStefano	Yes	Jennifer Polowchena
Absent	Jayson Cittrich	Yes	Jayna Gulan	Yes	Nicole Falconi-Shubert

15. STUDENT AND SERVICES

Approval of the following items, 15a-15d as recommended by the Superintendent of Schools and Student Achievement Committee of the Board:

- a. Approval for 8 hours of home instruction services for student no. 13669.
Instruction will be provided by Hopatcong certificated staff at the rate of \$40.00 per hour from 12/8/25-12/11/25.
- b. Approval for a maximum of 10 hours per week of educational instruction services for student no. 13394 beginning 12/3/25, for the anticipated duration of approximately 30-60 days. Instruction will be provided by Learnwell at a rate of \$56.70 per hour.
- c. Approval of the request by the Parents/Guardians of the following students to allow them to participate in the Inter-district Public School Choice Program for September 2026, if accepted into their program:

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Student Number	Current School	Current Grade	Choice Destination
14304	Hopatcong High School	9	Lenape Valley Regional High School
16056	First Impressions Preschool	Pre-K	Byram Township School District
14285	Hopatcong High School	8	Lenape Valley Regional High School
14840	Hopatcong Middle School	4	Byram Township School District
13954	Hopatcong Middle School	6	Roxbury Public School District
13679	Hopatcong High School	9	Lenape Valley Regional High School
15477	Durban Avenue Elementary School	1	Byram Township School District
15453	Tulsa Trail Elementary School	3	Byram Township School District
15094	Tulsa Trail Elementary School	3	Byram Township School District
15093	Tulsa Trail Elementary School	3	Byram Township School District
14231	Hopatcong High School	9	Lenape Valley Regional High School
13842	Hopatcong High School	8	Lenape Valley Regional High School
13922	Hopatcong High School	8	Lenape Valley Regional High School
13898	Hopatcong High School	8	Lenape Valley Regional High School
13874	Hopatcong High School	8	Lenape Valley Regional High School
13904	Hopatcong High School	8	Lenape Valley Regional High School
14997	Hopatcong Middle School	6	Kittatinny Regional School District
16018	Durban Avenue Elementary School	1	Mine Hill School District
13869	Hopatcong High School	8	Lenape Valley Regional High School
14218	Hopatcong High School	8	Lenape Valley Regional High School, Roxbury Township School District
13914	Hopatcong High School	8	Lenape Valley Regional High School
15192	Tulsa Trail Elementary School	2	Byram Township School District
14975	Hopatcong High School	10	Lenape Valley Regional High School
14973	Hopatcong Middle School	4	Byram Township School District
15755	Durban Avenue Elementary School	K	Byram Township School District
13872	Hopatcong High School	8	Lenape Valley Regional High School
14134	Hopatcong Middle School	7	Byram Township School District
14688	Hopatcong High School	8	Lenape Valley Regional High School
15973	Hopatcong High School	8	Lenape Valley Regional High School
16077	First Impressions Preschool	Pre-K	Byram Township School District
13213	Hopatcong High School	11	Lenape Valley Regional High School
14137	Hopatcong Middle School	7	Netcong School District
16432	Hopatcong High School	9	Lenape Valley Regional High School, Morris Hills Regional District
13879	Hopatcong High School	8	Lenape Valley Regional High School
13896	Hopatcong High School	8	Lenape Valley Regional High School, Roxbury Public School District
15967	Durban Avenue Elementary School	K	Byram Township School District
16078	First Impressions Preschool	PK	Byram Township School District

d. Approval of the following field trips:

Trip	School
UCA Cheerleading Nationals	High School
NJAC Student Leadership Summit	High School

Motion to approve 15a-15d:

(ACTION) Motion by Polowchena seconded by DiStefano

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Yes	James Chaffee, Jr.	Yes	Philip DiStefano	Yes	Jennifer Polowchena
Absent	Jayson Cittrich	Yes	Jayna Gulan	Yes	Nicole Falconi-Shubert ^

* Mrs. Schram Abstain 15c

^ Mrs. Falconi-Shubert Abstain 15 c

16. SUSSEX COUNTY REGIONAL COOPERATIVE

- a. The Superintendent and the Director of Transportation recommend the **approval of bills** for the Sussex County Regional Cooperative Operating account for November 25, 2025 through December 15, 2025 in the amount of \$41,106.45 for Regular bills and \$ \$4,433,788.55 for Contractor bills.
- b. The Superintendent and the Director of Transportation recommend the **approval of travel** to attend the Annual NJ Pupil Transportation Conference and Exhibit Show in Atlantic City, NJ, March 25-27, 2026. The conference costs are in compliance with the state travel reimbursement guidelines/state waiver. Total cost of conference registration, lodging, meals, tolls and mileage not to exceed \$3,021.00 for the following staff: Janine Byrnes, Nick Fairchild and Chris Verdi.
- c. The Superintendent and the Director of Transportation recommend the **approval of contracted sick day pay** for 150 days @ \$50.00 per day to Employee # 80269 as per contract.
- d. The Superintendent and the Director of Transportation recommend the **approval to hire Vanessa Giarusso** as a Bus Driver for the 2025-2026 school Year at the salary of \$35,790.30, prorated from the start date of January 1, 2026, pending final pre-employment clearance.
- e.
 1. The Superintendent and the Director of Transportation recommend the **acceptance** of student transportation **quotations for Special Education School Year Routes** for the 2025-2026 School Year as listed on Exhibit A.
 2. The Superintendent and the Director of Transportation recommend the **award** of student transportation **quotations for Special Education School Year Routes** to the lowest, responsible and responsive bus contractor companies for the 2025-2026 School Year as listed on Exhibit A.

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3. The Superintendent and the Director of Transportation recommend the ***approval of route contract addendums*** for the 2025-2026 School Year as listed on Exhibit A.
4. The Superintendent and the Director of Transportation recommend the ***acceptance*** of student transportation ***quotations for Athletic/Class/Field Trips*** for the 2025-2026 School Year as listed on Exhibit A.
5. The Superintendent and the Director of Transportation recommend the ***award*** of student transportation ***contracts for quoted Athletic/Class/Field Trips*** to the lowest, responsible and responsive bus contractor companies for the 2025-2026 School Year as listed on Exhibit A.
6. The Superintendent and the Director of Transportation recommend the ***renewal of 2024-2025 School Year Routes for the 2025-2026 School Year*** at State issued CPI increase of 3.57% or less as listed on Exhibit A.
7. The Superintendent and the Director of ***Transportation recommend the acceptance of bids submitted from November 4, 2025 Bid #2025-26-08*** for the 2025-2026 School Year as listed on Exhibit A
8. The Superintendent and the Director of Transportation recommend the ***award of bids submitted from the November 4, 2025 Bid #2025-26-08*** to the lowest, responsible and responsive bus contractor company for the 2025-2026 School Year as listed on Exhibit A.
9. The Superintendent and the Director of Transportation recommend the ***rejection of bids submitted from the November 4, 2025 Bid #2025-26-08*** due to cost exceeding allowable amount, non-compliance or termination of the routes as listed on Exhibit A.
10. The Superintendent and the Director of ***Transportation recommend the acceptance of bids submitted from November 12, 2025 Bid #2025-26-09*** for the 2025-2026 School Year as listed on Exhibit A
11. The Superintendent and the Director of Transportation recommend the ***award of bids submitted from the November 12, 2025 Bid #2025-26-09*** to the lowest, responsible and responsive bus contractor company for the 2025-2026 School Year as listed on Exhibit A.

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12. The Superintendent and the Director of Transportation recommend the ***rejection of bids submitted from the November 12, 2025 Bid #2025-26-09*** due to cost exceeding allowable amount, non-compliance or termination of the routes as listed on Exhibit A.

Motion to approve 16a-116e:

(ACTION) Motion by Polowchena seconded by Schram

Yes	Natalia Cappello	Absent	Kevin Daviau	Yes	Veronica Schram
Yes	James Chaffee, Jr.	Yes	Philip DiStefano	Yes	Jennifer Polowchena
Absent	Jayson Cittrich	Yes	Jayna Gulan	Yes	Nicole Falconi-Shubert

17. **BOARD OF EDUCATION MEMBER COMMENTS**

Mr. Chaffee – Happy Holidays!

Dr. Cappello – Happy Holidays and thank you to Tammy Miller for her many years of service.

Mrs. Gulan – Happy Hanukah, Happy Holidays to all.

Mrs. Polowchena – Happy Holidays and to Tammy Miller, enjoy your retirement.

Mr. DiStefano – Congratulations to Tammy and thanks to all for putting up with him. We have an amazing community. Mr. DiStefano advised the board members to pay attention to the financials. Mr. DiStefano then makes a motion to name the library or cafeteria after the Lake Hopatcong Rotary Club. They contribute scholarships every year and have always been big supporters of the district and continue to support Justin McCarthy and his astronomy pursuits and Observatory. President Falconi-Shubert notes that the board would discuss honoring the Rotary Club in some way at a later date.

Mrs. Schram – Thanked Phil for his service and wished all a Happy Holiday and Happy New Year.

Mrs. Falconi-Shubert – Wished everyone Happy Holidays and thanked Joan Marshall for her 38 years of service to the district as a bus driver and in many other positions.

18. **ADJOURNMENT**

Motion to adjourn:

(ACTION) Motion by DiStefano. seconded by Polowchena

All in favor: Yes Time: 7:44pm

Respectfully submitted,



Jeff Hallenbeck, Board Secretary