

Columbia School Board Meeting Minutes

Date	3/4/2025		
Time	5:15 pm School Board Meeting		
Location	CAES Business Room		
Chairperson	Stacey Campbell		
School Board Members		Principal	SAU Members
P-Stacey Campbell	P-Diane Little	P-Kim Wheelock	P-Dana Hilliard
P-Kristin Brooks			P-Bridget Cross
Public Present: Susan and Harry Porter			
Item	Subject		
1.	Roll Call: All Members Present The meeting was called to order by School Board Chair Stacey Campbell at 5:21pm.		
2.	Hearing of the Public- Mr. and Mrs. Porter asked why the tax rate increased significantly for the 2025 tax rate. Board Chair Campbell explained there were several reasons for the increase to include an additional 8 students and loss of adequacy aid from the state as well as less fund balance on hand. The board and public discussed the tax rates compared to their other home in Maine and how the education funding in NH is very low and the burden is on the local taxpayers compared to Maine.		
3.	Agenda Adjustments: Dana has a letter to read and have the board authorize for the chair to sign and send to ENSU (Canaan) in regards to the chatter regarding an Interstate agreement.		
4.	Reading of the Minutes: <ul style="list-style-type: none">Columbia School Board Meeting Minutes of February 4, 2025Columbia School Board Public Hearing Minutes of February 4, 2025 Motion made by Diane Little and seconded by Kristin Brooks to approve both minutes as written. VOTE:Motion Carries		
5.	Kim Wheelock - Principal Report Kim had nothing to report this evening.		
6.	Emilie Hall – CTE Director Emilie wasn't present and she doesn't have anything to report this evening.		
7.	Dana Hilliard - Superintendent Report <p>March Report- Strength Within: On January 29th I received communication from Superintendent Jennifer Lawcewicz regarding inquires from the public during her budget presentation on exploring consolidation in our area on an interstate school district. I have attached email communications and responses.</p> <p>I informed Jennifer that continuing to work together, share resources and strengthen the relationship between both of our districts is something that we can absolutely continue to do. However, a model which involves consolidation of SAU 7 with the ENSU district is not something which is a priority with this office and not something I am interested in exploring. I further went on to explain that if such a model was to be explored, it would be between the three schools in SAU 7 that this office would advocate for.</p> <p>At the 2-10-25 school board meeting in Canaan the topic was raised and a discussion incurred. I have included the recording of that meeting.</p>		

https://core-docs.s3.us-east-1.amazonaws.com/documents/asset/uploaded_file/3702/exsu19/5311673/CSD_2025-02-10_MP3.mp3

The discussion begins on 26.24 on that tape. You will hear as part of the recording that the Cannan Board is now planning on directly reaching out to each Chair to see if the Boards will begin discussions with them on exploring an Interstate model. They believed that the Superintendents should be left out of this discussion, and it should be a board to board talk now. (I wonder if I had agreed to explore this model if that plan would have been the same).

Each board Chair should expect a letter from the Cannan School Board or the ENSU inquiring if they wish to pursue this option. I am your only employee and work at the direction and discretion of you. You do know my two cents on this issue, however. Our strength comes from within SAU 7.

Since arriving here, I have witnessed the amazing high level of education delivered in all three of our schools. I am also proud of the dedication towards excellence in public education from every member of ALL five boards. If in the future a cooperative model is what you wish to explore, then I encourage you to look within. Often, we fall victim to thinking others have the answers to our greatness, when if we only took the time to pause and observe our own inner strength, we would realize that the key to our success is us.

Last October when we gathered for our SAU Board Goal Setting Goals number 2 and 3 set guidelines on the path of our vision.

Goal #2: Academics, Enrichment, ELO's Goal Summary: Utilizing all the resources in all schools and the communities to enhance the academics, enrichment and ELO's for all students. This will provide a well-rounded quality education for all students. The individual goals that made up the category

Goal #3: Resource Sharing Goal Summary: Better understanding of what SAU 7 offers – share these resources (staff, buildings, transportation) while remaining independent Lower taxes and expenses Increase collaboration between all members of SAU 7 Inventory of what we have!

This office views our goals as a living and breathing document and has been utilizing it since its creation. It has aided in guiding and grounding all the leadership, administrative team, and boards work. Just this week I had a follow up conversation with Rick Alpers from Primex to start the planning for next years goal setting session.

I am pleased with what we have accomplished since October, making headway on our goals. I am equally pleased with the high level of collaboration which is occurring between all the towns and schools which comprise SAU 7. OUR goals and OUR vision are what should continue to be OUR focus. And with all due respect, OUR pathway should not be dictated by other state.

As part of our adopted goals, I will continue to strengthen our relationship with Canaan and explore all means of how we can support each other. But as I have told

Jennifer, the State of Vermont needs to realize that the buses go both ways across the bridge.

You are the policy setters, and if other directions are what you as boards wish to explore then this office will guide you. Just know, as your Superintendent, I believe the strength to our success lies within.

On Wed, Jan 29, 2025 at 8:48 AM Jennifer Lawcewicz <jlawcewicz@ensvt.org> wrote:

Dana-

We had our budget presentation on Monday this week and it went great. We had several community members asking about the potential for exploring consolidation in our area (an interstate school district). I wanted to reach out to let you know that this conversation is coming up and I wanted to also see if your boards and community is in support of engaging in this work.

I will be adding the topic to the Canaan School District agenda for February 10th for discussion.

Jennifer Lawcewicz Superintendent

Essex North Supervisory Union

On Wed, Jan 29, 2025 at 10:25 AM Dana Hilliard <dana.hilliard@sau7.org> wrote:
Good morning,

Continuing to explore models in which we can support each other is absolutely something we can explore. Going down the road of formation of exploring consolidation of an interstate school district is not something which is on this office's agenda at this time. If that topic were to arise, I would encourage the board to look at a model that aligns the three schools within SAU 7. I am open to exploring how students from both sides of the river can continue to access the wide variety of courses we offer, including sharing teachers/staff.

As always, I am open to sitting down with you and discussing any topic.

D.

Dana then read a letter for the board to sign and approve the board chair to sign. The letter reads as follows:

SAU 7 prides itself on the model of collaboration which reflects our mission statement of "To prepare all SAU 7 students for success in whatever path they choose". This mission statement comes to practice each day within all three schools that comprise SAU 7. It is also grounded within our approaches of governing our district with the five boards and joint board which help shape the policies of success for all of SAU 7.

Our unofficial motto "United but Independent", reflects that spirit of partnership between all boards while honoring the uniqueness of each of the five towns. SAU 7 looks forward to continuing the partnership and collaboration with ENSU (Canaan) and exploring models where resources can be shared and utilized.

Our focus would be on sharing resources and not entering into a consolidation interstate

	<p>agreement or model. If SAU 7 were to explore a consolidation model the focus would be to study, explore and implement a model which was based upon the three schools (Colebrook Academy and Elementary School, Stewartstown Community School, The Pittsburg School) and includes all five districts within SAU 7.</p> <p>SAU 7 looks forward to continuing to strengthen our relationship and collaborative model while creating pathways of success for all our students.</p> <p>Dana also informed the board that Vermont has introduced a plan to consolidate the entire state into 5 districts. If you are part of an interstate agreement you are exempt from this forced merger.</p> <p>Kristin Brooks made the motion and Diane Little seconded to approve the letter that was drafted and to give the Board Chair permission to sign the letter.</p> <p>VOTE: Motion Carries</p> <p>Stacey commented that she would like to add to the minutes that Columbia has had an AREA agreement with Colebrook since 1970. It's a great school and we have an amazing working relationship with Colebrook.</p>
8.	<p>Bridget Cross – Business Manager</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Annual Meeting Discussion – Bridget suggested that the document created that compares the # of pupils, budgets, etc.. should be provided at the Annual school district meeting. The board has decided that they will table the Warrant Article for the trust funds in the amount of \$50,000 at the Annual District meeting. This would decrease the tax rate an additional \$0.56.
9.	Non-Public Session: None
10.	<p>Next Meeting Date:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Columbia Annual School District Meeting Tuesday, March 11, 2025 @ 7:15 pm Columbia Town Office Columbia School Board Meeting April 1, 2025 @ 5:15 pm CAES Business Room
11.	<p>Adjournment: Kristin Brooks made the motion and Diane Little seconded to adjourn.</p> <p>VOTE: Motion Carries</p> <p>Respectfully Submitted: Bridget Cross</p> <p>Board Adopted: April 1, 2025</p>

