

THE WESTFIELD NEWS

Gateway School Committee votes to restore positions using stabilization funds

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From left, Gateway Regional central office assistant James Hayes, School Committee chair Jason Forgue, Superintendent Melissa Matarazzo and Business

Manager Amy Mason discuss budget cuts at March 11 meeting. (AMY PORTER / THE WESTFIELD NEWS) The Westfield News



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HUNTINGTON — At a special meeting on March 16 to discuss and vote on the school budget, the Gateway School Committee voted to restore positions slated to be cut in the initial budget proposal by moving \$383,832 intended for capital stabilization into the general fund. Some of the funds in the capital stabilization account were contributed by the towns towards a new roof.

At the start of the meeting, Superintendent Melissa Matarazzo presented four options to the committee. The first option was to project rural school funding at \$16 million statewide and put \$971,316 in the Gateway Regional budget, the amount they were originally slated to receive for this school year before rural school aid was reduced to \$12 million statewide in December, 2025.

The first budget proposal had the lower amount of \$652,419 for rural school aid that the district actually received this year after the reduction to \$12 million statewide.

Matarazzo said this option would add \$318,897 to the general fund, and would restore several positions, including the assistant director of pupil services, .2 FTE music to Chester Elementary, one instructional assistant at Littleville Elementary, one school adjustment counselor, one wood shop teacher and one instructional assistant at Gateway Regional. Option one would contribute \$794,195 to the Capital Stabilization Fund.

Matarazzo said this is the option that she and the business manager were recommending.

None of the options presented would increase funding to the towns.

“It is a risk. We have moved expenses that are not people into rural school aid,” Matarazzo said, adding that the risk of not being able to pass the budget in the towns is weighed against that.

The other three options presented involved moving funds intended for the capital stabilization account into the general fund, with differing amounts and positions restored. Only option four, which was ultimately voted for by the committee, restored the same number of positions as option one, and was received most favorably by the committee.

Blandford School Committee member Nicole Daviau, who participated remotely, asked what would happen if they voted for option one and rural school aid came in at less than the \$16 million statewide. "How do we address that," she asked.

Matarazzo said they would address it the same way they did this year. When it came in lower, they made it up over the course of the year. She said to lessen the impact, in the new budget proposal, they moved people and classroom impacts out of rural school aid into expenses.

Business Manager Amy Mason said there are often new grant applications and multi-year grants available, which is how they were able to handle the funding reduction this year.

Chester School Committee representative Brian Forgue asked if they voted to move funds from capital stabilization, and then rural school aid comes in higher than anticipated, could they restore the stabilization account?

Mason said that since capital stabilization is non-foundation money and part of the general fund, and rural school aid is grant money and not part of the general fund, it might not work that way.

Later in the meeting, School Committee member Jason Forgue asked retired Assistant Superintendent and Business Manager Stephanie Fisk, who was also attending remotely, if that transfer would be possible. Fisk said it would not. She said the money from stabilization would go into the general fund, and rural school aid would have to be spent out and treated as a grant. Any leftover money in the general fund would go to the excess and deficiency account at the end of the year, and there would be a wait of six months for it to be certified before it could be transferred.

Mason said moving capital stabilization funds into the general budget would bring the budget back up, but would burden the towns with a higher amount that they would be assessed the following year.

Jason Forgue said he was happy that the district had projected the lower amount of \$12 million statewide for rural school aid in the budget this year. He also said the committee was trying to cram the discussion into one week that should have been taken up two months earlier.

"I think it will be our job as committee members to sell it," said Brian Forgue. He said they needed to explain to the towns that some of the additional dollars they gave to capital stabilization this year are needed for services. "This is what it means for the kids," he said.

Jason Forgue said even if they did not transfer any funds from capital stabilization, at the end of next year, they would have only \$1.8 million of the \$3 million needed for a new roof. "We're going to have to borrow money anyway," he said.

Forgue said ultimately, by the end of the meeting, the committee had to vote on an option. "Each one of these still has positions we're losing," he said, mentioning the director of technology, a position that provides resources to member towns. "Any of these proposals will not get us back to where we were," he added.

"What's not up there is option five, to restore the same positions and increase assessments (to the towns)," Forgue said. "If we send a 2.44% increase, it's just a matter of how we get there."

A motion was made to vote on option one, to increase the projection for rural school aid to \$16 million. Before the vote, Huntington Selectman John McVeigh asked if the capital stabilization funds were initially intended for a new roof.

“It’s not only for the roof, but it’s primarily for the roof,” Forgue said, adding, “We increased it to try to get closer to the roof.”

“Then you’re going to have a huge fight in Huntington,” McVeigh said.

RECOMMENDED

[Gateway Regional School Committee postpones vote on budget](#) [Mar. 17, 2026, 1:57 p.m.](#)

[Southwick Capital Expenditure Committee approves capital projects for fiscal 2027](#) [Mar. 16, 2026, 9:52 a.m.](#)

The School Committee ultimately voted down the first option to increase the projection for rural school aid due to the risk involved, with only a few members in support. Forgue said there is no evidence that rural school aid will be increased this year. “The evidence is going the other way,” he said.

Ultimately, the option to move the higher amount of \$383,832 intended for capital stabilization into the general fund, and contribute \$410,263 to the stabilization fund, passed unanimously, and the meeting was adjourned.

Forgue said he plans to attend upcoming Select Board meetings in the towns.

Amy Porter

Reporter