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—Contributor.....Virginia Ray  
—Contributor email.....ginnypray@gmail.com  
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**Notes from editor (not for publication):**

I almost titled the last bullet point “Literally, one person, one vote” after seeing how few people attended this meeting.



HEADLINE ELEMENTS:

####BEGIN HED####

1 WSESD approves \$68.9M budget a 2.6% increase

####END HED####

####BEGIN SUBHED####

2 The power went out, but the vote went on

####END SUBHED####

3 TEXT BODY:

####BEGIN TEXT####

4 With a back-up bullhorn in place and a patient crowd, a  
5 power outage didn't much faze annual meeting attendees at  
6 Brattleboro Union High School on March 17 as they voted to  
7 approve the Windham Southeast School District's (WSESD)  
8 proposed fiscal year 2027 operating budget of \$69.9 million.

9 The budget represents estimated per-pupil spending at  
10 \$15,972 — 0.8% higher than the current year.

11 Finance Committee Chair Ruby McAdoo noted an  
12 overall 2.6% budget increase to this year despite an anticipated  
13 rise in health insurance of about 7%, an expense that accounts  
14 for 13% of the total budget.

15 Saying the budget is responsive to student needs and  
16 minimally impactful on tax rates, McAdoo said it also reflects the  
17 district's continuous improvement goals, including increasing  
18 math and literacy achievement by 10%, improving graduation  
19 rates, and increasing students' "sense of belonging" by 10% over  
20 this year's measure.

21 "This budget, we believe, is our district's best effort to  
22 move forward in a way that we can afford and also to meet our  
23 goals," McAdoo said.

24 The budget reflects a reduction of nine positions, for a  
25 savings about \$800,000, that came about following community  
26 input.

27 Some members of the public in attendance viewed  
28 keeping the overall budget increase under 3% as responsible.

29 Others believed another \$400,000 to \$500,000 should  
30 have been cut. They expressed concerns over spending priorities,  
31 noting grandstand repairs at Tenney Field versus academics.

32 "There were too many missed opportunities," said  
33 community member Martha Noyes of Brattleboro, who borrowed  
34 a light from Moderator Steven Brown so she could read a  
35 statement.

36 "Members of our communities are struggling to make  
37 ends meet, are struggling to recreate their monthly budgets, and  
38 still struggling to pay their property taxes," Noyes said, noting the  
39 board, in her view, had several chances to make cuts and  
40 revisions and did not take or make them. "All people here are  
41 facing increasing costs of living."

## Other meeting notes

42  
43 • *Maintaining standards*: Some expressed skepticism  
44 about achieving repeated 10% improvement targets and  
45 cautioned against lowering standards to raise graduation rates.

46 “I don’t want you watering down the education in order  
47 to get the graduation rates up,” said former WSESD Board  
48 Member Jody Normandeau, who has been vocal about not  
49 supporting the renovations to the Tenney Field grandstand. “I  
50 want it to be true that these kids are really learning and really  
51 getting what we’re trying to teach them.”

52 • *Rucker commended*: During the meeting, Business  
53 Administrator Frank Rucker, who is set to retire at the end of  
54 December, was commended for his work and final annual  
55 meeting after 13 years of service.

56 • *Marlboro School vote*: Also discussed was the pending  
57 Marlboro School closing following a Town Meeting vote to do so  
58 due to declining enrollment.

59 Superintendent Mark Speno said he’s reached out to  
60 Marlboro families and there will be an open house at Marlboro  
61 School with WSESD administration attending on Wednesday,  
62 April 1.

63 • *Fiddling with the formula*: It was also noted that Act 73  
64 may shift to a regional funding formula around FY29 or FY30,  
65 reducing direct tuition transactions.

66 Current out-of-district tuition is \$20,000 under state law  
67 through FY29.

68 • *Directors’ compensation*: Voters also approved  
69 compensation for WSESD board directors at \$7,000 each and  
70 \$9,000 for the chair annually, totaling \$72,000 for the entire  
71 board.

72 • *Democracy in action*: Attendance, which was read into  
73 the minutes, was as follows at the annual meeting: Brattleboro  
74 voters: 78 of 9,096 voters (0.86%); Dummerston voters: 18 of

75 1,593 (1.13%); Guilford voters: 20 of 1,875 (1.07%); and Putney  
76 voters: 11 of 2,048 (0.54%).  
77 Total votes cast were 127 of 14,612 (0.87%).

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BIO/COATTAIL:

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