



**Monomoy Regional School District - Monomoy Regional School Committee
Meeting Agenda for Thursday, October 10, 2024 at 5:30 PM
Monomoy Regional High School Library, 75 Oak Street, Harwich, MA 02645**

This meeting will be broadcast to Channel 22 as well as live-streamed/recorded to the [MRSC YOUTUBE CHANNEL](#)

AGENDA

- A. Call to Order**
- B. Adjourn to Executive Session** Roll Call Vote to adjourn to Executive Session pursuant to M.G.L. c. 30A, sec. 21(a)(4) to discuss the deployment of security personnel or devices, or strategies with respect thereto. Regular Open Session to resume at approximately 6:30 PM.
- C. Approval of Minutes:** September 26, 2024 MRSC Meeting
- D. Public Comment:** Speakers are limited to three minutes; additional time is at the discretion of the Chairperson
- E. Reports and Discussions**
 - i. SHORE Food Pantry - Shana Grogan
 - ii. First Reading: 2024-2025 Superintendent Goals
 - iii. Preliminary FY26 Budget Process and Timeline
 - iv. MRHS Debt Reissuance
- F. Subcommittee, Representative, Liaison Reports**
 - i. Legislative Liaison Report - MASC Statement on Ballot Question 2 on MCAS Requirement
- G. Superintendent's Report**
 - i. Recognition of Donations, Grants, and other Acknowledgments
 - ii. October 1 Reporting
- H. Action Items - Vote Required**
- I. Presentation of the Warrants**
- J. Adjournment**

Authorized Posting Officer

Leah Tambolleo

October 7, 2024

Monomoy Regional School District - Monomoy Regional School Committee
Meeting Minutes for Thursday, September 26, 2024 at 5:30 PM
Monomoy Regional High School Library, 75 Oak Street, Harwich, MA 02645

This meeting was broadcast to Channel 22 as well as live-streamed/recorded to the [MRSC YOUTUBE CHANNEL](#)

Members present: Betty Gray, Chair; Tina Games, Vice Chair; Brad Schiff; Bre Rose; Jackie Zibrat-Long; Meredith Henderson; Jessica Rogers.

Members not present: Ryan Clarke

Administrators present: Dr. Scott Carpenter, Superintendent; Dr. Robin Millen; Michael MacMillan; Joy Jordan.

A. Call to Order The meeting was called to order at 5:32 PM by Chair Betty Gray.

B. Adjourn to Executive Session Roll Call Vote to adjourn to Executive Session pursuant to M.G.L. c. 30A, sec. 21(a)(4) to discuss the deployment of security personnel or devices, or strategies with respect thereto. Regular Open Session to resume at approximately 6:30 PM.

MOTION: Tina Games moved to adjourn to Executive Session, seconded by Meredith Henderson.

ROLL CALL VOTE: Bre Rose: aye; Brad Schiff: aye; Jackie Zibrat-Long: aye; Meredith Henderson: aye; Jessica Rogers: aye; Tina Games: aye; Betty Gray: aye.

UNANIMOUS the meeting adjourns to Executive Session at 5:33 PM.

Regular Open Session resumes at 6:40 PM.

C. MRHS Student Representative

MRHS Senior Jason Elhilow was welcomed to the podium as the new 2024-2025 MRHS School Committee Student Representative. Mr. Elhilow expressed excitement about being a student representative and shared his background, having moved to the district in sixth grade. He continued stating that the school year started smoothly, with a club fair and picture day, and the start of Open Campus for seniors. Upcoming events include Homecoming Week, a homecoming game against Wareham, and a homecoming dance. Mr. Elhilow also emphasized the positive school environment and the importance of events like club fairs and spirit weeks in fostering a sense of community.

D. Approval of Minutes: September 12, 2024 MRSC Meeting

MOTION: Meredith Henderson moved to approve the minutes of the September 12, 2024 MRSC meeting, seconded by Brad Schiff.

The motion passes with 6 ayes and Jessica Rogers abstaining from the vote.

E. Public Comment: None

F. Reports and Discussions

i. School Improvement Plans: Chatham Elementary and the Monomoy Regional High School

Jennifer Police, Principal of the Monomoy Regional High School, presented the school improvement plan, focusing on student learning, professional practices, and learning support. Ms. Police reviewed trends and patterns of MCAS data, highlighting the need for curriculum, instruction, and assessment oversight. The

school is redesigning Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) to focus on curricular alignment and collaboration among teachers. The plan also addressed the need for comprehensive onboarding for grade eight students and the integration of social, emotional, and behavioral interventions.

Dr. Jennifer Kelly, Principal of Chatham Elementary School, outlined the school's improvement plan, focusing on the portrait of a graduate, learning and academics, and wellness. The school has seen significant improvements in reading proficiency rates, from 33% in 2021 to 78.5% in 2024, and aims to continue this progress. The school is implementing the University of Florida Literacy Institute's Youth Why program to supplement the ARC reading program with more explicit phonics instruction. The school is also focusing on writing and mathematics, with a guided math workshop model showing significant gains in student performance.

ii. First Reading: 2024-2025 Superintendent Goals - Not presented

iii. AP Government trip to Washington, DC.

Potential Vote

MRHS teacher John Dickson presented his proposal for an AP Government trip to Washington, DC, similar to their trip last year. The trip will include visits to the State Department, Senate subcommittee hearings, and the Air and Space Museum.

In discussion, school committee members asked questions related to logistics and potential concerns, including the timing of the trip so close to the November election.

MOTION: Jackie Zibrat-Long moved to approve the AP Government trip to Washington, DC., seconded by Jessica Rogers.

UNANIMOUS the motion passes.

G. Subcommittee, Representative, Liaison Reports: None

H. Superintendent's Report

i. Recognition of Donations, Grants, and other Acknowledgments

Dr. Carpenter shared the following recognitions:

Monomoy Regional High School has joined with Outer Cape Health Services to offer additional support to our school community. The service will provide onsite access to OCHS Navigator services and tele-behavioral and telemedicine appointments. The school-based OCHS Navigator will work alongside school personnel to help students and families to access locally-based services and resources.

Thanks to a generous donation from Subaru of New England, every Chatham Elementary School student was given a math toolbox to take home – and the school also now has \$15,000 to dedicate toward special projects to support students. Each year, Subaru of New England schedules a community service project at their annual conference, which was held at Chatham Bars Inn this year. The team at CBI recommended Chatham Elementary School to Subaru as a worthy recipient. Each Chatham Elementary student has received a box filled with markers, whiteboard, clock, dominoes, playing cards, pencils, number chart, number line, protractor, ruler, math games, and more. This comprehensive set of materials will support and reinforce students in learning and practicing math.

Dr. Kelly was also invited to the conference's final dinner, where team members spoke about the company's commitment to giving back to the community. She was then surprised with a check from Subaru of New England for \$15,000 for the school.

ii. MASC Conference registration

Dr. Carpenter shared the MASC Conference agenda, to be held in November 2024, and told members to contact Leah Tambolleo if they wish to register.

I. Action Items - Vote Required

i. AP Government trip to Washington, DC.

Potential Vote

MOTION: Jackie Zibrat-Long moved to approve the AP Government trip to Washington, DC., seconded by Jessica Rogers.

UNANIMOUS the motion passes.

ii. Approval of MRHS Animal Welfare Club donation to the Sampson Fund

MOTION: Jackie Zibrat-Long moved to approve the payment of five thousand and twenty eight dollars and sixteen cents in FY24 invoices not previously encumbered, as presented to the School Committee. The motion was seconded by Meredith Henderson

UNANIMOUS the motion passes.

iii. Approval of payment of prior year - FY24 invoices

MOTION: Jackie Zibrat-Long moved to approve the donation of one hundred dollars from the Monomoy Regional High School Student Activity Animal Welfare Club Account to The Sampson Fund. The motion was seconded by Meredith Henderson.

UNANIMOUS the motion passes.

J. Presentation of the Warrants

Accounts Payable and Payroll warrants were presented for school committee member signatures.

K. Adjournment

MOTON: Jackie Zibrat-Long moved to adjourn the meeting, seconded by Jessica Rogers.

UNANIMOUS the meeting adjourns at 7:36 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,

Leah Tambolleo
Recording Secretary

Monomoy SHORE Food Pantry

Presented by:
Reese Labinski & Adam Manna



Who are we?

Students in the SHORE program have collaborated with Stop & Shop in East Harwich to offer a food pantry for MRSD families!



What do we do?

- ★ We offer 1-2 boxes of food on a weekly basis to any family in the Monomoy district, no questions asked
- ★ We pick up a large amount of boxes from Stop and Shop and we sort, organize, and stock our pantry
- ★ We look at our list of families and prepare the boxes for pick up and delivery
- ★ Every morning, we fill the snack tray and leave it in the hallway for students to get whenever they are hungry
- ★ We make Peanut and Jelly sandwiches or mac and cheese for the students



But, our favorite part ...

making friendships with everyone that stops by for a snack

It's a Win Win



We are learning so many valuable skills

1. Customer service skills
2. Stocking skills
3. Data entry
4. Packing skills
5. Delivery skills - don't worry, we are not driving the vans, just loading and dropping off
6. Food handling skills
7. Sense of community and pride in knowing that we are helping families in need

Monomoy students benefits ...

1. We have roughly over 100 students enter and exit our food pantry on a DAILY basis.
2. Many students come in on Fridays and before long weekends to stock up on food since breakfast and lunch is not always available when at home.
3. Our classroom is always happy and full of love. So, our food pantry makes students feel safe, respected, loved, and ready to learn with a full belly.

Our goal with this presentation is to get the word out that the SHORE Food Pantry is up and running

How do I sign up?

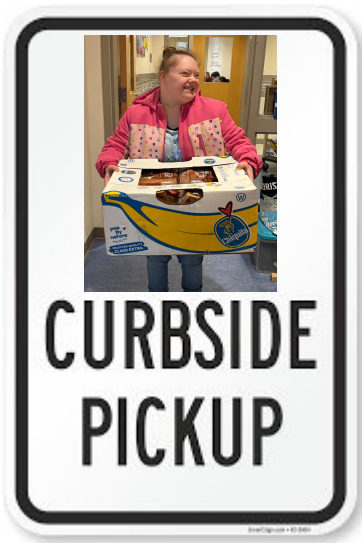
Sign up Genius

Complete this online form to schedule a pickup time for free non-perishable and perishable, when available, groceries.

<https://www.signupgenius.com/go/70A0E48A5A72BA3F49-44941612-shore>

QR Code





No transportation?
Working during these hours?

No worries

We deliver to Monomoy families



When: Fridays 10-1

Where: MRHS

Curbside: Section B, Door 19

Who: Families of Monomoy

Do you have any questions? email Mrs. Shana Grogan sgrogan@monomoy.edu

Thank You

Scott Carpenter's DRAFT Goals 2024-2025

Professional Practice Goal #1

Engage in professional development with a focus on strategic communication and public engagement. [Cross connects to the School Committee goal on Strategic Planning] To be part of their fall collaborative learning cohort (September 2024). Was sent an application from Leading Now and formally applied (October 2023). The format of this professional development is to attend a kick-off in-person two-day session in September 2024, then attend half-day virtual meetings with my cohort partners once a month, October through January 2025.

Action Steps:

- Prepare for the Leading Now 'in-person' meeting
- Attend the Leading Now "in-person" event for my cohort on September 17 and 18
- Participate in the half-day virtual meetings with my cohort:
 - October 16
 - November 14
 - December 12
 - January 9

Professional Practice Goal #2

Continue the Breaking Barriers work in engaging retirees and empty-nesters to provide college and career mentorship to high school students and investigate connecting our Monomoy group with the YMCA Cape Cod's Y (Young) Achiever's program. [Cross connects to the Superintendent Rubric under Family and Community Engagement]

Action Steps

- September 11 presentation on mentorship to the Cape Cod Men's Group. Connect with other organizations with similar presentations.
- September 23 meeting with the high school Counseling Department to discuss the program and which freshman students they would recommend us pairing with a mentor and which seniors may need the mentor support with the upcoming college process.
- October 3, held a meeting with YMCA Cape Cod staff and supervisors of the Y Achievers group to discuss the process and possibilities of creating a Monomoy "chapter" of Young Achievers.
- Mentor meetings throughout the year
- Mentee/mentor connection events, including four Saturday college visits to Massachusetts and Rhode Island colleges (aiming to visit two colleges each trip)
- Develop an end-of-year assessment on mentor and mentee recruitment, retention, and extent of participation

Student Learning Goal #1

With the Superintendent once again “mobile”, rekindle a practice of classroom learning walks with each evaluating administrator, in part to ensure consistency in providing feedback on best practices and areas of growth across administrators and across buildings. [Cross connects to the Superintendent Rubric under Instructional Leadership]

Action Steps:

- Work with Leah and individual administrators to schedule time at least once per week throughout the school year to do learning walks across a variety of classrooms.
- Use the “look for’s” in the Monomoy Observation Feedback Form to guide the post-walkthrough discussions with each administrator
 - Percent of classroom discourse produced by the students
 - How well the students understand the learning objective and how it is connected to standards, skills, and competencies
 - How deeply do students need to understand and be aware of lesson content to answer questions and solve problems (assessing depth of knowledge)
 - How the lesson is being differentiated to support ALL learners
 - Qualities seen in relationship with the teacher and their students

District Improvement Goal #1

Move forward the Monomoy Regional School Committee's goal of supporting “a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion audit within our district”. [Cross connects to the School Committee goal on Strategic Planning]

Action steps:

- Research other districts’ equity audit approaches, consultants, and funding sources.
- Explore partnering with Mid-Atlantic Equity Consortium, Inc. (MAEC) which has worked with Falmouth (2024) and Martha’s Vineyard (currently).
- Held a virtual meeting with MAEC to engage with them as a partner (October 2)
- Work with MAEC to sign-on with them, under their federal grant
- Allocate nominal funds to move forward the audit this year with MAEC in collaboration with Monomoy’s Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging Advisory Committee (DEIBAC)
- Work with Monomoy’s Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging Advisory Committee (DEIBAC) to:
 - Develop a recommended scope of work for the audit
 - Present DEIBAC’s audit scope recommendations to the School Committee, ideally for approval and to move the audit forward
 - Present with DEIBAC audit findings to the School Committee
- Budget for any continuation of the audit and/or implementation of recommendations, as needed (FY26).

District Improvement Goal #2

Work with the Monomoy Administrative Team to thoughtfully move forward parts of the district's Strategic Plan [Cross connects to the School Committee goal on Strategic Planning]

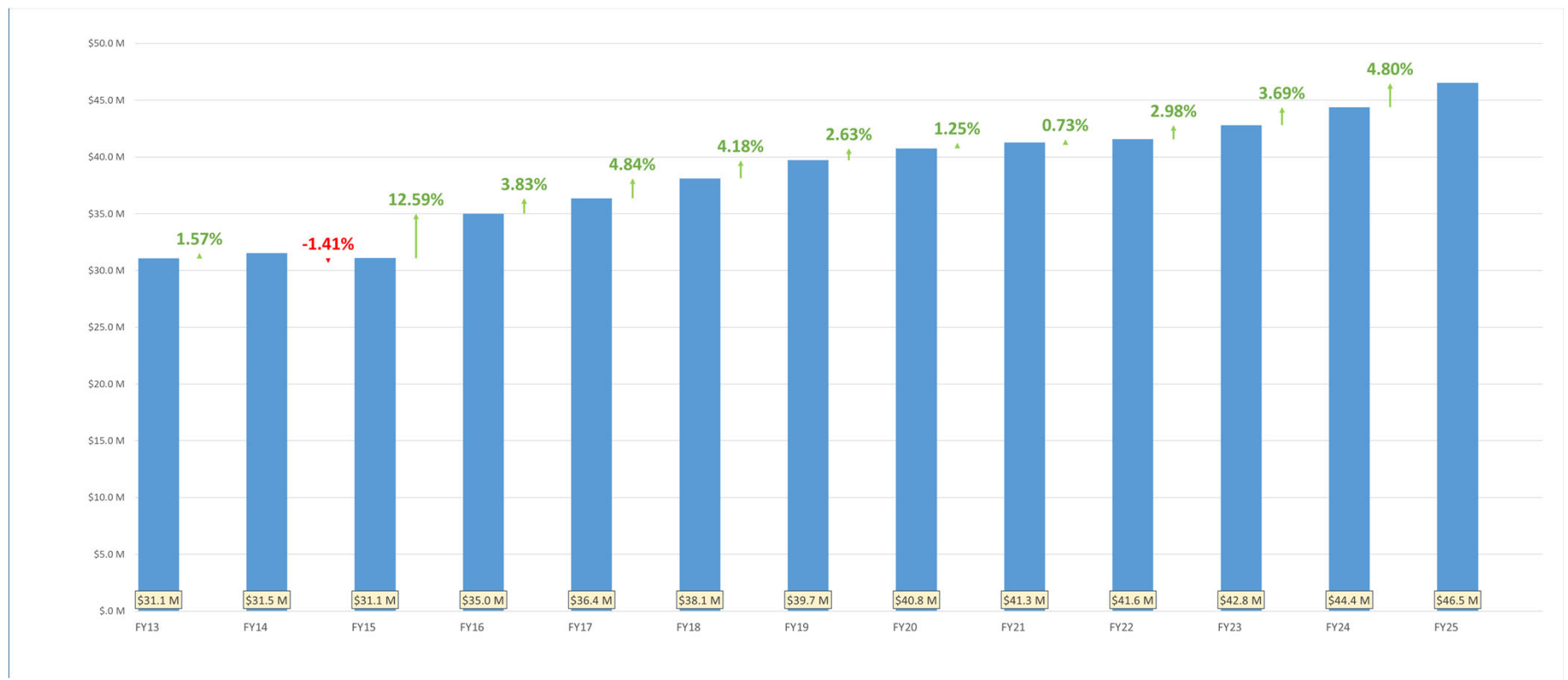
Action Steps:

- Work with the administrative team at monthly “Strategic Meetings” focusing on the three pillars in the Strategic Plan (meeting agenda built around Strategic Plan implementation)
 - Portrait of a Graduate Implementation: Develop and implement a comprehensive plan to ensure that every graduate possesses the skills, attributes, and characteristics necessary for success in college, career, and life
 - Learning and Academics: Foster a rigorous, equitable, and inclusive academic environment that nurtures the competencies of the Portrait of a Graduate to prepare students for college, career, and life
 - Being and Wellness: Cultivate a safe, inclusive, and supportive environment that promotes the mental, emotional, and physical well-being of students and staff
- Report out to the School Committee mid-year and end-of-the-year progress in moving the multi-year Strategic Plan forward

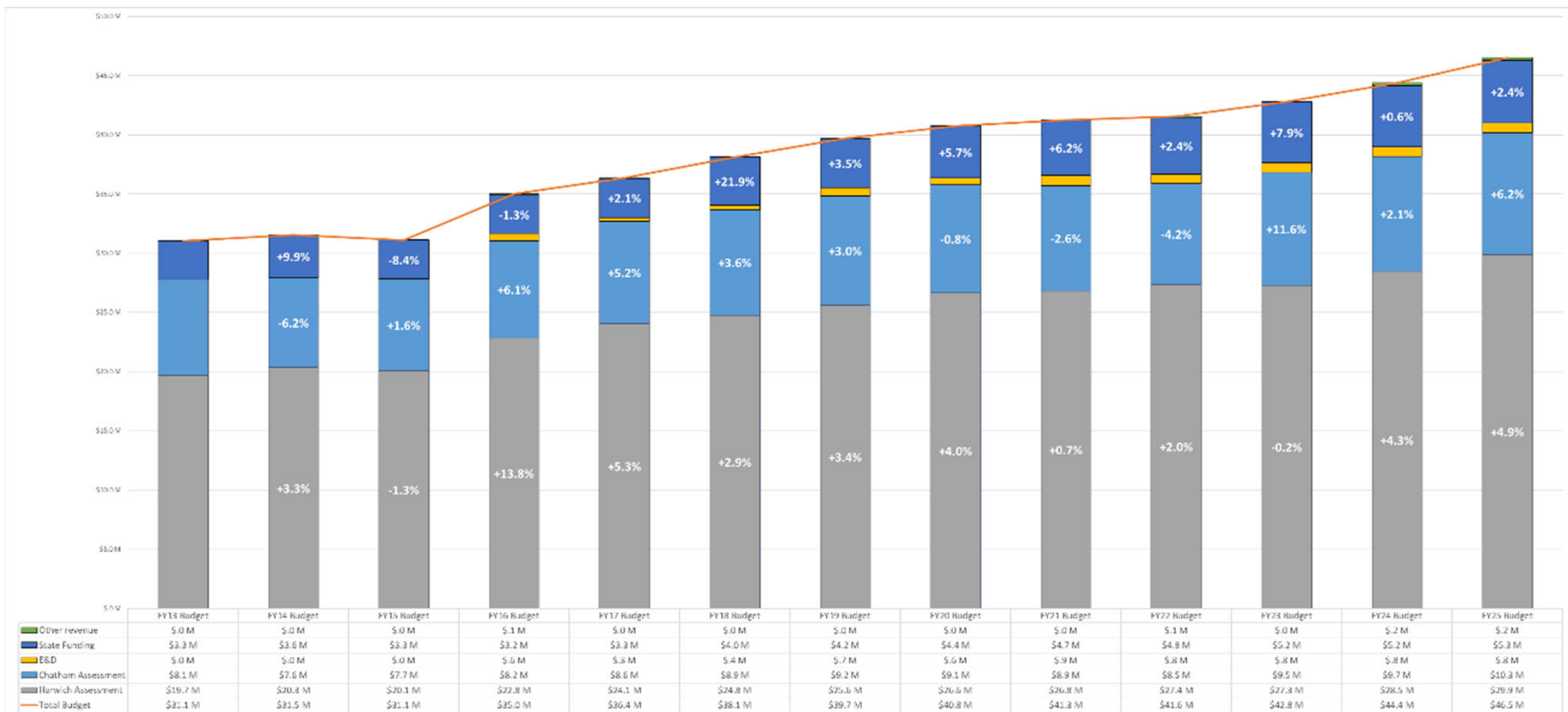
Monomoy Regional School District **FY26 Budget Context**

October 7, 2024

The FY25 Budget process ended with a 4.8% increase in the district budget.



This increase was funded through an increase in the Harwich assessment of almost 5% and in the Chatham assessment of 6.2%.

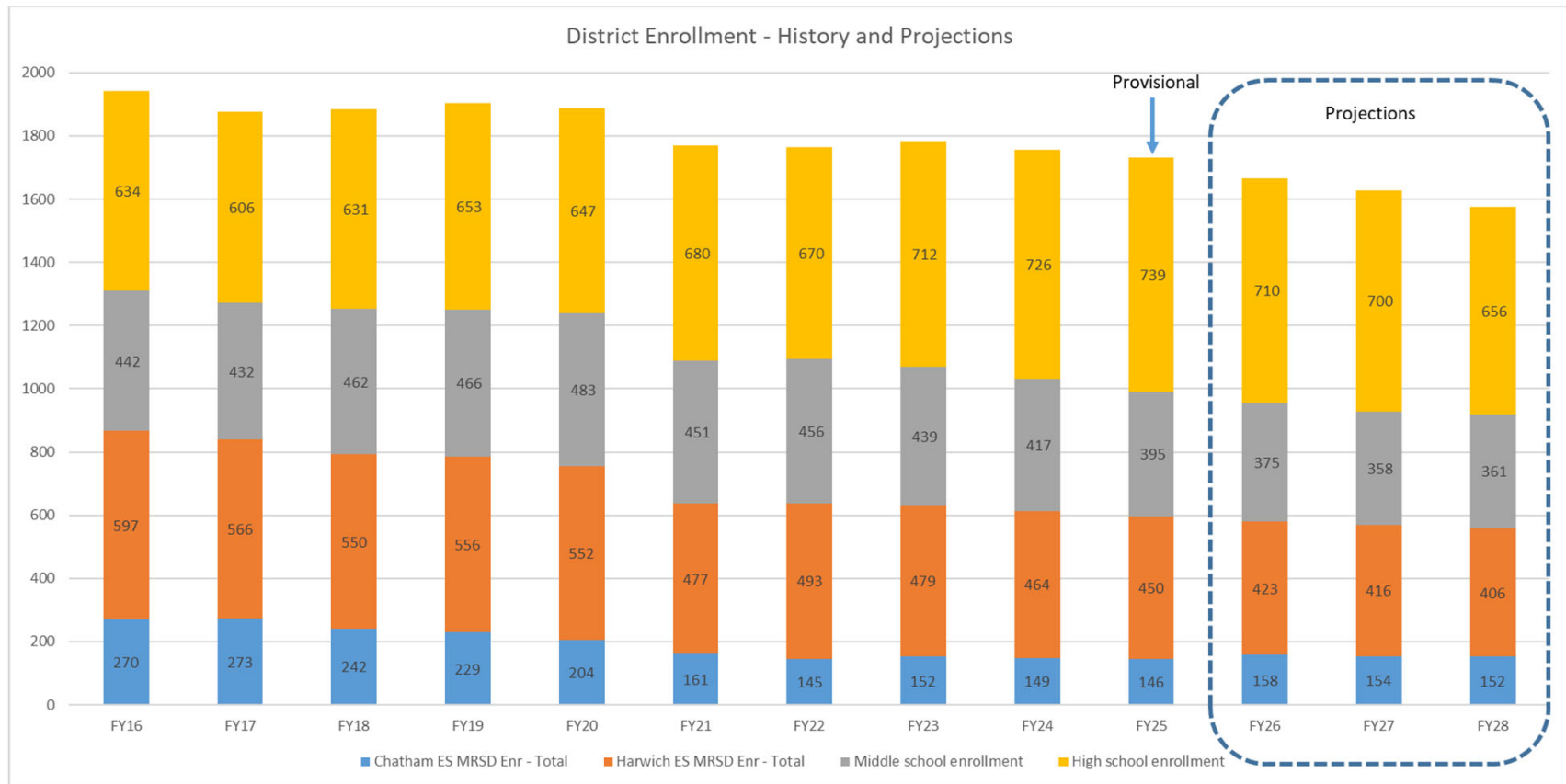


The provisional enrollment figures suggest a small overall shift toward Harwich.

District Enrollment			
Budget Yr	Harwich	Chatham	Shift
2020	74.30%	25.70%	
2021	74.80%	25.20%	0.5% to Harwich
2022	75.96%	24.04%	1.16% to Harwich
2023	76.52%	23.48%	0.56% to Harwich
2024	76.46%	23.54%	0.06% to Chatham
2025	76.30%	23.70%	0.16% to Chatham
2026	76.44%	23.56%	0.13% to Harwich

Foundation Enrollment			
Budget Yr	Harwich	Chatham	Shift
2020	73.45%	26.55%	
2021	74.35%	25.65%	0.9% to Harwich
2022	75.11%	24.89%	0.76% to Harwich
2023	76.27%	23.73%	1.16% to Harwich
2024	76.56%	23.44%	0.29% to Harwich
2025	76.83%	23.17%	0.27% to Harwich
2026	76.81%	23.19%	0.02% to Chatham

Enrollment expected to continue to go down, slowly.



Key factors that will influence the budget and assessments:

Salary agreements

The district concluded contracts for three of the four employee groups last year. These agreements provided salary increases to keep in step with surrounding districts and the local economy. This will lead to higher salary increases for FY26 and on.

Ongoing impact of COVID & end of ESSER funding

The impact of school closures on students' academic success and their social and emotional well being is ongoing and is driving the need for additional services.

State Funding

The Chapter 70 funding formula is based on *current* foundation enrollment and determines almost half of the assessments, it will be available in January.

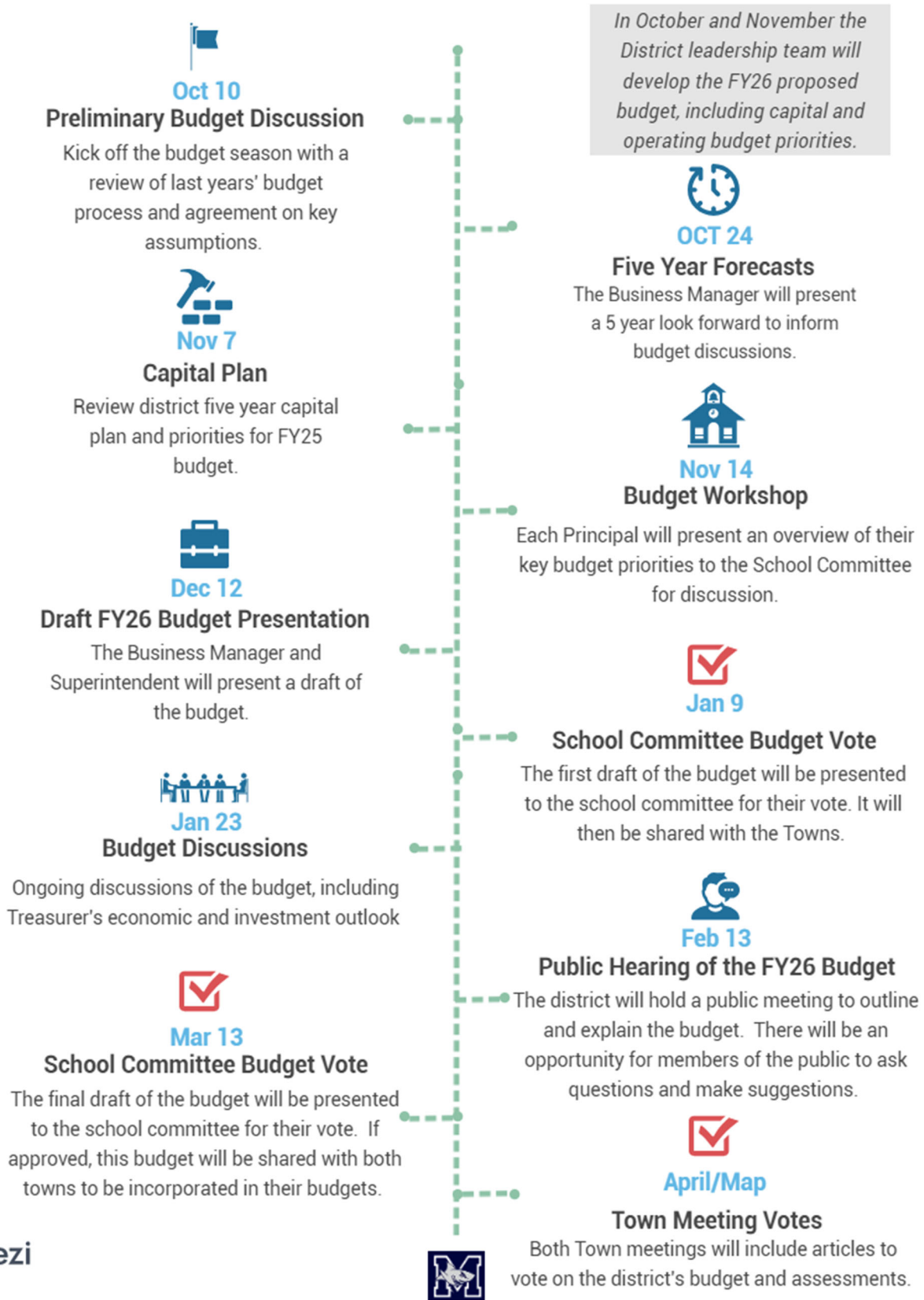
Capital needs

Although they have been well maintained, many of the schools' building components are reaching the end of their useful life.

School Choice Enrollment

School choice enrollment in and out of the district is going down and for FY26 will mean net lower revenue for the district.

FY26 Budget Timeline



FY26 Budget Assumptions



Health Insurance

The health insurance rates for FY26 will not be set until February 2025. Until then the district is assuming an increase of 10%. The increase from FY24 to FY25 was 8%

**10% increase in
costs
\$580,000**



School Choice Tuition

In recent years, the number of Chatham/Harwich students choosing to attend schools other than Monomoy fell faster than the number of students choosing to come to Monomoy from other districts. This has been a financial benefit to the district. The number of school choice 'in' students is forecast to fall by around 10-20 students without the same reduction in choice 'out' leading to a net decrease in revenue for the district.

**Decrease in
revenue
Net \$100,000**



Charter School Tuition

The number of Chatham/Harwich students attending charter schools fell significantly from FY21 to FY23. However, in FY24 this number increased and while we await the FY25 figures, we are assuming the same increase for FY26.

**Net increase
\$40,000**



New Hires

For budgeting purposes, the district assumes that new hires, in the event of resignation and retirements, will be hired at a step 7, masters column for unit A staff. For all other staff, it's assumed that the new hire will be at the same rate as the outgoing employee.



Salary Increases

The district completed negotiations with three employee associations, so there is greater certainty of salary levels for the FY26 budget. Negotiations with the custodian employee association will begin for their FY26-FY28 contract and the budget will include an assumption about possible increases that may result.



Enrollment

The district estimates next year's enrollment using a weighted cohort survival method. Estimates are based on the percentage of students moving to each grade in the last six years. Using that approach suggests a fall of 68 students. Further enrollment information will be available after the October 1 state reports are finalized. These numbers impact the budget and each town's assessment,



QUESTION 2: Elimination of MCAS as High School Graduation Requirement

Law Proposed by Initiative Petition

Elimination of MCAS as High School Graduation Requirement

Do you approve of a law summarized below, on which no vote was taken by the Senate or the House of Representatives before May 1, 2024?

SUMMARY

As required by law, summaries are written by the State Attorney General.

This proposed law would eliminate the requirement that a student pass the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) tests (or other statewide or district-wide assessments) in mathematics, science and technology, and English in order to receive a high school diploma. Instead, in order for a student to receive a high school diploma, the proposed law would require the student to complete coursework certified by the student's district as demonstrating mastery of the competencies contained in the state academic standards in mathematics, science and technology, and English, as well as any additional areas determined by the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education.

WHAT YOUR VOTE WILL DO

As required by law, the statements describing the effect of a "yes" or "no" vote are written jointly by the State Attorney General and the Secretary of the Commonwealth.

A YES VOTE would eliminate the requirement that students pass the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) in order to graduate high school but still require students to complete coursework that meets state standards.

A NO VOTE would make no change in the law relative to the requirement that a student pass the MCAS in order to graduate high school.

STATEMENT OF FISCAL CONSEQUENCES

As required by law, statements of fiscal consequences are written by the Executive Office of Administration and Finance.

The proposed law has no discernible material fiscal consequences for state and municipal government finances.

ARGUMENTS

As provided by law, the 150-word arguments are written by proponents and opponents of each question, and reflect their opinions. The Commonwealth of Massachusetts does not endorse these arguments, and does not certify the truth or accuracy of any statement made in these arguments. The names of the individuals and organizations who wrote each argument, and any written comments by others about each argument, are on file in the Office of the Secretary of the Commonwealth.

IN FAVOR: A Yes on Question 2 gives all students the opportunity to thrive and reach their full potential. We all agree that high standards help keep our public schools great, and assessments are needed to ensure that students master the knowledge and skills to succeed in life after high school. However, the MCAS is a one-size-fits-all exam that fails to measure other student achievement measures such as GPA, coursework, and teacher assessments in determining if a student is allowed to graduate. Replacing the MCAS graduation requirement with more comprehensive measures will allow teachers to stop teaching to a test and unburden students from a make-or-break standardized test. Voting Yes will allow schools and teachers, together with parents and students, to focus on the most important skills and knowledge to help students succeed in life, rather than having to focus on only those skills that can be measured on a standardized test.

Shelley Scruggs

Parent Volunteer

Massachusetts Teachers Association (MTA)

2 Heritage Drive, 8th Floor

Quincy, MA 02171-2119

617-878-8000

AGAINST: Vote NO on Question 2.

Question 2 is unfair to kids and will increase inequality. Some school districts will just adopt lower standards so students “graduate” even if they haven’t learned the knowledge and skills they need to succeed.

It’s not fair to grant diplomas to kids who aren’t yet ready to graduate. If students cannot pass basic assessments in math, English, or science, we adults should do the hard work to get them up to speed. Instead of supporting kids, **Question 2 would abandon them.**

Question 2 would remove our only statewide graduation standard. Massachusetts would have less rigorous high school graduation requirements than Mississippi and Alabama.

Question 2 is a radical and untested proposal and should be rejected. Significant changes to our education system should be carefully studied, designed, and implemented by experts to ensure these policies are actually better for our kids.

Vote No on Question 2.

Protect Our Kids' Future: Vote No on 2

P.O. Box 130041

Boston, MA 02113

www.protectourkidsfuture.com

FULL TEXT PROPOSED LAW

Be it enacted by the People, and by their authority:

A LAW REQUIRING THAT DISTRICTS CERTIFY THAT STUDENTS HAVE MASTERED THE SKILLS, COMPETENCIES AND KNOWLEDGE OF THE STATE STANDARDS AS A REPLACEMENT FOR THE MCAS GRADUATION REQUIREMENT.

Section 1D of chapter 69 of the General Laws, as appearing in the 2022 Official Edition, is hereby amended by striking from the first sentence of sub-paragraph (i) the words, “, as measured by the assessment instruments described in section one I.” and replacing them with the following: “by satisfactorily completing coursework that has been certified by the student’s district as showing mastery of the skills, competencies, and knowledge contained in the state academic standards and curriculum frameworks in the areas measured by the MCAS high school tests described in section one I administered in 2023, and in any additional areas determined by the board.”

MAJORITY REPORT

The following report was prepared by a majority of the members of the Special Joint Committee on Initiative Petitions, a committee of the Massachusetts General Court. As required by the Massachusetts Constitution, this Majority Report is printed below. Statements made in this report do not reflect the opinions of the Secretary of the Commonwealth.

A majority of the Special Joint Committee on Initiative Petitions (“The Committee”) recommends that the Initiative Petition 23-36, House 4252, “An Act requiring that districts certify that students have mastered the skills, competencies and knowledge of the state standards as a replacement for the MCAS graduation requirement,” (“the Initiative Petition”) as currently drafted and presented to this Committee, OUGHT NOT TO BE ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE AT THIS TIME.

The purpose of this report is to provide a recommendation to the full legislature on whether to accept the Initiative Petition as written for consideration and enactment.

The proposed Initiative Petition would amend Section 1D of Chapter 69 of the General Laws by eliminating the uniform statewide competency determination set by the Board of Elementary and

Secondary Education and replacing it with a competency determination established by each of the over 300 school districts in the Commonwealth.

Testimony

The Committee heard from experienced professionals, proponents, and opponents of the Initiative Petition, as well as members of the general public.

Subject matter expert Robert Curtin, Chief Officer for Data, Assessment, and Accountability at the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (“DESE”), testified that the overwhelming majority of high school students are able to graduate regardless of their socio-economic status, ethnic/racial background, or disability status. All of these subgroups graduate at rates far in excess of 90 per cent, with the exception of those with profound cognitive impairments. Mr. Curtin further testified that 99 per cent of students are able to graduate by passing the 10th grade Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (“MCAS”) or pursuing one of the alternative paths available to them. According to data from the Class of 2019, the last graduating class not impacted by COVID-19, of 70,000 high school seniors statewide, 700 failed to graduate because they had not met the requirement and in Boston, the largest district in the state with a high percentage of low-income students and students of color, only 7 in that class failed to graduate only for this reason. Over 88 per cent of twelfth grade students in the Class of 2019 achieved a “passing” score on the 10th grade MCAS tests. Mr. Curtin elaborated on previous comments, explaining that those who do not achieve that score on the first try can pursue a variety of options to demonstrate that they have acquired the requisite knowledge and skills. Students can retake the test until they achieve a passing grade, they can pursue a “Performance/Cohort Appeal” by demonstrating to DESE that their classwork is equivalent to that of students in their classes who did pass the test, or they can complete a district developed Educational Proficiency Plan if their MCAS score is slightly below passing. As a result of these multiple pathways, Mr. Curtin testified that, on average, less than 1 per cent of high school seniors fail to graduate solely because they did not meet the graduation requirement.

Other subject matter experts testified from the perspective of education leadership positions. Paul Reville, the Francis Keppel Professor of Practice of Educational Policy and Administration at the Harvard Graduate School of Education and former Massachusetts Secretary of Education during the Patrick Administration, commented that passage of the Initiative Petitions “would usher in a new era of scattershot standards and undermine decades of education reform.” Stephen Zrike, current superintendent of the Salem Public Schools and former receiver of Holyoke Public Schools, testified that requiring students to meet the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (“BESE”) competency determination is good preparation for the world beyond high school where graduates will be expected to perform in order to progress in their chosen fields.

Panels of proponents, including the President and Vice President of the Massachusetts Teachers Association (“MTA”), Max Page and Deb McCarthy respectively, current educators, and a college student, testified that the graduation requirement “create[es] classroom environments filled with anxiety and stress,” to the detriment of “excitement about learning.” The panelists further testified that the graduation requirement “has actively harmed our most marginalized students, especially our students of color, English learners, low-income students, and students with disabilities.” Rebecca Pringle, the President of the National Education Association, testified that MCAS scores are not an accurate, complete, or fair measure of student achievement and measures of achievement should focus on holistic approaches to identify students’ strengths and areas for growth. Ms. Pringle emphasized that since students are not standardized in their learning styles, standardized tests do not provide a full picture of students’ problem-solving abilities and ability to think critically.

Opponents to the Initiative Petition countered the proponents’ testimony by noting that as students’ progress through high school and beyond, they will be expected to demonstrate their knowledge and skills through a variety of assessments that have consequences. They also maintained that elimination of the graduation requirement would lead to more, not less, inequity. Jeff Howard, a former member of the state BESE and the founder and president of the Efficacy Institute, testified that “proficiency standards are a means for promoting social and economic equality. ... ‘Demonstrate these proficiencies and you will be prepared to meet the challenges of the world’”. He also stated that “the MCAS graduation requirement is an introduction to [the] world of certification and accountability all our students will enter after high school.” Jill Norton, parent of a special needs student and education consultant, spoke in favor of retaining the current graduation requirement so that schools would not regress to a time when special needs students graduated who could not meet basic standards.

Conclusion

The Education Reform Act of 1993 established the current system of K-12 education in the Commonwealth including the uniform graduation requirement. Prior to the implementation of that legislation, Massachusetts had no statewide curriculum standards, each of the local districts set their own graduation requirements and the quality of K-12 education varied dramatically from district to district across the state.

The Act required a significant increase in state funding to local districts to support the implementation of the standards as well as the uniform assessment system, the MCAS, designed to measure progress toward the goal of improved outcomes for all students. The legislature recently substantially increased funding with a more targeted focus on equity through the Student Opportunity Act.

The Initiative Petition eliminates the uniform graduation requirement without creating a uniform alternative. Based on the testimony presented, there are significant concerns with the lack of a standard, statewide assessment. Both the education leaders and the opponents of the Initiative Petition acknowledged the need to make improvements to the current system so that students who fail to achieve the minimum level of knowledge and skills required to graduate receive the support they need to meet those basic requirements. However, simply eliminating the uniform graduation requirement, which will allow students to graduate who do not meet basic standards, with no standardized and consistent benchmark in place to ensure those standards are met, will not improve student outcomes and runs the risk of exacerbating inconsistencies and inequities in instruction and learning across districts.

For these reasons, we, the majority of the Special Joint Committee on Initiative Petition, recommend that “An Act requiring that districts certify that students have mastered the skills, competencies and knowledge of the state standards as a replacement for the MCAS graduation requirement” (see House No. 4252), as currently drafted and presented to this Committee, OUGHT NOT TO BE ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE AT THIS TIME.

Senators.

Cindy F. Friedman
Paul R. Feeney
Ryan C. Fattman

Representatives.

Alice Hanlon Peisch
Michael S. Day
Kenneth I. Gordon
David T. Vieira