



NORTH MIDDLESEX REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT SCHOOL COMMITTEE
Ashby – Pepperell – Townsend, Massachusetts

MEETING MINUTES – November 14, 2024

Room #120, North Middlesex Regional High School, 19 Main Street, Townsend, MA 01469

PRESENT

Chairperson	Lisa Martin	Member, At Large
Vice-Chairperson	Randee Rusch	Member, At Large
	June McNeil	Member, Ashby
	Will Hackler	Member, Townsend
	Thomas Casey	Member, Pepperell ~ Absent
	Patrick McPhillips	Member, Pepperell
	Jill Twigg	Member, Pepperell
	Bill Burg	Member, Townsend
	Lisa Bloom	Member, At Large

ALSO PRESENT

Brad Morgan	Superintendent of Schools
Gary Burboa-Reese	Assistant Superintendent of Schools
Nancy Haines	Business Manager
Robin Eibye	Recording Secretary

Chairperson Lisa Martin opened the meeting at 6:05 p.m., confirmed attendance, and informed attendees that the meeting was being recorded. Martin announced that the meeting would be live-streamed via Zoom for public viewing. While physical attendance was available and encouraged, the live-stream option was provided as a courtesy. Martin noted that any technical issues affecting the remote broadcast would not interrupt or delay the in-person meeting.

APPROVAL OF CONSENT AGENDA

- *Will Hackler motioned, seconded by June McNeil, to approve the consent agenda as presented, excluding the October 23, 2024 minutes.*

Vote: The motion unanimously passed 8/0/0.

REPORTS/INFORMATION ITEMS

1. Student Representative Meredith Southard Pantano provided the following updates:
 - **Candy Grams:** The student council is selling candy grams for Thanksgiving, with proceeds benefiting Lucy's Love Bus, a charity that provides free therapies to children with cancer.
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OUR MISSION: At NM, we are committed to creating a diverse learning environment where students are provided a meaningful education through academic, social, and emotional learning experiences. Together with parents, caregivers, and the community, students are encouraged to ignite and embrace their individual potential to find success within NM and beyond.

- **Winter Craft Fair:** Scheduled for December 7th at 10:00 a.m.
- **Powderpuff Game:** Scheduled for Tuesday, November 19th, at 5:00 p.m.
- **Veterans Day Celebration:** The event was a success, with over 20 veterans in attendance.
- **Sports Updates:**
 - Field Hockey Team concluded their season in the Sweet 16.
 - Girls Soccer Team finished their season in the Elite 8.
- **Giving Tree Initiative:** The Giving Tree program is underway, with trees hosting tags for families in need during the holiday season. Trees will be located in school buildings and local businesses.

PUBLIC COMMENT

- Richele Bohm of 18 Woodland Drive in Townsend voiced her concerns with the FY26 budget, building closures, and capital funding.
- Jen Arsenault of 35 Bacon Street in Pepperell argued that the current budget cuts and the desire to keep buildings open are unsustainable and calls for a more realistic approach.
- Teacher, Dianne Rollo of 6 Fairview Avenue, Ashburnham said it was disheartening that whenever budget issues arise, there are talks of closing Ashby Elementary School.

REPORTS/INFORMATION ITEMS - CONTINUED

1. Assistant Superintendent – Gary Burboa-Reese

Dr. Burboa-Reese said Robin Eibye has been named Executive Assistant of the Year for the Massachusetts Council of School Committee Administrative Personnel. The award was announced during COSCAP's annual conference on Friday, November 8th. The award recognizes those who exemplify excellent leadership, commitment to staff and students, service to their communities, and contributions to the overall school experience.

NEW BUSINESS/GENERAL DISCUSSION

1. Martin requested the following items be continued to the next meeting and the committee agreed.
 - NMRSD School Committee Goals 2024-2025 – L. Martin
 - Superintendent Goals 2024-2025 – B. Morgan
 - School Choice Funds – B. Morgan

OLD BUSINESS

1. FY26 Budget

The Chairperson provided the following statement:

"I would like to remind the School Committee that our primary responsibility is to provide the best possible education for the children in our district. This responsibility often involves making difficult decisions and engaging in challenging discussions, especially given the constraints of our current budget. Unfortunately, the state is not providing the funding we need, and we must face the reality of these financial limitations.

It is essential that this discussion remains transparent and open to the public. Our caregivers, taxpayers, and community members deserve to understand the financial crisis currently facing the North Middlesex Regional School District. This crisis stems from unfunded mandates at the state and federal levels, coupled with a broken regional school funding system that fails to allocate resources appropriately.

While there is hope that state and federal governments may eventually provide assistance, the pace of government action is slow. Unfortunately, time is not a luxury we have. We cannot wait to take action—we must ensure that we continue to provide a quality education for the children in our towns without delay. We need to answer this crisis locally"

The School Committee, along with the Superintendent of Schools, Assistant Superintendent and Business Manager discussed the need to address a \$3 million budget deficit for FY26. Discussions ensued about staffing reductions and building closures. Concerns were raised about the impact on student space and transportation. The committee debated whether to exclude Ashby Elementary School from closure options, considering its role as a community hub. They also discussed the feasibility of consolidating services and the potential savings from building closures. The committee talked about the importance of community input and the need for a plan that considers the long-term impact on students and the NM community. The committee discussed the potential impact of closing Ashby Elementary, with arguments on both sides.

Will Hackler moved, and Patrick McPhillips seconded the committee direct the Superintendent to develop a Plan B, which includes closing buildings and reducing staff to reduce the FY26 budget by \$3 million.

After further discussion, Randee Rusch moved, and Lisa Bloom seconded to amend the motion that the committee direct the Superintendent to develop a list of options and savings with parameters.

Following discussions on boundaries and parameters, the committee agreed to vote on the amended motion.

Vote: The amended motion failed 0/7/1.

The committee agreed to vote on the original motion to direct the Superintendent to develop a plan with options for budget cuts, including building closures and staff reductions, to be presented at the next meeting on December 3rd.

Vote: The motion unanimously passed 8/0/0.

The discussion regarding parameters continued. Committee member June McNeil requested that the committee direct the Superintendent to remove Ashby Elementary School from consideration for closure.

Following discussion, June McNeil moved, and Lisa Bloom seconded the committee direct the Superintendent to remove Ashby Elementary School from consideration for closure.

Vote: The motion failed 3/5/0.

The committee agreed to meet on Tuesday, December 3rd, at 7:00 p.m. to discuss the FY26 budget.

SUBCOMMITTEE REPORTS – VOTES MAY BE TAKEN

Following a Policy Committee update, Randee Rusch moved, and Lisa Bloom seconded the committee adopt policies IIB Class Size, IJ Instructional Materials, and IJL Library Materials Selection and Adoption as presented.

Vote: The motion passed 6/0/2. (Will Hackler and Patrick McPhillips abstained)

At 7:45 p.m., Will Hackler moved, and Patrick McPhillips seconded to adjourn.

Vote: The motion unanimously passed 8/0/0.

Documents Reviewed / Referred To

- [2024 11-14 School Committee Agenda](#)
- [IIB Class Size](#)
- [IJ Instructional Materials](#)
- [IJL Library Materials Selection and Adoption](#)
- [Early Estimate of Some Fixed Contractual Budget Increases for FY26](#)
- [FY 2026 Proposed Budget by Function Code – DRAFT ONLY 11-14-24](#)
- [FY2026 Proposed Budget by Function Code – DRAFT ONLY 11-14-24](#)

Respectfully submitted,
Robin Eibye, Recording Secretary

APPROVED: December 3, 2024
