

GREATER FALL RIVER VOCATIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT COMMITTEE  
MINUTES OF REGULAR MEETING  
251 STONEHAVEN ROAD, FALL RIVER, MA  
DISTRICT OFFICE CONFERENCE ROOM  
January 9, 2025

The regular meeting of the Greater Fall River Vocational School District Committee was called to order at 5:47 p.m. by Chairman Paul Jennings, with the following persons in attendance, William Flanagan of Fall River, Richard Manuels Jr. (remote) of Fall River, Joan Menard of Fall River, Donald DiBiasio of Somerset and Jeffrey Begin of Swansea.

Also in attendance were: Brian Bentley, Superintendent/Director, Leslie Weckesser, Assistant Superintendent-Principal, Paul Kitchen, Director of Finance and Operations, Gregory Brilhante, Legal Counsel, Ace Wittkamper and Helena Neves, Executive Secretary

Members of the Diman Teachers Association were in attendance in person and remotely.

Mr. Jennings called for the roll call.

Mr. Jennings made the following announcement: In accordance with Massachusetts General Law, Chapter 30A, Section 20(f), any member of the public may make an audio or video recording of this public meeting. A member of the public who wishes to record a meeting must first notify the chair and must comply with reasonable requirements regarding audio or video equipment established by the chair so as not to interfere with the meeting. *Mr. Matos provided notification of intent to record.*

Mr. Jennings led the Pledge of Allegiance.

It was moved by Mr. DiBiasio, seconded by Attorney Flanagan, and voted on a roll call to dispense with the reading of the December 12, 2024 minutes and approved them, as recorded.

***6 in favor/0 opposed/0 abstention. Motion Carries***

Ms. Wittkamper provided the student report which included an update on current events, ongoing issues, new issues, planning for the future and the revitalization of the Bengal Challenge program. Ms. Wittkamper attended a very informative delegate assembly at the Massachusetts Association of Student Representatives. A donation of over a hundred coats was made by Student Government to the United Way. In an effort to get new fundraising ideas, local school districts are being contacted to inquire about the student fundraisers they are using. School lunch update - the meat choice for the student salads is now being offered as a side and not on the salad. The newest issue being presented is that blue shop pants are not allowed for freshman and exploratory, and jeans are mandatory, regardless of whether or not the student already owns blue work pants. The solution would be to update the dress code so that exploratory students can choose whether they want to wear the blue jeans or just wear the blue work pants. A video is being planned to advertise and provide detailed information about the different school clubs. The downstairs main hallway will be become the “Bengals Build Excellence” hallway and it will be a place to display and celebrate our students. A discussion with Administration on how to revitalize the Bengal Challenge Program is taking place.

There was no Citizen Input.

Mr. DiBiasio provided the MSBA project update. Concrete floors are being poured and steel is expected to be finished at the end of January. Construction is moving right along. The plumbers and electricians are on site and are doing rough-in work. As the winter weather continues more of the construction work is moving inside. Suffolk is already planning for the upcoming summer and what work can be done without causing any or little disruptions to summer activities.

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Mr. Kitchen provided an overview of the MSBA project expenditures. Invoices from KBA and Suffolk reflect monthly billing for the project. Colliers invoice was not received on time. A Yankee Engineering invoice for the amount of \$25,925.00 was also included.

It was moved by Ms. Menard, seconded by Attorney Flanagan and voted on a roll call to approve the following MSBA Project expenditures: KBA invoice #20006.01-30 dated 12/27/2024 for the amount of \$115,537.00, Suffolk Construction application no. 15 dated 12/31/2024 for the amount of \$6,061,512.73 and Yankee Engineering for the amount of \$25,925.00. ***6 in favor/0 opposed/0 abstention. Motion Carries***

Mr. Bentley reported on personnel appointments and retirements.

Mr. Bentley reported on the student travel requests.

It was moved by Mr. DiBiasio, seconded by Attorney Flanagan and voted on a roll call to approve the overnight student travel request submitted by the Deca Club advisor for the students to attend the Deca State Competition held at Boston Convention Center, February 27, 2025 to March 1, 2025.

***6 in favor/0 opposed/0 abstention. Motion Carries***

Mr. Bentley reported on the use of facilities requests.

It was moved by Mr. DiBiasio, seconded by Attorney Flanagan and voted on a roll call to approve the request submitted by Backstage Dance Academy to use the facilities for their annual rehearsal and recital being held on May 29, 2025 through June 1, 2025. The total use of facilities fee is \$5,069.52.

***6 in favor/0 opposed/0 abstention. Motion Carries***

It was moved by Mr. DiBiasio, seconded by Attorney Flanagan and voted on a roll call to approve the request submitted by Ms. Michaela Gagne, School Adjustment Counselor to use Room 251 Restaurant for the Fall River Youth of the Year Announcement Ceremony on March 20, 2025 from 8:30 am to 10:15 am and to waive all use of facilities fees.

***6 in favor/0 opposed/0 abstention. Motion Carries***

Mr. Bentley reported on the acceptance of gifts. The Charlton Charity Foundation has awarded Diman a two year grant in the amount of \$100,000 for the High School To College Certificate initiative.

It was moved by Mr. DiBiasio, seconded by Attorney Flanagan and voted on a roll call to accept the first payment of \$50,000 of the two year grant for the High School To College Certificate initiative.

***6 in favor/0 opposed/0 abstention. Motion Carries***

Mr. Begin asked for clarification on the initiative being funded by the grant funds. Mr. Bentley stated that the grant funds will allow the district to purchase courses for students to take classes for credit and attend Bristol Community College tuition free. Eric Silva, Guidance Counselor is spearheading the initiative and is the liaison between BCC, the District and students. The initiative is an articulation agreement and not a dual enrollment program.

Mr. Bentley reported on the 24/25 School Calendar change. The current 24/25 school calendar lists graduation as being on June 12<sup>th</sup>. Graduation will again be held at Durfee. It will be scheduled for June 4<sup>th</sup> instead of June 12<sup>th</sup> to align with Durfee's graduation so that a separate set up is not necessary.

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Mr. Kitchen left the meeting at 6:06 pm.

The rain date for graduation will be June 8, 2025. The last day for seniors will be May 30, 2025. Graduation rehearsal will be on June 2<sup>nd</sup> and Awards Night will be June 3<sup>rd</sup>. The last day of school for the 24/25 school year will be June 17, 2024. The revised calendar was shared with DTA.

It was moved by Mr. DiBiasio, seconded by Attorney Flanagan and voted on a roll call to approve the 24/25 School Calendar Changes as presented. *6 in favor/0 opposed/0 abstention. Motion Carries*

Mr. Kitchen returned to the meeting at 6:08 pm.

Mr. Bentley stated that due to a change in the law MCAS is no longer a graduation requirement. Diman has reviewed the course work and curriculum for all students in the classes of 2024, 2025 and 2026. As long as students have accrued enough credits, pass their classes and meet the local requirements, the district can declare that they have met the competency determination with no further testing. Diman will consider this the competency determination and award them a diploma.

Mr. DiBiasio asked if the MCAS test will still be administered to students. Mrs. Weckesser stated that although MCAS is no longer a graduation requirement, students will still have to take the test that will be offered in the spring because it affects the district's accountability score.

It was moved by Attorney Flanagan, seconded by Ms. Menard and voted on a roll call to approve the proposed competency determination, as submitted. *6 in favor/0 opposed/0 abstention. Motion Carries*

Mr. Bentley stated that Mrs. Weckesser has taken the lead role on the Vision of the Graduate and deferred to her for a summary. Mrs. Weckesser thanked Mrs. Boscombe for her assistance in getting the plan off the ground. The Vision of the Graduate is a plan that describes the skills, knowledge, and character traits that a school aims for all its students to possess upon graduation. A diverse stakeholder group that includes alumni, parents, current staff members and students will work to define the Vision of a Diman Graduate and set the framework for every program in our school. There are over thirty two volunteers in the group and the kickoff meeting is scheduled for Thursday.

Agenda item 3.1 Other Matters i. Discussion and Approval of Diman Teachers Association (DTA) Contract was not discussed.

Mr. Kitchen provided a summary of the monthly financial report. A majority of equipment purchased has been paid for with Skills Capital grant funds. Mr. Kitchen stated that he has met with department heads to discuss the needs of the department for the 25/26 school year and there are no large requests for equipment.

Mr. Kitchen provided an overview of the expenditures in excess of \$10,000. A correction will be made to the expenditure listed as Airgas USA. The vendor will be changed to Total Welding Supply for the amount of \$31,799.

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It was moved by Mr. DiBiasio, seconded by Ms. Menard and voted on a roll call to approve all expenditures, as submitted. *6 in favor/0 opposed/0 abstention. Motion Carries*

Mr. Kitchen provided an overview of the bid award request for #2 Fuel Oil.

It was moved by Attorney Flanagan, seconded by Ms. Menard and voted on a roll call to approve Sprague Operating Resources, 185 International Drive, Portsmouth, NH 03801 as the most responsible and responsive provider of #2 Fuel Oil for the SY24-25 for the Greater Fall River Vocational School District from the Commonwealth's OSD Contract ENE52 Agreement.

Mr. DiBiasio stated that the work at the house in Swansea is moving along well. Mrs. Torres stated that the roof is on and the concrete in the basement has been poured. The doors have not arrived yet. The students are continuing framing inside, and electricity will be there on Monday to start running wire. Mr. DiBiasio requested that the front yard be straightened out for the safety of students.

Mr. DiBiasio deferred to Mrs. Torres for a community projects update. The electricity students have finished the 4<sup>th</sup> Street pump station project. The building now has security lighting on the outside and everything rewired on the inside with the brand new service.

Mr. Bentley provided the Superintendent-Director's report which included an update on student enrollment, exploratory placement, admissions and the LPN Program. The current enrollment is 1,470 students. Exploratory has finished and shop placements have been assigned. 241 students were placed in their first choice shop. 27 out of 385 students are in a vocational area they did not choose. A detailed shop placement report will be presented at the February meeting. Eight hundred and seven applications have been received for next year's freshman class. Mr. Bentley and Mrs. Pitera, Interim LPN Director, attended a virtual meeting with the Massachusetts Board of Nursing to discuss their requirements for the program director. The Board is expected to notify the district within the next couple of days of the outcome of the meeting. Currently, there are 18 enrolled students and 6 more are in the process of enrolling.

The next regular meeting of the School Committee is scheduled for February 13, 2025.

Attorney Brillhante stated the reasons to go into executive session.

It was moved by Mr. DiBiasio, seconded by Mr. Begin and voted on a roll call at 6:30 p.m. to enter into Executive Session with Mr. Jennings, Mr. DiBiasio, Mr. Begin, Attorney Flanagan, Mr. Manuels and Ms. Menard voting yes.

It was moved by Mr. DiBiasio, seconded by Ms. Menard and voted on a roll call at 6:55 p.m. to rise into Open Session with Mr. Jennings, Mr. DiBiasio, Mr. Begin, Attorney Flanagan, Mr. Manuels and Ms. Menard and voting yes.

It was moved by Attorney Flanagan, seconded by Mr. Begin and voted on a roll call with Mr. Jennings, Mr. DiBiasio, Mr. Begin, Attorney Flanagan, Mr. Manuels and Ms. Menard voting yes to adjourn the meeting at 6:56 p.m.

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Respectfully Submitted,

*Helena S. Neves*

Helena S. Neves, Executive Secretary

**Materials Included:**

December 12, 2024 Minutes

Student Report

MSBA Project Expenditures

24/25 School Calendar Changes

Competency Determination

Vision of the Graduate

Monthly Financial Report

Student Activity Agency Accounts Report

Expenditure Report

Community Projects

Superintendent-Director Report