

MATTAPOISETT SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING
Mattapoisett, Massachusetts
BY: HYBRID FORMAT
BUDGET HEARING
MEETING MINUTES
March 24, 2025

Regular meeting of the Mattapoisett School Committee was held on Monday, March 24, 2025, and called to order by Chairperson Carly Lavin at 6:36pm. Chairperson Lavin stated the meeting is being conducted via hybrid format and the public has the ability to participate in-person or remotely through zoom with the link provided.

MEMBERS PRESENT: Carly Lavin, Chairperson (in-person), James Muse (in-person), Cristin Cowles (in-person), Amanda Hastings (remote) and Jack LeBrun (in-person).

MEMBERS ABSENT: None

OTHERS PRESENT: Michael S. Nelson, Superintendent of Schools; Sharlene Fedorowicz, Assistant Superintendent of Teaching and Learning; Howard Barber, Assistant Superintendent of Finance and Operations; Jaime Curley, Assistant Superintendent of Student Services, Dr. Linda Ashley, Principal – Center School; Stephanie Wells, Principal – Old Hammondtown School and Melissa Wilcox, Recording Secretary (all in-person).

MEETING TO ORDER:

Chairperson Lavin stated in accordance with Massachusetts Open Meeting Law, the Agenda has been set, the meeting is being recorded, and unless there are any emergencies that need to be added, the Agenda will be followed as outlined.

RECOGNITION:

The School Committee and administration recognized 5th grader Thomas Cooney for winning a Feinstein Foundation Golden Ticket which brings a donation of \$5,000 to Old Hammondtown School and \$500 to a charity of his choice.

FY26 BUDGET PUBLIC HEARING

Chairperson Lavin called the public budget hearing to order at 6:38pm.

Superintendent Nelson welcomed the school committee and community members to the hearing. He extended his appreciation to the Budget Subcommittee – Ms. Lavin and Mr. Muse, Mr. Barber and Town Officials for their collaboration and feedback during a difficult budget season. He recognized that it is difficult times for the towns in our districts, and across the state. He reminded those present that Mattapoisett School District continues to be in ‘hold harmless’ status as does over 200 out of about 300 districts in the State. This means that the district is receiving the minimum state aid based off the current Chapter 70 formulas and the limited revenue streams are not keeping up with the rise in the cost of doing business for the school, therefor creating serious fiscal sustainability issues. Superintendent Nelson continued that the goal is to present a proposed budget that is as fiscally and programmatically responsible taking into account budget drivers including student services expense, utilities and salary obligations.

Mr. Barber, Assistant Superintendent of Finance and Operations, welcomed the school committee members and community members as well. He thanked the administration and staff for their support and feedback while developing the proposed FY26 budget. He appreciates the support of the school committee, town officials and finance committee. Mr. Barber reviewed the below budget presentation with the FY26 Proposed budget being Mattapoisett Elementary Schools General Operating in the amount of \$8,618,094, and Bristol County Agricultural School District in the amount of \$167,113.

Mr. Barber shared the vision for the schools:

- Is dedicated to creating a safe and nurturing learning environment that offers inclusive and engaging educational experiences.
- Through collaborative relationships with our school community members, we strive to foster a respectful culture that prioritizes academic excellence and social emotional readiness.
- Our primary objective is to provide every student with the necessary skills and developed mindset to embrace future

opportunities and become responsible, lifelong learners and contributing global citizens.

He then discussed the core values for the schools:

THINK:

Cultivate a culture of academic rigor and integrity, which encourages critical thinking, creative thinking, collaboration and effective communication.

LEARN:

Strive for academic excellence in educating the whole child through authentic, rigorous and evidence-based learning opportunities that foster real world application and a continuous pursuit of learning.

CARE:

Ensure a caring and safe environment for all school community members by promoting a sense of belonging and respect for all.

Mr. Barber explained the administration and budget subcommittee worked to create a budget the supports the following priorities:

- Ensuring high expectations of teaching and learning for all students
- Efficiency and cost-effectiveness measures
- Strategic staffing and professional development
- Data-driven decision-making

Mr. Barber reviewed the budget development process, which primarily takes place from September through May each year.

Preparation and Planning:

Superintendent, school administrators and other stakeholders analyze past budgets, assess current financial status and set budgetary goals for the upcoming fiscal year.

Budget Proposal Creation:

Based on the planning stage, a preliminary budget proposal is developed. This proposal outlines anticipated revenues, expenditures and allocations for different programs and departments. The budget proposal may include funding for personnel salaries, benefits, instructional materials, technology, facilities maintenance, transportation and other operational costs.

Budget Review and Revision:

The preliminary budget proposal(s) undergoes a thorough review by school administrators and budget subcommittee. Adjustments and revisions are made based on feedback, financial constraints and any changes in priorities or mandates.

Input and Hearings:

Superintendent holds meetings where the school's Budget Subcommittee, Town Administrator and Town Representatives can provide input, ask questions and provide feedback about the budget proposal. Feedback from the attendees may influence further revisions to the budget.

School Committee Budget Approval:

After incorporating feedback and making necessary adjustments, the final Superintendent's Budget proposal is presented to the School Committee and community at a Budget Public Hearing for approval. The School Committee reviews the budget, conducts discussions and may vote to approve or make additional changes before finalizing the budget.

Final Budget Approval:

Once the budget is approved by the School Committee, the School Committee's Proposed Budget is presented at the Annual Town Meeting. The Superintendent or designated representative attends the Annual Town Meeting to offer any additional information in support of the School Committee's Proposed Budget.

The next part of the presentation, Mr. Barber reviewed the budget information items for Mattapoissett schools, which consists of three items:

- Bristol County Agricultural High School
- Grants and Other Special Revenues
- General Funds

Four (4) Mattapoissett resident students attend Bristol County Agricultural High School.

Expenditure	Amount	Notes
Tuition - Enrollment	\$ 95,319	
Debt Service	\$ 25,354	4 Students Enrolled
Transportation - Busing	\$ 46,440	Bus Contract Allocated Between Two Districts
Total BCAHS Costs	<u>\$ 167,113</u>	

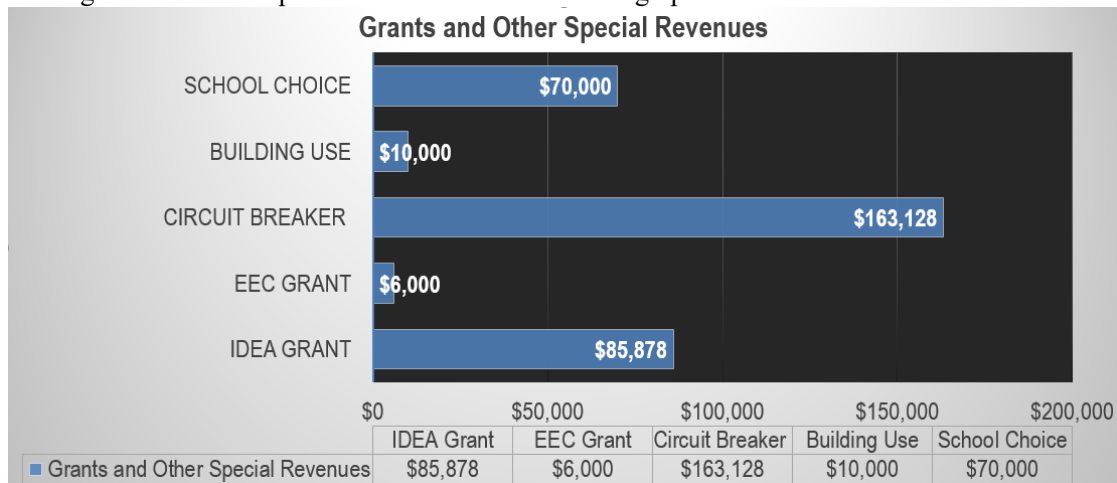
School or Department	Fiscal Year 2026	Fiscal Year 2025	Department Changes
Bristol County Agricultural H.S.	\$ 167,113	\$ 130,618	\$ 36,495
Total Bristol County School Budget	\$ 167,113	\$ 130,618	\$ 36,495

Grants and other special revenues are alternative funding used to supplement and reduce necessary general funds. The information below shows the buildings/departments supplemented by alternate funding or funding offsets.

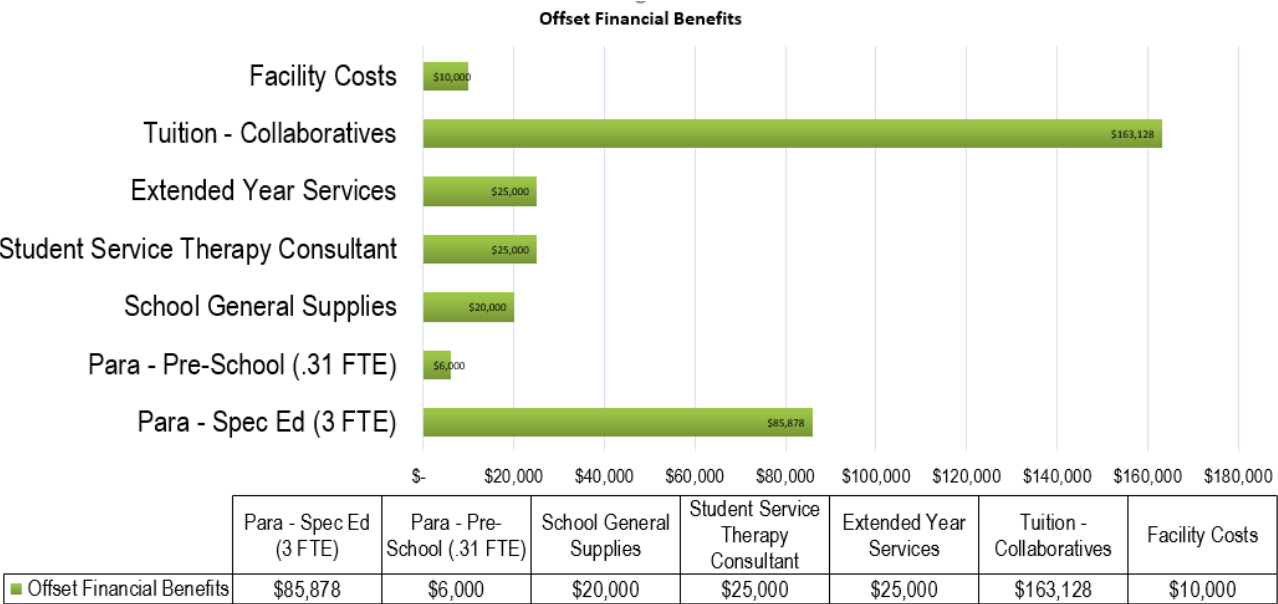
Mattapoissett Public Schools Superintendent's Proposed Budget for June 30, 2026

Building or Department	Funding Offsets
Center School	\$ 101,878
Old Hammondtown	\$ 10,000
Student Services	\$ 213,128
Facilities	\$ 10,000
Total FY26 Budget	<u>\$ 335,006</u>

The sources of these grants and other special revenues is shown in the graph below.



Mr. Barber continued to explain using the graph below where these funds are used.



Next, Mr. Barber discussed the general funds for Mattapoisett Public Schools. This is the primary source of funding for academics, student services, facilities, technology and transportation for the schools. Below shows the amount by building/department for the proposed budget. Superintendent Nelson added that he has heard from some community members with questions around federal funding for next year. He explained that state guidance is to continue with planning and similar guidance has been shared around free breakfast and lunch. The Food Service Department budget is not part of the operating budget but is a standalone. The Fresh Grants were recently cut, but the district had not been utilizing them at this time and had already exhausted the funds.

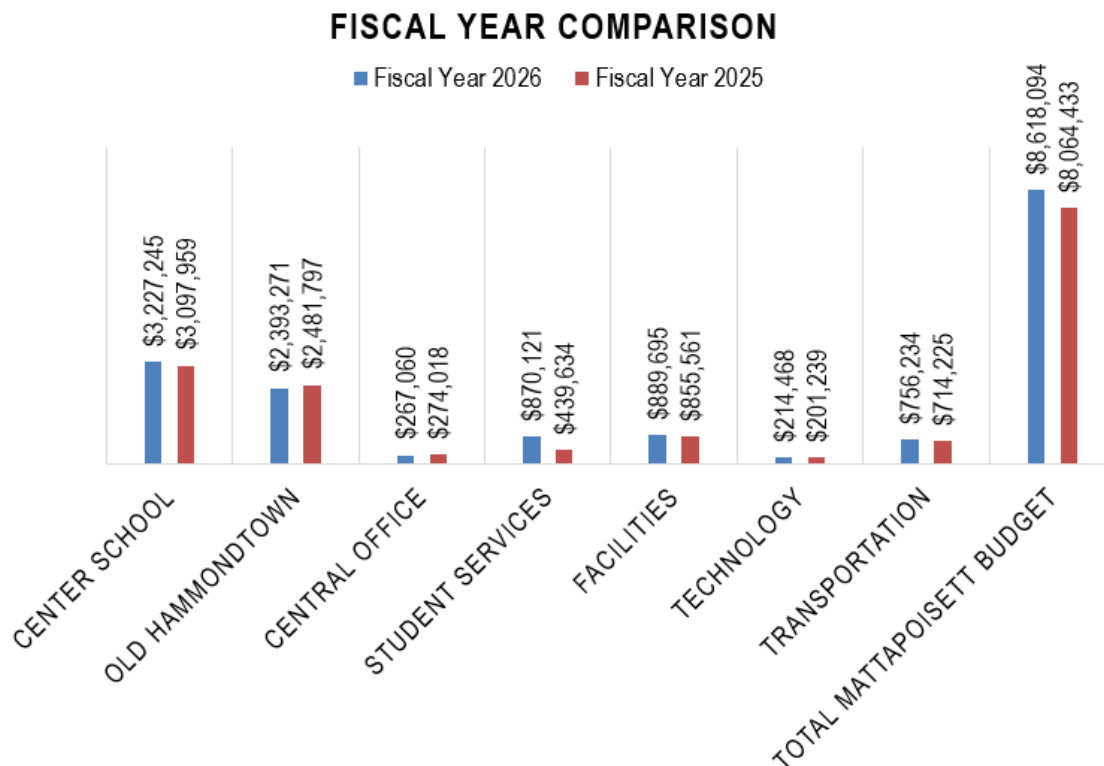
**Mattapoisett Public Schools
Superintendent's Proposed Budget
for June 30, 2026**

Building or Department	Budget Amounts
Center School	\$ 3,227,245
Old Hammondtown	\$ 2,393,271
Central Office	\$ 267,060
Student Services	\$ 870,121
Facilities	\$ 889,695
Technology	\$ 214,468
Transportation	\$ 756,234
Total FY26 Budget	\$ 8,618,094
Total FY25 Budget	\$ 8,064,433
	\$ 553,661
	106.865%

The next slide of the presentation reviewed a comparison of the approved FY25 budget and the proposed FY26 budget by building/department.

Mattapoissett Public Schools Superintendent's Proposed Budget for June 30, 2026			
School/ Department	Fiscal Year 2026	Fiscal Year 2025	Department Changes
Center School	\$ 3,227,245	\$ 3,097,959	\$ 129,287
Old Hammondtown	\$ 2,393,271	\$ 2,481,797	\$ (88,526)
Central Office	\$ 267,060	\$ 274,018	\$ (6,958)
Student Services	\$ 870,121	\$ 439,634	\$ 430,487
Facilities	\$ 889,695	\$ 855,561	\$ 34,134
Technology	\$ 214,468	\$ 201,239	\$ 13,227
Transportation	\$ 756,234	\$ 714,225	\$ 42,009
Total Mattapoissett Budget	\$ 8,618,094	\$ 8,064,433	\$ 553,661

Superintendent Nelson highlighted his opening comments illustrated here with special education and contractual obligations being main budget drivers. Mr. Barber reminded those present that special education costs are mandated expenses and not something the district has any flexibility with.



Next, Mr. Barber reviewed the changes by department.

Department Code	Department	Proposed Fiscal Year 2026 Budget	Approved Fiscal Year 2025 Budget	Budget Variance	Proposed Fiscal Year 2026 FTE	Approved Fiscal Year 2025 FTE	FTE Variance
001	School Committee	\$ 14,700	\$ 10,700	\$ 4,000	-	-	-
004	Superintendents Office	\$ 211,110	\$ 206,519	\$ 4,591	1.54	1.57	(0.03)
007	School Administration	\$ 455,492	\$ 459,055	\$ (3,563)	6.00	6.00	-
010	Classroom Teachers	\$ 1,458,085	\$ 1,548,145	\$ (90,060)	13.00	15.00	(2.00)
013	Kindergarten	\$ 311,982	\$ 296,760	\$ 15,223	3.00	3.00	-
016	Art	\$ 105,996	\$ 102,016	\$ 3,980	1.00	1.00	-
022	Reading	\$ 303,262	\$ 295,451	\$ 7,811	2.80	2.80	-
024	ELL Program	\$ 24,198	\$ 23,083	\$ 1,115	0.20	0.20	-
025	English	\$ 114,134	\$ 110,964	\$ 3,170	1.00	1.00	-
037	Mathematics	\$ 154,383	\$ 141,702	\$ 12,681	1.50	1.50	-
040	Media Services	\$ 115,259	\$ 114,414	\$ 845	1.00	1.00	-
043	Music	\$ 140,282	\$ 129,865	\$ 10,416	1.80	1.80	-
049	Physical Education	\$ 139,489	\$ 135,649	\$ 3,840	1.30	1.30	-
052	Science	\$ 223,939	\$ 216,678	\$ 7,261	2.00	2.00	-
055	Social Studies	\$ 113,155	\$ 109,514	\$ 3,641	1.00	1.00	-
061	Curriculum Development	\$ 45,000	\$ 61,000	\$ (16,000)	-	-	-
076	Health Services	\$ 181,624	\$ 172,753	\$ 8,871	2.00	2.00	-
079	Transportation	\$ 455,000	\$ 419,000	\$ 36,000	-	-	-
085	Miscellaneous	\$ 4,800	\$ 4,800	\$ -	-	-	-
088	Operation And Maintenance	\$ 889,695	\$ 855,561	\$ 34,134	2.17	2.17	(0.00)
093	Computer Program	\$ 214,468	\$ 201,239	\$ 13,228	1.03	1.05	(0.02)
100	Special Needs Administration	\$ 55,839	\$ 50,790	\$ 5,049	0.34	0.35	(0.01)
102	Project Grow	\$ 181,026	\$ 171,120	\$ 9,906	3.77	3.54	0.23
103	Learning Support Center	\$ 1,057,122	\$ 1,020,401	\$ 36,721	19.00	19.00	-
118	Speech	\$ 231,351	\$ 226,546	\$ 4,806	2.00	2.00	-
121	Support Services	\$ 199,878	\$ 199,203	\$ 675	1.00	1.00	-
127	Psychological Services	\$ 322,909	\$ 310,335	\$ 12,574	3.00	3.00	-
130	Sped Transportation	\$ 281,234	\$ 283,225	\$ (1,991)	-	-	-
133	Program With Others Sped	\$ 612,682	\$ 187,944	\$ 424,738	-	-	-
	Totals	\$ 8,618,094	\$ 8,064,433	\$ 553,660	71.46	73.28	(1.82)

Additional information was shared to review the major changes in the FY26 budget, including union contract obligations, tuition placement costs in special education and transportation as shown below.

Building/ Department	Fiscal Year 2026	Fiscal Year 2025	Department Changes	Notes
Center School	\$ 3,227,245	\$ 3,097,959	\$ 129,287	Union Contract Compensation
Old Hammondtown	\$ 2,393,271	\$ 2,481,797	\$ (88,526)	Staff Reduction - 2 FTE, Union Contract Compensation
Central Office	\$ 267,060	\$ 274,018	\$ (6,958)	Level Services
Student Services	\$ 870,121	\$ 439,634	\$ 430,487	Special Education Costs
Facilities	\$ 889,695	\$ 855,561	\$ 34,134	Utilities and Contracted Services
Technology	\$ 214,468	\$ 201,239	\$ 13,227	Equipment and Software
Transportation	\$ 756,234	\$ 714,225	\$ 42,009	Reg & Sped Ed Bus Contracts
Total Mattapoisett Budget	\$ 8,618,094	\$ 8,064,433	\$ 553,661	6.865%

Mr. Barber reviewed major cost drivers of the budget. For building based expenses, cost drivers were union based compensation and 2.0 FTE reduced Teacher Positions for a net \$40,761 increase. In student services, changes in program placements and an increased enrollment in these services net a \$424,738 increase. A \$26,000 increase in facilities and operations was due to contracted custodial services and an increase in electricity and gas expenses. In transportation, the second year of bus contract increased the budget by \$36,000 and an \$8,000 increase due to bus monitors for special needs requirements.

Next, Mr. Barber reviewed the below information from the Governor's Proposed Budget of Chapter 70 aid which has aid at an increase of \$27,300 more than FY25.

Comparison to FY25

	FY25	FY26	Change	Pct Chg
Enrollment	383	364	-19	-4.96%
Foundation budget	4,865,916	4,742,122	-123,794	-2.54%
Required district contribution	4,014,381	3,912,251	-102,130	-2.54%
Chapter 70 aid	1,045,053	1,072,353	27,300	2.61%
Required net school spending (NSS)	5,059,434	4,984,604	-74,830	-1.48%
Target aid share	17.50%	17.50%		
C70 % of foundation	21.48%	22.61%		
Required NSS % of foundation	103.98%	105.11%		

Mr. Barber concluded that the Superintendent's Proposed FY26 Budget was \$8,618,094, an increase of \$553,661 from FY25.

Fiscal Year 2026 Proposed Budget	\$ 8,618,094
Fiscal Year 2025 Approved Budget	<u>\$ 8,064,433</u>
Net Increase:	<u>\$ 553,661</u>
Net Percentage Increase	6.865%

He reminded the subcommittee members that the Math Curriculum will be a separate line item at Town Meeting because it is a one-time expense for a three-year license and not included in this operating budget proposal.

School Committee Feedback:

Chairperson Lavin thanked the administration and building leadership for their time and work during this budget season.

Mr. Muse commented that this budget did not happen overnight and a lot of work was done to get where it is today by the administration and the Budget Subcommittee. He always looks to the principals to hear their requests and what they need. He said over 6% is a lot to ask of taxpayers and things are tougher than he would like which weighs heavily on him, but he believes the proposed budget supports the schools.

Ms. Cowles noted that the enrollment analysis is completed every year for each grade level, and the teaching reductions are not a reflection of budget cuts but rather based on enrollment fluctuations in the district. Chairperson Lavin agreed. Superintendent Nelson agreed and informed the school committee that they are monitoring incoming Kindergarten numbers but at this time they anticipate only two sections being needed based on the current information and the rising second grade class enrollment has decreased over the last year or two as well so the administration is projecting only two sections at second grade as well. Ms. Cowles added that decreased enrollment is a trend statewide. Superintendent Nelson confirmed and that is why the Chapter 70 formula does not support over 200 districts. These decisions and conversations are extremely difficult.

Public Comment:

Sara Jacobsen – resident and teacher in Mattapoisett, and Co-president of the Mattapoisett Educators' Association.

Ms. Jacobsen commented to convey to the school committee and those present that eliminating two classes would likely effect four classes because two other teachers will probably be displaced to different grade levels. Ms. Lavin thanked Ms. Jacobsen for her comments and confirmed, adding that was thoroughly discussed at the Budget Subcommittee meetings.

Jennifer (last name inaudible) – Mattapoisett resident and parent – Jennifer asked for clarification between the Bristol County Agricultural High School expense being \$167,000 for a few students but only \$70,000 being received for 14 school choice students. Mr. Barber explained that these are two separate scenarios in that the school choice reimbursement rate set by the state is \$5,000 per student for any non-resident attending the district which has not changed for many years. For BCAHS, these are current residents attending vocational high school and the expenses are assessed to the Town for their regional expenses based on their cost per student and the district is required to pay for transportation for these residents as well.

Ashley Bristol – Mattapoisett resident and parent of incoming students.

Ms. Bristol asked for a better understanding in layman's terms of what the positions are being reduced and the impact to the kids. She also asked what budget scenarios were considered instead of those reductions. She said she couldn't imagine it would be that big of an increase in our taxes to pass the cost of these two teachers to taxpayers. Mr. Barber explained that submitting a higher proposed budget would affect proposition 2 ½. Superintendent Nelson explained that there are two pieces moving at the same time. The first is budget constraints around inflation and the second is the enrollment numbers, despite financial challenges. He further explained that class sizes are projecting less than 50 students per class. No matter what the financial situation, when the class size starts decreasing below 15 kids per class, the administration must review how many sections should be in place for that particular grade level. Chairperson Lavin added that these grade levels have been being monitored, especially the rising second graders which has decreased in enrollment since they began in Kindergarten. Next, Superintendent Nelson explained that when a reduction is decided upon, the Collective Bargaining Agreement between the Mattapoisett Educators' Association and the School Committee governs the process, which typically starts with looking at staff with non-professional teacher status. Ms. Jacobsen is correct, that although the reduction is in a particular grade level, it does not necessarily mean that a staff member from the same grade level will be effected based on the Collective Bargaining Agreement. Ms. Cowles reminded those present that enrollment is reviewed annually and just because this is the scenario for the 2025-2026 school year, that does not mean it will be the same for future years. Chairperson Lavin added that she has been doing this for a long time and the idea of reducing the best workforce in public education is not something she would like to do but as an elected school committee member, they must represent what is best for all constituents in the town. Mr. Muse agreed that this is very difficult but he does not want the school department to lose credibility running class sizes of less than 15.

Nicki Demakis – Mattapoisett resident

Ms. Demakis asked Superintendent Nelson to explain the 'hold harmless' status and state aid concerns further. Superintendent Nelson said over 200 districts state-wide are effected out of 351 in the state. Based on the current Chapter 70 formula and the way it works based on enrollment, the district receives the minimum amount, which this year was about \$27,000 of an increase from FY2025. Ms. Demakis said it has nothing to do with reckless spending and asked is that because Mattapoisett is considered a wealthy district. Mr. Barber explained it is a combination and there are six tiers of what the state reviews to determine funding including property assessments, enrollment, special education, etc. Superintendent Nelson explained there are many organizations state-wide working together and issuing joint statements advocating to the state on this topic, such as the Massachusetts Association of School Committees, the Massachusetts Association of School Superintendents, the Massachusetts Association of School Business Officials, just to name a few. There is a lot of agreement that maybe the formula worked in the past but based on everything effecting towns in the state, it needs to be looked at.

Max Richmond – Mattapoisett resident and parent

Mr. Richmond asked for clarification on student services expenses and if they are programs developed in-house. Superintendent Nelson explained the costs shared are attributed to out-of-district placements and the district has no control over the rates as they too are mandated by the state.

Kathleen LeClair – Mattapoisett resident and parent

Ms. LeClair asked how many students effected the student services increase. Superintendent Nelson shared the budget is for all the students but there were changes in placements for at least two students that moved to a more restrictive setting. He said this has nothing to do with how the funds are spent, and these services are necessary and supported for these students and families. This discussion is based solely on how the expenses effect the overall operating budget. Mattapoisett and the Tri-Town has always supported all of our students and the supports they need.

Chairperson Lavin reiterated enrollment in the two grade levels of Kindergarten and second grade would be the basis of the reductions and then the Collective Bargaining Agreement would be followed and additional grades would likely be affected.

Chairperson Lavin closed the Public Budget Hearing at 7:40pm. She thanked everyone for attending and sharing their comments and reminded them to advocate for improvement in state funding.

IV. General

A. Approval of FY26 Budget

Recommendation:

That the School Committee review for approval the FY26 Budget.

Mr. Barber reviewed the proposed motions in the school committee back-up information.

MOTION: by James Muse to approve the Superintendent's Proposed Fiscal Year June 30, 2025 Budget in the total amount of \$8,195,051 for the Mattapoisett Public Schools. The total amount of \$8,195,051 recognizes the two (2) segments of its funding: 1. Mattapoisett Elementary Schools General Operating in the amount of \$8,064,433, and 2. Bristol County Agricultural School District in the amount of \$130,618.

SECONDED: Jack LeBrun

MOTION PASSED: 5:0

ROLL CALL: Lavin (yes); Muse (yes); Cowles (yes); LeBrun (yes); Hastings (yes)

MOTION: by James Muse to approve the authorization in the total amount of \$70,000 from free-cash or alternative funding for the Mattapoisett School District. The total amount of \$70,000 is for acquiring a Department of Elementary and Secondary Education approved high quality Math instructional materials.

SECONDED: Carly Lavin

MOTION PASSED: 5:0

ROLL CALL: Lavin (yes); Muse (yes); Cowles (yes); LeBrun (yes); Hastings (yes)

MOTION: by James Muse to approve the transfer of \$70,000 for the Mattapoisett Public Schools from the School Choice Revolving Fund account to expenditures to be incurred in addition to the Superintendent's Proposed Fiscal Year June 30, 2026 Budget.

SECONDED: Carly Lavin

MOTION PASSED: 5:0

ROLL CALL: Lavin (yes); Muse (yes); Cowles (yes); LeBrun (yes); Hastings (yes)

ADJOURNMENT:

That the School Committee adjourn the Regular Session of the Mattapoisett School Committee at 7:46pm.

MOTION: by James Muse to adjourn at 7:46pm

SECONDED: Cristin Cowles

MOTION PASSED: 5:0

ROLL CALL: Lavin (yes); Muse (yes); Cowles (yes); LeBrun (yes); Hastings (yes)

Respectfully Submitted,

Melissa Wilcox, Recording Secretary