

GREATER FALL RIVER VOCATIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT COMMITTEE
MINUTES OF REGULAR MEETING
251 STONEHAVEN ROAD, FALL RIVER, MA
DISTRICT OFFICE CONFERENCE ROOM
March 13, 2025

The regular meeting of the Greater Fall River Vocational School District Committee was called to order at 5:32 p.m. by Chairman Paul Jennings, with the following persons in attendance, Richard Manuels Jr. of Fall River, Joan Menard of Fall River, Donald DiBiasio of Somerset and Jeffrey Begin of Swansea. William Flanagan of Fall River arrived at 5:35 pm.

Also in attendance were: Brian Bentley, Superintendent/Director, Leslie Weckesser, Assistant Superintendent-Principal, Paul Kitchen, Director of Finance and Operations, Attorney Gregory Brillhante, Ace Wittkamper, Student Representative 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 called the Budget public hearing to order and deferred to Mr. Kitchen for the FY26 Budget presentation. Mr. Kitchen provided a summary of the proposed budget that included an overview of the foundation budget, transportation and construction debt.

The floor was open to the public for questions regarding the proposed FY26 Budget. As there were no questions, the budget public hearing was closed at 5:57 pm.

Mr. Jennings called the School Choice public hearing to order. Mr. Bentley stated that the Greater Fall River Vocational School District/Diman Regional Vocational Technical High School, does not wish to participate in school choice for the 2025-2026 school year because of its inability to accept all students wanting to enroll from the four district communities.

There were no requests from the public to speak on School Choice. As there were no questions, the School Choice public hearing was closed at 5:58 pm.

Mr. Jennings called the regular meeting to order at 5:58 pm and 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 unanimously to approve the February 13, 2025 minutes, as submitted.

Ms. Wittkamper provided the student report which included an update on current events, sports, ongoing issues, and new issues. Ms. Wittkamper's goal is to establish a culture at Diman where student participation at school events is not seen as lame. A strong school spirit offers students opportunities to socialize with their peers in a fun environment. Some ideas to boost school spirit are: a time capsule for the Class of 2026, an

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auction night fundraiser, senior picnic, field day, scavenger hunts, etc. Ms. Wittkamper stated that poor communication between staff and students has come up as being an issue. Accurate, thorough and timely communication is incredibly important in building a trusting relationship.

There was no Citizen Input.

Mr. Jennings called for a discussion on the FY26 Budget. Mr. DiBiasio stated that there was a discussion in the past about not purchasing textbooks. Mr. Kitchen stated that only textbooks for some subjects are being purchased. ELA and Science will be primarily online. Mr. Kitchen stated that it would be advisable to discuss the rising costs of the health insurance plans with the bargaining units and suggested forming an insurance advisory committee. Mr. DiBiasio asked if the District is in a collaborative. Mr. Kitchen stated that the District is pretty much self-insured. Mr. Kitchen has reached out to an insurance consortium to gather data on increases. The GIC is not a very favorable option for Southeastern Massachusetts. Mr. Jennings requested additional information on the health insurance be made available for the April meeting.

Mr. Jennings asked how is it that Westport is down 10 students but it's only a \$10,000 difference. Mr. Kitchen stated that the formula used is based on social economics and the substantially higher property values.

It was moved by Mr. DiBiasio, seconded by Attorney Flanagan, and voted unanimously to approve the FY26 Budget as submitted.

Mr. Jennings called for a discussion on School Choice. Mr. Bentley does not recommend that the District be a choice school for the 2025-2026 school year. The District receives hundreds of applications each year and is not able accept all students wanting to enroll from the four district communities.

It was moved by Mr. DiBiasio, seconded by Attorney Flanagan, and voted unanimously that the Greater Fall River Vocational School District/Diman Regional Vocational Technical High School, not be a choice school for the 2025-2026 school year because of its inability to accept all students wanting to enroll from the four district communities.

Mr. DiBiasio provided the MSBA School Building update. Construction is about 35% done. Windows have started to be installed. Sheet rock is also going up, which means rough work is getting done. The wrap on the building will slowly start coming down because fireproofing is getting to the end. Most of the floors have been poured with the exception of the bottom shops. On an average day, there are anywhere between 180 to 200 workers on site. The project is on schedule and on budget.

Mr. DiBiasio provided a summary of Prime Contract Change Order (PCCO) No. 003 which was approved by the School Building Committee.

It was moved by Ms. Menard, seconded by Attorney Flanagan, and voted unanimously to reaffirm PCCO No. 003 for a total amount of \$194,700.73.

Mr. Kitchen provided an overview of the MSBA project expenditures. Invoices from Colliers, KBA and Suffolk reflect monthly billing for the project.

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It was moved by Attorney Flanagan, seconded by Ms. Menard, and voted unanimously to approve the following MSBA Project expenditures: Colliers Invoice #0001030453 dated 2/28/2025 for the amount of \$141,170.47, KBA invoice #20006.01-32 dated 2/28/2025 for the amount of \$135,709.95, and Suffolk Construction application no. 17 dated 2/28/2025 for the amount of \$7,380,826.65.

Mr. Bentley reported on personnel appointments.

Mr. Bentley reported on the student travel requests.

It was moved by Attorney Flanagan, seconded by Mr. Begin, and voted unanimously to reaffirm the out of state student travel request submitted by Mr. Soares for students to attend the Nike Track & Field Nationals at the Armory in New York from March 13th through March 15th.

It was moved by Mr. DiBiasio, seconded by Mr. Begin, and voted unanimously to approve the out of state student travel request submitted by the Carpentry and Cabinet Making Program Instructors for students to travel to the RI Convention Center in Providence, RI on April 8th & 9th to set up the Rosemary's Wish Kids Playhouse and on April 11th for the unveiling of the playhouse.

It was moved by Mr. DiBiasio, seconded by Attorney Flanagan, and voted unanimously to approve the out of state travel request submitted by Mr. Salsinha, for students to attend the Project MFG Maritime Competition on May 5, 2025 at the Providence Career and Technical Academy in Providence, RI.

It was moved by Attorney Flanagan, seconded by Ms. Menard, and voted unanimously to approve the afterhours travel request submitted by the DECA Club Advisors for students to attend the DECA Red Sox Day in Boston on May 20, 2025 from 3:00 pm to 11:00 pm.

It was moved by Attorney Flanagan, seconded by Ms. Menard, and voted unanimously to approve the out of state travel request submitted by the DECA Club Advisors for students to attend the DECA ICDC Conference in Orlando, Florida from April 25th through May 1st.

Mr. Bentley reported on the use of facilities requests.

It was moved by Mr. DiBiasio, seconded by Ms. Menard, and voted unanimously to approve the use of facilities request submitted by the Diman PTO to use the cafeteria on Saturday, March 23, 2025 from 9:00 am to 12:30 pm for a Paint and Brunch Scholarship event and to waive all use of facilities fees.

Mr. Bentley stated that the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) has renamed three vocational programs. Building and Property Maintenance is now called Facilities Maintenance Management; Electronics is called Electronics Engineering Technology and Graphic Communications is Graphic Design and Visual Communication. Mr. DiBiasio asked if the frameworks also changed. Mrs. Weckesser stated that DESE has gone through and updated the frameworks as part of the renaming process. Mrs. Torres has been working with the teachers to review the scope and sequence of all vocational programs to align with what is currently done and identify areas that need to be worked on. Mrs. Weckesser stated that there are some programming changes that a concerning.

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It was moved by Attorney Flanagan, seconded by Ms. Menard, and voted unanimously to approve the new names issued by DESE for the identified Vocational Programs.

Mr. Bentley began the discussion of the Bypass List. Each year 365 students are accepted into Diman. For the last couple of years the School Committee has approved to increase the number of acceptances to 385 students due to the high number of applications received. The recommendation is to increase the number of students from 365 to 385 for the incoming Class of 2029. Mr. Bentley stated he would leave it to the Committee's discretion to decide on the breakdown of the additional seats.

It was moved by Mr. DiBiasio, seconded by Attorney Flanagan, and voted unanimously to increase the number of students from 365 to 385 for the Class of 2029. Each of the four sending communities will be increased by 5 students.

Mr. Bentley deferred to Mrs. Weckesser for the 25/26 School Calendar. Mrs. Weckesser thanked the Diman Teachers Association for their patience and collaboration. There is a week in December that is split between A week and B week. This was needed to make sure that each student gets an equal amount of time in their vocational program and in their academic classes. This also allows the guidance department to work through the exploratory selection process and placement of students.

It was moved by Attorney Flanagan, seconded by Ms. Menard, and voted unanimously to approve the 25/26 School Calendar, as submitted.

Mr. Kitchen provided an overview of the transportation bid award. There was only one provider that submitted a bid. The bid was submitted by Tremblay's Bus Company of New Bedford and it came in at \$1,213,779.60 for the 17 routes. Any expenditures for extracurricular activities and sports are at a different rate.

It was moved by Mr. DiBiasio, seconded by Mr. Begin and voted unanimously to approve Tremblay's Bus Company, 284 Myrtle Street, New Bedford Massachusetts as the responsible and responsive bidder for the Student Transportation as specified for SY 2025-26, 2026-27, and 2027-28 for the Greater Fall River Vocational School District at a per route per day cost of \$396.66 and a total cost of \$1,213,779.60 per school year.

Mr. Kitchen provided a summary of the monthly financial report.

Mr. Kitchen provided an overview of the expenditures in excess of \$10,000.

It was moved by Mr. DiBiasio, seconded by Attorney Flanagan and voted unanimously to approve all expenditures, as submitted.

Mr. Kitchen requested that agenda item m) FY25 Budget Adjustment be tabled until the April meeting.

Mr. Kitchen provided a summary of the request to surplus textbooks and equipment. Textbooks will be donated. Equipment will be auctioned.

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It was moved by Mr. DiBiasio, seconded by Attorney Flanagan and voted unanimously to approve the surplus of books and equipment, as submitted.

Mr. DiBiasio deferred to Mrs. Torres for the Community Projects update. Mrs. Torres stated that the work on the projects is moving along nicely. Students are working on the playhouse which will be displayed at the RI Convention Center. The Key Club is fundraising to buy supplies and decorations for the playhouse. Mrs. Torres congratulated all the students and staff on the wonderful job they are doing on the playhouse.

Mr. DiBiasio deferred to Mrs. Torres for the 24/25 Housebuilding Program update. Mrs. Torres stated that the construction on the house is on track and on schedule.

Mr. DiBiasio stated that two applications have been received for the 25/26 Housebuilding Program. One is for a house in Swansea. The house is 1,800 square feet with a garage that brings it up to approximately 2000 square feet. The second house is in Westport. This house is 1,960 square feet and with the garage it's 2,400 square feet. This house would be a little bit more challenging because it has a walkout basement. The Housebuilding and Facilities Sub-Committee is recommending to give another community the opportunity to have a house built. The recommendation is to approve the Westport house pending negotiations with Mrs. Torres, Attorney Brilhante and the Homeowners. Diman will not be able to do the roof pitch and the chimney therefore it will be the homeowners responsibility to have it done. If the Westport homeowners do not come to an agreement, the Swansea house will be brought back for discussion.

It was moved by Mr. DiBiasio, seconded by Ms. Menard and voted unanimously to approve the Westport house pending contract negotiations with the homeowners.

Mr. Bentley provided the Superintendent-Director's report which included an update on student enrollment, exploratory program review, admissions, cooperative education and the LPN Program. Student enrollment remains strong at 1461 students as of March 6th. A review of the exploratory process, the placement of students in shops, the curriculum being used in the shops and the whole exploratory program will be taking place. Eight hundred and thirty eight applications have been received for the Class of 2029. Currently, there are 193 seniors and 38 juniors at a co-op placement with local employers. Twenty four students have been accepted into the LPN full time program for the 25/26 school year. Mr. Bentley stated that he will be requesting a meeting of the LPN Sub-Committee to begin discussing plans for the 26/27 school year.

The next regular meeting of the School Committee is scheduled for Wednesday, April 16, 2025 due to a conflict with the State OVS ceremony.

Attorney Brilhante stated the reasons to go into executive session.

It was moved by Ms. Menard, seconded by Attorney Flanagan and voted on a roll call at 6:43 pm 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 Attorney Flanagan and voted on a roll call at 7:14 p.m. to rise into Open Session with Mr. Jennings, Mr. DiBiasio, Mr. Begin, Attorney Flanagan, Mr. Manuels and Ms. Menard and voting yes.

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It was moved by Mr. DiBiasio, seconded by Attorney Flanagan and voted unanimously to adjourn the meeting at 7:14 pm with Mr. Jennings, Mr. DiBiasio, Mr. Begin, Attorney Flanagan, Mr. Manuels and Ms. Menard and voting yes.

Respectfully Submitted,

Helena S. Neves

Helena S. Neves, Executive Secretary

Materials Included:

February 13, 2025 Minutes
FY26 Proposed Budget
Student Report
Prime Contract Change Order No. 003
MSBA Project Expenditures
Transportation Bid Award
Monthly Financial Report
Student Activity Agency Accounts Report
Expenditure Report
Surplus of Books and Equipment
Superintendent-Director Report