

**Blackstone Valley Vocational Regional District School Committee
Minutes of Regular Meeting
August 21, 2025**

The regular meeting of the Blackstone Valley Vocational Regional District School Committee was held in the school cafeteria. The following members, staff and others were present:

Joseph M. Hall of Bellingham, Chair
Joseph A. Broderick of Blackstone
Mark J. Potter of Douglas
Anthony M. Yitts of Grafton
Mitchell A. Intinarelli of Hopedale
Edward D. Cray, III of Mendon
Paul J. Braza of Milford
Gerald M. Finn of Millville, Vice Chair
Jeff T. Koopman of Northbridge
Tyler D. Bartlett of Upton
James H. Ebbeling of Uxbridge

Members Absent:

Jan P. Hanratty of Millbury
James M. Mitchell of Sutton

Anthony E. Steele II, Superintendent-Director
Dr. Matthew J. Connors, Assistant Superintendent
Michele S. Denise, Principal
Robert Dolegiewicz, Facilities Manager
Nicole M. Ferguson, Business Manager
Catherine Proctor, Assistant Principal
David Champagne, Assistant Principal
Kerri Baltramaitis, Vocational Director
Bryant Laflamme, Vocational Director
Mary May, Director of Workforce & Economic Development
Miranda Dolegiewicz, Administrative Assistant
Maddison Dos Santos, Student Council Representative
Isla Koopman, Student Council Representative
Elise Bogdan, Recording Secretary

Item 1. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 6:00 p.m. by the Chair, Mr. Hall. The Superintendent-Director, Mr. Steele, informed the Committee that earlier this month, the school community experienced the loss of a student, a member of our Auto Technology shop, and the Class of 2027, Asher Mahoney of Bellingham, passed away. In remembrance of the student, the Committee held a moment of silence. Mr. Steele then shared with the Committee that he was notified in advance that Mr. Hanratty and Mr. Mitchell would be unable to attend.

Item 2. Secretary's Report – A. Yitts

2.1. On a motion by Mr. Yitts, seconded by Mr. Koopman, it was unanimously voted to waive reading of the minutes of the regular School Committee meeting of June 18, 2025, and to accept the minutes as written.

Item 3. Treasurer's Report – C. Pilla

Mr. Steele was given advanced notice that the Treasurer, Mr. Pilla, would not be able to attend the meeting. With Mr. Pilla not in attendance, it was agreed that the Treasurer's Report(s) would be tabled for the next regularly scheduled meeting.

Item 4. Student Council Representatives - Maddison Dos Santos & Isla Koopman

The Student Council Representatives provided an update on Council activities. First, they reported on the return-to-school welcoming activities. They had members volunteer at the Freshmen Cookout on the evening of August 13, 2025, greeting families and handing out Freshmen T-shirts. Council members also volunteered as mentors for the Freshmen Orientation Days on August 14 and 15, 2025. The Council created and placed personalized paper airplanes based on the theme of leadership without limits with each student's name on the appropriate homeroom doors to make the new students in the Class of 2029 feel welcome. Mr. Steele thanked the student representatives for their dedication and commitment to making a difference

in the school and the community.

Item 5. Business Manager – N. Ferguson

5.1. The Business Manager, Nicole Ferguson, shared an update on the FY25 district financial audit. The audit began on July 1, 2025, with sharing reports and data with the Hague, Sahady & Co. audit firm (BVT's auditors since FY16) and throughout August. While working with the same firm, Mrs. Ferguson shared that the field auditor who is conducting the audit works remotely, and therefore, the audit is being done remotely at their request. However, an on-site meeting is yet to be scheduled for a future date. As of today, we do not anticipate any audit findings. Everything is going smoothly, and they are very thorough, but we are in good shape overall and on track to complete the audit by the end of August. Other external financial reports are to be completed, including the Department of Revenue Reports (for certifying Excess & Deficiency), targeted for September, and the DESE End of Year Report due by September 30, 2025.

5.2. Donation Approval(s)

a. On a motion by Mr. Koopman, seconded by Mr. Intinarelli, it was unanimously voted to approve a donation of 200 aluminum plates from Primetals Technologies, which will be used for instructional and training purposes in the Advanced Manufacturing & Fabrication program.

Item 6. Assistant Superintendent's Report – Dr. M. Connors

6.1. Dr. Connors provided the Committee with a 2025-2026 School Year Initiatives update, which included the following informational updates under the principal's office and the Superintendent's office.

Principal's Office Initiatives:

The Dignity Index: is a school-wide initiative being introduced this school year. It is an eight-point scale for measuring how we talk to each other when we disagree. Dr. Connors shared a handout titled The Dignity Index with the Committee, which explains that honoring someone's dignity can be difficult, especially when situations get heated. The sheet includes steps to follow when stress rises such as: Be curious, not furious; Regulate the debate; Listen to understand, not to respond; Challenge ideas, don't attack people; Acknowledge knowledge; and Build up rather than tear down- and join the movement of Americans easing divisions, preventing violence, and solving problems by choosing dignity over contempt.

Competency Determination: Massachusetts high school students' Competency Determination (CD) is now based on satisfactorily completing district-certified coursework rather than passing the MCAS test, following a ballot question and new DESE guidance issued in December 2024 and May 2025. Students, particularly those in the graduating classes of 2026 and 2027, must demonstrate mastery of the skills, knowledge, and competencies that are equivalent to the prior MCAS-tested subjects through their coursework. Districts are responsible for certifying that students have met these standards. Based on DESE guidance and the state's ongoing update of the CD language, the Academic Curriculum Coordinator, Mr. Evans, will present CD language to the Committee at a future meeting.

Digital Initiatives: Under new school leadership, steps are being taken to improve efficiency and streamline processes from paper to digital. Examples include digital course approval request forms, electronic School Committee packets, and the introduction of Securly Pass (a digital hall pass).

Artificial Intelligence (AI): At BVT, as part of professional development for staff, we brought in a keynote speaker, the former MA DESE Commissioner, Jeff Riley, who inspired our team of educators. Through a fun and engaging presentation, he illustrated the importance of being a discerning AI user and recognizing its practical applications. Staff goals include the implementation of AI and the mandatory creation of AI-based assignments and projects across the curriculum.

Superintendent's Office Initiatives:

Superintendent Steele is full steam ahead on a lot of initiatives already, which include the following:

CTI Grant Recipient: The Healey-Driscoll Administration recently awarded \$24.2 million in Career Technical Initiative (CTI) implementation grants to 23 school districts. We're proud to be a \$1,040,000 grant recipient. This grant will allow us to deliver high-quality CTE to adults interested in upskilling and retraining, provide skilled labor to the local workforce, and generate non-local taxpayer revenue to help fund the school. We are starting with five, 200-hour programs this year in Advanced Manufacturing, Electrical, HVAC, Plumbing, and Welding.

Grant Pursuits: Another initiative is to increase external funding sources by pursuing more public and private grants and engaging with new potential partners.

Other initiatives: include embracing AI, improving our workflow efficiency, and fostering new relationships with our sending Town officials. We will be updating our master plan and vision for the next 10 years. We also want to take steps to enhance the way we communicate the budget requests to the towns. We will also be negotiating a new teacher contract, working on the roof renovation, and renovating the culinary arts area. There is no shortage of projects, and there is plenty to do right now. It's a really exciting time.

6.2. Dr. Connors introduced Mr. Robert Dolegiewicz, BVT's Facilities Manager, who presented the Committee with a 2025 School Building Enhancement Summary List. The lengthy list outlined the projects that were completed over the summer, many with the assistance of students, staff, and grant funds. Mr. Finn asked Mr. Dolegiewicz what the estimated value of the savings would be with the use of in-house talent. Mr. Dolegiewicz responded that he would prepare that figure after project completion and bring it to a future meeting.

6.3. The School Committee members received an update on new personnel and a document titled FY26 Appointments, which lists the positions/roles and appointees. It also indicated whether the person hired was new to the role, a rehire/reappointment, or an open/recruiting position. Dr. Connors extended compliments to the Human Resources department on their recruitment process. It was a very productive hiring season.

6.4. Vocational Framework Revisions: In partnership with Pathway2Careers™, the Massachusetts Department of Secondary Education is modernizing its CTE Frameworks to close the gap that exists between education and industry. All 18 vocational programs are now up-to-date according to the new frameworks for each program.

a. The Committee members received a packet titled, Culinary Arts Standards and Skills, dated February 2024, produced by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary

Education.

b. The Committee members received a packet titled, Engineering Technology Standards and Skills, dated August 2024, produced by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.

6.5. Dr. Matthew Connors informed the Committee that the collective and continuous efforts of the students and staff have resulted in national recognition from the nonprofit organization Project Lead the Way (PLTW) year after year. BVT was recently informed that it is a 2024-2025 PLTW Distinguished School for the eighth consecutive year, which is a testament to shared commitment and dedication.

6.6. Admissions Update

Some information was recently received from the state after the 90-day moratorium. A slide titled "Weights" was shared with the Committee, along with guidance for implementing a weighted lottery policy and how students may earn up to 3 additional entries into the lottery. Superintendent Steele shared that the District policy will need to be written in the coming weeks and reviewed with the Policy Subcommittee. The decision has been made within MAVA (our other sister vocational schools) to move forward with a positive attitude in implementing a lottery admissions policy that is in compliance with the guidance received. This means the Policy Subcommittee will need to meet and plan to bring a draft policy for a weighted lottery to the September meeting for the School Committee's consideration, or at the October meeting at the latest, for approval. The deadline for policy submission to DESE is November 1st to ensure compliance.

Although the state acknowledged the possibility of numerous unintended consequences stemming from the implementation of lottery admissions, we are focused on creating a conforming policy that minimizes negative impacts to our member towns. Mr. Yitts asked if there would be a handout or publication to explain, whatever policy is decided, to the sending towns. Mr. Steele shared that clear, consistent information would be made available and that he would be meeting with Town officials on how a weighted lottery would be implemented with constituents and prospective parents. A discussion of the anticipated challenges around the imposed lottery ensued. Members were encouraged to join the Policy Subcommittee.

Mr. Steele reminded everyone that the lottery does not address the shortage of seats. Mr. Steele explained that the state recognizes that the process for getting into a vocational school has been settled for the time being, but it does not address the 8000+ students statewide on waiting list to attend Voc schools. The state is taking steps to address access to CTE with a projected \$100 million this year in grant funding for comprehensive schools to add Chapter 74 programs, expansion of current voc-tech schools' capacity, and lab modernization of current Chapter 74 programs. The state is committed to expanding schools like ours, and BVT is strongly urged to apply for CTE-related grants to expand capacity.

Item 7. Principal's Report – Mrs. M. Denise

7.1. The 2025-26 Student Handbook and Planner was distributed to School Committee members at the meeting.

7.2. Michele Denise, BVT's Principal reported that the SkillsUSA competition series' third and final stage was held in Atlanta, Georgia from June 23 to June 27, 2025. The National Conference resulted in four gold and three bronze medals.

7.3. Mrs. Denise reported on the 2025-26 school year opening, which began on Monday, August 11th, with new staff orientation. On Tuesday, August 12th, all staff returned to campus. On Wednesday, August 13th, the Class of 2029 attended the Freshmen Cookout with near-perfect attendance. Thursday, August 14th, was Day 1 of Freshmen Orientation. It was a full school day; students rotated through their seven exploratory shops and met vocational teachers. Students had lunch and practiced the bus routine. Friday, August 15th, was Day 2 of Freshmen Orientation. Again, it was a full day of school. Students meet administrators, faculty, staff, and academic teachers by walking through their academic schedules. Monday, August 18th, was the first day of school for all of BVT. The new school year is off to a smooth start. The staff has been wonderful, and our students are motivated and glad to be here.

Mrs. Denise also shared that the summer was full of numerous initiatives and many are presently underway. In October, Jeff Riley will return with a Day of AI team for another presentation. With the loss of a student, aligning with the start of the new school year, our crisis team assembled and met with students and staff. We also recently held a grief workshop with parents. The crisis team and counselors provided significant support in the first few days.

Item 8. Superintendent-Director's Report - A. Steele

8.1. Mr. Steele shared the School Committee Member Directory and asked if any members needed to make any changes to the information listed in the directory that they inform his office of the changes.

8.2. The proposed 2026 Calendar of School Committee Meeting dates was shared with the Committee.

8.3. A draft of the Delineation of FY26 Subcommittees was shared with the Committee members for their review and consideration of service on a subcommittee vacancy. Mr. Steele detailed the vacancies on the various subcommittees, and any interested parties should contact Mr. Hall.

8.4. Introduction of new administrative and support staff included: Miranda Dolegiewicz, Administrative Assistant to the Superintendent-Director; Catherine Proctor, Assistant Principal; David Champagne, Assistant Principal; and Mary May, Director of Workforce & Economic Development. Superintendent Steele invited these new members to stand and gave a brief introduction of each staff member and was excited to welcome the talented members to the team. Bryant Laflamme, Vocational Director, was also introduced to the team as a returning player in a new position.

8.5. Table of Organization (Revision)

Superintendent Steele reminded the Committee that he had previously presented the Committee with a Table of Organization handout outlining BVT's proposed policy and administrative functions at the April meeting. With Mrs. Denise in the role of principal, the

revision in the table of organization now has Mr. Denise, Director of Athletics & Student Activities, no longer directly reporting to the principal but rather to the superintendent-director. On a motion by Mr. Finn, seconded by Mr. Koopman, it was voted to approve the draft as presented.

8.6. Correspondence

a. Mr. Steele shared his annual welcome back letter with the Committee. Given that the 2025-2026 school year is his first year as the new superintendent-director, the letter conveyed excitement for the remarkable year ahead.

8.7. FY26 Grant Listings:

An FY26 Grants document was shared with the Committee. The total FY26 to-date listings total is \$1,244,052 as of July 29, 2025.

a. Superintendent Steele informed the Committee that BVT is the recipient of a Career Technical Initiative Grant in the amount of \$1,040,000. Which will be used to provide training for 100 participants for Advanced Manufacturing, Electrical, HVAC, Plumbing, and Welding positions. The District will partner with Primetals Technologies USA LLC, Tessier Machine Company, Tegra Medical, Carter Electric, Kuik Electric, Renaud Electric & Communications, CPS Heating & Cooling, T&J Heating, Air Conditioning and Plumbing, Ace Temperature Control, Curtis Septic Service, Notturmo Home Services, Santon Plumbing and Heating, Riverdale Mills Corporation, Saint Gobain Abrasives, and DC Bates Equipment Co.

b. Vocational Expansion Grants

The Executive Office of Education hosted an online informational session on August 4th from 3:00 to 4:00 to provide an overview of the rollout plan for the \$100 million of CTE Expansion Capital Funding included in the FY26 budget. Staff attended the CTE Capacity Expansion Program Roll Out Planning Webinar. BVT has been urged to apply to the CTE Facility Development Grant Program, and plans to do so.

8.8. CAT 265 Acquisition

The CAT 265 Compact Track Loader, with its vertical lift design, delivers extended reach and lift height for quick and easy truck loading. Superintendent Steele informed the Committee that BVT has acquired the equipment through a grant for students to train as diesel mechanics. The newly acquired machine has been a game-changer, helping with numerous projects that would have previously been contracted out, and potentially being part of our Hoisting Engineer 2A/IC Licensing Program.

8.9. Summer Professional Development Update

a. Mr. Steele and Dr. Fitzpatrick attended the M.A.S.S. Executive Institute event, which took place in Mashpee on July 14–17, 2025. The Institute program featured three days of keynote speakers, various presentations, collegial meetings, and evening social activities. There was a lot of camaraderie with the vocational cohort and sharing of resources.

b. The Leadership Retreat on July 21–24, 2025, was well attended. The annual retreat held in Salem centered on campus-wide improvements, technology upgrades, team-building activities, recruitment of new personnel, and structural enhancements. It was a fantastic goal and

vision setting event, and particularly helpful with many team members now serving in new roles.

c. The MAVA Planning Retreat on August 5–7, 2025, was held in Devens. The multi-day retreat was a great professional development opportunity, and included an introduction of Pedro Martinez, the new Massachusetts Commissioner of Education.

8.10. Tours/Visits:

a. The new Sutton Town Manager, Austin Cyganiewicz, joined Superintendent-Director, Anthony Steele, and Dr. Connors on July 28, 2025, for a tour of the school. He came to introduce himself. It was a productive and cordial meeting.

b. Hopedale Select Board Chair, Scott Savage, requested a meeting with Superintendent-Director, Anthony Steele. Mr. Savage came to the school on August 8, 2025. It was a professional and respectful exchange.

c. Douglas Finance Committee Chair, Dick Vandenberg, requested a meeting. Superintendent-Director Anthony Steele and Dr. Connors meet with Mr. Vandenberg on August 11, 2025. It was a professional exchange with a shared perspective on the budget process.

d. Town of Millbury Representatives requested a meeting with Superintendent-Director, Anthony Steele, and Dr. Connors. They met at the school on August 15, 2025. It was a professional exchange with familiar faces, wanting to be in the know about BVT and more involved with more interaction. Perception of how the process works, opportunity to listen to concerns, and address mutual partnerships to improve transparency respectfully and mutually..

Mr. Yitts asked if the area Police Chiefs would come over in September. Mr. Steele responded that the Upton Police Chief, Nick Palmieri, came over to plan the annual Police Chiefs Breakfast and discuss the memorandum of understanding. The Committee asked to be reminded of the date of the breakfast once it is scheduled.

8.11. A draft of the FY25 Annual Report was shared with the Committee. On a motion by Mr. Braza, seconded by Mr. Intinarelli, it was voted to approve the draft as presented.

8.12. The Committee is in receipt of an invitation to attend the MASC/MASS Joint Conference in Hyannis on November 12–14, 2025.

8.13. School Newsletters:

a. The Freshmen Newsletter – The Bridge (Summer 2025) was available at the meeting.

b. The Parent Newsletter – The Link (Fall 2025) was available at the meeting.

8.14. Notification of Resignation/Retirement(s):

a. A notification of retirement letter dated August 7, 2025, from Michael Norton, Electronics/Engineering Instructor, with an effective date of June 30, 2026, was accepted with appreciation for his years of service and dedication to our students.

Item 9. New Business

9.0. On a motion by Mr. Intinarelli, seconded by Mr. Braza, it was unanimously voted to approve a donation of a 2015 Nissan Altima from Nissan of North America, which will be used for instructional and training purposes in the Automotive Collision Repair & Refinishing program.

Item 10. Items for the Good of the Committee:

The monthly compilation of news clippings and correspondence packet was provided at the meeting for members to review individually.

Item 11. Next Regularly Scheduled School Committee Meeting - J. Hall

The next regularly scheduled School Committee meeting will be held on September 18, 2025 at 6:00 p.m.

Item 12. Meeting Closure:

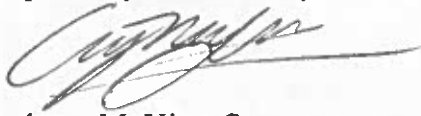
12.1. The meeting was declared closed by the Chair at 7:26 p.m.

12.2. On a motion by Mr. Braza, seconded by Mr. Intinarelli, it was voted to adjourn at 7:26 p.m.

Listing of materials used in the meeting:

- Item 2.1. Minutes of Meeting of June 18, 2025
- Item 3.1. Treasurer's Report dated May 31, 2025 – tabled
- Item 3.2. Treasurer's Report dated June 30, 2025 – tabled
- Item 5.2.a. Donation Letter to Primetals Technologies
- Item 6.1. The Dignity Index (handout distributed at meeting)
- Item 6.2. Completed Facilities Department Summer Projects 2025 (available at meeting)
- Item 6.3. FY26 Appointments: New Personnel Appointees
- Item 6.4.a. DESE MA Culinary Arts Standards and Skills
- Item 6.4.b. DESE MA Engineering Technology Standards and Skills
- Item 6.6. Weights (handout distributed at meeting)
- Item 7.1. 2025-26 Student Handbook (available at meeting)
- Item 7.2. SkillsUSA Nationals Update
- Item 8.1. School Committee Member Directory
- Item 8.2. School Committee Meeting Proposed 2026 Calendar Meeting Dates
- Item 8.3. Delineation of FY26 Subcommittees (Draft)
- Item 8.5. Table of Organization (Revision)
- Item 8.6.a. Welcome Back Letter (Staff)
- Item 8.7. FY26 Grant Listings
- Item 8.11. FY25 Annual Report (Draft)
- Item 8.12. MASC/MASS Joint Conference (11/12/25-11/14/25) Invitation
- Item 8.13.a. The Bridge (Freshmen Newsletter) – Summer 2025
- Item 8.13.b. The Link (Parent Newsletter) – Fall 2025
- Item 8.14.a. Notification of Retirement Letter
- Item 9.0. New Business: Donation Letter to Nissan of North America
- Item 10. Items for the Good of the Committee

Respectfully submitted by,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Anthony M. Yitts', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Anthony M. Yitts, Secretary