

GROTON BOARD OF EDUCATION
COMMUNICATIONS COMMITTEE
SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES
DECEMBER 4, 2025 AT 6:00 PM
REMOTE MEETING

MEMBERS PRESENT: Jay Weitlauf, Jennifer White, Adrian Johnson
ALSO PRESENT: Anne Marie Mancini, Rebecca Beyus

1. Call to Order - J. Weitlauf called the meeting to order at 6:05 p.m.
2. Review of Meeting Minutes: There were no comments or concerns regarding the meeting minutes from September 11, 2025.
3. Communications Update - R. Beyus provided an update on district and school communications initiatives aligned with the Communications Plan strategies (attached).

Highlights included:

- Ongoing work to support attendance and Impact Aid form completion, as well as recent media coverage featuring school programs.
 - Metrics on ParentSquare usage demonstrated continued growth in two-way communication across the district.
 - A. Mancini shared that she and Superintendent Austin are visiting staff meetings throughout the year to have meaningful dialogue with staff about the district's cradle to career vision and invite questions.
 - A. Johnson shared positive feedback on the development of a district events calendar. He requested that schools be encouraged to share event dates early in the year to support families with planning.
4. Family and Community Engagement - Evidence of strong online and in-person student and family engagement from the first three months of the school year was shared. Highlights included parent participation in parent-teacher conferences and school events hosted and attended across the district. Key principles of strong family engagement and effective communication were shared. The group discussed reaching disengaged families, including identifying families that have not participated in school events and understanding barriers. A. Johnson requested that the allocation of three half-days in October for parent-teacher conferences at Fitch High School be evaluated. J. White requested exploring ideas for community events and seeking insights on successful strategies from other districts.
 5. Discussion Regarding Parent Council - The group discussed the history of a district parent council, including successes and challenges, in consideration of reforming a council. At this time, no action was decided.
 6. Adjournment - The meeting adjourned at 7:25 p.m.



Communications Committee Meeting

December 4, 2025

Communications Update



Communication Highlights



Strategy 1 - Engage the community in understanding the mission of Groton Public Schools through transparency and robust internal and external communications.

- Created a district data dashboard on the web site.
- Updated families on school meals and community resources during government shutdown.
- Published informational communications on the Athletic Field referendum.
- Shared updates on student assessments.
- Strengthening districtwide attendance communications
- Communicated details on Impact Aid as part of the district's annual budget.
 - Impact Aid Total Completion 2025 - 66% (Electronic and Paper)
 - Impact Aid Electronic Only Completion 2025 - 73%

Communication Highlights



Strategy 2 - Promote achievements, improvements, and initiatives in Groton Public Schools to families, students, staff, other stakeholders, and the general community.

- Superintendent Austin attended the RTM meeting to share district updates.
- Distributing T1 elementary report cards December 12.
- Developing the School Matters District Newsletter, to be published 3x a year.
- Promoting the mentor program through social media, media coverage, and community partners.
- Promoting the expansion of the high school Manufacturing career pathway.
- Secured media coverage highlighting the career pathways and magnet programs.
- *Upcoming January 2026:* Promote early childhood opportunities, registration, and the magnet lottery for the 2026-27 school year.

Groton Public Schools In the News



PHOTOS BY SARAH GORDON/THE DAY
Students react to a hypothetical debate question during a meeting of the Groton Middle School Debate Club on Monday.

Groton Middle School students learn debate skills

By KIMBERLY DRElich
The Staff Writer

Groton — Groton Middle School students on Monday afternoon debated a topic inspired by a real discussion in the state legislature: whether to use taxpayer dollars to feed people who are food-insecure.

Sitting at tables, students from the middle school's debate club made their arguments, pro and con, about using taxpayer dollars to pay for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP, benefits.

The students on the pro side supported using taxpayer dollars because they said people cannot survive without food and without SNAP, many people would be left without food. Students on the con



State Rep. Dan Gaiwelski, D-Groton, speaks with students Monday.

side said using tax money in this way would take away dollars needed to make the state better and support areas such as health care and police stations.

It's all part of a new debate club at the middle school to teach students to debate and think critically.

State Rep. Dan Gaiwelski, D-Groton, visited the Groton Middle School Debate Club on Monday to teach students about how legislators debate. The legislature this month passed a bill to use up to \$50 million in budget reserves to fund food programs, energy assistance, health care, school meals, child care, and housing assistance in the wake of the recent government

SEE STUDENTS PAGE A3

LEARNING OUTSIDE THE CLASSROOM



PHOTOS BY SARAH GORDON/THE DAY

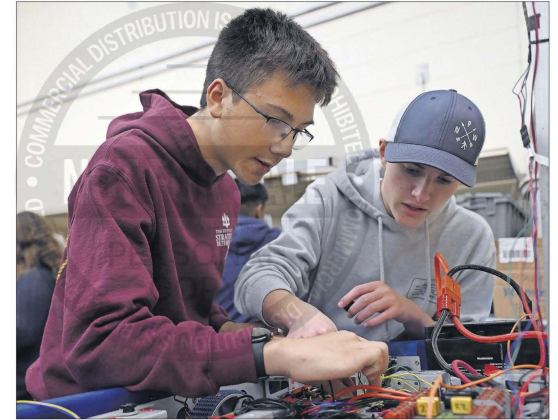


Students at Catherine Kolnaski STEAM Magnet School in Groton got to take advantage of a half-day Tuesday to explore hands-on, inquiry-based learning in Science, Technology, Engineering, the Arts, and Mathematics during the first STEAM Day of the school year.

The school holds three STEAM-focused days throughout the year where students and teachers have an opportunity to work with community partners and take a break from traditional classroom-based learning, explained Principal Christine Dauphinais.

Fifth-grade students at the EASTCONN Mobile Manufacturing Lab, powered by Electric Boat, took turns maneuvering a robotic arm and were guided through a pipe-fitting activity.

Above, fifth-graders, from left, Murphy Henry, Elias Gaiwelski, and Owen Gilmour participate in a pipe-fitting activity with Electric Boat. Left, classmates look on as fifth-grader Sapphire Collura controls a robotic arm in the EASTCONN Mobile Manufacturing Lab.



SARAH GORDON/THE DAY

Juniors Zachary Corriveau, left, and Charlie Gardner work on the electrical components of a robot as members of the Aluminum Falcon Robotics team meet in a part of the new Robotics and Manufacturing Center at Fitch High School in Groton on Tuesday.

Building skills and filling jobs

New manufacturing center, expanded curriculum at Fitch will teach manufacturing, engineering in partnership with Electric Boat

By KIMBERLY DRElich
The Staff Writer

Groton — Robert E. Fitch High School students from the Aluminum Falcon Robotics team busily worked in groups during a recent evening in the school's new robotics and manufacturing

center.

They wrapped a crate in holiday paper for an upcoming toy drive, used design software to make robotics parts, and learned about basic electrical systems for robotics in the new space outfitted with equipment and comput-

ers.

The team was back at the high school in space which had been a vacant auto shop, after years at the former Pleasant Valley Elementary School.

The renovation is the first step in a larger plan for a new manu-

facturing center and an expanded program to help students learn about manufacturing and engineering in partnership with Electric Boat.

Superintendent of Schools Susan Austin said the proposal is to create a Department of Robotics, Engineering, Architecture and Manufacturing that can

SEE PARTNERSHIP PAGE B5

Groton Public Schools In the News

Examiner

Groton, Education

Guided by Navy Roots, Groton Superintendent Steers Students Toward New Career Paths

— Amy Wu, 12.1.2025



Upcoming Coverage

Charles Barnum Student Discovery Expo - The Day

Mentor Program - The Day and Additional Coverage

Lt Governor's Coding Challenge Kickoff - Livestream from GMS - Coverage Expected

Communication Highlights



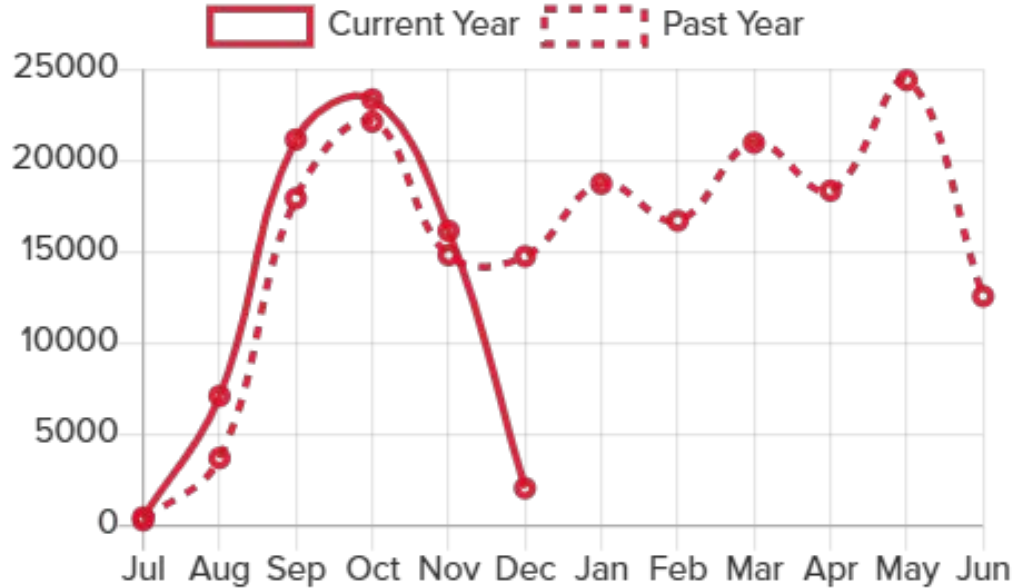
Strategy 3 - Allocate appropriate district and school personnel and resources to support the successful implementation of the communications plan.

- Ongoing staff training is building capacity and expertise across district platforms.
- Targeted training on specific skills, best practices, and district-created templates is strengthening key communications efforts, including attendance and Impact Aid.
- Updoming: Creating a district events calendar to support internal work flows and resource allocation.

Strategy 4 - Create and implement feedback opportunities to engage stakeholders in meaningful and interactive communications.

- Communication platforms are being used to actively engage parents, support two-way communication, while in-person opportunities such as parent/teacher conferences provide face to face opportunities.
- Superintendent Austin and Assistant Superintendent Mancini will visit all PTO meetings throughout the school year.
- Polls and surveys have not yet been conducted this year.
- Evaluating additional community forum opportunities.

ParentSquare Direct Messages



72,776 Direct Messages | **11,161** Threads Since June 30, 2025

(Comparison to last year 190,498 Direct Messages | 18,328 Threads)

ParentSquare Features

Feature / Interaction	2025-26 School Year	2024-2025 School Years
Auto Notices	8,454 Auto Notices	798 Auto Notices
Secure Documents	382 Secure Documents	322 Secure Documents
Forms / Permission Slips	1,020 Completed	1,799 Completed
Comments	451	521
Volunteers	1502	701

Communication Highlights



Strategy 5 – Proactively plan to communicate news and information to ensure clear and timely shared with the community during an emergency or crisis.

- Provided staff training regarding messaging in urgent and emergency situations to ensure families receive

Family and Community Engagement

Parent Teacher Conferences - K-8



Turnout for parent/teacher conferences held in October was strong across the district.

Elementary Schools: Over 95% attendance

Groton Middle School:

- 6th Grade: 414 signed up for 432 slots = 96% sign ups
- 7th Grade: 378 showed up for 414 appointments = 91% attendance
- 8th Grade: 378 showed up for 432 slots = 88% filled capacity
- Off Teams - 475 signed up for 792 slots = 60%

Parent Teacher Conferences - FHS



Average conferences per teacher: 4.1

Overall time-slot fill rate: 17.1%

Engagement Context

- Parent engagement is typically lower at the high school level.
- Many families encourage student independence as they prepare for adulthood, college, or careers.

Academic Communication Expectations

- Teachers are required to contact parents when a student has a D or F.
- Communication may include meetings, conference calls, or other outreach throughout the year.

Improvement for Spring Conferences:

- Teachers will be asked to use ParentSquare's scheduling feature.
- This will create a more convenient and user-friendly sign-up process for families.

Family and Community Engagement



Families and the community are exhibiting a feeling of connection to their schools by participating in events throughout the first three months of the school year.

- Back to School Meet and Greets, Picnics, Open Houses
- Parent/Teacher Conferences
- Veteran's Day Celebrations
- PTO / Booster Club Meetings

Family and Community Engagement



Catherine Kolnaski

Curriculum Night & Fall Festival – Over 400 people came to visit classrooms and learn about the curriculum students would be learning this year. We then went outside for a fun evening of fall themed games, activities, and a BBQ dinner.

Turkey Trot – Families joined CKMS staff for hike through the CK Nature Trail and whole school Turkey Dance.

Cookies & PJs – Typically over 400 people attend a fun night of reading followed by cookies & milk. All students attending receive a free book to add to their home libraries.

Charles Barnum

Literacy Night with Literacy How - Students and families engaged in fun tasks aimed to build vocabulary and model Literacy strategies that families could try at home. All children left with their choice of a beautiful picture book.

Student Discovery Expo - Students showcased their work from their T1 Discovery Clusters and parents and family members were invited to join. The event also included a smoothie station from the Farm to School program.

Stargazing with Planetarium - Both CKMS and CB hosted an evening stargazing event for 5th grade families in partnership with the Thames Amateur Astronomical Society. Approximately 65 families attended the events.

Family and Community Engagement



Mystic River

Day of Play - Mystic River hosted its second annual Day of Play to celebrate its Play and Ingenuity magnet theme. Stations were set up throughout the school where students can participate in different types of play and parents helped support the event as volunteers.

Math Night - Mystic River hosted its 3rd Annual Math Game Night. Families played fun math games and were provided with materials to continue the fun at home.

Northeast Academy

Camp Read S'More - NEA's Literacy Night for students TK-2 was a great evening of crafts, games, theater and most importantly, books!

Winter Concerts - Cocoa and Cookies Orchestra Concert for 4th and 5th grade families and 4th and 5th grade Chorus Concerts are coming up in December.

Books and Banter - NEA hosted a book club for parents centered around the *The Anxious Generation* by Jonathan Haidt.

Family and Community Engagement



Thames River

Inside and Out Back to School Event – Approximately 500 attendees enjoyed an evening that highlighted the school’s many partnerships and its outdoor learning spaces. Families visited their children’s classrooms, explored the Outdoor Learning Areas and Greenhouse, and connected with a wide range of community partners—from the Bill Memorial Library and New England Science & Sailing to the City PTO.

Future events include a Storyteller event in January and a THAMES (Thames Reading, Math, and Science) Night in March.

Family and Community Engagement



Groton Middle School

- Freshman Parent Orientation
- Open House - Back to School Night
- Parent Teacher Conferences
- PTO Family Trivia Night Event
- Veterans' Day Assembly - Over 40 veterans from the school community joined GMS for an assembly on November 10.

Additional GMS Events Throughout the Year

- Seasonal events including upcoming Breakfast with Santa
- Chorus, Strings and Band Concerts and the Falcon Players Fall and Spring Play
- Athletic Events

Family and Community Engagement



Fitch High School

- Freshman Parent Orientation
- EXPO Night
 - MYP Personal Project Exhibit
 - Club/Sport Activities Fair
- Robotics Open House
- Parent Teacher Conferences
- Fall and Winter Athletic Information Nights
- Early College Experience and FAFSA Information and Hands On Help Sessions

Additional FHS Events Throughout the Year

- Class Fundraising Events include Breakfast with Santa, Easter Egg Hunt, Movie Nights, etc.
- Senior Nights for all Fall Sports Teams
- Over 50 academic and special interest clubs and activities with Family Engagement Nights
- Chorus, Strings and Band Concerts
- Fall Play and Spring Musical

Upcoming District Events and Collaborations

Community Forum - Early Childhood, K Registration, Magnet Lottery

- Late January - Early February

Safety and Security - At School and Home

- Winter 2026

Children's First Resource Fair

- March 2026
- Additional Children's First Collaborations TBD

Connecting with Families

Principles of Strong Family Communication and Engagement

- Building Trust and Partnership
- Create A Tone of Support
- Personable and Personalized Communication
- Awareness of Tone and Language Barriers
- Reducing Barriers to Access and Participation
- Meeting Families Where They Are
- Creating Opportunities for Two-Way Communication
- Providing Value and Support to Families

Discussion Regarding Parent / Community Council Formation

Future Meetings

March 26, 2026

June 4, 2026



