

**MILAN AREA SCHOOLS
BOARD OF EDUCATION
REGULAR MEETING
WEDNESDAY, January 14, 2026
MINUTES**

The regular meeting of the Milan Area Schools Board of Education was called to order in the District Office Boardroom located at 100 Big Red Drive, Milan MI, 48160, by President Cislo at 7:00 p.m. on January 14, 2026.

Board Members Present: Cislo, Faro, Gutierrez, Prior, Meray and Burdette

Board Members Absent: Heikka

Staff Present: Ryan McMahon, Jennifer Bookout, Krista Hendrix, Sara Beckman, Ashley Harwood, Yvette Smith, Kolette Comstock, Annette Apple, Margaret Durkee and Andrea Bennink

Guests Present: Ashley Eichner Pendell, Libbie Thacker, Hannah Bedinger, Sarah Norton, and Jennifer Elrod

Motion by Burdette supported by Gutierrez to elect Faro for President of the Milan Area Schools Board of Education for one term. All Ayes. Carried 5-0.

Motion by Prior supported by Faro to elect Gutierrez for Vice President of the Milan Area Schools Board of Education for one term. All Ayes. Carried 5-0.

Motion by Faro supported by Gutierrez to elect Meray for Secretary of the Milan Area Schools Board of Education for one term. All Ayes. Carried 5-0.

Motion by Prior supported by Burdette to elect Heikka for Treasurer of the Milan Area Schools Board of Education for one term. All Ayes. Carried 5-0.

Motion by Faro supported by Burdette to approve the appointments listed below:
Washtenaw School Board Association Representative Gutierrez.
Legislative Relations Network Representative Prior.
Carried 5-0.

The Board reviewed the 2026 Board Committee Assignments.

The Board announced and discussed locations for 2026 Big Red Board Chats.

Motion by Prior supported by Gutierrez to accept the Code of Ethics as included in Attachment A and read by the Board President. All Ayes. Carried 5-0.

Superintendent McMahon highlighted a proclamation from Governor Gretchen Whitmer in observance of School Board Recognition month. Superintendent McMahon personally thanked the board members for their service to Milan Area Schools.

Public Comments:

- Libby Thacker who has children in the district and used to be an employee said she recognizes the impact of paras and supports them.
- Andrea Bennink–PAC representative and parent–said she remembers all of her son's paras. She said their job is hard and demanding. She urged the district to increase paras compensation.
- Ash Eichner-Pendall read a statement talking about her sons' challenges and the paras who have assisted them through school. She discussed her support for the paras.
- Yvette Smith (MASSS President) addressed historical contract concessions and advocated for compensation reflecting the district's current financial standing. She highlighted the physical demands of paraprofessional work and the expanding health and safety responsibilities of administrative assistants. She invited the board to observe these roles firsthand.
- Hannah Bedinger expressed appreciation for the specialized care and dedication provided by staff to her medically complex daughter. She noted the strong relationships built with paraprofessionals and advocated for improved recognition of their work.
- Margaret Durkee highlighted the long-term impact of past pay cuts and noted that district compensation currently lags behind neighboring areas. She shared that while she remains in the district for the students, the current pay scale creates significant financial strain for staff.

Meray Arrival: 7:21pm

Motion by Burdette supported by Prior to approve the minutes of the regular meeting of December 17, 2025. All Ayes. Carried 6-0.

Motion by Meray supported by Burdette to approve the minutes of the regular meeting closed sessions of December 17, 2025. All Ayes. Carried 6-0.

Motion by Faro supported by Prior to approve the bills/reimbursement of expenses. All Ayes. Carried 6-0.

Motion by Prior supported by Gutierrez to revise, repeal and/or adopt Board policies as described in Attachment B. All Ayes. Carried 6-0.

Motion by Faro support by Burdette to approve the Technology Staff Salary Schedule Update as described in Attachment C. All Ayes. Carried 6-0.

Motion by Prior support by Gutierrez to approve the District Office Salary Schedule Update as described in Attachment D. All Ayes. Carried 6-0.

Motion by Faro supported by Gutierrez to approve the Cafeteria Employee Policies as detailed in Attachment E. All Ayes. Carried 6-0.

Public Comments:

- Ashley Eichner-Pendell shared thanks to her children's paraprofessionals, teachers, and principals from both Paddock and Symons. She praised the staff's collaboration with her and commitment to inclusion.
- Andrea Bennink added her thoughts on the importance of competitive compensation to promote staff retention and maintain training.
- Ashley Harwood shared her experience working as a paraprofessional in the middle school RPZ room. She shared her love of her job, students, and colleagues and advocated for better compensation.
- Libbie Thacker shared information about the MASSS union and her commitment to supporting staff.

Student Board Member Comments:

- Miss Heikka was able to watch the dance team's recent performance and said it was very good.
- Miss Heikka thanked Mrs. Pierfelice for her help in setting up a meeting with another Black Student Union.

Assistant Superintendent Comments:

- Assistant Superintendent Bookout took a few minutes to talk about our district improvement process and some of the work that's been happening across our schools this year.
- As part of how we approach continuous improvement, we conduct internal reviews in each building. During the month of November, we completed those reviews in all four schools. Each one included a building presentation, time in classrooms, and student interview panels, which really helped us see learning in action and hear directly from students about their experiences.
- Mrs. Bookout thanked our administrators, teachers, and support staff. This process takes a lot of time and energy at each school, and we truly appreciate the work that goes into preparing for and participating in these reviews.
- What stood out throughout the process was the incredible work happening every day in our classrooms. We saw strong instruction, thoughtful planning, and positive relationships between students and staff. Our teachers, administrators, and paraprofessionals are doing really meaningful work, and that was clear in every building we visited.
- The outcome of all of this is a Comprehensive Needs Assessment, or CNA, for each school. These documents pull together everything we learned and help identify strengths, priorities, and next steps to guide future planning and professional learning. From an MTSS perspective, this work is especially important. The internal reviews and CNA documents help us look closely at how well our core instruction and supports are working for all students and gives us a strong foundation as we continue to build consistent, district-wide systems of support.

- Assistant Superintendent Bookout will be sharing the CNA documents with the board, and they'll also be posted on our district website next week so families and community members can take a look. Overall, this process gives us a clear picture of where each school is right now and helps guide where we go next.

Superintendent Comments:

- Superintendent McMahon shared an update on CACFP (Child and Adult Care Food Program). Federal Program that provides funding to cover meals and snacks for eligible students. In October our GSRP program received \$540 and in November the program received a little over \$400. We are grateful for the program and just wanted to share an update.
- Superintendent McMahon shared with the Board that he has met with representatives from both elementary buildings for initial conversations on community service projects for all students. The conversations have been very positive and the teachers are excited for the potential impact that this program could have. These are only initial conversations, but we are looking forward to moving this idea into action steps.
- Superintendent McMahon welcomed Will Anklin to the District as the newest member of the Technology Team. Will was hired to fill a vacancy and comes to Milan with experience working on the tech support team in another district.
- Superintendent McMahon briefed the Board on the Filter First grant. Gary Cox has been working diligently to take the next steps with the grant funds to upgrade our water systems, including adding filtration systems to the drinking water outlets. All of the supplies have been ordered and the installation is being scheduled to start soon.
- Superintendent McMahon shared with the Board that all of our buildings participated in the grade-level panoramic pictures, culminating this week. We are excited to add the PECC program and Young-5's to the collection, which will be displayed outside the Board Room when finalized.
- Superintendent McMahon reminded the Board and community that there will be a Professional Development Day this Friday, January 16. Students will not be in school on Friday as we look forward to a day of learning with our staff members.
- Superintendent McMahon informed the Board that the district received a retirement letter from our Director of Student Services, Lon Smith. Mr. Smith will be retiring at the end of February. We currently have the position posted and are collecting applications.

Board Member Comments:

- Burdette thanked the public for their comments and recognized the work of district paraprofessionals. He shared information regarding the GMACF Gala and available student scholarships, and noted his upcoming participation in two MASB Winter Institute courses, thanking the district for supporting his professional development.
- Prior noted that the GMACF has provided \$240,000 in grants to Milan Area Schools over the last six years and encouraged continued community support. She praised the Boys Swim Team and shared information about the MHS production of *Cinderella*, opening March 12th.
- Faro expressed appreciation for the public's advocacy and welcomed Melanie DiMartini as the new payroll and benefits manager. He also shared details regarding the PTO meeting on January 20th at the Middle School.

- Meray apologized for her late arrival, thanked those who spoke in support of district paraprofessionals and expressed gratitude for the School Board Month recognition. She praised the quality of district communication and highlighted the involvement of alumni and current students volunteering for the middle school musical.
- Gutierrez thanked speakers for their advocacy and emphasized the board's commitment to balancing fair staff compensation with the district's long-term financial health. She advocated for increased paraprofessional support through training, longevity pay, and improved assignment timelines. She suggested restructuring board chats to foster 2-way communication, proposed publicly displaying the signed board code of ethics, and highlighted the "Filter First" water grant and student panoramic photos. She concluded by recognizing Cislo's steady leadership during his tenure as board president.
- Cislo thanked parents and staff for their advocacy and congratulated Faro and Gutierrez on their new leadership roles. He expressed his honor in having served as board president and credited his love for the Milan community as the inspiration for his service.

Motion by Faro supported by Burdette to enter into closed session pursuant to Section 8(1)(c) of the Michigan Open Meetings Act for Negotiation Strategies. All Ayes. Carried 6-0.

Time entered closed session 8:24 p.m.

Time returned to open session 9:51p.m.

Time of Adjournment 9:51p.m.