

**MINUTES OF REGULAR MEETING
OF THE
DARTMOUTH SCHOOL COMMITTEE**

February 9, 2026

The warrants for bills payable were reviewed and signed by the School Committee.

CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order by Chairperson Elizabeth Coughlin at 6:00 p.m. in the Dartmouth High School Library Media Center. The Chair announced the meeting is being recorded for future broadcast over DCTV.

On a roll call the following members were present: Kathleen Amaral, John Nunes, Chris Oliver, Mary Beckwith and Elizabeth Coughlin.

Also present: Dr. Saba-Maguire, James Kiely, Student Representative Isabella Pires and Ms. Genthner.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Nathan Silva, Dartmouth resident, gave comments regarding the FY27 budget and encouraged the District to ask for what it needs.

Heather Noyes-Fredette, parent, Dartmouth staff member and resident, gave comments regarding the FY27 budget stating the District has support and, in turn, asked for help to amplify “your voices and your work,” to get the word out and to help others in the Town understand why funding the schools is such an important choice.

Peter Knowlton, Town Meeting member, voiced his support for “what’s already been said” regarding the FY27 budget and encouraged the District to put forward a budget for what you need adding comments on health insurance costs.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Mr. Nunes moved, seconded by Mr. Oliver to approve the Regular Session Minutes of January 27, 2026 as written. The motion passed: 3-0-1. Mrs. Amaral abstained noting she was not present at the meeting.

STUDENT REPRESENTATIVE REPORT

DHS Junior Isabella Pires provided an update of activities happening at Dartmouth High School (DHS).

- Update on activities in celebration of Black History Month
- Update on the Women in STEP Club’s recent field trip to St. Luke’s Hospital
- DHS National Honor Society will host its annual Valentine’s Day Dance at the Council on Aging on 2/13/2026
- DHS Orchestra will perform at the newly renovated Zeiterion Theatre next month

SPOTLIGHT ON KIDS – Joseph DeMello Elementary School: The Chair invited Dr. Saba-Maguire to introduce tonight’s *Spotlight on Kids* segment.

Dr. Saba-Maguire invited Elizabeth Correia and Adam Hill, Principal and Assistant Principal of the DeMello School respectively, to make the DeMello School *Spotlight* presentation.

Ms. Correia started by briefly reviewing ongoing and new traditions and celebrations at the DeMello School.

Ms. Correia reported *Gifts to Give* (a local charity organization) published an article on its website recognizing the DeMello school's fourth grade council's work over the years benefitting Southcoast families in need.

Ms. Correia invited Liz Voci, Instructional Technology Specialist at the DeMello and Cushman Schools, to report on the Bridgewater State University Invention Convention and the DeMello school team.

Ms. Voci invited students from this year's team to share "their journey."

Students described their process and their invention for this year's competition: students participating in tonight's meeting included Hunter, Brady, Maddie, Gianna, Mackenzie, Faith and Walter.

Mr. Hill provided a brief update on initiatives associated with social and emotional needs of students including neuro-affirming practices and professional development including a student survey pertaining to functional communication developed by the Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) Committee that will be conducted with students in grades 1 through 5 in the next couple of weeks; the results will help to "drive" how educators can better support students.

Ms. Correia shared some new initiatives that are being worked on at DeMello noting these initiatives are grounded in the District Strategic Plan: including *bring your family to school math days* noting a literacy *bring your family to school day* is in the planning stages for next year; CKLA literacy update noting the initial challenge implementing the new curriculum adding teachers are doing an excellent job bringing this program to their students who are reacting positively to learning with the new curriculum. (*A video was aired highlighting students' comments about the new literacy lessons.*)

Ms. Correia invited fourth grade students along with their teachers Michaela Markey and Lindsey Rafferty to share their inventions which were part of the *Eureka Student Invention Unit* one example of the CKLA curriculum combining rigorous academic standards with high interest real world applications: students participating in tonight's meeting included Claire, Emma, Ellie, Gabby, Henry, Phoenix, Annalise, and Evelyn.

CONSENT AGENDA

Dr. Saba-Maguire recommended the following request for the Committee's review and consent.

- DHS – WGI East Power Regional Competition– Winter Color Guard (March 20-22, 2026, Bethlehem PA)
- DHS – WGI East Power Regional Competition – Indoor Percussion (March 7-8, 2026, Toms River NJ)

Mr. Nunes moved, seconded by Ms. Amaral to approve both items. The motion passed unanimously: 5-0.

PRESENTATION

FY27 Budget: Ms. Coughlin invited Dr. Saba-Maguire to make the presentation.

Dr. Saba-Maguire made a statement regarding the budget in order to provide important context for the work behind its development noting the budget is aligned with the District Strategic Plan and is designed to move the Dartmouth Public Schools forward while remaining mindful of the fiscal realities we face as

a community adding we are “acutely” aware that this budget is being presented during a time of significant financial pressure within the District and throughout the town as a whole.

Dr. Saba-Maguire noted, in this environment, every decision we make requires thoughtful balance between need, impact and sustainability; the District has been intentional about listening to and gathering information from families, faculty and staff both formally and informally.

Dr. Saba-Maguire stated this budget reflects the voices heard and responds directly to what our community has asked of us particularly in the areas of student support adding the proposed budget reflects strategic priorities as well as restraint noting not every thoughtfully, considered request could be included in the FY27 budget proposal and these needs will continue to inform our future planning.

Dr. Saba-Maguire concluded her comments stating ultimately this budget reflects our best effort to be responsible stewards of public resources, to remain focused on our mission of supporting students and empowering our staff while preparing this district for the future.

Mr. Kiely gave a presentation which highlighted details of the proposed FY27 budget noting the full budget document was provided to the Committee in the meeting packet for their consideration.

Mr. Kiely invited Committee members to interrupt him with questions as necessary and noted there will be other opportunities to delve deeper into the budget process.

Mr. Kiely started the presentation with school enrollment (3,251) which is projected for FY27 and included information regarding average class size in all schools noting the District has a larger teacher to student ratio (12.2 students per teacher) than the state average (11.9 students per teacher).

Mr. Oliver asked what the out-of-district enrollment is that we are financially responsible for as well as asking for clarification on the teacher to student ratio adding non-classroom teaching staff are included in number.

Mr. Kiely said approximately 40 students are out of district and confirmed non-classroom teaching staff are included in the number and that, on average, the number of students per classroom is greater than 12.2.

Mr. Kiely addressed information about new developments in Dartmouth and stated he and Dr. Saba-Maguire have been meeting with the Town Administrator and Finance Director regularly about new developments and what it might mean from an enrollment standpoint stating, at the current time, we believe there will not be a new development “on line” during FY27 adding new development could have a significant impact on the FY28 budget.

Mr. Kiely addressed *selected student* populations which drives staffing needs and how we serve our students; Mr. Kiely noted that although some select student population percentages have “leveled off”, all categories are significantly higher than previous years and this presents challenges for allocation of resources adding that during these years our budgets have increased very modestly, more of a cost of living increase rather than an increase in terms of addressing these needs, and we are getting to the point where we don’t have the resources to serve students in the way that we should be.

Mr. Kiely provided a summary of *per pupil spending* showing Dartmouth’s spending ranking including for teachers, insurance, administrator, operations and pupil services and how the gap is widening noting Dartmouth is falling further behind in the state ranking.

Mr. Kiely commented we have an above-average performing school district at far below average cost; these numbers coupled with the increases in student needs will not allow us to sustain this level of performance with diminishing levels of funding; more investment is required.

Mr. Kiely noted Dartmouth has less staff per 100 students compared to the state average in every category: teachers, paraprofessionals, leadership, student support, clerical and tech.

Mr. Kiely highlighted some of the *key budget factors* that had to be considered when formulating the FY27 budget including but not limited to the following: *Contractual Salary Increases* noting salaries represent approximately 80% of the budget; *Instructional Supplies* noting the District has not increased the supply side of the budget since 2019; *Athletics* and *Music* budgets noting they have not been increased in recent years; *Maintenance and Utilities* budget explaining this request is for day to day routine maintenance not major repairs and moving staff from school choice funds.

Mr. Nunes asked about utility bills as well as snow removal.

Mr. Kiely responded they are significant.

Mr. Kiely briefly explained the reasoning behind the proposed budget recommendations including but not limited to the following: 4 education support professionals (ESP), 3 registered behavior technicians (RBT), 1 middle school adjustment counselor, 1 human resource staff, 1 maintenance staff, 1 Special Education team facilitator; 1 technology staff.

Mr. Oliver commented on the need for education support professionals.

Ms. Coughlin asked if the District asked for Special Education Team facilitators last year.

Dr. Saba-Maguire responded yes and they were added but we need additional staff.

Mr. Oliver asked, for clarification purposes, what a Special Education team facilitator does.

Laurie Dionisio, Executive Director of Student Services, explained the role of a team facilitator and stated they make quite a difference noting from 10 to 25 Individualized Education Plan (IEP) meetings are held per week in various school buildings and the team facilitator organizes and runs those meetings as well as preparing the follow up paperwork adding with the addition of a team facilitator the District will be able to designate a facilitator to the high school and to the middle school.

Dr. Saba-Maguire added the facilitator position is also meant to take some of the workload including administrative tasks from the classroom teacher who is delivering direct instruction to students.

Mr. Oliver noted the request for a human resource position was asked for last year adding, as the largest town department, we do not have staff dedicated to human resource matters.

Ms. Coughlin stated any business that employs 600 people would have a dedicated HR person.

Dr. Saba-Maguire recognized the recent assistance of Susana Cunningham, the new Town HR Director, adding the request is based on the need for dedicated staff to address daily HR matters.

Mr. Kiely explained the reasoning behind the Athletic Coordination request noting the number of events that are held and that the Athletic Director cannot attend all of them adding it would likely be a staff member employed in this role.

Mr. Kiely explained the request for the .5 elementary music teacher is to support the desire to reintroduce elementary music instruction to fifth graders.

Mr. Kiely stated the staffing recommendations amount to 13.5 FTEs (full time equivalent) to our budget.

Ms. Coughlin asked how many FTEs have been lost in the last 10 years.

Mr. Kiely stated we have lost and reallocated many positions because of the increase of students with high needs often times the only way to get through a budget process was through addressing declining enrollment and eliminating “sections” at each of the educational levels and reallocating staff to provide services to students with high needs which we did often as well as eliminating positions.

Mr. Kiely addressed the requests that were not funded: 1 elementary level behavioral specialist; 1 elementary level special education teacher and a middle school reading specialist.

Ms. Coughlin asked how many reading specialists we currently have.

Dr. Saba-Maguire noted we had two and now we have one reading specialist at the middle school adding we “converted” the reading specialist position to a special education position; students requiring assistance, reading or otherwise, receive support from the special educators.

Mr. Kiely reviewed the updated school choice spending plan reminding the Committee of the plan to reduce the District’s reliance on school choice funding which was agreed to by other Town boards by increasing the District’s operating budget spending by \$245,000 annually to bring us to the point, after 5 years, of having expended approximately what we earn through school choice; Mr. Kiely called the Committee’s attention back to the *Key Budget Factors* when he noted staff moved from school choice.

Mr. Kiely stated the District is “building in” a budget increase of \$2,781,229 or 5.02% (reference *Key Budget Factors*) as well as an increase of \$245,000 or 0.44% (reference *School Choice Reliance plan*) and \$768,500 or 1.39% (reference *Budget Recommendations*) for a total FY27 draft budget of \$59,226,287; a 6.85% budget increase.

Mr. Kiely provided category comparisons of the FY26 budget and the proposed FY27 budget and included the Medicaid budget noting one staff member, who does the Medicaid claim work, is paid through these funds noting it has been underfunded for years and we are proposing a 10% increase in that line noting the work done by the staff member generates revenue for the Town amounting to \$300,197 in reimbursements from the government.

Ms. Coughlin asked for confirmation that the reimbursements is considered revenue for the Town.

Mr. Kiely responded it is revenue that goes to the Town’s general fund; it does not come to the school department.

Mr. Kiely concluded stating the proposed FY27 budget will be posted on the District website tomorrow and provided next steps including but not limited to the following: the public hearing date (March 23rd); the School Committee vote on the budget (April 13th); the District’s presentation of the FY27 budget to the Finance Committee (March 5th); adding the Town Administrator and Finance Director will be providing additional information for your consideration.

Dr. Saba-Maguire gave closing comments noting the evolution of the budget process during her tenure and stated she “felt good” about this proposed budget.

Mr. Nunes asked if the Town is aware of the budget proposal.

Mr. Kiely responded they are aware in that we have had discussions and they attended the last budget sub-committee meeting when detailed discussions were had on tonight's budget proposal.

Mr. Nunes asked if we should ask Representative Markey or his aide to help us in getting the State to address the funding formula.

Mr. Kiely stated the Town is projected to receive a 1% increase in its overall State aid based on the governor's budget.

Mrs. Amaral asked about the rational behind the decision to not fund a special education teacher position which is highly regulated position.

Dr. Saba-Maguire assured the Committee that the District falls well within the standards in supporting special education students adding the thought processes behind not recommending a special education teacher which was requested at the elementary level and which was directly related to dysregulated students was to add three registered behavior technicians as a way to balance the request and not create an imbalance of teaching staff throughout the elementary schools.

Mr. Oliver commented the proposed budget puts on the table what the District needs but we are not there yet and hopes the Community is hearing us.

NEW BUSINESS

Chris Oliver left the meeting at 7:49 p.m.

Chris Oliver returned to the meeting at 7:52 p.m.

Superintendent's Update: Dr. Saba-Maguire provided information and updates of events and activities happening throughout the District.

- Teaching and Learning Update: School visits noting the consistency of learning across the District elementary schools through a high-quality learning resource; testing season is upon us (MCAS) noting the work of technology in preparation; February Early Release Day Professional Development strands; OpenSciEd curriculum pilot at DMS; Project T.I.M.E.
- Safe and Supportive Schools Update: Dr. Thibault and Mr. Crisafulli are working with the Children's Advocacy Center to bring presentations on digital safety to health classes at the high and middle schools; snow removal challenges this year for the maintenance staff; DHS hosted an informational panel for families of students with disabilities focused on post-secondary accessibility services with 5 local colleges participating adding the recording of the panel will be posted on the DHS Youtube page.
- Meeting with area Superintendents to plan a Legislative Breakfast for the Southcoast communities tentatively set for May 15th and Mike Watson, Superintendent of GNBK Voc Tech High School, has agreed to host the breakfast; more information to come.
- SEPAC meeting scheduled for February 12th at 6:00 p.m. in the DHS library media center to discuss post-secondary transition planning.
- Informational Evening for families on February 25th at 6:00 p.m. at Cushman School
- Kindergarten registration opened today and encouraged families to register at their earliest opportunity.

Report of the Chair: The Chair had nothing further to report and asked the Committee if they had anything further to add.

- DEF Spelling Bee will be held on April 1st and asked the Committee if it wanted to sponsor a team as it did last year; the Committee agreed
- Mr. Nunes requested a discussion on snow removal be placed on the next agenda adding he is looking for the cost of the removal and maybe we should request funds from the Finance

Committee
-Band Update

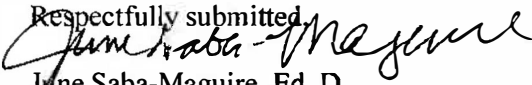
Other Matters that may not have been anticipated at the time of Agenda posting:

NEXT MEETING

Next Meeting: The Chair stated the next regular session of the School Committee will take place in the Library Media Center at Dartmouth High School and via live stream at www.youtube.com/dhstvmedia on Monday, March 2, 2026 at 6:00 p.m.

Mr. Nunes moved, seconded by Ms. Beckwith to adjourn from Open Session at 8:06 p.m. The motion passed unanimously: 5-0.

Respectfully submitted,


June Saba-Maguire, Ed. D.
Superintendent of Schools

Open Session - Documents/Exhibits

- Agenda
- Brief
- Regular Session Minutes for January 27, 2026
- Consent Agenda Items – WGI Competition/Winter Guard and Indoor Percussion
- Joseph DeMello School Spotlight on Kids Presentation
- FY27 Budget Presentation