

GREATER FALL RIVER VOCATIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT COMMITTEE
MINUTES OF REGULAR MEETING
251 STONEHAVEN ROAD, FALL RIVER, MA
DISTRICT OFFICE CONFERENCE ROOM
MARCH 12, 2026

The regular meeting of the Greater Fall River Vocational School District Committee was called to order at 5:34 p.m. by Chairman Paul Jennings, with the following persons in attendance, William Flanagan of Fall River, Richard Manuels Jr. of Fall River, Joan Menard of Fall River, Donald DiBiasio of Somerset (remote) and Jeffrey Begin of Swansea.

Also, in attendance were: Brian Bentley, Superintendent-Director, Leslie Weckesser, Assistant Superintendent-Principal, Melissa Petrasso, Director of Finance, Jennifer DeMariano, Assistant Principal of Technical Affairs, Attorney Gregory Brillhante, Helena Neves, Executive Secretary, Chace Albernaz, Student Representative, Gregory Joynt, Kaestle Boos and members of the Diman Teachers Association.

Remote attendance: Debbie Pacheco, Director of Special Education, Lisa Young, LPN Program Director, and members of the Diman Teachers Association.

Mr. Jennings 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 called for a motion to bring the Budget Public Hearing to order.

It was moved by Mr. Begin, seconded by Ms. Menard, and voted unanimously to bring the Budget Public Hearing to order at 5:36 pm.

Mr. Jennings deferred to Ms. Petrasso for the FY27 Budget presentation. Ms. Petrasso 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 FY27 Budget. As there were no questions, Mr. Jennings called for a motion to close the budget public hearing.

It was moved by Attorney Flanagan, seconded by Ms. Menard, and voted unanimously to close the Budget Public Hearing at 5:45 pm.

Mr. Jennings called for a motion to open the School Choice public hearing to order.

It was moved by Mr. Begin, seconded by Ms. Menard, and voted unanimously to bring the School Choice Public Hearing to order at 5:46 pm.

Attorney Brillhante 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 2026-2027 school year because of its inability to accept all students wanting to enroll from the four district communities.

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There were no requests from the public to speak on School Choice. As there were no questions, Mr. Jennings called for a motion to close the School Choice public hearing.

It was moved by Mr. Begin, seconded by Attorney Flanagan, and voted unanimously to close the School Choice Public Hearing at 5:46 pm.

Mr. Jennings called for a motion to bring the regular meeting to order.

It was moved by Ms. Menard, seconded by Mr. Begin and voted unanimously to bring the regular meeting to order at 5:46 pm.

It was moved by Attorney Flanagan, seconded by Ms. Menard, and voted unanimously on a roll call to approve the February 12, 2026 minutes, as submitted.

Mr. Albernaz provided the student report which included updates on current events and ongoing issues. Students have completed the district SkillsUSA assessment, and results have been received. Spring sports are beginning. AP contracts for sophomores and juniors are currently being collected. DECA students have advanced to the state competition and are expected to return Sunday. Scheduling and Attendance Concerns: Due to the recent snow week, the academic schedule has been impacted, resulting in A and B week imbalances and students falling behind in coursework. The school year has been extended, with the last day anticipated to be June 24th. Students have raised concerns with the added week. A number of students have expressed intentions of not attending school during the final week despite potential consequences.

There was no Citizen Input.

Mr. Bentley deferred to Ms. Petrasso for an update on the Property and Liability Insurance. Ms. Petrasso stated that upon reaching out to several regional school districts for recommendations six insurance brokers were identified. After discussing options with four firms, the Alera Group was found to be the best fit for the District.

Mr. Jennings asked what the fee will be. Ms. Petrasso noted that the Alera Group includes their commission within the insurance policy, meaning costs may vary with insurance rates and are not itemized. Ms. Petrasso further noted that brokerage commissions are typically standard in the industry, generally ranging between 12–15% of total coverage. Mr. Jennings asked how Alera's customer service is. Ms. Petrasso stated that they have been very responsive. Attorney Brillhante noted that customer service is important as the District had a very bad experience with the current insurance provider. Attorney Brillhante asked when do the current policies expire. Ms. Petrasso responded that the policies expire on June 30th. Attorney Brillhante asked whether the intent was to wait or to begin working with the new company immediately. Mr. Begin suggested waiting until the current policies expire. It was agreed to begin services with the Alera Group effective July 1, 2026.

It was moved by Mr. Manuels, seconded by Mr. Begin, and voted unanimously on a roll call to appoint Alera Group located in New Bedford, MA as the District's new insurance brokers, as presented.

Mr. Jennings asked if there were questions regarding the FY27 budget. Mr. DiBiasio asked Mrs. Weckesser if she is intending to replace the Assistant Supervisor of Building and Grounds position. It was his understanding that the position was not to be filled. Mrs. Weckesser responded that it is her intent to fill the position, as there is no one available to manage the department in the absence of the supervisor.

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Mr. DiBiasio stated that he would prefer to allocate funds toward a required service contract for maintaining rooftop units and boiler room equipment after the initial one-year management period. Mrs. Weckesser stated that it is her understanding that there is a service agreement as part of the contract. Mr. Joynt noted that most of the equipment installed in the building is covered under warranty, which is separate from service. Certain items, such as the elevator, include service contracts as part of their cost; however, once the district takes ownership of the building following substantial completion, ongoing maintenance becomes the district's responsibility. Mr. DiBiasio questioned the need of adding staff at this time, particularly since there will be limited grounds work for the next 18 months to two years, and based on prior understanding that the position would not be needed.

Mr. DiBiasio expressed concern about the hiring of additional custodial positions. Mr. Bentley noted that the building is larger and additional custodial staff is needed due to an increase in students, a significant increase in the number of student and staff bathrooms, as well as more trash. The layout, and vertical design of the new building will require additional time and effort to maintain, and noted that one to two additional custodians will be necessary. Mr. DiBiasio stated that he will discuss this further with Mr. Bentley.

Mr. DiBiasio questioned the need to hire an additional Technology Services staff member. Mrs. Weckesser noted that as a vocational technical school with advanced technology throughout the building including digital boards, VoIP phone systems, an enhanced media center and classroom technology the additional staff will be needed. Mr. DiBiasio acknowledged the need but expressed concern about increasing staffing in custodial, security, and technology roles at the expense of academic teaching positions. Mr. Bentley and Mrs. Weckesser clarified that no teaching positions are being eliminated.

It was moved by Mr. Begin, seconded by Ms. Menard, and voted unanimously on a roll call to approve the FY27 Budget, as submitted.

Mr. Bentley recommended that the Greater Fall River Vocational School District/Diman Regional Vocational Technical High School, not be a choice school for the 2026-2027 school year because of its inability to accept all students wanting to enroll from the four district communities.

It was moved by Attorney Flanagan, seconded by Mr. Begin, and voted unanimously on a roll call that the Greater Fall River Vocational School District/Diman Regional Vocational Technical High School, not be a choice school for the 2026-2027 school year because of its inability to accept all students wanting to enroll from the four district communities.

Mr. DiBiasio deferred to Mr. Joynt for the MSBA Project update. Mr. Joynt noted that the project is approximately 75% complete overall. Finishes are going in in most places, and the punch list process will begin this week. Some spaces are nearly ready for occupancy, pending minor corrections before final completion. Site work continues to progress despite weather related delays, and there are no major schedule concerns. The project budget remains in excellent condition.

Mr. Bentley provided an update on the signage for the new building. Mr. Bentley and Mrs. Weckesser are meeting regularly with a consultant to develop interior signage. The focus is on incorporating a community theme, highlighting the district towns and creating a cohesive identity. Concepts include "all roads lead to Diman" signage, historical displays, and timelines showing the school's evolution from its origins to the new facility.

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Additional features are being planned for areas such as the weight room, Room 251, and the gymnasium to create impactful, engaging spaces for students.

Mr. Joynt provided a summary of Prime Contract Change Order (PCCO) No. 015, which has been approved by the School Building Committee and needs to be reaffirmed. He noted that the change order covers minor items not included in the original bid.

It was moved by Ms. Menard, seconded by Attorney Flanagan, and voted unanimously on a roll call to reaffirm PCCO No. 015 for a total amount of \$70,558.76.

Mr. Joynt provided a summary of the Technology Purchase Orders; Hub Technical - Patch Cord Cables for the total amount of \$9,663.80. The order is for short cables that connect to the punchdown panels to technology switches.

It was moved by Mr. Begin, seconded by Attorney Flanagan, and voted unanimously on a roll call to reaffirm Technology Purchase Orders; Hub Technical - Patch Cord Cables, as submitted.

Mr. Bentley deferred to Mr. Joynt for a summary of the Furniture, Fixtures and Equipment (FF&E) purchase orders. Mr. Joynt noted that the purchase orders make up about 95-99% of the FF&E needs for student furniture, teacher furniture and office furniture which is being purchased through collaborative purchasing. The quotes are for Red Thread in the amount of \$1,374,430.41; Robert H. Lord in the amount of \$552,936.99; and W.B. Mason in the amount of \$290,610.89. Mr. Joynt further noted that certain costs exceeded the originally set FF&E budget; however, since none of the owner's contingency has been spent, there is sufficient funding to cover these overages. Additional reimbursement from MSBA is not available for these line items, but the budget remains healthy, allowing the purchase of necessary furniture and equipment to operate the building effectively.

It was moved by Ms. Menard, seconded by Mr. Manuels, and voted unanimously on a roll call to reaffirm the Furniture Fixtures and Equipment Purchase Orders; Robert H. Lord for the amount of \$552,936.99; W.B. Mason for the amount of \$290,610.89 and Red Thread for the amount of \$1,374,430.41, as submitted

Mr. Bentley provided a summary of the Chemical Inventory and Lab Move proposal. The chemical inventory process is underway, which includes cataloging, relocating, or disposing of chemicals from the current building. Final costs are not yet determined, but a price breakdown for services from Triumvirate is included in the meeting packet.

It was moved by Attorney Flanagan, seconded by Ms. Menard, and voted unanimously on a roll call to reaffirm the Chemical Inventory and Lab Move Proposal, as submitted.

Ms. Petrasso provided an overview of the MSBA project expenditures. Invoices from Colliers, KBA, and Suffolk reflect the billing for the month of February for the project.

It was moved by Ms. Menard, seconded by Attorney Flanagan, and voted unanimously on a roll call to approve the following MSBA Project expenditures: Colliers Invoice #0001150797 dated 2/28/2026 for the amount of \$129,459.02, KBA invoice #20006.01-44 dated 2/28/2026 for the amount of \$186,207.71, and Suffolk Construction application no. 29 dated 2/28/2026 for the amount of \$5,224,147.29.

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Mr. Bentley reported on personnel. Mr. Bentley noted that Mrs. DeMariano was very successful in acquiring a grant to review the CTE curriculum.

Agenda item 3.1.e Discussion of Assistant Superintendent-Principal Position will be discussed after executive session.

Mr. Bentley reported on the student travel requests.

Ms. Menard left the meeting at 6:31 pm.

It was moved by Mr. Begin, seconded by Mr. Manuels, and voted on a roll call to approve the out of state travel request submitted by Heath Chouinard, Facilities Maintenance Management Instructor for students attend and explore advancements in building technologies at the JLC Live Show at the RI Convention Center in Providence, RI on March 27, 2026 from 8:00 am to 2:00 pm.

It was moved by Mr. Manuels, seconded by Mr. Begin, and voted on a roll call to reaffirm the after-school hours travel request submitted by Michelle Bernier, Dental Assisting Instructor for students to take the Infection Control Exam at the Pearson Testing Center in Wellesley, MA on March 10, 2026 from 12:00 pm to 9:00 pm.

It was moved by Mr. Begin, seconded by Attorney Flanagan, and voted on a roll call to reaffirm the after-school hours travel request submitted by Priscilla Wicks, Dental Assisting Instructor/Department Head for students to take the Board Exam at the Pearson Testing Center in Wellesley, MA on March 11, 2026 from 2:00 pm to 9:30 pm.

Mr. Bentley provided a summary of the 25/26 School Calendar changes.

It was moved by Attorney Flanagan, seconded by Mr. Begin, and voted on a roll call to approve the 25/26 School Calendar changes, as presented.

Mr. Bentley deferred to Mrs. Weckesser for the 26/27 School Calendar. Mrs. Weckesser acknowledged the Diman Teachers Association (DTA) for their cooperation in the process, noting that extra time was needed for teachers to become familiar with the new building before students arrive.

Ms. Menard returned to the meeting at 6:35 pm.

Mr. Bentley noted that the proposed school calendar provides teachers with three days in the building before students arrive, allowing them time to settle into their new spaces.

It was moved by Ms. Menard, seconded by Attorney Flanagan, and voted unanimously on a roll call to approve the 26/27 School Calendar, as submitted.

Mr. Bentley reported on the Use of Facilities Agreement with Bristol Community College. He noted that, following the success of the current HVAC program, BCC is exploring a similar partnership for the Precision Machining program to meet the demand for trained machinists. A draft use of facilities agreement, modeled on the existing HVAC agreement, has been prepared, with the new program scheduled to begin in January 2027.

It was moved by Ms. Menard, seconded by Attorney Flanagan, and voted unanimously on a roll call to approve the Use of Facilities Agreement with BCC, as presented.

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It was moved by Ms. Menard, seconded by Mr. Begin, and voted unanimously on a roll call to approve the request by Bristol Community College to use the Precision Machining & Engineering shop and an adjacent classroom for their CNC/Precision Machining Partnership Program with Diman to begin in January 2027. Days and times to be determined. The use of facilities fees will be in accordance with the contract, as negotiated.

Mr. Bentley deferred to Mrs. Weckesser for the discussion on exploring new vocational program options. Mrs. Weckesser provided an overview of potential program expansions in four high-demand sectors in Greater Fall River over the next ten years. These include cybersecurity, media and TV broadcasting, health careers (including possible EMT training), and legal/protective services. The discussion included exploring dual enrollment opportunities, revising existing curricula, and seeking Department of Education approval for program duplication where permitted. Teachers will be actively involved in any curriculum adjustments. The goal is to align career and technical programs with the new building and future workforce needs, ensuring Diman's programs remain relevant for the next century.

Mrs. Menard left the meeting at 6:46 pm.

There was further discussion that focused on whether program expansions would involve adding new shops or enhancing existing ones. It was noted that shop space is limited, but creative solutions could allow for additions without reducing current programs. Concerns were raised that certain programs, such as cybersecurity, may not engage younger students. It was emphasized that program planning should consider local demand and student preferences rather than duplicating offerings from other districts. Part of the expansion process includes surveying incoming students to gauge interest.

Mr. Menard returned to the meeting at 6:48 pm.

Mr. Jennings asked Mrs. Weckesser if she is looking to establish a subcommittee. Mrs. Weckesser responded that a "Future of the District" subcommittee would be helpful. She noted that she has been meeting weekly with Joseph Marciszyn, Co-Op Coordinator, and with Mrs. DeMariano to review, research, explore opportunities at other schools, and discuss both future program development and potential adjustments to existing programs. Mrs. Weckesser requested permission to contact DESE to gather additional information and will notify Mr. Jennings when she is ready to establish the subcommittee.

Mr. Bentley reported on requests to surplus IT equipment, academic/library materials, and vocational shop equipment. Mrs. Weckesser requested guidance regarding approximately 8,000 books in the library, noting that they cannot be auctioned and are not being accepted by local libraries due to their age. Mr. Begin suggested donating them to an overseas organization. Mrs. Weckesser will follow up.

It was moved by Mr. Begin, seconded by Attorney Flanagan, and voted unanimously on a roll call to approve the Surplus of IT Equipment, Academic/Library Materials, and Vocational Shop Equipment, as submitted.

Agenda item 3.1 m. Discussion of Food Service Program was tabled.

Ms. Petrasso provided a summary of the monthly financial report.

Ms. Petrasso provided an overview of the expenditures in excess of \$10,000.

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It was moved by Attorney Flanagan, seconded by Ms. Menard, and voted unanimously to approve the expenditures in excess of \$10,000, as submitted.

Mr. Bentley provided the Superintendent-Director's report which included an update on student enrollment, applications, admissions, cooperative education and the LPN Program.

Mr. Bentley deferred to Mrs. Young for a report on the site survey conducted by the Massachusetts Board of Registration in Nursing (BORN). The review team met with administration, faculty, and students, and provided a preliminary summary of findings. Several areas requiring improvement were identified, including policy language, website updates, and the need to revise and update all job descriptions to align with regulatory standards. BORN emphasized the need for improved data collection and reporting, particularly tracking student outcomes from admission through NCLEX results. Significant concerns were raised regarding obstetrics (OB) training, including lack of direct clinical experience opportunities and the absence of faculty with OB expertise. Mrs. Young noted that she is working to secure clinical placements, though this remains a challenge and may impact program compliance. Additional concerns included limited staffing resources, lack of clearly documented shared governance, and insufficient administrative support during clinical rotations. The formal written report is pending. Mr. Bentley noted that he will be meeting with Mrs. Young to assist in preparing a response to the findings.

Mr. Begin expressed concern about the increasing difficulty of sustaining LPN programs, noting that regulatory requirements, particularly for obstetrics clinical experience, are challenging to meet. He noted that securing hospital placements for obstetrics is unlikely due to priority given to nursing programs, and emphasized that limitations on using lab simulations further complicate the program's ability to meet requirements and operate effectively.

Mr. DiBiasio made the recommendation that Mrs. Weckesser, as the incoming superintendent, become involved in discussions regarding the LPN program, as she will be responsible for its future oversight. He also suggested that subcommittee members attend relevant meetings to better understand the challenges and evaluate the potential financial impact of the program.

Mr. Bentley informed members that BORN has approved the program's change of location to Bristol Community College.

Mr. Jennings thanked Myles Brilhante and the maintenance and custodial team for their outstanding work during the blizzard. Mr. Bentley noted that the strong communication, behind-the-scenes efforts, and coordination with outside vendors ensured the facility was well-prepared for the safe return of students and staff.

Mr. Jennings noted that the May School Committee meeting needs to be rescheduled. It was agreed upon to hold the meeting on May 12, 2026.

The date for the June meeting will be reviewed, and a new date will be determined.

Mrs. Menard left the meeting at 7:24 pm.

The next meeting will be April 9, 2026 at 5:30 PM.

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Attorney Brilhante stated the reasons to go into executive session.

It was moved by Mr. Begin, seconded by Attorney Flanagan, and voted on a roll call at 7:28 pm to enter into Executive Session with Mr. Jennings, Mr. DiBiasio, Mr. Manuels, Attorney Flanagan and Mr. Begin voting yes. *Ms. Menard was not in the room.*

It was moved by Mr. Manuels, seconded by Ms. Menard and voted on a roll call at 7:44 p.m. to rise into Open Session with Mr. Jennings, Mr. DiBiasio, Mr. Manuels, Mr. Begin, Attorney Flanagan and Ms. Menard and voting yes.

Mr. DiBiasio left the meeting after executive session.

Agenda item 3.1.e Discussion of Assistant Superintendent-Principal Position. Attorney Brilhante recommended that the Board entertain a motion to post the Assistant Superintendent/Principal position immediately, with a start date of July 1, 2026, and a salary range of \$165,000 to \$175,000.

It was moved by Attorney Flanagan, seconded by Ms. Menard, and voted unanimously to post the Assistant Superintendent/Principal position immediately, with a start date of July 1, 2026, and a salary range of \$165,000 to \$175,000.

It was moved by Attorney Flanagan, seconded by Ms. Menard, and voted unanimously to adjourn the meeting at 7:46 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,
[Helena S. Neves](#)
Helena S. Neves, Executive Secretary

Materials Included:

FY27 Proposed Budget
February 12, 2026 Minutes
Student Report
Property & Liability Insurance Proposal
Prime Contract Change Order No. 015
Hub Tech Quote – Patch Cord Cables
FF&E Quotes – Red Thread, Robert H. Lord & WB Mason
Chemical Inventory and Lab Move Proposal
MSBA Project Expenditures
26/27 School Calendar
BCC Use of Facilities Agreement
Surplus Lists – IT Equipment, Academic/Library Materials, Shop Equipment
Monthly Financial Report
Student Activity Agency Accounts Report
Expenditure Report
Superintendent's Report