

DRAFT MINUTES OF THE REGULAR SESSION OF THE MALDEN SCHOOL
COMMITTEE

Monday, April 6, 2026

Herbert L. Jackson Council Chamber Room #106 - 215 Pleasant Street Malden, MA and
Virtual Meeting

Mayor Christenson called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

Mayor Christenson read docket items for the meeting.

Mayor Christenson led the committee in the Pledge of Allegiance followed by a moment of silence for those who have served our country and for those who continue to do so.

Roll Call

The following attendance was taken:

Mayor Christenson - Present

Mr. Drummey - Absent

Mr. McCarthy - Present

Ms. Spadafora - Present

Ms. Macklin - Present

Ms. Hortie - Present

Mr. Piazza - Present

Mr. Bernard - Present

Ms. Rose-Zeiberg - Present

Superintendent Sippel - Present

Student Representative - Gabriela Parini Cordova

Mayor Christenson, in consideration of those present, raised the matter of the Forestdale School May 2027 Washington D.C. trip and the Canobie Lake (K-8's) out of state trip out of order.

Forestdale School May 2027 Washington D.C. Overnight Trip

The Superintendent explained that the trip was being brought forward for early approval to allow time for planning and fundraising and introduced Principal Weldai and staff. Principal Weldai presented the proposal for a four-day, three-night trip to Washington, D.C., scheduled for May 2027 for current sixth and seventh grade students. He noted that the trip would be conducted by bus rather than plane to reduce costs and logistical challenges, including student anxiety and travel fatigue. The estimated cost is approximately \$1,075 per student, a decrease from the previous year, with structured payment plans available. The itinerary includes educational visits to museums and historical sites, along with organized activities and meals. He highlighted

ongoing fundraising efforts, including multiple events and grant support, with a stated goal of ensuring all students can participate regardless of financial circumstances.

Committee members asked several questions regarding logistics and accessibility. Ms. Hortie inquired about the decision to switch from air to bus travel, and staff explained it was due to cost savings and improved student experience. Ms. Spadafora asked about emergency protocols, including medical needs and supervision, and staff outlined procedures for medication administration, emergency response, and coordination with local medical facilities. Mr. Piazza asked for clarification regarding funding sources, and it was confirmed that costs are shared between family contributions and fundraising, with additional support available for students in need. Ms. Rose-Zeiberg asked about accessibility for students requiring additional support, and staff explained that accommodations can be arranged, including the option for additional support personnel or family participation if needed.

Ms. Hortie made a motion to approve the Forestdale School May 2027 Washington D.C. Overnight Trip. Mr. McCarthy seconded and so it was VOTED. The motion passed unanimously.

Canobie Lake (K-8's) Out of State Trip

The committee then considered a proposal for the annual eighth grade trip to Canobie Lake Park. Assistant Superintendent Bhasin presented the proposal, noting that the trip is a longstanding tradition for K-8 schools and that planning includes attention to safety, supervision, accessibility, and equitable participation. The cost to students is approximately \$30, with additional funding support provided through PTOs and school-based fundraising. Ms. Spadafora asked about scheduling, noting that two schools would attend on the same day, and staff confirmed that the park can accommodate large groups and that scheduling is based on limited availability and school calendars. Questions were also raised regarding chaperone ratios and financial assistance, with staff confirming appropriate supervision levels and a commitment to ensuring that all students can attend regardless of financial need.

Mr. McCarthy made a motion to approve the Canobie Lake (K-8's) Out of State Trip. Ms. Hortie seconded the motion and so it was VOTED. The motion passed unanimously.

Consent Agenda

Mayor Christenson brought forth the matter of the adoption of minutes for the approval of January 28, 2026 Special Meeting Minutes. Mr. Bernard made a motion to approve. Mr. McCarthy seconded the motion and so it was VOTED. The motion passed unanimously.

Mayor Christenson brought forth the matter of the adoption of minutes for the approval of February 2, 2026 School Committee Meeting Minutes. Ms. Spadafora made a motion to approve. Mr. Bernard seconded the motion and so it was VOTED. The motion passed unanimously.

Mayor Christenson brought forth the matter of the adoption of minutes for the approval of the February 18, 2026 Special Meeting Minutes. Mr. McCarthy made a motion to approve. Mr. Bernard seconded the motion and so it was VOTED. The motion passed unanimously.

Mayor Christenson brought forth the matter of the adoption of minutes for the approval of the March 9, 2026 Meeting Minutes. Mr. Piazza made a motion to approve. Ms. Spadafora seconded the motion and so it was VOTED. The motion passed with one abstention.

Mayor Christenson brought forth the matter of the March 2026 Warrants. Mr. Bernard made a motion to place the 2026 Warrants on file and authorize the Chair to sign. Ms. Rose-Zeiberg seconded the motion and so it was VOTED. The motion passed with a 7-1 vote.

Public Comment

Catherine Tarka, 196 Glenwood Street

Ms. Tarka expressed concern about excessive and non-instructional screen use in classrooms, citing her child's exposure to YouTube content at school. While supportive of appropriate educational technology, she emphasized the negative impacts of screen overuse on children's mental health, social development, and reading skills. She urged the committee to adopt a policy ensuring screen time is intentional, limited, and educationally justified.

Lindsay McCluskey - 23 Silver Street

Ms. McCluskey echoed concerns about managing children's exposure to technology and its developmental impacts. She advocated for a district policy promoting age-appropriate and purposeful use of technology and AI, with a focus on tools that demonstrate clear educational benefits. She also requested greater transparency and caregiver involvement in decisions regarding the after-school program vendor and emphasized the importance of maintaining affordable programs that prioritize social interaction and minimize screen time.

Kara Hogan - 581 Fellsway E

Ms. Hogan, a technology marketing professional, cautioned against relying on messaging from technology companies, noting that profit motives often outweigh concern for children's well-being. She highlighted that many tech leaders restrict their own children's technology use and stressed the importance of building strong critical thinking skills before introducing widespread use of AI and digital tools in schools. Similarly, Jessica Nadou and another Salemwood parent spoke in strong support of the MOST after-school program, emphasizing the value of its staff, community, and positive impact on their children. Both expressed concern about a potential shift to an outside vendor and urged the committee to consider the importance of maintaining the existing program and relationships.

Jessica Nadou - 9 Baldwin St.

Ms. Nadou spoke in support of the MOST after-school program, emphasizing the importance of its staff and community. Drawing on her experience with multiple childcare programs, she contrasted the positive environment and strong staffing of MOST with less successful experiences elsewhere. She highlighted the program's favorable staff-to-student ratios, inclusion of experienced educators, and its role in supporting both children and families. Ms. Nadou expressed concern about the potential shift to an outside vendor and urged the committee to consider the value of the existing program and the relationships it fosters within the community.

Annabette D'Entremont - 205 Harvard Street

Ms. D'Entremont described how the MOST program has supported their child's academic and social development, particularly compared to less successful experiences in other programs, and requested that the committee reconsider changes or seek a compromise.

Community Member - 25 Glenwood Street

This speaker provided a research-based perspective, explaining that effective learning depends on sustained attention and active engagement, which may be undermined by technology designed to maximize engagement rather than understanding. He also raised concerns about student data privacy and urged rigorous evaluation of educational technology before adoption.

Amanda Maffeo - Teacher and Community Member

Ms. Maffeo commended Ms. Spadafora for her transparency during recent budget discussions but expressed concern about potential cuts to safety personnel and the impact of school closures for voting on instructional time. She also expressed concern around the closure of schools for voting.

Dr. Liz Tonogbanua - Grace St., Malden

Dr. Tonogbanua thanked district leaders for supporting Black history programming while also calling for an audit of educational technology use, citing inconsistent implementation and questionable effectiveness of certain programs.

Elizabeth D'Entremont - 16 Preston St.

Ms. D'Entremont praised the MOST program and raised concerns about online safety risks and the lack of a librarian at Salemwood, advocating for a renewed focus on traditional reading and requested that the committee reconsider changes or seek a compromise.

Imene Bouziane Saidi - 30 Parkside Place

Ms. Bouziane Saidi acknowledged concerns about overuse of technology but emphasized that, when used thoughtfully, AI tools can support student access and engagement, particularly when

instruction is not fully differentiated. She encouraged a balanced approach that views technology as a support rather than a replacement for teaching.

Matt Womer (Ward 5)

Mr. Womer, an experienced technology professional, urged caution in adopting AI in schools, citing past challenges with new technologies and the risks of relying on tools that can produce inaccurate information. He emphasized the need for a deliberate, evidence-based approach to implementation.

Report of the Superintendent

The Superintendent opened his report by formally introducing Michael Sabin as the incoming principal of Malden High School, effective July 1. Mr. Sabin, currently an executive director in Boston Public Schools with over 19 years of experience in urban education, briefly addressed the committee, expressing appreciation for the opportunity and a commitment to supporting students, families, and staff. The Superintendent then outlined three main items for the presentation: an update on the district's strategy for improvement, a recommendation for the 9th and 10th grade English Language Arts (ELA) curriculum adoption, and initial findings from the special education audit and program review.

Regarding the district's strategy for improvement, the Superintendent connected the work to the committee-approved goals focused on advancing literacy, math, and science outcomes. He described an ongoing cycle of instructional leadership that includes collaboration among district coaches, school-based instructional leadership teams, principals, and educators. This work is supported by non-evaluative classroom observations, coaching cycles, data reviews, and the use of professional development (PD) and intervention blocks embedded in school schedules. He highlighted that all schools have implemented these structures, with flexibility for site-specific innovation, and emphasized cross-school collaboration as leaders observe and learn from practices at different schools. A featured example from Ferryway School demonstrated how teams are using data and collaboration time to drive targeted math interventions. In discussion, administrators explained that intervention blocks prioritize literacy first, with math interventions added based on student need, and that student progress is monitored through a combination of diagnostic tools, curriculum-based assessments, and teacher input.

The Superintendent then introduced the recommendation for adopting a new 9th and 10th grade ELA curriculum. The Assistant Superintendent detailed a comprehensive, multi-month selection process led by a 16-member educator advisory committee, which included teachers, specialists, paraprofessionals, and family and student input. The committee reviewed multiple curricula, narrowing options through initial and in-depth evaluations aligned to district criteria, and conducted classroom pilot lessons. Two final options, StudySync and Fishtank, were compared across factors such as alignment to standards, instructional design, use of full texts versus excerpts, reliance on print versus digital materials, and overall usability. Feedback from

educators, students, and families indicated a preference for Fishtank, citing its use of complete texts, greater emphasis on print materials, and stronger alignment with Massachusetts standards. The committee ultimately voted overwhelmingly to recommend Fishtank. While cost was not a deciding factor in the review process, it was noted that Fishtank is significantly less expensive than StudySync. The Superintendent formally recommended adoption of the Fishtank curriculum, noting that, if approved, the district would proceed with material procurement, educator training, and implementation planning, including support for diverse learners, pacing guidance, and ongoing professional development.

The student representative asked about teacher autonomy and whether the curriculum would limit creativity. Assistant Superintendent Bhasin explained that while the adoption is intended to create greater consistency across 9th and 10th grade experiences, there will still be opportunities for teacher flexibility through pacing adjustments, supplemental texts, and choice-based reading opportunities during extension blocks. Teachers will be provided with structured lesson guides and resources but will remain responsible for adapting instruction to meet the needs of their students.

Committee members asked several questions regarding cost and budgeting. Superintendent Sippel and Assistant Superintendent Bhasin clarified that the committee is being asked to approve the curriculum itself, not the duration of purchase, and that funding would likely come from existing curriculum budget allocations, with the possibility of expanding to multi-year purchases if funds allow. Cost comparisons were provided, showing that the recommended Fishtank curriculum is significantly less expensive than StudySync due to its pricing model. Questions about professional development and stipends were addressed, with staff noting that funding for training and implementation support comes from a combination of grants and existing professional development budget lines.

Additional discussion focused on practical implementation considerations. Members asked about access to physical books, replacement planning, and student organization, with administration confirming that class sets would be purchased and replenishment built into future budgeting. The importance of maintaining print materials was emphasized, while also noting that digital access would be available as a backup. Questions were also raised about alignment with 11th and 12th grade curriculum, with administrators explaining that ongoing vertical collaboration among teachers will ensure continuity and alignment over time.

Concerns about artificial intelligence features in curricula were also discussed. It was noted that the recommended Fishtank curriculum does not include AI components, while StudySync does include optional AI tools that could be disabled, though still included in the cost. Finally, the committee discussed how the district would evaluate the effectiveness of the new curriculum over time. It was explained that progress would be monitored through a combination of student performance data, classroom observations, teacher feedback, and student input, recognizing that

meaningful results from curriculum changes typically emerge over a three- to five-year period. Overall, the discussion reflected careful consideration of instructional quality, cost, and long-term implementation planning.

The committee then received a presentation on both an internal review of special education services and an external audit conducted by EmpowerEd, led by Jenna Rufo. Administrators first outlined their internal review, which examined compliance areas including service delivery, staff licensure, evaluation timelines, and classroom group sizes. Findings indicated strong compliance in academic and sub-separate services, though challenges persist with related service delivery—particularly at the high school—due to staffing shortages. Licensure was largely in progress or addressed through waivers, evaluation timelines were generally met with minor exceptions due to student availability, and classroom staffing levels were largely compliant, with some mid-year adjustments needed.

Ms. Rufo then presented a high-level overview of the external review, which analyzed quantitative data, classroom observations, surveys, and focus groups. She highlighted key strengths, including a strong district commitment to inclusive practices, positive classroom environments, collaborative staff culture, and established procedures aligned with regulations. However, several areas for growth were identified: student outcomes are not yet matching the district's high levels of inclusion; there is an overreliance on placement extremes (full inclusion or substantially separate settings) with limited intermediate supports; inconsistencies exist in the implementation of multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS); and instructional practices would benefit from greater differentiation and more effective use of co-teaching and support staff. Additional concerns included inconsistent understanding of programs across schools and the need to better analyze how staffing resources are utilized.

The report recommended developing a multi-year professional learning plan focused on inclusive practices, strengthening MTSS to provide more layered interventions, increasing opportunities for inclusion for students in substantially separate settings, and improving communication and consistency across the district. Ms. Rufo emphasized that a major asset is the district's strong staff commitment to students and belief in their potential, which provides a solid foundation for implementing these improvements. This report will inform future strategic planning and ongoing efforts to enhance special education services.

In closing, Ms. Rufo clarified that while some of the identified areas for growth may involve financial investment—such as professional development, potential new interventions, or additional administrative capacity—the majority of the recommendations are process-driven rather than cost-driven. She noted that improvements to systems like multi-tiered supports (MTSS) or instructional practices could uncover needs that carry costs, but the primary focus is on better use and allocation of existing resources, particularly staffing. One area identified as

relatively limited was administrative capacity to oversee special education programs, though overall staffing levels were generally aligned with comparable districts.

The Superintendent and Assistant Superintendent emphasized that the report marks the beginning of a longer process, with further analysis, stakeholder feedback, and integration of findings into the district's strategic planning efforts. The committee then concluded this portion of the meeting and entered a brief recess.

Subcommittee Reports and Discussions

Finance Subcommittee - Ms. Spadafora

The committee met on Thursday, April 2nd at City Hall. The agenda included continued discussion of financial policies previously introduced, which are expected to return for action items in upcoming motions and resolutions. Members also reviewed March 2026 warrants, transfers, adjustments, and policy items, along with an update on the FY2027 budget process. The committee also discussed net school spending and the impact of reported underspending; however, updated information was provided after it was determined that incorrect health insurance premium figures had been used in prior reporting to DESE. The City notified the finance office in mid-March of corrected rates, which adjusted the figures under discussion. The committee will reconvene later in the month to continue budget discussions as the Central Office continues development of the FY2027 budget.

Motions and Resolutions

DESE Waiver for Salemwood Power Outage - Mr. Piazza

Mr. Piazza made a motion to seek the waiver for the power outage day. Mr. McCarthy seconded the motion and so it was VOTED. The motion passed unanimously.

Afterschool Program Vendor Selection - Mr. Piazza

Mr. Piazza's intention was to join the voices of MOST families in favor of the program. He raised this to have public conversation about the process of selecting a new vendor, why we are changing vendors and to provide clarity. Superintendent Sippel expanded by saying there is a desire for the afterschool programming to be available to more students. There is belief that there are other organizations that do out of school programs well and at a larger scale. The district has prepared ways for families to be involved in the selection process (surveys, virtual listening sessions, an advisory committee to review proposals).

\$500 Northern Bank Donation - Ms. Hortie

Ms. Hortie made a motion to accept the \$500 Northern Bank Donation to the Maldonian for students who may need financial assistance. Mr. Bernard seconded the motion and so it was VOTED. The motion passed unanimously.

Revision of Attendance Area Map - Ms. Rose-Zeiberg

The committee discussed a proposed revision to the district's attendance area map under policy JCA, which assigns attendance zones for the city's K–8 schools and requires School Committee approval for changes. The Superintendent explained that the revised map was developed in response to enrollment imbalances, particularly with smaller kindergarten enrollment at Forestdale and higher enrollment pressures at Beebe, including a full integrated kindergarten classroom. The Superintendent emphasized that the change would not affect any currently enrolled students at Beebe, and families of current students would retain the option to remain enrolled or request transfer under existing policy provisions. He also noted that no students had yet been officially assigned to schools for the upcoming year, though families may have already viewed preliminary placements through the district's online school locator.

Committee members sought clarification on policy implications, including sibling assignments and whether students already registered but not yet placed would be impacted. They confirmed that sibling placement provisions remain in effect and that the revised map would apply before final assignments are issued. Members also requested that future public-facing materials clearly indicate that attendance zones are subject to revision.

Additional discussion included a request for data on how the boundary change might affect student demographics, including high-needs students and English language learners. Committee members also emphasized the need for flexibility for families near boundary lines and encouraged direct outreach to School Committee members with individual concerns.

Ms. Rose-Zeiberg made a motion to approve the Revision of Attendance Area Map. Ms. Hortie seconded the motion and so it was VOTED. The motion passed unanimously.

Grade 9 & 10 ELA Curriculum Adoption - Ms. Rose-Zeiberg

Ms. Rose Zeiberg made a motion to approve the recommended Grade 9 & 10 ELA Curriculum. Ms. Hortie seconded the motion. Ms. Spadafora asked if they were voting on the length of the curriculum contract or just the approval of the curriculum itself. The Superintendent clarified that it was the approval of the curriculum itself. And so it was VOTED. The motion passed unanimously.

Program of Studies - Ms. Rose-Zeiberg

The district provided an executive summary to the committee to indicate any changes to the program of studies. Ms. Rose-Zeiberg made a motion to approve the Program of Studies. Mr. Bernard seconded the motion. Ms. Spadafora noted that the Rise program was not listed under offerings for the high school and the Superintendent affirmed this would be corrected. And so it was VOTED. The motion passed unanimously.

Policy DGA: Authorized Signatures - Ms. Spadafora

Ms. Spadafora made a motion to send Policy DGA: Authorized Signatures requiring that all warrants submitted for payment be approved by a majority of the school committee unless they had taken a vote to authorize the Chair to sign. There is no record of the vote taking place; therefore the motion is to refer the policy to the Policy Subcommittee for review and recommendation, and for the Committee to adhere to the existing policy as written. Ms. Rose-Zeiberg seconded the motion and so it was VOTED. The motion passed unanimously.

Policy DBJ: Revised Transfer Policy - Ms. Spadafora

In finding a contradiction to our current policy, Ms. Spadafora made a motion to refer policy DBJ to the Policy Subcommittee to comply with MASC guidance and MGL. Ms. Rose-Zeiberg seconded the motion and so it was VOTED. The motion passed unanimously.

DESE Inter-District School Choice Program - Ms. Spadafora

As this has never been docketed as a public hearing in accordance with MGL, Ms. Spadafora made a motion to hold a public hearing for the Inter-District School Choice vote on May 4, 2026. Mr. Bernard seconded the motion. Superintendent Sippel indicated that he will provide the available seats for a vote in favor of an Inter-District School Choice vote by May 1, 2026. And so it was VOTED, the motion passed unanimously.

MASC Contract Policy Service - Ms. Spadafora and Ms. Rose-Zeiberg

Ms. Spadafora made a motion to refer the proposed contract with the MASC in the amount of \$10,500 to a joint meeting of the finance and policy subcommittees for review. Ms. Rose-Zeiberg seconded the motion and so it was VOTED. The motion passed unanimously.

Resolution in Support of a Financial Management Review - Ms. Spadafora and Ms. Rose-Zeiberg

Ms. Spadafora made a motion to approve the following resolution: “NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Malden School Committee hereby expresses its full support for the proposed order to seek a Financial Management Review of the City of Malden; and BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the School Committee strongly encourages that the scope of this review include all municipal finances, including those allocated to and within the Malden Public Schools; and BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the School Committee looks forward to reviewing the findings of the Financial Management Resource Bureau upon completion and working collaboratively with City leadership to implement any recommendations that improve transparency, efficiency, and service to the residents of Malden and the students of the Malden Public Schools.”

Mr. Piazza made a motion to table the resolution for the purposes of providing the School Committee with enough time to review the resolution per the School Committee policy. Ms. Spadafora seconded the motion and so it was VOTED. The motion passed unanimously.

Personal Privilege

Executive Session

Ms. Macklin made a motion to go into Executive session at 9:55 p.m. Mr. Bernard seconded the motion and a roll call vote was taken as follows:

Roll Call Vote

Mr. Drummey - Absent

Mr. McCarthy - Yes

Ms. Spadafora - Yes

Ms. Macklin - Yes

Ms. Hortie - Yes

Mr. Piazza - Yes

Mr. Bernard - Yes

Ms. Rose-Zeiberg - Yes

Mayor Christensen - Yes

The committee reconvened to regular session at 10:01 p.m.

Mr. Bernard made a motion to adjourn at 10:02 p.m. Ms. Macklin seconded the motion and so it was VOTED. The motion passed unanimously.

Ariana Langston

Ariana Langston, Clerk