



SCHOOL COMMITTEE

BUSINESS MEETING OPEN SESSION MINUTES

May 4, 2026

Meeting:	School Committee
Date:	May 4, 2026
Location:	MERMHS Learning Commons
Attendees:	Pamela Beaudoin, Superintendent Michelle Cresta, Director of Finance & Operations Chris Reed, Chairperson Lindsay Banks Jake Foster Kate Koch-Sundquist, Vice-Chair Nadia Wetzler Theresa Whitman
Absent:	John Binieris
Guests:	
Recorded by:	Maria Schmidt
Link to Reports and Presentations	https://www.mersd.org/domain/785

- A. Call to Order of** – Mr. Reed called the School Committee Business meeting to order at 5:54 p.m. This meeting preceded the Essex Town Meeting.
- B. Business Meeting Open Session**
- 1) Public Comment (Guidelines for public comment can be found in sections BEDH and BEDH-E of the School Committee policy manual)** – none
 - 2) Chairperson’s Report** – Chris Reed. Mr. Reed made no report.
 - 3) Consent Agenda** –
 - Acceptance of Warrants: AP Voucher 1069 and payroll warrant for April 27, 2026
 - Minutes for approval: April 27, 2026

Mr. Reed moved to approve AP Voucher 1069 and the payroll warrant for April 27, 2026; Mr. Foster seconded the motion.

The motion passed 5-0. Ms. Wetzler was not present for the vote.

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Mr. Foster moved to accept the School Committee minutes from April 27, 2026. Ms. Whitman seconded the motion.

The motion passed 4-0. Ms. Whitman abstained. Ms. Wetzler was not present for the vote.

4) Sub-Committee Reports

- **Elementary Facilities/MSBC Sub-Committee** (John Binieris/Theresa Whitman) – Report. Ms. Whitman said that the SBC met on April 28, 2026. They voted unanimously to approve the Preferred Schematic Report, a major deliverable for the feasibility study. The report has been submitted to the MSBA. It is expected that the MSBA will respond with follow-up questions. Ultimately, the Preferred Schematic Report must be approved by the MSBA board of directors for the project to move to the Schematic Design phase. In the meantime, the SBC will move forward with design work in anticipation of that approval. The goal is to present a draft to the School Committee by mid-September, with the final report expected in October.

Ms. Whitman said that the SBC also considered two budget adjustment items that apply to the feasibility study. The first was a \$7,500 bill from Dore+Whittier. There is a second adjustment, estimated at \$300K, raising the total cost of the feasibility budget to \$1.8M. This increase is due to increased time and materials costs that were attributed to consideration of the complex building options. Ms. Whitman stated that the portion of the feasibility study eligible for MSBA reimbursement is equal to this \$300K amount. Consequently, the district will not have to ask voters to approve additional funds. Ms. Whitman said that, since the last building project, the MSBA now requires that contracts are for “time and materials.” Consideration of multiple sites and grade configurations required a significant increase in work. Superintendent Beaudoin noted that this increased the time required by two months and more than doubled the number of meetings from the Memorial building project. If the additional costs are not approved, the project would come to a halt. The superintendent stated that she underestimated the projected cost when constructing the initial feasibility proposal. Superintendent Beaudoin said that JCJ is a fixed cost versus “time and materials.” Ms. Koch-Sundquist emphasized that, although with foreknowledge the budget for the feasibility study could have been increased, the district was not in a position to eliminate any of the proposed design configurations from consideration. Community input and oversight demanded consideration of these options for possible cost savings. Items in the MSBA Statement of Interest (SOI) had to be pursued. Superintendent Beaudoin said that the district has some additional work to do with the MSBA to confirm that a vote by the School Committee is all that is required to approve the budget increase. The superintendent hopes to have that work done by the next SC meeting on May 19. Ms. Whitman noted that the SBC has a renewed commitment to providing robust financial insight into the building project as it moves into design work.

Clarification: The superintendent clarified that a vote will be requested from the School Committee to increase the Feasibility budget from \$1.5M to \$1.8M. Superintendent Beaudoin drew parallels to the Memorial Elementary building project, which was also

tight on the feasibility budget. The superintendent recalled that bridge funds were used while bond funding was being finalized. Ms. Whitman clarified that the funding source for the additional amount will come from MSBA reimbursement. The increased cost will reduce funds available for later project phases, but it is manageable within the current budget allocation. Superintendent Beaudoin emphasized that the process has differed from the Memorial project because of the complexity of building configurations. Modeling the EES building project on that of MMES did not account for the different needs. SC members re-affirmed that consideration of all possibilities was crucial for the current building project in response to community concerns. Ms. Whitman stated that the SBC communication working group is prepared to make all financial information available to the public.

- **Finance Sub-Committee** (Jake Foster/Chris Reed) –No Report
- **Policy/Advocacy Sub-Committee** (Lindsay Banks/Nadia Wetzler/Theresa Whitman) – No Report
- **Negotiation Team Sub-Committee** (Kate Koch-Sundquist/Chris Reed) – No Report

5) Superintendent's Report –

- a. School Committee Calendar, current year – The superintendent said that the SC will not be able to reorganize on May 19 because that is date of Essex elections. Superintendent Beaudoin suggested adding an additional SC meeting on June 16. The June 2 meeting would then cover SC reorganization. On June 16, the district would hold its annual retirement reception, and then the SC would have a general business meeting, including the spring budget-to-actual report. It was noted that two members are unavailable on that date.

Superintendent Beaudoin said that the summer School Committee meeting will likely be held during the second week in August.

School Committee Calendar for FY27 - Superintendent Beaudoin asked members to consider holding curriculum updates every other month to allow for principal spotlights. This is an opportunity for each principal to share what is going on in their building and to highlight how the strategic initiatives are playing out.

- b. Transportation Contract – Ms. Cresta is confirming with DESE that the district is able to use the state bid list without engaging in its own bid process. Ms. Cresta expects to have insight by the end of May.
- c. Massachusetts State Educational Support – Superintendent Beaudoin stated that there may be a slight bump in Chapter 70 support from the state.

Ms. Banks noted that Representative Tarr posted about increased Chapter 70 to local schools, highlighting a 4.8% increase for Manchester-Essex. Ms. Cresta noted that this amount is very similar to what the district anticipated and included in the budget. Superintendent Beaudoin said the district will follow up about the Representative's post and send SC members an update.

- d. Administrative Contracts Renewal - Superintendent Beaudoin notified the SC that three administrative contracts are up for renewal with expected market adjustments between 5-6%. The superintendent said that this amount can be absorbed by the current budget.

Mr. Foster asked for the timeline for this adjustment. The superintendent plans to have them completed by the end of May. The superintendent advocated for completing the process before the conclusion of local budget votes because administrators need time to determine if they are staying or seeking other positions. Their current contracts have been held to a 2.5% increase for several years. Superintendent Beaudoin estimated the increase at \$7K total.

6) Continued Business –

- a. FY27 Budget – Town Meeting Preparations – no further discussion
- b. Draft FY27 School Committee Calendar – discussion postponed

- 7) School Committee Comment** –Mr. Foster stated that he would like to include consideration of the superintendent search on the School Committee calendar for FY27. Ms. Koch-Sundquist said that she really liked the principal spotlights held in previous years and would like to see them return.

C. Adjourn

Ms. Koch-Sundquist moved to adjourn the School Committee business meeting; Ms. Wetzler seconded the motion.

The motion passed 5-0. Ms. Whitman was not present for the vote

Meeting Adjourned at 6:29 pm

School Committee Future Meetings

- **May 19, 2026**
- **June 2, 2026**
- **June 16, 2026** **tentative**