GROTON BOARD OF EDUCATION
SPECIAL MEETING
MAY 11, 2026 @ 5:00 P.M.
CENTRAL OFFICE, ROOM 11/HYBRID

MEMBERS PRESENT: Beverly Washington – Chairperson, Adrian Johnson – Vice Chairperson (remote), Andrea Ackerman (remote), Sean Corcoran (remote), Mitch Shinbrot, Ian Thomas, Jay Weitlauf (remote), Jennifer White

MEMBERS ABSENT: Michael Whitney

ALSO PRESENT: Susan Austin, Anne Marie Mancini, Sam Kilpatrick, Clint Kennedy

I. CALL TO ORDER – Mrs. Beverly Washington, Chairperson, called the meeting to order at 5:04 p.m.

II. Discussion and possible action regarding approval of the Wit & Wisdom ELA Grades 6-8 Curriculum Resource (Attachment #1)

MOTION: Shinbrot, White: To approve the Wit & Wisdom ELA Grades 6-8 Curriculum Resource.

Dr. Mancini gave an overview of the rational and the gathering process.

PASSED – UNANIMOUSLY

III. Discussion and possible action regarding approval of the plan for a machine shop in the auto shop at Fitch Hitch School and the proposed relocation of the Robotics team to the woodshop at Fitch High School by September 2026 (Attachments #2a & #2b)

MOTION: White, Shinbrot: To approve the plan for a machine shop in the auto shop at Fitch High School and the proposed relocation of the Robotics team to the woodshop at Fitch High School by September 2026.

Superintendent Austin gave an overview of the plan for a machine shop in the auto shop at Fitch High School and the proposed relocation of the Robotics team to the woodshop at Fitch High School.

MOTION: Thomas, Johnson: A motion was made to amend the motion to add, "and instruct the Superintendent to work with administration and coaches to develop and present at least three plan options for a permanent practice field space to be presented to the BOE for consideration no later than June 15, 2026."

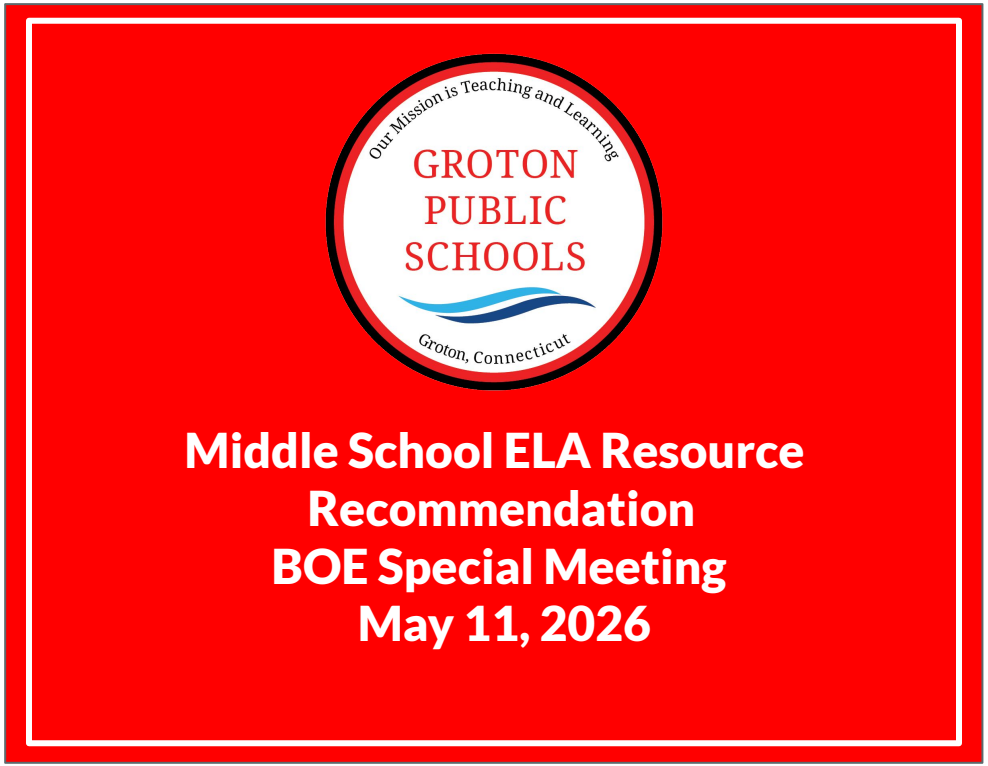
VOTE ON AMENDMENT: YES – Weitlauf, Washington, Ackerman, Johnson, Corcoran, Thomas, White
NO – Shinbrot
PASSED

VOTE ON MAIN MOTION AS AMENDED:
YES – Weitlauf Ackerman, Corcoran, Thomas, White, Shinbrot, Washington
ABSTAINED – Johnson
PASSED

IV. ADJOURNMENT

MOTION: Thomas, Shinbrot: The meeting adjourned at 6:11 p.m.
PASSED – UNANIMOUSLY

Attachment #1



AGENDA



- Rationale: Why Do We Need a New Resource?
- Information Gathering Process and Pilot Review
- Q&A

GPS Strategic Plan Pillars

1

Accelerate Academic Achievement



2

Cultivate a Rich and Vibrant Learning Community



3

Strengthen Pathways that Develop Post Secondary Readiness



4

Attract and Grow A Skilled and Supported Workforce



5

Improve Operational Efforts and Increase Fiscal Responsibility



Goal

To select a research-based and standards-aligned resource that serves as a foundation for the middle school ELA curriculum

Rationale

Why do we need a new resource in Grades 6-8 for ELA?

1. Supports improved student outcomes

2. Provides high-quality instructional material (HQIM) for teachers

3. Establishes instructional coherence, Grades 6-8

Reason #1: Supports Improved Student Outcomes

Smarter Balanced ELA

Grade/ Year	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	+/- Post-Pandemic
Grade 6	50%	No State Testing	Hybrid Testing Year	48%	37%	42%	44%	-6% pts
Grade 7	64%			58%	48%	45%	49%	-15% pts
Grade 8	57%			49%	50%	53%	39%	-18% pts

Reason #2: Provides Teachers with HQIM

The (current) approved middle school curriculum is grounded in TCRWP.

- **Is No Longer Supported**: The curriculum is not supported by the CSDE and by literacy experts because of its approach to teaching reading.
- **Relies Too Heavily on Leveling**: The approach of having students read only books at their level restricts access to grade level text.
- **Prepares Students Inadequately**: The curriculum does not adequately prepare students for the rigors of high school which requires them to read and analyze complex text.
- **Does Not Systematically Build Knowledge**: The curriculum fails to build knowledge systematically, focusing only on skills and strategies.

Reason #2: Provides Teachers with HQIM

HQIMs are beneficial for students. There is a strong link between high-quality instructional materials (HQIMs) and positive learning outcomes.

- Several studies find that the choice of ELA textbooks had significant effects on test scores.

HQIMs are beneficial for teachers. When teachers do not have access to HQIMs, research indicates that the following things are likely to happen:

- Teachers are forced to spend time (7 hours per week) looking for materials online.
- Teachers spend time creating their own materials (5 hours per week).

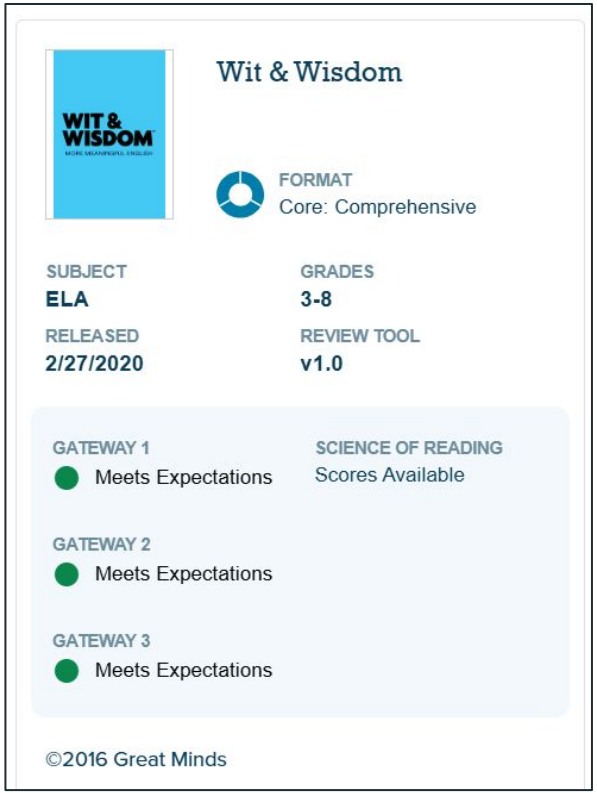
HQIMs improve the quality of instruction. Where they do not exist, there is no standards alignment, quality control, or analysis of the effectiveness of the content that is being pulled together for the students.

Reason #2: Provides Teachers with HQIM

Wit & Wisdom has met the ratings expectations by EdReports on all three Gateways, including #1- Text Complexity & Quality & # 2- Building Knowledge and #3- Usability

Wit & Wisdom has earned high marks from the Knowledge Matters Campaign for rich texts, connectedness of writing to reading instruction and other aspects of the resource.

The publisher of Wit & Wisdom was highlighted by the *NY Times* (Goldstein, December 2025) for the program's emphasis on having the students read full texts (rather than excerpts).

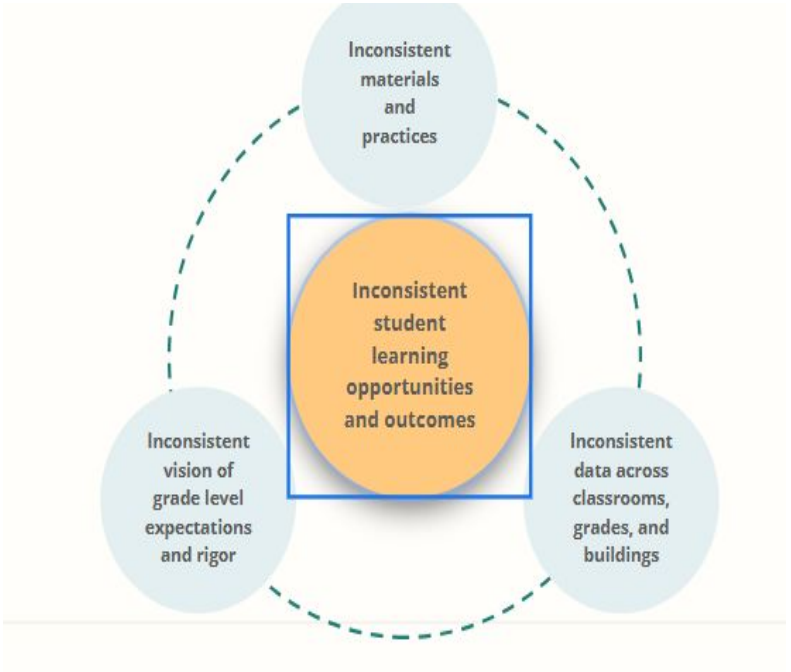


Reason#3: Establishes Instructional Coherence

Current Model

K-5: Wit & Wisdom

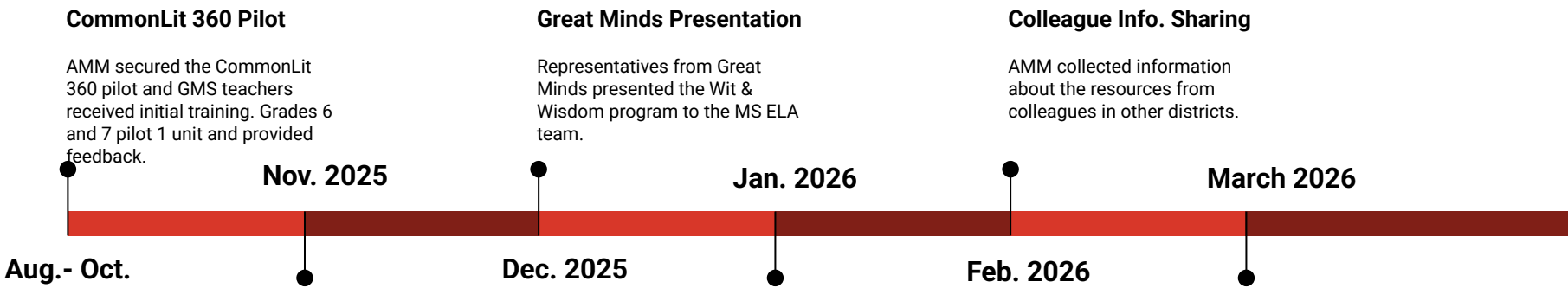
6-8: Teachers College R&W Workshop



Information Gathering and Pilot Process

ELA Resource Comparison Review Document

Information Gathering Process



Pilot #1: CommonLit 360

- This resource was piloted by all three grade levels.
- Grades 6 and 7 used the resource in the early fall, with each grade piloting one unit.
- **Direct feedback from GPS teachers**:
  - "The units often feel overloaded with stories and generally too repetitive. The lessons must be pulled apart and supplemented with teacher created/other curriculum material."
  - Texts and skill development were rigorous for the Commonlit 360 curriculum, but there was a need to supplement grammar instruction. Additionally, the structure is far too rigid. This is practically a scripted curriculum.

Pilot #2: MyPerspectives

- This resource was piloted by Grade 6 team.
- *MyPerspectives* is being used at the middle school level by three other CT districts: Waterbury, East Windsor, and Norwich.
- **GPS Grade 6 Teachers**: liked the diverse texts, the built-in diagnostic assessment, and the amount of choice available as a part of this resource. Students enjoyed the text selections.
- **Norwich and East Windsor users shared the following feedback**:
  - The digital platform is difficult to navigate.
  - The amount of choice is almost overwhelming to teachers.
  - Student engagement in the reading selections is high.

Pilot #3: Wit & Wisdom

- This resource was piloted by Grade 7 team.
- *Wit & Wisdom* is currently being used in Grades K-5 by GPS and is being used in several other districts at the middle level, including two local schools: HKMS and East Lyme MS.
- **GPS Grade 7 Teachers**: shared that student engagement in the pilot unit was "strong" and that the lessons were "accessible and appropriately rigorous."
- **HKMS** teachers like the Socratic Seminars, the texts, the "deep dives" (grammar, conventions, and vocabulary), and the accessibility of the resource to all students
- After one year of implementation at HKMS, grade 6 saw an increase of 9% points, grade 7 increased by 4% points, and grade 8 improved by 9% points.

New ELA Curriculum Resource Recommendation:

Wit & Wisdom
Great Minds

“Curiosity, Inquiry, Knowledge”

Key Features of Wit & Wisdom

- Designed around the science of reading
- Uses complex text to build students' background knowledge
- Integrates reading, writing, speaking, and listening through the study of rich, authentic texts and works of art
- Provides sample dialogue and clear structures, but is NOT a scripted program; encourages teachers to adapt lessons based on the needs of their students

Key Features of Wit & Wisdom

1. **Module-based Instruction**: The curriculum is organized into four thematic modules per grade level, each lasting 6–8 weeks. These modules are built around essential questions that guide students through deep inquiry into topics spanning history, science, and literature.
    - **Example Topics**: Resilience in the Great Depression (Grade 6), A Hero's Journey (Grade 6), The American Civil War (Grade 7), and World War I (Grade 8).

2. **High-Quality, Authentic Texts**: Wit & Wisdom replaces traditional textbooks with a "text-first" approach.
    - **Core Texts**: Students read award-winning novels (e.g., *Bud, Not Buddy*), primary source documents, poetry, and informational texts.
    - **Visual Art**: Every module integrates fine art (paintings, photography, film) to teach visual literacy and provide another "text" for analysis.
    - **Diverse Perspectives**: Texts are curated to act as "mirrors and windows"—allowing students to see themselves reflected and gain insight into others' lives.

Key Features of Wit & Wisdom

3. **Instructional Routines**: The the program uses a consistent five-step questioning routine requiring students to do the following:
   - **Wonder**: What do I notice and wonder?
   - **Organize**: What is happening in this text?
   - **Reveal**: What does a deeper exploration of this text reveal?
   - **Distill**: What is the essential meaning of this text?
   - **Know**: How does this text build my knowledge?

4. **Support for Struggling Learners**: The program offers a set of supplementary lessons (*Prologue*) designed for multilingual learners and students with language-based disabilities. These lessons "front-load" essential vocabulary and background knowledge to ensure all students can participate in the whole-class grade-level instruction.

Skills-based Instruction

Grammar = Deep Dives

Daily lessons focused on morphology, grammar, and vocabulary directly related to the module's core text

Speaking and Listening = Socratic Seminars

Regular, student-led discussions that build speaking and listening skills through rigorous, evidence-based debate

Skills-based Instruction

- **Writing instruction** focuses on using evidence from the text to build arguments or informative essays, moving away from "personal response" prompts. Students write to deepen their understanding of the complex text they are reading.
- By the end of Grade 8, students will have mastered **three primary modes of writing** as defined by college-and-career readiness standards:
  - **Argumentative**: Building a claim supported by logical reasoning and relevant evidence from multiple texts
  - **Informative/Explanatory**: Examining complex ideas and conveying information clearly (e.g., explaining the causes of the Dust Bowl using both a novel and historical photographs)
  - **Narrative**: While less frequent than the others, students write narratives that require them to use literary techniques studied in their reading, such as establishing a specific tone or using non-linear plot structures.

Skills-based Instruction

To teach the *process* of **writing**, *Wit & Wisdom* uses a recurring **Craft Stage framework**. This ensures students don't just "do" writing, but learn the "how" behind it.

- **Examine:** Students analyze a "mentor text" (a professional piece of writing or a high-quality student exemplar) to see how an author handles a specific skill, such as transition words or thesis statements.
- **Experiment:** Students practice that specific skill in a low-stakes way, often in their response journals.
- **Execute:** Students apply the skill to a formal writing task connected to the text they are currently studying.

Skills-based Instruction

Writing is scaffolded through **three tiers of tasks** that increase in complexity:

1. **Checks for Understanding:** short, informal writing that students are required to complete daily.
2. **Focusing Question Tasks**: Significant pieces of writing (multi-paragraph) that answer a "Focusing Question" about a specific book or section of a module. Students are assigned these every 1-2 weeks.
3. **End of Module Task**: This is the capstone or summative assessment that students complete at the end of each module. Students synthesize everything they learned across the 6–8 week module to answer the Essential Question.

Educator Implementation and Support Plan and Cost

Implementation & Support Plan: SY 2026-2027

Teachers will be provided **four types** of PD/support during Year 1 of implementation:

1. **Initial Training:** This will take place on August 27 (½ day: "Launch," ½ day: Module Study).
    - Special education and Bilingual/EL teachers will be included.
2. **Co-Planning and Co-Teaching**: A consultant from Great Minds will work with teachers in the classroom to plan, model, and co-teach lessons (2 days: TBD).
3. **Science of Reading PD**: Per the request of members of the department, teachers will participate in two half-day sessions on the science of reading (October 6 and February 9).
4. **Pacing Guidance/Support**: specific to schools with a block schedule

Cost

The following provides a high-level summary of the Year 1 (Implementation) expenses for the Wit & Wisdom resource for Grades 6-8:

Item	Cost	One-Time or Annual
Digital Platform Licenses- Teacher and Student	$10,653	*Annual
W&W Student Workbooks	$51,916.00	*Annual
Professional Learning: 4 Days	$11,700	One-Time
Core Texts: Student and Teacher Copies	$46,075.00	One-Time

**$30,000 in DoDEA funds has been allocated to this expense.

Questions?



Our Roadmap to Success





District Improvement Plan

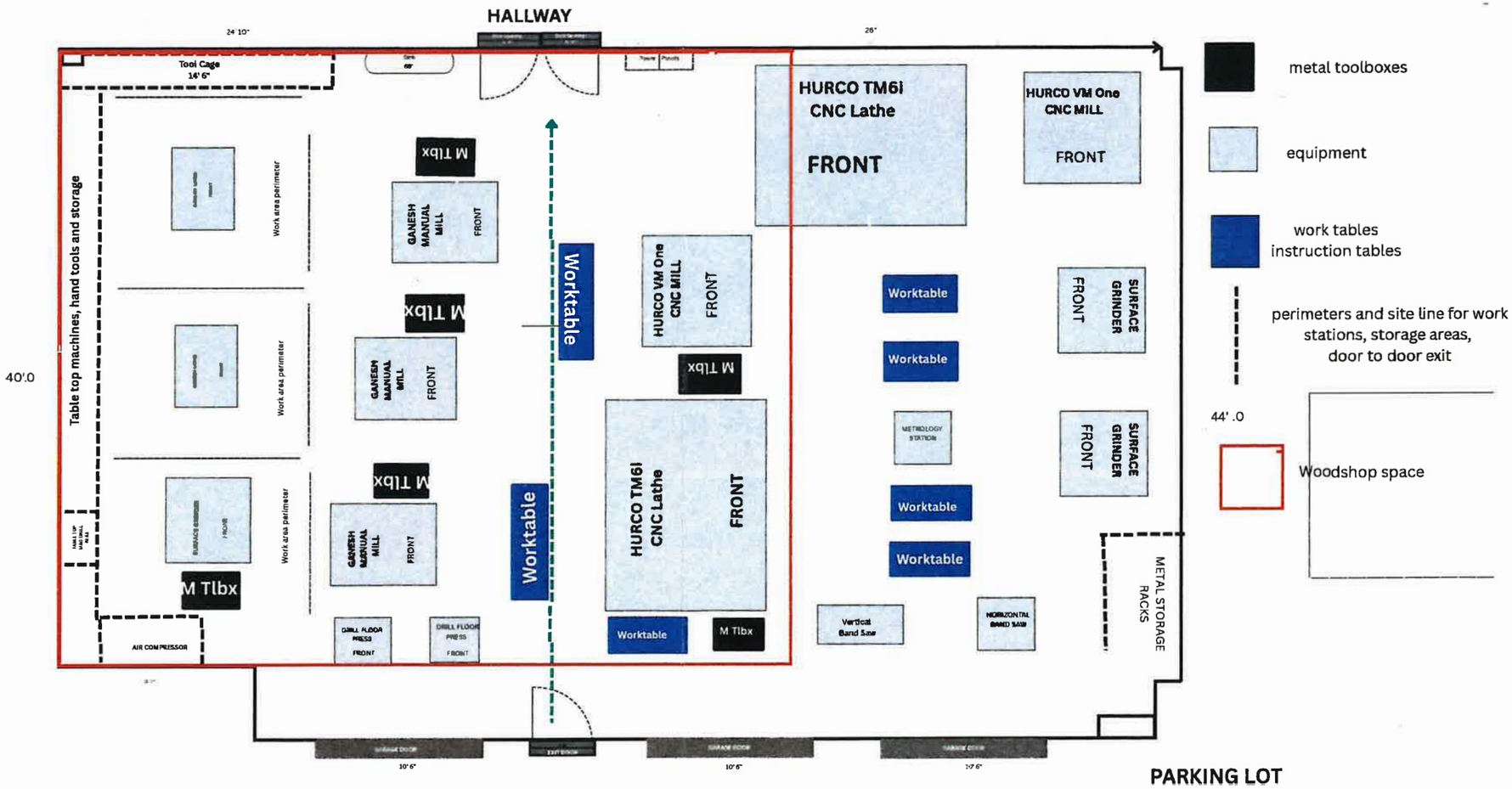


School Improvement Plan

Key Performance Indicators and State Data Measure Progress

MACHINE SHOP PLAN IN THE AUTO SHOP

RED lines are an overlay of the woodshop dimensions over the machine shop. The woodshop measures 40 x 40 on one side and 40 x 48 on the other side. The machine shop measures 60 x 44 and 60 x 40 respectively. The drawing depicts a shortage of space for the macchines based on the floor print needed for safe operation.



Attachment #2b

Robotics Team Relocation to the Woodshop

