



**SCHOOL COMMITTEE**

**BUSINESS MEETING OPEN SESSION MINUTES**

May 19, 2026

<b>Meeting:</b>	School Committee
<b>Date:</b>	May 19, 2026
<b>Location:</b>	Remote Meeting
<b>Attendees:</b>	Pamela Beaudoin, Superintendent Michelle Cresta, Director of Finance & Operations Lindsay Banks John Binieris Jake Foster Nadia Wetzler Theresa Whitman
<b>Absent:</b>	Chris Reed, Chairperson Kate Koch-Sundquist, Vice-Chair
<b>Guests:</b>	
<b>Recorded by:</b>	Maria Schmidt
<b>Link to Reports and Presentations</b>	<a href="https://www.mersd.org/domain/785">https://www.mersd.org/domain/785</a>

**A. Call to Order** – Ms. Whitman presided over the School Committee meeting. Ms. Whitman called the School Committee Business meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. The meeting was held remotely.

**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) –**

Janice Gauthier, Beverly, MA – Ms. Gauthier is an MERSD special education retiree and spoke to the School Committee to advocate for the contract renewal of teacher Jacqueline Maher's contract. Ms. Gauthier emphasized Ms. Maher's impact on student achievement as the Middle School Academy teacher and highlighted student growth on the MCAS during Ms. Maher's time at the school. Ms. Gauthier asked the School Committee and Superintendent Beaudoin to consider renewing her contract for next year.

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- 2) **Student Report** – Maggie Whitman. Ms. Whitman shared current events at the high school, including updates about MCAS testing, the approach of finals, and spring sports. Ms. Whitman said that the middle school held its spring concert and the high school had a vocal showcase. Seniors have completed their SCORE projects and will present them. Prom is this week, and DECA returned from their competition in Atlanta with notable achievements by two members.
- 3) **Chairperson’s Report** – Ms. Whitman made no report.
- 4) **Consent Agenda** –
  - Acceptance of Warrants: AP Vouchers 1070- 1076 and payroll warrant for May 7, 2026
  - Minutes for approval: May 4, 2026

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

Questions/Clarification: Ms. Banks asked for clarification on funding for prom expenses. Ms. Cresta clarified that all prom expenses are student-funded from their student activities account. The expense appears on the School Committee vouchers because it exceeds the \$10K limit set by DESE fiscal policy for check writing by the school and must be processed as a direct payment from the district. Superintendent Beaudoin clarified that funding comes from a combination of yearly dues and fundraising. The prom is not a general fund item for the district.

*Roll Call Vote:*

*Ms. Banks – Yes*

*Mr. Foster – Yes*

*Mr. Binieris – Yes*

*Ms. Whitman - Yes*

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

## **5) Sub-Committee Reports**

- **Elementary Facilities/MSBC Sub-Committee** (John Binieris/Theresa Whitman) – Ms. Whitman reported that the SBC met on May 12, 2026. Their primary topic was the continuation of working groups, which have been difficult to schedule and have had low attendance. Alternatively, this work could be brought to the full committee. Following discussion, the SBC elected to continue with working groups, putting in place practices to make attendance easier.

The SBC had a presentation on mechanical, electric, and plumbing systems. A working group will meet to review options and recommend to the full committee which specific

systems to pursue further, including a full lifecycle cost analysis. This work will span the end of June to early July. This exploration will result in the selection of a final option to be included in the Schematic Design.

The SBC also had a report out from the program working group. Members of this group include staff who work in both buildings. They shared insight into lessons learned from the Memorial building project.

Ms. Whitman said that the SBC held an initial discussion regarding the construction delivery method. There are two methods for consideration. The design-bid-build model is the more traditional approach. Once the design work is complete, it goes out to bid and the lowest bid wins. These plans are then built to specifications. Ms. Whitman characterized this model as best for simple projects. The Construction Manager at Risk model involves selection of a manager, in a process similar to that used to select the OPM and design firm, who would have oversight of the project and assume some risk because they are part of design development. The manager at risk is part of budgeting, scheduling, and constructability. As part of the design team, the manager helps to avoid pitfalls. Ms. Whitman said that the SBC expressed a strong preference for the “At-Risk” model because of the complexity of phased building and the relocation of the building on the current site. The SBC will vote on the preferred construction delivery method at their next meeting on May 26, 2026. Superintendent Beaudoin noted, later in the meeting, that the cost for the CM at risk position is built into the existing Feasibility budget under “other contingency.”

Superintendent Beaudoin stated that the SBC project team presented the Preferred Option to the MSBA subcommittee on facilities. The goal was to demonstrate that work on the educational program is included in the Preferred Option. The presentation was attended by representatives from both towns. It went very smoothly, and the project team received positive feedback on both the educational plan and design. The project team is now able to receive formal MSBA approval and begin the first iteration of site massing which will more fully depict what the structures will look like. This work will unfold between June and August. The superintendent commented that the smoothness of the presentation underscored the district’s growth and experience with the process since the MMES building project.

Questions: Ms. Banks asked for clarification on the costs associated with the two construction delivery methods. Ms. Whitman said that the design-build option can have additional unanticipated costs at the end. There is a premium paid initially for the “at-risk” option because it includes the service of being part of the design process. However, experienced members of the SBC assert that this initial cost is offset by savings in the process. Superintendent Beaudoin confirmed that the MMES building project used the Construction Manager at Risk method for construction delivery. The superintendent said that the manager is able to provide instant feedback about what is buildable and can put together pre-release packages for materials, like steel.

Ms. Wetzler asked about tracking for reimbursable expenses. Ms. Whitman and the superintendent reassured the SC that reimbursement from the MSBA is part of the conversation at every level of the process. The architect and construction team are charged with keeping track and highlighting areas where the district is pursuing plans beyond what is considered standard by the MSBA. For example, the district is proposing a gym that is able to host JV events. This will exceed the MSBA standard. The superintendent pointed members to where these figures are included in SBC reports online. Superintendent Beaudoin said that, with a bid-build model, change orders to account for things that cannot be built or areas where the district changes its mind can really add up.

- **Finance Sub-Committee** (Jake Foster/Chris Reed) –No Report
- **Policy/Advocacy Sub-Committee** (Lindsay Banks/Nadia Wetzler/Theresa Whitman) – Ms. Banks asked for consideration of a final School Committee newsletter for the year to acknowledge the budget votes and provide an SBC update.

Superintendent Beaudoin updated the SC on the issue of policy around AI misuse. District attorney Colby Brent communicated that the district is well-covered by current policy to handle any behavior issues and counseled that the district not pursue AI-specific policy.

Superintendent Beaudoin stated that the School Committee would receive the annual DIP update at the June 16, 2026, meeting and suggested publishing the last newsletter after that. The School Committee will approve the newsletter via email to facilitate this.

Superintendent Beaudoin delayed the SC conversation on the Wellness Policy and will attempt to schedule an additional School Committee conversation before the June 2, 2026, SC meeting.

- **Negotiation Team Sub-Committee** (Kate Koch-Sundquist/Chris Reed) – No Report

#### **6) Superintendent's Report –**

##### **a. Upcoming Events**

- i. May 20 – HS Academic and Scholarship Night MHS 6:00 pm
- ii. May 21 – Junior/Senior Prom
- iii. May 21 Elementary Concert and Art Exhibit – MHS 6:00 pm
- iv. May 28 – Baccalaureate – MHS 6:00 pm
- v. June 3 – 6<sup>th</sup> Grade Parent Orientation Night – MHS 6:00 pm
- vi. Memorial Day Celebrations –
  1. May 21 – Essex Elementary – 9:30 am
  2. May 22 – Memorial School – 8:45 am
  3. May 22 – Middle School 10:30 am

##### **b. SCORE Presentations start Wednesday, May 20**

- c. Recognition – Manchester Memorial Elementary was awarded a silver level recognition through the Massachusetts Department of Transportation's Safe**

Routes to School Program. The award highlights Memorial's commitment to being a safe school for biking and walking. Principal Willis and Teacher Luke Boria will accept the award on June 1 at the State House at the 2026 Safe Routes to School Awards Ceremony.

- d. Transportation Contract – The district's requirements for transportation service were not identical to those on the state bid list. To be certain that it is in compliance, the district issued a Request for Service (RFS). Proposals are due June 1. The bid includes restoration of the late bus serving Essex.
- e. Essex Elementary Before School Pilot Program – Superintendent Beaudoin said that the district will pilot a before-school program next year at Essex Elementary utilizing breakfast staff and flexible staff scheduling. Similarly to the MMES before-school program run by Manchester Parks & Recreation, the district will charge a general registration fee, and then families will pay monthly for days in which students attend. The program is expected to cost \$5-7K. The superintendent emphasized that the district wants to build quality programs that meet the needs of Essex families.
- f. Manchester Memorial Elementary – Prekindergarten and Kindergarten enrollment update. The superintendent shared that the prekindergarten program has lower enrollment next year. However, kindergarten has had a spike in enrollment. Superintendent Beaudoin said that there is also a complex set of needs within the entering kindergarten cohort. Memorial plans to transfer a teacher from the prekindergarten program to kindergarten next year.

Questions: Ms. Banks confirmed that the district intends for the before-school program at EES to be self-funding. Superintendent Beaudoin said that the YMCA provides after school care daily until 6:00 pm. Additionally, there are after-school activities run by teachers using the stipend program. Currently, the breakfast club at Essex provides 15-20 minutes of morning supervision. The school will build on this with gym time.

The superintendent will bring additional elementary class size insight to the School Committee but said that class sized are expected to be similar for both schools and within benchmarks.

## **7) Continued Business –**

- a. FY27 Budget Update – Superintendent Beaudoin said that the district could receive additional support from the state, whose budget is still pending. Ms. Cresta expressed gratitude for passage of the district's operational budget in both towns and said that the principals have received their budget lines. Ms. Whitman extended appreciation to voters and the volunteers who got the word out.
- b. Essex Elementary School Feasibility Study Budget Amendment – *Vote to Approve*. Ms. Cresta stated that costs for the Feasibility Study have exceeded the appropriation amount of \$1.5M because of the complexity of the options studied. The project manager receives "time and materials," and this ended up being approximately \$300K more than anticipated. However, MSBA grant

revenue reimbursement for the Feasibility Study will be of a similar amount and can be applied to meet the additional expense. Additional funds will not need to be requested from the towns, but the SC must vote to amend the original appropriation. Ms. Cresta stated that the reimbursement would otherwise have been applied to the rest of the building project.

*Ms. Whitman moved that the School Committee amend the April 2, 2024, appropriation for the Essex Elementary Feasibility Study as follows: The Manchester Essex Regional School District (MERSD) hereby appropriates the amount of \$1,800,000 for the purpose of paying costs of the Essex Elementary School feasibility study, for the school located 12 Story St, Essex, MA 01929, described in two separate deeds recorded in a) Book 4203 on Page 399, and b) in Book 4216 on Page 501 and shown together on a plot plan in Plan Book 86, Plan 88 in the Essex South Registry of Deeds and depicted on Map 129, Lot 5 of the Town of Essex Assessors' maps, including all costs incidental and related thereto (the "Study") said amount to be expended under the direction of MERSD Essex Elementary School Building Committee. To meet this appropriation, \$500,000 is hereby transferred from available funds of the District, \$300,000 in MSBA grant funds shall be authorized for expenditure, and \$1,000,000 shall be assessed upon the Towns of Manchester-by-the-Sea and Essex and apportioned between the two member towns in accordance with the formula for capital cost apportionment contained in the MERSD regional agreement, as amended. The District acknowledges that the Massachusetts School Building Authority's ("MSBA's") grant program is a non-entitlement, discretionary program based on need, as determined by the MSBA, and any costs the District incurs in excess of any grant approved by and received from the MSBA shall be the sole responsibility of the District.*

*Ms. Banks seconded the motion.*

Discussion: Mr. Foster confirmed that the overall change is limited to the additional \$300K amount. Ms. Banks acknowledged the complexity of the project options that were reviewed. Ms. Banks stated that it was critical that the building committee fully consider all school location options and the configurations for merging students across the district, because the communities advocated for a full exploration of cost-saving options.

*Roll Call Vote:*

*Ms. Wetzler – Yes*

*Ms. Banks – Yes*

*Mr. Foster – Yes*

*Mr. Binieris – Yes*

*Ms. Whitman - Yes*

*The motion passed 5-0.*

Comments: Ms. Wetzler noted that construction costs are rising quickly and cautioned that extended timelines risk cost increased. Superintendent Beaudoin stated that the project is on schedule for a November/December vote. Ms. Banks said that the CM-at-risk would help to predict building expenses and be able to lock in costs sooner.

- c. School Committee Calendar – Postponed until the full School Committee is in attendance.

**8) School Committee Comment** – Ms. Whitman expressed appreciation for outgoing School Committee member John Binieris. Mr. Binieris said he is grateful to have served and thanked the School Committee members for their continued service.

Ms. Banks asked if there was an update regarding the middle school academy. Superintendent Beaudoin did not have an update at this time.

### **C. Adjourn**

*Mr. Foster moved to adjourn the School Committee business meeting; Ms. Wetzler seconded the motion.*

*Roll Call Vote:*

*Ms. Wetzler – Yes*

*Ms. Banks – Yes*

*Mr. Foster – Yes*

*Mr. Binieris – Yes*

*Ms. Whitman - Yes*

*The motion passed 5-0.*

*Meeting Adjourned at 7:00 pm*

### **School Committee Future Meetings**

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