Meeker and Wright Special Education Cooperative
720 9th Ave, Howard Lake, MN 55349
Joint Powers Board Meeting
Tuesday, June 23, 2026 - 5:30 pm
Meeting Minutes - *Official*

Present:	Sarah Baker, Gena Jacobson, Jessica Johnson, Cindy Miller, Kelsey Puncochar, Jen Rasset
Absent:	Alex Carlson
Others Present:	Andrea Fladeboe, Kim Geurts, Melissa Hanson, Kate Ryan

I. Call to Order/ Board Roll Call

The Regular meeting was called to order at 5:36 pm.

A roll call was conducted:
Sarah Baker: Present
Alex Carlson: Absent
Gena Jacobson: Present
Jessica Johnson: Present
Cindy Miller: Present
Kelsey Puncochar: Present
Jen Rasset: Present

A quorum of six board members was established.

II. Pledge of Allegiance

The board recited the Pledge of Allegiance.

III. Approval of Meeting Agenda

A motion to approve the agenda as presented was made by Kelsey Puncochar and seconded by Gena Jacobson. Motion carried unanimously.

IV. Consent Agenda

A motion to approve the consent agenda was made by Gena Jacobson and seconded by Sarah Baker. The board unanimously approved the consent agenda which included:

- Minutes of Previous Board Meeting
- Bills for payment and other financial reports as attached
- Personnel Items
    - Retirements/Resignations/Terminations
        - Resignation: Holli Amberg, Paraprofessional, Trek, Effective June 5, 2026
        - Resignation: Amy Stienessen, Classroom Systems Consultant/Due Process Specialist, Effective June 5, 2026
    - Recommendations for Employment
        - Lindsey Buttweiler, Paraprofessional, Village Ranch, Effective August 10, 2026
        - Thomas Larson, Paraprofessional, Village Ranch, Effective August 10, 2026

        - Cheri Nord, Paraprofessional, Village Ranch, Effective June 15, 2026
    - Contract Changes/Approvals/Position Changes
        - Reinstatement: Cassandra Drusch, 1.0 FTE Special Education Teacher, Trek, Effective August 24, 2026
    - Recognition of Tenure
        - Rebecca Buttke, Physical Therapist
        - Annette Hystad, Special Education Teacher
        - Michelle Ryder, Special Education Teacher
        - Cheryl Ulik, Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment Specialist
        - Marissa Warren, School Psychologist
        - Trent Wheatley, Special Education Teacher
- Contract Items
    - Non-Member Purchased Services Contracts
        - FY27 Purchased Services Agreement - Little Falls
        - FY27 Purchased Services Agreement - West Central Education District
    - Other Contracts
        - FY27 ACT Testing Agreement
        - FY27 SpEd Forms Software License and Service Agreement

V. Informational Items

A. Executive Director Report

General Updates
MAWSECO has reached a tentative agreement with the MSEA Union following negotiation sessions held on May 21 and June 10, with union members expected to vote on the agreement in early July. The cooperative has also secured purchased service contracts with three non-member organizations for the 2026–2027 school year, including staffing support for Buffalo-Hanover-Montrose Public Schools, Little Falls Public Schools, and West Central Education District. These partnerships provide cost efficiencies for member districts while helping participating organizations fill hard-to-staff special education positions through a shared staffing model. In addition, MAWSECO received positive news regarding its workers' compensation and liability insurance rates, earning an estimated $10,000 discount for the 2026–2027 fiscal year. The reduction reflects the cooperative's strong safety record over the past five years, as measured by a favorable experience modification factor, and highlights the impact of ongoing staff safety training, resources, and support across all programs.

MAWSECO Program Updates
MAWSECO program leaders are participating in the Culturally Responsive School Leadership Academy, a 2.5-day professional development program designed for school leaders engaged in advancing non-exclusionary discipline practices. In addition, MAWSECO is partnering with Sandy Hook Promise to establish and implement an anonymous threat-reporting system called "Say

Something," which is intended to enhance school safety by providing students and staff with a confidential way to report potential concerns.

MN Blue Ribbon Commission on Special Education
The legislatively appointed Blue Ribbon Commission on Special Education has been directed to develop an action plan by October 1, 2026, that identifies $250 million in reductions to state special education aid for the biennium beginning July 1, 2027. Recent preliminary recommendations from commission subcommittees propose significant changes that could shift more special education costs to local school districts. Key proposals include reducing reimbursement rates for specialized transportation, removing certain transportation services from the special education funding formula and placing them in a capped fund with lower aid rates, and requiring transportation decisions to be based strictly on documented IEP needs. Additional recommendations would remove ADSIS funding from the special education formula and transition it to a capped per-pupil allocation model, phase out the "Hold Harmless" funding protection, and eliminate certain tuition billing cross-subsidy aids. If adopted by the Legislature in 2027, these changes would represent a major restructuring of special education funding and would likely increase the local special education cross-subsidy, requiring districts to use more general education funds to cover mandated special education services.

Federal Restructuring - Special Education Oversight
On June 16, 2026, the U.S. Department of Education announced an inter-agency agreement that will transfer the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS), including oversight of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), to the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), while the Office for Civil Rights (OCR) will move to the Department of Justice (DOJ). Although these changes do not alter existing special education laws or policies, they will divide responsibilities that have traditionally been housed within the Department of Education, potentially creating administrative challenges and uncertainty for states, school districts, and families. Concerns have also been raised that HHS lacks extensive experience in the K–12 education system, which could complicate the implementation and oversight of special education services and supports.

B. Director of Finance Report
FY2027 purchased service 90% prebilling estimates have been provided to member districts, with invoices scheduled to be issued on July 1. To support cash flow needs, a 90-day short-term loan was drawn on June 11, 2026, and is due for repayment by September 2, 2026. Additionally, an updated FY2027 preliminary budget will be presented for a second review, incorporating costs associated with a new curriculum opportunity as well as summer Extended School Year (ESY) salaries and supplies.

C. Director of Special Education Report

New Teacher Cohort
MAWSECO continues to strengthen support for new special education staff through its New Teacher Cohort program, which provides training, resources, and ongoing mentorship for educators who are new to special education, new to MAWSECO, or returning to the profession. Planning is underway for the 2026–27 cohort, which will begin with two summer training sessions covering special education fundamentals, due process requirements, instructional practices, IEP development, and MAWSECO procedures, followed by monthly virtual support meetings and instructional coaching throughout the school year. The program aims to build staff confidence, improve retention, and ensure high-quality, legally compliant services for students. During the 2025–26 school year, 16 teachers participated in the cohort, with 12 consistently engaging in monthly support sessions; of those, 11 will return next year, reflecting the program's success in fostering professional growth and educator retention.

SEAC (Special Education Advisory Council)
The MAWSECO Special Education Advisory Council (SEAC) completed a successful 2025–26 school year focused on promoting parent engagement, family education, and stakeholder input on special education services and programming. The council included parent representatives from member districts and provided presentations and discussions on topics such as special education processes, due process options, transition services, conservatorship, inclusive extracurricular opportunities, School-Linked Mental Health services, and resources available through NAMI Minnesota. A year-end survey was conducted to gather family feedback on future topics, meeting formats, and ways to increase participation, with results helping guide planning for the 2026–27 school year and supporting stronger partnerships among families, schools, and MAWSECO.

Program Monitoring
MAWSECO continues to assist member districts in meeting state and federal special education compliance requirements through ongoing monitoring and technical support. During the 2025–26 school year, MAWSECO participated in the corrective phase of the Minnesota Department of Education's Special Education Monitoring process following a state risk assessment. As part of this process, 275 student files were reviewed across programs and member districts, focusing on progress reporting practices. The review identified 28 citations requiring corrective action, primarily related to documenting measurable progress data and clearly describing progress reporting procedures within Individualized Education Programs (IEPs). MAWSECO staff worked closely with districts to address these findings and strengthen compliance practices to improve the quality and consistency of special education services.

Secondary Transition Program Analysis
As part of its ongoing commitment to improving postsecondary outcomes for students with disabilities, MAWSECO recently facilitated a Secondary Transition Program Self-Assessment in each member district. The assessment evaluated district practices related to transition planning, career exploration, work-based

learning, community partnerships, student self-advocacy, and postsecondary readiness. MAWSECO is currently analyzing the results to identify strengths and areas for growth across districts. Future efforts will focus on reviewing trends, sharing successful practices, and developing targeted action plans to enhance transition programming and better prepare students for employment, postsecondary education, and independent living. This initiative will help create a more consistent and comprehensive transition framework across all MAWSECO member districts.

D. Summer Services Overview

2026 Summer Services Enrollment
Summer programming schedules, times, and student enrollment vary across multiple MAWSECO programs, including both Extended School Year (ESY) and summer school services. ESY programs such as Journeys, Trek, STEP, Eastern Wright, and Cornerstones run on select June and August dates with morning sessions (typically 7:30–11:30) and serve small groups of 2–5 students each. Sholund operates as a summer school program in three weekly June sessions from 7:45–11:15 for 7 students, while Village Ranch runs a longer summer school schedule from June 8–29 (with Juneteenth off) serving 25 students from 7:30–3:00. Wings provides both ESY and summer school services over the same June 8–29 period, with split morning and afternoon sessions (7:00–2:30), serving 1 ESY student and 14 summer school students.

Extended School Year
Extended School Year (ESY) is a legally required special education service provided to students with an Individualized Education Program (IEP) during times when school is not normally in session, such as summer, to ensure a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE). Students may qualify for ESY services through programs such as Journeys, Trek, STEP, Cornerstones, and Eastern Wright if they meet eligibility criteria including significant regression and difficulty recouping skills after breaks, needs related to essential self-sufficiency skills like eating or behavioral control, or other unique circumstances determined necessary by the IEP team to maintain meaningful progress. ESY is distinct from traditional summer school because it is not optional, does not focus on enrichment or credit recovery, and is not intended to teach new skills, but rather to prevent substantial loss of critical skills. ESY services are provided at no cost to families, including transportation.

Summer School
Summer school is a state-approved program offered during the summer break that may be optional or required and is designed to help students recover credits, meet graduation requirements, qualify for grade promotion, or accelerate academic progress. Students in MAWSECO programs may be placed in summer school if they have failed courses, scored below proficiency on assessments such as the MCA, or are below grade level in reading, and the host district is

required to provide minimum educational services for students receiving care and treatment in facilities such as Village Ranch, Sholund, and Wings.

VI. Action Items

A. Old Business

1. FY27 Preliminary Budget [Second Reading]
   A motion to approve the FY27 Preliminary Budget was made by Gena Jacobson and seconded by Sarah Baker. Motion carried unanimously.

VII. Discussion Items

A. 2026 Board Stipends

The board discussed updating the 2026 board stipend structure to better reflect the significant off-hours responsibilities carried by certain leadership roles, particularly the Board Chair. Current compensation was noted as insufficient given duties such as frequent operational communications, overseeing the Executive Director's evaluation and contract negotiations, and handling ad hoc meetings with staff, board members, and legal counsel. The administrative recommendation proposes revising the compensation model to include fixed annual stipends for roles with substantial work beyond regular board meetings, with any approved changes applied retroactively to January 2026. The board requested that MAWSECO return at the next meeting with a specific recommendation for the Board Chair stipend and also consider whether additional officer roles, such as Vice Chair, Treasurer, and Clerk, should receive similar stipends based on workload.

VIII. Executive Director Evaluation - Closed Session

A motion to go into closed session for the Executive Director Evaluation pursuant to MN Statute 13D.05, Subd. 3(a) - Closed Meetings for Employee Evaluations was made by Kelsey Puncochar and seconded by Gena Jacobson.

Roll Call Vote:
Sarah Baker - aye
Gena Jacobson - aye
Jessica Johnson - aye
Cindy Miller - aye
Kelsey Puncochar - aye
Jen Rasset - aye

Motion carried with six votes in favor.

The board entered into a closed session at 7:04 pm.

A motion to reopen the meeting was made by Kelsey Puncochar and seconded by Sarah Baker.

Roll Call Vote:

Sarah Baker - aye
Gena Jacobson - aye
Jessica Johnson - aye
Cindy Miller - aye
Kelsey Puncochar - aye
Jen Rasset - aye

Motion carried with six votes in favor.

The board reopened the meeting at 7:57 pm.

IX. Future Board Meetings

A. July 28, 2026, 5:30 pm, Regular Board Meeting, MAWSECO Ed Center, Howard Lake
B. August 25, 2026, 5:30 pm, Regular Board Meeting, MAWSECO Ed Center, Howard Lake
C. September 22, 2026, 5:30 pm, Regular Board Meeting, MAWSECO Ed Center, Howard Lake

X. Adjournment

A motion to adjourn the meeting was made by Kelsey Puncochar and seconded by Jen Rasset. Motion carried unanimously. The meeting was adjourned at 8:01 pm.

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