



SCHOOL COMMITTEE

BUSINESS MEETING OPEN SESSION MINUTES

June 16, 2026

Meeting:	School Committee
Date:	June 16, 2026
Location:	MERMHS Learning Commons
Attendees:	Pamela Beaudoin, Superintendent Michelle Cresta, Director of Finance & Operations Kate Koch-Sundquist, Chairperson Lindsay Banks Jake Foster Chris Reed, Vice Chair Sarah Stone Nadia Wetzler
Absent:	Theresa Whitman
Guests:	Heather Leonard, Director of Curriculum and Instructional Technology Cami Molinare, Athletic Director John Willis, Principal Memorial Elementary Kim Provost, Principal Essex Elementary
Recorded by:	Maria Schmidt
Link to Reports and Presentations	https://www.mersd.org/domain/785

A. **Call to Order of** – Ms. Koch-Sundquist called the School Committee Business meeting to order at 6:04 p.m. This meeting followed the annual retirement reception.

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** – Kate Koch-Sundquist. Ms. Koch-Sundquist stated that she met, as School Committee Chair, with Superintendent Beaudoin regarding the superintendent's contract renewal. Ms. Koch-Sundquist said that the superintendent should receive a goal update from the School Committee. The superintendent will present her self-evaluation and discuss her contract at the August 17, 2026, School

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Committee meeting. Ms. Koch-Sundquist asked SC members to share their perspectives before that meeting regarding both issues. Ms. Koch-Sundquist, as a follow up to Mr. Foster's concerns about the hiring timeline for the superintendent's position, explored local practices for superintendent hiring. In surveying MASC and local schools, Ms. Koch-Sundquist found that most started the search about four months before the planned hire. Ms. Wetzler inquired about prior superintendent goals. Superintendent Beaudoin said that the SC chose not to set goals for the last year. However, the superintendent outlined an end of year self-evaluation from which she worked. The superintendent will forward the last version of the superintendent goals to SC members for background. Superintendent Beaudoin clarified that her self-evaluation informs the School Committee's evaluation of the superintendent similarly to the teacher's evaluation process. The evaluation is used to create goals. Superintendent Beaudoin's goals are tied to the standards and highlight where her focus is placed for the year.

- 3) Student Report – Maggie Whitman.** Ms. Whitman honored retiring staff members, Ms. Burns and Ms. Carlson, emphasizing their work to foster a sense of community for students. Ms. Whitman shared student quotes that underscored the impact of both. Ms. Whitman stated that preliminary student schedules for next year have been released. Students are now working to adjust their schedules before the final versions are published at the end of the summer.

Questions: Ms. Whitman confirmed that she would like to continue in her position as SAC representative, provided the SAC votes to keep her in the role.

4) Consent Agenda –

- Acceptance of Warrants: AP Vouchers 1079 & 1080 and payroll warrant for June 4, 2026
- Minutes for approval: June 2, 2026

Mr. Foster moved to approve AP Voucher 1079 & 1080; the payroll warrant for June 4, 2026; and the minutes from June 2, 2026. Ms. Stone seconded the motion.

Discussion: Mr. Foster asked whether the purchase of elementary science packs referenced in the vouchers was the result of the science curriculum review. Superintendent Beaudoin confirmed this and said the topic would be explored during the DIP review.

Given the cost of the recent mercury remediation, Mr. Foster asked if the district has completed a review of potential mercury-bearing items in the building. Ms. Cresta said that the district intends to complete a thorough review over the summer.

The motion passed 6-0.

5) Sub-Committee Reports.

- **Elementary Facilities/MSBC Sub-Committee** (Theresa Whitman) – Superintendent Beaudoin stated that the MSBA will vote next Wednesday to advance the Essex Building Project to the Schematic Design phase. The superintendent said it will be a busy summer of meetings to advance the design. The cost estimate and design will be presented in September. The SBC held a meeting at the Essex Senior Center, learning a lot about past school buildings. The SBC hopes to return to the venue for additional design updates once or twice more.

Ms. Koch-Sundquist stated that she spoke to Mr. Binieris, outgoing School Committee member, and he expressed some interest in remaining on the SBC. Superintendent Beaudoin will follow up with Mr. Binieris.

- **Finance Sub-Committee** (Jake Foster/Chris Reed) –Mr. Foster stated that the subcommittee met earlier in the day to review the budget to actual report. The overage on the budget was estimated at around \$300K, but other lines are under budget and should compensate for the overage. An anticipated \$300 – 500K is expected to be returned to E&D at year's end. Mr. Foster said that the budget has been tighter since Ms. Cresta took over. Superintendent Beaudoin cautioned that many expenses come in at the end of the year. The superintendent said that budget corrections for inflation helped to prevent the district from starting the next fiscal year in deficit.
- **Policy/Advocacy Sub-Committee** (Lindsay Banks/Nadia Wetzler/Theresa Whitman) – The subcommittee did not meet. Superintendent Beaudoin asked for a School Committee vote to approve the MASC: EFD – Meals Charge Policy and EFC - Universal Free School Lunch. In response to Mr. Foster's concern that the draft Wellness Policy contained too many deliverable bullet points, Superintendent Beaudoin created an additional version of the policy that refers to these items as action points instead. The superintendent stressed that the wellness committee worked hard to create a policy that is responsive to existing guidance and the demands of the online tools they employed. This guidance led to the bulleted section of the draft policy. For additional guidance, Superintendent Beaudoin reached out to a representative from the nutrition department of the DOE. The superintendent sent both versions of the draft policy, asking for clarification on whether either policy version meets the standard. The superintendent also asked for advice for the school committee to ensure that it does not overcommit to deliverables that cannot be reasonably enforced. The district is awaiting this input.

Ms. Banks moved to approve the school nutrition charge policy and the universal lunch policy; Mr. Foster seconded the motion.

The motion passed 6-0.

- Ms. Banks provided as outline of the May/June School Committee newsletter which includes headings for additional updates from the current SC meeting and ongoing issues. The newsletter will inform the community and direct readers to supporting documents on

the district website. Ms. Banks said that the SC may choose to either pre-approve the final version, as updated by herself and the superintendent, or to review the final document and approve it remotely. The SC expressed its support for pre-approval.

- **Negotiation Team Sub-Committee** (Kate Koch-Sundquist/Chris Reed) – No Report. Superintendent Beaudoin stated that she has begun a discussion with the district’s legal counsel, and they will begin setting dates and sending out calendar invites for negotiations. Meetings are expected to start in November.

6) Superintendent’s Report – Superintendent Beaudoin congratulated the tennis team for winning their state championship and the athletics program for winning the Cal Baker Hyland Award. They earned the title as co-winners with Hamilton/Wenham. This award is for demonstrating excellence across all interscholastic athletic areas, including athletic success, academic achievement, community service, sportsmanship, and student participation. The superintendent also noted the work of Principal Provost in support of the Essex School Building Project.

7) Continued Business –

- a. **Athletics Proposal: Hockey Cooperative Program for FY27, Pilot Proposal for MERSD as Host** - Cami Molinare, Athletic Director. MERHS students currently participate in a hockey cooperative program sponsored by Rockport. Due to declining participation numbers, Rockport has informed MERSD that they are no longer willing to serve as the host district. As the largest participating district, MERSD was asked to assume responsibility for hosting the cooperative program for the 2026–2027 season. Ms. Molinare has developed a budget-neutral proposal that would allow MERSD to host the program for one year through a 100% participation fee structure. Participating districts would reevaluate at the end of the year to see if MERSD is the best option to serve as host.

Ms. Molinare shared that the hockey coop between Manchester-Essex and Rockport has been in place since the early 1990s. As participant numbers declined, Ipswich and Hamilton/Wenham joined the cooperative. Next year, Rockport will have only 2 participants while MERSD expects 10 returning students plus new players from grade nine.

Superintendent Beaudoin said that the program will be monitored over the summer and, if MERSD continues as host, the district could put together a detailed budget plan for moving forward. Ms. Molinare’s current plan for the pilot year is fully student-funded and budget neutral. It also includes administrative cost sharing with the other participating districts.

Discussion/Clarification: Ms. Molinare said that the program will assume the contract at the current rink. Ms. Molinare was excited about the potential to increase ME participation in hockey. Ms. Banks asked what would happen if

MERSD did not take over the host roll. Ms. Molinare said that students are dispersed to any district that will accept them. Unfortunately, Ms. Molinare did not think there would be room for all MERSD students at other schools. Towns are only permitted to accept out-of-district students if their own enrollment is below a certain threshold.

Ms. Stone asked about the girls' hockey program. Currently, they are in a cooperative program with Gloucester as the host. Their returning players were estimated at 6 athletes. The superintendent said that the district would assess their program if enrollment reached the level of the boys' program.

Mr. Foster asked for insight into participation and the cost to families. Ms. Molinare clarified that the user fee for the hockey program will not match the current athletic fee structure because of the high costs of the program. The increased cost will be passed on to participating hockey families. The district will also share administrative costs with other participating districts, which is not part of Rockport's current agreement. The district will also charge admission to the events. Mr. Foster noted that there could be decreased MERSD enrollment because of the increased costs. Ms. Molinare said that this is why she plans to first survey families. An analysis will be part of the one-year pilot.

Ms. Koch-Sundquist said that she is in favor of MERSD students playing as teammates with athletes from schools that may be their rivals in other sports.

Ms. Molinare addressed concerns about discipline for coop participants. Ms. Molinare stressed that all participating schools currently enjoy a working relationship with strong communication. Infractions that occur within the school day are addressed by the student's school, and the district is kept informed. For in-game issues, the athletic department and Dean of Students would address the issue. Given recent sports in the local news, Ms. Koch-Sundquist asked about MIAA rules and how consequences are handed down. Ms. Molinare said that the student's school would investigate any chemical health violation and send MERSD an update. Ms. Sgroi and Ms. Molinare highlighted their confidence in partner schools and the working relationships that MERSD has with them.

Superintendent Beaudoin said that the SC would be presented with additional plan details and results of family surveying, including anticipated participation given the increased cost.

The School Committee voted 6-0 by straw poll to move forward with the plan to host the hockey cooperative for FY27 as a one-year pilot.

- b. Update to Elementary Handbook – John Willis, Principal MMES and Kim Provost, Principal EES. *Vote to approve.* Requested changes to the elementary

handbook are primarily operational or advisory and do not conflict with existing district policies. The proposed revisions have been reviewed by the Elementary School Councils. The School Committee was asked to review the student handbooks primarily to ensure alignment with District policies, with particular attention to student discipline and related policy matters.

- i. “HYDRATION (add to page 11 or 12) Students may only bring water, milk, or juice to school. Soda, energy drinks, or other beverages are not permitted at school. Students are encouraged to bring a refillable water bottle to fill at the water bottle filling stations to stay hydrated throughout the school day.”

Principal Willis stated that there has been a surge in the production of caffeinated drinks and marketing of these beverages to young people. These drinks typically contain between 50-300 mg of caffeine. The principal said that students consuming these drinks in school has had a significant impact on the classroom. The updated guideline will specify that students may only bring water, milk, and juice to school and prohibit energy drinks.

- ii. “CONTAGIOUS DISEASES (page 13 under “Other Health Issues”- replace current bullet) If students are diagnosed with a highly contagious disease such as strep throat, impetigo, pertussis, or bacterial conjunctivitis, please notify the Health Room at once. Any of these conditions may result in dismissal from school after evaluation by the school nurse. An antibiotic or other treatment approved by a health care professional must be administered for a minimum of twenty-four (24) hours before students will be permitted to return to school (minimum of 5 days for pertussis).

Principal Provost said that the update to the language is based on the recommendation of the district physician, Allison Ste. Marie. The requested change updates the pertussis guideline to a minimum of five days instead of 24 hours.

- iii. “HEAD LICE (add to page 13) In-school transmission of head lice is rare as transmission requires close head-to-head contact. Students with head lice may remain in school and start treatment at home after school. Population-based screenings within schools have not been shown to be effective. School nurses are available to check a student following treatment at the parent’s request and are also available to provide guidance to families on effective treatments.”

Principal Provost said that head lice is no longer recognized as a contagious disease, and this designation will be removed from the handbook. Population-based screening is also no longer recommended.

- iv. “MCAS (add to page 11 under Academics) The Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) is a statewide assessment required for students in grades 3–5. Students participate in assessments in English Language Arts, Mathematics, and Grade 5 Science and Technology/Engineering. Participation in MCAS is required for all Grade 3-5 students in Massachusetts public schools and there is no “opt-out” provision. Students who do not participate receive an individual assessment score of zero for the session(s) not completed and our school receives a score of zero for the student as well. Families can support students by ensuring they arrive at school on time, well-rested, and prepared for testing. Students with IEP or Section 504 accommodations will receive approved testing supports in accordance with state guidelines. We encourage all students to do their best and approach MCAS with confidence and effort.”

Principal Willis said that there are outside groups encouraging families to opt their students out of MCAS testing. When students do not complete the MCAS it counts against the school’s accountability rating. Changes to the elementary handbook are part of an updated process to communicate with families about MCAS. The elementary schools will also send a form letter to families and require parents to sign a form acknowledging that there is not an “opt-out” option for the test and students and the school will receive a zero.

Questions: Ms. Wetzler asked about the percent of students choosing not to take the test. Principal Willis said that the total number is small, but it is trending upwards. In small districts, it can have a large impact. Ms. Stone emphasized the need for families to understand the repercussions.

Mr. Foster cautioned that referencing a “zero” on the test sounds like the student is receiving a zero on a classroom score. Mr. Foster stated that terminology used can make it sound like “opting out” is an option. Principal Willis clarified that it is referenced as “non-participation. Superintendent Beaudoin said that the district is looking to keep records of this choice for future accounting. Principal Willis stated that the school has had parents keep students out of school for the entire testing window to avoid the test. The superintendent explained that documentation is important because MCAS scores can be used to demonstrate that a student is not making adequate progress at a later point in time. The signed document will provide evidence that parents made an active choice and may relieve the district of responsibility to remediate.

Ms. Banks noted that the opt-out movement was fueled by the state's removal of the MCAS as a graduation requirement. Ms. Banks said that the district has a responsibility to inform families about how the MCAS is used beyond graduation requirements. Principal Willis confirmed that the communication letter outlines how MCAS data is used and that this information will be missing for students who do not complete the test.

Mr. Foster said that illustrating the personal consequences for students when MCAS data is missing may help this issue to resonate with families. Ms. Stone said it is important to ensure that parents and the community understand the state's use of this measure and the town's stake as it relates to property values. Ms. Banks recommended including the impact of non-participation when MCAS scores are presented to the School Committee. Superintendent Beaudoin stated that the district is now looking to track this.

Principal Willis stated that the elementary handbook needs an overhaul and the items presented are considered the most pressing. Superintendent Beaudoin suggested a review of the K-8 handbooks after the new middle school principal comes on board.

The School Committee voted to support the proposed changes to the elementary school handbook 6-0.

- c. District Improvement Plan – End of Year Progress Report. Pam Beaudoin and Heather Leonard. A comprehensive report is included with SC meeting materials. The District Improvement Plan (DIP) is the second in a three-cycle sequence designed to carry forward the Manchester Essex Regional School District's long-term Strategic Plan priorities. The Strategic Plan is in service to the MERSD Vision. The DIP outlines the work to be undertaken between 2025 and 2028 to strengthen teaching and learning, support student well-being, build an inclusive school culture, and maintain sustainable operations. Three Strategic Priorities work together to improve instruction and student achievement. Priority 1 centers on authentic learning (coherent PreK–12 curriculum, performance-based assessment, and the Vision of the Graduate), so classroom experiences are rigorous, engaging, and connected to the real world. Priority 2 integrates social-emotional learning (SEL) and a Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) to ensure students are ready to learn every day through consistent Tier 1 practices, targeted interventions, and partnerships with families. Priority 3 advances Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and inclusive practices so all students can access, participate, and demonstrate mastery in multiple ways.

Ms. Leonard stated that the DIP progress report, included with SC meeting materials, outlines progress on deliverables. The slide deck used in the current meeting provides a summary with highlights and observations.

The superintendent observed that end-of-year reflection and analysis emphasized the interconnectedness of the three priorities/initiatives.

Superintendent Beaudoin said that the DIP is fed by the Strategic Plan; state and federal mandates, and student data and local needs. The ten-year Strategic Plan is the big picture plan. It breaks down into three, three-year increments (DIP), which provide the construct for the School Improvement Plan and the educator plans. At the school plan level, educators are working within the same strategic plan, within the same framework, but there is a lane for the individual need of that school. This provides each school with the space necessary to react if something emerges in student data

Strategic Initiative 1: Authentic Learning. Ms. Leonard said that educators strive to provide a better learning environment for kids and promote improved instructional practices and opportunities for students to feel like active participants in learning and not recipients of knowledge.

Complete/On Track or In Progress

- Ongoing coaching, training and resources for tech and AI integration – Includes MIT RAISE Initiative work regarding Artificial Intelligence.
- Professional Learning
- Curriculum Revision, Mapping, and Articulation
- Data Routines

Behind/In Progress

- Inventory/Matrices – scheduled completion by fall. The matrices were described as an outward facing document that will provide explanations and examples to families to bring to life the hands-on components of authentic learning in their student's education. The team will continue its work to map how authentic learning takes place daily and determine how best to share this with families. Examples of authentic learning include inquiry-based experiences; real world application guided by students feedback, knowledge, or experiences; real world issues; and higher order thinking.

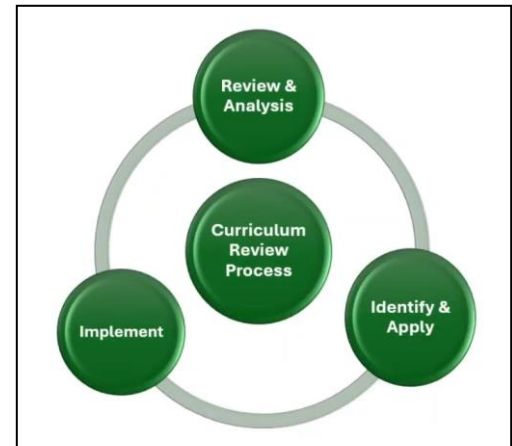
Ms. Leonard identified curriculum review as a place to define authentic learning and described curriculum as a sequence of student learning experiences, facilitated by teachers, using curricular materials as a foundation. Curriculum encompasses the organization and sequence of academic content, curriculum materials, and instructional goals which guide classroom practice.

Ms. Leonard said that curriculum review is concerned with the sequence of learning experiences, the pedagogy and the teacher practices that go into teaching that content. The review examines current research on the topic, student assessments, and an examination of curriculum materials to determine whether they provide an opportunity for student choice and voice. The review must determine whether the curriculum is meeting the needs of all learners. Ms. Leonard summarized the process as going far beyond whether a new textbook is needed.

Curriculum Review: Essential Questions

- What do students need to know and be able to do?
- What does research say about teaching and learning in this discipline?
- Is the curriculum meeting the needs of all learners? How is this determined?

Ms. Leonard shared the curriculum review progress for History/Social Science; Science, Technology, and Engineering; Mathematics; and ELA (6-12). As an example, Ms. Leonard said that the science review determined that the KnowAtom unit organization was not grounded in real world phenomena. Teachers are working to reorganize the units and provide this connection so that they can engage in an inquiry cycle using the familiar KnowAtom tool. The science review also reviewed Mystery Science resources for K-2 students, which was being under-utilized. The review determined that Mystery Science would be a good tool for the hands-on science needed with the addition of curriculum resources (as requested in the current AP vouchers) and a commitment across the grades to participate. Ms. Leonard noted that local parent-teacher organizations have supported this program previously. Shifting the responsibility to the district will ensure continued access to all students. For grades 6-8, the district plans to field test OpenSciEd. For the high school, the review includes student feedback on areas that are missing.



Strategic Initiative 2: SEL and MTSS.

- Existing SEL and student support systems continue to support students.
- SEL/MTSS district-wide framework – In Progress
- Administrative team walkthroughs prioritized MLL instructional look-fors as part of training, delaying some SEL-specific implementation work. Although part of separate distinct initiatives, both focus on creating supportive, inclusive learning environments and share complementary instructional practices.

Superintendent Beaudoin said that growth in this area has been impacted by limited bandwidth for those working on this initiative as they were putting a lot of energy into the curriculum review. However, the superintendent described SEL and MTSS systems as sound and serving students. Going forward, the district hopes to extend vertical articulation into the high school. The new middle school principal should be able to drive this.

For SEL, Ms. Leonard said that there was a shift from looking at classrooms to looking at instructional practices and their impact on students. As a result, the district engaged in corrective actions for Multilanguage Learners (MLL). The administrative team went through a series of training sessions with the district MLL teacher. They employed these look-fors in their walk throughs and found that there was overlap with SEL look-fors, with similar pools of techniques. This highlighted the interplay of the three strategic priorities.

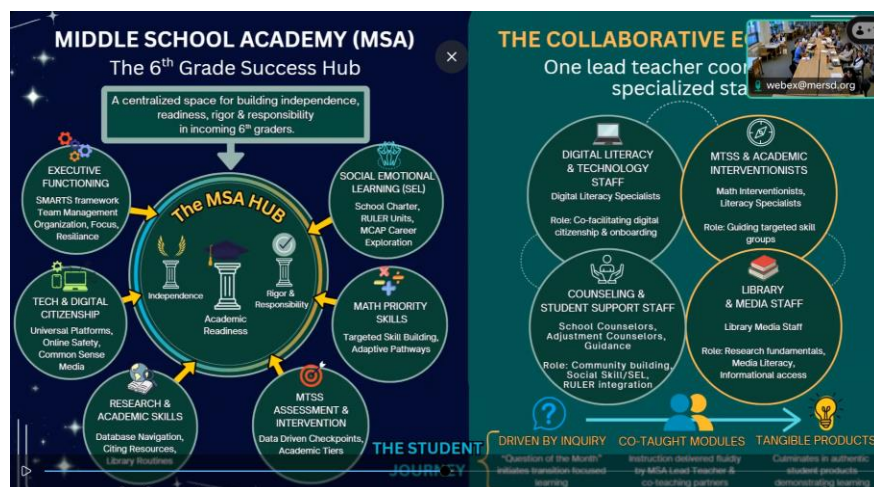
Strategic Initiative 3: Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and Inclusion – Classrooms that meet the needs (academic behavioral, social emotional cultural needs), of all students.

- Complete/On-Track, In-Progress
 - UDL Expectation
 - Differentiated PD
 - SEL Endorsed Teachers
 - English Language Curriculum Selected
 - MLL Coach
 - Administrator Training
- Highlights
 - Successfully addressed all areas of DESE Multilingual Learner (MLL) Program Review. This review identified areas for correction, which was done through programmatic redesign and restructuring with a new MLL instructor, Andie Pinner. Ms. Pinner serves as the program coordinator, and direct teacher to students. She has also devoted a lot of time to coaching work. Ms. Leonard said that students are currently being re-screened. She could provide the exact number of program participants once the screenings are complete. Ms. Leonard pointed out that former English learners may still need future supports that may need to be strategically embedded in classrooms. Superintendent Beaudoin complimented the work done by Ms. Pinner and Ms. Leonard for the MLL administrator training.
 - Administrative Team Training on DESE's MLL look-for tool. The tool was described as well-articulated and providing support for a wide range of students, not just MLL students.

- Teacher Coaching – supporting integration of strategies into classroom instruction
- Review, Field Test, and Selection of English Language Learning Curriculum: National Geographic Reach Higher and National Geographic Lift. The district employs sheltered English conversion. A student identified as a multilingual learner is provided with different supports within the classroom to ensure that they can access grade level content. Additionally, if the student has not yet attained a certain benchmark identified by the state, the district provides direct instruction in English language development using this curriculum.

Middle School Academy (MSA) – Transition to Sixth Grade Success Hub. Superintendent Beaudoin shared that the class was originally designed as an introduction to the middle school which changed over the years to meet the principal's focus. The class is currently in transition. The district sees this as an opportunity to reset the class to address additional areas of need rather than focusing on English skills. Instead, the class will provide students with multiple experiences and interventions. Ms. Leonard said that MSA will become a foundation for secondary learning with a lead teacher in intentional partnership with specialized staff.

- Reset to support students' transition to middle school through a focus on academic readiness, executive functioning, social-emotional development, digital literacy, and authentic learning experiences.
- Demonstrates how multiple district priorities can be advanced through a single student experience, recognizing that academic, social-emotional, and instructional needs are interconnected.



Superintendent Beaudoin referenced the state MyCAP program (My Career and Academic Plan), a DESE initiative designed to prepare students for college, careers, and civic readiness. MSA would be a venue for students to use the program to think about themselves as a learner and thinker and apply

that consideration. Ms. Leonard provided examples of possible experiences in the MSA class. The superintendent said that the MSA class would provide a dedicated space for MTSS for sixth graders, transitioning between the elementary and grade 7/8 structures.

Questions: Ms. Stone asked administration to consider dedicated planning time for staff stakeholders to plan and collaborate.

Strategic Initiative 4: Budget. Superintendent Beaudoin said that the SC did not set a deliverable for this year, instead focusing on big picture items across the three years. The district achieved its desired budget, and it has a game plan for E&D and OPEB funding. The district plans to continue its zero-based budgeting in SPED. The Essex Building Project is on schedule.

- Capital Improvement - The superintendent said that the district is looking ahead to the needs of the middle/high school building as outlined by the Habib report.
- Program and Organizational Planning
 - Reviewed staffing models and organizational structures to ensure resources are used effectively and aligned with current and future student needs.
 - Developed a proposed stipend restructuring model aligned with district priorities. (Under review by joint labor management working group.)
- Funding and Partnerships
 - Expanded efforts to pursue grant funding and alternative revenue opportunities. This includes an examination of school choice and student activities fees. Ms. Cresta is working to build in electric grants into the transportation contract.
 - Continued exploration of collaborative opportunities and operational efficiencies.
- Technology and Infrastructure – Has focused on cyber preparedness. There is no state support for cyber security.

Questions and Comments:

Mr. Foster expressed appreciation for the professional development. Mr. Foster said that he continues to look for details about how the student experience changes because of district efforts. Superintendent Beaudoin said that it is early in the process, and the student experience was more easily illustrated at the end of the last DIP phase. Ms. Leonard said that the world language program is further along in the review process, and she will look to provide the SC with insight. Ms. Koch-Sundquist said that this is often shared during the individual school spotlights.

Ms. Banks received confirmation that there is one staff member serving as the MLL coordinator, teacher, and coach. Ms. Leonard said that it is a very specialized role that is part SPED teacher and part liaison. The district has small MLL numbers, spread across four schools and of variable needs. The coaching role is important. Students may not need direct instruction but still need specific strategies in the classroom to succeed.

Ms. Stone asked about teacher perspective regarding embedded SEL practices and instructional strategies as they explore new curriculum, marrying the two so that it's more practical for kids to apply. Ms. Leonard pointed to work done to meet the needs of all learners. As an example, Ms. Leonard pointed to social science and how a student comes to understand what's happened through history, through cultures, through society while also thinking about their own experiences and knowledge. Ms. Leonard said there is work to be done to map where embedded SEL is happening. Tier 1 instruction was highlighted as a place where SEL can be embedded, and that work will continue next year. Superintendent Beaudoin shared that the SEL entry point for the district was as a counter measure to the perceived high pressure academic environment. Consequently, it was not originally approached with an emphasis on integration.

Ms. Koch-Sundquist said that she is grateful for SEL work and noticed some teachers implement engaging tools, but these tools are not available across grades or between classes. Ms. Leonard emphasized that Strategic Initiative 3 addresses all students to ensure that they are heard, seen, and able to meet goals for classroom learning. Students have increasingly diverse profiles, and the district can no longer assume that content will meet their needs. Superintendent Beaudoin emphasized that it is important to acknowledge the diversity that also exists for their adult teachers. The superintendent said that it is also critical to have patience and provide support networks for staff willing to move forward. Principals will support those willing to grow and change.

Mr. Foster expressed gratitude for the opportunity to discuss the MSA program and his concern with the current proposal for the course. Mr. Foster said that the class previously provided an authentic learning, project-based component and said that the current plan seems to be based on an intervention model. Mr. Foster said that the district should aim to fix the math program rather than have MSA develop into a second math class. Mr. Foster noted that a lot of Strategic Initiative 1 is listed as part of this course and suggested that would slow down efforts to incorporate those components across the curriculum. Mr. Foster agreed with the goals but not with putting them all in the MSA class. Mr. Foster reiterated that he would like to see MSA about authentic learning.

Ms. Koch-Sundquist noted that the MSA roadmap does not speak to the type of activities, and they could be authentic learning opportunities. Ms. Koch-Sundquist also said that the plan does not restrict these goals to the MSA class.

Ms. Banks asked if the MSA class is intended as a launchpad for the transition from elementary school to middle/high school. Ms. Banks noted that students increasingly get authentic learning/ project-based experiences as part of every class as they move up each year. MSA students would receive concrete, project-based learning/authentic learning experiences around the listed skills that they will need.

Mr. Foster encouraged use of authentic learning language, rather than the current presentation, and said that he wants to convey how the MSA blueprint comes across. Mr. Foster cautioned against assumptions about the course that are not specified in the presentation. Superintendent Beaudoin offered to include references to authentic learning. The superintendent clarified that MSA has historically changed depending on the lead teacher in the position. This meant that the experience was inconsistent across years. The current blueprint is intended to memorialize MSA as a bridge course for students. It is planned as a place where students maintain access to instruction that has dropped out of their schedule from the elementary experience, including technology instruction, library research, and defined intervention. Currently, students needing intervention are pulled out of their specials blocks. The current MSA vision is responsive to parent and staff feedback, including the need for a space to assist students in managing an increasingly complex school environment with seven instructors and a rotating schedule. The superintendent noted that there is no place in the schedule for adjustment counselors to push in to classes with SEL content. This is also the case for technology integration specialists, and the district is looking for opportunities for direct instruction on social media and bias. The superintendent said that the blueprint weaves authentic learning strands throughout. Superintendent Beaudoin said that the course will have a unit sequence with one coordinator but multiple content deliveries.

Ms. Banks complimented the MSA plan as possessing crucial elements identified as needed for grade six students. Superintendent Beaudoin confirmed for Ms. Banks that the writing instruction previously part of MSA will be intentionally shifted to the ELA class. The superintendent said that math needs are a concern that requires a systemic approach. It will take time to identify the broad needs. MSA will bridge the gap.

Ms. Stone expressed excitement for the MSA blueprint. Ms. Stone stressed that the co-teaching piece is essential to the success of the course and planning time for the group is critical. Ms. Stone also said that this course is a needed opportunity for students to catch their breath and have a place for SEL work.

Superintendent Beaudoin stated that most of the co-teaching staff are not classroom teachers and have flexibility to pair up for planning. The superintendent noted that the Dean of Students is examining last year's floating blocks and how to leverage the idea for seventh and eighth graders to create specialty courses or opportunities. Superintendent Beaudoin said that the "ME" block is being reintroduced, and renamed, as a twenty-minute block where students can reset.

Mr. Reed agreed with Mr. Foster that the MSA blueprint could end up focusing on remedial work and asked for additional updates for the School Committee. Mr. Reed said that the plan for the course is very ambitious and wondered about how it will be executed. Superintendent Beaudoin said that multiple activities, using a centers-concept, will sometimes occur simultaneously. At other times, the course may utilize group lessons (for example, MyCAP). Data will drive individual student activities.

School Committee members noted that all students have areas for improvement. Regarding concerns about how the course's content and curriculum will be ready by the start of the new school year, Superintendent Beaudoin stated that there is already a draft blueprint that outlines the course month by month. The superintendent said that a lot of the goals already exist as curriculum which just needs to be threaded through the course blueprint. Superintendent Beaudoin noted an opportunity to address math priorities by re-introducing the "math explorers" program used at Memorial. This program is very hands-on. Mr. Foster stated that he hopes conversations about authentic learning opportunities are happening across classes and not just in the MSA course

Ms. Wetzler asked about measures of success for the course in a year's time.

Ms. Banks asked if the lead teacher would be responsible for parent engagement in order to share their wholistic insight into students. The superintendent said that every teacher is expected to engage with parents for their class.

Superintendent Beaudoin stated that authentic learning language will be made clearer. Mr. Foster reiterated the necessity for being cautious around assumptions about what will happen in the course. Ms. Leonard noted that this will also be a place for assessments to happen for students instead of losing time in core content areas. While assessment is not a rigorous, authentic learning experience, monitoring student growth and learning is also critical.

- d. FY26 Spring Budget to Actual Report – Michelle Cresta. The full report will be available on Monday, June 22, 2026. Ms. Cresta projected \$500K in unspent funds from the FY26 operating budget.

There were five areas of deficit that the district will cover internally from other line items. Ms. Cresta emphasized that fluctuations in these categories would be difficult to budget for without creating an unsustainably large budget.

- i. Substitutes – Projected deficit of approximately \$12K due to long term substitute placements. The district was recently made aware of additional LTS openings for September.
- ii. SPED Contract Services – Projected deficit of approximately \$60K. This year the district used contract services to meet student needs, which have been escalating. Next year, the district will add an in-house position to reduce the expense.
- iii. Security – Projected deficit of approximately \$4.5K School Resource Officer. The district does not receive the invoice for the resource officer until the last week of school. Ms. Cresta estimated a deficit of \$5K.
- iv. Building Grounds – Projected deficit of approximately \$78K. Snow removal put the line item significantly overbudget for the year.
- v. SPED Out of District (OOD) - Projected deficit of approximately \$143K.

The district will provide final budget to actual numbers and an analysis in August. This will include a report on grants.

- e. Procurement Card Authorization – *Vote to Approve*. Ms. Cresta requested that the School Committee vote to approve a new Purchasing Card (PCard) program through the Bank of Montreal (BMO). This program will replace the district's current single credit card setup. Transitioning to a P-Card system will clean up tracking, protect district funds, and provide better control over daily school purchases. This program is recommended for school districts by the Massachusetts Association of School Building Officials (MASBO). Ms. Cresta has used this system in two other school districts. The PCard can be used for online purchases and with other vendors that do not accept purchase orders. Administrators will be able to control the types of expenses that can be made on the card and set up a limit on the dollar amount of purchases. Ms. Cresta reported that the district will be eliminating school-based student activities accounts. Instead, these accounts will be managed through the district office. PCards will give administrators the ability to purchase what they need while eliminating school-based checking accounts.

Ms. Koch-Sundquist moved to approve a Resolution Authorizing Issuance of Individual Procurement Cards. Whereas, the School Committee of the Manchester Essex Regional School District has the authority to enter into an agreement with the Bank of Montreal for purchasing cards. Now, therefore, be it resolved by the Manchester Essex Regional School Committee that the Superintendent and Director of Finance and Operations are authorized to enter into an Agreement with the Bank of Montreal to secure Procurement Cards for each authorized employee of the district under such terms and conditions as approved by the Committee.

The Committee authorizes the District's Director of Finance and Operations to execute a P-Card program agreement on its behalf.

Ms. Wetzler seconded the motion

The motion passed 6-0.

Ms. Cresta stated that the Bank of Montreal also services the current district credit card.

- f. Essex Elementary School Feasibility Study Amendment – *Vote to Approve.* Superintendent Beaudoin stated that the MSBA requested a slight change to the language used in the School Committee previous approval of the Feasibility Study Amendment.

Ms. Wetzler moved that the School Committee amend the April 2, 2024, appropriation and the subsequent May 19, 2026, appropriation for the Essex Elementary School Feasibility Study as follows:

The Manchester Essex Regional School District (MERSD) hereby appropriates the sum of \$1,800,000 for the purpose of paying costs associated with the Essex Elementary School feasibility study for the school located at 12 Story Street, Essex, Massachusetts 01929, described in two separate deeds recorded (a) in Book 4203, Page 399, and (b) in Book 4216, Page 501, and shown together on a plot plan recorded in Plan Book 86, Plan 88, at 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's Essex Elementary School Building Committee. To meet this appropriation, \$1,500,000 has previously been appropriated and authorized for the Study, consisting of \$500,000 from available District funds and \$1,000,000 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. An additional \$300,000 is hereby authorized from available funds of the District, bringing the total appropriation for the Study to \$1,800,000.

The District acknowledges that the Massachusetts School Building Authority's grant program is a nonentitlement, discretionary program based on need, as determined by the MSBA, and that any project costs incurred by the Manchester Essex Regional School District in excess of any grant received from the MSBA shall be the sole responsibility of the Manchester Essex Regional School District.

Ms. Stone seconded the motion.

The motion passed 6-0

- g. Transportation Contract – Ms. Cresta said that the district is currently vetting the three responses it received. Ms. Cresta was hopeful that a contract would be finalized within the next week.

- 8) School Committee Comment** – Superintendent Beaudoin said that the SC may want to extend the upcoming August 17 School Committee meeting to include a business agenda. Prior to that meeting, Ms. Cresta said that SC members will receive remote vouchers for approval every two weeks.

C. Adjourn

Ms. Banks moved to adjourn the School Committee business meeting; Ms. Stone seconded the motion.

The motion passed 6-0.

Meeting Adjourned at 9:03 pm

School Committee Future Meetings

- **Monday, August 17, 2026, 9:00 am**