

MINUTES OF THE REGULAR SESSION OF THE MALDEN SCHOOL COMMITTEE

Monday, June 1, 2026

Herbert L. Jackson Council Chamber Room #106 - 215 Pleasant Street Malden, MA and
Virtual Meeting

Mayor Christenson called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m.

Mayor Christenson read docket items for the meeting.

Mayor Christenson led the committee in the Pledge of Allegiance followed by a moment of silence for those who have served our country and for those who continue to do so.

Roll Call

The following attendance was taken:

Mayor Christenson - Present

Mr. Drummey - Present

Mr. McCarthy - Present

Ms. Spadafora - Present

Ms. Macklin - Present

Ms. Hortie - Present

Mr. Piazza - Present

Mr. Bernard - Present

Ms. Rose-Zeiberg - Present

Superintendent Sippel - Present

Consent Agenda

Mayor Christenson brought forth the matter of the adoption of minutes for the Approval of May 4, 2026 regular meeting minutes. Mr. Drummey made a motion to approve the minutes and Mr. McCarthy seconded the motion. And so it was VOTED. The motion was approved, 8-0, with 1 abstention.

Mayor Christenson brought forth the matter of the May 2026 Warrants. Ms. Spadafora made a motion to place the May 2026 Warrants on file and authorize the Chair to sign. Ms. Hortie seconded the motion and so it was VOTED. The motion passed unanimously.

Superintendent Sippel recognizes Joumana Salameh Cafferty, a Malden Public Schools educator retiring this year. The Committee takes a brief recess to personally congratulate Ms. Cafferty.

The Committee returns to regular session at 6:37 p.m.

Public Comment

Dr. Liz Tonogbanua

Dr. Tonogbanua expressed concerns regarding the district's use of educational technology, including platforms such as i-Ready and CourseMojo. She stated that excessive screen-based instruction has negatively impacted student engagement, curiosity, and attitudes toward learning. She advocated for reduced technology use, greater differentiation in instructional practices through MTSS teams, and increased opportunities for inquiry-based learning. Dr. Tonogbanua also raised concerns regarding student data privacy related to a federal class-action lawsuit involving i-Ready and questioned how the district would respond to participating families. Additionally, she expressed concerns about technology pilot programs being implemented without parental permission and urged the district to reconsider its approach to educational technology.

Rashna Irani, 119 Bainbridge Street

Ms. Irani, a parent of three Forestdale School students and a pediatrician, spoke in support of limiting student screen use during indoor recess. She shared that her family maintains a screen-free environment at home and emphasized the developmental benefits of unstructured play, reading, creativity, and social interaction. She expressed concern that students are permitted to use Chromebooks during indoor recess and noted that this practice may discourage peer interaction and traditional forms of play. Ms. Irani encouraged the district to consider implementing a screen-free indoor recess policy to promote children's social-emotional well-being and healthy development.

Abdul Wahab, 405 Pearl Street

Mr. Wahab spoke about the impact of scheduling MCAS and other assessments on the Muslim holiday of Eid al-Adha. He noted that because the Islamic calendar shifts annually, testing has repeatedly fallen on significant Muslim holidays over the years. While acknowledging that religious absences are excused, he stated that students may still face barriers, including missed instruction, make-up testing, and the need to request accommodations. He encouraged the district to recognize Eid on the school calendar and noted that neighboring districts have successfully done so.

Meriam Bushtout, 82 Washington Street

Ms. Bushtout, a Malden High School student, requested that the School Committee consider recognizing Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha on the school calendar. She described Eid as one of the most important holidays in Islam and explained that Muslim students often feel forced to choose between observing their faith and attending school. She shared personal experiences of balancing religious observance with academic responsibilities and stated that formal recognition of Eid would promote inclusion and demonstrate respect for the district's diverse student population. Ms. Bushtout encouraged the district to explore solutions adopted by neighboring communities.

Zenadine, 64 Essex Street

A student speaker advocated for recognizing Eid as a school holiday, noting that many students in Malden schools are Muslim and often miss instructional time and assignments when observing the holiday. The speaker also expressed concerns about student use of electronic devices in school, stating that technology can be distracting and may negatively affect attention, posture, and overall learning. The student encouraged greater use of paper-based learning and reduced reliance on electronic devices.

Dawn O'Toole, 130 Adams Street

Ms. O'Toole spoke regarding requests to add additional religious holidays to the school calendar. She acknowledged and expressed empathy for families whose religious observances are not recognized as school holidays, noting that many Catholic holy days are also not observed through school closures. She emphasized the importance of excused absences and opportunities to make up missed work for students observing religious holidays. Ms. O'Toole also noted that state attendance requirements and the existing school calendar may make it challenging to add additional holidays without affecting vacations or extending the school year.

Report of the Superintendent

The Superintendent began by recognizing a number of longtime employees who are retiring after years of service to the Malden Public Schools and thanked them for their dedication to students and families.

Retirees recognized included Joanna Katowski (Beebe School teacher), Bernice Stallworth (Early Learning Center education support professional with 25 years of service), Earl Fitzpatrick (Ferryway School, 29 years of service), Gloria Marcela Baldarama (Ferryway School, 13 years of service), Richard Caton (custodian, 39 years of service), Juan Anderson, Cheryl Cohn, and Deborah Thomas (Linden School), Marcia Healy (Malden High School teacher with 30 years of service), Marian Genova Long (Malden High School), and Caroline Jacques (Salemwood School education support professional), among others. The Superintendent thanked each retiree for their commitment to the district and asked for a round of applause in recognition of their service.

The Superintendent next presented the district's annual School Improvement Plans, noting that the plans are required by state regulations and district policy. He explained that Assistant Superintendents and school leaders had worked extensively throughout the year to coordinate and develop the plans. The Superintendent recognized the principals in attendance and thanked them for their participation in the planning process. He reported that the plans were developed through a comprehensive and inclusive process that included the review of student achievement and attendance data, staff and family feedback, student focus groups, and input from School Councils.

The Superintendent then explained that the plans establish school goals, identify areas for improvement, and outline strategies that will be used to support student achievement during the coming school year. He noted that the plans are submitted annually and that administrators are increasingly using evaluation, classroom observation, and progress-monitoring processes to ensure implementation and accountability.

Ms. Hortie raised questions regarding co-teaching practices and asked how schools are providing common planning time for general education and special education teachers, particularly at the elementary level where special education teachers often serve multiple grade levels.

Superintendent Sippel explained that at Malden High School, co-teaching teams are provided dedicated co-planning periods in place of certain duty assignments. At the K–8 level, scheduling is more complex because educators are often assigned across multiple grade levels. Administrators reported that planning time is created through professional development blocks and strategic scheduling opportunities whenever possible. While acknowledging that arranging this time requires significant coordination, administrators emphasized that meaningful co-planning is essential to effective co-teaching and improved student outcomes.

The Superintendent then presented a recommendation regarding the district's request for proposals (RFP) for extended-day and summer programming services. He reminded the Committee that the RFP was issued in March with proposals due on April 15. The district sought a partner organization to manage before-school, after-school, and summer programming at Beebe, Forestdale, Linden, and Salemwood Schools beginning in the next school year.

The Superintendent described the review process as extensive and collaborative. An evaluation committee reviewed the proposals, conducted discussions, and visited vendor-operated programs to observe services firsthand. Committee members included School Committee Members Rose-Zeiberg and Piazza, school administrators, district staff, and parent representatives. The Superintendent thanked the committee members for dedicating substantial time to reviewing detailed proposals and evaluating them according to the criteria established in the RFP.

After reviewing three submissions, the evaluation committee recommended AlphaBEST Education as the strongest proposal. The Superintendent reported that AlphaBEST's submission was determined to be the most competitive and best aligned with the district's goals and the needs of students and families. He requested School Committee approval so that contract negotiations and implementation planning could begin, including staffing and family registration processes for the upcoming school year.

Ms. Spadafora asked about program capacity and whether all students needing before- or after-school care would be able to participate. Ms. Mertz shared that AlphaBEST does accept vouchers so we are hoping more will be serviced since it will be more affordable. Also sharing that prioritizing current staff hiring was written into the RFP. Also sharing it is about 8-10 weeks in the summer.

Ms. Spadafora raised questions regarding support for students with disabilities and students requiring additional behavioral or social-emotional support. Administrators responded that the review committee specifically examined vendors' approaches to inclusion and student support. Examples from site visits were shared, including observations of staff responding effectively to students with varying needs and circumstances. Administrators stated that these experiences increased their confidence in AlphaBEST's ability to serve a diverse student population.

Committee Ms. Rose-Zeiberg emphasized that accessibility should remain a priority and stated that programming should be available to all students who need it. She requested that expectations regarding equitable access and inclusion be clearly communicated and incorporated into the district's partnership with the provider.

Following discussion, the Superintendent reiterated the administration's recommendation to approve AlphaBEST as the district's extended-day and summer programming provider and noted the importance of moving forward promptly to allow adequate planning and family enrollment before the start of the next school year.

Motions and Resolutions

Extended Day & Summer Programming AlphaBEST RFP - Mr. Piazza

Mr. Piazza made a motion to approve the acceptance of the AlphaBEST Extended Day & Summer Programming RFP. Ms. Rose-Zeiberg seconded the motion and a roll call vote was taken as follows:

Roll Call Vote

Mr. Drummey - Yes

Mr. McCarthy - Yes

Ms. Spadafora - Yes

Ms. Macklin - Yes

Ms. Hortie - Yes

Mr. Piazza - Yes

Mr. Bernard - Yes

Ms. Rose-Zeiberg - Yes

Mayor Christenson - Yes

The motion passed unanimously.

Subcommittee Reports and Discussions

Policy Subcommittee - Ms. Rose-Zeiberg

Ms. Rose-Zeiberg reported that the Policy Subcommittee met on May 21, 2025, to review several policies updated by the Massachusetts Association of School Committees (MASC). The subcommittee reviewed Policy JFBB, School Choice, and discussed updates that would provide admission priority to siblings of students already enrolled in the district should Malden participate in school choice in the future, as well as the addition of a definition of race and updated legal references. The subcommittee voted unanimously to recommend adoption of those revisions. The committee also reviewed Policy JKAA, which has been retitled by MASC as Timeout, Seclusion, and Physical Restraint of Students to reflect new DESE requirements that must be implemented by August 17, 2025. The subcommittee unanimously recommended adoption of the updated policy while noting that additional revisions may be needed to provide greater detail and specificity in the future. The subcommittee further discussed Policy JLCD, Administration of Medication to Students, and the proposed new Policy JLCDC, Self-Administration of Medication. The subcommittee agreed to seek additional input from district nursing leadership, the Board of Health, and MASC before bringing those policies forward for action. Ms. Rose-Zeiberg concluded her report by noting that the meeting adjourned at 7:36 p.m.

Finance Subcommittee - Ms. Spadafora

Ms. Spadafora reported that the Finance Subcommittee met on February 23, April 2, May 14, and May 22, 2025, and that the full School Committee convened for a public hearing on the FY2027 budget on May 28. She provided an overview of the proposed FY2027 budget, noting that the district's required net school spending is projected at \$134,194,726, with approximately \$70 million expected from Chapter 70 state aid and a required local contribution of approximately \$64 million, pending final approval of the state budget by the Legislature. Ms. Spadafora highlighted several significant budget drivers, including contractual obligations, district tuition costs, special education transportation, contracted special education services, short-term substitutes, and staffing adjustments. The proposed budget includes several strategic staffing additions, including an additional Program Manager for Specialized Instruction in Special Education, a new science coach at Malden High School, and an additional STEM coach. She concluded by emphasizing that the district's primary goal throughout the budget development process remained ensuring that students receive the services, supports, and opportunities necessary for their success.

Motions and Resolutions

SY27 School Budget - Ms. Spadafora

Ms. Spadafora made a motion to approve the SY27 School Budget. Mr. Drummey seconded the motion.

Mr. Piazza asked several budget-related questions focusing on key areas of financial and academic reporting. He first inquired about the significant increase in out-of-district tuition costs, noting that spending had risen by approximately 169% and asking for clarification on the cause. Ms. Mertz and Superintendent Sippel explained that the increase was due both to a rise in the number of students placed out of district—from one student to four—as well as substantial cost increases charged by collaboratives and private programs, including state-approved rate increases and program reviews that allow certain providers to significantly raise tuition.

Mr. Piazza also asked about the district's performance in digital literacy and computer science courses, noting that Malden is below the state average in the percentage of students completing such coursework. Superintendent Sippel responded that they are reviewing course coding and data accuracy to ensure all existing courses are properly reflected in state reporting, and that a broader K–12 review of digital literacy and computer science offerings is planned as part of the district's strategic plan. They noted that expansion of programming will be considered after the state releases updated frameworks in this area.

Finally, Mr. Piazza raised concerns about a reported decline in advanced coursework completion rates, from 77% in 2024 to 45% in 2026. The Superintendent explained that the decrease was largely due to a prior coding error in which a non-AP statistics course had been incorrectly classified as an advanced course in state reporting. Once corrected in consultation with DESE, the adjusted data reflected a more accurate baseline.

A roll call vote was taken as follows:

Roll Call Vote

Mr. Drummey - Yes

Mr. McCarthy - Yes

Ms. Spadafora - Yes

Ms. Macklin - Yes

Ms. Hortie - Yes

Mr. Piazza - Yes

Mr. Bernard - Yes

Ms. Rose-Zeiberg - Yes

Mayor Christenson - Yes

The motion passed unanimously.

Nomination of Vice Chair of the School Committee - Mayor Christenson

During consideration of the nomination for vice chair, questions were raised regarding both the procedure used for the nomination and the selection of Keith Bernard. Ms. Spadafora asked whether the chair should have stepped down from presiding while making the nomination, citing a belief that committee policy requires the chair to relinquish the chair when conducting

committee business. Ms. Rose-Zeiberg explained that no specific policy existed for this situation, as vice-chair elections are typically conducted following member swearing-in rather than during a mid-term vacancy. Discussion then focused on the nomination process, with several members expressing surprise and disappointment that another experienced committee member had not been considered more directly for the role. Ms. Macklin noted that the process of soliciting interest through email differed from previous vice-chair selections and questioned whether additional conversations should have taken place with potential candidates. The chair explained that the vacancy arose under unusual circumstances and that members had been asked to express interest in the position, with Keith Bernard being among those who responded. The chair stated that seniority among interested candidates was a factor in the nomination. In response to questions, Mr. Bernard explained that he had previously declined to pursue leadership roles due to work and family commitments but decided to express interest when the vacancy occurred. He stated that his interest was motivated by a desire to serve the committee, schools, and city, emphasized that he held no personal attachment to the position, and pledged to work collaboratively regardless of the outcome. The chair concluded by noting that members retained the option to reject the nomination and open the process to additional nominations if they so chose.

Mayor Christenson made a motion to nominate Keith Bernard as Vice Chair of the Malden School Committee for the remainder of the 2-year term. Mr. Piazza seconded the motion and a roll call vote was taken as follows:

Roll Call Vote

Mr. Drummey - Yes

Mr. McCarthy - Yes

Ms. Spadafora - No

Ms. Macklin - Abstain

Ms. Hortie - Yes

Mr. Piazza - Yes

Mr. Bernard - Yes

Ms. Rose-Zeiberg - Yes

Mayor Christenson - Yes

The motion passed 6-1-1

Acceptance of \$100 donation to the MHS Band - Ms. Spadafora

Ms. Spadafora made a motion to accept the \$100 donation from Mayor Christenson to the Malden High School band. Mr. Bernard seconded the motion and a roll call vote was taken as follows:

Roll Call Vote

Mr. Drummey - Yes

Mr. McCarthy - Yes

Ms. Spadafora - Yes

Ms. Macklin - Yes

Ms. Hortie - Yes

Mr. Piazza - Yes

Mr. Bernard - Yes

Ms. Rose-Zeiberg - Yes

Mayor Christenson - Yes

The motion passed unanimously.

SY27 School Improvement Plans - Ms. Spadafora

Ms. Spadafora made a motion to approve and adopt the SY27 School Improvement Plans and Mr. McCarthy seconded the motion. And so it was VOTED. The motion passed unanimously.

Policy JFBB: School Choice - Ms. Rose-Zeiberg

Ms. Rose-Zeiberg made a motion to approve updates to language in policy JFBB. Ms Hortie seconded the motion. And so it was VOTED. The motion passed unanimously.

Policy JKAA: Time Out, Seclusion and Restraint - Ms. Rose-Zeiberg

Ms. Rose-Zeiberg made a motion to amend Policy JKAA. Mr. Drummey seconded the motion and so it was VOTED. The motion passed unanimously.

MASC Contract Service - Ms. Rose-Zeiberg & Ms. Spadafora

Ms. Rose-Zeiberg made a motion to accept the MASC contract for Policy service. Ms. Spadafora seconded the motion and so it was VOTED. The motion passed unanimously.

SY26-27 Student, Families & Caregivers Handbook - Ms. Rose-Zeiberg

Ms. Rose-Zeiberg made a motion to approve the SY26-27 Student, Families & Caregivers Handbook. Ms. Hortie seconded the motion and so it was VOTED. The motion passed unanimously.

2026-2028 Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan - Ms. Rose-Zeiberg

During discussion of the proposed updates to the District Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan, Assistant Superintendent MacDonald explained that the revisions primarily consisted of updating references to the district's health and wellness curriculum, correcting links and reporting forms, removing outdated information, and aligning the document with the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) model plan. She noted that the plan is reviewed and approved every two years, as required, and that both DESE guidance and legal counsel were consulted during the review process.

Ms. Spadafora expressed concerns about approving the updated plan without additional review. Questions were raised regarding investigation timelines, family notification procedures, and whether the plan fully aligned with current district policies. Mr. Piazza also noted that the language frequently referenced "parents" and suggested broader terminology to ensure inclusion of students whose primary caregivers may not be parents. Additional concerns focused on whether the plan adequately addressed the evolving nature of cyberbullying, particularly given recent developments in technology and online behavior.

Committee members further inquired about the administration of required school climate and bullying surveys referenced in the plan. Administration reported that bullying, school climate, and safety questions had recently been included in the district's student survey and that survey data would be available at a later date. Discussion also highlighted the relevance of the district's ongoing work related to artificial intelligence and student conduct, with members suggesting that future revisions to the bullying plan incorporate recommendations from the AI working group as well as survey findings. The committee discussed the possibility of conducting a more comprehensive review of the plan in the coming year to ensure it reflects current challenges and best practices related to bullying prevention and intervention.

Ms. Spadafora made a motion to table the 2026-2028 Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan vote and to send it to the policy subcommittee for review. Ms. Rose-Zeiberg seconded the motion and so it was VOTED. The motion passed unanimously.

Personal Privilege

Executive Session

Mr. Drummey made a motion to move to Executive Session at 8:41 p.m. Mr. McCarthy seconded the motion and a roll call vote was taken as follows:

Roll Call Vote

Mr. Drummey - Yes

Mr. McCarthy - Yes

Ms. Spadafora - Yes

Ms. Macklin - Yes

Ms. Hortie - Yes

Mr. Piazza - Yes

Mr. Bernard - Yes

Ms. Rose-Zeiberg - Yes

Mayor Christenson - Yes

The motion passed unanimously.

The committee reconvened to regular session at 8:48

Mr. Drummey made a motion to adjourn at 8:48 p.m.. Mr. McCarthy seconded the motion and so it was VOTED. The motion passed unanimously.

Ariana Langston

Ariana Langston, Clerk