

SCHOOL COMMITTEE

BUSINESS MEETING OPEN SESSION MINUTES

August 17, 2026

Meeting: School Committee

Date: August 17, 2026

Location: MERMHS Learning Commons

Attendees: Kate Koch-Sundquist, Chairperson, Chris Reed, Vice Chair , Lindsay Banks, Jake Foster, Nadia Wetzler, Theresa Whitman, Pamela Beaudoin, Superintendent, Michelle Cresta, Director of Finance & Operations

Absent: None

Guests: None

Recorded by: Electronically

Link to Reports and Presentations: N/A

A. Call to Order

Ms. Koch-Sundquist called the School Committee Business Meeting to order.

B. Business Meeting Open Session

1) Public Comment

None.

2) Consent Agenda

Minutes for Approval: June 16, 2026

The School Committee separated the donation from the minutes for individual consideration. It was noted that Sarah had been omitted from the attendees listed in the June 16 minutes.

Mr. Reed moved to approve the June 16, 2026 minutes. Ms. Stone seconded the motion with the amendment to add her name to the list of attendees. The motion passed as amended, with Ms. Whitman abstaining.

Booster Club Donations

Superintendent Beaudoin presented donations from the Boosters and Gridiron Club to support renewal of the District's Hudl video subscription service for the 2026–2027 school year. The service provides live

streaming and game video that can be used for review and to support student-athlete portfolios. The balance of the subscription is supported through athletic revolving funds.

Ms. Whitman moved to accept the donations from the Boosters and Gridiron Club to fund renewal of the Hudl subscription for the 2026–2027 school year. Ms. Wetzler seconded the motion.

The motion passed.

Superintendent Beaudoin also provided a brief update on the proposal for MERSD to serve as the host for the hockey cooperative. Additional conversations with athletic directors are taking place, and a formal recommendation is anticipated for September 1.

3) Sub-Committee Reports

• Elementary Facilities/MSBC Sub-Committee (Theresa Whitman)

Ms. Whitman provided an update on the Essex Elementary School Building Project. The project is now in the Schematic Design phase, and the Construction Manager at Risk has been selected and onboarded following a competitive process that included review of submissions, proposals, and interviews with five firms.

The exterior design is further along than the interior design. The project team is currently refining two exterior concepts, including a peaked roof option and a rounded design feature intended to be evocative of a ship's hull. Because the rounded design is a distinctive feature and has generated differing reactions, the project team plans to invite community feedback on the two options at the August 25 community meeting. Design documents are also moving into pricing, which may inform additional decisions as the project progresses.

The interior design continues to develop, with attention to programmatic requirements, teacher needs, MSBA space requirements, classroom configurations, community learning spaces, and the relationship between the cafeteria, gym, and stage. Updated floor plans are being developed to help the Building Committee better understand how the individual spaces work together.

The Committee discussed lessons learned from the Memorial Elementary School project. Superintendent Beaudoin noted that Schematic Design does not represent the final level of interior design and that the building needs to remain flexible and adaptable over its expected lifespan. Breakout spaces, building systems, classroom storage, and other design features were identified as areas where experience at Memorial is informing current planning. The Committee also noted that some MSBA requirements have changed since the Memorial project.

The project team continues to work through site safety and security, parking, bus circulation, student drop-off and pick-up, and traffic flow, with the goal of moving these activities off-street to the extent possible. The Committee suggested that a site diagram illustrating traffic flow be available at the August 25 community meeting. Indoor recess space, the playscape, field size, the pond area, and long-term maintenance implications of exterior design materials were also discussed.

The project remains on schedule for Town Meeting consideration in November and a ballot vote in December. Superintendent Beaudoin noted that a project communications group is beginning its work to increase public awareness of the project, upcoming community meetings, and the votes that will occur later in the year.

- **Policy/Advocacy Sub-Committee**

Superintendent Beaudoin provided an update on the District Wellness Policy. At the June meeting, Mr. Foster suggested exploring whether the detailed bullet points contained in the draft could be removed to streamline the policy. The District subsequently sent both versions of the policy to a state-supported wellness policy consultant for review.

The consultant advised that the bullet points could not be removed and identified additional required provisions that needed to be incorporated. Superintendent Beaudoin explained that many of the requirements are connected to federal school lunch program requirements. Ms. Leonard updated the policy based on the consultant's feedback. Several minor typographical edits were also identified and will be corrected in the final document.

Ms. Whitman moved to approve the District Wellness Policy with the noted grammatical edits. Ms. Banks (?) seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

- **Negotiation Team Sub-Committee**

No report. Superintendent Beaudoin noted that negotiations would be discussed later in the day.

- **Finance Sub-Committee**

No report.

4) Auditorium and Stage Update

The Committee received an update following a meeting with representatives of the arts community regarding improvements to the auditorium and stage. The discussion helped shift the immediate focus away from a significant investment in the sound system and toward improvements to the curtains and stage background.

Ms. Cresta reported that the District received a proposal to replace the white cyc curtain, which has been in disrepair, and to replace or repair panels of the existing black show curtains, some of which have dry rot. The proposal, including installation, is approximately \$17,000. The work will be funded through facilities rental funds. The District plans to move forward so that the work can be completed prior to upcoming performances and events.

The District will continue to assess the auditorium as a whole, including microphones, sound, storage, and how the various systems work together. No School Committee vote was required or taken on the curtain work.

5) Continued Business

a. Financial Update – Michelle Cresta, Director of Finance and Operations

Ms. Cresta reported that the District remains on track with closing FY26. The District continues to receive some late invoices, and final year-end numbers will be available once those expenses have been processed. At this point, there are no unexpected financial concerns.

For FY27, Ms. Cresta reported that final Chapter 70 funding is approximately \$103,000 higher than the amount budgeted by the District. The additional funding provides flexibility during the fiscal year and, if unused, will flow to E&D at year end.

Ms. Cresta also reviewed the FY28 budget development calendar. The calendar follows the District's standard budget development process and has been updated to align with current dates and the overall District planning calendar. Budget development work will begin in the coming months.

Ms. Cresta provided an update on the IRS audit initiated approximately one year ago. The audit is nearing completion and resulted in a fine of approximately \$4,000 related to 1099 forms that were not issued in 2023. No additional corrective action was required beyond explaining the District's process going forward, which the IRS found satisfactory. A final closing report is expected within the next several weeks.

Ms. Cresta also reported continued delays in receiving the District's final FY25 audited financial statements from its audit firm. The District has received two draft versions but is still awaiting the final report. Ms. Cresta explained that the District needs to receive the statements by the end of August to avoid potential implications for its bond rating. The District has already selected a new audit firm for the next fiscal year.

b. Transportation Update

Ms. Cresta provided an update on the transition to the District's new bus company, Doherty's Garage. The District and provider have developed preliminary routes and are working to keep them as similar as possible to previous routes to minimize disruption for families.

The provider will conduct test runs before the routes are finalized. The District anticipates releasing bus route information to families the following week. Ms. Cresta reported that the transition and working relationship with the new provider have been positive.

6) Other Updates

North Shore Admissions Meeting

The Committee discussed District participation in an upcoming North Shore admissions meeting. The proposed meeting date conflicts with staff orientation and opening-of-school activities. Superintendent Beaudoin stated that the District has attempted to send representatives to these meetings when possible and will explore whether someone is available to attend.

Building Environmental Review

In follow-up to a question raised at the June meeting, Ms. Cresta confirmed that the District completed a review of the buildings for potential mercury-containing materials and has identified a company to assist with chemical management.

Family Portal

Superintendent Beaudoin provided an update on the upcoming launch of the state family portal. The District plans to notify families toward the end of the following week. The portal will allow families to

access student assessment information directly through the state system rather than relying solely on a District mailing.

Families will receive information and a code explaining how to access the portal. The District plans to communicate before the larger volume of back-to-school information is distributed and provide another reminder after the start of school.

Superintendent Beaudoin noted that the state is not providing direct technical support to families. Ms. Leonard and Ms. LeJeune have developed a process to receive questions from families and direct them to appropriate District staff for assistance. The District will monitor implementation and provide additional communication and support as needed.

C. Business Meeting Conclusion

Ms. Koch-Sundquist concluded the Business Meeting following completion of the business agenda. The School Committee transitioned to a Workshop.

D. School Committee Workshop

The School Committee continued in open session for a workshop focused on organizational planning and priorities for the upcoming year.

1) School Committee Reorganization

The Committee discussed School Committee reorganization, including subcommittee appointments for the upcoming year.

2) School Committee/Superintendent Goals

The Committee discussed the process and areas of focus for development of School Committee and Superintendent goals.

3) School Committee Planning Items

The Committee discussed several topics for future planning and consideration:

- Student Activity Fees
- School Choice
- District Metrics of Success

These items will inform future School Committee discussion and planning.

E. Executive Session – Negotiation Strategy

Ms. Koch-Sundquist moved to enter Executive Session for the purpose of discussing negotiation strategy. Ms. Whitman seconded the motion.

A roll call vote was taken:

Kate Koch-Sundquist – Yes
Lindsay Banks – Yes
Jake Foster – Yes
Nadia Wetzler – Yes
Theresa Whitman – Yes

The motion passed unanimously.

Following the Executive Session, Ms. Koch-Sundquist moved to exit Executive Session. Ms. Whitman seconded the motion.

A roll call vote was taken:

Kate Koch-Sundquist – Yea
Lindsay Banks – Yea
Jake Foster – Yea
Nadia Wetzler – Yea
Theresa Whitman – Yea

The motion passed unanimously.

The meeting concluded following the Executive Session.

School Committee Future Meetings

September 1, 2026 – School Committee Business Meeting