

MINUTES OF THE REGULAR SESSION OF THE MALDEN SCHOOL COMMITTEE

Monday, August 31, 2026

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

Mayor Christenson called the meeting to order at 6:00 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 June 24, 2026 special meeting minutes. Mr. Drummey made a motion to approve the minutes and Mr. Bernard seconded the motion. And so it was VOTED. The motion passed unanimously.

Mr. Drummey made a motion to approve the August 3, 2026 special meeting minutes and Ms. Hortie seconded the motion. And so it was VOTED. The motion passed unanimously.

Mr. Drummey made a motion to approve the July and August 2026 warrants and authorize the Chair to sign. Mr. Bernard seconded the motion and so it was VOTED. The motion passed unanimously.

Mr. McCarthy made a motion to approve the July and August 2026 grants and authorize the Chair to sign. Mr. Bernard seconded the motion and so it was VOTED. The motion passed unanimously.

Public Comment

Dr. Liz Tonogbanua - Grace St., Malden Ma

Dr. Liz Tonogbanua approached the Committee on behalf of the newly established local chapter of the national Schools Beyond Screens coalition.

Dr. Liz Tonogbanua presented a petition with 221 signatures urging Malden Public Schools (MPS) to adopt a comprehensive “green time” policy addressing student screen use. The requested policy would: Eliminate or significantly limit device use for the youngest students, establish specific and enforceable screen-time limits by grade level, reduce one-to-one device programs in elementary schools, block non-educational platforms on district-issued devices, prohibit device use during unstructured time, provide parents with greater transparency and meaningful opt-out rights, encourage the use of paper materials, physical textbooks, and off-screen homework, evaluate educational technology contracts based on educational value and student data privacy.

Dr. Liz Tonogbanua stated that parents have observed effects of screen use on students’ ability to focus, interact with peers, and engage in meaningful learning. Dr. Liz Tonogbanua encouraged the Committee and district leadership to take further action regarding screen use in schools and thanked the Committee for its consideration.

Catherine Tarka, 196 Glenwood Street

Ms. Tarka, a Malden resident and parent of three MPS students in grades 3, 6, and 8, spoke about technology and screen use in MPS. She identified herself as a participant in the Superintendent’s AI Working Group and a member of Reconnect Malden, a community group focused on technology use in MPS and students’ lives.

Ms. Tarka expressed appreciation to the Superintendent for convening the AI Working Group and stated that participating families felt they had a meaningful opportunity to provide input. She also recognized recent actions by the administration, including disabling access to Gemini AI on student Chromebooks, reducing student access to YouTube, and implementing GoGuardian to monitor and restrict access to inappropriate or non-instructional online content.

Ms. Tarka emphasized that concerns about technology extend beyond artificial intelligence and expressed support for the Superintendent’s stated intention to undertake a broader examination of student screen time. She stated that families are interested in continuing to work collaboratively with the district on screen-time policies and technology use.

Erin Stringfellow, 143 West Street

Ms. Stringfellow, a Malden resident and parent of a third-grade Beebe School student, spoke as a newer member of Reconnect Malden. She discussed student screen use during indoor recess. She stated that indoor recess provides opportunities for social interaction, reading, games, building activities, and other forms of development that do not require screens. Ms. Stringfellow stated that indoor-recess practices may vary by teacher and asked the Committee to consider a districtwide policy discouraging screen use during indoor recess and encouraging alternatives such as Legos, board games, reading, and social interaction.

She raised concerns about the district's technology acceptable-use agreement recently distributed to parents. She stated that the agreement combines several issues—including device care, use of educational tools, and sharing student data with Google—and that a parent's failure to respond is treated as consent. She requested that these matters be separated into individual provisions, that affirmative consent be required where appropriate, and that the district clearly explain the consequences of declining individual provisions.

Ms. Stringfellow raised concerns about how educational technology tools are defined and evaluated. She questioned whether all products described as educational provide sufficient educational benefit and referenced her child's use of Prodigy as an example. She recommended that the district establish minimum standards for determining whether a technology product is educational and make the district's evaluation process publicly available, particularly as the district develops policies governing artificial intelligence.

Lynn Walters Rekhi, 621 Highland Ave.

Malden resident and parent of a fifth-grade MPS student, addressed concerns regarding the Chinese Culture Connection (CCC) after-school program. She stated that she had previously contacted the Committee and Superintendent by email seeking clarification but had not received sufficient follow-up.

Ms. Walters Rekhi expressed concern about communication with CCC families during the summer regarding the program's status for the new school year. She stated that families learned only shortly before the beginning of the school year that the program's continued operation was uncertain. She also raised questions concerning the district's agreement with AlphaBEST and the scope of its exclusivity, noting that another organization remained able to use the YWCA program. She reported that parents had raised concerns about AlphaBEST involving billing, communication, registration fees, and the handling of student medical information.

Ms. Walters Rekhi also emphasized the cultural importance of CCC to many Malden families and described the program as a diverse, women-led program that has provided cultural enrichment and a longstanding community for children. She requested greater clarity regarding the future of CCC and stated that families need timely and direct communication about the program's status.

In response, the Committee stated that a meeting with representatives of the Chinese Culture Connection was scheduled for Thursday morning. The Committee acknowledged that it should have communicated this upcoming meeting to Ms. Walters Rekhi and other families sooner. The Committee stated that the purpose of the meeting would be to explore a path forward and that families would be updated following the meeting.

Written Public Comment – Shalene Title

The School Committee clerk read a written public comment from Shalene Title, a Ward 5 resident, who was unable to attend the meeting in person.

Ms. Title expressed appreciation to the School Committee, technology subcommittee members, and Superintendent Sippel for their approach to technology and artificial intelligence in MPS. She stated that she appreciated parents' concerns being heard and addressed.

Ms. Title referenced a recent conversation with an MIT professor who researches AI in education and contrasted the attention given to AI in affluent school districts with the other challenges facing gateway cities. She stated that she was proud that Malden was addressing generative AI while also managing other challenges facing the district. She praised the district's creation of a diverse AI Working Group to review evidence and develop standards for determining whether generative AI is appropriate for student use. She also expressed support for disabling AI chatbots while that work is underway and characterized this approach as a means of addressing potential risks before broadly implementing emerging technologies.

Written Public Comment – Josie Morway

The School Committee clerk also read a written public comment from Josie Morway, a Ward 3 resident and MPS parent, who was unable to attend the meeting in person.

Ms. Morway welcomed the Committee and district leadership back for the new school year and expressed appreciation for actions she viewed as placing greater emphasis on students and educators and reducing reliance on commercial educational technology companies.

She specifically praised the district's changes involving YouTube access and oversight, the termination of the CourseMojo program, and the disabling of AI chatbots while a districtwide AI policy is developed.

Ms. Morway referenced recent studies and media reporting concerning educational technology and generative AI and expressed concern about student privacy and the educational effects of some technology platforms. She stated that communities with greater financial and social resources may have greater capacity to advocate for their students and argued that MPS has a responsibility to ensure that students across backgrounds and circumstances receive appropriate educational support and protections.

She concluded by expressing support for the continued work of the AI Working Group and Technology Subcommittee and stated that she and other parents were interested in working with the district on these issues.

Report of the Superintendent

The Superintendent welcomed the School Committee, families, caregivers, staff, and members of the district leadership team to the 2026–2027 school year and expressed enthusiasm about beginning the new school year together. The Superintendent reaffirmed the district's core values of including and collaborating, embracing growth, and doing right by all students.

The Superintendent noted that the district launched the first year of its strategic plan in June. The plan is organized around five strategic priorities: high expectations with support to meet diverse needs; fair access to opportunity; deep partnerships; a strong, well-supported workforce; and financial and operational sustainability. The Superintendent explained that the work taking place across the district at the beginning of the school year, including preparations for students and staff, enrollment monitoring, staffing, professional development, and technology initiatives, is aligned with these strategic priorities.

The Superintendent highlighted several activities that took place in preparation for the new school year. On August 18 and 19, the district welcomed more than 60 new educators. New staff members expressed appreciation for the district's emphasis on collaboration, multilingual learners, students with disabilities, and active student engagement in the learning process. On August 24, more than 1,000 district employees gathered at Jenkins Auditorium at Malden High School for the district-wide opening of the school year. Following the opening activities, educators participated in a full day of professional development at Malden High School, consisting of three sessions and approximately 77 different offerings.

A significant focus of the professional development was an introduction to the science of learning, including the science of attention and how the brain learns. Additional professional

development addressed practical classroom strategies and ensured that educators understood how to access information regarding students with disabilities and the accommodations required through Individualized Education Programs (IEPs). The Superintendent reported positive feedback from educators.

The Superintendent then introduced and recognized the principals leading the district's seven schools: Alex Rock, Early Learning Center; Dr. Kari-Ann Murphy, Beebe School; Dr. Matt Stahl, Ferryway School; Adam Weldai, Forestdale School; Ray Garcia, Linden School; Van Huynh, Salemwood School; and Mike Sabin, the new principal of Malden High School. The Superintendent thanked the principals for their extensive work preparing their schools for the new year and for their continued leadership throughout the school year.

The Superintendent also introduced members of the Special Education Office working under Assistant Superintendent Pam McDonald. These included Elise Comeau, the new K–8 program manager; Tanya McDonald, the new program manager for Malden High School; Connor O'Keefe, the incoming program manager for specialized instruction, who is transitioning from Revere Public Schools; and Stephanie Scalese, Program Manager.

Members of the Teaching and Learning leadership team and district cabinet were also introduced. The group includes Christina Balter-Scarlatos, Director of Intervention and Instructional Support; Sheila Butler, new Director of Nursing; Erin Craven, Director of School Counseling; Charlie Conefrey, Director of Athletics, Health and Wellness; Krista Finke, new Director of STEM, Pre-K–12; Amy Heuton, new Director of Literacy and English Language Arts; Hannah Feintuch and Carmen Livesay, Directors of Multilingual Education; and Gerard Tannetta, Director of Social Studies and Visual and Performing Arts. The Superintendent noted that these directors, along with the program managers and principals, completed extensive work over the summer to prepare staff and schools for the opening of the year and expressed appreciation for their efforts.

More than 60 new educators joined the district for the first day of school, and nearly every position had been filled. At the time of the report, only two positions remained to be filled, with qualified staff members providing short-term coverage while the district continued its recruitment efforts. The Superintendent thanked Assistant Superintendent for Human Resources Sarah McLaughlin and HR Coordinator Lauren Kustka for their extensive work in recruitment, processing, onboarding, and welcoming new employees to the district.

The Superintendent provided an update on district enrollment, noting that current enrollment was approximately 340 students below the comparable enrollment figure from the previous year at the end of August. These figures are preliminary and may change before the October 1 census date, noting that enrollment increased between the comparable date in the previous year and

October 1. Current enrollment appeared to be slightly lower across several K–8 schools and significantly lower at the high school.

To conclude, the Superintendent provided an update regarding technology changes, particularly the implementation of GoGuardian and restrictions related to YouTube access on district devices. GoGuardian is being used to help educators monitor student Chromebook activity, ensure that students are accessing appropriate educational websites, reduce distractions, and support student safety. The Superintendent reported that early feedback from educators has been positive, while acknowledging that staff will continue learning how to use the platform effectively. The district will continue monitoring these technology controls and addressing attempts to circumvent the restrictions. The Superintendent emphasized that the goal is to ensure students receive the educational benefits of technology while minimizing distractions and protecting student privacy.

Ms. Hortie asked for clarification about how teachers would be able to use video resources such as TED Talks in classroom instruction under the district's new technology restrictions. The Superintendent clarified that teachers will be able to use GoGuardian to permit students to access a specific instructional video or designated website without providing unrestricted access to the broader platform. Teachers may also create a designated "scene" within GoGuardian that allows students to access only the websites necessary for a particular lesson while blocking other sites. These permissions are tied to a specific time window and will automatically close at the conclusion of the designated lesson.

Ms. Spadafora asked for clarification regarding the remaining vacancies reported by the Superintendent, specifically whether the figures included all English as a Second Language (ESL) and Special Education (SPED) positions or only classroom teaching positions. The Superintendent clarified that the previously reported figure referred specifically to classroom teaching positions. A small number of Education Support Professional (ESP) positions remained pending, including an RBT position, as well as three non-classroom instructional coaching positions: one STEM coach and two Special Education coach positions.

Ms. Spadafora also raised concerns regarding the increase in the number of students placed in out-of-district special education programs. She noted that the number had increased from approximately 68 students in May 2025 to approximately 91 students at the time of the meeting, which she described as a significant increase. Assistant Superintendent Macdonald explained that the previous May figure had been unusually low because the district was awaiting several placements, which contributed to an artificially low number. The district had also experienced several student move-ins, including at least three foster children who had entered the district and were consequently included in the district's out-of-district placement enrollment figures. She further explained that several students currently receiving out-of-district services are expected to age out of the program during the school year, which will affect the numbers going forward.

Mr. Piazza asked additional questions regarding the district's enrollment decline. He asked whether the district was seeing a disproportionate loss of students at particular points in the K–12 pipeline or whether the decline was more evenly distributed throughout the district. The Superintendent stated that a more detailed analysis would be needed but noted that current ninth-grade enrollment was noticeably lower than the previous year and that kindergarten enrollment was also somewhat lower, with kindergarten enrollment currently below 400 students.

The Superintendent reported that new students continue to enroll through the district's Welcome Center and that approximately 140 additional students were pending enrollment at the time of the meeting because they were awaiting documentation, residency verification, vaccination records, or other requirements needed to finalize enrollment. The administration indicated that these pending enrollments could significantly increase the district's current enrollment figures but emphasized that the district would continue monitoring enrollment closely as the October 1 census date approached.

Ms. Rose-Zeiberg asked whether the district could determine why students were not returning to the district and whether enrollment declines were attributable to families moving out of Malden, enrolling their children in private schools, choosing charter schools, or other circumstances. The Superintendent further clarified that much of the current enrollment decline appeared to be attributable not simply to students leaving the district, but to fewer new students arriving to replace students who naturally leave the district each year because of family moves and other circumstances. The Superintendent agreed to provide the committee with the available anecdotal information regarding student departures and transitions to help provide additional context for the enrollment decline.

Subcommittee Reports and Discussions

Policy Subcommittee - Ms. Rose-Zeiberg

Ms. Rose-Zeiberg reported that the Policy Subcommittee most recently met on August 27th to review and revise the district's Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan. The Chair thanked Assistant Superintendent MacDonald for her extensive work updating the policy and coordinating legal review. The subcommittee compared the district's existing policy with the MASC model policy and identified several areas requiring updates, including language addressing cyberbullying and deepfakes. The revised language was reviewed and approved by legal counsel. Members also agreed that the policy is necessarily lengthy and contains significant legal language, making it difficult for families and students to use. To address this concern, Tess Meagher, Communications Coordinator, developed a user-friendly FAQ that will accompany the policy once approved, providing families with accessible answers and allowing for easier updates as new issues arise. The subcommittee voted to forward the revised policy to the full

School Committee for consideration and adoption. Members noted that while the policy can be amended in the future as needed, having a current and legally appropriate policy in place is important for practical and legal reasons.

A committee member asked whether the bullying prevention policy is required to be updated every two years and whether a student-friendly version could also be made available. The Chair and administration explained that the policy is required by the state and contains substantial legal language that closely follows state requirements. The FAQ was therefore developed to provide a more accessible explanation for families, with consideration given to making the information useful for students as well.

Technology Subcommittee - Mr. Bernard

Mr. Bernard then provided an update on the Technology Subcommittee. He reported that all members were able to participate in the most recent meeting, which included discussion of GoGuardian, YouTube access, and issues raised by the district's AI Working Group. The subcommittee received a thorough presentation regarding artificial intelligence. No policy recommendations were presented and no votes were planned at this time. Mr. Bernard encouraged committee members to review the materials and engage community members who may feel they were not included in previous AI discussions. He expressed appreciation to Mark Racine, Dr. Sippel, and the members of the AI Working Group for their work and for engaging in difficult and thoughtful discussions about developing appropriate AI policies. He noted that the district is addressing a relatively new area in which few other municipalities have established policies and emphasized the importance of developing thoughtful policies as the district moves forward.

Motions and Resolutions

2025/2026 Transfer of Funds According to Policy DBJ - Ms. Spadafora

Ms. Spadafora noted that the purpose was primarily to comply with existing policy. Mr. Piazza identified potentially confusing/duplicative language in the policy's description of transfers, which the committee agreed should be addressed during upcoming policy work. Ms. Spadafora made a motion to approve the 2025/2026 transfer of funds. Mr. Bernard seconded the motion and so it was VOTED. The motion passed unanimously.

Policy KF (Use of School Facilities) Rental Fee Review - Ms. Spadafora

The committee wanted to verify that organizations using school facilities are being charged appropriately and that required liability insurance is consistently collected. Assistant Superintendent of Finance and Operations, Toni Mertz confirmed that renters currently must provide insurance naming the City of Malden and Malden Public Schools as additionally insured. Ms. Spadafora made a motion to send Policy KF to Policy subcommittee for a joint policy and

finance subcommittee review. Ms. Rose-Zeiberg seconded the motion and so it was VOTED. The motion passed unanimously.

Policy JFAA: Residency Policy Audit - Ms. Spadafora

Members supported examining residency compliance but emphasized that the audit should avoid unnecessarily intrusive or heavy-handed practices. Privacy, secure handling of identification/residency information, use of district personnel, and adherence to the existing residency-verification policy were specifically raised. Ms. Spadafora made a motion for the Superintendent to develop a proposal for a comprehensive internal audit for the Committee's review. Ms. Hortie seconded the motion and so it was VOTED. The motion passed unanimously.

Review of Policy JA-G: Access to Education, Student Privacy, and Immigration

Enforcement - Ms. Rose-Zeiberg

Superintendent Sippel shared that the district already had a related policy and had begun working with legal counsel to crosswalk it against the new state requirements. Ms. Rose-Zeiberg made a motion to send Policy JA-G to policy subcommittee to review and finalize. Mr. Bernard seconded the motion and so it was VOTED. The motion passed unanimously.

Ms. Spadafora made a motion to suspend docket rules to vote on the Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan. Mr. Bernard seconded the motion and so it was VOTED. The motion passed unanimously.

Approval of the revised Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan - Ms. Rose-Zeiberg

Ms. Rose-Zeiberg made a motion to approve the revised Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan. Mr. Bernard seconded the motion and so it was VOTED. The motion passed unanimously.

Melvin Klayman Trust Donation to Malden Public Schools/Melvin Klayman Trust Scholarship Fund - Ms. Spadafora

Ms. Spadafora recognized the connection of the Klayman family to Malden and education. The \$50,000 scholarship portion is intended to support approximately \$2,000 annual awards over roughly 25 years, subject to investment/interest and administration of the fund. Ms. Spadafora made a motion to accept the Melvin Klayman Trust Donation and Trust Scholarship Fund to Malden Public Schools. Mr. McCarthy 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 7:41 p.m. 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.

The committee reconvened to regular session at 8:33

Mr. Drummey made a motion to adjourn at 8:35 p.m. Ms. Hortie seconded the motion and so it was VOTED. The motion passed unanimously.

Ariana Langston

Ariana Langston, Clerk