AMESBURY SCHOOL COMMITTEE

SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES

August 10, 2026

Present were Ian Gillis, Abigail Jurist Levy, Deb Manseau, Greg Noyes. Brock Omohundro, Brooke Woodsom

A recording of this meeting can be viewed here:
https://cloud.castus.tv/vod/amesbury/video/6a8c76b038f4f60002fd1ede?page=HOME

I. Call to Order/Mission Statement/Pledge of Allegiance – Mr. Omohundro read the mission statement and led the committee in the pledge.

II. Comments by Visitors & Delegations (2:18)

- Matt Lipson, Main Street - resident, parent, and mental health therapist, addressed the committee regarding the district's policies on timeout, seclusion, and physical restraint. Expressing concern over the potential traumatic impacts of isolation on vulnerable students and citing his child's behavioral anxiety around closed rooms, he urged the committee to review district policies, staff training, transparency, and reporting practices. He called for trauma-informed strategies to prevent unnecessary student isolation and ensure parents are consistently informed of interventions.
- Hillary Fraize, Main Street - Co-Chair of the Amesbury Special Education Parent Advisory Council (SEPAC), addressed the committee regarding Policy JKAA (Physical Restraint and Seclusion). Drawing comparisons to Amherst Public Schools' collaborative implementation model, she voiced concern that SEPAC's recommendations were omitted following 15–20 hours of meetings with administration. She highlighted a lack of district-wide, trauma-informed practices and consistent social-emotional learning, and urged the committee to remain actively involved post-vote to ensure transparency, review upcoming professional development, and mandate meaningful, ongoing SEPAC collaboration.
- Heather Lull, Macy Street - resident and Co-Chair of the Special Education Parent Advisory Council (SEPAC), addressed the committee regarding Policy JKAA. She urged the committee to delay voting on the draft, stating it fails to fully comply with DESE updates. She highlighted missing requirements—including trauma-informed protections, prohibitions on locked timeout, clear definitions, medical/psychological contraindications, and oversight structures—and called for easily accessible parent procedures and comprehensive, trauma-informed professional development for all staff.

III. Communications & Reports (12:19)

A. Educational Leadership

1. Superintendent's Report — Stephen Zadravec

- Transition & Community Engagement: The Superintendent reported completing one-on-one entry meetings over the past month with stakeholders to identify district strengths, opportunities, and partnerships, with plans to synthesize findings into a comprehensive report in the fall. An upcoming meeting with SEPAC is scheduled for this week.
- Leadership Retreat & Training: The upcoming two-day administrative leadership retreat will focus on training regarding restraint and seclusion policies and laws to prepare for district-wide staff rollout. The retreat will also focus on integrating the "Vision of a Graduate" framework into school goals and communications.
- Staffing Update: Hiring for the upcoming school year remains on track, with active recruitment ongoing for remaining vacancies. Specific details and new hire lists were provided via a link in the written report.
- Athletic Projects & Coaching Hires: Turf installation on the baseball/field hockey field was recently completed, with potential fall schedule disruptions and field workarounds communicated to families by Athletic Director Craig Genualdo. New coaching hires were announced for field hockey, soccer, and cheerleading.
- Childcare Initiative Update: Discussions regarding the proposed childcare facility remain ongoing. District leadership is scheduled to meet with the YMCA (the sole RFP bidder) next week to review facility assessment costs for the proposed middle school location. Given that the facility will not open this fall, the district is taking additional time to evaluate whether the middle school is the optimal site before presenting a final proposal to the committee for a vote.
- Mr. Noyes asked the athletic director to generate the cost for all the various workarounds and how that is going to be absorbed by the budget for discussion at the next Finance and Facilities Subcommittee meeting.

B. Student Advisory Council

- Cell Phone Policy Rollout: Student Representative Brooke Woodsom reported meeting with AHS Principal Dr. Ritchie to plan the council's involvement in rolling out the high school's upcoming "bell-to-bell," phone-free policy for the fall.
- Committee Inquiries & Discussion:
    - Mr. Noyes asked if the representative could explain DESE's recommended "bell-to-bell" cell phone policy. Ms. Woodsom noted she was not fully versed in the exact policy details but confirmed the high school will be a phone-free zone throughout the school day.
    - Dr. Zadravec added that while state legislation remains pending, the high school, Innovation High School, and middle school will

maintain cell phone-free expectations during the school day, with parent forums being planned.
    - Dr. Jurist Levy asked whether the new regulations would change how the district enforces its existing cell phone policy. Dr. Zadravec confirmed that enforcement protocols will change—requiring greater ownership of the process from start to end of the day—and offered to have Dr. Ritchie provide detailed specifics to the committee.
- Upcoming Council Activities: The Student Advisory Council plans to host an open meeting for students during the first week of school to gather feedback.
    - Mr. Omohundro asked how the committee could best support the council. Ms. Woodsom shared that the council is currently in the preparation phase and will bring specific needs to the committee once student input is gathered in the fall.

C. Whittier Tech Representative Report – Representative was absent, report was not provided

D. SEPAC Report

1. **SEPAC Leadership & Operations**: Co-Chair Hillary Fraize announced the board leadership roster: Hillary Fraize and Heather Lull as Co-Chairs, Katie Jordan as Secretary, and Matt Lipson as Interim Fourth Board Member. Due to upcoming venue policy changes restricting outside groups at the Costello Transportation Center after December, SEPAC is seeking an accessible new location for its monthly general meetings (held on the third Wednesday of each month at 6:30 PM).
2. **Upcoming Workshops & District Collaboration:**
    1. Workshop: A mental health resources workshop with the Justice Resource Institute is scheduled for August 19 (6:30–8:00 PM) at the Costello Transportation Center and virtually.
    2. Superintendent & Administration Meetings: SEPAC leadership is scheduled to meet with Dr. Zadravec on August 13 and is working to re-establish ongoing monthly collaborative meetings with Martha Robinson and Heather Eigen.
3. **Caregiver Survey Results & District Concerns**: Board members discussed key takeaways from the recent SEPAC caregiver survey provided to the committee, emphasizing concerns regarding trust, transparency, rising legal and out-of-district placement costs, and the need for meaningful parent input.
4. **Policy JKAA & Professional Development Concerns:**
    1. Ms. Fraize, Ms. Lull, and Mr. Lipson urged the committee to adopt MASC's comprehensive policy model rather than a bare-minimum legal draft, calling for trauma-informed approaches, eventual elimination of seclusion, and mandatory SEPAC involvement in policy and procedural development.
    2. Superintendent Response & Discussion: Dr. Zadravec clarified that administrative leadership is undergoing legal training regarding the

new law and that district leadership has developed a professional development calendar front-loaded for the start of the school year.

5. **Committee Remarks**: Mr. Noyes thanked SEPAC for providing the comprehensive survey data. Mr. Gillis expressed concern over survey findings regarding parent legal expenses and inquired about planned professional development. Dr. Manseau thanked SEPAC for establishing a baseline survey to measure and improve family engagement and trust moving forward.

E. Subcommittees

1. **Finance & Facilities:** Committee Chair Brock Omohundro announced that the subcommittee will regularly meet one hour prior to the first School Committee meeting of each month at the high school. Due to a schedule conflict, the August meeting was set for August 24 at 6:00 PM.
2. **Curriculum, Inclusion, & Community Engagement:** Meetings are scheduled for the second Tuesday of each month from 6:30 PM to 7:30 PM at the high school. The subcommittee is actively setting goals and inviting community input.
3. **Policy, Personnel, & Strategy:** Negotiations Update: Dr. Abigail Jurist Levy reported that teacher union negotiations are ongoing, with the last meeting held on July 6 and additional sessions being scheduled for September. (Policy updates regarding JKAA were deferred to a later agenda item.)
4. **Joint Education:** Athletic Fields Discussion: Dr. Jurist Levy reported on the August 6 Joint Ed meeting focusing on district athletic fields and building use, featuring an update from municipal/district leadership reviewing field projects over the past seven years. The next meeting is scheduled for October 22.
    1. Baseball Field Project & Committee Questions:
        a. Mr. Noyes raised concerns regarding the delayed completion, surface flatness, specification oversight, and financial leverage for the baseball field project.
        b. Dr. Zadravec and Dr. Jurist Levy noted that while project completion is approaching, local leadership—including the Superintendent and Acting Director of Finance and Operations Daniel Grayton—along with contract managers and industry experts, will verify that all bid specifications are satisfied before final sign-off and payment releases.

F. Requests of Committee

1. Mr. Noyes requested Craig Genualdo or Jim McCarthy attend a meeting to provide updates on the athletics fields.
2. Dr. Jurist Levy requested a timeline for the regionalization report.
3. Mr. Omohundro requested a visit from Chartwells (our food services provider).
4. Dr. Jurist Levy introduced a framework provided by MASC (Massachusetts Association of School Committees) outlining core school committee responsibilities and operations. She proposed dedicating time at an upcoming meeting to review these guidelines to refine committee norms, align working habits with the new leadership team, and incorporate updated practices into the onboarding manual for new members.

5. Mr. Noyes recommended inviting School Council representatives to the first October meeting to share their school improvement priorities and budget needs early in the fiscal planning process, noting that engaging councils ahead of the district's November budget launch would foster a more proactive approach.

IIII: New Business (57:49)

6. SY 2026-2027 School Handbooks (Review)
    1. Handbook Consolidation & Review Process: Dr. Deb Manseau presented the draft student handbooks, explaining that administrative leadership is working to align policies (such as attendance and dress codes) across all district schools to foster consistency rather than siloed policies.
    2. Timeline & Feedback:
        a. Dr. Zadravec and Dr. Manseau noted that the administrative leadership team will review initial feedback during their upcoming retreat.
        b. Committee Discussion: Committee Chair Brock Omohundro noted that the second reading and vote are targeted for August 24. To meet this deadline, Dr. Zadravec requested that committee members submit any additional feedback within five days (by the following Monday) so revised drafts can be provided a week prior to the vote. Mr. Omohundro reminded members to send feedback via email to maintain compliance with Open Meeting Law.
7. Vote to surplus 3 district vans
    1. Interim Director of Finance and Operations Daniel Grayton requested committee approval to declare three district vans as surplus property. He reported that the vehicles are no longer roadworthy or repairable, and surplussing them will allow the district to send them to scrap and remove them from district insurance coverage. *Mr. Noyes motioned to surplus the vans, seconded by Mr. Gillis. Passed unanimously.*
8. Second read: JKAA-TIME-OUT, SECLUSION, AND PHYSICAL RESTRAINT OF STUDENTS. (Vote expected)
    1. Dr. Abigail Jurist Levy detailed revisions made to Policy JKAA following its first reading, including removing the word "verbal" prior to "directives," setting strict parent notification timelines (same-day notification where possible, no later than 24 hours, and written notice within three days), requiring administrative approval for timeouts/seclusions exceeding 30 minutes, and mandating annual procedural reviews posted on the district website and embedded in student handbooks. She explained that after

consulting both MASC and district legal counsel, the committee chose a streamlined policy directing administration to adhere to state law rather than embedding dynamic procedures directly into board policy, which can cause compliance delays when state rules are updated and/or revised.
Mr. Noyes motioned to approve JKAA, seconded by Dr. Manseau. Opened up to discussion.
Director of Student Services Martha Robinson outlined operational implementation, including completed physical space audits of potential timeout rooms across all schools, mandatory weekly principal inspections, and safety care de-escalation protocols. She detailed a comprehensive, trauma-informed professional development plan created with Dr. Alex Hirschberg and Mass Partnerships for Youth, featuring 20 hours of role-specific, asynchronous training to be launched September 22 alongside specialized counseling consultation. Mr. Noyes affirmed that omitting verbatim legal text does not lessen compliance expectations, while Mr. Omohundro emphasized the need for transparent, accessible procedures to rebuild community trust.
Following discussion, JKAA passed unanimously.

Consent Agenda (1:31:53)

G. *Mr. Gillis motioned to approve the minutes from April 27, seconded by Dr. Manseau. Passed unanimously.*
H. *Mr. Noyes motioned to approve the warrants by fiscal year, seconded by Dr. Jurist Levy. Passed unanimously.*
Mr. Noyes motioned to approve the following warrants: July 9 (SY26) $393,773.99, July 15 (SY26) $58,912.98; seconded by Mr. Gillis. Mr. Noyes confirmed that this would close out FY26. *Passed unanimously.*
Mr. Noyes motioned to approve the following warrants: July 15 (SY27) $2,324.43, July 23 (SY27) $130,989.06, July 30 (SY27) $149,113.66; seconded by Mr. Gillis. Passed unanimously.
I. *Mr. Noyes motioned to accept the following gifts: $2,000.00 from the Newburyport Bank Charitable Foundation for the Windrush Therapeutic Riding Program, $3,000.00 from the Institution for Savings Charitable Foundation for the Windrush Therapeutic Riding Program; seconded by Dr. Manseau. Passed unanimously.*

Mr. Noyes moved to adjourn, seconded by Mr. Gillis. Passed unanimously.

The next regular meeting of the School Committee will be held on Monday August 24, 2026, at 7pm.