AMESBURY SCHOOL COMMITTEE

SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES

September 14, 2026

Present were Mayor Kassandra Gove, Ian Gillis, Chris Hunt, 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/6aad9a48b35c16000217e8be?page=HOME

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

II. Comments by Visitors & Delegations (1:24)

- Heather Lull, Macy Street - Addressed the committee alongside her son, Brady, to raise serious concerns regarding the management of special education services by the Office of Student Services. Ms. Lull stated that after she rejected her son's proposed IEP and N1 form in June due to omitted progress data, district administrators and legal counsel relied on legal maneuvering rather than collaborative process. Quoting internal emails obtained via public records requests involving Director of Student Services Martha Robinson, Assistant Director Heather Eigen, and district counsel Michael Joyce, she alleged that the district intentionally "slow walked" an Independent Educational Evaluation (IEE) request from June 23, predetermined placement changes outside of the IEP team without parental input, and declined requests to explore therapeutic options. Asserting that these actions violated IDEA regulations and denied her son a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) while his engagement deteriorated, Ms. Lull requested three specific actions: a formal investigation into the conduct revealed in the internal emails, a review of leadership within the Office of Student Services, and a firm commitment that future special education decisions take place transparently at the IEP table rather than through private communications.
- Hillary Fraize, Main Street - Addressed the committee to advocate for swift leadership changes, noting that public trust in the district is eroding. While expressing optimism regarding Dr. Zadravec's transparency and collaborative work with SEPAC, she criticized the district's historically reactive posture, high attorney fees, and defensive communication style during parent listening sessions. Drawing from personal experiences with negative administrative communications and insensitive staff comments, she warned

that unsupportive practices are driving families to seek out-of-district placements, while pointing to the collaborative culture at the Innovation Academy as a positive model for restoring parent relationships.

III. Communications & Reports (7:45)

A. Educational Leadership

1. Superintendent's Report: Dr. Zadravec presented his report, confirming a successful and fully operational start to the school year featuring opening-week activities such as a joint Fun Run for Shay and Cashman Elementary students. He shared the office's inaugural newsletter—which will feature student work and Vision of the Graduate milestones—alongside an updated staffing report indicating hiring has stabilized. As part of his entry plan, Dr. Zadravec announced upcoming student focus groups to gather feedback on district opportunities, highlighted an engineering and chemistry project grant as an exemplar of hands-on learning, and outlined plans to establish transparent, collaborative goals with SEPAC following a recent survey review meeting.

B. Student Advisory Council: SAC representative Brooke Woodsom delivered the student report, highlighting the successful rollout of the high school's new bell-to-bell phone policy alongside upcoming school events and communication initiatives. Under the new routine, students place their devices in numbered classroom boxes during an initial six-minute homebase block to verify attendance, retrieving them only at the end of the day; medical exceptions are accommodated with phones kept stowed in bags. Ms. Woodsom noted that the policy has already positively impacted school culture, fostering livelier face-to-face interaction at lunch and greater academic focus during WIN ("What I Need") periods. Dr. Zadravec added that grant funds from the Attorney General's office are being pursued to back-fund classroom storage equipment. Additionally, SAC is launching monthly meetings with Principal Dr. Ricci, exploring the return of morning announcements to keep students informed without phones, hosting a Student Activities Fair for underclassmen, and planning community events including the late-October "Monster Bash" and Winter Carnival.

C. Whittier Tech Representative Report - No attendee to report.

D. SEPAC Report: SEPAC representatives Ms. Fraize and Katie Jordan delivered the committee report, detailing recent family workshops, organizational updates, and key special education advocacy efforts. On August 19, SEPAC hosted a workshop with the Justice Resource Institute (JRI) regarding wraparound behavioral health resources and referral systems, which was attended by Superintendent Dr. Zadravec and Innovation Academy Principal Evan Walsh. Looking ahead to their September 17 general meeting at the Costello Center, SEPAC announced plans to outline annual priorities and restart parent support groups, while noting that the Costello Center will no longer be available for rentals, requiring a new meeting location. To foster stronger collaboration, SEPAC

requested a joint meeting with Mayor Gove, Mr. Omohundro, and Dr. Zadravec to discuss expanding SEPAC's formal role in district governance, such as establishing a dedicated School Committee liaison or non-voting advisory seats on subcommittees.

Turning to safety and policy concerns, SEPAC shared observations from a recent walkthrough of Cashman Elementary's seclusion room and classroom calming areas. Ms. Fraize expressed concern over sound transmission in Cashman's open-concept layout and noted a lack of wall or floor padding to protect dysregulated students. Crucially, SEPAC highlighted a potential compliance gap under Policy JKAA regarding parental consent for seclusion, reporting that elementary administrators did not yet have standardized consent forms or a clear protocol in place. Dr. Zadravec clarified that the district intends to handle parental consent on an individualized, case-by-case basis rather than issuing blanket forms to all families, and committed to providing the documentation to SEPAC. Mayor Gove confirmed that leadership would follow up with building principals and schedule the requested joint leadership meeting.

Concluding the report, Ms. Jordan urged the district to proactively align with DESE's three-year trajectory toward becoming seclusion-free. SEPAC plans to meet with elementary principals to discuss current Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) and restorative practices, emphasizing that true progress requires district-wide, trauma-informed training for all staff—including teachers, paraprofessionals, cafeteria workers, and bus drivers. By focusing on root causes, co-regulation, and early support, SEPAC emphasized that the district can reduce reliance on exclusionary measures and rebuild essential trust with families.

E. Subcommittees

1. Finance & Facilities: Chair Omohundro reviewed FY26 financial closeout activities, noting that prior-year warrants are up for School Committee review and pending City Council approval. Across the district, facility improvements are moving forward, beginning at Shay and Cashman Elementary Schools where requests for estimates to re-stripe the parking lots have been issued, targeting work for Thanksgiving break or summer to prevent operational disruptions. At Amesbury Middle School, curb painting is complete, 45 new campus signs have been ordered, and technical repairs to the office air conditioning unit are scheduled. At Amesbury High School, front-entrance concrete work is finished, funding is secured to repair tennis court cracking, and the baseball field renovation project is entering its final punch-list review.
2. Curriculum, Inclusion, & Community Engagement: Mr. Omohundro outlined efforts to expand public engagement and district transparency through enhanced social media communication and community feedback initiatives. The subcommittee is establishing three presentation dates for the Spotlight Award to recognize outstanding contributions from staff, administration, and community members throughout the year. Additionally, in coordination with Director of

Curriculum Chris Heath, the subcommittee plans to host data-focused public presentations covering MAP, DIBELS, and MCAS metrics to analyze student achievement alongside attendance and retention trends, ensuring Amesbury Public Schools remain the primary choice for local families.

3. Policy, Personnel, & Strategy: Chair Dr. Jurist Levy, alongside Dr. Manseau, introduced a draft tracking tool designed to align subcommittee tasks directly with broader School Committee goals. On leadership and strategy, the subcommittee plans to revise the new member guide, attend the annual MASC conference, and review the long-range planning report in October to inform early budget planning. Regarding policy review and compliance, the committee conducted a first reading of a draft policy aligning with the newly enacted Massachusetts Protect Act, which restricts civil and federal immigration enforcement on school grounds during operating hours without a judicial warrant or court order. The subcommittee also recommended formally removing out-of-date regulations (JKAA-R) from the online manual while maintaining current seclusion guidelines, while scheduling future policy reviews for Chemical Use in November — incorporating feedback from the Student Advisory Council and Site Councils — and a comprehensive audit of civil rights and athletic policies in December. Finally, leadership confirmed that collective bargaining dates are being scheduled, with an executive session planned for the next meeting to update the full committee.

4. Joint Education: Dr. Jurist Levy reported that the Joint Education Subcommittee has not convened since its last meeting in August, with the next session scheduled for October 22.

F. Requests of Committee - none

IV. New Business (52:08)

1.Middle School Field Trip Approval - 8th Grade Trip

Eighth-grade civics teachers Tia and Joe Costello presented the annual eighth-grade overnight field trip to Boston, marking the fourth year of the program. Designed to lock in early transportation rates and maintain a cost-effective schedule, the two-day itinerary combines civics, state history, and social activities. Key highlights include a guided Freedom Trail walking tour, a visit to the State House to meet local legislators and participate in mock governance, a Boston Harbor cruise, an escape room activity, and visits to Fenway Park and the USS Constitution Museum. Administrators evaluated removing the overnight stay to reduce costs, but determined the minimal $79 savings did not justify eliminating a landmark middle school experience.

To support equitable access, the cost structure operates on a sliding scale based on participation, supplemented by student-led fundraisers including a Flatbread pizza night on October 6 and a holiday wreath sale earning $5 per unit toward individual balances.

Additional proceeds feed into a tuition assistance fund, complemented by local community sponsors such as Greenstone Gives to ensure financial hardship does not prevent any student from attending. For students remaining at school, staff have planned engaging local activities, including courtyard projects, history walks to the Macy Colby House, a visit to Alliance Park, and a group cookout.
Mr. Gillis motioned to approve, seconded by Dr. Jurist Levy. Passed unanimously.

2. Middle School Field Trip Approval - 6th Grade Camp Bournedale Trip

Mark Rinaldi presented the annual sixth-grade overnight trip to Camp Borndale in Plymouth, Massachusetts, a district tradition running continuously since the early 1990s. Scheduled for October 21–23, the three-day, two-night excursion serves approximately 140 sixth-grade students. Anchored in hands-on science and team building, the itinerary features:

- Marsh & Beach Ecology: Marine scavenger hunts and tide-pooling via dedicated bus transport to the coast.
- Marine Lab: Pond-water microscopy, aquatic ecosystems, and interactive shark dissections.
- Rocketry: Design and dynamic launching of pneumatic and engine-powered rockets.
- Project Adventure & Recreation: Ropes courses, outdoor team-building challenges, dodgeball, court sports, and evening entertainment including a live reptile showcase.

The all-inclusive cost is $290 per student, covering all meals, cabin lodging, activities, and charter bus transportation. To offset costs and ensure full accessibility, students participate in an online Meadow Farms fundraiser yielding 40%–50% direct profit margins. Additional tuition support is provided through local organizations — including Greenstone Gives, Amesbury Youth, Jordan Shay, and AEFI — and an existing district scholarship fund, ensuring no student is excluded due to financial need.

For the roughly 20 students remaining at school, staff coordinate an enriching alternative schedule rather than standard coursework. Activities include off-site workshops at Code & Circuit, lunch at Flatbread, interactive presentations by Curious Creatures, chess tournaments, and outdoor games.
Mr. Omohundro motioned to approve, seconded by Mr. Noyes. Passed unanimously.

3.Policy Review: INTERACTING WITH LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICERS ENGAGED IN CIVIL LAW ENFORCEMENT (PROTECT ACT) (First Read)

The School Committee conducted a first reading of the proposed policy titled Interacting with Law Enforcement Officers Engaged in Civil Law Enforcement, introduced in response to the state's newly enacted Protect Act.

Mayor Gove and Superintendent Dr. Zadravec clarified that while the state mandated swift adoption, district operations are already compliant with the law's core requirements, such as requiring a judicial warrant before permitting civil or federal immigration enforcement on school grounds. Mayor Gove noted that the primary update in the policy provides specific operational protocols for front-office staff and secretaries, designating clear points of contact so administrators—rather than front desk personnel—handle law enforcement interactions and legal consultation.

Committee members discussed public engagement strategies ahead of the second reading and formal vote, with suggestions to share the draft policy with community organizations like Amesbury Cares (Racial and Social Justice Group) and distribute the finalized guidelines to district families.

V. Consent Agenda

A. *Dr. Jurist Levy motioned to approve the following minutes: May 4 & May 18; seconded by Dr. Manseau. Vote: 5 Yes, 2 No (Gillis, Noyes)*

B. *Dr. Jurist Levy motioned to approve the following warrants: May 28 $382,546.78; June 25 $483,307.13; July 10 Payroll $580,234.51; July 24 Payroll $630,005.41; August 7 Payroll $621,517.99; September 10 $437,864.80; seconded by Dr. Manseau. Passed unanimously.*

C. *Mr. Noyes motioned to accept the following gifts: Phone Free School Grant from the Attorney General's Office for $15,600; Grant to support Amesbury Water Quality REDHAWK from Toshiba for $8,946; Earmarked Funds for Athletics from Senator Finegold's office for $35,000; Earmarked Funds for 3rd Grade Chromebooks from Senator Finegold's office for $49,000; seconded by Mr. Hunt. Passed unanimously.*

Dr. Jurist Levy moved to adjourn, seconded by Mr. Gillis. Passed unanimously.

The next regular meeting of the School Committee will be held on Monday September 28, 2026 at 7pm.