Meeker and Wright Special Education Cooperative
720 9th Ave, Howard Lake, MN 55349
Joint Powers Board Meeting
Tuesday, September 22, 2026 - 5:30 pm
Meeting Minutes - *Official*

Present:	Gena Jacobson, Jessica Johnson, Cindy Miller, Kelsey Puncochar, Jen Rasset
Absent:	Sarah Baker, Alex Carlson
Others Present:	Kim Geurts, Melissa Hanson, Laura Holmquist, Kate Ryan

I. Call to Order/ Board Roll Call

The Regular meeting was called to order at 5:33 pm

A roll call was conducted:
Sarah Baker: Absent
Alex Carlson: Absent
Gena Jacobson: Present
Jessica Johnson: Present
Cindy Miller: Present
Kelsey Puncochar: Present
Jen Rasset: Present

A quorum of five board members was established.

II. Pledge of Allegiance

The board recited the Pledge of Allegiance.

III. Approval of Meeting Agenda

A motion to approve the agenda as presented was made by Kelsey Puncochar and seconded by Gena Jacobson. Motion carried unanimously.

IV. Consent Agenda

A motion to approve the consent agenda was made by Gena Jacobson and seconded by Kelsey Puncochar. The board unanimously approved the consent agenda which included:

- Minutes of Previous Board Meeting
- Bills for payment and other financial reports as attached
- Personnel Items
    - Recommendations for Employment
        - Mary Jo Vetsch, 1.0 Floating Paraprofessional, Effective September 1, 2026
    - Contract Changes/Approvals/Position Changes
        - Lane Change: Cassandra Drusch, Special Education Teacher, Trek, moving from BA+40/MA to BA+50/MA+10, Effective August 24, 2026
        - Reinstatement: Annette Hystad, 1.0 FTE Special Education Teacher, STEP, Effective August 24, 2026

- Contract Items
  - Other Contracts
    - FY27 HLWW Custodial Services Contract

V. Acknowledgements

A. School Board Recognition Month

Melissa Hanson, Executive Director, MAWSECO formally recognized the members of the Joint Powers Board of Directors in honor of School Board Recognition Month, expressing sincere appreciation for their leadership, committee service, thoughtful decision-making, and ongoing commitment to student success across member districts.

VI. Informational Items

A. Executive Director Report

Start of the School Year - MAWSECO Programs Census Information
MAWSECO Programs opened the 2026–2027 school year with a typical initial student census totaling 210 students—the highest overall start in six years—with numbers expected to grow further as new referrals and placements occur throughout the year. Total enrollment was primarily driven by Birth-3 ECSE reaching 100 students and STEP surging to 26, supported by steady counts across Village Ranch (27), Cornerstones (16), Wings (14), Sholund (9), Trek (7), and Journeys (7). In contrast, Eastern Wright experienced an anticipated enrollment drop to 4 students, prompting a proactive staffing reduction to one special education teacher to align with the lower student count.

MN Raises Age of Delinquency to 13 - Impacting MAWSECO's VRAP Program
Effective August 1, Minnesota raised its minimum age of juvenile delinquency from 10 to 13, reclassifying younger youth as Children in Need of Protection or Services served primarily through child welfare, limiting secure detention to 24 hours, and allowing prompt returns to school. Following this policy shift, Village Ranch Inc. in Cokato expanded its residential intake to accept children as young as age 10. This would result in a notable shift for MAWSECO's Village Ranch Alternative Program (VRAP), which historically catered to older students. To prepare for this younger demographic, all VRAP teaching staff have obtained PELSB licensing for ages 10 and up, and Administrator Laura is developing an alternative instructional schedule to seamlessly accommodate potential enrollments in the 10–13 age range.

MDE Clarification on ABA & EIDBI
New Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) guidance clarifies that Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) and Early Intensive Developmental and Behavioral Intervention (EIDBI) qualify as "Care and Treatment" placements only when a school district and parents mutually agree to the designation. Furthermore, because ABA is not legally classified as a medical service, counseling, or mental health treatment, excusing students for daytime ABA therapy requires careful review under Minnesota's Compulsory Attendance Law. To ensure compliance,

Director of Special Education Andrea and MAWSECO special education supervisors are identifying students leaving for ABA/EIDBI, reviewing IEP provisions regarding FAPE and transportation, and reconvening IEP teams as needed to properly address service designations under the updated state guidelines.

Special Education State Complaints
A survey by the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) and the National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE) revealed that special education written state complaints surged by nearly 46% during the 2025–26 school year, accompanied by rising counts in due process hearing requests.

Understanding the Permanent School Fund Amendment on the November 3 Ballot
On November 3, Minnesota voters will consider a constitutional amendment to modernize the payout formula for the state's $2.3 billion Permanent School Fund (PSF), which generates revenue from state trust lands to directly support public, charter, and tribal schools, including all seven MAWSECO member districts. If approved, the updated formula is expected to increase annual per-pupil funding by up to $40 per student statewide without creating new government programs or raising property, income, or sales taxes. Because passing a constitutional amendment in Minnesota requires a majority of all total voters participating in the election, leaving the question blank counts as a "No" vote, making it essential for voters to check both sides of their ballot to ensure their vote is recorded as intended.

Celebrating our Staff at the Leadership in Educational Excellence Award (LEEA) Banquet
Physical Therapist Rebecca Buttke and Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE) Teacher Jeanine Sunsten have been named the MAWSECO 2026 Leadership in Educational Excellence Award (LEEA) Staff Choice Award recipients. The LEEA recognizes outstanding teachers, consultants, related-service providers, and other certified staff for their exceptional contributions to the cooperative. Both honorees will be officially celebrated at a regional dinner banquet hosted by Resource Training and Solutions on September 30 in St. Cloud.

B. Director of Finance Report
Business Office staff finalized and sent out several billing items—including FY26 Final Purchased Service invoices, Summer Purchased Service invoices, and Spring and Summer general education tuition bills—while updating member districts' FY26 Purchased Service data. Additionally, the cooperative received $1,778,916.39 in FY26 Special Education funding from MDE following final SEDRA and MARSS data recalculations. Audit preparations are currently in full swing in anticipation of auditors being on site October 20th–23rd.

C. Program Administrator Report

Laura Holmquist, Program Administrator for the Village Ranch Alternative Program (VRAP), reported that the school entered the year fully staffed, resolving previous staffing shortages through internal role transitions into open teaching positions and the hiring of three new paraprofessionals. Current enrollment stands at 31 students, including one local foster home day student, allowing class sizes to remain at 6–7 students with both a teacher and a paraprofessional in every classroom. The daily schedule was adjusted to incorporate dedicated time for special education IEP goals alongside new electives in Psychology and Strength Training. Additionally, following a two-day August training attended by Laura and four team members, VRAP launched "The VRAP Way"—a multi-year PBIS behavioral framework grounded in tolerance—to establish strong schoolwide consistency, structured support, and positive momentum for the year ahead.

D. Policy Review [First Reading]

The following policies were brought to the board for a first reading. No action was taken.

1. Policy 202 - School Board Officers
2. Policy 208 - Development, Adoption, and Implementation of Policies
3. Policy 402 - Disability Nondiscrimination Policy
4. Policy 521 - Student Disability Nondiscrimination
5. Policy 529 - Staff Notification of Violent Behavior by Students
6. Policy 535 - Service Animals in Schools
7. Policy 706 - Acceptance of Gifts
8. Policy 709 - Student Transportation Safety
9. Policy 806 - Crisis Management Policy

E. Policy Rescission [First Reading]

The following policy was brought to the board for a first reading. No action was taken.

1. Policy 406.p - Procedures for Carrying out HIPAA Regulations

VII. Action Items

A. Old Business

1. Policy Review [Second Reading]

A motion to approve the listed policy changes was made by Kelsey Puncochar and seconded by Jen Rasset. Motion carried unanimously.

Policy 423 - Employee-Student Relationships
Policy 504 - Student Dress and Appearance
Policy 507.5 - School Resource Officers
Policy 520 - Student Surveys
Policy 524 - Internet Acceptable Use Policy

Policy 526 - Hazing Prohibition
Policy 530 - Immunization Requirements
Policy 623 - Mandatory Summer School Instruction
Policy 701 - Establishment and Adoption of School District Budget
Policy 702 - Accounting
Policy 703 - Annual Audit
Policy 704 - Development and Maintenance of an Inventory of Fixed Assets and Fixed Asset Accounting System
Policy 705 - Investments
Policy 712 - Video Surveillance Other Than on Buses
Policy 713 - Student Activity Accounting
Policy 714 - Fund Balances Policy
Policy 721 - Uniform Grant Guidance Policy Regarding Federal Revenue Sources
Policy 722 - Public Data and Data Subject Requests

B. New Business

1. **Health Insurance Plan Modifications & Aggregate Value Consent**
   A motion to approve the MOAs reflecting the unions consent regarding the Health Insurance Plan Modifications & Aggregate Values was made by Cindy Miller and seconded by Gena Jacobson. Motion carried unanimously.

2. **Resolution Accepting Donation**
   A motion to approve the Resolution accepting the donation from UnitedHealthcare was made by Cindy Miller and seconded by Jen Rasset.

   Roll Call Vote:
   Gena Jacobson - aye
   Jessica Johnson - aye
   Cindy Miller - aye
   Kelsey Puncochar - aye
   Jen Rasset - aye

   Motion carried with five votes in favor.

VIII. Future Board Meetings

A. October 20, 2026, 5:30 pm, Regular Board Meeting, MAWSECO Ed Center, Howard Lake
B. November 24, 2026, 5:30 pm, Regular Board Meeting, MAWSECO Ed Center, Howard Lake
C. December 15, 2026, 5:30 pm, Regular Board Meeting, MAWSECO Ed Center, Howard Lake

IX. Adjournment

A motion to adjourn the meeting was made by Jessica Johnson and seconded by Gena Jacobson. Motion carried unanimously. The meeting was adjourned at 6:20 pm.

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