

ANSONIA PUBLIC SCHOOLS
BOARD OF EDUCATION
AMENDED

PLACE: Robert E. Zuraw Administrative Office Building, DTL 42 Grove Street, Ansonia, CT 06401

DATE: September 16, 2026

TIME: 6:30 p.m.

MEETING CALLED TO ORDER BY: Mr. Phipps, President.

I. OPENING

A. Pledge of Allegiance

B. Roll Call – Mr. Phipps called the meeting to order and confirmed a quorum

MEMBERS OF THE BOARD	PRESENT	ABSENT	LATE
DR. STEVEN ADAMOWSKI	X		
MR. RICH BSHARA	X		
MR. DAVID KNAPP	X		
MS. BETH LABERGE	X		
STEPHANIE OCASIO-GONZALEZ		X	
MR. CHRIS PHIPPS	X		
MS. SHARON VOROSCHAK	X		
TOTAL	6	1	

Mr. Phipps asked everyone to remain standing for a moment of silence to honor the passing of Mead School teacher Jessica Holohan and Norma McLain, who served as a paraprofessional for over 20 years.

II. PUBLIC SESSION

There was no one from the public who wished to speak.

Dr. Adamowski asked to have additional items added to the agenda, specifically the approval of the final 2025–2026 budget year and the approval of the 2025–2026 fund balance. He noted that these items were not ready at the final meeting of the prior term, there was no meeting over the summer, and they now require Board approval.

Mr. Phipps asked for a motion regarding the addition to the agenda.

MOTION: To accept to request to have the items added to the agenda.

MEMBERS OF THE BOARD	MOTION	YES	NO	ABSTAIN
DR. STEVEN ADAMOWSKI	X	X		
MR. RICH BSHARA		X		
MR. DAVID KNAPP		X		
MS. BETH LABERGE		X		
STEPHANIE OCASIO-GONZALEZ				
MR. CHRIS PHIPPS		X		
MS. SHARON VOROSCHAK		X		
TOTAL		6		

III. ACTION ITEMS AND CONSIDERATION OF APPROVAL OF THE FOLLOWING ITEMS:

A. Ansonia Board of Education Special meeting minutes dated June 10, 2026, July 1, 2026 (special), and July 8, 2026 (special).

MOTION: To accept meeting minutes dated June 10, 2026, July 1, 2016 (special), and July 8, 2026 (special).

MEMBERS OF THE BOARD	MOTION	YES	NO	ABSTAIN
DR. STEVEN ADAMOWSKI		X		
MR. RICH BSHARA		X		
MR. DAVID KNAPP	X	X		
MS. BETH LABERGE		X		
STEPHANIE OCASIO-GONZALEZ				
MR. CHRIS PHIPPS		X		
MS. SHARON VOROSCHAK		X		
TOTAL		6		

B. Approval of Administrator's Contract.

Superintendent DiBacco thanked Dr. Adamowski and the members of the city administration who attended the negotiations for the administrators' contracts. He noted that the contract increase aligns with the overall state average. He informed the Board that while he wishes staff could be compensated more, it is not feasible within the city's current budget. He added that some cleanup and minor language changes were made to the document.

Dr. Adamowski agreed that the changes were minor and noted these were the last of a series of contracts providing a 3% increase to sustain personnel costs moving forward. He also thanked Ed Norman and Anne Lynch for attending the negotiations.

MOTION: To accept the approval of the Administrator's contract.

MEMBERS OF THE BOARD	MOTION	YES	NO	ABSTAIN
DR. STEVEN ADAMOWSKI		X		
MR. RICH BSHARA		X		
MR. DAVID KNAPP	X	X		
MS. BETH LABERGE		X		
STEPHANIE OCASIO-GONZALEZ				
MR. CHRIS PHIPPS		X		
MS. SHARON VOROSCHAK		X		
TOTAL		6		

C. Policy Update

1. Repeal/Replace 5010 Admission to Public School at age five.

Mr. Phipps briefed the Board on the new policies. Dr. Adamowski noted that he understood the updates and looked forward to Superintendent DiBacco's presentation on the changes. Mr. Phipps stated it is his understanding that these updates are mandated by the state, but invited Superintendent DiBacco to speak further. Superintendent DiBacco explained that leaving the current kindergarten age policy unchanged would conflict with the new state statute. The age of five is now required by law, and no waivers are being issued. Dr. Adamowski asked if the kindergarten age policy change was a legislative act and which rule was followed for current kindergarten students, noting this must be communicated clearly to parents. Superintendent DiBacco replied that districts were allowed a waiver for the current year, and starting in January, formal communication will be sent to the public and all Pre-K parents.

2. First Read Policy: 9500 Officers

Superintendent DiBacco explained that Shipman & Goodwin had previously been retained to align district policies with active practices. Due to the volume of updates, an oversight occurred regarding the election of officers and their terms. He explained that the policy is currently in direct conflict with the city charter and read a letter from the district's attorney stating that the correction should be made at the earliest opportunity. Ms. LaBerge noted that during the intensive policy update period, competing requests to add and change items may have caused confusion, leading to the error. Superintendent DiBacco and Mr. Phipps agreed, noting that organizational meetings have taken place annually for as long as they can remember. Mr. Knapp requested a language change to read "him/her" instead of "him". He then read from the charter to clarify the difference between the city charter and the new state statute. Adamowski asked exactly what was out of alignment.

Superintendent DiBacco stated that the current policy lists a member's term as four years. Ms. LaBerge reiterated that this small oversight was likely due to the massive volume of changes handled by Shipman, adding that they did an excellent job overall. Phipps suggested that if everyone was in agreement, the Board could consider this the first reading, with a final vote scheduled for next month to align with state policy. Superintendent DiBacco confirmed this serves as the first reading and noted that one additional reading is required.

D. Finalizing 2025-2026 Fiscal Year Budget (Item added to agenda)

Mr. Marriott reviewed the budget transfers necessary to finalize the year. He informed the Board that following these transfers, a balance of \$26,024 remains. He noted there are three additional items he is currently reviewing with Kim and Mike from the city administration.

Mr. Phipps complimented Erich and his team for a job well done, noting it was great to see accounts balance after being in the red for a period. Dr. Adamowski suggested that a single motion could cover both the finalization of the 2025–2026 budget and the corresponding fund transfers.

MOTION: To accept the transfer of funds as presented by Mr. Marriott, and to accept the 2025-2026 Budget

MEMBERS OF THE BOARD	MOTION	YES	NO	ABSTAIN
DR. STEVEN ADAMOWSKI	X	X		
MR. RICH BSHARA		X		
MR. DAVID KNAPP		X		
MS. BETH LABERGE		X		
STEPHANIE OCASIO-GONZALEZ				
MR. CHRIS PHIPPS		X		
MS. SHARON VOROSCHAK		X		
TOTAL		6		

Dr. Adamowski asked Mr. Marriott and Mr. Bshara for an update on audit preparations. Mr. Marriott stated that it is progressing well and he has been compiling documentation for the approximately 65 tasks requested by the auditor. The documents are posted, and he has been reconciling accounts with the city.

Dr. Adamowski observed that historically, the city has felt delayed due to the school district's timeline, and asked Mr. Marriott when his portion would be finished. Mr. Marriott responded that it depends on several variables, including any potential findings from the auditor that require attention, which cannot be predicted yet. Dr. Adamowski expressed satisfaction that the district is not currently in a position that would delay the city.

Mr. Bshara noted that some delays may occur because he is no longer employed by the city and lacks direct access to the system, making the process more time-consuming. Mr. Marriott added that they have reached out to the city regarding outstanding receivables and purchase orders, and noted that grant funds were received for the ESS filing pertaining to Adult Education.

IV. INFORMATIONAL ITEMS:

A. Assistant Superintendent's Report

Mr. Bergin welcomed the Board and hoped everyone enjoyed a great summer. He reported a very smooth and positive start to the school year, commending the entire staff for an amazing job.

The district is moving directly into the academic year focusing on collaborative and professional development. Instructional practices will feature Tier 1 intervention learning for all students within the entire classroom setting rather than small groups. Restorative practices are being expanded to the high school to ensure district-wide alignment. Additionally, the "Vision of a Graduate" framework has been developed and walks are being conducted to ensure these practices are implemented. He noted the high school has done tremendous work, and this year a significant amount of time will be spent supporting K-8 schools. School Climate Teams will be utilized for monitoring.

Mr. Bshara inquired about the newly introduced electronic hall pass system. School principals and staff present at the meeting explained its operation, agreeing it has been highly effective in managing the number of students out of classrooms and monitoring their time away. Mr. Bergin added that the rollout began at the high school and, after working through initial adjustments, has proven highly successful.

A discussion was held regarding the effectiveness of the No Cellphone Policy across all schools. Ms. LaBerge expressed her approval of the rule from a parent's perspective. Dr. Adamowski asked if these policies are included in the student handbooks, which Superintendent DiBacco confirmed. Dr. Adamowski noted he had not seen them in the overarching district policy manual. Superintendent DiBacco clarified that the policies are explicitly written into each individual school's handbook.

Dr. Adamowski noted that his question stems from the Governor's public remarks regarding cell phone bans and limiting student screen time, and asked where the district stands on the issue. Superintendent DiBacco agreed there is a strong external push regarding screen time, but noted a challenge arose during COVID-19 when districts were mandated to provide a computer to every student. Managing screen time is complex when certain curricula require computer usage. Currently, administrative discretion is used to monitor screen time. Following a brief discussion on current school-by-school practices, Mr. Phipps asked if Board members could participate in classroom learning walks, which Mr. Bergin welcomed.

B. Special Education Director

Ms. Fenech presented data pulled as of September 2. She reviewed changes in student enrollment numbers and introduced new staff members joining the department. She highlighted the speech-language pathologist position at Prendergast School, ongoing support staff coaching, and in-house training benefits across the district. She also detailed the diverse training program for students aged 18–22, noting that skills are individualized to foster personal success.

Dr. Adamowski asked how current enrollment numbers compare to the previous year. Ms. Fenech noted that there are likely more out-placed students now compared to the end of the prior school year, citing a few families with special needs students who relocated into the district late in the term. Dr. Adamowski requested a comparison against the state average. Ms. Fenech stated she believes the district's current level of severe special needs is higher than in previous years.

Ms. Voroschak asked for an update on the TAG (Talented and Gifted) Program. Ms. Fenech replied that a formal program is not currently active, though testing is conducted for advanced students. She noted that future enrichment options would be a great topic to explore. Dr. Adamowski agreed it warrants review, pointing out the unusual circumstance where students are being tested to qualify for a program that does not currently exist.

C. Technology Report

Mr. Pastore reported on the purchase of new Chromebooks at the conclusion of the prior school year. Over the summer, all existing technology inventory was cleaned and repaired. Additionally, the district firewall system was upgraded, and approval was secured for a new Wi-Fi system that qualifies for an 85% reimbursement rate.

D. School Business Administrator Financials

Mr. Marriott stated he does not yet have an active update for the 2026–2027 budget. However, the PPR Report, final Excess Cost Grant, MBR Report, and final ED131 have all been successfully submitted, which will greatly streamline the upcoming audit process. He concluded with status updates on active and pending grant applications.

E. Food Service Director's Report

Mr. Benham reported a successful start to the school year and noted that comprehensive data is not yet available. He reviewed the summer breakfast and lunch programs and emphasized that his primary focus remains keeping operational funds in the black. He also shared that the district has established partnerships with several local farms to incorporate fresh, local ingredients into school lunches.

F. Athletic Director's Report.

Mr. Phipps presented the athletics report submitted by Mr. Brockett, noting the fall season is successfully underway. Mrs. Anne Lynch provided an operational update on individual sports teams. Dr. Adamowski expressed appreciation for the student-athlete participation metrics provided and noted it would be beneficial to track these percentages across upcoming sports seasons.

G. Enrollment

The Board reviewed current enrollment figures. Superintendent DiBacco highlighted that 50 new students have enrolled since the start of the school year. Board members requested that enrollment data continue to be provided on a monthly basis.

H. Youth Family Outreach Summary

Mr. Lisi reviewed his summary report, highlighting a positive reduction in chronic absenteeism across all schools, dropping from 23.1% down to 18.2%. The department's core focus remains partnering with families to make school attendance a top priority. He noted that official state metrics are not yet published, though all districts were required to submit data on time.

A discussion followed regarding resources for incoming low-performing students and the local organizations providing community support. Special recognition and thanks were extended to The Salvation Army, Shawn Venson, the James H. Wilkins Lodge, and Our Lady Queen of the Apostles Parish for providing backpacks and essential school supplies. Mr. Lisi concluded by reviewing recent juvenile citations.

Dr. Adamowski asked about the 205 newly registered students, specifically inquiring if 50 of them fell into the chronically absent category and if they were accounted for in the presentation. Mr. Lisi confirmed they were included. Dr. Adamowski

commended the staff, noting that the improving metrics reflect a significant amount of personalized, individual effort. Superintendent DiBacco added that resolving attendance issues has been a massive, ongoing priority since the pandemic.

I. Facilities Director's Report

Mr. Bob Evans addressed the Board, outlining several facility projects completed over the summer as well as ongoing maintenance tasks. Key updates included safety hazard remediations, widespread painting across all district buildings, and the excavation of a sinkhole at Mead School. Additionally, a costly but necessary mechanical repair was completed on the Middle School elevator, despite ongoing efforts to minimize capital expenditures at that building. He noted that his department plans to remove the remaining two storage tanks next year.

J. Superintendent's Report

Superintendent DiBacco stated that the annual convocation was an excellent start to the school year, noting there is nothing better than welcoming students back into the buildings.

He shared that the district is actively working on a plan to remove the solar panels from the high school roof to properly address and repair ongoing leaks and structural issues. He also expressed his gratitude for the time and effort being dedicated to the new Middle School Project.

Superintendent DiBacco reported on his attendance at the Manufacturing Innovation Summit alongside Dennis Proto. He observed that manufacturing sector leaders shared the same demographic concerns raised at the recent Superintendent's Conference regarding the "birth recession" that began around 2007. At the summit, the Governor emphasized a strong statewide push for career pathways. Superintendent DiBacco noted that employers are actively seeking a prepared workforce, and schools are being encouraged to expand pathway programs. On November 2, U.S. Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona will visit the high school to tour programs and discuss career pathways.

Superintendent DiBacco emphasized the difficulty students face in securing high-paying jobs without established high school career pathways. He stated that given our current partnerships and the high-profile visit from Secretary Cardona, the district has a tremendous amount to offer. He reflected that whenever corporate representatives visit, he never has to explicitly ask for a partnership; the students speak for themselves, ask insightful questions, and naturally forge strong relationships. The student body consistently demonstrates a strong work ethic and excellent self-marketing skills.

Mr. Phipps commended Superintendent DiBacco for his long-standing passion and leadership on career pathways. He asked if the district receives formal credit or metrics for successfully guiding students directly from graduation into high-quality career pathways. Superintendent DiBacco answered that while this has been discussed alongside military enlistment tracking, there is currently no formal state system to track graduates entering successful pathway careers.

Dr. Adamowski asked how many career pathway programs are currently offered at the high school and requested a formal report detailing the active programs and student enrollment numbers for each. Superintendent DiBacco responded that there are currently 7 clearly defined pathways.

Dr. Adamowski then inquired about staff turnover, asking if there was a specific reason why the majority of departures appeared concentrated at the Middle School. Superintendent DiBacco stated that he believes uncompetitive compensation is the primary driver, as teachers frequently leave for higher-paying districts. He noted that the district has implemented mentorship and support programs to retain new teachers by building strong professional relationships. Dr. Adamowski suggested that offering sign-on bonuses for high-need positions could be beneficial, provided the district secures an agreement with the teachers' union.

Union representative Matt Hough stated his belief that teachers are not leaving solely due to salary. He explained that the profession as a whole has become increasingly stressful, driving educators to leave the field entirely due to unprecedented demands occurring nationwide. Mr. Bergin added that the district's induction programs are specifically designed to make the transition as smooth as possible for incoming teachers.

K. Additional; Administration or Board of Education

Mr. Bshara commended Superintendent DiBacco for his decision to close Mead School out of respect for the passing of their staff member.

Dr. Adamowski noted that at the June meeting, he requested a session to review Superintendent DiBacco's professional evaluation. He stated that Mr. Phipps had committed to scheduling a meeting to set goals and review SBAC testing data through the Curriculum Committee. Since neither has occurred, Dr. Adamowski asked for specific dates, emphasizing that goal-setting and evaluation are fundamental legal obligations of the Board. Mr. Phipps agreed the Board should look at dates to schedule the session.

Ms. LaBerge noted that the official testing results had only become available a few days prior. Dr. Adamowski responded that an initial review does not require an exhaustive presentation; it could be a straightforward comparison of this year's scores against last year's to identify areas for growth and set corresponding goals. Superintendent DiBacco noted that he already has dedicated internal data teams and professionals handling this specific process.

Dr. Adamowski clarified that he is referring specifically to the Board's governance role in supporting staff and helping drive those goals. Mr. Bshara expressed that Superintendent DiBacco and his administrative teams are the educational experts, and he would defer to their expertise. Ms. LaBerge agreed that reviewing general district improvements would be useful, but she did not feel the Board should reinvent the wheel or require an overly dense presentation. She noted she would prefer a high-level summary with bullet points outlining the future plan.

Dr. Adamowski suggested holding a workshop or dedicating a portion of an upcoming meeting to the topic. He noted that if the Board preferred the Curriculum Committee to lead the review with individual members invited to attend, that would be acceptable, but he reiterated it remains a core Board responsibility. Ms. LaBerge asked if it could be formatted as a high-level overview rather than a dense data presentation. Mr. Knapp and Mr. Phipps asked if this workshop could be scheduled immediately prior to a regular monthly meeting. Mr. Bshara suggested scheduling the workshop for October 28th at 6:30 p.m.

Dr. Adamowski noted that covering the three core areas—Math, English, and Science—typically involves a 90-minute presentation of charts and graphs followed by Board discussion and questions.

Mr. Phipps opened the floor to public comment. Community member Diane Stroman stated that after listening to the discussion regarding an overworked and understaffed district, she questioned the fairness of asking hardworking educators to spend valuable time creating extensive charts and graphs. Dr. Adamowski countered that because the testing results are publicly available, the data is already there to look at. Ms. LaBerge questioned why additional charts and graphs would be necessary if the data is already publicly accessible. Dr. Adamowski clarified that the Board simply needs the Superintendent to discuss the results and share his vision and goals for the future across those core subject areas. Ms. Stroman asked why the published results couldn't simply be reviewed as-is. Dr. Adamowski stated he is confident the Superintendent can determine the most effective way to present the information, adding that he is only asking for a "light" version. Ms. Stroman noted it originally sounded like a rigid directive was being given to the Superintendent.

VIII. ADJOURNMENT:

MOTION: To adjourn the meeting at 8:30pm

MEMBERS OF THE BOARD	MOTION	YES	NO	ABSTAIN
DR. STEVEN ADAMOWSKI		X		
MR. RICH BSHARA	X	X		
MR. DAVID KNAPP		X		
MS. BETH LABERGE		X		
STEPHANIE OCASIO-GONZALEZ				
MR. CHRIS PHIPPS		X		
MS. SHARON VOROSCHAK		X		
TOTAL		6		

Respectfully submitted,

Cassie Venson

Cassie Venson
Recording Secretary
Date: 9/20/2026