DRAFT

SCHOOL COMMITTEE
BUSINESS MEETING OPEN SESSION MINUTES
November 3, 2026

Date: November 3, 2026

Location: Manchester Essex Regional Middle High School Learning Commons and virtual via WebEx

Attendees: Kate Koch-Sundquist, Chairperson; Chris Reed, Vice Chair; Lindsay Banks; Theresa Whitman; Sarah Stone; Jake Foster; Nadia Wetzler; Pamela Beaudoin, Superintendent; Michelle Cresta, Director of Finance & Operations.

A. Call to Order

The meeting opened at 4:30 p.m. with a statement of the reasons for entering executive session: to hear META Unit A Level 3 grievances and discuss collective bargaining strategy.

B. Executive Session

Purpose: (1) Hearing META Unit A Level 3 grievances and (2) discussing collective bargaining strategy.

Mr. Reed moved to enter executive session for the stated purposes. Mr. Foster seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously by roll call, with Mr. Reed, Ms. Koch-Sundquist, Ms. Whitman, Ms. Banks, and Mr. Foster voting yes. Ms. Stone joined during executive session.

At approximately 7:00 p.m., Ms. Banks moved to exit executive session and return to open session. Mr. Foster seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously by roll call, including Ms. Stone, who had joined late.

C. Business Meeting Open Session

Chairperson Koch-Sundquist resumed the meeting in open session at approximately 7:00 p.m. Technical issues with remote audio and video were addressed before public comment.

1) Public Comment

Mr. Stefanek requested that Units A and B bargain together to the greatest extent possible during upcoming negotiations, while allowing separate discussion of issues unique to each unit. He emphasized the contributions of paraprofessionals and identified a living wage as a priority. No action was taken on the request.

2) Student Report

No student report was presented.

3) Chairperson's Report

Ms. Koch-Sundquist reported that she and Superintendent Beaudoin had followed up with 1623 Studios after a resident identified missing meeting videos. Recent recordings were posted or processing. She encouraged residents to report access concerns. Reappointment of town representatives to Essex North Shore Agricultural and Technical School would be added to the November 17 agenda.

4) Consent Agenda

Ms. Whitman moved to approve the consent agenda, including accounts payable vouchers #1025 through #1028, the October 22 payroll voucher, and the October 20, 2026, meeting minutes. Ms. Koch-Sundquist seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously by roll call, with Ms. Whitman, Ms. Koch-Sundquist, Ms. Wetzler, Ms. Banks, Mr. Foster, and Ms. Stone voting yes.

5) Subcommittee Reports

Elementary Facilities and Essex School Building Committee

Ms. Whitman reported on the October 27 School Building Committee meeting and community outreach for the proposed Essex Elementary School. Members reported that many current questions concerned alternatives and decisions examined early in feasibility. Three communication priorities were identified: explaining the project's

scale and cost, describing the implications if it does not proceed, and connecting the design to student experience and districtwide educational needs.

The Building Committee identified members who could respond to specialized questions and continued planning for Town Meeting. Recent outreach included Rotary and Essex Senior Center meetings. Drop-in office hours were planned at the Essex library on Friday from 1–2 p.m. and Monday from 4–5 p.m. The next Building Committee meeting was scheduled for November 10.

The November 4 community meeting would use a shorter presentation and devote most of the meeting to public questions and discussion. The project website included the booklet, handout, videos, schematic design report, total project budget, and FAQs. Additional FAQ responses were expected to be posted the following morning. Members also discussed making clear the date and escalation assumptions associated with earlier estimates of existing-building needs.

Superintendent Beaudoin reported guidance received from the Office of Campaign and Political Finance limiting district-funded distribution after the debt exclusion question had been placed on the ballot. The planned mass mailing would not proceed. Materials could remain available on the district website, and copies could be provided in quantities appropriate for attendance at publicly scheduled meetings and Town Meeting. Independent groups could download and distribute materials using their own resources. The district was seeking clarification about distribution at other public locations. Restrictions on district social media distribution of the project video were also discussed.

Finance Committee

Mr. Foster reported that the Finance Committee had met earlier that afternoon to review the first-quarter financial report. The report was presented under Continued Business.

Policy Committee

Ms. Banks reported that the Policy Committee was reviewing fundraising and student activities policies and considering a rescind-and-replace approach based on Massachusetts Association of School Committees guidance. Seclusion and restraint policy revisions and policies concerning library material selection and challenges under the Freedom to Read requirements were being prepared for first readings on November 17. No policies were adopted at this meeting.

Negotiation Team

The negotiation team had not met.

6) Superintendent's Report

Superintendent Beaudoin reported that a town collaboration meeting was scheduled for Thursday to address remaining building-project and Town Meeting questions and begin discussing budget planning. The town moderators had been invited.

The annual assessment review was moved to November 17 to allow sufficient discussion. The presentation would emphasize what the data indicate about instructional work, progress, and areas requiring attention, with detailed results provided in an appendix.

High School Principal Julie Sgroi and district leadership were reviewing the Program of Studies and adjustments needed to align graduation requirements with new state guidance. A presentation was tentatively anticipated for December 15, with a possible second discussion at the first January meeting if changes to requirements required further review.

Late bus service had begun, and administrators would monitor use. Superintendent Beaudoin noted Wellness Committee volunteer opportunities, an upcoming special education parent workshop, Night of Stars, and the fall play. She also reminded members of the district's continuing partnership with The Open Door and the availability of food assistance to staff, families, and community members.

7) Continued Business

Fall Budget to Actual Report

Ms. Cresta reviewed district finances through September 30. Expenditures totaled approximately $6.26 million, or 18 percent of the FY27 budget, compared with approximately 19 percent at the same point in the prior year. The budget was stable and on track. Long-term employee absences and substitute coverage were the principal costs requiring closer monitoring.

Personnel expenditures were approximately $2.1 million, or 10 percent of budget, reflecting the September start of many school-year payroll costs. Operating expenditures were approximately $4.1 million, or 32 percent, reflecting front-loaded and annual expenses. Revolving and special fund balances totaled approximately $12.9 million. The stabilization fund held approximately $960,000 after funding the district share of the Essex feasibility study, with no other current commitments reported against it. An updated OPEB liability report was expected later in the year.

Ms. Cresta described improvements in electronic billing and collection. Members welcomed the Morning Movers before-school program and restored late bus service as supports for families and student access. Morning Movers participation was reported as 112 attendances across multiple days and 37 active students. Administrators were continuing to close FY26 accounts. No vote was taken on the financial report.

FY28 Budget Development

Budget packets were being distributed to principals. The first draft budget was expected November 25, for review the following week, with the public budget hearing scheduled for December 9. Members would discuss budget philosophy, targets, and priorities on November 17.

Members encouraged restrained budget growth in light of taxpayer pressures and the proposed school project, while sustaining services. School choice and activity fees remained areas for further analysis. Administrators reported no unusual new cost pressures beyond familiar variables, including health insurance and staffing costs. The Superintendent explained that the early budget hearing communicates preliminary expectations to the towns using assumptions that will be refined as more information becomes available. No budget target or appropriation was adopted.

8) School Committee Comment

Letter to Local Newspapers

Ms. Stone reported incorporating member feedback into the draft letter concerning the school project. Members discussed differing newspaper word limits and possible coverage by the Gloucester Daily Times. Ms. Whitman moved to authorize Ms. Stone to submit the final letter on behalf of the Committee and take further action to place the letter or a version of it with the Gloucester Daily Times. Ms. Banks seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Student Conduct and Athletic Expectations

Members discussed a weekend student gathering and the relationship between athletic expectations and enforcement. Superintendent Beaudoin explained that the police report identified attendees but did not identify students in possession of prohibited substances or report charges against student-athletes. Administrators had met with involved students, and community service was discussed. Members emphasized clear communication about expectations; the Superintendent explained that consequences under the handbook require credible evidence of a violation.

Election Day Building Access and Calendar Planning

Ms. Banks relayed parent concerns about voting traffic near preschool students at Memorial and congestion during Election Day. Superintendent Beaudoin explained that the school was designed with a separate community entrance and secured separation from instructional areas. Members discussed considering Election Day for professional development or parent conferences when developing future calendars, while recognizing the effect of multiple interruptions on instruction and families.

D. Adjourn

Ms. Stone moved to adjourn. Ms. Wetzler seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously. The exact adjournment time was not established in the supplied transcript.

Reports and Presentations

Materials can be found on the SC Reports & Presentation page.

Essex Elementary School Building Project Materials available on Essex School Building Project page