

WALTHAM SCHOOL COMMITTEE
Waltham, Massachusetts
REGULAR MEETING

MINUTES

MAY 6, 2026

The regular meeting of the Waltham School Committee convened at 6:01pm. Present were Ms. Wong-Bigelow, Ms. DeJoannis, Mrs. AlJammal, Mrs. Coleman, Mr. Tarallo, and Mr. Zanghi. Mayor McCarthy was not present. Mrs. Coleman presided.

RECESS

VOTED: On motion of Ms. DeJoannis, seconded by Mrs. AlJammal, to move to Executive Session at 6:02pm to conduct strategy sessions with respect to collective bargaining with the WSSA and / or to conduct negotiations with the WSSA; to conduct strategy sessions with respect to collective bargaining with the WSAA and / or to conduct negotiations with the WSAA; to conduct strategy sessions with respect to collective bargaining with the Waltham School MIS Technicians and / or to conduct negotiations with the Waltham School MIS Technicians; to conduct strategy sessions with respect to collective bargaining with the Waltham School Department Food Service Workers and / or conduct negotiations with the Waltham School Department Food Service Workers, and to conduct strategy sessions with respect to collective bargaining with the Waltham School Building Trades, to include Attorney Jonathan Atwater, Superintendent Dr. Mendonsa and HR Administrator Kate Peretz, and return to the regular meeting at 7:00 pm. All in favor.

**PUBLIC HEARING
ON THE RENAMING
OF NORTHEAST
ELEMENTARY
SCHOOL FOR
FORMER WALTHAM
PUBLIC SCHOOLS
SUPERINTENDENT
JOHN J. DADDONA**

Mayor McCarthy opened the Public Hearing on the Renaming of Northeast Elementary School for former Waltham Public Schools Superintendent John J. Daddona at 7:03pm.

Waltham resident Diane Krueger spoke in support of renaming Northeast for Mr. Daddona. She explained his forty years of dedication and contributions to the Waltham Public Schools deserves to be honored and naming a school for him would be a profound gesture. She detailed numerous accomplishments and confirmed he was always an advocate for educators.

Northeast Elementary's Assistant Principal Kelly McAvoy, Northeast teachers Pamela Ferraro, Ryan Hoyt, Jennifer-Ann Caruso, Northeast parents Mark Cardarelli, Allison Jones and Alyse DiLuzio, and Northeast alumni Meghan Kern and Ani Ostayan all shared their opposition to the renaming of Northeast Elementary. They indicated a name change would be drastic, would change the school's identity, and would erase the more than seventy years of history at Northeast. Many acknowledged the positive impact Mr. Daddona had within the district and added that something should be named for him, but Northeast Elementary is not it. Multiple people suggested the 617 Lexington Street building would be a more suitable option as it would better reflect the connection Mr. Daddona had with the entire district.

At the request of the Chair, Mrs. Coleman read a letter from Margaret Cannon, who requested the name change. It included insight into Mr. Daddona's many contributions to the district.

Mayor McCarthy closed the Public Hearing on the Renaming of Northeast Elementary School for former Waltham Public Schools Superintendent John J. Daddona at 7:31pm.

RECONVENE

The School Committee reconvened at 7:32pm. Present were Mr. Tarallo, Mr. Zanghi, Mrs. Coleman, Mrs. AlJammal, Ms. DeJoannis, Ms. Wong-Bigelow and Mayor McCarthy. Mayor McCarthy presided.

Mr. Tarallo led the Committee in the Pledge of Allegiance.

PUBLIC INPUT

Valor High School math teacher Michael Russo expressed his desire for Valor to remain a school, at least for the next few years, while it continues to grow.

WPS parent Jeremy Robitaille indicated he is happy Dual Language students can take AP Spanish in tenth grade at Waltham High and asked that the prior meeting minutes reflect this.

Plympton Elementary parent Anna Antoniak shared her opinion that the staff is overwhelmed and the school needs more support, not less.

Waltham High teacher Francisco Kondor advised the removal of SEI classes will have a negative impact on students as they will be unable to learn the curriculum being taught in core classes. He added the school should utilize its current ESL resources already in the building instead of making budget cuts.

Waltham High sophomore Michael Hovsepian informed the members he was part of the WHS principal interview committee and questioned what happened during the subsequent rounds as he is surprised a certain candidate was not moved to the final round.

Waltham High ESL Teacher Vanessa Bello expressed her concern with the proposed budget cuts to ESL staff. She indicated ESL teachers help bridge the language gap for students and help ensure no student is left behind. Additionally, the proposed budget cuts will reduce ESL coaches but school administrators are emphasizing the importance of utilizing these important resources.

WPS parent Corinne Lofchie advised she is glad AP Spanish is available for Dual Language students in tenth grade but added she would like this included in the meeting minutes.

STUDENT COUNCIL
STUDENT INPUT

There were no students present at the meeting to share information.

SCHOOL
COUNCIL/PTO/
SEPAC/BELPAC
INPUT

BELPAC member Adela Escobar shared her personal experience with ESL classes and confirmed advocacy for English learners is important.

VOTED: On motion of Mr. Tarallo, seconded by Mrs. Coleman, to add item 8g to the agenda. All in favor.

CONSENT AGENDA

The superintendent presented the following Consent Agenda items:

- Minutes from the Regular Meeting held on April 15, 2026;

Retirements:

- Margaret Santana, Secretary, MacArthur Elementary School - effective 08/30/2026;
- Laurine Cence, Cafeteria Manager, Northeast Elementary School - effective 06/22/2026;
- Camille Leblanc, Carpenter, Facilities Dept. Districtwide - effective 07/18/2026;
- Paula Oliveri, Secretary, Kennedy Middle School - effective 06/30/2026

Resignations:

- Rivka Connors, Teacher, Plympton Elementary School - effective 04/17/2026;
- Karina Merida, Teacher, Dual Language School - effective 06/22/2026;
- Abril Lopez Soto, Teacher, Dual Language School - effective 06/22/2026;
- April Liles, Director of Food Services, Central Office - effective 06/30/2026;
- Lesly Garcia, ESL Teacher, McDevitt Middle School - effective 06/30/2026;
- John Brokish, Teacher, Waltham High School - effective 06/30/2026;
- Kristen Marriott, Secretary, Northeast Elementary School - effective 06/30/2026

Dr. Mendonsa informed the members that a \$5,000. donation was received from the McBrine Family for the Waltham High School's Quiz Bowl Team's upcoming trip to the national tournament in Atlanta at the end of the month.

Ms. DeJoannis requested a revision to the April 15th meeting minutes being presented for approval. She asked that more details about Waltham High's language courses available to Dual Language students be included in the minutes.

VOTED: On motion of Ms. DeJoannis, seconded by Mr. Tarallo, to table approval of the April 15, 2026 meeting minutes. All in favor.

VOTED: On motion of Mrs. Coleman, seconded by Mr. Tarallo, to approve the remainder of the Consent Agenda. All in favor.

COMMUNICATIONS

a) Information regarding SEI and ESL staff changes

Superintendent Mendonsa provided background information about English and multilingual learners, the levels of English Language Proficiency and Sheltered English Immersion (SEI).

All required core content teachers at WHS have the SEI endorsement in their licensure and most teachers within WPS have the same. Any teachers renewing their licensure in the upcoming years will be required to obtain the same endorsement.

Current SEI courses at Waltham High are taught by content area teachers and have smaller class sizes. Dr. Mendonsa shared DESE's Placement Guidance for ESL students on the foundational and transitional levels.

English learner enrollment for the past few years has decreased and Waltham High's English learner and Former English learner accountability ratings demonstrate that moderate progress toward targets is being made. Administrators have been planning

for the implementation of more support across Waltham High and Valor High and are also utilizing outside resources for additional assistance.

VOTED: On motion of Mr. Tarallo, seconded by Mrs. Coleman, to hear from off-committee members. All in favor.

Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction Dr. Shannon Conley addressed many questions from the members about ESL teachers and coaches; accountability differences within various subject areas; the plan going forward; professional development; middle school vs. high school models, and the monitoring of transitions and progress.

VOTED: On motion of Mrs. Coleman, seconded by Mr. Tarallo, to move item 8g out of order. All in favor.

**UNFINISHED
BUSINESS**

g) Renaming of
Northeast
Elementary
School

Ms. Wong-Bigelow made a motion to not recommend Northeast Elementary School be renamed for former Waltham Public Schools Superintendent Mr. John J. Daddona. There were no seconds.

Mayor McCarthy confirmed she does not want anything in the city named for her for doing her job. She provided a brief history of how Northeast and the district's other schools obtained their names.

VOTED: On motion of Mrs. AlJammal, seconded by Mrs. Coleman, to send the information from the Public Hearing to the City Council confirming nine people spoke against the renaming of Northeast and two in favor. A friendly amendment was added by Mr. Tarallo (accepted by Mrs. AlJammal) requesting the City Council be informed that there was glowing support for Mr. Daddona to be honored in some manner but the Northeast community does not want to change its identity. An additional friendly amendment was added by Mr. Zanghi (also accepted by Mrs. AlJammal) requesting the City Council be informed that the recording of the School Committee's Public Hearing is available for them to view through WCAC. All in favor.

VOTED: On motion of Mrs. Coleman, seconded by Mr. Tarallo, to move item 8f out of order. All in favor.

f) Valor High
School

Dr. Conley reiterated the difference in DESE involvement between having an alternative school or a program and the overall impact to Valor and Waltham High. A conversation followed about Valor's purpose being to support students seventeen or older who were undercredited and also to support teen parents. It was confirmed that if Valor shifts from a school to a program, there will be no change in the grant funding from the BARR Foundation. Dr. Conley and Dr. Porch are working with Waltham High to address its dropout rate.

Ms. Wong-Bigelow left the meeting at 9:44pm and returned at 9:45pm.

The members were also reminded of the differences in courses, curriculum, and schedule between the traditional school model at WHS and the more flexible, alternative model at Valor High.

VOTED: On motion of Mayor McCarthy, seconded by Mr. Tarallo, to table Valor High School and the Renaming of Northeast Elementary School. All in favor.

CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

a) Waltham Family School update

Waltham Family School Coordinator Jackie Herrera explained the program's goal of providing families with young children access to high quality educational opportunities via preschool and early childhood education, adult ESOL instruction, community connections, and social emotional support. She reviewed the program's eligibility requirements, current enrollment and shared updates about some of the successes of former Waltham Family School students and families.

Mrs. Coleman left the meeting at 10:00pm and returned at 10:05pm.

Ms. Herrera explained the student success goal for the year is to ensure families feel supported, safe, and included during the transitions into preschool and kindergarten, which will foster student engagement, learning and success. She detailed the plan to accomplish this goal and how progress will be tracked. From the connected community lens, the school will increase the number of community-based organizations that participate in family and school engagement workshops. Additionally, the Waltham Family School will provide access to professional development for WFS preschool and ESOL teachers, which will ensure they have access to educational opportunities.

Many members shared their appreciation for the hard work and dedication of Ms. Herrera and her staff which has led to much program success and has benefited many families within the city.

SUPERINTENDENT'S UPDATE

a) Miscellaneous Personnel

New Hires:

- Waheda Parvin, Lunch Monitor, MacArthur Elementary School - effective 04/27/2026;
- Louanne Fucci, Transportation Coordinator, Central Office - effective 05/01/2026;
- Emma Logue, Substitute Teacher, District-Wide - effective 04/27/2026;
- William Curley, Substitute Teacher, District-Wide - effective 05/04/2026

Transfers and Promotions:

- Liateang Vong, Food Service Worker 3.5hr, Waltham High School - effective 03/30/2026;
- Lisa Kingsley, Assistant Superintendent of Special Education and Student Services, Central Office - District-wide - effective 07/01/2026

b) Monthly District Enrollment

The district's enrollment continues to hold firm at 5,640 students.

c) Information

The superintendent shared an update on the search for a new Waltham High School principal. She detailed each step of the search process, beginning with the number

of applicants; creation of an interview committee; the first round of interviews; the recommendations to the superintendent; the second round interview process, and next steps. The three finalists moving onto the final round are: Dr. William Conard, Mr. Joel Stembridge and Dr. Robert Rametti. Short bios, including years of principal experience, were shared with the School Committee.

Multiple members voiced their frustration and disgust with the community's response to the process and added that the high school needs stability and people need to be supportive.

UNFINISHED

BUSINESS (cont.)

- a) MSBA - Waltham High School Project **VOTED:** On motion of Mayor McCarthy, seconded by Mr. Tarallo, to remove this item from the agenda going forward. All in favor.
- b) Anti-Racism, Diversity, Equity and Inclusion The Equity Team is finalizing its presentation for the School Committee and hopes to share it in June or July. Additionally, a Professional Development survey has been circulated to staff.
- c) Dual Language School Model and Reutilization of 617 Lexington Street The 617 Committee will meet again in mid-May to fine-tune its presentation for the Executive Team.
- d) Waltham High School's Career and Technical Education (CTE) Department The superintendent confirmed Dr. Conley provided current and future enrollment, staffing numbers, space and facilities requirements, along with information on closing a Chapter 74 program.
VOTED: On motion of Mr. Tarallo, seconded by Mrs. Coleman, to table item 8d. All in favor.
- e) Waltham High School Schedule The next WHS schedule meeting will take place in the upcoming weeks.

NEW BUSINESS

There were no New Business matters to be discussed at the meeting.

VOTED: On motion of Mr. Tarallo, seconded by Mrs. Coleman, to move item 10c out of order. All in favor.

FISCAL MATTERS

- c) Bills on Warrant **VOTED:** On motion of Mr. Tarallo, seconded by Mrs. Coleman, to pay the bills on warrant. All in favor.

**AGENDA ITEMS
FOR FUTURE
MEETINGS**

VOTED: On motion of Mrs. Coleman, seconded by Mr. Tarallo, to move item 11 out of order. All in favor.

VOTED: On motion of Ms. Wong-Bigelow, seconded by Mayor McCarthy, to review the transportation contracts between Waltham Public Schools and its vendors, especially JSC. A friendly amendment was added by Mayor McCarthy, seconded by Mr. Tarallo (accepted by Ms. Wong-Bigelow), requesting all district families be surveyed to determine if they require bus transportation for their student(s) next year. All in favor.

VOTED: On motion of Ms. DeJoannis, seconded by Mr. Tarallo, to hold an education technology workshop to discuss student chromebook usage in schools. A friendly amendment was added by Ms. Wong-Bigelow (accepted by Ms. DeJoannis) requesting information on how the district plans to address the potential statewide ban on cell phones in public schools for the upcoming school year. All in favor.

**FISCAL MATTERS
(cont.)**

b) Update on the
FY '27 School
Department
Operating
Budget

The superintendent reviewed the budget priorities focusing on the classroom first and ensuring all classes are adequately staffed and have the necessary materials. The district's increases for operational expenses and Special Education costs were explained. The initial reorganization of Central Office has changed and the new positions being proposed are: Executive Director of Career and College Readiness, Executive Director of Language Acquisition, and Deputy Superintendent. Additionally, two classroom reductions have been reallocated to Special Education.

Dr. Mendonsa explained school and district based reallocations taking place across all levels. Staff reductions of 6.5 FTE (five classroom teachers and 1.5 specialists) on the elementary level; four classroom teachers at the secondary level and a ESL coach were detailed. Requested new additions across the district were also identified. The superintendent provided an analysis of the FY '26 budget compared to the FY '27 budget and the overall increases within each category. A budget of \$136,574,647. is being requested by the School Department for FY'27.

It was confirmed for Ms. Wong-Bigelow that the reallocation of teachers does not necessarily mean that a teacher whose position is being reduced will shift to a new position. She clarified that the funds from one position will be reallocated to fund a needed position elsewhere in the district.

Ms. DeJoannis inquired about Fine and Performing Arts staffing as multiple members are retiring this year. The superintendent confirmed that even with the elimination of 1.5 FTE, the department may need additional staff but it will be determined after scheduling is completed.

Mr. Tarallo expressed concern with some of the elementary section sizes.

VOTED: On motion of Mr. Tarallo, seconded by Ms. DeJoannis, to add another kindergarten class at Stanley Elementary for next year. All in favor.

The superintendent clarified that all TASC students at Stanley are assigned to specific grade classes, however, spend much of their day in separate classrooms.

Mayor McCarthy left the meeting at 11:29pm and returned at 11:33pm.

VOTED: On motion of Mr. Tarallo, seconded by Ms. DeJoannis, to add another Stanley first grade class for next year. A friendly amendment was added by Ms. DeJoannis (accepted by Mr. Tarallo) to confirm Stanley's building can accommodate this additional classroom. All in favor.

VOTED: On motion of Mr. Tarallo, seconded by Mr. Zanghi, to add another first grade class at Northeast Elementary for next year. Roll call: Mr. Zanghi - yes; Mr. Tarallo - yes; Mrs. Coleman - no; Mrs. AlJammal - no; Ms. DeJoannis - no, and Ms. Wong-Bigelow - no. **The motion did not pass.*

Mrs. Coleman left the meeting at 11:33pm and returned at 11:38pm.

The superintendent confirmed for Ms. DeJoannis that the approximate kindergarten enrollment noted for next year does include students who have applied for the Dual Language School lottery.

A conversation about SEI and the proposed ESL reductions at Waltham High began and Mr. Zanghi made a motion to keep all of the current ESL staff positions at Waltham High for next year. The motion was seconded by Mr. Tarallo for discussion. A lengthy discussion between the members followed about ESL support from teachers and coaches and the benefit to students.

Mr. Zanghi amended his initial motion to keep 10.4 FTE ESL teachers at Waltham High and Mr. Tarallo seconded it for discussion. Mrs. AlJammal indicated she did not believe ESL teachers to be as beneficial to the SEI transition as ESL coaches for the upcoming year based on the earlier presentation.

Mr. Zanghi made a new motion to retain 10.4 FTE ESL teachers and add a 0.5 FTE ESL coach. There was no second. Mr. Zanghi then withdrew his entire motion.

VOTED: On motion of Mr. Zanghi, seconded by Mrs. AlJammal (for discussion), to add only a 0.5 FTE ESL Coach at Waltham High. Mrs. AlJammal requested a friendly amendment, which Mr. Tarallo seconded (and Mr. Zanghi accepted), to increase the ESL Coach position to 1.0 FTE. All in favor.

The Chair confirmed she needs to know the actual number of WPS teachers who will lose their jobs as a result of the proposed budget.

VOTED: On motion of Mrs. Coleman, seconded by Mr. Tarallo, to continue the meeting after midnight and into May 7, 2026. All in favor.

Ms. Wong-Bigelow left at 12:01am and returned at 12:05am.

A discussion ensued about the addition of the classes at Stanley and the building's capacity.

The School Committee recessed at 12:07am and reconvened at 12:11am with all members still present.

c) Vote on the FY
'27 School
Department
Operating
Budget

VOTED: On motion of Mr. Tarallo, seconded by Ms. DeJoannis, to approve the School Department's FY '27 budget request of \$136,874,647. to be sent to Mayor McCarthy. All in favor.

ADJOURNMENT

VOTED: On motion of Mrs. Coleman, seconded by Ms. Wong-Bigelow, to adjourn the Regular Meeting at 12:12am. All in favor.

Dr. Marisa Mendonsa
Clerk