

WALTHAM SCHOOL COMMITTEE
Waltham, Massachusetts
REGULAR MEETING

MINUTES

FEBRUARY 25, 2026

The regular meeting of the Waltham School Committee convened at 5:05pm. Present were Ms. Wong-Bigelow, Mrs. AlJammal, Mrs. Coleman, and Mr. Zanghi. Ms. DeJoannis, Mr. Tarallo and Mayor McCarthy were not present. Mrs. Coleman presided.

RECESS

VOTED: On motion of Mrs. AlJammal, seconded by Ms. Wong-Bigelow, to move to Executive Session at 5:05pm 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; to conduct strategy sessions with respect to collective bargaining with the Waltham School Building Trades and / or to conduct negotiations with the Waltham School Building Trades; to conduct collective bargaining sessions to include a grievance hearing under Purpose 2 and to discuss strategy with respect to litigation under Purpose 3 if an open meeting may have a detrimental effect on the litigating position of the public body and the chair so declares - Waltham School Administrators Association and Waltham School Committee, Grievance Dated November 4, 2025, WHS TASC Classroom Teacher Duties, and Strategies with Respect to Negotiations with non-union personnel: Waltham High School Principal - John Barnes; Waltham Valor High School Interim Principal - Linda Flueckiger; Kennedy Middle School Principal - Kevin Gildea; McDevitt Middle School Principal - Scott Lipman; Dual Language Elementary School Principal - Ricardo Dobles; FitzGerald Elementary School Principal - Jennifer Santillo; MacArthur Elementary School Principal - Kevin Kmiec; Northeast Elementary School Principal - Mary Ellen Tenaglia; Plympton Elementary School Principal - Adrienne Norris; Stanley Elementary School Principal - Jennifer Hacker; Whittemore Elementary School Principal - David Sweder; Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction; Assistant Superintendent for Finance and Operations; Administrator of Human Resources, and Chief Officer for Family and Community Engagement, to include Attorney Jonathan Atwater, HR Administrator Kate Peretz, and Superintendent Dr. Marisa Mendonsa, and following this, to move to a Budget Workshop and then return to the regular meeting at 7:00 pm. All in favor.

RECONVENE

The School Committee reconvened at 7:08pm. 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.

MOMENTS OF SILENCE

The Committee held a moment of silence for former Waltham Public Schools Special Education employee Marcia Delaney as well as former Waltham Public Schools educator and superintendent John "Jack" Daddona, who both recently passed away.

PUBLIC INPUT

WPS parents Nicole Piche-Nicholas, Marialuiza Rodriguez (staff member and parent), Mary Ellen Dischino, Tom Haley, Michelle Campbell and Waltham High students Olivia Priore, Antonio Rodriguez, Katie Whittier, Sierra Nicholas, and Anabel Rutledge all addressed the Committee to express their disapproval with the possible change in the high school schedule for next year which would reduce the number of class blocks. The speakers indicated many students will be forced to choose between elective classes and rigorous academic courses, and they fear that CTE electives and Fine and Performing Arts courses will be drastically impacted. Multiple people emphasized the impact a reduction in blocks will have on CTE students in Chapter 74 programs and also students requiring academic support. The possible elimination of Hawk block was also noted as negatively impacting students. Many praised Waltham High for its robust course offerings and for the many opportunities available to students and they do not want to see this change. A request was made for the proposals to be shared in advance with the community.

**STUDENT COUNCIL
STUDENT INPUT**

Waltham High School students John McCalla and Anabel Rutledge informed the members that the girls basketball team and the boys and girls hockey teams are in the MIAA tournament. Additionally, registration is open for spring sports; Senior Revue will be taking place in two weeks, and college decision day for seniors is just over two months away.

**SCHOOL
COUNCIL/PTO/
SEPAC/BELPAC
INPUT**

There was no one present from these groups who requested to speak with the Committee.

CONSENT AGENDA

Superintendent Dr. Mendonsa presented the following Consent Agenda items:

- Minutes from the Regular Meeting held on February 4, 2026;

Retirement:

- Jeanne Cronin, Teacher, Stanley Elementary School - effective 6/30/2026

Resignations:

- Conan Devlin, Paraprofessional, Waltham High School - effective 2/24/2026;
- Kaitlyn Kelly, Paraprofessional, McDevitt Middle School - effective 2/27/2026

Dr. Mendonsa informed the Committee about a \$1,500. donation from Watertown Savings Bank to Waltham High School's Class of 2027. The funds will help offset senior year expenses during the upcoming school year.

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

COMMUNICATIONS

Nothing new was shared in the area of Communications at the meeting.

**SUPERINTENDENT'S
UPDATE****New Hires:**

- Leah Jonczyk, Substitute Teacher, District-Wide - effective 02/09/2026;
- Kristine Kistoryan, Substitute Secretary, District-Wide - effective 02/09/2026;

a) Miscellaneous Personnel

- Deirdre Georgoudis, Substitute Secretary/Teacher, District-Wide - effective 02/09/2026;
- Nicholas Kritikos, Substitute Teacher, District-Wide - effective 02/09/2026;
- Tamar Kaya, Substitute Secretary, District-Wide - effective 02/09/2026;
- Yang Ji, Substitute Teacher, District-Wide - - effective 02/12/2026
- Barry McNeil, Substitute Secretary, District-Wide - effective 02/23/2026;
- Michael Papastavrou, After Hours Security Monitor, Waltham High School - effective 02/23/2026;
- Alessia Zotolla, Substitute Teacher, District-Wide - effective 02/23/2026;
- Stephanie Lombardi-Sebastiao, Substitute Secretary, District-Wide - effective 02/23/2026;
- Ethan Beeler, LTS HS History and Social Studies Teacher, Waltham High School - effective 02/23/2026
- Nicole Coleman, Substitute Teacher, District-Wide - effective 02/23/2026

Transfers and Promotions:

- Leah Jonczyk, ELA Lab - LTS, McDevitt Middle School - effective 02/23/2026 - 04/20/2026 (Approx.);
- Brooke Lallensack, LTS - ESL Teacher, Northeast Elementary School - effective 02/10/2026 - 06/17/2026;
- Elissa Levine, LTS Grade 2 Teacher, Stanley Elementary School - effective 02/09/2026 - 04/01/2026

b) Information

Dr. Mendonsa gave a shout out to the girls varsity basketball team, boys and girls varsity hockey teams, the wrestling team, the swimming and diving team and members of the high school's indoor track team for making it into the state tournament during this winter season.

Additionally, she shared two reminders:

- On Saturday, March 7th from 8am - 1:30pm, the district will hold its annual Parenting Awareness Conference at Waltham High School;
- March 2nd is the deadline for applications for any high school freshman interested in joining a CTE Tech 1 class next year. Additionally, the CTE Department will hold a lottery for any Tech 1 class that receives more applications than seats on March 18th at 2:20pm in the WHS cafe.

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

Assistant Superintendent for Finance and Operations Chad Mazza indicated that the second budget workshop with the School Committee focused on possible section reductions at all levels; staff / student comparisons; average class size comparisons; a Dual Language / Somerville UNIDOS program comparison, and the possible expansion of the co-teaching model within the district.

Within the department of Curriculum and Instruction, Assistant Superintendent Shannon Conley provided an overview of the science staff at the middle and high school levels. The middle schools are supported by seventeen science teachers and two PLTW (Project Lead The Way) teachers. Middle school students are learning via the STEMScopes curriculum and practices are shifting to align to NGSS and

Innovative MCAS. Dr. Conley explained that more cross-district collaboration between teachers is taking place to support school SIPs (school improvement plans).

At the high school level, twenty-one science teachers educate students at Waltham High, one teacher educates students at Valor High and there is a designated science ESL para. Instruction is focused on Launch/Learn/Land and Differentiation in Academic Discourse, in addition to PLTW courses. Some highlights at this level include expansion of participation in the MEL Grant, interdisciplinary CPT groups, and Phase one of IMplementMA HQIM adoption.

Interim Assistant Superintendent of Special Education and Student Services Dr. Lisa Kingsley informed the members of the themes stemming from recent principal listening tours. She noted there is strong leadership and a commitment to supporting diverse learners. There is a need for clearer, centralized decision-making on programs or changes to placements as well as concerns with consistency across schools. The importance of communication, visibility and follow-through was emphasized.

Feedback from a recent Evaluation Team Leader (ETL) poll shows effective evaluation / IEP processes overall and a strong cross-program collaboration at the ETL level. However, the need for clearer procedures due to new state-mandated faster turnaround timelines and for better-defined roles exists.

From the Family and Community Engagement area, Dr. Ray Porch reminded all about the upcoming seventh Annual Parenting Awareness Conference taking place at Waltham High on Saturday March 7th being run by the Office of Pupil Services and the Parent Information Center. Stemming from an inquiry by the superintendent, Dr. Porch indicated there will be speakers sharing information, community resources available and staff members present to answer questions.

Mrs. AlJammal asked why the location was changed to Waltham High and she questioned whether it may impact family access. Dr. Porch indicated the decision had been made prior to his start with the district but that attendance data will be reviewed to determine if the venue should change for next year. Mayor McCarthy suggested the Tick-Tock Trolley might be able to assist with transportation in the future.

Ms. Wong-Bigelow asked what the conference will focus on this year. Dr. Porch indicated school safety and special education will be the key focuses and that members from the Special Education Department as well as the Parent Information Center will be present to engage with families.

Human Resources Administrator Kate Peretz shared a staffing update noting over 1,400 total staff work for Waltham Public Schools and confirmed there are seven WPS collective bargaining units. Each year, there are approximately fifty parental leaves and an additional fifty to sixty medical leaves. Open positions remain within Special Education and when possible, outside agencies are utilized to provide additional temporary support. The need for license waivers each year is decreasing. Approximately seventy-five to one hundred new staff are onboarded annually and measures are being taken to solicit feedback from these staff during their first year.

CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

- a) Science Curriculum Adoption

Dr. Conley returned to advise the Science Department is recommending the adoption of OpenSciEd Middle School for all students in grades six through eight. The adoption would include a full-unit implementation of six units per year and would take three years to complete the phased rollout. The assistant superintendent explained this recommendation comes following a multi-year review led by Director Matt Burns and the middle school science staff, comparative field testing, and an alignment to district priorities and DESE IMplementMA guidance. She continued by providing insight into the current state of the science curriculum, the expiration of the current STEMscopes subscription, and the multi-year inclusive effort by many to explore new options.

OpenSciEd is an open educational resource that is organized for figuring out based on reviewing and explaining real world phenomena, not just memorizing facts. The curriculum is teacher-facilitated but student driven and is fully aligned to the NGSS framework. Dr. Conley reviewed some key highlights along with the professional learning overview relative to the phased rollout.

A short conversation between Ms. DeJoannis, Ms. Wong-Bigelow and Dr. Conley took place about assessments and “phenomenon based” learning. Mayor McCarthy added that this new curriculum should help expand interest in science.

VOTED: On motion of Ms. Wong-Bigelow, seconded by Mr. Tarallo, to approve the adoption of the OpenSciEd curriculum for the middle schools. All in favor.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

- a) MSBA - Waltham High School Project
- b) Anti-Racism, Diversity, Equity and Inclusion
- c) Dual Language School Model and Reutilization of 617 Lexington Street
- d) Waltham High School's Career and Technical Education (CTE) Department
- e) Waltham High School Schedule

Mayor McCarthy confirmed the two year close-out process with the state has begun and signatures have been obtained from the outside parties who worked on the high school project.

The equity team groups continue to meet and focus on the student experience in the classroom and the teaching and learning taking place across the district. More detailed information will be presented to the Committee in late March or early April.

The 617 Committee continues to explore options for the 617 Lexington Street building and the possible expansion of the Dual Language School continues to be a priority. Recruiting and retaining bilingual staff is a big factor.

There was nothing additional added outside of the March 2nd application deadline and March 18th lottery date.

Dr. Mendonsa confirmed multiple schedule options have been shared with high school staff and are being discussed with union representatives. Caregiver forums will be held on Monday, March 2nd - the first at 6pm at Waltham High and the second

at 7pm will be virtual. On March 3rd, a slide deck presentation of the proposed schedule will be posted on the school website for review. For the rest of that week, information will be shared with students during advisory blocks. Following the caregiver forums, a google form will be provided for feedback. She indicated the schedule committee continues to meet and evaluate all options.

Ms. DeJoannis asked about the timeframe for course selection at the high school. Dr. Mendonsa indicated it will take place after the School Committee approves the Program of Studies, which should occur in March. A follow up question was asked about course recommendations for students and it was explained that the guidance department is very involved in the course selection process with students.

Mrs. AlJammal indicated it would be helpful if the possible schedule options, including CTE, are available for families to view during the forums. The superintendent confirmed they will be available.

Mayor McCarthy indicated that the needs of all students are not the same, whether from year to year or CTE students compared to non-CTE students. A short conversation about the CTE Exploratory program followed with the mayor and superintendent.

Mr. Zanghi asked if the state's CTE deadline of March 6th has been met by the high school. Dr. Conley explained that the state imposed a deadline for all CTE schools to submit their lottery proposals to the state and Waltham High's lottery proposals were approved.

NEW BUSINESS

There was no New Business shared at the meeting.

FISCAL MATTERS

- a) FY '26 Out of District Tuition and Transportation update

Assistant Superintendent Mazza provided an update on the status of the special education out-of-district tuition and transportation costs the district is facing this year. He clarified that the updated student enrollment (including pending and potential students) as of February 25, 2026 is 104. Given the costs of tuition and transportation for these 104 students, it is believed the district will face a \$1,316,009. deficit after the remaining Circuit Breaker funds are applied.

VOTED: On motion of Mr. Tarallo, seconded by Ms. Wong-Bigelow, to ask Mayor McCarthy to request funding from the City of Waltham in the amount of \$1,316,009. for the purpose of resolving the School Department's deficit stemming from Special Education out-of-district tuitions and transportation costs. All in favor.

Dr. Mendonsa left the meeting at 8:47pm and returned at 8:49pm.

- b) FY '26 Mid-Year Budget Report

The assistant superintendent confirmed the purpose of the mid-year report is to analyze the budget-to-actual spending of the School Department through January 31, 2026 by both expenditure object and cost center. The budget is made up of four expenditure objects: personnel, operating expenses, equipment and unusuals and special items. As of the end of January, 47% of the FY '25-'26 budget of \$123,336,745. has been expended. A general explanation of the budget categories and cost centers was provided. He also explained the difference between funds

expended versus encumbered and how this impacts the budget.

Mr. Mazza then advised that special revenue funds (athletic receipts, building rentals, pre-k tuition, and special education circuit breaker funds) help offset budget costs. Additionally, federal, state and private grants provide additional support to districts.

A question from Ms. Wong-Bigelow about the budgeted amounts for Dual Language secondary, Kennedy Middle School and for ELA sparked a conversation with Mr. Mazza.

Mrs. AlJammal asked for clarification as the report reflected that only 70% of the Special Education budget was expended. The assistant superintendent advised that the remaining budgeted amount was already encumbered by other expenses and would be paid out in the future.

c) Bills on
Warrant

VOTED: On motion of Mr. Tarallo, seconded by Ms. Wong-Bigelow, to pay the bills on warrant. All in favor.

**AGENDA ITEMS
FOR FUTURE
MEETINGS**

Ms. Wong-Bigelow reminded the group she had previously inquired about the possibility of implementing a GPS tracking app for the district's buses. She indicated she recently learned that Cambridge Public Schools, who also utilizes Eastern Bus Company's services, has the GPS tracking app available for its families and asked that this be revisited.

VOTED: On motion of Ms. Wong-Bigelow, seconded by Mr. Tarallo, to add GPS app tracking for buses to the agenda. All in favor.

Mayor McCarthy advised this option was researched by the city's purchasing agent when bus bids were reviewed and she will have this information forwarded to Ms. Wong-Bigelow.

Mrs. Coleman advised that Kennedy Principal Kevin Gildea, Waltham High School staff member Brenda Burke, Waltham parent Jeff Hines and Belmont Middle School's Coach Ian Haffer, immediately jumped into action to assist the Kennedy Middle School's boys basketball coach who suffered a medical emergency earlier this month.

VOTED: On motion of Mrs. Coleman, seconded by Mr. Tarallo, to present Kennedy Principal Kevin Gildea, Waltham High School staff member Brenda Burke, Waltham parent Jeff Hines and Belmont Middle School's Coach Ian Haffer, each with a citation commending their efforts that helped to save the Waltham coach's life. All in favor.

Ms. DeJoannis indicated she would like to get feedback from people following the CTE Chapter 74 lottery scheduled to take place in mid-March.

VOTED: On motion of Ms. DeJoannis, seconded by Ms. Wong-Bigelow, to request a report about the Chapter 74 lottery process and review feedback from those involved. All in favor.

ADJOURNMENT

VOTED: On motion of Mrs. Coleman, seconded by Mr. Tarallo, to adjourn the Regular Meeting at 9:06pm. All in favor.

Dr. Marisa Mendonsa
Clerk