

WALTHAM SCHOOL COMMITTEE
Waltham, Massachusetts
REGULAR MEETING

MINUTES

MARCH 4, 2026

The regular meeting of the Waltham School Committee convened at 5:08pm. Present were Ms. DeJoannis, Mrs. AlJammal, Mrs. Coleman, Mr. Tarallo, and Mr. Zanghi. Ms. Wong-Bigelow and Mayor McCarthy were not present. Mrs. Coleman presided.

RECESS

VOTED: On motion of Mrs. AlJammal, seconded by Mr. Tarallo, to move to Executive Session at 5:09pm 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, 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 - Shannon Conley; Assistant Superintendent for Finance and Operations - Chad Mazza; Administrator of Human Resources - Katherine Peretz, and Chief Officer for Family and Community Engagement - Raymond Porch, to include HR Administrator Kate Peretz and Superintendent Dr. Marisa Mendonsa, and then return to the regular meeting at 7:00 pm. All in favor.

RECONVENE

The School Committee reconvened at 7:00pm. 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.

Mayor McCarthy confirmed the meeting was being recorded by WCAC. No one else indicated they were recording the meeting.

VOTED: On motion of Mrs. Coleman, seconded by Mr. Tarallo, to take items 6B and 5A out of order. All in favor.

SUPERINTENDENT'S UPDATE

b) Information

Dr. Mendonsa read a statement relative to the proposal to change the current Waltham High School schedule for the upcoming '26-'27 school year. She explained DESE's involvement with the high school due to its low accountability rating and the

partnership with ABL to develop new schedule proposals to help address the lack of time in core classes. She shared a comparison of weekly core class time at the middle school and high school levels. The superintendent indicated an eight block schedule was proposed to staff but the feedback received from staff and the union was that teaching for eighty minutes was too much. Given this, the eight block options were removed from the latest proposals.

At this point, the superintendent advised she will pause the implementation of a new schedule and have the existing schedule continue for the upcoming '26-'27 school year. The schedule committee will continue to review possible options to address the needs of all students. Hawk Block will continue and additional academic support will be available to students after school. The school will also explore adding a before school support option. Dr. Mendonsa emphasized the importance of longer blocks to help increase PBL (Project-Based Learning) options.

COMMUNICATIONS

a) Waltham High School's Quiz Bowl Team

Members of Waltham High School's Quiz Bowl Team, accompanied by advisors Reba Tierney and Mike Russo, were recognized for their achievements. The team, which earned a spot in season 17 of GBH's High School Quiz Show, will now move onto a national competition in Atlanta in May. The Committee presented the team with certificates of achievement and wished them luck.

PUBLIC INPUT

Waltham High students Anabel Rutledge, Jacob Katz, Owen White, Charlotte McCrary, Lillian Ebert, Anthony Pollano, Alice Svinolobova, Sofia Laviano, Morgan Brennan, Anya Hersch, Derek Dowcett, Gabby Fox, Sierra Longstaff, Olivia Priore, Ariana Raad, Sierra Nicholas, Ashley Dowcett and Raffi Sarkissian, along with Waltham residents / parents: Emile Colon, Priscilla Lopez-Pollano, Michelle Campbell, Maryellen Dischino, Jenafer Priore, Rich Profita, Nicole Piche-Nicholas, Danielle Truxaw, and Linda Hanley all addressed the Committee about a variety of high school related matters. The majority spoke out against the proposed changes to the Show Choir courses which, if approved, would remove the co-curricular designation from Music Unlimited and make it a class with an optional after school club. Most expressed how this would negatively impact the course as the high standard that Show Choir has become accustomed to performing at would not be possible if the after school practices were optional or attended by others not taking the in-school class. Many speakers spoke about how immensely beneficial Music Unlimited has been and the bonds, lessons and skills they developed have helped shape who they are. Additionally, they questioned how some see Music Unlimited and Music Express not accessible or equitable to students who want to participate.

A few people expressed their concern with the proposed change to the Project Lead The Way (PLTW) Capstone project. They believe that by combining the BioMedical, Engineering and Computer Science pathways for the Capstone project, that students will miss out on important final year curricula and rigor and that the programs are too different to be blended.

A couple of parents raised questions about the impact the elimination of SEI classes may have and some expressed their appreciation for the superintendent's update on the high school schedule as they feel the community's feedback is being heard.

Mrs. Coleman left the meeting at 8:03pm and returned at 8:07pm.

Following Public Input, one Waltham resident submitted a written statement to the Committee expressing concern with the recent increase in required graduation credits for high school students from 120 to 130 as it will be difficult for some students to achieve the necessary amount.

**STUDENT COUNCIL
STUDENT INPUT**

Waltham High Student Representative John McCalla announced Senior Revue will be taking place next week and registration for spring sports is ongoing.

**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 25, 2026;

Resignations:

- Maria Zepeda, Paraprofessional, Waltham High School - effective 03/06/2026;
- Erica Silva, Teacher, Plympton Elementary School - effective 06/30/2026;
- Susan Sutherland, Supervisor of Registration, Translation & Transportation, Central Office - effective 03/13/2026

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

The School Committee took a brief recess from 8:27pm and the meeting resumed at 8:32pm with all members present.

**SUPERINTENDENT'S
UPDATE**

a) Miscellaneous
Personnel

New Hires:

- Jon Leclair, Substitute Teacher, District-wide - effective 02/23/2026;
- Hadley Babstock, Substitute Teacher, District-wide - effective 03/02/2026;
- Alexander O'Halloran, PE Teacher - Elementary LTS, District-wide - effective 02/25/2026

b) Information
(cont.)

Due to the four snow days Waltham Public Schools has had so far this winter, the new last day of school for students in grades K-11 is Monday, June 22nd. This will change if there are any additional snow days this year.

Additionally, she shared a reminder about the Parenting Awareness Conference taking place Saturday, March 7th from 8am - 1:30pm at Waltham High School.

The superintendent explained that Waltham High has been selected by DESE to be included in an Accelerated Achievement Initiative based on its low accountability rating and achieving less-than-expected progress toward its targets. The high school will receive targeted DESE support and Waltham will be invited to a two day retreat this spring. A comparison between Waltham's accountability rating and similar and / or abutting districts was shared with the members.

c) Monthly
District
Enrollment

Student enrollment remains stable and is currently at 5,653 students, which is a slight increase from the start of the year.

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

**CURRICULUM AND
INSTRUCTION**

a) Waltham High
School
Program of
Studies

Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction Dr. Shannon Conley, accompanied by Waltham High School Principal-in-Residence John Barnes, shared the proposed changes to the Waltham High School Program of Studies for the upcoming 2026-2027 school year. SEI specific courses are being removed based on information received from DESE in January and the assistant superintendent provided some background as to the original intent of SEI courses and how this change will impact students. She emphasized repeatedly that all licensed teachers are required to have an SEI endorsement and that many supports will be put in place to help students transition into CP and honors classes.

Within the Early College Program, two courses are being added: Our Blue Planet and Climate Change is Now while Introduction to Ethics Early College and Early College Forensic Anthropology are being removed (by the colleges). Additionally, AP World History Modern and AP Calculus Recitation are being added and AP Bio Seminar will return to the book. The Project Lead The Way (PLTW) Pathways will now combine for a Common Capstone class during senior year instead of individual capstones for each pathway. This change is being implemented by PLTW and in order for the school to continue with the curriculum pathways, the same change must be adopted.

Music Express Show Choir Intermediate and Music Unlimited Advanced are being proposed for the upcoming year to replace the Music Unlimited Show Choir and Music Express Show Choir. The change will split the current Music Unlimited course into a school course for credit and an optional after school club. Music Odyssey Show Choir is being added as a semester based elective for beginners.

In ELA, Reading Intervention levels one, two and three are being added. A couple of courses are undergoing name changes and both LGBTQ+ Voices and Screenwriting are being removed due to low enrollment over the last few years.

The CTE area will remove three electives due to the expansion of some Chapter 74 programs: Small Engines, Fundamentals of Cosmetology and Intro to Health Care. Changes to credits are being proposed for students within Chapter 74 programs: students will earn ten credits in Tech 1 and fifteen in Tech 2 and 3. It is believed that this change will make a greater distinction between Chapter 74 programs and other classes and will allow for more flexibility in junior and senior year.

Within the Fine and Performing Arts area, multiple classes are being added in the areas of drama, music and dance. A few classes will see name changes and Newcomers Music Exploratory, Voces Unidas, AP Music Theory, Music Theory, and Jazz Band will likely not run next year, due to low enrollment.

The History / Social Science Department is requesting to remove Government and Citizenship in the 21st Century due to a lack of interest.

Within the subject of Math, Fundamentals of Integrated II is being added; a few courses will see slight name changes, and Newcomers Math, Topics in Algebra & Geometry, and Problem Solving for Math Contests will not be offered next year.

The Science Department plans to remove both its Physics and Biology Enrichment courses.

In the area of Wellness, Physical Education and Health, Project Adventure and Advanced Adventure Learning will not be included in the program book for the upcoming year.

The World Language Department is adding Spanish for Heritage Speakers, levels one and two and will be eliminating American Sign Language I and II as both have been underenrolled. Dr. Conley explained they are looking into other options (possibly working with Framingham State to make this an Early College course) to see if they can continue this language offering.

Two Information Technology courses are undergoing course description updates.

Mrs. Coleman left at 9:01pm and returned at 9:02pm.

The Multilingual and ESL Department are planning to remove three courses, one that has an alternative offering for ESL students and two that have been underenrolled and have not recently run. A few classes will receive upgraded titles and the department will add ESL Composition 3.

Mrs. AlJammal asked the assistant superintendent to explain the difference between SEI classes and ESL classes and where SEI students will now be placed. Dr. Conley explained that SEI (Sheltered English Immersion) classes were designed to be one year academic content classes for newcomer students taught for multilingual students only. ESL classes are geared towards language acquisition for English learners. She added that all licensed teachers are required to have an SEI endorsement and that in grades K-8, SEI students are not separated. Additional professional development will be given to teachers and more support will be implemented for students during the upcoming year to help with the transition.

Mrs. AlJammal inquired about the PLTW Capstone combination. Dr. Conley explained PLTW changed the Capstone course to include students from all three pathways who will need to collaborate in the final project. She indicated that in order to have access to the curriculum in each area, the high school needs to implement the same change.

School Committee member AlJammal shared that she is a Show Choir parent and that the co-curricular model has worked for a long time. Students, alumni and parents all spoke out about the need for the Music Unlimited course to be both in school and after school to achieve the high standard the group has performed at locally and nationally. She referenced Andover High School as having a similar program and also questioned how, with the offering of Music Express and the new Music Odyssey, an equity issue would exist. She would like the courses to continue to run as they have.

Mrs. Coleman left at 9:32pm and returned at 9:35pm.

Mr. Tarallo expressed his concern with removing the two ELA classes from the Program of Studies book for fear students may not realize they are options in the future. Additionally, he would like to see American Sign Language continue, even if it means the district partners with an outside school to do so. Mr Tarallo continued by asking if Project Adventure can somehow continue using the resources at 554 Lexington Street. The assistant superintendent indicated she will discuss this with the director. Additionally, the Committee member believes teaching children about civics is extremely important and he does not agree with the History department removing this course. He echoed Mrs. AlJammal's thoughts about Show Choir and then asked if both AP Music Theory and Jazz Band are being removed due to a lack of enrollment. Dr. Conley confirmed this is the case.

Ms. DeJoannis engaged in a short conversation with Dr. Conley and Dr. Mendonsa about Jazz Band and the different music offerings at the middle and high school levels.

Ms. Wong-Bigelow informed Dr. Conley that she believes the LGBTQ+ course should stay to show students support. She thinks the combination of the PLTW Capstone is wonderful as many careers need to rely on other fields in order to succeed.

Dr. Mendonsa left the meeting at 9:41pm and returned at 9:43pm.

Mr. Zanghi asked for clarification on the PLTW pathways and the assistant superintendent provided more details. He expressed his disapproval with the civics course being removed and suggested the Committee entertain having a workshop to discuss the future plans of the CTE program.

Mrs. Coleman advised she is glad to see the Music Odyssey class being added as an additional offering but wants the current Music Express and Music Unlimited courses to remain the same.

Mayor McCarthy voiced her approval of the new ELA classes which will provide additional support for students. While she is happy with the new PLTW Capstone course, she is concerned with the civics class being eliminated as it is important. The Mayor added that both the high school schedule and the Program of Studies are necessary for budgeting purposes and she would like to proceed with provisional approval of the course selection book. With regard to Show Choir, she believes the courses should stay. The Mayor emphasized the importance of ensuring rigor at all levels for all students.

VOTED: On motion of Mrs. Coleman, seconded by Mr. Tarallo, to provisionally approve the proposed Waltham High School Program of Studies as long as Music Unlimited and Music Express courses remain the same as this year. Ms. Wong-Bigelow added a friendly amendment, accepted by Mrs. Coleman, requesting all matters raised by the members at the meeting be reviewed by program directors prior to the book being sent out to students. The motion and friendly amendment were both approved unanimously.

VOTED: On motion of Mr. Tarallo, seconded by Ms. DeJoannis, to have Dr. Mendonsa and Dr. Conley review the recommended changes and leave in the Program of Studies: Screenwriting, LGBTQ+ Voices, and Civics, even if they will not run during the upcoming year. All in favor.

VOTED: On motion of Mr. Tarallo, seconded by Mrs. Coleman, to explore options to offer American Sign Language next year. All in favor.

A discussion between Mr. Zanghi, Dr. Conley and Dr. Mendonsa followed about the proposed changes to CTE credits, the PLTW Capstone course, and the tracking of English learners.

VOTED: On motion of Mr. Zanghi, seconded by Mayor McCarthy, to track the upcoming transition of SEI students to determine if the additional support is proving beneficial. A friendly amendment offered by Ms. DeJoannis, and accepted by Mr. Zanghi, added that class sizes impacted by the removal of SEI courses should also be monitored. Roll call (friendly amendment): Ms. Wong-Bigelow - yes; Ms. DeJoannis - yes; Mrs. AlJammal - no; Mrs. Coleman - yes; Mr. Tarallo - no, and Mr. Zanghi - yes. Roll call (full motion): Ms. Wong-Bigelow - yes; Ms. DeJoannis - yes; Mrs. AlJammal - no; Mrs. Coleman - yes; Mr. Tarallo - no, and Mr. Zanghi - yes.

Mr. Tarallo asked how the CTE credit change will be implemented for current and future students. A short conversation followed and Dr. Conley confirmed she will speak with Director Grace about this.

Ms. Wong-Bigelow asked if AP courses can be reviewed to determine if they satisfy core requirements. The assistant superintendent advised they have been reviewed for this but will likely have to be re-reviewed when the new graduation standards are issued by DESE later this year.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

- a) MSBA - Waltham High School Project A Big Three meeting is scheduled for later this month.
- b) Anti-Racism, Diversity, Equity and Inclusion The Equity Team recently met and is working on finalizing a proposal to be shared with the School Committee in the next month.
- c) Dual Language School Model and Reutilization of 617 Lexington Street The next 617 Committee meeting will take place in mid-March.
- d) Waltham High School's Career and Technical Education 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. The list of impacted programs will be shared within a week of the lottery.

(CTE)
Department

Nothing additional was added following Dr. Mendonsa's statement about the schedule.

e) Waltham High
School
Schedule

NEW BUSINESS

There was no New Business shared at the meeting.

FISCAL MATTERS

a) Bills on
Warrant

VOTED: On motion of Mrs. Coleman, seconded by Mrs. AlJammal, to pay the bills on warrant. All in favor.

AGENDA ITEMS
FOR FUTURE
MEETINGS

VOTED: On motion of Mr. Zanghi, seconded by Ms. DeJoannis, to have a CTE workshop to receive an update and discuss future plans for the CTE Department. Mr. Tarallo offered a friendly amendment, that was accepted by Mr. Zanghi, that the workshop take place during a Regular Meeting so it can be televised. The motion and friendly amendment were both approved unanimously.

ADJOURNMENT

VOTED: On motion of Mrs. Coleman, seconded by Mr. Tarallo, to adjourn the Regular Meeting at 10:41pm. All in favor.

Dr. Marisa Mendonsa
Clerk