

WALTHAM SCHOOL COMMITTEE
Waltham, Massachusetts
REGULAR MEETING

MINUTES

APRIL 15, 2026

The regular meeting of the Waltham School Committee convened at 5:35pm. 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 Mrs. AlJammal, seconded by Mr. Tarallo, to move to Executive Session at 5:36pm 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 to conduct strategy sessions in preparation for negotiations with nonunion personnel and / or to conduct negotiations with nonunion personnel - Assistant Superintendent for Special Education and Student Services, to include Attorney Jonathan Atwater and HR Administrator Kate Peretz, and return to the regular meeting at 7:00 pm. All in favor.

RECONVENE

The School Committee reconvened at 7:04pm. Present were Mr. Tarallo, Mr. Zanghi, Mrs. Coleman, Mrs. AlJammal, Ms. DeJoannis, and Ms. Wong-Bigelow. Mayor McCarthy was not present. Mrs. Coleman presided.

Mrs. Coleman announced the meeting was being recorded by WCAC. No one else confirmed they were recording the meeting.

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

**MOMENT OF
SILENCE**

The Committee held a Moment of Silence for former Waltham High School Italian Teacher Sandy Hart who recently passed away.

VOTED: On motion of Ms. DeJoannis, seconded by Mr. Tarallo, to open the Public Hearing on the School Department's Operating Budget for FY 2027 at 7:05pm. All in favor.

Mayor McCarthy arrived at 7:05pm.

**PUBLIC HEARING
ON THE SCHOOL
DEPARTMENT'S
OPERATING
BUDGET FOR FY
2027**

MacArthur teacher Kristine Barker voiced her concerns with the changes to the upcoming summer school program. She noted programming is being cut, teacher pay is being reduced, with no reduction in work, and no explanations have been provided.

Waltham High School staff members Maria Luiza Rodriguez, Arielle Trager, Lauren Boyle, Lynnie Marinaccio, Cathrina Mili, and Lauren Sampson, along with Waltham

parents Jessica Powers, Maria Vidart-Delgado and Carolina Lara all shared their concern with the upcoming SEI changes and the proposed cuts to the WHS ESL staff. They noted a lack of transparency to staff, students and families about the changes. They indicated no plans or processes for the upcoming transition or full implementation have been communicated. It was requested that administrators collaborate with them before any changes are made and to prioritize student success. They urged the members to reconsider staff cuts and to think about the impact on all students. A letter from the WEA, signed by dozens of WHS staff, was read reiterating the same message.

Parent Jessica Powers also shared her thoughts on the benefits of increasing Hawk Block for students.

VOTED: On motion of Mr. Tarallo, seconded by Mrs. Coleman, to close the Public Hearing on the School Department's Operating Budget for FY 2027 at 7:37pm. All in favor.

RECONVENE

The School Committee reconvened at 7:37pm. Present were Mr. Tarallo, Mr. Zanghi, Mrs. Coleman, Mrs. AlJammal, Ms. DeJoannis, Ms. Wong-Bigelow, and Mayor McCarthy. Mayor McCarthy presided.

PUBLIC INPUT

There was no one who requested to address the Committee.

**STUDENT COUNCIL
STUDENT INPUT**

There were no students present at the meeting.

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

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

CONSENT AGENDA

Ms. Peretz presented the following Consent Agenda items:

- Minutes from the Regular Meeting held on March 18, 2026;

Retirements:

- Maureen Meagher-Ryan, Reading Specialist, MacArthur Elementary School - effective 06/30/2026

Resignations:

- Laura Sanchez Ospina, Paraprofessional, Kennedy Middle School - effective 04/06/2026
- Zirui Xu, Teacher, Waltham High School - effective 06/22/2026
- Lisa Butler, Accountant, Central Office - effective 05/15/2026
- Shaliyah Dixon, Library Paraprofessional, Waltham High School - effective 04/17/2026

HR Administrator Kate Peretz informed the members that two \$1,000. donations had been received, both to support the Waltham High School's Quiz Bowl Team's

upcoming trip to the national tournament in Atlanta next month. The donations were from the Village Bank and the Proskoczilo family.

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

COMMUNICATIONS

There was nothing new shared in the area of Communications.

SUPERINTENDENT'S UPDATE

a) Miscellaneous Personnel

New Hires:

- Cassandra Edwards, Substitute Teacher, District-Wide - effective 04/07/2026;
- Devin Cummings, Transition Specialist, District-Wide - effective 04/01/2026

Transfers and Promotions:

- Alexandria Gately, LTS Grade 3 Teacher, MacArthur Elementary School - effective 03/30/2026-06/22/2026 - approx.;
- Dari Ramirez, 3.5hr Perm Cafe Worker, Dual Language School - effective 03/30/2026;
- Iris Godoy, 3.5hr Perm Food Service Cafe Worker, Waltham High School - effective 03/30/2026;
- Leah Jonczyk, LTS 8th Grade ELA, McDevitt Middle School - effective 05/13/2026-09/25/2026 - approx.;
- Laura Barranco, Grade 4 LTS, Whittemore Elementary School - effective 03/26/2026-06/22/2026 -approx.;
- Brooke Lallensack, Daily Building Sub, Northeast Elementary School - effective 03/30/2026;
- Reham Ebrahim, LTS ESL Teacher, Northeast Elementary School - effective 03/30/2026-06/30/2026 - approx.;
- Carina Catino, TASC Paraprofessional, Stanley Elementary School - effective 04/27/2026;
- Victoria Zarkadas, TASC Teacher, Stanley Elementary School - effective 01/28/2026

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

b) Information

Assistant Superintendent for Finance and Operations Chad Mazza provided an overview of the remainder of the budget process. In May, the School Committee will vote on the proposed budget, the approved budget will be submitted to the Mayor's office and then, the Mayor's proposed budget will be submitted to City Council for consideration. In June, the City Council Finance Committee will hold its budget hearing and vote on the final city budget. Following approval, the School Committee will vote on the cost center allocations for the final approved budget.

World Language Director Sharon Kalagher provided an update to the Committee. The middle schools currently each have a French teacher, an Italian teacher and share three Spanish teachers. At Waltham High, there are two French, two Italian, two Italian / Spanish, and six Spanish teachers who educate students.

During the 2026 - 2027 school year, Spanish for Heritage Speakers levels one and two will be offered and, in 2027 - 2028, level three will be offered. This will provide more challenging coursework for native speakers.

Over 200 eighth and ninth graders were tested and placed for next year. The continued revision of DESE grant curriculum aligned to ACTFL proficiencies work is ongoing. Additionally, new AP Language tests will be implemented for the upcoming year and teachers will be trained this summer through grant funds.

The World Language Department offered several field trips this year thanks to grant funds and over 130 Seal of Biliteracy tests were administered.

Ms. Wong-Bigelow asked if the new Spanish for Heritage Speakers classes will be open to Dual Language students. Ms. Kalagher confirmed they will be and that all students will be tested to ensure they are placed into appropriate levels. Ms. Wong-Bigelow inquired about the possibility of expanding the foreign language options to include Mandarin and others. The Foreign Language Director indicated this is being considered for the future.

Based on questions from Ms. DeJoannis, Dr. Kalagher confirmed that students who are proficient in Spanish are able to take AP Spanish earlier in high school as grade level restrictions were removed. It was noted that taking AP Spanish earlier would enable students to take courses in other romance languages. Additionally, Ms. Kalagher indicated she will explore the idea of a foreign exchange program in the future.

Dr. Lisa Kingsley, Interim Superintendent for Special Education and Student Services, advised the department has focused on the skills that matter most for our students. During a recent Professional Development afternoon, educators from each school level shared with their peers a variety of skills, successes and recommendations. Across all levels, emotional regulation and planning skills are consistent top priorities, as are the need for more support for students during school transitions and to better align services with student needs. Literacy is a shared priority and it is apparent there is strong alignment across the staff.

From the Family and Community Engagement area, Dr. Ray Porch shared pictures from the District's Art Show opening which took place earlier this month. He indicated a Family Engagement Advisory Council has been established with various stakeholders. The first meeting was last week and important conversations, concerns and topics were shared.

Human Resources Administrator Kate Peretz informed the members that the WHS Principal Committee met virtually on April 7th to prepare for interviews that were held on Monday and Tuesday of this week. Seven candidates were interviewed and feedback and recommendations were given to Dr. Mendonsa. More information about the candidates, school visits and caregiver forums will be shared in the upcoming weeks.

Mayor McCarthy asked about the composition of the interview committee and Ms. Peretz provided info. The Mayor emphasized the importance of stability and inquired about exit interviews and feedback. A short conversation followed.

CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

There was nothing new shared in Curriculum and Instruction at the meeting.

**UNFINISHED
BUSINESS**

- a) MSBA -
Waltham High
School Project There will be some work done at the high school during school vacation week, primarily in the Cosmetology area and in some of the science rooms.
- b) Anti-Racism,
Diversity,
Equity and
Inclusion There was nothing new added in this area.
- c) Dual
Language
School Model
and
Reutilization of
617 Lexington
Street The 617 Committee met on Monday afternoon and is working on its presentation for the Executive Team about possible options for the building.
- VOTED:** On motion of Mrs. Coleman, seconded by Mr. Tarallo, to hear from off-committee members. All in favor.
- d) Waltham High
School's Career
and Technical
Education
(CTE)
Department The assistant superintendent indicated the Culinary department has been handling family style meals for staff throughout the year as well as numerous catering requests for district events. Due to a delay in software / electrical work, Culinary plans on a soft-opening for the public in May. The Cosmetology salon is now open offering a variety of services to residents and staff. The Graphic Design department is accepting requests and continues to support the district with various projects. Additionally, both Auto Tech and Collision have been open all school year to provide automotive services to Waltham residents, employees and students.
- Dr. Conley provided the members with a written list of the Ch. 74 program enrollment for the current '25-'26 school year as well as the projections for the upcoming '26-'27 school year. She also provided an overview of the staff that supports the CTE program.
- Multiple questions were asked by Ms. Wong-Bigelow, Mayor McCarthy, Mrs. AlJammal, Mr. Tarallo and Ms. DeJoannis about oversubscribed and underenrolled Chapter 74 programs, the possible revamping of underenrolled programs, adding additional sections to accommodate more students, whether CTE electives may impact Ch. 74 enrollment, and CTE trends across the state. The assistant superintendent indicated possible options are being explored but the school is bound by restrictions on enrollment based on building / area space. Dr. Conley indicated she will provide more information regarding space and staff restrictions and possible options after reviewing DESE guidelines.
- e) Waltham High
School
Schedule Nothing new was noted in this area.

f) Reapproval of the 2026-2027 Waltham Public Schools District Calendar

Ms. Peretez indicated the formatting revisions requested at the last meeting were made to the district calendar for the upcoming 2026 - 2027 school year.

VOTED: On motion of Ms. Wong-Bigelow, seconded by Mrs. Coleman, to approve the revised 2026-2027 Waltham Public Schools District Calendar. All in favor.

g) Valor High School

The Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction explained the written process for students to be referred to and enroll in Valor. She detailed the referral team's composition and the steps taken prior to accepting students. The process during the school year is the same, however, timing is not as flexible. A set written process has not been developed for vacancies at this time. Dr. Conley advised additional information will be shared with the members about the school vs. program model.

Mr. Tarallo asked if the Barr Foundation has given a recommendation about the future path of the school. The assistant superintendent confirmed the Barr Foundation supports the vision of the school and provides financial support but the future of the school is up to the district.

VOTED: On motion of Mayor McCarthy, seconded by Mr. Tarallo, to obtain the written admission process for Waltham High School. All in favor.

VOTED: On motion of Mr. Tarallo, seconded by Mrs. Coleman, to table this matter until the May 6th, 2026 meeting. All in favor.

NEW BUSINESS

a) Vote for the Assistant Superintendent for Special Education and Student Services

Mrs. Coleman shared the process that was taken to permanently fill the Assistant Superintendent for Special Education and Student Services position. It was determined that current Interim Assistant Superintendent Dr. Lisa Kingsley is the best candidate. Dr. Kingsley is being offered a three year contract with a salary of \$188,000. for the first year and a 2.8% increase the following years.

VOTED: On motion of Mrs. Coleman, seconded by Mr. Tarallo, to approve the contract for the Assistant Superintendent for Special Education and Student Services. Roll call: Ms. Wong-Bigelow - yes; Ms. DeJoannis - yes; Mrs. AlJammal - yes; Mrs. Coleman - yes; Mr. Tarallo - yes; Mr. Zanghi - yes, and Mayor McCarthy - no.

Mayor McCarthy explained she cannot support the contract as a budget has not yet been approved for next year.

FISCAL MATTERS

a) Bills on Warrant

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

**AGENDA ITEMS
FOR FUTURE
MEETINGS**

VOTED: On motion by Ms. Wong-Bigelow, seconded by Mr. Tarallo, to have a presentation about the proposed changes to the SEI classes and ESL staff by Dr. Mendonsa. All in favor.

A short conversation between Mayor McCarthy and Ms. Peretz followed about notification of staff reductions, ESL staff and the budget.

VOTED: On motion of Mayor McCarthy, seconded by Mr. Tarallo, to receive a budget analysis of the current year vs. projected upcoming year classroom sizes and staffing. All in favor.

Mayor McCarthy added that this can be completed now for all levels except Waltham High, as course selection is underway.

Ms. Wong-Bigelow took the opportunity to publicly thank all of the art teachers and the Waltham Public Library for an amazing district art show. Mayor McCarthy gave a brief history of the art show in Waltham.

ADJOURNMENT

VOTED: On motion of Mr. Tarallo, seconded by Ms. Wong-Bigelow, to adjourn the Regular Meeting at 9:07pm. All in favor.

Kate Peretz
Clerk Pro-Tem