

WALTHAM SCHOOL COMMITTEE
Waltham, Massachusetts
REGULAR MEETING

MINUTES

OCTOBER 7, 2026

The regular meeting of the Waltham School Committee convened at 5:31pm. Present were Ms. Wong-Bigelow, Ms. DeJoannis, Mrs. AlJammal, Mrs. Coleman, and Mr. Zanghi. Mr. Tarallo and Mayor McCarthy were not present. Mrs. Coleman presided.

RECESS

VOTED: On motion of Mrs. AlJammal, seconded by Ms. DeJoannis, to move to Executive Session at 5:32pm 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; to conduct strategy sessions in preparation for negotiations with nonunion personnel and/or to conduct negotiations with nonunion personnel – Assistant Superintendent for Finance and Operations; to conduct strategy sessions with respect to collective bargaining with the Waltham Building Maintenance Workers Association and/or to conduct negotiations with the Waltham Building Maintenance Workers Association, and in accordance with Mass. G.L. c. 30A, Section 21(a)(3), to discuss strategy with respect to litigation if an open meeting may have a detrimental effect on the litigating position of the public body and the chair so declares - Waltham School Secretaries Association and the Waltham Public Schools MUP-26-12223, to include Attorney Jonathan Atwater and Superintendent Dr. Mendonsa, 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. AlJammal, Ms. DeJoannis, Ms. Wong-Bigelow, and Mayor McCarthy. Mrs. Coleman was not present. Mayor McCarthy presided.

The Committee recited the Pledge of Allegiance.

PUBLIC INPUT

Steven Hirsch, parent of a Stanley kindergartener, inquired about communicating with the School Committee in the future and also requested that our registration paperwork be revised to use neutral pronouns.

Eric Hoffman, a WPS parent, expressed his concerns after watching the video of a recent altercation involving students at Kennedy last week. He asked what the district's policy is regarding teacher involvement in a fight between students.

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.

VOTED: On motion of Mr. Tarallo, seconded by Mrs. AlJammal, to move the addendum in its entirety. All in favor.

CONSENT AGENDA

Dr. Mendonsa presented the following Consent Agenda items:

- Minutes from the Regular Meeting held on September 16, 2026;

Retirements:

- Robert Mantey, Senior Custodian, Central Office - effective 11/16/2026;
- Alba DeFazio-Binney, Teacher, MacArthur Elementary School - effective 6/30/2027;
- Lisa Damigella, Head Bookkeeper, Central Office - effective 1/11/2027

Resignations:

- Erin Madden, Special Education Paraprofessional, Waltham High School - effective 9/25/2026

The superintendent shared three generous donations:

- SharkNinja, Inc. is donating 25 SpeedStyle hair dryers and 25 Glam Multi-Stylers, along with other styling accessories, to Waltham High's Cosmetology Program. The donation is valued at over \$18,000.
- A donation of 120 winter coats from Cradles to Crayons will greatly benefit WPS students this winter.
- A donation of tickets from Maricruz Hairstyles, Inc., valued at \$1,000, for two WHS Cosmetology students to attend an upcoming hairstyle event.

VOTED: On motion of Ms. Wong-Bigelow, seconded by Mrs. AlJammal, to approve the Consent Agenda. All in favor.

COMMUNICATIONS

There was nothing shared in this category.

SUPERINTENDENT'S UPDATE

a) Miscellaneous Personnel

New Hires:

- Bernadette Scalese, Lunch Monitor, FitzGerald Elementary School - effective 09/10/2026;
- Margaret Santana, Door Security, MacArthur Elementary School - effective 09/02/2026;
- Meagan Hoffman, TASC Special Education Paraprofessional, Stanley Elementary School - effective 9/16/2026;
- Alyssa Orifice, Special Education Paraprofessional, Northeast Elementary School - effective 09/18/2026;
- Hilary Filkins, WHS Assistant Principal, Waltham High School - effective 09/23/2026;
- Isabella Terzian, TASC Special Education Paraprofessional, Stanley Elementary School - effective 09/18/2026;
- Kevin Tracey, Interim Principal, Kennedy Middle School - effective 09/21/2026;
- Isabella Abeiga, Human Resources Generalist, Central Office - effective 09/21/2026;
- Jason Coburn, Academic and Behavior Support Interventionist, Waltham High School - effective 09/22/2026;
- Dylan Brock, Building Sub, Kennedy Middle School - effective 09/28/2026;
- Charlie Gullledge, Door Monitor, Central Office - effective 09/28/2026;

- Joshua Hogan, LTS ESL Teacher, FitzGerald Elementary School - effective 10/01/2026;
- Norah Bessey, LTS Elementary General Music Teacher, MacArthur Elementary School - effective 10/05/2026

Transfers and Promotions:

- Grasielle DeOliveira, School Secretary, Whittemore Elementary School - effective 09/14/2026;
- Jennifer Arsenault, 7th Grade Social Studies Teacher, Kennedy Middle School - effective 08/31/2026;
- Michele O'Connell, School Psychologist, District-wide - effective 08/31/2026;
- Alexandra Zablotsky, Itinerant Music Teacher, Instrumental District-wide / MacArthur General Music - effective 08/31/2026;
- Kayla Buono, Art Teacher/CTE Teacher, Waltham High School - effective 08/31/2026;
- Jamie Lipof, Kindergarten Teacher, Northeast Elementary School - effective 08/31/2026;
- Carolyn Romero, Elementary Science Specialist Plympton Elementary School - effective 08/31/2026;
- Deanna Hoffman, Elementary Science Teacher, Dual Language / MacArthur - effective 08/31/2026;
- Jamie Long, Math Coach, Waltham High School - effective 08/31/2026;
- Emily Dyckman, Math Teacher, Waltham High School - effective 08/31/2026;
- Jessica Bella, Math Teacher, Waltham High School - effective 08/31/2026;
- Daisy Chiu, Forensics Teacher, Waltham High School - effective 08/31/2026;
- Brian Chiachio, Carpentry Instructor, Waltham High School - effective 03/06/2026;
- Yoon Choi, Chemistry Teacher, Waltham High School - effective 08/31/2026;
- Matthew Liebman, Learning Center Paraprofessional, Waltham High School - effective 08/31/2026;
- Nathaniel Holden, Music Teacher, Plympton / Stanley / Northeast - effective 08/31/2026;
- Meredith Lee, Out of District Coordinator, Central Office - effective 08/31/2026;
- Deanna Ventura, Paraprofessional, MacArthur Elementary School - effective 08/31/2026;
- Lauren Harpham, Special Education Evaluation Tester, McDevitt Middle School - effective 08/31/2006;
- Brianna Fox, Kindergarten Teacher, Stanley Elementary School - effective 08/31/2026;
- Nicholas DiCicco, PE Teacher, Stanley Elementary School - effective 08/31/2026;
- Jeff Harpham, Elementary PE Teacher, Dual Language / MacArthur Elementary School - effective 08/31/2026;
- Erica Kelley, District Instrumental Music, District-wide - effective 08/31/2026;
- Kristen Crotti, Grade 5 Teacher, Northeast Elementary School - effective 08/31/2026;
- Taylor Joyce, Grade 4 Teacher, Northeast Elementary School - effective 08/31/2026;
- Michaela O'Brien, Drama Teacher, Stanley Elementary School - effective 08/31/2026;
- KB Bickford, Music Teacher, Plympton Elementary School - effective 08/31/2026;

- Dorson Plourde, Art teacher, Stanley Elementary School - effective 08/31/2026;
- Julie Bonafilia, Grade 2 Teacher, Northeast Elementary School - effective 08/31/2026;
- Danielle Sweder, Grade 3 Teacher, Northeast Elementary School - effective 08/31/2026;
- Danielle Keating, Grade 1 Teacher, Northeast Elementary School - effective 08/31/2026;
- Elizabeth Coloian, 8th Grade Science Teacher, Kennedy Middle School - effective 08/31/2026;
- Debra Edwards, Integrated PreK Paraprofessional, Northeast Elementary School - effective 08/31/2026;
- Joselin Contreras, Paraprofessional - TASC Program, McDevitt Middle School - effective 08/31/2026;
- Nancy Ortega, Paraprofessional - RTAP Program, Stanley Elementary School - effective 08/31/2026;
- Rachel Lang, 7th Grade Social Studies Teacher, McDevitt Middle School - effective 08/31/2026;
- Nina Doonan, 7th Grade Science Teacher, McDevitt Middle School - effective 08/31/2026;
- Matthew Ogle, Math Lab (Math Interventionist), McDevitt Middle School - effective 08/31/2026;
- Elaina Heikes, Grade 4 Teacher, Plympton Elementary School - effective 08/31/2026;
- Natasha Sarkisian, ESL Teacher, Whittemore Elementary School - effective 08/31/2026;
- Ashley Marston, Kindergarten Teacher, Whittemore Elementary School - effective 08/31/2026 - 06/30/2027;
- Stephanie Mikelis, SEI Instructional Coach, Waltham High School - effective 08/31/2026;
- Jeff Dumerjean, Senior Custodian, Whittemore Elementary School - effective 08/17/2026;
- Gina Fajardo, Integrated PreK Paraprofessional, Northeast Elementary School - effective 08/31/2026;
- Benjamin Calvanio, LTE Teacher, Kennedy Middle School;
- Courtney O'Malley, School Secretary, MacArthur Elementary School - effective 08/31/2026;
- Radha Hernandez, Integrated PreK Teacher - Special Education - Moderate Disabilities, Northeast Elementary School - effective 08/31/2026;
- Reagan Holmes, Career Exploration Leave, Waltham High School - effective 08/31/2026 - 06/30/2027;
- Jessica Nicholson, Building Substitute, MacArthur Elementary School - effective 09/18/2026;
- Alexea Marston, LTS Grade 1 Teacher, Northeast Elementary School - effective 10/05/2026 - 01/08/2027;
- Tiffany Martinez, Family Liaison, Northeast Elementary School - effective 08/31/2026

b) Information

The district's new Administrator of Student Engagement and Discipline, Elizabeth Murray, was introduced to the Committee.

c) Monthly
District
Enrollment

The monthly district enrollment report confirmed 5,452 students are currently enrolled in Waltham Public Schools.

Ms. DeJoannis inquired about the projected increase of students next year at Kennedy and how this will be addressed. Dr. Mendonsa indicated administrators have already begun to discuss how this increase will be handled and will continue to work on this throughout the year.

VOTED: On motion of Ms. Wong-Bigelow, seconded by Mr. Tarallo, to hear from all off-Committee members. All in favor.

**CURRICULUM AND
INSTRUCTION**

a) School
Improvement
Plan -
Kennedy
Middle School

Kennedy Middle School administrators, Principal Kevin Gildea and Assistant Principals Amy Woogmaster and Kate Sullivan, were present to share their school's improvement plan for the year. Additionally, Mr. Kevin Tracey was introduced as the school's new interim principal.

Mr. Gildea explained how the School Improvement Plan was developed based on data from last year. While the school demonstrated an overall improvement in iReady scores from the start of the year, literacy is the focus area for this year's improvement plan.

The Student Learning Goal for this year is "All students will increase their reading skills by meeting their 'typical growth goal' as measured by iReady and students who are 2 or more grade levels below grade level will meet their 'stretch goal' as measured by iReady." The Professional Practice Goal is "Teachers will expand their instructional toolkit focusing on informational text to increase student literacy performance" and the School Culture Goal was identified as "We will improve the school climate by establishing expectations to increase student Kindness, Motivation, Success so that all students feel known, feel valued, and are empowered to succeed." Information about the steps that will be taken to achieve each goal along with plans for progress monitoring were also provided.

The members asked some clarifying questions, provided feedback and wished Mr. Gildea well in his upcoming retirement.

Mayor McCarthy asked Mr. Gildea if he believes the school would benefit from the addition of another cluster and he confirmed it would, adding that either a new cluster or the expansion of an already existing cluster would help.

b) School
Improvement
Plan -
McDevitt
Middle School

McDevitt Middle School Principal Scott Lipman, accompanied by Assistant Principals Jaime Wakefield and Tedd Markos, provided a summary of last year's MCAS and accountability improvement and noted the areas in which students are outperforming state averages.

The middle school's Student Learning Goal is "Students will demonstrate an increased ability to independently comprehend rigorous texts across all grade levels and content areas." The Professional Practice Goal was identified as "All teachers and educators will consistently and intentionally implement accommodations and scaffolds to support the needs of all students to ensure that students are independently accessing tools which will enable them to comprehend grade level

content.” McDevitt’s Student Engagement Goal for the year is “All students will demonstrate an increased sense of belonging. We will emphasize equitable opportunities for all students to develop trusted relationships with staff, engage in activities that amplify student voice, and participate in cross-grade and cross-curricular experiences.” Mr. Lipman provided insight into the school’s plan for achieving these goals and how progress will be tracked.

Ms. Wong-Bigelow, Ms. DeJoannis and Mayor McCarthy asked questions and provided feedback to Mr. Lipman.

c) School Improvement Plan - Valor High School

Linda Flueckiger, Valor High School’s principal, shared the positive news about an increase in the completion of modules by students last year. She noted the post-graduation shift between the Classes of 2025 and 2026. Valor’s first year graduates all intended to head into the workforce after graduation. Last year, the Class of 2026 planned to enter the workforce, enlist in the military, go to trade school, or enroll in two or four year colleges.

Valor’s Growth and Support Plan listed its Student Learning Goal as “By the end of the 2026-2027 school year, Valor High will improve student academic success and engagement by strengthening attendance, academic accountability, classroom academic supports, goal-setting, social-emotional learning, and school culture through consistent advisory systems, instructional practices, and relationship-based supports.”

The school’s Professional Practice Goal is “By the end of the 2026-2027 school year, Valor High School will collaborate with WHS to share best practices that support student engagement, attendance, academic success, and school connectedness, while improving systems between Waltham High School and Valor High School to ensure smooth referral, enrollment, and transition processes that also supports student success.”

The Student Engagement / Family and Community Engagement Goal was identified as “By the end of the 2026–2027 school year, Valor High will strengthen family and community engagement by ensuring consistent communication, celebration, and collaboration between the school and families, by expanding and strengthening community partnerships, and formalizing structures for shared decision-making.”

The process for working toward each goal along with how progress will be monitored was explained in detail by the principal.

Multiple questions were asked by the Committee relative to student attendance, school flexibility, home visits, and family liaison support.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

a) Anti-Racism, Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

Nothing new was shared in this area.

b) Dual Language School Model and

Nothing new was shared at the meeting relative to this topic.

Reutilization of
617 Lexington
Street

- c) Waltham High School's Career and Technical Education (CTE) Department Dr. Mendonsa reiterated that the new HVACR position at Waltham High remains unfilled. Students in Tech 2 are most impacted as they do not currently have a teacher. Additionally, freshmen CTE exploratory students have been informed that HVACR will be removed from their exploratory rotation. The superintendent shared the current recommendation which includes keeping the position open so recruitment efforts can continue, removing HVACR from this year's exploratory program for either first semester or the whole year if the position is not filled prior to the start of the second semester, and eliminating HVACR from the lottery for Tech 1 placement if the vacancy continues. Looking ahead, if the position remains unfilled, the recommendation is to offer HVACR Tech 1 every other year so enrolled students can fill program requirements with the current staff.

VOTED: On motion of Mayor McCarthy, seconded by Ms. DeJoannis, to hear from Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction Dr. Shannon Conley. All in favor.

All of the members asked questions and offered suggestions in an effort to determine what options, if any, remain for filling the vacancy and how this might be impacted by a different high school schedule next year. The suggestions included: hire another Ch. 74 teacher who could teach affiliated curriculum; explore online modules; contact professional companies; explore double sessions; reach out to DESE for guidance, and consider if a co-teaching model might work. Dr. Conley confirmed the CTE PAC has been informed and is attempting to assist. She also discussed the other suggestions and noted they will continue working toward a resolution.

- d) Waltham High School Schedule The Waltham High School schedule committee will reconvene tomorrow to continue its work.
- e) Enrollment, Space and Data in the Waltham Public Schools Enrollment information as well as building capacity information for Kennedy and McDevitt Middle Schools was provided to the Committee. A request was made for a more detailed visual to demonstrate specific class enrollment within the middle schools.
- f) School Committee Subcommittee Meetings **VOTED:** On motion of Mr. Tarallo, seconded by Ms. Wong-Bigelow, to table this matter to the next meeting. All in favor.

NEW BUSINESS

- a) Approval of the School Committee Meeting Calendar for 2027 The School Committee reviewed a list of proposed meeting dates for 2027 and a brief discussion followed.
- VOTED:** On motion of Ms. DeJoannis, seconded by Mr. Tarallo, to move the proposed March meetings to March 10, 2027 and March 24, 2027. All in favor.

VOTED: On motion by Mr. Tarallo, seconded by Ms. DeJoannis, to approve the amended School Committee Meeting Calendar for 2027. All in favor.

b) Declaration of Surplus - Portion of second floor of 617 Lexington Street

Mayor McCarthy informed the members that a community partner's facility will be undergoing a large renovation starting in the summer of 2027. Given this, the partner is looking to use a portion of the second floor of 617 Lexington Street, after school hours, to continue to offer its programming. A conversation ensued about the approximate length of usage time, the section of the building, whether usage would impact the Dual Language School, and next steps.

VOTED: On motion of Mr. Tarallo, seconded by Mrs. AlJammal, to declare a portion of the second floor of the 617 Lexington Street building temporarily surplus for usage by an outside organization. All in favor.

VOTED: On motion of Ms. Wong-Bigelow, seconded by Mr. Tarallo, to move agenda item 10c out of order. All in favor.

FISCAL MATTERS

c) Bills on Warrant

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

a) FY '26 Budget Transfers and Close Out

The Mayor provided each member with an analysis of the FY '26 school department budget.

Ms. DeJoannis left the meeting at 9:37pm.

RECESS

The Chair declared a recess at 9:37pm.

RECONVENE

The School Committee reconvened at 9:41pm with all members, except Mrs. Coleman, still present.

Mayor McCarthy read her letter which included a breakdown of surpluses and deficits within the four school department accounts. The mayor requested multiple funding transfers:

- Funding transfer from the 5100 Account in the amount of \$2,389,902.41 to be applied to the deficits in the 5200 Account;
- Funding transfer from the 5400 Account in the amount of \$17,125.05 to be applied to the deficits in the 5200 Account, and
- Funding transfer from the 5500 Account in the amount of \$10,996.38 to be applied to the deficits in the 5200 Account.

After the transfers are completed, the overall deficit for the FY '26 School Department Budget is \$864,596.08.

VOTED: On motion of Mr. Tarallo, seconded by Ms. Wong-Bigelow, to approve the three transfer requests made by Mayor McCarthy. All in favor.

Mr. Zanghi asked how the deficit will be handled and the mayor advised recommendations will be given and an outside auditors office will review.

b) FY '27 Budget
Transfer
Request

Dr. Mendonsa received confirmation about how transfers can be made within school department accounts. Any transfers within the same account need to be approved by the School Committee.

AGENDA ITEMS
FOR FUTURE
MEETINGS

Mr. Tarallo thanked the City Council for approving the School Committee's request to rename the 617 Lexington Street building for former WPS Superintendent John "Jack" Dadonna.

VOTED: On motion of Mr. Tarallo, seconded by Ms. DeJoannis, to remove the Waltham High School name from the front of the 617 Lexington Street building; to move forward with the dedication of the building, and to also dedicate the west wing of the building for Robert Eagle. All in favor.

Ms. DeJoannis inquired about reconvening the city-wide PTO meetings referenced at the last School Committee meeting. The Mayor confirmed she will handle facilitating these and a short discussion about how they will be run, how matters can be submitted for discussion and the School Committee's involvement took place.

Ms. Wong-Bigelow asked when the survey about the district calendar for next year, that was previously discussed last spring, will be circulated to the WPS community.

Ms. DeJoannis inquired about the next steps for obtaining student, staff and family feedback since the district moved away from using Panorama surveys. She asked how the district plans to increase engagement.

ADJOURNMENT

VOTED: On motion of Mrs. AlJammal, seconded by Ms. DeJoannis, to adjourn the Regular Meeting at 10:03pm. All in favor.

Marisa Mendonsa
Clerk