

WALTHAM SCHOOL COMMITTEE
Waltham, Massachusetts
REGULAR MEETING

MINUTES

JUNE 17, 2026

The regular meeting of the Waltham School Committee convened at 5:37pm. 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 5:37pm 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; 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 Educators Association/MTA and the Waltham School Committee, MUP-26-12065; 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, and to conduct strategy sessions in preparation for negotiations with nonunion personnel and/or to conduct negotiations with nonunion personnel – Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction, to include Attorney Jonathan Atwater, Superintendent Dr. Mendonsa and HR Administrator Kate Peretz, to then move to a Workshop regarding the Superintendent's Metrics, 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, Ms. Wong-Bigelow, and Mayor McCarthy. Mayor McCarthy presided.

The Chair 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.

PUBLIC INPUT

Waltham parent Emile Colon, WPS staff members Karen Lawn, Carol Rodriguez, and Kristine Scheufele all addressed the Committee to urge the members to offer a fair and equitable contract to the members of the Waltham School Secretaries Association (WSSA). They expressed their frustration with working for the last year without a contract, the importance of their positions to the district, and their desire to feel valued and paid appropriately for their work. Waltham parents Nicole Piche-Nicholas and Danielle Truxaw both spoke about the Waltham High School schedule process. Ms. Piche-Nicholas explained she believes it is important to have caregivers involved earlier in the schedule process. Both she and Ms. Truxaw believe the staff schedule survey questions may have been persuasive and biased.

WPS staff member Derek Vandegrift read a petition signed by numerous Waltham School Administrators Association members requesting the School Committee offer a fair and just contract to the WSAA members. He confirmed the WSAA stands in solidarity with the remaining WPS unions working without a contract for nearly a year and that all deserve to be compensated equitably for their hard work and dedication to the district.

**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.

RECESS

The School Committee recessed at 7:40pm.

RECONVENE

The Committee reconvened at 7:41pm with all members present.

CONSENT AGENDA

Dr. Mendonsa presented the following Consent Agenda items:

- Minutes from the Regular Meeting held on June 3, 2026;
- Minutes from the Special Meeting held on June 10, 2026;

Retirements:

- Phillip Cacciatore, Whittemore Elementary School, Senior Custodian - effective 7/11/2026;
- Thomas Muizulis, Plympton Elementary School, Custodian - effective 7/8/2026

Resignations:

- Danielle Nicolazzo, Plympton Elementary School, Teacher - effective 6/30/2026;
- Ross Wolfson, Districtwide, Director of School Counseling - effective - 6/30/2026;
- Diane Hartman, Central Office, Out of District Secretary - effective 6/30/2026
- Susan O'Laughlin, MacArthur Elementary School, Lunch Monitor - effective 6/8/2026
- Melissa Bevilacqua, Stanley Elementary School, Teacher - effective 6/30/2026
- Andrew Papastavrou, Waltham High School, Teacher - effective 6/30/2026;
- Evan Omi, Districtwide, Varsity Girls Volleyball Coach - effective 6/30/2026

The superintendent shared two donations:

- A 2012 Toyota Camry donated by Toyota of Watertown to the WHS CTE Automotive program valued at approximately \$3,500.; and
- A \$1,500 donation from Alexa Loura and Nancy Vito to establish the Dr. Nadene Stein Growth & Independence Scholarship which will benefit students next year in the Class of 2027.

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

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

COMMUNICATIONS

- a) Out of State travel request from the Fine and Performing Arts Department

Ms. Yank'l Garcia and Mr. Nat Blankenship were present to request approval for the WHS Full Orchestra to travel to Florida next April to perform and participate in workshops at Disney World. A few questions were asked by the members and answered by the teachers.

VOTED: On motion of Mrs. Coleman, seconded by Mr. Tarallo, to approve the out-of-state travel request from the Fine and Performing Arts Department. All in favor.

SUPERINTENDENT'S UPDATE

- a) Miscellaneous Personnel

New Hires:

- Victoria Blanchard, LTS Teacher, Waltham High School - effective 05/04/2026

Transfers and Promotions:

- Natasha Sarkisian, Whittemore Elementary School, ESL Teacher - effective 08/31/2026;
- Jennifer Paul, Northeast Elementary School, 7hr Cafe Manager - effective 08/31/2026

- b) Information

A reminder that the last day of school for all students in grades Pre-K through eleven is Monday, June 22nd, 2026 and is a full day.

Additionally, the district is migrating to a new website platform powered by ParentSquare's SmartSites. The transition will help streamline communication and provide a more user-friendly experience across the district and school websites. During the migration, some portions of the websites might be temporarily unavailable and families should reach out to their child's school with any questions.

Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction Dr. Shannon Conley informed the group that the new MCAS Family Portal will be unveiled by DESE soon. The portal will provide MCAS results online to families earlier in the year. She shared information families will need to access their child's results and about available translations.

Dr. Ray Porch, the Chief Officer of Family and Community Engagement, advised that on June 1st, the school site councils from across the district held their second meeting. Additionally, on June 4th, the PIC staff and family liaisons attended a DESE professional development session. He explained about additional upcoming staff training and provided an update on a fall family survey.

Human Resources Administrator Kate Peretz shared an update on the Registered Teacher Apprenticeship Program (RTAP). The four RTAP apprentices within the district have successfully completed the spring semester and all earned Dean's List. Work is currently underway with DESE and the district's RTAP Coordinator to ensure a smooth transition into year two.

CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

- a) Waltham Public Schools 2026-2027 Elementary School Handbook

Dr. Conley reviewed the proposed changes to the elementary school student handbook. The changes include standard updates, clarification of provisions, some reformatting, and a general clean-up of the handbook. Stemming from a request from Dr. Mendonsa, Dr. Conley explained that up to thirty minutes of recess is to be provided to students in grades K-5. Recess cannot be taken away as a consequence and students cannot be expected to make up work during recess time. Students may lose time at recess if they cause an issue at recess.

A short discussion between Mr. Tarallo, Ms. Wong-Bigelow, Mrs. AlJammal, and Dr. Conley followed about rephrasing and clarifying some of the language. It was decided that certain language can be modified but those that are specific School Committee policies could not be revised without a meeting of the policy subcommittee.

RECESS

The School Committee recessed at 8:05pm.

RECONVENE

The School Committee reconvened at 8:11pm with all members still present.

VOTED: On motion of Mrs. AlJammal, seconded by Mrs. Coleman, to approve the Waltham Public Schools 2026-2027 Elementary School Handbook. A friendly amendment was made by Mr. Tarallo, seconded by Ms. DeJoannis, to revise the recess language to reflect that principals should be notified at the beginning of the sentence. All in favor.

Ms. Wong-Bigelow requested any formatting issues and scrivener's errors be fixed.

- b) Waltham Public Schools 2026-2027 Middle School Handbook

The Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction reviewed the similar updates to the middle school handbook for the upcoming year. Mrs. AlJammal and Ms. Wong-Bigelow requested the same revisions to grammar and formatting and more consistency with labels.

VOTED: On motion of Mrs. AlJammal, seconded by Mr. Tarallo, to approve the Waltham Public Schools 2026-2027 Middle School Handbook. All in favor.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

- a) Anti-Racism, Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

Dr. Mendonsa confirmed the equity team recently shared the final draft of the equity plan with The Leadership Academy and is preparing to present it to the School Committee in August.

- b) Dual Language School Model and Reutilization of 617 Lexington Street

Assistant Superintendent for Finance and Operations Chad Mazza and Chief Officer for Family and Community Engagement Ray Porch provided background information about the 617 Committee's process for exploring additional uses for the building. The vision for the expansion of Valor High and continued needs of the LIFE Program were explained along with the associated building needs and requests. The goal is to keep Valor and LIFE in the same area, with access to the courtyard and elevator and to add a designated cafe (deli) and a separate school entrance for these

students. Multiple questions were asked by members and it was explained that these were visions for the school / program only and that actual logistics have not yet been the focus. Mayor McCarthy advised the proposed new back entrance for Valor is utilized by Reagle Theatre and that other alternatives will need to be explored for the school.

With the recent move to the 617 Lexington Street building, the Dual Language School hopes to be able to expand, starting with increasing to four kindergarten sections, in the fall of 2028. In order to accommodate this, Dual Language's principal Ricardo Dobles explained the goal would be to move the Dual Language School from the first floor up to the second and third floors to increase capacity. It was stated that Dual Language could expand at the middle school level and relocate to the 617 building, when the four kindergarten sections starting in the fall of 2028, finished fifth grade and that room within the building could be allocated for the additional grades. The new needs that the expansion (including middle school grades) and move would trigger were detailed. It was also noted that a school expansion would likely increase the number of transportation issues that plague families without vehicles.

A conversation followed about space within the building and the feasibility plan completed by SMMA a few years ago. Mrs. AlJammal indicated that expanding the Dual Language School would likely lead to additional staffing challenges. She also noted concerns with the attrition rate and indicated that unlike other district schools, students cannot easily be added within the Dual Language model. Mrs. Coleman requested that the Dual Language students be surveyed to get their input on whether they want to attend middle school within Dual Language or follow the current model and attend middle school at Kennedy.

A conversation followed about possible additional transportation options.

VOTED: On motion of Mr. Tarallo, seconded by Mrs. Coleman, to have a copy of SMMA's recent feasibility study sent to all School Committee members. All in favor.

Dr. Porch then explained the possible options to use building space for the benefit of the community. The 617 Committee is proposing to promote adult and youth enrichment community programming as well as expand the capacity of school programming and partnerships.

A conversation followed about space rentals, which area(s) can be used, revenue for the district, meeting the needs of the school district first, renovation costs, the possible expansion of CTE programs, and the concerns of having outside adults in the building during the school day. The president of the Watch City Program spoke in favor of securing space near the gym for this program.

The Chief Officer of Family and Community Engagement shared the vision of including a pre-K program at 617 Lexington Street and what the model could look like. Mayor McCarthy informed him that Mr. Tarallo requested space for a universal pre-K program a few years ago when SMMA was completing its feasibility study. A discussion ensued about building space, the possible need to utilize areas if the district's enrollment continues to grow, and whether a pre-K program could include students up through age six.

- c) Waltham High School's Career and Technical Education (CTE) Department Nothing new was added for this item.
- d) Waltham High School Schedule The superintendent referenced communication sent to families yesterday about the process to design a new high school schedule that fits the needs of all students, including those in CTE programs, on IEPs, and students identified as English Learners. Additionally, a new schedule must meet all DESE time and instructional requirements as well as allow for new high school graduation requirements to be met. Dr. Mendonsa shared feedback from WHS staff members about their top priorities and then outlined the next steps in the schedule process. Questions were asked about whether the state's new graduation guidelines will include a sample schedule for schools with CTE programs and how a new schedule will benefit students looking for more challenging courses and those who may be struggling.
- e) Enrollment, Space and Data in the Waltham Public Schools Dr. Mendonsa advised she is still working on compiling data about available space within current school buildings.

NEW BUSINESS

- a) Superintendent's Evaluation Mrs. Coleman provided an overview of the superintendent's evaluation process and specified the dates for each step.

FISCAL MATTERS

- b) Bills on Warrant **VOTED:** On motion of Mrs. Coleman, seconded by Mr. Tarallo, to pay the bills on warrant out of order. All in favor.
- a) FY '27 School Department Budget Dr. Mendonsa read a statement about the FY'27 budget process and her recent analysis of the school department's budget request. She indicated that additional funds are available to the district for the upcoming year through the increase in Circuit Breaker funds from the state and the larger contingency amount that had been factored into the original requests. She advised she believes the new amount the school department will need for next year is \$133,213,257 and she requested the School Committee amend its request to the City Council.
- Mayor McCarthy provided a copy of her communication to the City Council and then reviewed each of the school department account amounts she believes should be sufficient for the upcoming year. She advised she requested an increased amount of \$132,847,897 from the City Council. Multiple questions were asked by the members of Mayor McCarthy and Dr. Mendonsa about their new amounts. The conversation then shifted to whether the School Committee should rescind its prior request to the City Council for additional funding as it appears the increased amount is no longer needed.

VOTED: On motion of Mr. Tarallo, seconded by Ms. DeJoannis, to request Dr. Mendonsa ask the City Clerk and City Council President to rescind the original FY '27 School Department budget request made by the School Committee. All in favor.

**AGENDA ITEMS
FOR FUTURE
MEETINGS**

There was nothing new requested for future meetings.

ADJOURNMENT

VOTED: On motion of Ms. DeJoannis, seconded by Mr. Tarallo, to adjourn the Regular Meeting at 10:35pm. All in favor.

Marisa Mendonsa
Clerk