



Lunenburg Public Schools

Dr. Jodi Fortuna, Superintendent of Schools

MEETING MINUTES
SCHOOL COMMITTEE
Wednesday, August 26, 2026
LMS Room D#132
7:00 – Hybrid

School Committee

Laura Brzozoski, Chair
Anthony Sculimbrenne, Vice Chair
(absent)
Mandy Gilman, Secretary
Jean Russell, Member
Emily Young, Member

Superintendent

Dr. Jodi Fortuna

Recording Secretary

Gina Gonsalves

In accordance with the requirements of the Open Meeting Law, please be advised that this meeting is being recorded and broadcast live over the Lunenburg Public Access channel, on Facebook Live on the Public Access Facebook page. (<http://www.facebook.com/Lunenburg-Public-Access-Cable-157427270975305/>) and will be uploaded to the Lunenburg Access YouTube after the meeting.

The agenda lists all the topics which may be discussed at the meeting and those reasonably anticipated by the Chair. Votes may be taken as a result of these discussions. Not all items listed may in fact be discussed and other items not listed may be brought up for discussion to the extent permitted by Open Meeting Law

- 1. Call to Order at 7:00 by Chair Brzozoski**
- 2. Pledge of Allegiance led by Chair Brzozoski**
- 3. *Public Comment for prior Issues***

Dave Rogers expressed significant concern regarding the direction of the school district, including recent personnel turnover, financial oversight, and elementary student reading performance. He questioned the circumstances surrounding the departure of the district's former finance director and referenced past financial problems within the school system as a reason for his concern regarding appropriate controls over expenditures and purchasing. Mr. Rogers also expressed particular concern regarding student reading performance and questioned what immediate steps were being taken to address the issue. He characterized the reported reading results as unacceptable and urged the district to take aggressive action, including considering greater involvement by parents, grandparents, senior citizens, and other community volunteers to assist students with reading.

In response, Dr. Fortuna and members of the Committee discussed the district's current financial and academic challenges. Dr. Fortuna stated that reading performance was a concern across grades one through five and agreed that the scores were unacceptable. She explained that literacy was the district team's primary academic focus and described measures already underway, including reading interventionists, a senior volunteer program targeted toward third-grade students, and comprehensive literacy professional development for teachers in grades K–5. She stated that the district was directing available resources toward academics but could not guarantee that the reading concerns would be resolved within one year.

The discussion also addressed the effect of limited funding on educational programming and class sizes, including the prospect of 31 students in a second-grade classroom, as well as reductions to athletics, middle school sports, and athletic transportation as resources were directed toward academic needs.

Mr. Rogers continued to urge the district to mobilize community resources and questioned why a larger volunteer effort could not be organized to assist students. He referenced a previous community effort that had raised funds to support Lunenburg athletics as an example of residents working collectively to address a problem. During the discussion, Mr. Rogers also referred to historical financial misconduct within the district and expressed concern about ensuring that appropriate safeguards were in place regarding expenditures and purchasing. A Committee member objected to any implication that current school or athletic department personnel were engaged in financial wrongdoing. Mr. Rogers clarified that he was not accusing current officials or employees of misconduct and stated that his comments were intended to emphasize the importance of financial oversight based on the Town's past experience.

The discussion then turned specifically to the recent departure of the former finance director. Dr. Fortuna stated that the former finance director had resigned without notice and that the district had received an email notifying it of the resignation without further discussion. In response to Mr. Rogers's concern that another individual had immediately been hired to replace him, Dr. Fortuna clarified that she had not hired anyone to replace Mr. McNamara. She explained that the individual in question had been working with the district to mentor Mr. McNamara and assist him in meeting the standards of his position. Dr. Fortuna stated that the arrangement was scheduled to be finalized on the same day that Mr. McNamara resigned. She further stated that the individual had not been brought in as his replacement and characterized reports to the contrary as rumor and conjecture rather than fact. Mr. Rogers thanked the Committee and Dr. Fortuna for addressing his concerns and emphasized the importance of communication with the public.

Renee Emkey stated that she was speaking on behalf of herself and not in her capacity as a member of the Select Board. She said that, with Special Town Meeting approaching, she continued to have questions regarding the proposed additional school funding and hoped the Committee would address them during the meeting. Her questions focused on Ignite tutoring, athletic transportation, restoration of middle school sports, and the amount of additional state aid being requested.

Regarding Ignite tutoring, Ms. Emkey noted that the district had received a grant covering 36 tutoring seats, while earlier spending plans had contemplated a larger number of seats. She asked whether the district intended to remain with the 36 grant-funded seats or supplement the program with additional seats funded elsewhere in the school budget.

Ms. Emkey also questioned the proposed cost of restoring high school athletic transportation. She noted that the FY27 budget had included approximately \$127,550 for athletic transportation, while the current proposal identified approximately \$60,000 to restore high school transportation. She asked why the projected cost had decreased so significantly and whether the district was confident that the lower figure would be sufficient for the full school year. She also asked how the anticipated delivery of two 10-passenger vans might affect transportation costs and what role those vehicles were expected to play once available.

On middle school athletics, Ms. Emkey referenced an estimated cost of approximately \$19,350 to restore certain middle school sports and asked whether the Committee would consider available school funds or other funding combinations to support those programs. She referenced balances in several school-related accounts and questioned whether any portion of those funds could legally or appropriately be used to reduce pressure on the operating budget and help restore middle school athletics.

Ms. Emkey further asked whether, if Town Meeting approved a funding source from outside the existing school budget, the School Committee would formally commit to using those funds for the purposes identified in the citizen petition. She noted that the wording of a Town Meeting article would not itself

control how the School Committee ultimately allocated appropriated funds and therefore questioned whether the Committee would take a separate vote expressing its intent.

Finally, Ms. Emkey raised questions regarding the calculation of the approximately \$418,000 in additional state aid being requested. She stated that the amount did not appear to account for an increase in school choice and charter school sending tuition assessments and also included approximately \$5,541 in school choice receiving tuition that she understood would flow automatically to the school department without Town Meeting appropriation. She suggested that the additional school choice revenue could potentially be considered as another source of funding toward restoring middle school sports.

Stephanie Quinn expressed appreciation for the proposed restoration of high school athletic transportation and asked whether, if the additional funding were approved at Special Town Meeting, transportation could be reinstated in time to benefit students participating in the current fall athletic season. She also asked whether restoration of district-provided transportation would eliminate the private transportation waiver currently included in FinalForms, which allowed student-athletes to be transported privately while district transportation was unavailable.

Ms. Lockwood, participating remotely, commented on the overall level of funding provided to the schools and emphasized that the district had originally identified approximately \$800,000 in additional funding as necessary to maintain FY26 service levels. She expressed concern that discussion of individual programs and relatively small funding amounts could distract from the larger financial issue facing the district. She stated that the schools had not received the level of funding needed to maintain existing services and believed that additional available funding should be directed toward the schools. She also referenced concerns regarding student reading performance and the effects of continued budget reductions on educational services. She encouraged the community to recognize the connection between available resources and the district's ability to address academic needs. She expressed support for providing the schools with adequate funding and for allowing the Superintendent and educational professionals to determine how those resources could best be used to support students.

4. Chair's Report

Chair Brzozoski reported that the district was interviewing candidates for the finance director position and hoped to have a candidate available for a public School Committee interview at the next meeting. She noted that the position had been posted shortly after notification of the resignation and discussed the difficulty of recruiting qualified school business officials.

5. New Business Action

a. Additional Funding for Education

Dr. Fortuna presented three possible scenarios for the use of an additional \$418,000, contingent upon appropriation at Special Town Meeting. She emphasized that none of the proposals would be final unless the funding was appropriated.

Dr. Fortuna reported that the district had received a state grant for 36 Ignite tutoring seats at a cost of \$2,500 per seat. Because students could rotate through the seats, the administration determined that the 36 grant-funded seats would be sufficient and that additional seats would not be funded through the general fund or the requested appropriation. This freed approximately \$129,458 within the proposed \$418,000 spending plan.

All three scenarios included restoration of high school athletic transportation. Dr. Fortuna reported that the verified transportation cost was approximately \$58,880, which she rounded to \$60,000. Of that amount, \$10,000 would come from the additional appropriation and \$50,000 from the athletic revolving account. She explained that the reduced cost resulted from scheduling more competitions closer to Lunenburg, increasing home competitions, and using actual schedules and prior-year spring costs to obtain a more accurate transportation estimate. Two passenger vans expected in November were not anticipated to become operational until approximately the spring because additional steps, including bargaining and driver training, would be required.

Scenario 1 focused on financial accuracy and transparency and included an estimated \$119,458 for an independent financial audit. Dr. Fortuna described a proposed phased review of school-managed ledgers, payroll, receiving records, shared costs, and other financial operations. A later phase involving full municipal ledger access would require Town authorization.

Scenario 2 focused on reducing second-grade class sizes and expanding literacy support. Dr. Fortuna reported that 124 fully registered second-grade students would result in four classes of approximately 31 students. The proposal would add a second-grade teacher, reducing those classes to approximately 24–25 students. It would also provide \$15,736 for literacy professional development and support at the middle/high school level, in addition to the \$10,000 for athletic transportation.

Scenario 3 focused on behavioral stability and intervention through the addition of a Board Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA). Dr. Fortuna explained that the district currently had one BCBA serving the entire district and discussed the role of a BCBA in behavioral assessment, intervention planning, crisis stabilization, and staff support. She also discussed new state requirements affecting student behavioral interventions and the potential relationship between in-district behavioral supports and costly out-of-district placements. The administration reported that 19 out-of-district placements were then anticipated. The Committee discussed the three scenarios, including the urgency of reducing the second-grade class size, the ability to hire a qualified teacher after the normal hiring season, the value of restoring a second BCBA, and the benefits of an independent financial audit. Dr. Fortuna stated that she was approximately 95% confident that the district could hire a qualified second-grade teacher within a reasonable period. If the district were unable to fill the position, the matter could return to the Committee to determine another spending priority.

The Committee also heard a statement prepared by absent member Mr. Sculimbrene regarding the Special Town Meeting warrant article and school funding. The statement expressed concerns regarding the accounting underlying the article, advocated for additional unrestricted school funding, discussed the treatment of health insurance costs within the school budget, and supported a comprehensive financial review of school finances.

Following a straw poll regarding the three proposed scenarios, Scenario 2 received the most support.

Ms. Gilman moved to accept Scenario 2 as outlined, including the addition of a second-grade teacher, \$15,736 for literacy professional development, and \$10,000 toward the restoration of high school athletic transportation, with additional transportation funding to come from the athletic revolving fund. Ms. Young seconded the motion.

The motion passed, 3-0-1, with Ms. Young abstaining.

The Committee next discussed the Special Town Meeting warrant articles related to school funding. Regarding the second warrant article, the lead sponsor stated that the article would be passed over at

Town Meeting and that there was no longer a funding request associated with it.

The Committee then reviewed Article 3, a citizen petition seeking \$151,338.38 from certified free cash or other available funds to supplement the FY27 school operating budget for athletic transportation and the restoration of middle school sports. Because high school athletic transportation had already been addressed through Scenario 2, the Committee discussed what portion of the citizen petition remained applicable and the estimated costs of restoring sports that could still be offered during the current school year.

The Committee discussed an estimated \$19,349 to restore middle school boys' basketball, girls' basketball and outdoor track, including coaching stipends, transportation, officials and meet entry fees. Cross-country and field hockey could no longer be scheduled for the current year. The Committee also discussed an additional estimated \$26,500 to restore high school ski and girls' lacrosse, for a combined estimated cost of \$45,849.

Members discussed potential funding sources and clarified that Town Meeting could not appropriate school revolving funds or circuit-breaker funds, which were school funds and, in some cases, restricted to specific purposes. The Committee discussed whether it would support the citizen petition if the Town provided new funding for the requested programs. Members acknowledged that not every sport identified could necessarily be restored because of scheduling, participation and other practical limitations, but expressed support for following the intent of the petition if additional Town funding were appropriated.

A motion was made and seconded that the School Committee support the spirit of the citizen petition if the funding came from a new Town funding source rather than existing school operating funds and, if the funding were appropriated at Town Meeting, that the Committee use the funds for the purposes requested. The motion passed unanimously.

Dr. Fortuna subsequently confirmed that the district planned to remain with the 36 grant-funded Ignite tutoring seats. She stated that athletic transportation would be restored as soon as possible following Town Meeting appropriation and that the private transportation form would be removed if the funding passed. The Committee also discussed returning a transportation donation previously accepted for the football team to the boosters if transportation funding were restored.

6. *Public Comment for issues Discussed during 08.26.2026 meeting*

Renee Emkey reiterated that although Town Meeting could not appropriate money from school revolving funds, the School Committee had the authority to use those funds. She noted that if the Committee identified sufficient funding within its own available accounts to address Article 3, the citizen petition could be passed over at Town Meeting. Ms. Emkey also referenced the additional \$5,541 in school choice revenue that the district would receive without a Town Meeting appropriation, noting that the amount represented approximately one-quarter of the estimated \$19,349 needed to restore the identified middle school sports. She suggested that the additional revenue could be considered as a potential source toward reducing the remaining amount needed.

Matt Nazarenko, 79 Rossville Road, identified himself as the petitioner for Article 3 and expressed disappointment that a member of the Committee had publicly characterized the figures associated with the petition as inaccurate. He stated that he had presented the article to the Finance Committee approximately two weeks earlier and had offered to work with Committee members to establish the

correct figures in advance of Town Meeting. Mr. Nazarenko noted that the figures he had used had been provided to him by the School Committee and referenced the Chair's earlier acknowledgment that the Committee was not completely confident in the accuracy of all of the figures being discussed. He expressed concern about publicly criticizing the numbers submitted by a resident who had volunteered his time to advocate for school funding and transportation. Mr. Nazarenko stated that he looked forward to the article passing and would continue working with Dr. Fortuna and the Committee to determine the correct figures and reach an appropriate funding amount.

A **remote participant** encouraged parents and other residents to attend Special Town Meeting and vote in support of additional school funding. She emphasized that the effects of the budget reductions extended beyond athletics and were being felt across numerous student programs. She noted that the Music Boosters had contributed \$1,213 to restore the middle school jazz band and cited that amount as an example of how even relatively small budget reductions were affecting students. She also referenced impacts on students seeking physical education, community service and language courses. She characterized the proposed additional funding as a one-year stopgap rather than a solution to the district's larger financial challenges and encouraged residents to support the funding to provide some immediate relief to students.

Jackie Favreau, 91 Russell Road, identified herself as a primary school teacher and thanked the Committee for selecting Scenario 2 and supporting the addition of a second-grade teacher. She emphasized the importance of manageable elementary class sizes, particularly given student behavioral needs and the reduced level of support available due to funding constraints.

7. A motion was made and seconded to adjourn. The motion passed unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,

Gina Gonsalves