MEETING MINUTES
SCHOOL COMMITTEE
Wednesday, September 9, 2026
LMS Room D#132
7:00 – Hybrid

School Committee
Laura Brzozoski, Chair
Anthony Sculimbrene, Vice Chair
Mandy Gilman, Secretary
Jean Russell, Member
Emily Young, Member

Superintendent
Dr. Jodi Fortuna

Recording Secretary
Gina Gonsalves

Guests
Derrick Andrews, School Business Administrator candidate; Monica, Student Representative; Keisha Taylor, Girl Scout Troop 64501 representative

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In accordance with the requirements of the Open Meeting Law, please be advised that this meeting was 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.

1. **Call to Order at 7:00 by Chair Brzozoski**
   Chair Brzozoski called the meeting to order.

2. **Pledge of Allegiance led by Chair Brzozoski**
   Chair Brzozoski led the Pledge of Allegiance.

3. ***Public Comment for prior Issues***
   There was no public comment from those attending in person or remotely via Zoom.

4. **Chair's Report**

Chair Brzozoski thanked residents for supporting additional school funding at the September 3 Special Town Meeting. She reported that the $418,000 appropriation would directly support students, including the addition of a second-grade classroom that reduced class sizes from approximately 31 students to 25. Although the appropriation addressed immediate needs, it did not eliminate the difference between the district's funding and its educational needs. She recognized school and Town staff for their work preparing for the Special Town Meeting and responding to unexpected sound-system problems. Despite successful testing before the meeting, the equipment did not function as anticipated. She commended the staff members and student employees who remained calm, located alternative equipment and worked together to allow the meeting to continue.

Chair Brzozoski also thanked staff for a successful opening of school despite larger classes, reduced resources and increased demands. Committee members expressed appreciation for residents' support and for the parents who advocated for additional athletic funding. Members encouraged continued community involvement as the district prepared for the next budget cycle.

5. Student Representative's Report

Monica introduced herself as the new student representative and a high school senior.

She announced upcoming open houses at the high school on September 10, middle school on September 17, Turkey Hill Elementary School on September 23 and primary school on September 24. High school homecoming was scheduled for October 17, and parent-teacher conferences were scheduled for October 20 and October 22.

She also reported tentative dates of September 29 through October 2 for a fifth-grade program and noted that September 29 would be a district-wide half day. Families were encouraged to consult school newsletters, update required student forms and pay applicable activity fees.

6. Review & Approve Minutes

a. Regular Session Minutes 7/29/26 & 8/26/26

A member reported submitting a correction to a name in the minutes. Members also noted that they would abstain from approving minutes for meetings they had not attended.

A motion was made and seconded to approve the July 29, 2026, regular session minutes. Members voted in favor.

A motion was made to approve the August 26, 2026, regular session minutes. The motion passed, with Mr. Sculimbrene abstaining.

7. Review & Approve Line Item Transfers, Warrants and Donations

a. Line Item Transfers

There were no line item transfers.

b. Donations

Girl Scout donation is found under New Business.

c. Warrants $396,688.90

Warrants totaling $396,688.90 were reported. The warrant period was stated during the meeting as July 28, 2026 through August 27, 2026.

8. Superintendent's Report

Dr. Fortuna thanked the community for approving Articles 1 and 3 at the Special Town Meeting. The additional funding would expand student learning supports and maintain athletic programming, including transportation for student-athletes. She reiterated the district's commitment to responsible and transparent use of the funds. She also recognized the staff and student employees who addressed the sound-system problems during Town Meeting. She commended their flexibility and cooperation under difficult circumstances.

The administrative team's summer retreat focused on the thoughtful and ethical use of emerging technologies, grade-level expectations and instructional rigor, equitable access to learning, and consistent expectations for sensory spaces.

Dr. Fortuna reported the launch of two literacy initiatives. The New Teacher Center began a landscape analysis through classroom learning walks at Turkey Hill and focus groups with educators and other stakeholders. The review would examine instructional materials, professional learning, coaching and the conditions supporting collaboration. She explained that the work was intended to evaluate the instructional system, rather than individual teachers, and identify strengths, barriers and opportunities for more consistent literacy instruction.

The Reading Buddy Program also began with training for 12 community volunteers. Volunteers would work individually with third-grade students at Turkey Hill during structured, 20-minute sessions focused on oral reading fluency. Training addressed reading strategies, student safety, boundaries and program expectations. The program would supplement classroom instruction and literacy services.

Dr. Fortuna reported that the additional second-grade classroom reduced class sizes to approximately 24 or 25 students. Staff considered student needs and family circumstances when reorganizing classes and prepared the classroom for students by Tuesday morning following Town Meeting.

Although the additional funding addressed immediate concerns, Dr. Fortuna emphasized that the district continued to face structural financial challenges. The next budget cycle would require distinguishing temporary resources from sustainable investments, protecting essential services and explaining the educational consequences of funding decisions. She committed to providing understandable financial information, explaining significant variances and strengthening the assumptions and systems used in budget development.

9. New Business

Action

a. Public Interview of Business Administrator – Derrick Andrews

Dr. Fortuna introduced Derrick Andrews, a candidate for School Business Administrator. She described his accounting degree from the University of Massachusetts Amherst, public-sector fiscal and procurement experience, grant-administration work, prior small-business ownership and current employment as a mathematics teacher.

Dr. Fortuna explained that an administrative screening team had interviewed Mr. Andrews and recommended him for the Committee's consideration. The Committee would conduct the public interview that evening and discuss the hiring decision at its next meeting.

Mr. Andrews described his work with the Commonwealth's Operational Services Division and Executive Office of Education. His responsibilities included procurement, requests for proposals, vendor evaluation, contract negotiations, reconciliations, encumbrances, fund transfers and year-end financial work. He had worked with financial leadership on a budget of approximately $56 million to $60 million. His grant experience primarily involved financial oversight and compliance.

Members questioned Mr. Andrews about the district's repeated turnover in the position and the challenge of combining accounting expertise, school operations, public communication and financial analysis in one role. Mr. Andrews acknowledged that he had not previously served as a school business administrator. He emphasized his accounting and public-sector experience, relationship-building skills and interest in supporting students through financial administration.

Mr. Andrews described his role in preparing procurement documents, comparing vendor proposals and negotiating costs, deliverables and timelines following the selection of vendors. He acknowledged that he had not used Munis but explained that he had successfully learned the Commonwealth's financial system in a previous position.

In discussing year-end closeout, Mr. Andrews described reconciling accounts, reviewing encumbrances, coordinating invoices and payroll, identifying potential overruns and working with budget leadership to address variances before the fiscal year ended. His approach to budget development would begin with actual expenditures, historical trends, recurring obligations and anticipated revenue. He would consult stakeholders to distinguish ongoing needs from temporary expenses and present options and tradeoffs to decision-makers.

Members asked how Mr. Andrews would recognize when outside assistance was needed. He described seeking procurement and legal guidance for a complex project involving construction requirements. He also discussed the importance of professional contacts and support from experienced school business administrators.

Mr. Andrews described experience using data analysis to support procurement decisions, including the Commonwealth's acquisition of personal protective equipment during the pandemic. He emphasized presenting financial information in a form that nonfinancial audiences could understand. He had reviewed professional training opportunities through the Massachusetts Association of School Business Officials and intended to begin the process toward the necessary qualifications.

Members raised concerns about unexpectedly large unspent balances in recent fiscal years despite repeated requests for financial updates. Mr. Andrews stated that he would first examine historical records, reconciliation procedures and existing controls to determine the cause. He emphasized the distinction between encumbered funds and actual expenditures and the importance of ensuring that reports accurately conveyed the district's financial position.

The Committee also discussed the complexity of the Town's and district's charts of accounts and the need for coordination between their financial offices. Mr. Andrews emphasized communication, clear responsibilities and timely identification of discrepancies. He identified learning local procedures, school-specific requirements and stakeholder expectations as priorities during his first 90 days.
No hiring decision was made.

b. Donation-Girl Scouts Haddie's Bench

Ms. Taylor, representing Girl Scout Troop 64501, presented a proposed donation of a memorial picnic table honoring Haddie. The troop members, who had completed their Girl Scout program and were attending college, wished to use their remaining funds for a meaningful community contribution.

The table had been painted green and would include a memorial plaque. The primary school was proposed as its location following communication with the family.

Members reviewed photographs and discussed maintenance, safety and the potential future cost to the district. The troop representative offered to repaint and inspect the table as needed and assist with removal when it was no longer serviceable. District staff would coordinate delivery.

A motion was made and seconded to accept the donation from Girl Scout Troop 64501. The motion passed.

Public Inquiry Regarding the Interview Process
Mr. Rogers questioned whether members of the public would be permitted to ask the business administrator candidate questions. Chair Brzozoski explained that the agenda described an interview conducted publicly by the Committee and that the hiring decision rested with the Committee. Mr. Rogers expressed concern about the lack of an opportunity to question the candidate directly. Chair Brzozoski invited him to submit questions to Dr. Fortuna and advised that further comments could be made during the public comment period at the end of the meeting.

c. Back to School Updates-Principals

Primary School

The primary school principal reported an enrollment of 385 students and a positive opening of school. Kindergarten students began on September 1 with first- and second-grade students, while preschool and Early Learning Center students began the following week. Staff focused on establishing routines, building relationships and supporting students' sense of belonging. The school completed its first fire drill successfully.

Following Town Meeting, staff opened a fifth second-grade classroom. Teachers and support staff prepared student assignments, notified families and set up the classroom during the period between Thursday's vote and Tuesday's opening. Committee members thanked the staff who came in on their day off to complete the work.

The principal reviewed staffing changes, including the new second-grade teacher, a long-term kindergarten substitute, transfers between grades and schools, new paraprofessionals and a transition from a paraprofessional position to a preschool teaching role.

Upcoming events included the school's September 14 observance of Dot Day, picture days on September 15 and 16, and the September 24 open house. Open-house sessions would be staggered to help manage parking and traffic.

Turkey Hill Elementary School

Mr. McGrath reported a positive start to the year and reviewed administrative and instructional staffing changes. These included a new assistant principal and staff serving the Therapeutic Learning Center, Achieve classroom, English language learners and fifth grade.

Enrollment totaled 362 students: 109 in third grade, 115 in fourth grade and 138 in fifth grade. Average class sizes were approximately 27 in third grade, 29 in fourth grade and 27 in fifth grade.

Mr. McGrath emphasized safety preparation and reported a successful fire drill on the second day of school. He also described the New Teacher Center's classroom visits and thanked staff for supporting the transition to new building leadership.

Third- and fourth-grade classrooms would be self-contained to reduce transitions and preserve instructional time. Mr. McGrath would continue reviewing the schedule and making adjustments to support learning within the district's staffing constraints.

Middle School and High School

The middle/high school principal reported a smooth opening and reviewed enrollment, staffing and student opportunities.

Middle school enrollment totaled 387 students, including 112 in sixth grade, 115 in seventh grade and 160 in eighth grade. Class sizes were approximately 22 in sixth grade, 24 in seventh grade and 26 to 27 in eighth grade. Some world language classes approached 32 or 33 students following staffing reductions.

Clubs, student government, drama and Science Olympiad were beginning, and the first middle school dance was planned for October. Staff were reviewing travel providers for the eighth-grade Washington, D.C. trip, including a possible train option at a cost comparable to previous trips. A proposal would be brought to the Committee for approval, with members emphasizing the need to provide families with early cost information.

All teaching positions at the middle and high schools had been filled, although some paraprofessional vacancies remained. Social workers had been hired for both schools, strengthening mental health and social-emotional support. Approximately 15 staff members were new to their buildings or positions.

High school schedules were being finalized through the add/drop process. Funding approved at Town Meeting would support additional course opportunities through a full-time music teacher. The administrative team was fully staffed and focused on supporting students, employees and families.

Members discussed students choosing other districts because of educational opportunities unavailable in Lunenburg. They expressed concern about the effect on students, school funding and the broader community, and reiterated their commitment to preserving and expanding local opportunities.

Dr. Fortuna commended the principals and their teams for filling vacancies, preparing classrooms and supporting a successful opening of school.

d. Vote to Approve Warrant Articles 9/3/26 Town Meeting

Chair Brzozoski explained that the Committee had already acted on the warrant articles at the September 3 Town Meeting.

A motion was made and seconded to pass over this agenda item. The motion passed.

Mr. Sculimbrene left the meeting at approximately 8:07 p.m., before the principals presented their back-to-school updates.

e. Café Contract Ratification

The Committee reviewed the cafeteria workers' memorandum of agreement, which had been discussed previously. Members who participated in negotiations commended the employees for their cooperation and commitment to students.

Dr. Fortuna confirmed that the agreement included hourly rates for the three-year contract period and that an electronically signed version was available.

A motion was made and seconded to approve the cafeteria workers' three-year contract and associated hourly rates. The motion passed.

A printed copy would be provided for Committee signatures at the following meeting.

f. Potential Financial Audit

Dr. Fortuna reported that the Finance Committee would discuss funding a financial audit at its meeting the following evening. The Town Manager was requesting the use of Finance Committee reserve funds. Town and school representatives had met with one potential firm and planned to meet with another.

Chair Brzozoski stated that an audit would help establish a reliable financial starting point for the incoming business administrator and answer questions about prior-year financial reporting. She expressed concern about using funds needed for student services to pay for the work and hoped that Town funding would be available.

Members discussed the proposed scope, including the reasons for recurring financial discrepancies, the accuracy of athletic financial information, reconciliation procedures and the relationship between the Town and school business offices. They emphasized the need to document responsibilities, financial procedures and the flow of information between offices.

Dr. Fortuna reported that one firm anticipated approximately two months to complete the work. Members emphasized obtaining findings early enough to inform budget development.

The Committee discussed the importance of transparency and implementing improvements identified through the review. Members also expressed concern that the audit should be used constructively to improve financial practices, rather than as a reason to reduce school funding.

It was clarified that the proposed audit was intended to improve financial procedures and reporting and was not based on suspected criminal activity or malfeasance. Chair Brzozoski and Dr. Fortuna planned to attend the Finance Committee meeting to discuss the request.

No vote was taken.

g. Operating Protocols

Chair Brzozoski asked members to review the Committee's operating protocols and identify proposed changes before the next meeting. She described the protocols as an annually reviewed document

addressing Committee authority, the superintendent's operational responsibilities, superintendent evaluation, communication and members' interactions.

Members discussed making the protocols available on the district website. Further consideration and a vote were anticipated at the next meeting. No action was taken.

h. SC Goals & Year Review

The Committee reviewed the three goals adopted on November 5, 2025: the future of Turkey Hill Elementary School, the primary school parking lot and playground, and the budget process.

The Turkey Hill initiative had been deferred while the new superintendent and facilities manager became established. Dr. Fortuna reported that Mr. Stevens was gathering information for the next Massachusetts School Building Authority Statement of Interest process.

Funding had been secured for a study of the primary school parking lot and playground, but the study and improvements had not yet been completed. Members proposed a more specific goal to implement the study and identify the funding needed for subsequent work.

Members agreed that the budget process had improved through an earlier start, more frequent discussion, greater transparency and tri-board participation. They acknowledged that these improvements had not resolved the district's financial challenges.

For Turkey Hill, members discussed establishing a goal to prepare and submit the Statement of Interest. Dr. Fortuna described the anticipated January-to-April application period and offered to provide an overview of the process, including Committee and community participation. Members recognized that acceptance was uncertain and that a major school project would take several years. They also asked that the district consider interim improvements addressing accessibility and building conditions while pursuing longer-term options.

Financial stability was identified as another proposed goal. Members discussed stabilizing the business office, improving access to reliable financial information and implementing recommendations from the proposed audit. The assistant business administrator position was intended to provide continuity and support.

The Committee discussed continued communication with the Select Board and Finance Committee. Chair Brzozoski proposed at least two tri-board meetings, including an early meeting focused on community priorities and the relationship between those priorities and budget decisions. Members identified joint discussion, public participation and school advocacy as valuable aspects of the prior process. Some members questioned the value of repeating detailed departmental presentations already provided elsewhere.

Members also discussed the need for a broader Town strategy to increase revenue and state support. Suggestions included inviting legislators to visit the schools, involving teachers and students in advocacy, encouraging community-generated ideas and holding an informational event to explain school needs and budget choices.

Dr. Fortuna reported that a legislative delegation visit was already being planned in connection with earmarked funding. She would explore incorporating school visits and additional discussion into that event.

Chair Brzozoski would organize the proposed goals for further review at the next meeting. No goals were formally adopted.

i. Prism II

The Committee noted that the Prism II item had already been addressed.

A motion was made to pass over the Prism II discussion. Members voted in favor.

10. Executive Session – *to consider or interview applicants for employment or appointment by a preliminary screening committee.*

Chair Brzozoski explained that the full Committee was not acting as a preliminary screening committee and would not enter executive session for the business administrator interview or hiring discussion. Further consideration of the candidate would occur publicly at the next meeting.

A motion was made and seconded to pass over executive session. The motion passed.

The Committee did not enter executive session.

11. Old Business

Discussion

a. FY26 Year End Budget Review

The Committee agreed to defer the FY26 year-end budget review until the next meeting because the necessary information was not available.

A motion was made and seconded to pass over the FY26 year-end budget review. The motion passed.

12. Public Comment for Issues Discussed Tonight

There was no public comment from those attending in person or remotely.

13. Reports of Sub-Committees

Members reviewed where to locate subcommittee assignments in the shared core documents folder. Several subcommittees had not yet begun meeting.

It was noted that the Municipal Building Design Committee had been meeting, but scheduling conflicts had prevented the School Committee representative from attending. No substantive report was provided.

14. Topics for Future Discussion

Members requested discussion at the next meeting of possible warrant articles for the November Town Meeting. The warrant was understood to close the day after the Committee's next meeting.

A member proposed considering funding for the previously authorized reserve fund for out-of-district placements using available year-end funds. Dr. Fortuna cautioned that free cash might not be certified in time because the school year-end closeout remained incomplete. Members favored placing the matter on the next agenda to preserve the opportunity for consideration and coordinating with the Town Manager regarding timing.

The Committee also discussed scheduling the district's capital plan presentation. Chair Brzozoski would coordinate with Mr. Sculimbrene, the Committee's capital planning representative, because the Town's capital planning process was beginning earlier.

15. Adjournment

Chair Brzozoski requested a motion to adjourn at 9:12 p.m. She called for discussion and a vote, then concluded the meeting.

Respectfully submitted,

Gina Gonsalves

Documents Used — September 9, 2026

- Meeting agenda.
- Draft regular session minutes of July 29 and August 26, 2026.
- Warrants totaling $396,688.90.
- Derrick Andrews' résumé.
- Girl Scout Troop 64501 donation materials, including photographs of the memorial picnic table.
- Cafeteria workers' memorandum of agreement, including hourly rates for the three-year contract.
- School Committee operating protocols.
- School Committee goals adopted November 5, 2025.
- School Committee subcommittee assignments.