

**Mansfield School Committee Meeting  
Minutes for Tuesday, March 28, 2023  
In Person & Virtual Meeting using GoToWebinar**

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An **Open Meeting** of the Mansfield School Committee was held in person and virtually on Tuesday, March 28, 2023. The open meeting session was called to order by Chair Kiera O'Neil at 6:02 p.m.

**Members Present:**

Kiera O'Neil, Chair  
Lauren Scher  
Jenn Walsh  
Vivian Webster (at 6:06 pm)

**Administration Present:**

Teresa Murphy, Superintendent  
Michael Connolly, Assistant Superintendent (Teaching / Learning)  
Ed Donoghue, Assistant Superintendent (Finance/ Operations)

**Members Absent:**

Lynn Cavicchi, Vice Chair

All members attended in person; roll call votes are not required tonight.

Three members were present to start the meeting: Kiera O'Neil, Jenn Walsh and Lauren Scher. Chair O'Neil called for a motion to enter into Executive Session under:

**Under Exception No. 3.** To discuss strategy with respect to collective bargaining or litigation if an open meeting may have a detrimental effect on the bargaining or litigating position of the public body and the chair so declares – and –

**Under Exception No. 4:** To discuss the deployment of security personnel or devices, or strategies with respect thereto.

**Motion** to enter into executive session by Jenn Walsh / Lauren Scher at 6:02 p.m.

**Roll Call Vote:**

Jenn Walsh                    aye  
Kiera O'Neil                   aye  
Lauren Scher                   aye

**Motion Carries 3 - 0**

The Committee returned from executive session at 6:33 pm.

**Public Speak:** None

**Communications:**

Letter from a Dighton-Rehoboth parent praising Mansfield Schools and requesting that Mansfield continue the school choice program.

**Administrative Reports:**

Superintendent Murphy reported on the success of the amazing Jordan/Jackson 5<sup>th</sup> Grade Play *Dear Edwina, Jr.* This was Jamie Steinbach's 26<sup>th</sup> play. The audience was packed for all performances. Teresa thanked the staff, students, and parent volunteers who all had a part in the play's success.

On Thursday evening, the district will meet with the Equity Planning Team to review the latest draft of the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Strategic Plan. The district has been working to revise the

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plan provided to us from Mass Insight based on feedback from our leadership team. From the meeting, final changes will be made and then the District will present the plan to the school committee in April. Part of the plan includes short-, medium- and long-term plans.

This morning Mansfield received a swatting call indicating there was an active shooter at the high school. Over two dozen MA schools also received the same call. The call came in to the police business line from a "voice over the internet" call which can be from anywhere in the world. Immediately when the call came in, the police notified our SRO who was in the high school at the time. Nothing was amiss. The Police dispatched officers to each school for a walk through. Very quickly it was confirmed that there was no concern. An email was sent by the district notifying staff and families of the hoax call.

Sadly, our Jordan/Jackson School lost a wonderful teacher after a long health battle. He worked throughout his illness right up to weeks before he passed away. Rob Lobello was a beloved staff member, a hard worker and a stellar special education teacher who cared immensely about his students. Chair O'Neil asked if there are counselors available. Yes, we have internal counselors as well as a counselor brought in from our Employee Assistance Plan. Families have also been notified and offered assistance if needed.

**Approval of Warrant:**

**Motion** to approve the warrant memo dated 03-13-23 by Jenn Walsh / Lauren Scher

**Motion Carries 4 - 0**

	Salary & Wages 2023-16 2-3-23	Goods & Services 23031S 2-7-23	Salary & Wages 2023-17 2-17-23	Goods & Services 230034S 2-21-23
General Fund	1,737,217.24	801,231.98	1,754,865.24	426,628.86
Medicare	2,465.60	-	2,465.60	-
Capital	-	-	-	-
Revolving	56,055.73	4,544.07	55,591.00	7,127.18
Food Service	28,191.83	71,422.69	29,023.06	56,074.62
Gifts	-	177.72	-	2,587.59
Student Activity	-	17,633.57	-	12,385.31
Grants	63,505.51	32,168.25	54,613.59	22,808.25
Prior Year	-	9,050.00	-	8,144.08
	\$	\$	\$	\$
	1,887,435.91	936,228.28	1,896,558.49	535,755.89

**Approval of Minutes:**

Date	1st	2nd	Discuss Y/N	Vote	Roll Call /comments
Open Meeting 01-31-23	Jenn Walsh	Lauren Scher	None	4 - 0	

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**Old Business:**

**Budget:** Met last week with the larger budget subcommittee to go through further reductions. Tomorrow the three boards will meet with the hope of creating a balanced budget.

**Facilities:** Met a few weeks ago to review general updates; what was accomplished over February vacation and what will be done over April vacation. They also reviewed the status of the MSBA projects. Ed Donoghue noted that we are currently working on the chair lift at Roland Green. This has been a lengthy project due to supply issues. Work will continue on the chair lift during April vacation. The MHS boiler will be completed this summer. Kiera O'Neil stated her appreciation for our facilities department and the dramatic turnaround in the department since Matt Jacques and Ed Donoghue came on board.

**New Business:**

***MHS NEASC Update:***

Gail Farrington, MHS teacher and Russ Booth, Principal MHS: There is an accreditation cycle that runs for each participating school district. Typically, it is a 10 year cycle but COVID has bumped us out a bit. Currently, MHS is in the collaborative conference visit stage which is a new component. Now it is truly a collaborative process with the intent of sharing and providing ideas and feedback. Next week, educators from other schools will be at MHS for two days. Based on the feedback, MHS will have two years to make improvements. At that point there will be three-day review. Key areas of interest are learning culture, student learning, professional practices, learning support and learning resources. Chair O'Neil noted that the process seems more streamlined than in the past. Principal Booth noted that in prior years, the NEASC review was extremely intense, involved a lot of staff time and was kind of a "gotcha" process. Now the goal is to provide the schools constructive feedback in order to improve processes.

***Consideration of Field Trips:***

**All second-grade students to Woonsocket Stadium Theater for a Science Show:** Principal Kerri Sankey spoke about the trip. This show ties in nicely with our science standards so we have decided to take the entire grade. Katie Fisher and Sherrie Forget are planning the day. The students will travel by bus and will return for a bagged lunch/picnic at mid-day.

**Motion** to approve the June 5<sup>th</sup> trip to Woonsocket, RI by Jenn Walsh / Lauren Scher  
**Motion Carries 4-0**

***Consideration of changes to the 2023-24 QMS Program of Studies:***

Principal David McGovern spoke to the changes which are minimal this year. He also noted that traditionally, QMS and MHS present their updates on the same evening. Typically, MHS presents in February in order to meet deadlines for publishing and course registration. QMS held back in order for the department chairs to first focus on the high school and then the middle school. This is probably a model that will be used going forward. Mr. McGovern reviewed each of the changes with the reasoning for each change. Modifications are from minor housekeeping to changes in curriculum due to the changing needs of our students. He was pleased to announce the return of 8<sup>th</sup> grade chorus which had been removed last year due to lack of interest. He noted that the interest dropped during COVID limitations. He is very excited to see students involved again.

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**Motion** to approve the 2023-24 QMS Program of Studies by Jenn Walsh / Lauren Scher  
**Motion Carries 4-0**

***Update on Revolving Funds:***

Assistant Superintendent Donoghue reported on our current balances and planned expenditures. Some of our balances are running out of the ordinary due to COVID impacts. Some accounts need to be spent down. The business department is constantly monitoring and evaluating usage in order to meet regulations for our auditors. Given the high dollar amount in our transportation revolving account, the district will not raise fees in 23-24. However, this account will be spent down over the next couple of years due to increases in our transportation contracts. At some point, the district will have to revisit fees.

It was also noted that we no longer bring in a lot of money for rental fees. For example, Leslie College used our space in the past but now provide courses online. We no longer have the folk festival. Lauren asked if we can advertise for space rentals. We can but there are probably not many takers.

The CHAMPS account has been used to help defray some salary costs but Ed will evaluate usage going forward.

***Update on FY24 School Budget:***

After several meetings with the town administrators, Finance Committee and Select Board, the district has made additional changes to the budget. The revised budget (third iteration) for FY24 is \$57,601,994 which is a 3.14% increase over FY23. It was noted that in "Other Expenses" that the technology capital lease to free cash amounts to \$193,000. The presentation will be modified to reflect this comment. The item is still in our budget but it will now be covered by free cash. Lauren asked if we had final numbers from the state. Ed noted that the most recent cherry sheets are \$300,000 more favorable for us. Final numbers will be released in June.

Ed then reviewed the consolidated spreadsheet noting that the central services line item has been decreased by using the Pay N Ride Revolving account. The increase in facilities is primarily attributed to utility costs. The special education increase is primarily due to the state approved 14% tuition increases. Lauren asked if any school line item was cut. No. Vivian Webster asked if the cuts will impact support programs or any courses at the schools. Ed noted that there will be slight impacts. For example, at the high school the number of classroom sections for some classes will be reduced by a class.

The budget reconciliation page shows the additions and reductions from FY23 to FY24. Kiera asked for some elaboration on the 10 – 12 FTE cuts. Teresa noted that we must live within our means. During the post COVID grant years, we were fortunate to be able to add staff. Those funds are running out and we need to review the allocation of staff. Keep in mind that we are talking about people's jobs so the conversations now are vague while the district works out what is in the best interest of our students and staff given the budget constraints that we are facing. We are reviewing across the entire district. There are still unknowns as well; for example, the final enrollment numbers for kindergarten. Right now, this enrollment is well below last year. Teresa wished we could work with an unlimited budget but that is not the case. It was noted that all interventionists will be kept in the budget. Ed reiterated that it is our responsibility to the Town of Mansfield to live with in the budget.

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Chair O'Neil understands our budget limitations and our declining enrollment. However, she asked that Teresa and Ed let the committee know if we reach a tipping point where there is significant impact and the committee needs to push back on cuts. Lauren noted that we need to make difficult decisions but need to keep an eye on our student needs. She noted concerns with large class sizes. Superintendent Murphy emphasized that there are NO plans for large classroom sizes.

Tomorrow is the next meeting between boards where this budget will be presented. The hope is that the parties can all agree to a balanced budget. At our next school committee meeting, there will be a public hearing and then final vote by the committee on the budget.

***Discussion on 2023-2024 School Choice:***

Superintendent Murphy provided a brief recap of our first year using school choice. We had 35+ applicants who made it through various stages of the registration / enrollment process. In the end 12 students started school in September and 1 student started in January. There has been little impact to the high school setting. Teresa and Ed have reviewed enrollment numbers, staffing and class size and propose the following: 20 spots for grade 09; 10 spots for grade 10 and 10 spots for grade 6. As a reminder this is in addition to the existing 13 students who will remain through graduation. The addition of grade 6 reflects the decrease in enrollment.

Kiera asked if there was any concern with the level of behavior at QMS. Do we want to bring in additional students? Vivian recommended opening up spots in grade 11 since not all available spots were taken for this year's grade 10 students. Teresa noted that although the state does allow school choice at grades 11 and 12, it is recommended that we stay away from those grades as there may be challenges to meeting graduation requirements and fitting in required course selection. Kiera asked if any consideration had been given to the elementary schools since those numbers, although increasing, remain low. She also noted that elementary school parents are often very interested in establishing in a school choice district at a young age. Teresa is comfortable with the enrollment numbers in most elementary grades but is open to suggestions. Ed noted that the kindergarten numbers for next year are low. Kiera suggested maybe try 5 per grade?

Lauren asked if there is any concern that we are increasing school choice options at the same time we are reducing staff. The tuition benefit is very low so is there really benefit? Teresa has asked the committee to put some thought into school choice and she will work with the committee on what they feel is the best scenario. Ed noted that increases at MHS will, over time, help the district maintain courses. Lauren then asked if principals are on board with school choice. Teresa noted that she has been working closely with principals on these difficult staffing and enrollment decisions. Managing day to day activities would favor low enrollment but the district cannot continue to operate with the staffing we have if enrollments continue to decline. Teresa did point out that these students have offered a lot to our community. She has watched them play, perform and participate in various activities.

Vote will take place on April 11<sup>th</sup>. Applications will be ready for the following week and then a cutoff date will be established.

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***Superintendent Murphy Mid-Year Update:***

As part of the annual superintendent evaluation cycle, Teresa provided an update on where she stands with her annual goals.

Student Learning Goal (participate in the town-wide Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Committee. Work alongside MHS students to improve conditions in their learning environment.): The town has not kicked off these meetings yet. It is anticipated that the first meeting will be held in April. For now, Teresa is at a standstill.

District Improvement Goal (Update the Mansfield Public School Crisis Manual for staff): Excellent progress has been made and we are on track to complete by the end of the year. We will be reaching out to Allegra soon for publishing / printing options.

Professional Practice Goal (Complete doctoral dissertation): Progress is slow. The goal was to complete by August of 2023. Hopefully that can still occur but possibly not.

She also provided a long list of the many activities, events and projects with which she has been involved.

**School Committee Business:**

Budget Public hearing will be held on Tuesday April 11<sup>th</sup> at 6:00 pm. Jenn Walsh, Lauren Scher and Kiera O'Neil are available for the student advisory meeting on April 11<sup>th</sup>.

**Other- Items not anticipated by the Chair 48 hours prior to this meeting:** None

**Documents Referenced:**

MHS NEASC Update  
Field Trip documents  
QMS Program of Studies proposals  
FY24 Revised Budget  
School Choice / Enrollment numbers  
Superintendent Murphy Mid-Year update

**Motion to adjourn:** At 8:38 p.m., Kiera O'Neil asked for a motion to adjourn.

**Motion** to adjourn by Jenn Walsh / Lauren Scher

**Motion Carries 4-0**

Respectfully Submitted,  
Diane Nugent, Administrative Assistant to  
Superintendent & School Committee