

MINUTES OF THE REGULAR SESSION OF THE MALDEN SCHOOL COMMITTEE

Monday, February 2, 2026

Herbert L. Jackson Council Chamber Room #106 - 215 Pleasant Street Malden, MA and
Virtual Meeting

Mayor Christenson called the meeting to order at 6:03 p.m.

Mayor Christenson read docket items for the meeting.

Mayor Christenson led the committee in the Pledge of Allegiance followed by a moment of silence for those who have served our country and for those who continue to do so.

Roll Call

The following attendance was taken:

Mayor Christenson - Present

Mr. Drummey - Present

Mr. McCarthy - Present

Ms. Spadafora - Present

Ms. Macklin - Present

Ms. Hortie - Present

Mr. Piazza - Present

Mr. Bernard - Present

Ms. Rose-Zeiberg - Present

Superintendent Sippel - Present

Consent Agenda

Mayor Christenson brought forth the matter of the adoption of minutes for the January 12, 2026 Regular Session Meeting of the School Committee. Mr. Drummey made the motion to adopt the minutes. Mr. McCarthy seconded and a roll call vote was taken:

Roll Call Vote

Mr. Drummey - Yes

Mr. McCarthy - Yes

Ms. Spadafora - Yes

Ms. Macklin - Yes

Ms. Hortie - Yes

Mr. Piazza - Yes

Mr. Bernard - Yes

Ms. Rose-Zeiberg - Yes

Mayor Christenson - Yes

The motion passed unanimously.

Mayor Christenson brought forth the matter of the adoption of minutes for the January 2026 warrants. Ms. Spadafora made the motion to approve the warrants, place them on file and authorize the Chair to sign. Mr. Drummey seconded and a roll call vote was taken:

Roll Call Vote

Mr. Drummey - Yes

Mr. McCarthy - Yes

Ms. Spadafora - Yes

Ms. Macklin - Yes

Ms. Hortie - Yes

Mr. Piazza - Yes

Mr. Bernard - Yes

Ms. Rose-Zeiberg - Yes

Mayor Christenson - Yes

The motion passed unanimously.

Public Comment

Dr. Liz Tonogbanua, Grace St., Malden

Dr. Tonogbanua thanked the Mayor for supporting the arts and recognizing student talent, then raised concerns about inequities in 7th grade English classes, particularly the use of AI tools without parental consent. She stated that families were not informed in advance about the implementation of CourseMojo and expressed concern that some students are required to use AI while other classes receive more rigorous instruction. She requested transparency regarding the upcoming family engagement event, including advance notice of what data would be shared, an open and accessible format without requiring QR codes, and balanced information about the benefits and drawbacks of AI. She also asked for the release of midyear data and student survey results referenced by district leadership, including when the survey was administered, how many students responded, and the main findings. Additionally, she requested clarity about whether AI tools would be expanded next year and which grades and schools would be affected.

Caitlin Peale Sloan, 69 Colombia St. Malden

Ms. Sloan supported the call for parental consent and emphasized the need for advance notice, opt-out options, and true pilot programs with data evaluation when introducing new technology. Ms. Sloan also expressed concern about the new high school English curriculum relying on excerpts rather than full novels and urged the district to continue supporting opportunities for students to read and analyze complete texts, as seen in the elementary curriculum.

Report of the Superintendent

The Superintendent welcomed attendees and acknowledged Director of School Counseling, Ms. Erin Craven, for receiving the Administrator of the Year Award 2026 for the State of Massachusetts by Massachusetts School Counselors Association.

The Superintendent then welcomed Malden Reads and invited Jodie Zalk to present their book of the year and updates on the work they have done and continue to do for the City of Malden. Malden Reads presented their annual program and announced this year's community-wide book selection, *Our Missing Hearts*, chosen in connection with the upcoming 250th anniversary of the American Revolution and its themes of democracy, civic engagement, resilience, empathy, and standing up for what is right. Ms. Zalk highlighted ongoing collaboration with Malden Public Schools and community partners through events such as Ruby Bridges Walk to School Day, Winter Wonders, and multilingual storytelling programs, as well as student partnerships including Malden High School Love for Kids and Y Leaders. She shared that 80 copies of the book were distributed to Malden High School for use across multiple courses and described companion book selections for students from pre-K through middle school that emphasize responsibility, courage, and local history. Upcoming initiatives include a Citizen Lyceum series on the Constitution and Bill of Rights, reader's theater programming, trolley tours of historical landmarks, and the continuation of the Many Writers Den program for middle school students. A kickoff event was announced at the Malden Public Library featuring music, crafts, and student participation. Committee members thanked Malden Reads for its work promoting literacy and community engagement, and the presenters invited the public and school community to participate in upcoming programs and events.

The Superintendent thanked the volunteers of Malden Reads and introduced Mr. Alex Rock as the newly appointed permanent Principal of the Early Learning Center, following his successful service as interim principal. Mr. Rock expressed appreciation for the collaboration among staff and noted strong student growth and future opportunities for districtwide collaboration. The Superintendent reaffirmed the district's core values of inclusion, collaboration, growth, and doing right by all students. He then reported on progress toward the student learning goal focused on improving literacy, math, and science achievement through the district's Strategy for Improvement, including school-based cycles of observation, data analysis, and action planning, as well as non-evaluative formative teacher coaching. He described the coordinated work of instructional leadership teams, building-based coaches, principals, and district leaders in observing instruction, supporting lesson study, and reviewing student data. He also highlighted expanded professional development efforts, including embedded PD blocks within the school day and more differentiated support for educators. The Superintendent noted positive feedback from teachers regarding these initiatives and stated that future meetings would include additional data and examples of instructional collaboration across schools. He then shared a video of the Grade 1 team at Salemwood School.

In response to School Committee questions regarding the effectiveness of the district's Strategy for Improvement, the Superintendent reported early but promising student growth across multiple measures. He cited higher-than-average literacy growth in Grade 1 at Salemwood, districtwide gains in math through IXL, and improvements in early literacy as measured by DIBELS, with K–5 students showing the strongest midyear results in three years. Students in Grades 4–8 demonstrated improvement on i-Ready assessments, including students with disabilities, and Grades 2–7 showed meaningful growth in math. He explained that “meaningful growth” reflects student progress toward grade-level standards rather than attainment alone and noted the adaptive nature of several assessments. Committee members asked about subgroup data, including English learners, students with disabilities, and socioeconomic status; the Superintendent stated that preliminary subgroup trends are positive and more detailed disaggregated data will be shared later. In discussing instructional practices, he explained that increased student “heavy lifting” in classrooms promotes deeper understanding and better assessment outcomes through strategies such as peer discussion and active problem-solving. Members also inquired about consistency across schools, benchmark progress, and the role of special education staff. The Superintendent confirmed that gains are being seen districtwide, that benchmark levels have not yet reached desired targets, and that special education and multilingual educators are fully included in instructional planning and professional development. Finally, he clarified that newly implemented embedded professional development blocks occur approximately every other week, do not replace teachers’ prep time, and were created through scheduling adjustments without additional cost.

The Superintendent and Director of Finance and Operations, Toni Mertz, presented an overview of the FY27 budget outlook, noting that Malden is projected to receive a \$501,000 increase in Chapter 70 funding, which was lower than anticipated due to a decrease in enrollment. They explained that the district faces a challenging budget year, as it must meet net school spending requirements while also making up a \$1.6 million shortfall from FY25, which resulted from lower-than-projected costs for items such as health insurance rather than underspending. It was noted that 270 of 351 communities received only minimum aid, highlighting broader statewide funding challenges and concerns about inequities in the Chapter 70 formula. District leaders emphasized the need to revisit the funding formula, particularly as FY27 is the final year of the Student Opportunity Act, and discussed forming a working group to explore possible advocacy and reform. Ms. Spadafora acknowledged the difficulty of the budget constraints, expressed appreciation for the finance team’s work, and reaffirmed the district’s commitment to meeting net school spending obligations while continuing to prioritize students.

Motions and Resolutions

1. NRT Contract - Ms. Spadafora

The School Committee considered an extension of the district’s special education transportation contract with NRT, which is concluding its initial three-year term with two

optional one-year extensions. Ms. Spadafora explained that transportation costs have increased due to a rise in students requiring individual transport, changes in collaborative school locations, and additional routes. Ms. Spadafora pointed out that she is aware that complaint levels have declined due to closer oversight and that further cost efficiencies may be possible through route review. Ms. Spadafora made a motion to recommend another 1-year extension. Mr. Bernard seconded the motion and a roll call vote was taken to approve the 1-year extension:

Roll Call Vote

Mayor Christenson - Yes

Mr. Drummey - Yes

Mr. McCarthy - Yes

Ms. Spadafora - Yes

Ms. Macklin - Yes

Ms. Hortie - Yes

Mr. Piazza - Yes

Mr. Bernard - Yes

Ms. Rose-Zeiberg - Yes

Mayor Christenson - Yes

The motion passed unanimously.

2. Subcommittee Assignments - Ms. Spadafora

The Committee revisited proposed subcommittee assignments and structural changes following discussion from the prior month. Ms. Spadafora made a motion to suspend docket rules to change the name of subcommittees. Mr. Bernard seconded the motion and a roll call vote was taken as follows:

Roll Call Vote

Mayor Christenson - Yes

Mr. Drummey - Yes

Mr. McCarthy - Yes

Ms. Spadafora - Yes

Ms. Macklin - Yes

Ms. Hortie - Yes

Mr. Piazza - Yes

Mr. Bernard - Yes

Ms. Rose-Zeiberg - Yes

Mayor Christenson - Yes

The motion passed unanimously.

The Committee discussed renaming the Budget Subcommittee to Finance to better reflect its broader scope and clarified the role of the Policy and Procedure Subcommittee. The Technology and Student Services Subcommittee was redefined to focus primarily on technology initiatives. An ad hoc Teaching and Learning Subcommittee was reestablished to support curriculum work, while several inactive ad hoc subcommittees, including Superintendent Evaluation, Calendar, and Equity and Opportunity, were dissolved, with related responsibilities absorbed into standing committees. Liaison assignments were also updated due to member availability. After suspending docket rules to allow for the changes Ms. Spadafora made a motion to approve the revised subcommittee structure. Mr. Bernard seconded the motion and a roll call vote was taken as follows:

Roll Call Vote

Mr. Drummey - Yes

Mr. McCarthy - Yes

Ms. Spadafora - Yes

Ms. Macklin - Yes

Ms. Hortie - Yes

Mr. Piazza - Yes

Mr. Bernard - Yes

Ms. Rose-Zeiberg - Yes

Mayor Christenson - Yes

The motion passed unanimously.

Personal Privilege

The Chair encouraged residents to seek additional information about the override at www.cityofmalden.org/override.

Executive Session

Ms. Hortie made a motion to enter into Executive Session at 8:21 p.m. Ms. Rose-Zeiberg seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken:

Roll Call Vote

Mr. Drummey - Yes

Mr. McCarthy - Yes

Ms. Spadafora - Yes

Ms. Macklin - Yes

Ms. Hortie - Yes

Mr. Piazza - Yes

Mr. Bernard - Yes

Ms. Rose-Zeiberg - Yes

Mayor Christenson - Yes

The motion passed unanimously.

The committee reconvened to Regular Session at 8:44 p.m.

Ms. Spadafora made a motion to approve compensation for the Early Learning Center Principal effective February 1, 2026. Ms. Hortie seconded the motion and a roll call vote was taken as follows:

Roll Call Vote

Mr. Drummey - Yes

Mr. McCarthy - Yes

Ms. Spadafora - Yes

Ms. Macklin - Yes

Ms. Hortie - Yes

Mr. Piazza - Yes

Mr. Bernard - Yes

Ms. Rose-Zeiberg - Yes

Mayor Christenson - Yes

The motion passed unanimously.

Ms. Spadafora made a motion to accept the MOA for SEIU Local 888 Administrative Assistants and authorize the Chair to sign. Mr. Bernard seconded the motion and a roll call vote was taken as follows:

Roll Call Vote

Mr. Drummey - Yes

Mr. McCarthy - Yes

Ms. Spadafora - Yes

Ms. Macklin - Yes

Ms. Hortie - Yes

Mr. Piazza - Yes

Mr. Bernard - Yes

Ms. Rose-Zeiberg - Yes

Mayor Christenson - Yes

The motion passed unanimously.

Adjournment

Mr. Drummey made a motion to adjourn the regular session at 8:46 p.m.. Mr. Bernard seconded the motion and a roll call vote was taken as follows:

Roll Call Vote

Mr. Drummey - Yes

Mr. McCarthy - Yes

Ms. Spadafora - Yes

Ms. Macklin - Yes

Ms. Hortie - Yes

Mr. Piazza - Yes

Mr. Bernard - Yes

Ms. Rose-Zeiberg - Yes

Mayor Christenson - Yes

The motion passed unanimously.

I certify that a notice of this meeting was filed with the Clerk of the City of Malden in the manner provided under Chapter 39, Section 23A of the General Laws.

Ariana Langston

Ariana Langston, Clerk