

**Nantucket School Committee
Meeting Minutes
April 1, 2025**

Present Members: Chair Timothy Lepore, Vice-Chair Laura Gallagher Byrne, Esmerelda Martinez, Shantaw Bloise-Murphy, Vincent Murphy, and Student Council Representative Cecilia Wendelken

The April 1, 2025, School Committee meeting was called to order at 6:00 PM in the Nantucket High School LGI by Chair Timothy Lepore. A motion was made by Laura Gallagher Byrne, seconded by Vincent Murphy. The agenda was approved unanimously.

There was no public comment

Superintendent's Update

Dr. Lepore read Superintendent Hallett's update, reporting that enrollment has slightly decreased by 12 students this month, from 1,733 to 1,721, with reductions across the schools. Regarding staggered start times, after discussions with district leadership and union representatives, the idea has been tabled in favor of improving transportation services. Plans include issuing bus tags with QR codes, consolidating bus stops, and exploring alternative transportation options for middle and high school students. The start of MCAS testing, with NIS fifth graders and NHS 10th graders testing for ELA. The testing season will continue through May, with various grade levels scheduled to take assessments. Although the new testing platform has had some issues, the testing process has been smooth. She reminded everyone that despite the revocation of MCAS as a graduation requirement, MCAS scores still impact district accountability. Lastly, the Applied Learning Discovery Program at NHS, supported by a grant to enhance applied learning practices. NHS administrators and staff are participating in professional development with other Massachusetts districts and have visited schools in Boston, and will soon visit schools in Denver. The middle school team, now in the second year of the program, has seen great success with Applied Learning initiatives.

Presentations and discussions of issues to the Committee

Drop Out Rate - Mandy Hilemn, Nantucket High School Principal

Ms. Hilemn, Principal of NHS, presented on the school's dropout rate, which for the 2023-24 year showed 10 students reported as dropouts, representing 1.7% of the total student population of 589 students in grades 9-12. The students who dropped out were from grades 9, 10, and 11, with none being seniors. Of the 10, seven were female, three male, and the ethnic breakdown included four Hispanic/Latino, two Portuguese, and four White students. Notably, five of the dropouts were English language learners, and one student entered the Job Corps program, though it is unclear if they completed it, which would remove them from the dropout count. The dropout numbers remained consistent with those from 2016-17 and were higher than in other recent years. Some students left for social and emotional reasons, seeking outside mental health treatment. To address dropout concerns, NHS is focusing on strategies to encourage students to stay in school. This includes co-observations of teaching strategies for English learners, increased support from the guidance department for multilingual students, and plans for a college visit in May. The school has introduced co-teaching in social studies and science with ESL teachers and regular education teachers, and all staff participated in SEI professional development. The Accelerate Academy has been implemented to help older students catch up on credits, allowing them to graduate on time. Additionally, multilingual counseling support has been increased through a new student support group in the Bridge Room. The school is continuing to explore additional multilingual support to assist these students.

Mr. Murphy inquired about commonalities among the female students who dropped out, noting that some of the dropouts had both English language learning needs and emotional challenges.

Ms. Hilemn responded that some of the multilingual learners, particularly within the Hispanic community, leave school early due to the need to work. To address this, the school has been trying to work with students to create adjusted schedules, allowing them to attend classes while also having time for employment. As some students are financially supporting themselves.

Mrs. Gallagher Byrne asked about the colleges they will be visiting.

Ms. Hilemn thinks it is Bridgewater State College.

The conversation then centered around how to provide alternative education for students who need to work during the day. As these students often work early morning shifts, the idea is to offer classes in the evening, from 4:00 to 7:00 PM. A suggestion was to hire teachers for an evening program, starting with core subjects like math, science, English, and social studies, and offering three courses per evening. This would allow students to continue their education while working and still earn their diploma.

The State Department requires an exit interview with the Principal. Sometimes, offering an adjusted schedule to earn the diploma.

Wellness Committee Update - Michael Horton

Mr. Michael Horton, Principal of Cyrus Peirce Middle School, gave an update as co-leader of the NPS Wellness Committee, with Meri Lepore as the other co-leader, who was not able to be there. He shared that the committee has met twice so far this year, in January and March, and plans to meet two more times to meet the annual requirement of four meetings. He explained that there are three wellness-related groups in the district: one led by Dr. Mandy Bardsley, focused on implementing new state health and wellness standards, one led by Sheri Lewis Sholler that includes counselors and social workers focusing on mental health, and the committee he co-leads, which focuses mainly on food services and nutrition. He noted a challenge in not having a permanent food services director since Linda Peterson's retirement, though interim coverage is being provided by Ken and Christian from Chartwells. Christian is expected to attend the next meeting. Recent committee topics included food brought in for celebrations at the lower grades ("cupcake conversation"), students ordering food deliveries, and efforts to maintain gluten-free options for students with dietary needs. Food insecurity was also discussed, with nurses reporting that many student visits could be reduced if more food support was available. Nurses sometimes provide snacks using personal funds. Mr. Horton supported adding a part-time nurse to help across schools. He also mentioned students are enjoying the wider variety of lunch options, though it has caused longer lunch lines.

Ms. Wendelken shared that she appreciated the variety offered at lunch, especially enjoying the grilled cheese and tomato soup available that day. As a vegetarian, she said the expanded options have been a welcome change, allowing her to have more than just one meat-based choice. She added that on days when students can't pack lunch, it's helpful to have appealing school meal options.

Mr. Murphy commented on the "lavish lunch" trend, asking if food deliveries take up staff time. Mr. Horton explained that front office staff just hold the food with the student's name, and the student picks it up, so it doesn't take much staff effort. He added that the real concern is equity. Some students can get takeout while others can't, which can lead to jealousy, sharing, or even taking food. In some cases, families with restaurant connections may get free or discounted meals, adding another layer to the issue.

Ms. Kubisch and Ms. Janda noted that the same lunch options are not available at the Elementary or Intermediate Schools. Ms. Kubisch said the only other choices there are sunbutter or ham and cheese sandwiches, and she was not aware of any gluten-free options. Mr. Horton clarified that nurses are aware of students who need gluten-free meals. Mrs. Bloise-Murphy questioned why the younger students are not getting the same variety and asked about lunch times at the lower level schools.

School Committee Self-Evaluation Report

Dr. Lepore started by explaining that on March 25, the members met in a workshop meeting and discussed sections where there were inconsistencies.

In Section 1: Governance, Mrs. Gallagher-Byrne suggested revisiting the mission statement as it had not been reviewed in several years. Dr. Hallett noted that the mission statement is linked to the District Improvement Plan. Dr. Lepore proposed including the mission statement in meeting packets.

For Section 4: Committee/Superintendent Relations, members acknowledged a past situation that was subject to legal restrictions preventing the School Committee from being informed. Dr. Hallett clarified that not all decisions can be shared with the committee based on FERPA. She also shared that, in a small community such as ours, news sometimes travels faster than our ability to provide clear, factual information in a timely manner, but that she will always inform the School Committee of critical items.

In Section 6: Community Relations, two members disagreed on certain aspects. Dr. Hallett reiterated that all public communication goes through the superintendent's office. Mr. Murphy addressed the communication plan for the February 18 meeting, stating that he found it to be thorough. Committee members expressed interest in receiving each school's parent newsletters. Dr. Lepore emphasized the need for more positive press to highlight

student achievements beyond sports. Dr. Hallett recalled previous discussions with the Inquirer and Mirror about a school feature, while Mr. Murphy suggested sending items to Daybreak. Dr. Lepore raised the importance of multilingual communication and sought input from Ms. Martinez, who indicated that some parents do not feel comfortable engaging. Dr. Hallett stressed the need to create a welcoming environment. The committee proposed outreach via the new Spanish radio station, including interviews.

Regarding Section 7: Conduct of Meetings, members expressed a desire for a hybrid meeting option. Concerns were raised about the physical meeting space. Dr. Hallett emphasized the need for audience members to use microphones, while Mr. Murphy confirmed this as an existing procedure. Mr. Murphy suggested adding an announcement to the agenda stating that meetings are recorded. Dr. Hallett reported that we are looking into having the laptop hardwired for improved internet connectivity. We may also need another staff member or school committee member to assist with hybrid participation.

Committee discussions and votes to be taken

Vote to approve January 23, 2025 Workshop Meeting Minutes. *Laura Gallagher Byrne made a motion to approve with the amendment of adding Mr. Murphy as a present member, seconded by Shantaw Bloise-Murphy, and with no opposed vote, the motion was approved unanimously*

Vote to approve March 4, 2025 Meeting Minutes. *Laura Gallagher Byrne made a motion to approve, seconded by Vincent Murphy, and with no opposed vote, the motion was approved unanimously*

Vote to approve the grant from Massachusetts Councils on Aging (MCOA) to the Nantucket Community School for \$7,500 to be used for the memory cafe. *Laura Gallagher Byrne made a motion to approve, seconded by Shantaw Bloise-Murphy, and with no opposed vote, the motion was approved unanimously*

Vote to approve Transfers & Invoices. *Laura Gallagher Byrne made a motion to approve, seconded by Shantaw Bloise-Murphy, and with no opposed vote, the motion was approved unanimously*

Student Council Representative - Cecilia Wendelken

Ms. Wendelken provided an update on recent student activities. Over the past two weeks, spring sports have begun with several season openers. Highlights included a sailing victory over Old Rochester (4-1) despite extreme weather conditions, with winds reaching 40 mph causing multiple boats to capsize. The baseball team split a doubleheader in Dorchester, defeating Brighton but falling to Boston Latin Academy. Girls' lacrosse won their opener against St. John Paul, boys' lacrosse secured a 12-0 win, and softball narrowly lost their opener to Barnstable, 14-12. The weather has made practices challenging. The band and chorus concert on March 25th featured a special conceptual performance, involving nearly 40 participants, including community members and NPS music staff, effectively doubling the usual ensemble size. High school students have also been busy with AP mock exams across multiple subjects. Additionally, the final Teen Truth lesson focused on helping students identify their interests and seek related opportunities. Seniors participated in the "Credit for Life" simulation, learning financial literacy skills by managing a simulated monthly budget based on chosen careers. The quarter ends on April 11th, and spring break begins on April 19th. Many students, including about 30, will be traveling to England, France, and Germany for a World War II history tour planned by Mr. West. Lastly, the Accidentals and Naturals will be traveling to New York this Thursday for a four-day trip that includes seeing Hamilton and Chicago on Broadway.

Nothing to report on Sub-Committee/Work Group Report

Mr. Murphy shared thoughts on supporting Nantucket Public Schools, specifically regarding recruitment efforts. He clarified that while recruitment is primarily the responsibility of school principals, his intention was not to interfere but to explore ways the School Committee might offer support.

Agenda for the next meeting, April 15, 2025 - Transportation Update, Applied Learning Presentation, Cell Phone/Social Media Policy, 3rd Quarter Budget/Food Service Update, School Choice Participation vote

Mrs. Bloise-Murphy, through the chair, announced that the Nantucket Cultural District Grant cycle opened earlier that day and will remain open through the end of the month. She encouraged participation from teachers and schools, noting that the grant supports projects involving art, music, cultural events, and even school trips. She emphasized the simplicity of the application process, highlighting that responses are limited to 250 words per question and are designed to be straightforward. Mrs. Bloise-Murphy expressed a strong desire to see more

applications from the public schools, stating that while the committee is always happy to support the community school, they would be equally eager to fund initiatives led by public school teachers to benefit students.

Adjournment

Motion to adjourn at 6:52 PM by Laura Gallagher Byrne, seconded by Shantaw Bloise-Murphy, and with none opposed, the motion was approved unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,
Katie Bedell
School Committee Clerk