

**Nantucket School Committee
Meeting Minutes
April 15, 2025**

Present Members: Chair Timothy Lepore, Vice-Chair Laura Gallagher Byrne, Shantaw Bloise- Murphy, Esmerelda Martinez, Vincent Murphy, Superintendent Elizabeth Hallett, and Student Council Representative Nora Sullivan

The April 15, 2025, School Committee meeting was called to order at 6:01 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.

Announcement: this meeting is being audio and video recorded
There was no Public Comment

Superintendent's Update

Superintendent Hallett reported that the district submitted its annual update on the Student Opportunity Act (SOA) to the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education on April 1. The SOA requires a three-year plan to address gaps in educational experiences and outcomes for students from marginalized groups, including students of color, those from low-income backgrounds, English learners, and students with disabilities. Nantucket's focus areas remain improving school climate and strengthening the multi-tiered system of support. Once the update is approved, a full presentation will be shared with the committee and community. She noted that while SOA is required for all public districts, Nantucket receives limited state funding compared to others.

She then gave an update on MCAS testing, reporting that English Language Arts testing has been completed across the district. Math and science testing for grades 3–8 will begin at the end of April and continue into May. High school math will be tested in late May, followed by 10th-grade science in June and the new 8th-grade civics MCAS.

Dr. Lepore asked if students seemed engaged in the testing.

Dr. Hallett invited the principals to respond. Middle School Principal Mr. Horton reported that many students were still working at 2:00 PM and showed more effort than last year, with full student participation. High School Principal Ms. Hilemn agreed and shared that students took the test seriously, and attendance was strong even with knowing the test isn't required for graduation.

Mrs. Gallagher Byrnes asked whether colleges consider MCAS scores in their admissions process. Mrs. Hilemn was uncertain, but Superintendent Hallett clarified that the MCAS is particularly relevant for eligibility for the John and Abigail Adams scholarships, which require students to pass the exam on their first attempt.

Superintendent Hallett reported that credit audits are currently being developed, with Cape and Islands Superintendents collaborating on consistent policy language.

Dr. Lepore inquired about the number of students affected by these issues over the past 10 years. Mrs. Hilemn did not have exact data but shared that four students from the previous year had been impacted and were subsequently contacted to collect their diplomas. Superintendent Hallett added that some of these students fall under the special needs category and had completed portfolio assessments, which are no longer considered valid. As a result, their coursework must now be reviewed. Superintendent Hallett concluded by stating they are still waiting for updated guidance from the state, and the current policy will likely need to be revised.

Dr. Hallett then reported that Spring sports were in full swing despite the challenging weather. The Annual Town Meeting is Saturday, May 3, at the High School. High school students have been invited for community service. She then shared two brief updates and recognized Assistant Principals Week, expressing appreciation for the district's five assistant principals: Kim Albertson (NES), Donna Johnson (NIS), Adriene Lombardi (CPS), and Tracy Mailloux and Jennifer Psaradelis (NHS). She also acknowledged National Principals Day, which falls on May 1st, and extended congratulations and thanks to the district's principals: Kim Kubish, Becky Janda, Mike Horton, and Mandy Hilemn, noting the schools' daily reliance on their leadership and dedication.

Presentations and discussions of issues to the Committee

Applied Learning Presentation - Michael Horton, CPS Principal & Mandy Hilemn, NHS Principal

Michael Horton, CPS Principal, shared his initial skepticism about applied learning but noted that over time, he came to see its value. He emphasized the importance of helping students understand why education matters, not just fulfilling curriculum requirements, but connecting learning to real-world relevance and the future of society. He encouraged teachers to be ready with meaningful answers when students ask why they are learning something, and stressed the importance of teaching problem-solving, teamwork, and soft skills through real-world challenges. Mr. Horton also shared that Melissa Devitt and Mandy Bardsley brought him into a grant application originally tied to the Mass STEM Hub. While the program initially focused on STEM and engineering, he has since come to see that applied learning is much broader. The CPS team began school visits in January 2024 and continued through the year, including trips to schools in Randolph, Boston, Roxbury, and Washington, D.C. After the first year, they joined the Applied Learning Leadership Institute (ALLI), and in fall 2024, visited several schools in Philadelphia, including the Science Leadership Academy and Carver High School. He reflected on the value of stepping outside the local context, noting that visiting other schools offered valuable insights. Many classrooms looked similar to CPS, but others featured new and innovative practices that could be adapted and implemented back home.

Mandy Hilemn, NHS Principal, explained that the high school is in the early stages of its applied learning journey and is currently part of the Discovery Program. Their first school visit took place in February, followed by a visit to Denver in early April. Looking ahead, the team plans to implement applied learning in the fall and is exploring how best to integrate it into the high school setting.

Mr. Horton shared that a major benefit of participating in the project has been access to high-quality instructional materials (HQIM) provided through the One8 Foundation, which invests significant time and resources in identifying top educational tools worldwide. As a result, CPS has received valuable resources funded by the grant. The initiative began with OpenSciEd and Project Lead The Way and has recently expanded to include social studies and civics materials through the Investigating History and Democratic Knowledge Project. Staff also received training last summer in Cambridge, near Harvard Square. He shared the new curriculum and resources the schools were using. Mr. Horton outlined the five key tenets of applied learning, emphasizing their importance in preparing students for real-world success. These include tackling real-world problems, developing both content knowledge and soft skills such as teamwork, collaboration, patience, flexibility, creativity, and openness to feedback—qualities that employers now seek in job candidates. He encouraged attendees to view posters displayed in the room, which visually summarize these principles, including the value of iteration and persistence. He highlighted “professional framing,” which connects classroom learning to future careers, helping students understand pathways to roles like sports management or coaching, whether through colleges like Syracuse or UMass Amherst. This reinforces the central question: why is this learning relevant to students’ futures? At CPS, the focus has been on essential learning outcomes that guide students’ growth from grades 6 through 8. In sixth grade, the emphasis is on executive functioning and school organization. In seventh grade, students learn to form logical arguments supported by evidence. Eighth grade centers on student discourse—encouraging purposeful group work and communication, rather than uneven collaboration where only one student contributes. This work aligns with CPS’s focus on collaboration and communication, the core applied learning tenet guiding their pilot over the past year and a half.

Ms. Hilemn explained that the High School is currently in the Discovery Program phase of applied learning and is considering two core tenets to focus on: collaboration and communication, as well as real-world problem solving. These align with existing efforts, such as the school’s “Vision of the Graduate,” and reflect the broader goal of preparing students for life beyond high school. Ms. Hilemn noted the importance of helping students make meaningful connections between what they learn and their future goals. The school has not yet finalized which tenet to prioritize and plans to include teacher input before making a decision. Reflecting on her own background in marketing and business education, Ms. Hilemn explained that hands-on, project-based learning, what is now termed applied learning, has long been a part of her teaching philosophy. She emphasized that applied learning should extend beyond vocational classes to include subjects like social studies, English, and world languages, helping students see how all content areas connect to real-life applications. She highlighted examples from recent school visits that left a strong impression. One involved a medical class where students used tape to map out a large-scale heart on the floor and rotated through stations to explain each part’s function, an engaging activity that students found memorable. Another standout example was a team collaboration chart that helped students track their progress and accountability in group projects. This model mirrors real-world expectations in the workplace, emphasizing shared responsibility. She also noted the prevalence of student work displays in the schools visited, which showcased student pride and ownership in their learning.

Mrs. Gallagher Byrne complimented the presentation and asked if this will be integrated into the curriculum or NHS teaching philosophy. Ms. Hilemn responded that some aspects are already present at the high school, but a small shift is needed. It will take training of staff, so it won't happen by the fall. Ms. Hilemn also emphasized that there are no plans to change graduation requirements or make major adjustments to the program of study for the time being. The key message for teachers, students, and the community is that this is not a significant overhaul, but rather a focused effort to enhance classroom experiences.

Mr. Murphy asked whether the shift toward applied learning, moving away from traditional pencil-and-paper exams and toward more diverse learning styles and methods, would potentially impact their performance on standardized tests. Mr. Horton explained that exams are not going away.

3rd Quarter Budget/Food Service Update - Martin Anguelov, Chief Financial Officer

Chief Financial Officer Martin Anguelov reported on the third quarter budget, stating that year-to-date expenses are up by approximately \$1.99 million compared to the same time last year. He noted that this has been a difficult financial year, with increased costs across several areas including special education tuition, repairs and maintenance, and professional development. Payroll has also risen as expected due to contractual obligations, with 62% of the payroll budget spent compared to 59% last year. He explained that payroll tends to trend lower at this point in the year because of summer salary accruals for teachers. Mr. Anguelov added that without the \$450,000 transfer previously approved by the School Committee from the Special Education Reserve Fund, the overall increase in expenses would have totaled \$2.44 million. This transfer has helped offset some of the current shortfalls.

The Community School has faced a small revenue decrease of just over \$14,000 through the third quarter, due primarily to a \$32,000 drop in pool revenues and a \$68,000 decline in extended day program revenues. Efforts are underway by the Community School team to increase programming and boost revenue in the final quarter, which is typically the most difficult. Summer camp revenue will post in FY26 and is currently held in a separate escrow account. Some increases in revenue have been seen in the sports and recreation revolving account, which now includes a wider variety of programs such as tennis and DanceWorks. Additionally, Mr. Anguelov shared that a meeting was held with the Executive Director of the Community School Alicia Graziadei and Town Finance Director Brian Turbitt to prepare for a future request in FY27 to increase the general fund subsidy. This request is being considered due to the growing difficulty the Community School faces in keeping program fees affordable while covering rising expenses. He noted that the school has already experienced a \$59,000 increase in expenses this year, largely due to contractual obligations and higher medical insurance costs.

Dr. Lepore asked why the pool revenue is down.

Mr. Anguelov explained that they are hopeful pool revenues will improve in the fourth quarter. He noted that last year was an unusually strong year for pool revenue, which appears to have peaked, as shown in the attached chart. While the pool remains heavily used and participation is high, current revenues have not matched last year's levels. Discussions are ongoing with the pool director, coordinator, and executive director of the Community School to better understand the situation. This recent decline comes as a surprise, as pool revenues had been steadily increasing over the past nine quarters.

Mr. Anguelov reported that the school lunch program is currently operating at a deficit of approximately \$92,000, an increase from the \$65,000 deficit at the same time last year. He noted that the situation remains challenging. A meeting was held earlier that day with Superintendent Hallett and Erin Long, the district manager for Chartwells, to discuss possible solutions. While the food service director position has been posted, there is no confirmed candidate yet, particularly none based on Nantucket. The team is working through various scenarios to clarify the leadership structure of the food service program. He also highlighted ongoing confusion around funding due to mixed signals from both the state and federal levels. Sarah Kirk has been actively participating in webinars to better understand potential changes, but the state itself is receiving inconsistent guidance from the federal government. Much of the funding for the universal free meals program in Massachusetts comes from the federal level, although it is distributed through the state. With current federal audits and reviews of program funding, the future remains uncertain.

He emphasized that the district submits reimbursement requests promptly each month and hopes to close the year without needing to draw from the general fund. Ideally, any remaining deficit will be covered by the school lunch fund balance built up over previous years. Mr. Anguelov acknowledged the difficulties and uncertainty of the year and concluded by welcoming any questions.

Mrs. Gallagher Byrne asked about summer camp revenue, noting it is typically a strong source of income. Mr. Anguelov responded that current collections for summer camp are over 20% higher than this time last year, which he described as very encouraging.

Mrs. Bloise Murphy expressed concern about the school district's financial situation, noting it is disheartening to see such limited funding allocated to education in a community with a significant overall budget. She questioned why more isn't being invested in the future of Nantucket through its schools. She also asked what the implications would be for the community school if the town chooses not to increase its share of the community school budget.

Mr. Anguelov explained that if the town does not increase its share of funding for the community school, it would likely result in further program price increases, many of which have already gone up. The community school would also need to seek additional revenue through grants, gifts, and donations. He noted that several organizations, such as the Nantucket Golf Club and the Community Foundation for Nantucket, have generously supported specific programs. However, as enrollment and programming grow, staffing and operational needs—and their associated costs—also increase. He emphasized that operating expenses, not just salaries, have been a major concern, with the district's operating budget underfunded for the past two years. Funds have been shifted from the operating to the payroll budget, which is not sustainable. Mr. Anguelov added that while next year's budget is in a better position due to capital articles, it is crucial for the community to support Article 10 at Town Meeting and to vote in the upcoming election on May 20.

End of the Year Audit Report - Martin Anguelov, Chief Financial Officer

Mr. Anguelov presented the end-of-year audit report, noting that this year's audit format had significantly changed under DESE guidance. Previously a brief document, the audit now includes both general and specific compliance requirements. The only general compliance finding was a recurring issue from the past four years: the school district's accounting system, Munis, is not compatible with the DESE-required system. While the district has explored solutions, transitioning would be complex and require preserving historical financial data, making it a resource-intensive project. Other districts have faced similar issues, and while the town is supportive and willing to share costs, no viable solution has been identified yet. This issue also impacts the town's audit and is a shared concern with the finance director, Brian Turbitt. Additionally, two new findings were noted this year related to missing debt authorization amounts in the report. These figures were not included in the information provided by the town treasurer, but communication has since taken place to ensure a full data set is provided moving forward. Amendments have already been made to the report to address the omissions. Mr. Anguelov acknowledged the challenges of working with Munis, describing it as quirky but functional if used to its full capacity. He emphasized the need for more staff training and support to better utilize the system, while also recognizing that any accounting platform would come with its own limitations and challenges.

Committee discussions and votes to be taken

Vote No to the Selection of School Choice Participation, Academic Year 2025-2026, Policy JFBB, Esmerelda Martinez made a motion to approve, seconded by Shantaw Bloise-Murphy, and with no opposed vote, the motion was approved unanimously

Vote to approve the donation from Nantucket Education Trust to the Nantucket Intermediate School for \$6,000.00 to be used for the Grade 5 Nature's Classroom Field Trip, Shantaw Bloise-Murphy made a motion to approve, seconded by Vincent Murphy, and with no opposed vote, the motion was approved unanimously

Vote to approve the donation from Musack to the Nantucket High School's Music Department for \$5,000.00, Shantaw Bloise-Murphy made a motion to approve, seconded by Laura Gallagher Byrne, and with no opposed vote, the motion was approved unanimously

Vote to approve the donation from Friends of Nantucket Public Schools to the Nantucket High School Europe field trip for \$1,998.00, Shantaw Bloise-Murphy made a motion to approve, seconded by Laura Gallagher Byrne, and with no opposed vote, the motion was approved unanimously

Vote to approve the donation from the American Legion, Orleans Post 308, to the Nantucket High School Europe field trip for \$2,000.00, Shantaw Bloise-Murphy made a motion to approve, seconded by Laura Gallagher Byrne, and with no opposed vote, the motion was approved unanimously

Vote to approve the donation from Cape Cod Five to the Nantucket High School Student Gift account for \$1,000.00, Shantaw Bloise-Murphy made a motion to approve, seconded by Laura Gallagher Byrne, and with no opposed vote, the motion was approved unanimously

Vote to approve the Nantucket High School Diversity Club's overnight field trip April 11 and 12, 2025, to Boston

Vote to approve March 18, 2025 Meeting Minutes, Shantaw Bloise-Murphy made a motion to approve, seconded by Laura Gallagher Byrne, and with no opposed vote, the motion was approved unanimously

Vote to approve the March 25, 2025 Workshop Meeting Minutes, Shantaw Bloise-Murphy made a motion to approve, seconded by Laura Gallagher Byrne, and with no opposed vote, the motion was approved unanimously

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

Student Council Representative - Nora Sullivan

Ms. Sullivan reported that the school district began quarter four as of yesterday and is approaching April break. During the break, a group of students will travel to Europe for a World War II history trip, visiting England, France, and Germany. On Wednesday, April 16th, the NHS guidance department will take sophomores on a college visit to Bridgewater State University and Wheaton College.

She also shared sports updates: the sailing team won against Cape Cod Academy, and varsity boys lacrosse defeated Monomoy 13–3. Boys tennis played Sturgis West, and the outdoor track team had what is likely their first official meet in Wareham. Boys lacrosse also faced Nauset. While girls lacrosse and sailing had games scheduled, those were postponed.

Additionally, the Tri-M Music Honor Society will perform at the Saltmarsh Center this Thursday for community members.

Sub-Committee/Work Group Report

Mrs. Gallagher Byrne reported there was a policy committee meeting and meeting again on May 12

Mrs. Bloise-Murphy reported negotiations are moving along successfully.

Mrs. Gallagher Byrne shared that, as the legislative representative, she and Beth will be traveling to Boston for “Day on the Hill” prior to the next meeting. They will leave on Monday and report back at the May 6th meeting. The event focuses on federal issues of concern to the state and will involve school committees and related education groups.

Agenda for the next meeting, May 6, 2025 - Student Enrollment, Special Education Update, Nantucket Community School Update, Veritas, I Policies

Awards ceremony

Adjournment

Motion to adjourn at 7:21 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