

**Nantucket School Committee
Meeting Minutes
May 20, 2025**

Present Members: Chair Timothy Lepore, Vice-Chair Laura Gallagher Byrne, Esmeralda Martinez, Vincent Murphy, Superintendent Elizabeth Hallett, and Student Council Representative Cecilia Wendelken

The May 20, 2025, School Committee meeting was called to order at 6:02 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 provided an update on hiring and staffing, reporting that there are currently 20 open teaching positions—fewer than in previous years, with 10 already filled by strong candidates. In transportation, new bus driver Paul Budynski began driving the small bus and will also cover field trips and sporting events. Two additional individuals have expressed interest in becoming drivers. Dr. Hallett met with the Cape Cod Collaborative and shared that for the upcoming school year, there are plans to coordinate bus stops and begin bus sign-ups early to ensure a smooth start in September. In additional updates, Teresa Flores has been appointed as the new food service supervisor. Though new to the supervisory role, she will attend a two-day off-island training. Mr. Murphy confirmed that Teresa Flores is a current Chartwells employee.

Presentations and discussions of issues to the Committee

Special Services Update - Dr. Deb Gately, Director of Special Services, Ms. Sherri Lewis, Coordinator of Student Support & Social Emotional Learning, Ms. Michelle Cadavid, Special Services Coordinator

Dr. Gately, Director of Special Services, reported on a busy year for the department and introduced Michelle Cadavid, Coordinator of Special Education, and Sherri Lewis, Coordinator of Student Support and Social Emotional Learning. She noted that last week the department underwent a site visit from the Department of Education's Integrated Program Monitoring team, which had been in preparation since November 2024. The visit took place on May 12th and 13th, and the team has already begun addressing the preliminary findings. Dr. Gately emphasized that none of the findings were unexpected, particularly with the recent implementation of the new IEP form, and they are confident in addressing them promptly. She expressed pride in the work of special education liaisons, counselors, social workers, and TAs, while acknowledging ongoing work to improve compliance. Dr. Gately also highlighted that recent office reorganization and the new educational plan system have significantly improved efficiency and compliance, particularly with centralized monitoring of evaluations and IEP signatures, now available for parents to sign online. She concluded by emphasizing the wide range of services encompassed by the department and the collaborative efforts of staff and administrators to meet student needs.

Mrs. Cadavid shared an overview of the current student population served by the special education department. Currently in her second year as Coordinator of Special Education, she supports meeting processes, staff, students, and building administrators alongside colleagues Dr. Gately and Ms. Lewis. As of May 12, there are 354 students with active special education plans—an increase of 19 students from the previous year. Of these, 10 students are in out-of-district residential placements and 9 attend a combination of private schools.

She noted that Nantucket's special education rate currently stands at 19.7%, slightly below the state average of 20.6%. Mrs. Cadavid pointed to possible causes for the increase in referrals, including the new early literacy screening requirement for grades K–3 implemented by DESE on July 1, 2023, and a rise in referrals among English language learners. She also shared a breakdown of student distribution: 194 students are at the elementary level (PreK–Grade 5) and 160 are at the secondary level (Grades 6–12, including transition-aged students). Currently, there are two students in the 18–22 transition program—one at Bridgewater State University and one at Nantucket High School.

Dr. Gately shared that the number of students placed outside the district has stayed about the same, with 10 students attending residential schools in Massachusetts and Connecticut. She visits these schools each year to check on the students and meet their teams. The goal is to bring students back to the district when possible, but

some have needs that require services the district can't provide.

There is one student in a short-term evaluation placement and one placed through a settlement. Of nine private school students who qualify for special education, eight get services at public schools by choice. Dr. Gately said the district works closely with private schools and meets with them every year to arrange funding and services. For the second year, the district sent a provider to a private school so students could get help without leaving their school. She said it is hard to keep and grow these services and that the district hasn't yet heard about next year's federal funding but believes they can keep current services. She then introduced Ms. Lewis, who said more students are on 504 plans this year. This is because some students moved off IEPs or are using district accommodation plans, which offer extra support without formal 504 or IEP plans. This helps teachers and students better meet learning needs.

Dr. Gately shared that the full implementation of the new IEP form, directed by DESE, emphasizes increased student participation. At the secondary level, more students are now involved in their IEP meetings, with the long-term goal of transitioning to student-led meetings. Efforts are ongoing to support students who are interested in taking on that role. The form itself is highly student-centered, aiming to elevate student voice in the process. The department has also been collaborating closely with the parent advisory group to further encourage student involvement. In addition, the district has fully implemented EdPlan, a new IEP management system, replacing Aspen. This transition has improved compliance, as the new system allows for automatic electronic distribution and signature of IEPs by parents, in addition to the required mailing. Dr. Gately acknowledged the significant efforts of staff, including special education liaisons and school counselors, in navigating this transition and ensuring successful implementation. She emphasized the tremendous amount of work, preparation, and dedication that went into the process. A state grant was secured to compensate teachers who manually transferred educational plans from Aspen to EdPlan, helping ease the workload. Dr. Gately expressed confidence in the district's current position and shared her pride in the team's accomplishments.

Ms. Lewis shared that all schools now have social-emotional learning (SEL) programs. Elementary and intermediate schools use Second Step and Responsive Classroom. The middle school uses Teen Truth, and the high school has continued Teen Truth for a third year. The district also uses Zones of Regulation and Social Thinking to keep language and strategies consistent across grade levels.

At the high school, Tier 2 and 3 supports are in place through a two-year BRYT grant, used in the Bridge Room. This space supports students returning from hospitalization or with serious emotional needs, working closely with outside mental health providers to offer full support. The district uses DESSA data to identify student needs in areas like social skills and behavior. This spring, a new mental health tool called MYO was piloted. It helps assess issues like anxiety, depression, ADHD, and trauma, making it easier to identify students who need help and support the work of school counselors. Ms. Lewis reported that 33 staff members across the district are currently certified in CPR and AED, with training still available for interested staff. She highlighted a range of student and health services that continue to expand through collaboration with both on- and off-island partners. All schools offer small group counseling at Tier 1 and 2 levels. This year, the district partnered with the Family Resource Center to provide small group sessions, especially targeting middle school students during lunch to help with social navigation. Fairwinds also collaborated with the district for the first time to run a sibling support group. The Bridge Program expanded this year from one counselor to two adjustment counselors/social workers. The district has also been consistently implementing six-week SEL (social-emotional) interventions for students experiencing temporary crises or repeated suspensions. The SAVE (Substance, Alcohol, Vaping Education) program remains active, supported by Elise Norton from ASAP in her third year of collaboration. K9 therapy is now present in all four schools, with NIS and NES joining this spring. The Teen Truth Pass program, now in its second year, offers an off-island therapeutic alternative to suspensions or support for students with attendance or emotional challenges. A staff member travels with students daily to ensure continuity of care. Finally, the district continues to offer QBS Safety-Care de-escalation training, with overall programming continuing to grow and evolve. Ms. Lewis continued by emphasizing the district's focus on expanding student support services. The SEAL (Social-Emotional Academic Learning) interventions, which run for six weeks, are designed to help students facing short-term challenges—such as crises or disciplinary issues—get back on track and avoid more serious concerns in the future. These interventions are being closely monitored for their impact. She also noted the success of the PASS program, now in its second year. This off-island program serves as an alternative to suspension or as a reset opportunity for students dealing with attendance or emotional challenges. A dedicated staff member travels with the students daily to ensure they receive consistent support. In addition, canine therapy was expanded this year, now reaching all four schools. The program began at the elementary level this spring and has been

well-received. Ms. Lewis confirmed that the district continues to provide QBS Safety-Care de-escalation training to staff to ensure safe and effective responses to student behavioral needs. Overall, she highlighted the district's steady progress in growing and strengthening its student services and mental health supports.

Dr. Gately concluded by sharing that the district aims to complete the full transition to EdPlan by the end of this year or early next year. Professional development will continue for both the district leadership team and general education staff to ensure they can effectively use the new system. While all staff have access to EdPlan, not everyone is yet confident in using it, so ongoing training remains a priority. A key benefit of EdPlan is its ability to provide families with real-time access to IEP documents, including digital signatures. Dr. Gately highlighted her favorite feature—the platform's built-in translation tool. Once a liaison finishes an IEP, she can review it and with one click, the plan is translated into the family's preferred language. This has made a major difference in communication and understanding. The system currently supports Spanish, Portuguese, Bulgarian, and Haitian Creole, with other languages handled by outside translation providers. She emphasized that EdPlan also helps improve compliance with IDEA regulations. Additionally, the district will complete its three-year Orton-Gillingham training initiative next year, resulting in certified staff in all four school buildings. Dr. Gately closed by noting the department's ongoing efforts to support students and families, and invited questions from the committee.

Mr. Murphy praised the work being done and said he loves the idea of students joining their IEP meetings. He asked if students are given support to be active participants and not just go along with what others suggest.

Dr. Gately explained that students can attend at any age, but by law, they are officially invited starting at age 14. In the past, many families chose not to have their child attend, but the district is now encouraging more student involvement so they can be part of the decision-making process.

Ms. Cadavid shared that at the high school, students are now being encouraged to lead their own IEP meetings. They are prepared ahead of time by their special education liaisons with questions and talking points. During the meetings, they share what works for them and what they need. She said it's been great to see students take the lead, and even younger students are starting to show interest in participating.

Mrs. Gallagher Byrne asked about the 504 process and the steps.

Ms. Lewis explained that when a student is struggling, they are typically referred to the MTSS (Multi-Tiered Support System) to identify learning gaps and provide support, such as reading or math interventions. If the concern is related to accommodations, the team may begin with a District Accommodation Plan to better understand how the student learns and what supports are helpful—such as extended time, clear instructions, or help with transitions. As data is collected, the team decides if the student would benefit from a formal 504 plan. While a diagnosis is preferred before creating a 504, it is not always required.

Mrs. Gallagher Byrne asked for a little more information about Children's Cove and Youth Villages.

Ms. Lewis explained that Children's Cove is an off-island organization that supports students who have experienced sexual abuse. They visit the island annually to remind school counseling staff of their services. Their goal is to ensure children are interviewed only once to prevent retraumatization. Fortunately, the district does not use their services often. Youth Villages is now based on the island. The district has worked with them for several years, but this is their first year locally. Since their arrival in March, the district has been able to secure more spots for students—about five or six now. Youth Villages offers wraparound services including counseling, parent and student support, and regular communication with the school. They collaborate closely with Fairwinds and other providers to provide a full support team for the child and family.

Dr. Lepore asked about the number of teachers trained in Orton-Gillingham vs the number of students in the district.

Dr. Gately explained that the district is in the middle of a four-year Orton-Gillingham training program. By the end, there will be three trained teachers at NES, eight at NIS, two at CPS, and two at NHS. Specialized reading support is provided through IEPs and involves a structured, rules-based approach.

She noted that interventionists closely monitor student progress in reading, starting with early literacy screenings in kindergarten. Curriculum teams, including Melissa Devitt, are also reviewing literacy programs to improve outcomes. The district is focusing on literacy development for the upcoming 2025-26 school year.

Dr. Gately emphasized that special education works with students with the highest needs, focusing on areas like phonemic awareness. The district aims to close literacy gaps, recognizing that each student has a unique story. She acknowledged the importance of this work and confirmed ongoing efforts to support students through interventions and evaluations.

Policies Updates

Dr. Hallett reviewed the proposed policy changes and noted that Policy JLDBA-R&P, Suicide Prevention, included partners who were no longer in business. Sherri Lewis led the revisions. Mr. Lewis explained the goal of the policy is to reduce hospitalizations and create a less traumatic process for students, which has been successful. Dr. Hallett shared the draft with the leadership team, who expressed their comfort with it.

Dr. Lepore pointed out that the role of the school nurse seemed to be missing from the process.

Ms. Lewis responded that, according to the school nurse, nurses are currently overextended. However, the school nurse is involved when students return to school after a crisis.

Dr. Hallett added that the crisis support team includes the school nurse and suggested formally adding the nurse to the policy when it goes to vote.

She then continued to review the remaining policies, all of which are recommended by MASC and have been reviewed and approved by the policy subcommittee.

The committee had no further questions.

Committee discussions and votes to be taken

Vote to update Policy JLDBA-R&P, Suicide Prevention. *Laura Gallagher Byrne made a motion to approve with adding the School Nurse to the Crisis Support Team on p. 1, seconded by Vincent Murphy, and with no opposed vote, the motion was approved unanimously*

Vote to update Policy EEAG, Student Transportation in Private Vehicles. *Laura Gallagher Byrne made a motion to approve, seconded by Vincent Murphy, and with no opposed vote, the motion was approved unanimously*

Vote to update Policy EFC, Free and Reduced Price Food Services. *Laura Gallagher Byrne made a motion to approve, seconded by Vincent Murphy, and with no opposed vote, the motion was approved unanimously*

Vote to update Policy IJOA, Field Trip and Student Travel. *Laura Gallagher Byrne made a motion to approve, seconded by Vincent Murphy, and with no opposed vote, the motion was approved unanimously*

Vote to remove Policy ILBA, District Program Assessments. *Laura Gallagher Byrne made a motion to approve, seconded by Vincent Murphy, and with no opposed vote, the motion was approved unanimously*

Vote to remove Policy IMA, Teaching Activities/Presentations. *Laura Gallagher Byrne made a motion to approve, seconded by Vincent Murphy, and with no opposed vote, the motion was approved unanimously*

Vote to update Policy IJND, Access to Digital Resources. *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 Educational Support Staff Collective Bargaining Agreement 2025-2028. *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 donation from Friends of Nantucket Public Schools to Nantucket Elementary School for Jami Witherell and Jamie Collum in the amount of \$695.27. *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 donation of \$485.00 from Parents to the Nantucket Elementary School Teacher Appreciation Lunch. *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 donation from Friends of Nantucket Public Schools to Cyrus Peirce Middle School Summer Reading for \$2000.00. *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 Transfers & Invoices. *Laura Gallagher Byrne made a motion to approve, seconded by Vincent Murphy, and with no opposed vote, the motion was approved unanimously*

Student Council Representative - Cecilia Wendelken

Student Council Representative Cecilia Wendelken reported that the recent annual job fair was one of the best she has attended. The Junior Prom took place last Saturday. Sophomores are currently taking the MCAS exams, scheduled for both today and tomorrow. A district-wide band concert is set for tomorrow, and this Thursday the chorus will perform a Masterworks Chorus concert featuring Jazz and Blues at the First Congregational Church. The NHS Drama Club will present performances on Friday, May 23, and Saturday, May 24, all during "All in the Time." The Special Olympics will be held on May 30. The upcoming Senior Ball will feature both a live band and

a DJ. In response to a question from Mrs. Gallagher Byrne, Ms. Wendelken shared that the directors of the drama club are Morgan Smith-Jones and Kylee Murphy.

Sub-Committee/Work Group Report

Mrs. Gallagher Byrne reported she attended the Cape Cod Collaborative meeting.

Agenda for the next meeting, Student Enrollment, ACK-SEPAC, Graduation/End of Year Activities, English Learner Update, Seal of Biliteracy, Technology Update

Adjournment

Motion to adjourn at 7:12 PM by Vincent Murphy, seconded by Laura Gallagher Byrne, and with none opposed, the motion was approved unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,
Katie Bedell
School Committee Clerk