

**Nantucket School Committee
Meeting Minutes
December 17, 2024**

Present Members: Chair Timothy Lepore, Vice-Chair Laura Gallagher-Byrne, Esmeralda Martinez, Vincent Murphy, and Student Council Representative Nora Sullivan.

The December 17, 2024, School Committee meeting was called to order at 6:15 PM in the Nantucket High School LGI by Chair Timothy Lepore. A motion was made by Laura Gallagher Byrne, seconded by Vincent Murphy. The amended agenda was approved unanimously.

Public Comment

Nantucket committee member David Dickson shared a comparison of Nantucket High School's AP science results from 2011 and 2012 to 2024, highlighting significant improvements. He noted that in 2011 and 2012, AP science results were poor, with most students scoring a 1, which is considered unsatisfactory. For example, in 2011, of the 19 students enrolled in AP Biology, 17 scored a 1, and in 2012, all 11 students taking AP Biology scored a 1. Similarly, in AP Chemistry, most students scored a 1, with only a few achieving a 3. Fast forward to 2024, the results have drastically improved. In AP Biology, 20 out of 23 students scored a 3 or higher, with 11 scoring a 4 and 3 scoring a 5. In AP Chemistry, 10 out of 11 students scored a 3 or higher, with 4 students earning a 4. There were no scores of 1 in either AP Biology or AP Chemistry, showing a significant shift in student performance. David congratulated the students, teachers, and administrators for their hard work and dedication in improving these AP science scores, and concluded by wishing everyone a Merry Christmas.

Superintendent's Update

Dr. Hallett shared updates on transportation and the new state law regarding MCAS.

For transportation, she announced that Morgan Gray, a current bus driver, has been appointed as the new transportation facilitator for Nantucket Public Schools. Morgan will continue driving her route but will also handle scheduling, athletic trips, and in-service training. However, the district is still facing challenges with the growing need for bus transportation. To help, a late bus has been added for students in grades 6-12. This late bus picks up students at 3:15 PM, which helps free up space on earlier routes for younger students. However, the early and late bus schedules are not ideal. The district only has four bus drivers, and while there have been offers to help, training for new drivers must occur off-island. Dr. Hallett emphasized the ongoing struggle to retain bus drivers and suggested revisiting a staggered schedule starting in the 2025-2026 school year. She plans to hold a community forum to discuss potential changes.

Mr. Murphy asked about the NRTA bus.

Dr. Hallett also provided an update on the recent ballot result that removed the MCAS test as a requirement for high school graduation. While current students who earned proficient or exemplary MCAS scores are not affected, students who did not meet these benchmarks will need to demonstrate mastery of required skills through coursework. The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) is asking districts to determine their own competencies, which has caused confusion among superintendents. Dr. Hallett mentioned that the Cape and Islands superintendents will meet to discuss how to proceed, and a webinar with the commissioner is scheduled for this week for more guidance. While the MCAS graduation requirement has been removed, the state will still administer MCAS tests and use the results for district accountability.

Dr. Lepore asked about students who did not graduate due to MCAS scores, can they?

Dr. Hallett replied yes if they can prove the competency but not sure how far back and will be providing more information as we know.

Presentations and discussions of issues to the Committee

NHS Student Culinary Arts Presentation - Soren Edwardes, Grade 11

NHS Principal Mandy Hilemn introduced Soren Edwardes, explaining that early in the school year, he and his mother approached her about a trip to Nicaragua. After discussing the details, Principal Hilemn viewed the trip as

similar to a college visit, which is typically allowed for students. She emphasized the rarity and value of such opportunities and requested that Soren share his experience with the school committee to highlight the unique opportunities students at NHS can pursue.

Soren Edwardes, a junior at Nantucket High School, introduced himself and shared his plans to pursue a career in cooking rather than attending college. He has worked in kitchens for almost four years, gaining experience at Pro Priors and the Great Harbor Yacht Club. Soren explained that he recently had the opportunity to attend a two-week immersion cooking course in Nicaragua, where he learned traditional culinary techniques, sustainable cooking practices, and gained an appreciation for Nicaraguan culture.

During his time in Nicaragua, he was offered a full-time job in a pastry kitchen and an internship at the resort where he worked. Soren also reflected on how the trip helped him disconnect from technology, realizing that a simpler lifestyle without constant phone use can lead to more meaningful connections.

Regarding his schoolwork, Soren met with his teachers to ensure he stayed on top of his assignments during the trip and maintained his grades. He expressed gratitude for the opportunity, which broadened his culinary skills and cultural understanding. He shared some photos from the trip, including images of fish he caught and dishes he prepared. Soren concluded by thanking everyone for listening and welcomed questions.

Ms. Wendelken asked if Soren was interested in further traveling to different kitchens.

Mr. Edwardes responded that he does plan to travel the world and work in various kitchens, as it will allow him to experience different styles and learn new techniques.

Mr. Murphy shared that he is a classically trained French chef, having completed a three-year culinary degree program in Ireland. He mentioned that learning culinary French was the most challenging part for him, as he had struggled with French in high school. He encouraged Soren, wishing him good luck in his culinary career, noting that it is a rewarding field. Mr. Murphy recommended a book called *Practical Cookery* for learning, as it covers everything from basic techniques to fine dining. He wished Soren the best of luck.

Mrs. Gallagher Byrne admired how he knew what he wanted to do and asked how he chose Nicaragua. Mr. Edwardes explained that he heard about the opportunity from one of his dad's coworkers, who mentioned it as a cool place. That's how he learned about it and decided not to pass up the chance.

Dr. Hallett asked what the most interesting dish was that he had cooked. Soren shared a photo and described it as a dish he made during his trip. It featured filet mignon wrapped in less processed bacon, a plantain patty topped with cranberry sauce, and a red wine reduction on the side. He mentioned it was one of his favorite dishes from the experience. Dr. Hallett then inquired why he decided not to attend a culinary institute. Soren shared that head chefs and colleagues have told him that with his years of experience, he's ahead of many cooking school graduates. He plans to keep working in different restaurants to continue improving.

NHS Vocational Programs Update - Michael Girvin, Heather Ring, Jessica Douglas, Derek Mulson, Tom Proch (NHS Vocational Teachers)

NHS Principal Mandy Hilemn introduced the vocational team and thanked Mrs. Douglas for the presentation.

Culinary Teacher Tom Proch brought samples and shared that he began teaching culinary in 2014 and enjoys seeing his former students succeed in their careers. He mentioned that one of his favorite yearly lessons involves breaking down a whole deer for butchery. This year, he was able to get three deer, one for each of his culinary classes, and informed parents in case it might be too much for some students. He ensures that students understand the process respectfully and invites the anatomy class to observe when possible. After breaking down the meat, they use it in various dishes, like sausage and pâté, and make stock from the bones.

Mr. Proch explained that while he doesn't expect all students to become chefs, he supports those who wish to pursue it. He emphasized that students can learn a lot from working under a skilled chef, and he helps students get internships or summer jobs in local restaurants, which can lead to careers in the culinary field.

The committee members agreed on what a wonderful program it is and praised the valuable exposure it provides for the students.

Mike Girvin, the Wood Shop teacher, explained his classes, which include Wood Tech 1 for novice woodworkers, Wood Tech 2 for those who have completed Wood Tech 1, and a Carpentry class for Juniors and Seniors interested in building. He shared a picture of a class collaborating on a chimney for a bonfire project.

He also discussed the shed-building project where students roofed a shed, and islanders can request sheds through Island Lumber. The recipients make donations to support the high school's wood shop, automotive, and horticulture programs. Mr. Girvin highlighted the mix of boys and girls in the classes, mentioning how it's great to

see young women joining the wood shop, which was traditionally male-dominated. He showed photos of Shaker tables made by students in the first semester, which were built without fasteners and painted by the students. Wood Tech 1 students started with cutting boards, and one student made a beautifully painted quarterboard. He also shared a project of another student who immigrated from Guatemala, showing how students personalize their projects with names, flags, and other designs. Wood Tech 1 students are now working on turning pens using a lathe, and the pens are sold at the farmers' market. Wood Tech 2 students are starting a project using the CNC machine and they'll learn more computer-driven woodworking. Mr. Girvin invited anyone interested to see more of the student's work at the upcoming Winter Tide Arts Show. He emphasized the importance of safety and assured there had been no accidents in the class.

Jessica Douglas, the Nursing and Allied Health teacher, shared an overview of her classes. She teaches Intro to Nursing, Nursing II, and Nursing and Allied Health III which is new this year.

In Intro to Nursing, students are introduced to healthcare careers, focusing on professionalism, communication, teamwork, and safety. They end with a resume, cover letter, and mock interview.

Nursing II students learn patient care skills, such as activities of daily living (ADLs). Two students were shown helping a volunteer patient with hair care while pretending to be bed bound.

Nursing and Allied Health III, a new course this year, covers diseases and disorders of different body systems. Recent lessons focused on the urinary system, with a guest speaker from the hospital talking about dialysis. Students also visited a dialysis center to observe the treatment process.

Mrs. Gallagher-Byrne inquired about the new Nursing III class. Mrs. Douglas explained that the class is smaller this year with four students, but Nursing II has 21 students, indicating growth in the program.

Dr. Lepore commented that from his perspective, the program is a significant benefit for the hospital and its patients, especially considering the current reliance on traveling professionals. He expressed his appreciation for the program, calling it tremendous.

Mrs. Douglas mentioned that dentistry is being considered as a future addition to the program and noted that Dr. Hallett had the opportunity to be a guest speaker for the Nursing III class.

Heather Ring, Horticulture teacher, provided an update on the horticulture and agriculture programs. She showcased some vegetables grown by students and highlighted their focus on sustainability and adapting to the local climate. Students have utilized the greenhouse, which features raised beds, to grow over 17 varieties of vegetables. With colder weather settling in, they've transitioned from warm-weather crops to others better suited for the season. Both horticulture and agriculture students participate in seed selection, planting, research, garden bed maintenance, and harvesting, which they began in September. In addition to hands-on gardening, students explore sustainability-focused gardening books, enhancing their knowledge, public speaking, and idea-pitching skills. These activities aim to prepare students for careers in landscaping, design, or selling at farmers' markets. One class project involves redesigning pathways in the greenhouse area. After removing unsustainable rubber mulch, students researched and proposed eco-friendly, cost-effective materials. The emphasis on native plants has inspired students, particularly those with family landscaping businesses, to consider alternatives to traditional plants like privet for privacy screens. Mrs. Ring also integrates marine science into her teaching, showcasing local sea creatures and connecting topics like fertilizer use to environmental impact. She expressed excitement about the students' growth and future contributions.

Ms. Wendelken, student representative, inquired about the chosen material. Mrs. Ring confirmed they would use wood chips.

Mr. Murphy asked about community partnerships, and Mrs. Ring noted their collaboration with Sustainable Nantucket.

Mrs. Gallagher-Byrne asked if the horticulture program works with the culinary department. Mrs. Ring explained the challenge of growing enough produce for cooking but mentioned that students harvest and eat the vegetables they grow.

Mrs. Martinez asked if the horticulture program was a new class. Mrs. Ring clarified that it is not new.

Dr. Hallett asked if students visit the garden next to the Central Office. Mrs. Ring replied that they go there frequently, about two days a week.

Dr. Hallett inquired how students stay engaged, given the time it takes to grow plants. Mrs. Ring shared that they start with microgreens, which grow quickly. Students planted seeds on a Thursday or Friday, and by Monday, they had germinated, keeping the students excited and involved.

Mr. Derek Mulson, Automotive teacher for over ten years, shared details about the program he leads. The program includes two courses: Introduction to Automotive and Advanced Automotive. The introductory course covers basics like fluid maintenance, tire pressure, and small suspension services, while the advanced course focuses on engine systems, drivability, and more complex automotive skills. Mr. Mulson emphasized hands-on learning, where students disassemble and rebuild engines, diagnose issues, and apply engineering principles. He strives to make learning engaging, drawing on his 30 years of industry experience, including a background in motorsports. The program also explores related fields like marine and aerospace industries to give students a broader perspective. Many students pursue careers in local shops, trade schools, or specialized programs like the automotive technology degree at SUNY Morrisville. Some are inspired to explore high-performance and motorsports careers. Mr. Mulson highlighted the program's success in preparing students for technical careers and meeting industry demand for skilled workers.

The committee commended the program for its practical value and its ability to spark students' interest in technical careers.

Ms. Hilemn provided an overview of the Criminal Justice class, complementing Officer Thompson's earlier presentation to the committee. She noted that the course is a popular part of the vocational program and highlighted activities such as sobriety tests with "drunk goggles" to simulate impairment. Students also learn about incarceration and the justice system through engaging, hands-on experiences. She concluded by expressing pride in the teachers' dedication and the positive impact of the program, which is highly valued by students.

Federal Grants - Mellisa Devitt, Director of Curriculum & Assessment for the Humanities

Mandy Bardsley

Deb Gately, Director of Special Services

Melissa Devitt presented an overview of federal grants and their alignment with the district's improvement plan (DIP). She manages Title I, II, and IV grants, while Barbara Cohen oversees Title III, and Deb Gatley handles IDEA. These grants are strategically used to support high-impact tiered practices.

Title I and III funds are used for a five-week summer school program focused on reading instruction (Title I) and language acquisition for English Learners (Title III). Title IV funds are allocated for behavior management and social-emotional learning initiatives. The grants also support a mentoring program under Initiative 2.2 to promote a diverse, high-quality workforce, particularly benefiting 35 new teachers this year. Parent engagement efforts tied to Initiative 3.1 are funded through Title III, including LPAC programs.

Title I funding decreased significantly this year to \$83,400 from \$166,000 due to fluctuations in free and reduced lunch numbers, which affect eligibility. These funds are primarily used for a teaching assistant's salary and summer school programming expenses. Title II (\$27,444) supports mentoring and supplies, Title III (\$51,518) funds summer school teachers, online platforms, and family engagement, and Title IV (\$2,491) supports initiatives like Responsive Classroom training.

Mrs. Devitt noted that the Title I funding decline stems from variations in economic disadvantage metrics across the district's three Title I schools. Slight changes in these numbers annually impact the grant amount.

Deb Gately, Director of Special Services, provided an update on the IDEA Federal Entitlement Grant, which focuses solely on supporting students with disabilities. Currently, the district serves approximately 330 students with disabilities and employs 132 staff members within the special services department, though not all are exclusively dedicated to special education. The IDEA grant ensures students with disabilities receive the services outlined in their Individualized Education Programs (IEPs). Funding allocations are based on the district's special education population, including private school students who qualify as Nantucket residents. This year, the IDEA grant totaled \$445,900, a decrease of about \$20,000. Despite this, the grant remains a critical source of funding for special education services and programming.

Approximately \$183,000 of the grant is allocated to professional salaries, including benefits like Medicare. Contracted services receive \$93,000, with \$23,342 designated for equitable services for private school students. Additionally, the district's IDEA 262 grant, which focuses on early childhood education, partially funds an early

childhood teaching assistant. The decrease in funding is attributed to a positive development: for the first time in three years, the district was not found significantly disproportionate in special education eligibility for Hispanic, Latino, or Black/African American students. This progress is credited to improved practices in the Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) process and a stronger focus on interventions before special education referrals.

The district continues to prioritize professional development, with significant investment in Orton-Gillingham training for specialized reading instruction. Over the past two years, \$662,000 has been allocated for a two-year training cohort, with an additional \$22,000 spent this year. By the program's conclusion, the district will have certified Orton-Gillingham teachers across all school levels, including EL teachers and reading interventionists, supported by their respective departments.

Efforts to improve services for private school students include providing counseling at the Nantucket New School to reduce anxiety for students with social-emotional needs. Plans are in place to expand services beyond counseling as federal funding allows. Dr. Gately concluded by emphasizing the need to increase general fund budgets to maintain the quality of professional development and services, while continuing to align grant usage with the district's strategic initiatives.

Ms. Gallagher Byrne asked whether there was a counselor that went to the Nantucket Lighthouse School as well as the New School. Dr. Gately shared that the Lighthouse School has their own, and she continued to have a positive relationship with both of the private schools.

Dr. Lepore asked how students were tested. Dr. Gately explained that NPS currently brings people in from the outside to complete the testing needed.

Committee discussions and votes to be taken

Vote to approve the donation of the Tennis Backboard. *Esmeralda Martinez made a motion to approve, seconded by Vince Murphy, and with no opposed vote, the motion was approved unanimously*

Vote to approve the NPS 2025-2026 School Calendar (Draft 12032024). *Laura Gallagher Byrne made a motion to approve, seconded by Esmeralda Martinez, and with no opposed vote, the motion was approved unanimously*

Transfers & Invoices. *Esmeralda Martinez made a motion to approve, seconded by Vince Murphy, and with no opposed vote, the motion was approved unanimously*

Student Council Representative - Cecilia Wendelken

Ms. Wendelken provided an update on several activities at the school. The Accidentals and Naturals had a busy month, performing at the Stroll on December 7th and their annual Dessert Cabaret on December 13th. The two cabaret shows were well-attended, and items were auctioned to raise money for their upcoming trip to New York in April. The National Honor Society organized a candy gram fundraiser from December 10th to 12th, raising money and spreading holiday cheer. The NHS band and chorus concert on December 11th was praised as one of the best recent performances, with both groups receiving rave reviews.

Auditions for the musical The Little Mermaid were held on December 11th and 13th, and callbacks were announced on December 15th, with the official cast expected soon. The seniors also hosted the annual December Delight on December 14th, which was a success thanks to the efforts of many staff and students, including Ms. Lombardi, Ms. Parsons, and Ms. Manning. Vendors reported great sales, and the event was a wonderful community gathering. This week is Spirit Week, featuring activities like Pajama Day and Ugly Sweater Day, with more fun events planned, including a Gingerbread House competition, a holiday movie night, door decorating, and a scavenger hunt. These activities are designed to bring some festive fun to the students before the winter break.

Sub-Committee/Work Group Report

Laura reported on the NET board meeting with talk on housing housing.

Dr. Hallett reported that Shantaw and Esmeralda are alternating on the ESP negotiations.

Agenda for the next meeting, January 7, 2025 - January Student Enrollment, Student Success Program - Alt Ed, TON FY26 Budget Presentation, Budget Development - Tech., Facilities, Community School, Athletics

Adjournment

Motion to adjourn at 7:49 PM by Laura Gallagher Byrne, seconded by Esmeralda Martinez, and with none opposed, the motion was approved unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,
Katie Bedell
School Committee Clerk