

NEWPORT SCHOOL COMMITTEE REGULAR MEETING
Tuesday, April 14, 2026 at 6:30 PM
Pell Elementary School, 35 Dexter Street, Newport, Rhode Island 02840-3898

The Chair called the meeting to order at 6:30 pm.

Present: James Dring (Chair), Rebecca Bolan (Vice Chair), Sandra Flowers, Elizabeth Cullen, Robert Leary, Robert Power, Stephanie Winslow

School Department: Superintendent Colleen Burns Jermain, Ed.D.; Director of Finance and Administration Ronald Gonsalves; Director of Operations Robert Young; Director of Student Services Candace Andrade; Director of MLL Ronilee Mooney; Director of Human Resources Ashley Zaroogian; RHS Interim Principal Michael Monahan; TMS Principal Michael Browner; Pell Principal Traci Westman, RHS Asst. Principal Evelyn Folcarelli, TMS Asst. Principal Beth Raffa, Pell MTSS Coordinator Jen Conheeny.

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

2.0 Public Comment

Emily Conklin, 7 Guinn Court, Newport, is the Chair of the Energy and Environment Commission. She encouraged participation in the composting pilot in the City and encourage all families, elected officials to participate.
Blackearthcompost.com/Newport

3.0 Superintendent and Staff Requests/Reports

Mrs. Bolan made a motion, seconded by Ms. Winslow to accept the Superintendent and Staff Reports. The motion passed (6-1) with Mr. Leary opposed.

3.1 School Improvement Team Update

Dr. Browner spoke about the Rising Star Program and its success; students were recognized for perfect attendance in March.

Principal Westman spoke about the pancake breakfast ahead of RICAS testing for Grades 3 and 4; positive PR and work on the school website is ongoing. They are working to promote academic achievements, i.e. student of the month, and more accolades and student recognitions. They hope to hold a meeting at Conexion Latina next year for more engagement.

Mr. Monahan reported about the March meeting. Over 20 participants attended the SIT first meeting. The current School Improvement Plan was shared with all attendees for input and connection to the district Strategic Plan.

3.2 Expenditure, Revenue, and Restricted Grants Reports

Director Gonsalves reported two material updates: electricity and impact aid. The asbestos remediation at NACTC will also impact the projected deficit. The school

year has been very strained and the forecast for FY27 will require a structural reset. Out of district placements have grown during the year. Discussion followed on the impact of the new RHS and being fully powered by electricity.

- 3.3 College and Career Readiness Report
Director Young and Ms. Clarke reported on the activities of the NACTC programs. They are recruiting for the AOIT Program as there is space available.
- 3.4 Facilities Report
Director Hallal reported on maintenance and snow removal. FEMA is reimbursing for only certain days within the week of the blizzard, not the entirety of the storm.

4.0 Action Items

- 4.1 Discussion/possible action - Grade 5 move to Pell
Mrs. Bolan made a motion to leave 5th grade at Thompson Middle School for the 2026-2027 school year. The motion was seconded by Dr. Flowers.

The Chair explained that Mrs. Bolan and two other members asked for this item to be brought back before the committee. Mrs. Bolan has new information on staffing at Pell and enrollment and believes it is not the right time. Dr. Flowers supports keeping Grade 5 at TMS. Dr. Power believes it is in the best interest to have Grade 5 at Pell, but is concerned about the capacity for this to happen. He believes that the current Superintendent can make it happen, but without her presence he is not confident that the transition will be successful. Mrs. Cullen is disappointed in this reversal and believes that Grade 5 students need that additional year in an elementary school.

Jennifer Hole, TAN President, thanked Dr. Flowers for voicing her opinion.

Penelope Hunt, 15 Dartmouth Street, Newport, commented that the working group was a positive experience and balanced. The group's decision not to provide a report to the committee was a mis-step and she did not hear compelling evidence to support the move.

Dr. Jermain explained that the space is available at Pell and believes elementary students should be in one location. ELL and resource rooms still need to be decided. The report to the school committee did not happen because of the lack of consensus from the work group. Work group members provided individual comments if they wished to do so. The motion passed (5-2) with Mr. Dring and Mrs. Cullen opposed.

- 4.2 Discussion/Approval to limit expenditures to essential items only
Mrs. Bolan made a motion, seconded by Ms. Winslow to limit expenditures for the remainder of the school year to essential items only.

Mr. Leary amended the motion that all non-essential spending be frozen. Ms. Winslow seconded the motion.

Discussion followed on the definition of essential versus non-essential spending. Mr. Leary's amendment passed (7-0). The motion, as amended, passed (6-1) with Mr. Leary opposed.

- 4.3 Request for Acceptance of NPEF Bus for a Cause grant
Mrs. Bolan made a motion, seconded by Dr. Power to accept the Bus For A Cause grant. The motion passed (7-0).
- 4.4 Request for Acceptance of NPEF Enrichment Grants
Mrs. Bolan made a motion, seconded by Ms. Winslow to accept the NPEF Enrichment Grants in the amount of \$19,805, as presented. The motion passed (7-0).
- 4.5 Discussion/Approval - Agreement between RELAY (Medicaid reimbursement contractor) and Newport Schools
Mrs. Bolan made a motion, seconded by Ms. Winslow to approve the agreement with RELAY, as presented. Discussion followed on the processing fee of 5%. The motion passed (5-2) with Mrs. Cullen and Mr. Leary opposed.
- 4.6 Discussion/Approval Policy 5540 - Students - Disciplinary Policies - Dress Code (Second Reading)
Mrs. Bolan made a motion, seconded by Dr. Flowers to approve Policy 5540, as presented, on the second reading.
Ms. Winslow reported that there was great student involvement to formulate this policy. She is very disappointed by the negative comments, letters to the editor, and response to the Student Integrity Board. Mr. Leary commented on the investigative report recommendation that students not wear hoods or hats.
The motion passed (5-2) with Dr. Power and Ms. Winslow opposed.
- 4.7 Discussion/Approval - Policy 5630 Students – Disciplinary Policies - School Substance Misuse (First Reading)
Mrs. Bolan made a motion, seconded by Dr. Flowers, to approve Policy 5630 on the first reading. Ms. Winslow reported that the Newport Prevention Coalition was a great help in formulating this policy.

Melanie Saunders, 130 Austin Road, North Kingstown, Coordinator of the Newport Prevention Coalition, spoke in favor of the policy to address substance misuse. Substance misuse and addiction is becoming a growing concern. The motion passed (7-0).

Mrs. Bolan made a motion, seconded by Mr. Leary to remove items 4.8 and 4.9 from this agenda for consideration at a future meeting. The committee needs more information on other vendors that responded. The motion passed (7-0).

- 4.8 Discussion/Approval - Contract between Newport Public Schools and Nexgen Mechanical for Pell Elementary School Boiler Maintenance
- 4.9 Discussion/Approval - Contract between Newport Public Schools and Nexgen Mechanical for Thompson Middle School Boiler Maintenance
- 4.10 Discussion/Approval - Award of RFP NPS 2026-002 - Legal Services
Mrs. Bolan made a motion, seconded by Mr. Leary, to award RFP 2026-002 for Legal Services, as presented. Dr. Power is concerned that the RFP was not posted widely. Ms. Winslow is concerned that Attorney Carroll was given authority to engage with the hiring process, contract negotiation and wondered how this aligns to the district policies and state law. The motion passed (5-2) with Dr. Power and Ms. Winslow opposed.
- 4.11 Discussion/Approval – Authorization to issue RFP for staffing audit
Mrs. Bolan made a motion, seconded by Ms. Winslow, to approve the issuance of an RFP for a staffing and financial audit. Dr. Power indicated that the department may be underfunded and we need to understand the position in order to determine if the committee can or should seek additional funding. Mrs. Cullen suggested finding a grant to fund this work. The motion passed (6-1) with Mr. Leary opposed.
- 4.12 FY 2027 Budget Draft
Mrs. Bolan made a motion, seconded by Dr. Flowers, to accept the draft budget for FY2027, as presented. Director Gonsalves reviewed the cost drivers and staffing reductions that have been determined.

Penelope Hunt, 15 Dartmouth Street, Newport noted that the budget is balanced with a large request to the City. She believes the property tax base can support a 13% ask. She welcomes the idea of a staffing audit.

After discussion on the projected gap of \$3.8M, there is no specific ask of the Council at tomorrow night's workshop.

The motion failed (3-4) with Mr. Dring, Dr. Power, Mrs. Cullen and Mr. Leary opposed.

Dr. Jermain requested direction for tomorrow night's workshop with the City Council.

Mrs. Bolan made a motion, seconded by Dr. Flowers to present to the Newport City Council the budget slide deck and communicate that there is no agreement by the

Newport School Committee and the budget is a work in progress. The motion passed (5-1) with Mr. Leary opposed. Ms. Winslow abstained.

5.0 Discussion

5.1 Discussion/Approval - Contract between Newport Public Schools and Yankee Fiber Control

Mrs. Bolan noted that this work was an emergency approval in order to get students and staff back into the building. Mrs. Cullen opposed paying for this work since the vendor did not follow the RFP.

5.2 Deficit Reduction Plan FY26

Dr. Jermain summarized the options including use of the fund balance for FY26. A letter will be sent to the Auditor General to inform of the process. Discussion must occur with the City regarding a payment plan and it is expected that there will be a visit by the Auditor General.

6.0 Consent Agenda

Mrs. Bolan made a motion, seconded by Dr. Flowers to approve the consent agenda, as presented.

6.1 Invoices and requisitions – Approved.

6.2 Home instruction – Approved. Discussion followed on why families choose home instruction and how the district can obtain and track data.

6.3 Regular and Special Meeting Minutes – Approved.

March 10, 2026 – Regular Meeting minutes, March 10, 2026 Special Meeting minutes, March 18, 2026 Special Meeting minutes were all approved.

6.4 Subcommittee Reports – Accepted.

Policy subcommittee meeting notes of March 25, 2026 were shared, as well as minutes for the March 3 Workforce Development Advisory Committee meeting and agenda for April 9, 2026.

Mrs. Cullen made a motion to adjourn, seconded by Ms. Winslow. The motion passed (7-0). The meeting adjourned at 9:13 pm.