

**South Kingstown School Committee
Executive Session and Business Meeting
South Kingstown High School Cafeteria
215 Columbia Street
Wakefield, RI 02879
Tuesday, March 24, 2026**

1. Executive Session

A. Executive Session

Ms. Vetter called the meeting of the South Kingstown School Committee to order at 5:33 PM. Ms. Vetter asked for a motion to convene into Executive Session for Discussion and/or Action regarding those items of business exempt from open meetings under RIGL 42-46-4 and A: Discussion: Personnel - Terms of Contract Negotiation - Athletic Director (RIGL-42-46-5(a)(1)). Individuals were notified, including their right to have any discussion held in open session.

MSV(1) – Motion made to recess into Executive Session

Motion made by James Restivo

Motion seconded by Kate Macinanti

Motion passes 4-0 (Michelle Brousseau, Bradley Shear, and Stewart Lander absent at time of vote)

MSV(2) – Motion made to adjourn Executive Session and Reconvene Open Session

Motion made by James Restivo

Motion seconded by Kate Macinanti

Motion passes 5-0 (Michelle Brousseau and Stewart Lander absent at time of vote)

2. Call to Order

A. Call to Order/Roll Call

Ms. Vetter called the meeting to order at 6:03 PM and led the roll call:

Member	Present	Absent	Notes
Carol Vetter	X		
James Restivo	X		
Michelle Brousseau		X	
Paula Whitford	X		
Kate Macinanti	X		
Bradley Shear	X		Arrived at the beginning of Executive Session
Stewart Lander		X	
Other Attendees			
Michael J Podraza Superintendent	X		
Daniel P Seger Assistant Superintendent	X		
Patricia Proctor Chief Financial Officer	X		
Kimberly Rothwell-Carson Director of Student Services	X		

B. Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag

Ms. Vetter led the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag.

C. Motion to Seal Minutes of the Executive Session

MSV(3) – Motion made to Seal the Minutes of the Executive Session.

Motion made by James Restivo

Motion seconded by Kate Macinanti

Motion passes 5-0

D. Disclosure of Votes Taken in Executive Session

Ms. Vetter stated that there were no votes taken in Executive Session.

E. Student Recognitions

During the monthly Student Recognition ceremony, the following students were recognized for their outstanding academic achievements and contributions to the South Kingstown School Department and its community: Zada Sowers, Michael Spink, Mackenzie Pringles, Nevaeh Sekator, Ivy Simoneau, Hudson Boutros, Caleb Pearce, Raymond Chen, Lumi Luminesca, Abby Ferraris, Lilah Nallen, Pia Muir, Brooke Bell, Emily Letourneau, James Ritorto, Emma Palm, Henry Mohr, Eloise Stabile, Emma Laning, Kai Schneider, Andrew Englander, Miles Licht, Isabel Brilhante, Abigail Barrus, Gracelyn Gardner, Olivia Reppucci, Lillian Bradannini, Tripler Nardini, Lydon Richard, Sofia Lawless, Orion Gilmore. Congratulations to all.

3. Comments from the Community

A. Comments from the Community

Brian Nelson - Mr. Nelson shared his frustration with the Town Council, stating that the Council has failed in its basic responsibility to support public education, describing years of neglect, poor decisions, and repeated level funding as a form of negligence. He stressed that, even with the proposed additional \$1 million, the district is still being forced to find another \$2 million in cuts after already reducing programs and staff “enough,” which he believes has broken trust with teachers, staff, and the broader community. Nelson emphasized that public education is not optional but central to the town’s future, and that the resulting loss of teachers and teacher assistants is the direct result of Town Council choices. He urged the School Committee to do everything possible to make the Town Council fully understand the damage these decisions have caused to the community.

Mary Kutcher - Ms. Kutcher emphasized how critical the middle school model is within the district’s overall K–12 experience, noting that while people often celebrate kindergartners and high schoolers, middle school plays a uniquely important role. She explained that middle schools are intentionally designed to meet students’ academic, social, and emotional needs through stronger teacher-student relationships, regular team meetings about individual students, and robust interventions. In contrast, she described a junior high model as more like a mini-high school: more departmental, less student-centered, and with students simply “rolling through” classes. She argued that the middle school model is more nurturing, while junior high pushes students more abruptly before many are ready.

Dorald Beasley - Mr. Beasley shared his belief that it is “ridiculous” to claim taxpayers do not support the schools, citing high per-pupil spending (approximately \$31,000 in-district vs. \$28,000 out-of-district) and voter approval of a \$150 million new high school whose debt service will begin impacting taxpayers in July and fully by 2028. They noted the district has historically reduced staff (about 19 positions per year, 3.6 this year), yet characterized current staffing as “employment creep” given that the proposed \$2.5 million increase comes without staff cuts. Pointing to performance data—no five-star schools, only two four-star and three three-star schools, and ongoing teacher chronic absenteeism, especially at Broad Rock Middle School—he contended that teachers are not underpaid and outcomes do not justify further tax increases. With 11.3% of the budget going to tuition and an already high tax rate that makes it difficult for new families to move into South Kingstown, the speaker urged the district to “find the cuts,” stressing that residents on fixed incomes cannot afford an additional tax burden.

Bridget Moore - Mrs. Moore shared her concern that it can be a dangerous policy to allow people to speak without a time limit, stating that the lack of a timer can lead to overly long, unstructured, or imbalanced public comment and may undermine fairness, order, and efficiency in the meeting process, and can also lead to erroneous information being shared.

Ms. Vetter closed Community Comments as no community members wished to speak.

4. Consent Agenda

- A. Approval of Executive Session Minutes - 2/27/2026**
- B. Approval of Open Session Minutes - 3/10/2026**
- C. Purchases Over \$10,350**
- D. Homeschool Requests - SY 2025-2026**

MSV(4) – Motion made to approve the Consent Agenda.

Motion made by James Restivo

Motion seconded by Kate Macinanti

Motion passes 5-0

5. Superintendent’s Report

A. Superintendent’s Report Presentation

Mr. Podraza shared the Superintendent’s Presentation.

B. Personnel Actions - Non-Exempt/At Will Employee Updates (For Information Only; No Board Action Required)

Mr. Podraza shared the personnel actions of the district. There were three requests for a leave of absence and one notice of retirement received. Mr. Podraza also shared the appointment of the District's spring athletic coaches.

C. SY 2025-2026 Annual Calendar Update

Mr. Podraza shared that he is still awaiting action by the Council of Elementary and Secondary Education. The Council did not hold a makeup meeting for the missed February meeting. Mr. Podraza reported that if the state of emergency days (2) during the recent blizzard are waived for student compulsory attendance, the last day of school for students would be Tuesday, June 23rd. The last two days of the school year for employees would be an in-person professional development day on Wednesday, June 24th, with the second day of professional development being asynchronous, with its completion on or before Thursday, June 25th. Mr. Podraza will update with new information as soon as it is received.

D. Transportation Audit

Mr. Podraza gave an update on the recent transportation audit provided by Transpar through an offering by RIDE. The draft report has been received; however, it has been confirmed that data is missing from 8 buses. Mr. Lonergan is working with Ocean State to determine the cause and will coordinate with both Transpar and Ocean State to update and ensure accuracy of the final report. Mr. Podraza reported that key observations from Transpar are not likely to change regardless of the data received. Due to the rural environment of the district, longer run times and low capacity utilization are expected. There may be opportunities to reduce the time offset between South Kingstown High School and Broad Rock Middle School. There is also a recommendation to explore utilizing the Statewide bus for private schools coming from surrounding districts. When Mr. Podraza receives the final report, he will update the Committee/community.

MSV(5) – Motion made to accept the Superintendent's Report

Motion made by Kate Macinanti

Motion seconded by James Restivo

Motion passes 5-0

6. School Committee Business

At this time, there is a motion made to move School Committee Business item E to the top of School Committee Business.

MSV(6) – Motion made to move School Committee Business Item E to the top of School Committee Business.

Motion made by Kate Macinanti

Motion seconded by Brad Shear

Motion passes 5-0

E. Discussion: Implications of Town Council Preliminary Budget Adoption

Mr. Podraza shared his Memorandum to the School Committee with the members of the community, as follows:

The purpose of this memorandum is to outline options that require consideration should the Town Council's allocation to the schools not increase from the preliminary adopted budget.

To be direct: none of the areas identified below represent desired outcomes, and each carries real consequences for students, staff, and the community of South Kingstown. Rather, these options are presented because responsible stewardship of the budget process demands that the School Committee have a full and transparent picture of what must be examined if the current funding shortfall is not resolved. Each area below represents a potential avenue for deliberation as the School Committee determines the path forward for FY2027.

Dance, Music, Theater, and Visual Arts & Design

BEP- Classes in at least visual arts and design, and music shall be available for each student in each grade through the middle level. Curriculum that includes dance and theatre shall adhere to the applicable grade span expectations. A program of study shall exist for all secondary students to enable them to demonstrate proficiency in at least one art form. Additionally, secondary school students shall be provided with the opportunity to do multiple levels of coursework in visual arts and design in both two and three dimensions, and in at least one performing arts discipline.

Physical Activity and Nutrition Services (Athletics)

BEP- Provide a variety of physical activity opportunities to students in grades 6 through 12, such as stretch breaks, dance programs or classes, intramural athletics, interscholastic athletics, or other activities;

World Languages

BEP- Coursework in a minimum of two languages other than English at the secondary level and offerings of at least three consecutive years of the two selected languages...

BEP- Although not required, instruction in at least one world language other than English at the elementary school level is recognized as best practice.

After School Support Services

- Summer Credit Recovery
- Substance Abuse Counselors (Grant-funded)
- Late Buses
- Extracurriculars Beyond Collective Bargaining

Other

- Delayed Purchasing- Technology Refresh
- Pay Rate for Substitutes
- Voluntary Reductions from Current Contracts
- Current and Future Contract Negotiations
- Payments to Town for Services (Raised During FY26 Process)
 - Field Maintenance
 - School Resource Officers
 - Crossing Guards
- Shared Services with Town- Facilities
- Additional Use of Fund Balance
- Reorganization of Middle School to Junior High School
- Utilization of the Remaining FY27 Budget Process
 - Petitions for Revision on or before April 21, 2026
 - Referendum Petitions on or before May 12, 2026

The options outlined in this memorandum are not a menu of choices that the District welcomes. They are a reflection of the difficult fiscal reality the District faces as a result of the current funding gap. Many, if not all, of the areas identified above touch directly on the programs, services, and opportunities that define the educational experience we have committed to providing for every student in this District. Reductions or eliminations in any of these areas would represent a step backward from that commitment.

The School Committee is being asked to make decisions under circumstances not of its making. State aid reductions, the elimination of one-time revenues, and a funding formula that continues to undervalue South Kingstown's true fiscal capacity have collectively created a structural imbalance that cannot be absorbed without consequence.

The District remains hopeful that the Town Council will recognize the severity of this situation and act accordingly. At the same time, the School Committee must be prepared to exercise its fiduciary responsibility and make whatever decisions are necessary to adopt a balanced budget. The options above will inform that process, not as a preferred path, but as the available one if additional relief does not materialize.

The Administration remains committed to transparency throughout this process and will continue to provide the School Committee, the Town Council, and the community with the information needed to make informed decisions on behalf of the students of South Kingstown.

Discussion ensued regarding the Town Council's identifying an additional \$1 million for the school transfer—sourced from other Town funds without raising the tax rate—while still leaving approximately a \$1.5 million operating gap for the District. This \$1 million is an ongoing increase to the transfer (not a one-time grant). Legal counsel has confirmed the Town cannot attach programmatic conditions to the appropriation, and that proposals for the Town to assume responsibility for the Capital Improvement Program (CIP) would only help if done in addition to, not instead of, fully funding operating needs. Shifting capital costs to the Town alone does not close the current operating deficit, as the district is already using \$1 million of fund balance in the proposed budget, and relying further on one-time fixes (extra fund balance, deferring technology purchases, etc.) would worsen the structural deficit. Committee members agreed they must clearly convey to the Town Council that, even with the preliminary \$1 million, significant cuts to core programs and services remain likely unless additional sustainable operating support is provided. The committee directs Mr. Podraza to create an impact statement of what meeting the BEP only means for the district.

Further discussion that given the magnitude and complexity of potential budget cuts, a special additional meeting should be scheduled (with availability to be polled) to review the Superintendent's forthcoming detailed memo and impact/equity matrix, while using the April 1 joint session with Town Council only to convey the scope of the problem rather than discuss specific line-item reductions.

There is no vote taken on this item.

At this time, there is a motion made to move School Committee Business Item B before School Committee Business Item A.

MSV(7) – Motion made to move School Committee Business Item B before School Committee Business Item A.
Motion made by James Restivo
Motion seconded by Kate Macinanti
Motion passes 5-0

B. Discussion/Action: Field Trip - SKHS - Robotics Tournament - West Springfield, MA

Mike Lobdell and Stephanie Otilige review the upcoming field trip opportunity for the SKHS Robotics team.

MSV(8) – Motion made to approve Field Trip - SKHS - Robotics Tournament - West Springfield, MA
Motion made by James Restivo
Motion seconded by Paula Whitford
Motion passes 5-0

A. Discussion: Office of Student Services Update

Dr. Carson presents her annual report to the School Committee. Items presented and discussed were as follows:

- Meet the Team
- Goals of Year 2
 - **Develop and refine policies, procedures, and guidance** - Dr. Carson identified as a key year-two goal the continued development and refinement of special education policies, procedures, and guidance so they are clearly documented, aligned with new state and federal (IDEA/RIDE) requirements, and effectively support compliant, high-quality services for students with disabilities.
 - **Review and revise staffing patterns, distribution, and services** - Dr. Carson explained that a second major goal is to review and revise special education staffing patterns, distribution, and services to ensure students receive the best possible support and that existing staff are used efficiently—not simply as a budget-cutting exercise. This includes examining how staff are assigned across programs and buildings, expanding in-class/co-teaching models instead of pull-out where appropriate, refining how related services are delivered (including consultation as an intervention), using detailed time studies (e.g., for SLPs and OTs) to align caseloads with actual work, strengthening transition supports and job coaching, and redefining roles such as the preschool coordinator and intensive program staffing so that services match student needs across the district.
 - **Family and Community** - Dr. Carson reported ongoing work to strengthen family and community engagement in special education through a reactivated parent advisory committee (SELAC), informational and training sessions (including on facilitated IEPs), and new parent feedback surveys, including an end-of-IEP QR-code survey.
- Moving Forward
 - Dr. Carson reviewed next steps, including implementing the FY27 special education budget she has recommended, continuing improvement planning, refining service delivery changes, supporting both new and existing families, collaborating with special education coordinators and building administrators on practices and procedures, and sustaining support for the parent advisory committee's leadership.

C. Discussion: Legislative Liaison Updates - Current Initiatives Before the House and Senate Relating to Public Education

As Ms. Brousseau is the legislative liaison and as she was unable to attend the meeting, the matter is tabled and will be brought to a future meeting. The Committee is updated that there are unfunded mandates present in the emails forwarded to the Committee by Mr. Podraza.

D. Discussion/Action: Policy #8435 - High School Grades and Honorary Diploma Policy - SECOND READ

Mr. Restivo reviewed the updates to the current policy.

MSV(9) – Motion made to approve Policy #8435 - High School Grades and Honorary Diploma Policy - SECOND READ
Motion made by Kate Macinanti
Motion seconded by Brad Shear
Motion passes 5-0

F. Discussion: School Building Committee Update

Ms. Macinanti gave an update on the School Building Committee. She reported that new high school construction is expanding beyond the academic tower (including the auditorium), is planning a topping-off ceremony with a signed beam later in April, has addressed abutter concerns by committing to better advance communication about weekend and extended-hour work, and is engaging CTE students through contractor-led site walk-throughs, with a similar experience planned for Broad Rock after testing.

7. Adjournment

A. Adjourn

MSV(10) – Motion made to adjourn the meeting.

Motion made by Kate Macinanti
Motion seconded by Brad Shear
Motion passes 5-0

The meeting was adjourned at 8:50 PM.