

**South Kingstown School Committee
Special Meeting
South Kingstown High School Cafeteria
215 Columbia Street
Wakefield, RI 02879**

1. Call to Order

A. Call to Order/Roll Call

Ms. Vetter called the meeting to order at 6:01 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		

B. Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag

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

2. Comments from the Community

A. Comments from the Community

Mary Kutcher, South Kingstown High School teacher - Ms. Kutcher stated her frustration with the Town Council for creating unnecessary upheaval in the school district by refusing to allocate 1.5 million of the Town's reserves to the schools. This decision undermines hard-won stability in district leadership and the student community, and unfairly harms families and children. The District has significant positive developments underway, and she is frustrated that the Council's actions risk overshadowing these accomplishments. Ms. Kutcher thanked the School Committee for its efforts to change the Council's mind and urged parents to pay attention, show up, and make their displeasure clear to the Town Council.

Katie Garvin - Parent of two children in the district - Ms. Garvin voiced her strong frustration that the School Committee must once again contemplate painful cuts because the Town Council has not adequately funded the schools. She emphasized that elementary "specials" (art, music, PE, and UA classes) are often what motivate many children, especially those not driven by pure academics, to attend school, and that UA teachers play a critical role by knowing students over many years and helping identify their growth and struggles. She also described how the middle school team model transformed her formerly very anxious child by creating a smaller, connected community where teachers collaborate closely, and she warns that dismantling this model for a more "outdated" structure would harm students' mental health and sense of connection.

As there were no other speakers, Ms. Vetter closed Community Comments.

At this time, Ms. Vetter shared that the April 1 meeting with the Town Council has been cancelled. The next hearings will take place on April 6 and April 7, 2026.

3. Consent Agenda

A. Approval of Open Session Minutes - 3/17/2026; 3/24/2026

MSV(1) – Motion made to approve the Consent Agenda.

Motion made by James Restivo

Motion seconded by Kate Macinanti

Motion passes 5-0

4. School Committee Business

A. Discussion: Implications of Town Council Preliminary Budget Adoption

Mr. Podraza provided a recap of the district's FY 27 preliminary request for an additional \$2.5 million for operations and the need to use fund balance for \$1 million, outlining the unexpected reduction in state aid, increased healthcare costs, and other financial challenges. The proposed budget includes staffing reductions due to attrition and breakage, and the district is monitoring enrollment declines.

Mr. Podraza then shared the FY 2027 Budget Matrix, explaining the remaining choices the district must consider if additional municipal funding is not approved. Each decision/option is broken down, giving the fiscal impact, personnel impact, program impact, and Mission & Equity Consideration. Each option in the matrix reflects a real consequence to students, staff, and programming. All of the options presented in the matrix equal a total of \$1,177,120. Items discussed were as follows:

Arts

- Reduce music electives - Elementary level
- Reduce music electives - Middle level

World Languages

- Reduce World Language - Middle level

Athletics

- Eliminate Middle school sports
- Eliminate JV sports

After School Opportunities

- Eliminate Summer Credit Recovery
- Eliminate late bus service
- Cut extracurricular stipends (beyond contract)

Supplemental Support Services

- Lose Substance Abuse Counselor (Grant-funded)

Technology

- Defer phone system replacement
- Defer BRMS laptop replacement (8-9 year old devices)
- Defer network equipment upgrade
- Cancel new laptops for grade 9 and kindergarten

Town Cost Sharing Requests

- Request that the Town absorb field maintenance costs
- Request that the Town fully fund public safety positions

Other

- Remove FY27 advertising budget
- Reduce substitute teacher pay by \$5/day
- Reduce substitute teacher pay by \$10/day

Under Development

- Voluntary furlough - administration and exempt positions
- Further personnel reductions

Mr. Podraza reiterated that this list of cuts - all undesirable - still only totals about \$1.1 million, meaning even if everything on it were to be cut, the district would still need fund balance/or deeper reductions. Discussion ensued with Committee members repeatedly stressing that these are not "extras," but core student supports, that many cuts would most harm vulnerable and marginalized students, and that program

reductions will drive families (and their per-pupil funding) out of the district. Several members stated that the real issue is external—lost revenue and rising benefits costs, not district overspending—so the focus must be on “raising the floor” via increased town funding. Committee members also stated that while they agree the matrix is necessary for transparency and for making their case to the Town Council, they are reluctant to start declaring specific cuts “on” or “off” the table until they know whether the Council will increase its allocation.

B. Discussion: Preparation for the Upcoming Joint Town Council/School Committee Meeting

Mr. Podraza and Ms. Proctor discussed the Town Council’s questions about the District’s Capital Improvement Projects and the need for clarity on submitted and completed projects. Ms. Proctor reviewed a spreadsheet detailing completed and submitted CIP projects, which included estimated and verified costs. The importance of maintaining the District’s 3% maintenance of effort and the potential impact of Town Council decisions on future funding is stressed. The budget matrix and capital improvement project information will be available to the Town Council at the upcoming public hearings. Committee members express their hope that the Town Council will hear their concerns and provide more funding to avoid significant cuts. They also reiterate their commitment to advocating for the district’s needs and the importance of maintaining high-quality educational programs.

2. Comments from the Community

At this time, Ms. Vetter asks for a motion to reopen Comments from the Community.

MSV(2) – Motion made to reopen Comments from the Community.

Motion made by James Restivo

Motion seconded by Paula Whitford

Motion passes 5-0

Katie Garvin - Parent of two children in the district - Ms. Garvin stressed that cutting arts, sports, and other programs—especially at the elementary and middle levels—will push families with means toward private options or out of the district altogether, widening inequities between “haves and have-nots.” She urged parents to write, email, and show up—especially to the April 6–7 hearings. Investing in students and families should be the Town’s core purpose.

Ashley Weeks, Teacher - South Kingstown School Department - Ms. Weeks urged the Committee and Town Council to be explicit about what staff cuts and structural changes—such as reverting Broad Rock to a junior high model—would actually mean for students. She believes that dismantling the middle school team structure would severely weaken social-emotional support and cause more students to “fall through the cracks,” because teachers would teach more grades and more students and would be less able to know them well. She also noted that shifting certified middle-level teachers into elementary roles just to make staffing “fit” would not be what’s best for kids; despite her license, she says she would be far less effective if moved to elementary after 24 years in middle school. Ms. Weeks acknowledged the difficulty of talking about personnel reductions in public, but insists that the Town Council and community need to see the concrete educational and human impact of underfunding. She encouraged people to come to the hearings and advocate alongside the Committee.

Dorald Beasley - Resident - Mr. Beasley recounted organizing a past petition to reduce school funding, describing how on the day of that referendum vote, heavy smoke from Canadian wildfires caused extremely poor air quality while district students were outside playing instruments in front of the rec center to greet voters. He noted that wind-blown chemical residue from the smoke coated his car and emphasized that those conditions were among the worst air-quality days ever recorded in Rhode Island. He warned the Committee not to “use students as props” at upcoming budget and Town Council events, stressing that students should not be placed in potentially unsafe or performative situations for political purposes.

Christine Pearce - Music Teacher - South Kingstown School Department - Ms. Pearce emphasized that every proposed cut ultimately reduces the number and effectiveness of adults directly facing children, which is exactly what students most need. She stressed that programs like strings, band, and chorus are not just about music, but about the human relationships and long-term connections teachers build with students—in class, in hallways, and across years. Ms. Pearce is concerned that if positions are eliminated or reassigned, many educators will no longer be doing the work where they make the greatest difference for kids, and the district will be less of a safe, stable space for students who are dealing with trauma and other challenges. Staff are already working hard, and the district has not been fiscally irresponsible, and she questioned why the Town Council cannot clearly recognize the need to protect these adults-in-front-of-kids roles.

Ms. Vetter closes Comments from the Community.

Mr. Restivo reviews the remaining steps in the Town budget process for members of the community.

5. Adjournment

A. Adjourn

MSV(3) – Motion made to adjourn the meeting.

Motion made by Stewart Lander

Motion seconded by Kate Macinanti

Motion passes 5-0

The meeting was adjourned at 8:00 PM.