

**South Kingstown School Committee
Executive Session and Special Meeting
South Kingstown High School Cafeteria
215 Columbia Street
Wakefield, RI 02879
Tuesday, May 19, 2026**

1. Executive Session

A. Executive Session

Ms. Vetter called the meeting of the South Kingstown School Committee to order at 5:00 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/Job Performance - FY 2026-2027 Faculty and Staff Reduction (RIGL 42-46-5(a)(1)). Individuals have been 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 Michelle Brousseau

Motion passes 5-0 (Brad 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 Michelle Brousseau

Motion passes 6-0 (Brad Shear absent at time of vote)

2. Call to Order

A. Call to Order/Roll Call

Ms. Vetter called the meeting to order at 6:05 PM. Ms Vetter stated that there was a medical incident at the high school yesterday morning - continued thoughts are with the family. She then 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	
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.

C. Motion to Seal Minutes of the Executive Session

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

Motion made by Michelle Brousseau

Motion seconded by Paula Whitford

Motion passes 6-0

D. Disclosure of Votes Taken in Executive Session

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

3. Comments from the Community

Frantz Delias, Teacher - Mr. Delias spoke in strong opposition to the proposed elimination of French at the middle school, urging the committee to reconsider leaving Spanish as the only world language option. He emphasized that this decision is not simply about staffing, but about preserving educational opportunity, student choice, and a robust pathway for language learning from middle to high school. He noted that students choose French for reasons including family heritage, academic interest, travel, and future careers, and argued that removing French at the middle level would weaken enrollment and threaten the long-term viability of the successful high school French program. Mr. Delias highlighted student achievements such as earning the Seal of Biliteracy, strong performance on AP French exams, and recognition in the National French Contest, as well as the role of the French Club in fostering enthusiasm and cultural engagement. He stressed that world language education is an essential component of communication, cultural awareness, and global readiness, not an “extra,” and asked the committee to weigh the long-term impact on students and families against short-term budget savings, concluding with the French Honor Society motto, “Vouloir, c’est pouvoir” (“Where there is a will, there is a way”).

Noelle Johnson, Student - Noelle praised Monsieur Delias as a dedicated and inspiring French teacher, emphasizing the importance of having a native French speaker for effective language learning.

Hazel Geremia, Student - Hazel shared her support for Monsieur Delias, citing a petition with over 80 signatures and the positive impact he has on students beyond just his class.

Katie Garvin, Parent/Resident - Ms. Garvin shared her concerns regarding the mental health challenges faced by students and the impact of budget cuts on essential services, urging the School Committee to reconsider the decision to lay off beloved teachers.

Penelope Fillion, Student - Penelope highlighted the importance of middle school language programs and the significant contributions of Monsieur Delias to the French program and school culture.

Emma Laning, Student - Emma shared her personal experiences with having been a student of Monsieur Delias for four years. She expressed her sadness for other students who will not benefit from having him as a teacher.

Kristin Ross, Student - Kristin emphasized the cognitive benefits of learning multiple languages and the importance of preserving the French program for future students.

Janelle Geaber Morelli, Parent/Resident - Ms. Morelli spoke against staff reductions at West Kingston Elementary School. She emphasized that in a small school, each staff member has a significant, long-term impact on students, with relationships that continue across grade levels. She noted that staff go “above and beyond” to adjust their approach when something is not working and urged the committee to reconsider cuts affecting West Kingston staff, stressing that these educators mean a great deal to students and families and make a meaningful difference in the school community.

Tim LaRose, Parent/Resident - Mr. LaRose spoke about the importance of continuity of teachers for students and families. He described how having the same teachers across siblings builds strong communication about students’ needs, including mental health, and creates relationships that “aren’t on spreadsheets” and are hard to quantify. He shared that his second grader’s growth – including being recognized as student of the month – was closely tied to her connection with a specific teacher now losing her job. He urged the committee to reconsider decisions that break these relationships, emphasizing the significant impact such continuity has on both students and families.

Maggie Brown, Parent/Resident - Ms. Brown spoke in strong support of Mrs. Karns, a fourth-grade teacher at West Kingston whose position is at risk. She described years of severe school avoidance for her daughter that were turned around after having Mrs. Karns, who became her “person” in the building and made her feel she belonged and wanted to attend school. Ms. Brown stressed that South Kingstown has a long tradition of valuing educational excellence and that teachers like Mrs. Karns are central to that identity, urging the Committee to find a way to keep her in the district.

Lillie Cote, Student - Lillie spoke in strong support of Monsieur Delias and the French program. She explained that although she began French in seventh grade and initially struggled, her interest and success grew significantly after having Monsieur Delias at the high school. She described his classes as joyful and highly effective, emphasizing that his assessments focus on true understanding rather than memorization and that he uses both conventional and creative teaching methods that deeply engage students. Lillie credited him with igniting her passion for French, supporting her dream of traveling abroad, and helping her feel prepared to use the language in real-world contexts. She urged the committee to reconsider any decision that would remove him, stating that he means a great deal to many students.

Ms. Vetter closes public comment at this time.

4. School Committee Business

A. Discussion/Action: FY 2025-2026 Budget Update

Ms. Proctor reported a projected year-end surplus of approximately \$330,474.70, up from an earlier estimate of \$200,000. This figure reflects updated revenue and expenditure totals, closure of unused purchase orders, and verification of remaining obligations (including end-of-year payroll, retiree payouts, and stipends), as well as an allowance for unforeseen expenses and a transfer from CIP for prior capital spending. Mr. Podraza noted that the surplus Ms. Proctor has estimated could be applied to support FY 2026-2027 as fund balance. He did caution that doing so would increase the district's structural deficit in future years and that some risk of unexpected costs remains through the end of the fiscal year. Discussion ensued regarding possible variances in the surplus.

No vote was taken on this item.

B. Discussion/Action: FY 2026-2027 Transportation Update

Mr. Podraza reported that, after reissuing the RFP to better reflect community values, the district again received only one bid, from Ocean State Transit, and that the vendor is now offering only a one-year contract. Ms. Proctor explained that costs have increased primarily due to changes in state prevailing wage requirements, including a \$4.25/hour increase for bus monitors (to ~\$40/hour). The proposed one-year contract for regular transportation (excluding field trips) is approximately \$4.865 million, with an additional \$8,000 budgeted for field trips, representing an increase of about \$35,500 over the prior figure but still far below the originally bid 33% increase (roughly \$1.2 million) rejected earlier in the process. Committee members questioned why the district is seeing a much larger percentage increase than neighboring districts, whether negotiations with the sole bidder are possible, and how field-trip costs relate to PTO-funded activities. Mr. Podraza confirmed that, because Ocean State is the sole bidder, negotiation is legally permissible, but details would need to occur outside public session; the earlier three-year bid is no longer valid. Committee members expressed concern about the budget strain and broader unfunded state mandates around transportation. Mr. Podraza stated that the contract will be placed on the next agenda for the Committee's consideration.

No action was taken on this item.

C. Discussion/Action: Personnel/Job Performance - FY 2026-2027 Faculty and Staff Reduction

Mr. Podraza gave an overview of the necessary staffing adjustments for the upcoming 2026-2027 school year, emphasizing that these proposed reductions do not reflect performance concerns with any of the staff members who are affected. These staffing recommendations are due to fiscal exigency and/or program reorganization caused by budgetary constraints and enrollment trends consistent with RIGL 16-13-3, et seq. Of the 14 positions recommended for reduction, Ms. Vetter polls the Committee to see if they would like any of the positions pulled for further discussion:

Ms. Macinanti would like to pull #9 - World Language.

Ms. Whitford would like to pull #7 - Social Worker

MSV(4) – Motion made to accept the Superintendent's recommendation for FY 2026–2027 personnel reductions, excluding item #9 (Broad Rock Middle School World Language) and item #7 (0.5 FTE social worker) for further discussion.

Motion made by Michelle Brousseau

Motion seconded by James Restivo

Discussion: Ms. Macinanti asks for clarification as to why the reductions need to be voted on at this time. Mr. Podraza explains that the cuts had to be voted on at this time because State law and contracts set a hard deadline for layoff notices, personnel is the only lever large enough to close a multi-million dollar gap. The Committee needs to preserve flexibility to manage an already significant structural deficit, while also retaining the option to call back positions if future funding improves.

Committee members share how difficult this process is for them. They gave their thanks to the students and families who came out to share their concerns. Discussion ensued regarding changes to State aid and what, if anything, might potentially be allotted to the district to help offset any budget shortfalls.

The motion on the table is amended, as follows:

MSV(5) – Motion made to amend the motion on the table to include the removal of item #2 (1.0 FTE Grade 2, West Kingston)

Motion made by Kate Macinanti

Motion seconded by Michelle Brousseau

Motion passes 6-0

MSV(6) – Motion made to amend the motion on the table to include the removal of item #10 (0.5 FTE PE/Health, Broad Rock Middle School) for separate votes.

Motion made by Stewart Lander

Motion seconded by Michelle Brousseau

Motion passes 6-0

Clarification is given by counsel that the motion before the Committee at this time is as follows:

Motion made to accept the Superintendent's recommendation as far as personnel reductions involving items #1, #3, #4, #5, #6, #8, #11, #12, #13, and #14.

A roll call vote is taken:

Kate Macinanti - Aye
Paula Whitford - Aye
Michelle Brousseau - Aye
James Restivo - Aye
Carol Vetter - Aye
Stewart Lander - Aye

Motion passes 6-0

Ms. Vetter asks for clarification on the next item. Mr. Podraza explains the rationale for the reduction of item #2 (1.0 FTE Grade 2 at West Kingston Elementary School).

MSV(7) – Motion made to accept the Superintendent's recommendation as far as personnel reductions involving item #2 (1.0 FTE Grade 2 at West Kingston Elementary School).

Motion made by James Restivo

Motion seconded by Michelle Brousseau

A roll call vote is taken:

Stewart Lander - Aye
Kate Macinanti - Aye
Paula Whitford - Aye
Michelle Brousseau - Aye
James Restivo - Aye
Carol Vetter - Aye

Motion passes 6-0

MSV(8) – Motion made to accept the Superintendent's recommendation as far as personnel reductions involving item #7 (0.5 FTE district-wide social worker).

Motion made by James Restivo

Motion seconded by Michelle Brousseau

Discussion:

Mr. Podraza explains the rationale for the reduction of item #7 (0.5 FTE district-wide social worker). Ms. Whitford shares her concerns that support staff should be wherever students are.

A roll call vote is taken:

Stewart Lander - Aye
Kate Macinanti - Aye
Paula Whitford - Nay
Michelle Brousseau - Aye
James Restivo - Aye
Carol Vetter - Aye

Motion passes 5-1

MSV(9) – Motion made to accept the Superintendent's recommendation as far as personnel reductions involving item #9 (1.0 FTE World Language, Broad Rock Middle School)

Motion made by James Restivo

Motion seconded by Michelle Brousseau

Discussion:

Committee members strongly agree against this reduction. They emphasized that cutting middle school French would effectively dismantle the French program pipeline, undermine the high school program, and contradict prior assurances that world language would not be

eroded. Members referenced student and parent testimony about the program's growth, student success, and its role in keeping students in-district, and stressed that offering only a single language option at the middle school is educationally inadequate. Several stated that, while they understood the fiscal pressures, they could not support a cut that so directly reduces student choice and a thriving academic program.

A roll call vote is taken:

Stewart Lander - Nay
Kate Macinanti - Nay
Paula Whitford - Nay
Michelle Brousseau - Nay
James Restivo - Nay
Carol Vetter - Nay

Motion fails 0-6

MSV(10) – Motion made to accept the Superintendent's recommendation as far as personnel reductions involving item #10 (0.5 FTE PE/Health, Broad Rock Middle School)

Motion made by James Restivo

Motion seconded by Michelle Brousseau

Mr. Podraza explains the rationale for the reduction of item #10 (0.5 FTE PE/Health, Broad Rock Middle School). Discussion regarding families' concerns regarding the lack of movement opportunity for students and how this would impact programming.

A roll call vote is taken:

Stewart Lander - Aye
Kate Macinanti - Aye
Paula Whitford - Aye
Michelle Brousseau - Aye
James Restivo - Aye
Carol Vetter - Aye

Motion passes 6-0

D. Discussion/Action: FY 2026-2027 Budget

Mr. Podraza outlined the plans to present a balanced final operating budget at the next meeting, with federal and state grants reported separately to provide a clearer picture of unrestricted funds. Mr. Podraza noted that, even with the approved reductions, the district is entering FY 2028 with an estimated \$1.75 million structural deficit, limiting further use of fund balance. Committee members agreed on the need to minimize additional reliance on fund balance and to begin budget discussions with the Town Council and legislators much earlier in the cycle. Mr. Podraza shares that administration is committed to incorporating updated cost drivers (including transportation) and using budget amendments later if revenues change.

No vote is taken on this item.

7. Adjournment

A. Adjourn

MSV(15) – Motion made to adjourn the meeting.

Motion made by Stewart Lander

Motion seconded by Kate Macinanti

Motion passes 6-0

The meeting was adjourned at 8:22 PM.