

**South Kingstown School Committee
Executive Session and Business Meeting
South Kingstown High School Cafeteria
215 Columbia Street
Wakefield, RI 02879
Thursday, May 28, 2026**

1. Executive Session

A. Executive Session

Ms. Vetter called the meeting of the South Kingstown School Committee to order at 5:31 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: School Safety Plan (RIGL 42-46-5(a)(3)) and B: Discussion: Personnel - SKESP Negotiations Update (RIGL 42-46-5(a)(2)). 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 Stewart Lander
Motion passes 6-0 (Brad Shear absent at time of vote)

MSV(2) – Motion made to adjourn Executive Session and Reconvene Open Session
Motion made by Stewart Lander
Motion seconded by Michelle Brousseau
Motion passes 4-0 (Brad Shear, James Restivo, and Kate Macinanti absent at time of vote)

2. Call to Order

A. Call to Order/Roll Call

Ms. Vetter called the meeting to order at 6:06 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	
Stewart Lander	X		
Other Attendees			
Michael J Podraza 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

Michelle Manning, MLL Teacher - Ms. Manning expressed concern about the opacity and inequity of the budget-cut process, noting that some staff knew about position reductions while others—including herself—did not and therefore could not advocate for their roles. She urged that proposed position cuts be communicated clearly and in advance, without names but with sufficient detail so affected staff and the community can identify potential errors and seek correction. Manning specifically objected to the reduction of a full-time MLL specialist position to 0.8 FTE, explaining that this is the only MLL role shared between two schools and that the cut would effectively remove one full day of MLL support from each building, harming multilingual learners—many of whom are newcomers or have disabilities—and limiting teachers' access to specialist support and materials. Citing state regulations requiring equitable access to a free and appropriate public education for multilingual learners, she argued that targeting an already underserved student group is inequitable and educationally unsound, and she urged the committee, administration, and union to work together to restore the position and make the process more transparent.

Jonathan Sigman, Social Worker - Mr. Sigman shared his concern regarding the prior use of the term "SpEd" at a recent school committee meeting in reference to transportation for special education students. He explained that this abbreviation is commonly used by students as an insult (e.g., "you're so sped"), and therefore can be demeaning and harmful, even when no offense is intended. Citing guidance such as that from Arizona State University's journalism school, which advises against using "SpEd" as shorthand for special education, Mr. Sigman urged the district to discontinue the term and to model trauma-informed, inclusive language in public forums so that all members of the school community feel safe and respected. He noted he had already spoken privately with the individual who used the term, who was appreciative of the feedback, and emphasized that his intent was not to "call out" anyone, but to clarify publicly that such language is not acceptable going forward.

Ms. Vetter closes public comment at this time.

4. Consent Agenda

- A. Approval of Executive Session Minutes - 5/12/2026; 5/19/2026
- B. Approval of Open Session Minutes - 4/28/2026; 5/12/2026; 5/19/2026
- C. Personnel - Administrative Exempt Employee Actions
- D. Fundraiser - SKHS - Robotics Team - Panera Bread Restaurant Night
- E. Fundraiser - SKHS - Robotics Team - Popcorn Sales

MSV(4) – Motion made to Seal the Minutes of the Executive Session.

Motion made by James Restivo

Motion seconded by Michelle Brousseau

Motion passes 6-0

5. Superintendent's Report

A. Superintendent's Report Presentation

Mr. Podraza presented the Superintendent's Report.

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

Mr. Podraza presented the personnel actions of the district (Leave of Absence (4); Retirement (2); Rescind Retirement (1); Resignation (1), and Superintendent Appointment (1)).

C. Enrollment Update

Mr. Podraza reviewed the current enrollment for the district. At this time, district enrollment has shown overall relative stability since January, with a net change of +4 students at the elementary level and +5 at the secondary level. Mr. Podraza then shared the current Kindergarten registration information. Particular attention was given to kindergarten enrollment at West Kingston, where 51 students are already registered—exceeding both the current number of sections and next year's projections, and raising concerns about meeting contractual class-size limits and the requirement for a full-time aide when kindergarten classes exceed 20 students. Committee members discussed possible factors behind higher-than-projected enrollment, including neighborhood turnover, new housing developments in the Kingston area, and the anticipated expansion of developments such as Champagne Heights, noting that these trends are difficult to predict in advance. Mr. Podraza confirmed that the district is physically able to add a kindergarten section at West Kingston if needed and outlined that decisions on intra-district transfer requests (e.g., for siblings or childcare reasons) are typically made after mid-August. He emphasized that administration will continue monitoring registrations, consider system-wide kindergarten capacity and transportation options, and bring a clear recommendation on additional sections to the committee, while striving to honor neighborhood school assignments and keep siblings together.

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

Motion made by Michelle Brousseau

Motion seconded by Stewart Lander

Motion passes 6-0

6. School Committee Business

A. Discussion/Action: Bid Award - RFP #2471 - Transportation - Ocean State Transit

Mr. Podraza reviewed that the bid request had been issued twice and yielded a single responsive bidder, Ocean State Transit. Mr. Podraza reviewed that the proposed one-year contract totals \$4,888,000, covering daily in-district student transportation, as well as athletics, with authority for the athletic director to contract separately when the vendor cannot meet specific trip needs. Mr. Podraza cited factors driving the cost increase, including Department of Labor prevailing wage requirements and district geography/limited walkability. This is a one-year-only bid. This bid is 1.2 million over the initial bid received. He indicated the district will explore earlier, regionalized bidding options for future years. Discussion ensued with Committee members expressing appreciation for the extensive work by the transportation and business office staff. They also acknowledge the significant budget impact transportation has on the district.

MSV(6) – Motion made to accept the Bid Award for Ocean State Transit.

Motion made by Michelle Brousseau

Motion seconded by Paula Whitford

Motion passes 6-0

B. Discussion/Action: FY 2026-2027 Substitute Pay

Mr. Podraza presented the proposed substitute pay rates for FY 2026-2027. The Rhode Island minimum wage will increase to \$17/hour on January 1, 2027. Mr. Podraza explained that hourly rates for substitutes in custodial, TA, clerk, and student intern roles are tied to the state minimum wage to ensure compliance, while daily rates for teachers, nurses, and principals are set as per diem amounts, not hourly wages. Discussion ensued as to whether the substitute clerk rate should be raised above \$17.00 (to mirror the \$0.50 increases applied elsewhere). Mr. Podraza would need to determine the budget impact of a higher clerk rate. Further discussion ensued regarding clarification of the pay chart by labeling which positions are hourly vs. per diem and specifying that the “minimum wage” reference means Rhode Island state minimum wage, not federal. Committee members inquired about clerks earning more than TAs. Mr. Podraza noted this mirrors the underlying bargaining unit salary scales. Committee members voiced interest in improving TA pay in the future. Mr. Podraza reported that substitute fill rates are generally acceptable and that the proposal keeps South Kingstown regionally competitive.

MSV(7) – Motion made to approve the FY 2026-2027 Substitute Pay as presented.

Motion made by Kate Macinanti

Motion seconded by Michelle Brousseau

Motion passes 6-0

C. Discussion/Action: Final FY 2026-2027 Budget

Mr. Podraza and Ms. Proctor reviewed the final FY 2026-2027 budget, which incorporated updated revenue and expenditure figures, including the \$1.58M municipal increase, state aid assumptions based on the Governor’s proposal, and a planned \$1.3M use of fund balance (inclusive of an anticipated but not yet realized approximate \$300K FY 2025-2026 surplus). Mr. Podraza and Ms. Proctor outlined salary and benefit assumptions (contractual raises, conservative hiring “breakage” estimates, and reduced ERS/MERS rates), major cost drivers (transportation, tuitions, mandated services), and adjustments to capital and technology lines while maintaining progress toward the 3% facilities maintenance-of-effort requirement in coordination with housing aid reimbursements. With all reductions applied, revenues exceeded expenses by roughly \$564K; the superintendent recommended using this capacity to reinstate a 1.0 guidance position, restore the 0.2 MLL reduction (returning that role to 1.0 FTE), and add one new 1.0 kindergarten section, leaving an estimated \$228K margin and still relying on \$1.3M from fund balance. Discussion ensued regarding the stress caused by issuing and later recalling layoff notices, the criteria for prioritizing reinstatements, the risks of building a budget on projected surplus, and the need to improve the town–district budget process and timelines in future years. Further discussion regarding fund balance, federal grant alignment, and capital planning.

MSV(8) – Motion made to approve the Final FY 2026-2027 Budget

Motion made by James Restivo

Motion seconded by Kate Macinanti

Motion passes 6-0

Ms. Vetter thanked everyone for their work on putting forth this budget.

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

Ms. Brousseau reported on the current state budget and school funding formula proposals, highlighting Senate bill S3025 and House bill H8351, which stem from the Rhode Island Foundation/Annenberg Institute “blue ribbon” work. She explained that the proposals would shift from a “core instructional amount” to a broader “core educational amount”, so that the full cost of educating a student—including transportation, high-cost special education, legacy pension debt, out-of-district transportation, and early childhood services—is accounted for in the formula. The plan would increase equity by raising weights for economically disadvantaged students and sharing weights for multilingual learners and students with disabilities, and by moving toward the state covering approximately 58% of education costs statewide, with a uniform state share regardless of where a student lives. Ms. Brousseau also referenced related legislation on unfunded mandates (Senate bill S2239) that would allow districts to decline mandates not fully funded by the state. Ms. Brousseau recommended that the committee draft and adopt a resolution in support of the funding formula and unfunded-mandate bills and suggested encouraging community members to contact their legislators. Ms. Vetter will contact legal counsel to prepare a draft resolution for consideration at the next meeting.

E. Discussion: Annual Summer Workshop Topics

Mr. Podraza asked for input from the Committee to begin planning for its annual summer workshop. Discussion ensued regarding having the equity audit as the major point of discussion (what has been implemented, evidence of impact, challenges, data being collected, and next steps for keeping equity central to district planning. Further discussion ensued regarding early planning for the next budget cycle, and how to improve coordination and communication with the Town Council, and what that communication may look like, with a possibility of having a Joint Meeting with the Town Council to start the budget conversation. Ms. Brousseau also suggested holding a legislator work session before the next General Assembly term.

F. Discussion: School Building Committee Update

Ms. Macinanti reported that construction of the new high school is progressing well: concrete floor pours are nearly complete (with late-night work expected to end around June 10), the building envelope is enclosing, and interior spaces such as the cafeteria and auditorium are taking shape. She highlighted improved communication and relationships with abutters, including targeted email lists, advance notice of Saturday work, and schedule adjustments (e.g., delaying early-morning concrete cutting and using contingency funds) to mitigate impacts. At Curtis Corner, hazardous-material abatement is underway, with demolition to follow; that work is structured as a separate, reimbursable project with three phases (demo, track/field, and site work). Looking ahead, she stressed the need to develop a detailed traffic and parking plan for fall 2027, when the new high school opens and the existing building has not yet been fully demolished, so that student parking, staff parking, and parent drop-off are safely managed.

7. Adjournment

A. Adjourn

MSV(9) – Motion made to adjourn the meeting.

Motion made by Stewart Lander

Motion seconded by Michelle Brousseau

Motion passes 6-0

The meeting was adjourned at 8:51 PM.