Pawtucket School Committee
Meeting Minutes
September 29, 2026
Joseph Jenks Junior High School
350 Division Street
Pawtucket, Rhode Island 02860
6:00 PM

Meeting called to order at 6:03PM.

I. Roll Call

Matthew Wildenhain, James Chellel, Angeliz Rosa, Omar Reyes, Kimberly Grant, and Joanne Bonollo were present.

Juan Pablo Barrera was absent.

II. Pledge of Allegiance was led by Joanne Bonollo

III. Approval of Meeting Minutes

A. September 15, 2026

Motion to approve: James Chellel Second: Matthew Wildenhain, Angeliz Rosa

Yea: all

Motion carries unanimously.

IV. Public Participation

Sandra Santos, a Kindergarten teacher at Cunningham, addressed the committee regarding the state of the school. She expressed gratitude to the principal of Cunningham, April Flowers. She expressed concern with the reassignment of paraprofessionals and the lack of support for classrooms.

Omar Reyes arrived at 6:06PM.

Sheila Duckworth, a music teacher at Fallon addressed the committee regarding lack of transition time and lack of building support.

Casey Duckworth Feroli, a special ed teacher at Fallon, expressed concern regarding lack of support in the building. She shared that more support professionals, including administrators and TAs, are absolutely necessary. She also expressed concern about the teacher's contract not being approved in light of working a longer school day.

Motion to move Approval of City Year Contract, agenda item VII.D, before the Superintendent's Report: James Chellel Second: Matthew Wildenhain

Yea: all

Motion carries unanimously

V. Superintendent's Report

A. Teaching & Learning / District Academic Focus

Superintendent Buck provided an update on Teaching and Learning, emphasizing that improving academic outcomes remains the district's highest instructional priority and is a responsibility shared across all 16 schools. The district is focused on strengthening Tier I instruction by ensuring students receive rigorous, standards-aligned core instruction, supported by High-Quality Curriculum Materials, professional learning connected to classroom practice, and consistent instructional expectations. Principals are receiving professional learning on effective instructional walkthroughs, including identifying evidence of strong instruction and providing meaningful, actionable feedback to teachers. The district is implementing a consistent improvement cycle of walkthrough, data, feedback, support, and revisit to monitor instructional practices and student progress. Formative and summative data will be used to identify areas of success, gaps in learning, and the need for additional support, with particular emphasis on addressing unfinished learning at the elementary level. The Superintendent noted that the Strategic Plan, instructional vision, curriculum materials, professional learning, coaching, PLCs, walkthroughs, and data cycles provide the framework for this work, with consistent implementation and accountability across schools being the next priority. This districtwide focus also supports the more intensive instructional monitoring and support being provided through the Slater Middle School Redesign.

B. District Updates

1. Slater Redesign

Superintendent Buck provided an update on the continued implementation of the Slater Middle School Redesign, noting that the school has moved from redesign planning into Year 1 implementation. The district is now monitoring whether the commitments outlined in the approved Redesign Plan are being implemented and beginning to produce the intended results. Greater structure and accountability have been established through leadership routines, progress-monitoring tools, shared accountability between Slater and Central Office, and the monthly reporting process.

The next phase will focus on Slater's identified instructional priorities through classroom walkthroughs, student data, and progress-monitoring routines to identify effective practices, inconsistencies, and areas requiring additional support. Superintendent Buck emphasized that the redesign is aligned with the districtwide academic strategy, including strong Tier I instruction, implementation of high-quality curriculum materials, instructional leadership, meaningful feedback, and the use of data, while recognizing Slater's need for more intensive support and monitoring.

Superintendent Buck also highlighted the new Paxton Patterson Career Exploration Lab at Slater, which will provide students with opportunities to explore career fields and connect their current learning with future opportunities. A ribbon-cutting ceremony is being planned for the coming weeks. The Superintendent noted that continued monitoring will be necessary to determine whether the redesign strategies are being implemented with fidelity and, over time, are resulting in improved student experiences and outcomes.

2. Right to Read

Superintendent Buck provided an update on the district's Right to Read corrective action work. As of September 28, there were 16 educators with outstanding Awareness requirements and 46 with outstanding Proficiency requirements; however, those numbers are expected to change as Curriculum and Human Resources verify recently submitted documentation of previously completed requirements.

For educators who still need to complete requirements, the district has identified appropriate pathways, including Reading Reimagined, LETRS, AIM Pre-K, and AIM Pathway, along with completion timelines. With the exception of new educators, Awareness requirements are expected to be completed by October 21. Reading Reimagined participants will complete requirements on a rolling basis through November and December, with make-up opportunities through December 19, while educators enrolled in AIM Pathway are scheduled to complete proficiency requirements by January 15.

Superintendent Buck also reported that Human Resources has been incorporated into the Right to Read process and now participates in weekly check-ins with RIDE. Right to Read status will be reviewed during hiring and onboarding, and the district is reviewing recruitment and job-posting language to ensure

applicable requirements are clearly communicated to candidates. Current educators with outstanding requirements will receive formal written notification identifying their outstanding requirements, required pathway, completion expectations, and deadlines. The district is coordinating this process with Human Resources, labor counsel, RIDE, and union leadership. Superintendent Buck emphasized that the goal is not only to achieve full compliance but also to establish systems that prevent outstanding requirements from accumulating in the future.

3. Graduation Audit

   Superintendent Buck provided an update on the district's response to the graduation audit. On September 16, the district submitted preliminary Standard Operating Procedures to RIDE regarding student withdrawals and graduation cohort review. The district has developed clearer withdrawal procedures, defined school- and district-level responsibilities, established documentation and verification requirements, added levels of review and accountability, and developed training materials for staff.

   A significant structural change is the transfer of centralized oversight of the graduation data verification process to the Office of Technology, creating clearer ownership and separation between data entry, review, and final oversight. Superintendent Buck also recognized the Providence Public School Department for sharing previously RIDE-reviewed procedures that provided a foundation for the district's work.

   Following a review with RIDE, the district is incorporating feedback regarding documentation requirements, the student-centered purpose of the process, additional scenarios for staff training, and the relationship between graduation data and federal accountability. Superintendent Buck emphasized that the work is focused not solely on graduation-rate calculations, but on ensuring that the district knows where students are and that no student falls through the cracks. The district remains on schedule to submit its final response to RIDE by September 30 and is developing a repeatable system with clear procedures, accountability, training, quality assurance, and ongoing monitoring.

4. Before-School Programming Update

   Superintendent Buck provided an update on the before-school programming at Agnes Little, Potter-Burns, and Curvin-McCabe Elementary Schools, which was

established as part of the implementation of the new elementary start times to provide additional support and flexibility for students and families.

Approximately 170 students are currently participating across the three programs, with particularly strong participation at Potter-Burns and Agnes Little. Superintendent Buck reported positive feedback from families and school leaders, as well as improvements including smoother morning arrivals and fewer late and tardy students at some locations.

The district is closely monitoring participation, staffing and supervision, student needs, family communication, arrival procedures, space, and coordination with community partners. This monitoring has identified areas for adjustment, including backup staffing coverage, individual student needs, communication systems, and staffing and space needs as participation grows. Superintendent Buck stated that the district will continue making adjustments based on implementation and exploring opportunities with community partners to expand before- and after-school programming and increase access for families.

5. Transportation and Registration Update - Strong Start to the School Year

   Superintendent Buck recognized the Transportation and Central Registration teams for their essential work in supporting the successful opening of schools. More than 1,900 students are currently utilizing district transportation. During August and September, the Transportation Department processed approximately 939 transportation requests, including 332 approved general transportation applications, 394 applications that did not meet eligibility requirements, and 213 Special Education transportation requests. The department also managed routing changes, Special Education transportation needs, eligibility reviews, and daily family inquiries.

   Superintendent Buck also highlighted the work of the Central Registration Team, which completed 935 registrations for the 2026–2027 school year as of September 21, including 740 K–12 and 195 preschool registrations. The team also processed 666 transfers, withdrawals, and re-enrollments between July and September 21, and handled approximately 1,481 emails during the two weeks preceding the first day of school. Superintendent Buck expressed appreciation to both teams for their responsiveness, patience, and commitment to supporting students and families.

6. Building the Future of Pawtucket: New Pawtucket High School

Superintendent Buck provided an update on planning for the new Pawtucket High School, noting that the district continues to work closely with Colliers on both the physical development of the building and opportunities for meaningful community engagement. The planning process will include student engagement opportunities, stakeholder groups, and opportunities for educators and staff to provide input. Superintendent Buck emphasized the importance of involving students, educators, families, and the broader community in shaping the future of the school. The district also plans to begin community engagement regarding the identity of the new high school, including its mascot and school colors. Superintendent Buck stated that additional updates will be provided as the planning process progresses.

7. Tolman/NEASC Accreditation Update

Superintendent Buck concluded his report with an update on Tolman High School's accreditation process. The New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) reviewed Tolman's Decennial Accreditation Report and voted to award the school continued accreditation. Superintendent Buck congratulated Principal Coleman, the leadership team, educators, students, and the Tolman community on the accomplishment.

NEASC recognized progress in several areas, including the collaborative development of core values and a vision of the graduate, implementation of the LEAD framework, PBIS and school-culture initiatives, expanded career pathways and JROTC, professional learning, educator collaboration, and increased use of consistent, high-quality curriculum materials. Superintendent Buck noted that areas for continued growth remain, with Tolman's first formal Progress and Planning Report due to NEASC by May 1, 2027. He emphasized that the accreditation decision provides meaningful external recognition of the focused school-improvement work underway at Tolman.

Chair Joanne Bonollo requested that the report be emailed through the clerk James Chellel expressed gratitude to Tom in transportation for his efforts in making the start of the year go smoothly and for educating him on the bus contract. Mr. Chellel also requested that a school committee member be involved in the conversation about the name and colors of the new high school.

Deputy Chair Kimberly Grant echoed Mr. Chellel's gratitude for transportation and all in registration and administration. She also expressed gratitude for all the teachers and staff for their hard work at the beginning of the school year and the service that they are providing for the students of the district.

VI. Discussion

A. New High School Update - Traffic and Parking Plan Presentation

This is a follow up from the building committee. Designer Phillip presented that there have been some adjustments in the design since it was originally presented last year. Parent dropoff will mostly be along Division Street. Main changes are two vehicular gates to create a secure area, a pull off for special ed student dropoff, and a change to two way traffic next to the nurses station with additional parking.

Chair Joanne Bonollo asked what was stopping traffic from going the wrong way. It was clarified that there is an exit only driveway with do not enter signs.

Parr, the traffic engineer, has made a recommendation to stagger high school, middle school, and elementary school start times to alleviate traffic. A study has been conducted at the intersection of South Bend and Division and it has been concluded that there shouldn't be a significant impact on traffic with the opening of the high school.

It was requested that more student parking be added; the team has increased the number of spaces from 42 to 55 on the property.

Architect Jonathan Levy shared proposed plans for the Amvet property as the gateway to the high school. This is not a critical plan at this time. He shared concerns from the building committee about additional maintenance load and the proposals for the site.

James Chellel asked whether the corner lot was considered to be a traffic outlet. Mr. Levy shared that there wasn't enough property acquired to make this feasible. Phillip shared that there is a large utility pole at the corner that would make that a very difficult possibility.

It was shared that the green renderings were from a landscape architect. There were further conversations regarding green spaces and outdoor maintenance.

Discussion was had about pavers for purchase to support a concession stand, restrooms, and stands due to funds reallocated to permit fees required by the city. It was shared that stands with an adjacent event space are in the current plans. Omar Reyes asked clarification on the building permit fees and shared the significance of having this facility. This project will be above and beyond the RIDE approval and therefore not reimbursable. There was further conversation about the concession stand and logistics.

Legal counsel suggested that conversation about the concessions be added to a future agenda and that the committee return to the agenda item regarding traffic flow.

B. Varieur Elementary School HVAC Contingency Update

Patrick Damour of Colliers shared that The 5 AON units are slated to arrive in early December, with potential for 1 or 2 to be delivered earlier. The plan is to have these installed during the weekends in December and over Christmas break, weather permitting. Deputy Chair Kimberly Grant shared greater concern with this timeline and lack of contingency. Mr. Damour shared that the contractor will incur any necessary storage cost and the units will be stored at the crane rigger's yard. The project has reached substantial completion and therefore will receive reimbursement. Deputy Chair Grant requested updates on the units and their installation. There were further questions regarding the substantial completion date and reimbursement which were clarified by Mr. Damour and Rose Gaitan.

C. CSI Spend Down - Plans for Remaining Balance

Superintendent Buck shared that he has worked with financial teams to ensure efficient spend down efforts. Slater and Shea funds have been exhausted, but there are still some balances for Goff, Jenks, and Tolman. The goal is to never leave money on the table. Going forward, there will be a connection between finance systems and the RIDE system to increase clarity and efficiency. Chair Joanne Bonollo expressed concern with there being $80,000 leftover in this fund that will expire on 9/30. The spend down challenge is that these funds can only be spent on specific items. The charge is at the principal level to initiate spending, but it is a district-wide responsibility to ensure that these funds are spent.

Deputy Chair Kimberly Grant asked if we have a secondary transformation officer and whether that individual should ensure that money isn't left. It was further clarified that moving forward, these systems are being built for improvement in the future. Chair Bonollo expressed concern with the fact that there is such a significant sum left on the table. Deputy Chair Grand asked if the approved City Year contract would be allocated in this spend down; it was clarified that it would come out of next year's grant money. Omar Reyes shared that when he was the chair, there was over $300,000 left on the table and that this is an improvement, but these funds should never be left behind. Matthew Wildenhain asked about what approval is needed to spend this money; it was clarified that it was pre-approved by RIDE with plans submitted by the district. There was further conversation regarding the monitoring and approval of future funds. Deputy Chair Grant

asked about what areas this money was planned to be spent on; Superintendent Buck promised to send a report of these expenditures.

D. Audit and Capital Reserve Update

CFO Stephanie DeMaio shared that the audit closed on September 25. She also shared that there was a very productive Finance Committee meeting with a lot of information. She informed the committee that a draft audit often doesn't have all of the information included and that it is supposed to be confidential. The final audit is available for review and offers clarification. She requested that in accordance with prior practice the committee allow the auditor to come and present the audit to the committee. Omar Reyes asked about funds discovered through the audit; it was clarified that previously the medical reserve was categorized differently and that this should be established as a separate fund as it is a restricted fund. Mr. Reyes expressed confusion with the medical reserve balance and requested clarification on that fund. Mrs. DeMaio shared that previously we were self paid, but now we are covered by The Trust. She stated that it is important to keep a large reserve in this fund to offset any potential premium payments. The self-pay company used to add/subtract funds from the medical reserve, but the Trust doesn't work that way so the number should remain roughly static.

Mrs. DeMaio continued with capital reserve and shared that it was also a restricted fund. This is a fund that can be used for capital projects, and with strategic planning are eligible for reimbursement via housing aid. This ties into the potential establishment of a revolving fund. The capital reserve balance was shared as $11,210,060. The balance fluctuates due to reimbursements in September and March. If a project is under 500,000 it can be filed as an emergency approval through RIDE. Omar Reyes expressed confusion with the history of the capital reserve. Mr. Reyes requested a month to month report of the capital reserve. Mrs. DeMaio shared that she had provided several reports and had presented at the finance committee. Legal counsel shared procedural clarification from Policy BDH, which states that the superintendent and staff are not required to prepare documents that are not already in existence, but provides that these requests can be approved with a majority vote by the committee. Chair Joanne Bonollo requested clarification on what Mr. Reyes was requesting, given that Capital Reserve income has been shared. Mr. Reyes clarified that it appeared that money was found and he was requesting an explanation of where that money came from. Mrs. DeMaio shared that money wasn't found, but it came in via deposits from housing aid and may have been

interpreted as missing. It may not have been included in the budget as it had not yet been deposited. Discussion was had on the movement of capital reserve monies.

E. Teaching Assistants
    1. Vacancies
    2. Training Requirements
    3. Hiring and Exit procedures/process

Assistant Superintendent Lee Rabbitt shared some of the state requirements and certifications for teacher assistants.

Deputy Chair Kimberly Grant clarified that what she had requested was information on the district training and onboarding process. Assistant Superintendent Rabbitt shared a brief overview of that process. Deputy Chair Grant requested further explanation for the training program and district efforts to retain new TAs. There was further discussion on retention and training efforts. There was conversation about implementing a training program for TAs through Central Office as well as future potential professional development. Omar Reyes shared that he felt that there have been a lot of contradicting reports around TAs. Chair Joanne Bonollo echoed previous comments regarding TA training. There was further discussion about TA shortages, hiring, and training.

Deputy Chair Kimberly Grant requested an update on the new tas at the next workshop and an update on the training process in a couple of months.

Mr. Reyes requested a comparison of the number of TAs the district had employed at the end of last school year, the beginning of the school year, and now.

F. Teacher Absenteeism Rate

Chair Joanne Bonollo asked about the teacher absenteeism rate. Superintendent Buck shared that in FY24 the district chronic absenteeism rate was 24.3%; the state rate was 8%. As a district, they are approaching teacher attendance parallel to student attendance. They are working to identify goals and strategies to determine what accountability measures are needed. Chair Bonollo requested that a cause for this rate is determined to aid in mitigation.

Deputy Chair Kimberly Grant asked who is responsible for discipline when teachers misuse their sick time. It was clarified that there is an HR process for investigating these matters.

G. A response to the City Council's claims against a School Committee Member

Omar shared remarks regarding a conversation about the city council and a letter from a former employee. He addressed defamatory and slanderous allegations included in this

letter. He shared that he felt he had experienced racism in his role. He raised a defence, citing that he worked to advocate for students, educators, and school buildings. He also discussed financial allegations that were raised. He expressed frustration with perceived unequal treatment during his chairmanship.

Matthew Wildenhain responded to Mr. Reyes's comments by sharing that he had requested an investigation into this matter at the end of 2025. He also expressed frustration that he felt the committee had also taken abuse from Mr. Reyes during his tenure.

VII. Discussion/Action

A. Template Contracts

Chair Joanne Bonollo requested that this item be continued to the next meeting as the committee did not receive the template contracts.

Legal Counsel Bill Conley requested the opportunity to present; he shared that per the request of the superintendent they are reviewing administrator contracts to provide updated contracts to the committee as well as making suggestions to update the policy relating to the contracts. The team will ensure that contracts adhere both to a standard template and that they are in accordance with state regulations.

Chair Bonollo requested that the template contracts be provided to the committee for the identified critical positions.

It was agreed that the templates would go before the policy and finance subcommittees simultaneously before coming before the full committee.

1. Administrator Contract
2. Employee Contract
3. Review of PSD Policy CDD

B. Blackstone Valley Community Health Care Parking MOA

Legal Counsel Bill Conley clarified that we are really giving permission to Blackstone Valley Community Health Care to utilize our parking lot. Opposed to a regular ticket to park, this agreement will provide additional protections for the department.

James Chellel asked why we aren't charging them; it was clarified that Dr. Andrade negotiated the contract and isn't present to speak to it. It was further clarified that the city owns the property.

Motion to approve: Kimberly Grant Second: Angeliz Rosa

Yea: all

Motion carries unanimously.

C. Approval of Virtual Instruction Day Plans

Motion to approve: James Chellel Second: Kimberly Grant

Deputy Chair Kimberly Grant asked about students with special ed and whether packets would be provided to them. Assistant Superintendent Lee Rabbitt clarified that these packets would be provided. Deputy Chair Grant requested that these packets be prepared in advance.

Omar Reyes asked if this plan was discussed with the union; there wasn't a definite answer. Chair Joanne Bonollo requested that administration meet with the union to discuss this plan. This item was continued to the next meeting to allow the union to discuss at their meeting to occur on 10/7.

D. Approval of City Year Contract

Nirva LaFortune and Aimee Schnebeck of City Year addressed the committee in regards to who they were and the services that they are planning to provide for the district. They are working as partners for schools in transformation and are hoping to partner with Slater Middle School. They are starting as a team of 9 but are planning to expand to a team of 11 to aid students in academic and interpersonal development, collaborating with school staff. Gianna Rose, an active AmeriCorp member, shared about her day and shared that students have already showed marked improvement. Madison Martinez, also an AmeriCorp member, shared her background and experience working with an 8th grade math classroom.

Superintendent Buck shared that this proposal is to support the Slater redesign and requested approval of this contract.

Deputy Chair Kimberly Grant asked what the process is for determining what classrooms receive additional support. It was shared that part of their determinations began with working with Principal Vorro and Superintendent Buck. Through the process of training Corp members, they determine where individual strengths lie to determine best placement.

Deputy Chair Grant also asked about student improvement and how it was measured. Ms. Rose shared a quote from a student that demonstrated the help received. It was also shared that part of this contract will be data sharing.

Deputy Chair Grant asked Superintendent Buck about the scope and funding for this contract, it was clarified that it was only for Slater and the funds are coming from redesign grant money.

James Chellel asked about the schedule for the corp members, it was shared that they are there full time Monday through Friday. Mr. Chellel expressed confusion about the low cost of the contract with the number of individuals serving; it was shared that CityYear raises funds for their compensation and that this is a service organization. Ms. LaFortune shared that working with this organization provides a lot of opportunities beyond the program.

Omar Reyes shared that he attends their annual gala and shared that he believed that there are multiple benefits to the program, including that the Corp members often represent what the Slater students look like and that the program places individuals that may not necessarily be interested in education to begin the program but become more interested because of their experience.

Motion to approve: Omar Reyes Second: Angeliz Rosa

Yea: all

Motion carries unanimously.

E. From the Finance Subcommittee:

1. Establish a Revolving Fund

   It was shared that at the finance committee the CFO Stephanie DeMaio shared about the revolving fund and provided a greater understanding to the committee.

Motion to draft an MOA with the city to establish a revolving fund for housing aid reimbursement: James Chellel Second: Matthew Wildenhain

It was shared by Legal Counsel Bill Conley that there are several successful arrangements in other districts for a revolving fund; the city remains the fiscal agent for the department. This fund is established by the city and controlled by the school department.

Clarification was offered on the seed money. The capital reserve money would be the seed money. Omar Reyes asked about housing aid reimbursement; it was clarified that this arrangement would formalize the existing arrangement, where bond money reimbursement goes to the city and housing aid comes to the school district. It was also clarified that there isn't an absolute reimbursement number and that projects need to be substantially completed and strategically bundled to ensure return on investment.

Yea: all

Motion carries unanimously.

VIII. Subcommittee Updates

A. Building

Colliers provided an update.

B. Facilities

There were communications with the facilities team in regards to the storm over the weekend, and commendations were offered for reopening Shea after one day.

C. Finance

No update

D. Policy

Will be meeting in October.

E. Special Education

No updates.

F. Wellness

Moving to 6 times per year.

IX. Reports

A. Budget Transfer Report

B. Departmental Overtime Report

C. Enrollment Report

D. Monthly Distribution Report

E. Vacancy Report

Kim asked about TA vacancies and requested the list of where the existing vacancies are.

F. Work Order Report

X. Possible Executive Session

A. The School Committee may vote to go into executive session for discussion and/or action pursuant to Rhode Island General Laws §42-46-4 regarding those items of business exempt from open meetings under Rhode Island General Laws §42-46-5:

1. Pursuant to RIGL § 42-46-5(a)(9) a hearing on a grievance filed
2. Pursuant to RIGL § 42-46-5(a)(1) a discussion related to the job performance of a District employee.

Motion to enter executive session: James Chellel Second: Kimberly Grant and Matthew Wildenhain

Yea: all

Motion carries unanimously.

Open session entered recess at 9:44PM.

Omar Reyes and Angeliz Rosa left before Executive Session.

Open session called back to order at 11:46PM.

XI. Return to Open Session

A. Roll Call

Matthew Wildenhain, James Chellel, Kimberly Grant, and Joanne Bonollo were present.

B. Reporting out any votes subject to disclosure pursuant RIGL § 42-46-4.

1. There were two motions made that carried unanimously.
2. Motion to seal Executive Session Minutes: James Chellel Second: Kimberly Grant and Matthew Wildenhain

   Yea: all

   Motion carries unanimously.
3. Motion to adjourn Executive Session: Matthew Wildenhain Second: James Chellel

   Yea: all

   Motion carries unanimously.

XII. Adjournment

Motion to adjourn: Kimberly Grant Second: Matthew Wildenhain

Yea: all

Motion carries unanimously.

Meeting adjourned at 11:47PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Emily Lotter

Emily Lotter
Pawtucket School Committee Clerk