

WESTWOOD SCHOOL COMMITTEE
Westwood, Massachusetts

MEETING MINUTES
March 19, 2026

Attendance and Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 6:32pm by Maya Plotkin. Also present were JoAnna French, Anthony Mullin and Amanda Phillips. Superintendent Timothy Piwowar, Assistant Superintendent Caitlin Ahern and Director of Finance and Operations Lemma Jn-baptiste were present on behalf of the district.

Alyssa Provazza recorded the minutes.

Superintendent's Report

Sheehan Principal Search Update

Supt. Piwowar gave an update about the Sheehan principal search, which is on track. Supt. Piwowar is expected to make an announcement about the selected candidate the following week.

Chair's Update

Ms. Plotkin gave some updates on important dates for community members to know going forward, including the May Town Meeting. Ms. Plotkin shared that the April School Committee meeting date may change.

Liaison reports

There were no liaison reports.

Public Participation

Jenelle Kelly of 15 Hampton Road spoke regarding the buffer zone policy and asked about what strategies were considered before implementing the buffer zone policy. Ms. Kelley asked to understand more about how buffer zone areas were decided.

Discussion Items

Fiscal Year 2026 Budget Update

Ms. Jn-baptiste provided some background about the open IA and ABA positions, and explained that the district would be requesting a transfer of \$905,000 from the ABA and IA salary lines to the contracted services line in Student Services. This would be a transfer internal to the Westwood Schools operating budget to offset a deficit in contracted services.

In addition, the district will be asking to make a request at Town Meeting for a transfer of \$345,000 from Free Cash to the Westwood Schools operating budget to cover the cost of contracted employees who have filled roles as ABAs and IAs in Special Education classrooms.

Mr. Mullin asked whether it would be possible to learn what the difference is in wages and benefits for contracted versus full-time employed IAs and ABAs. Ms. Jn-baptiste clarified that negotiating discussions with the IA/ABA unit would be ongoing.

Ms. Jn-baptiste explained that an analysis of the operating budget in the first week of March suggests that the district will exceed budget in Special Education tuition and transportation, mainly due to unexpected changes in student placements. The Special Education Reserve would help offset some of the funds needed. The requested transfer of \$680,000 would use the bulk of the reserve. Ms. Jn-baptiste explained that it would be ideal for the district to ask for additional funds to be added to the reserve for future use. Replenishment would have to occur from Free Cash, which requires an article at Town Meeting.

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Warrant Articles for 2026 Annual Town Meeting

Supt. Piwowar stated that the three articles on the warrant for the annual Westwood Town Meeting would be for (1) the Free Cash transfer to address IA/ABA services, (2) a transfer from the Special Education reserve, and (3) a transfer from Free Cash for litigation purposes.

MSBA Statement of Interest for Thurston Middle School

Supt. Piwowar reviewed that the Statement of Interest is the first step to partnering with the MSBA in order to access state funding for a potential school building project. In the SOI, the district must identify which of the MSBA's predefined priorities are applicable. For Thurston, those are addressing issues of overcrowding, renovation and modernization of facility systems, and replacement or addition of obsolete buildings to provide the full range of programs needed.

Supt. Piwowar shared a timeline of potential next steps if the SOI is accepted into the MSBA pipeline. A feasibility study would begin around Spring 2027, culminating in construction beginning around 2030 and the building being completed around 2032.

Supt. Piwowar clarified that the MSBA will not require the district to submit a separate SOI for Sheehan, even though one of the scenarios for grade configurations could result in closing the Sheehan building. Supt. Piwowar reiterated that no decisions have been made regarding a 6-8 versus 5-8 grade configuration for a potential new middle school, but that the district needed to be diligent in ensuring that the SOI addressed the correct items.

Ms. Phillips asked whether the feasibility phase could be shortened. Supt. Piwowar stated that it is not likely because the first months of that phase involve hiring an OPM and forming the design team. The procurement process is linked to the MSBA funding requirements.

2026-2027 School Calendar with Early Release Days

Ms. Ahern explained that the early release days were scheduled in the same manner as years past. Ms. Ahern explained that planning the calendar involved working around other holidays and taking into account semester timelines, as well as teacher conferences. Ms. Ahern shared more information about what teachers do during the early release afternoons.

In Westwood, the early release days are longer for teachers than their usual days, and they do a mix of professional development at the department, building and district level; report card writing; parent conferences; team collaboration, etc.

Ms. French raised the idea of sharing more widely what the staff is doing on their professional development days, so that families can understand better how important that work is. Mr. Mullin raised the possibility of making December 23 a half day rather than an early release.

Second Reading of Draft Revisions to Policy ADF: Wellness Policy

Ms. Ahern explained that the proposed revised policy adds language around supporting student mental health, digital wellness, and social emotional learning. Other additions include a parameter for data-informed decision making and a proactive approach to wellness programming by paying attention to national trends and data.

Action Items

MOTION made by Amanda Phillips: Having convened in an open meeting on March 19, 2026, prior to the SOI submission closing date, the School Committee of the Town of Westwood, in accordance with its charter, by-laws, and ordinances, has voted to authorize the Superintendent to submit to the Massachusetts School Building Authority the Statement of Interest form dated April 17, 2026 for the

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Thurston Middle School located at 850 High Street, Westwood, Massachusetts which describes and explains the following deficiencies and the priority categories for which an application may be submitted to the Massachusetts School Building Authority in the future:

Priority 2: Elimination of existing severe overcrowding;

Priority 5: Replacement, renovation or modernization of school facility systems, such as roofs, windows, boilers, heating and ventilation systems, to increase energy conservation and decrease energy related costs in a school facility;

Priority 7: Replacement of or addition to obsolete buildings in order to provide for a full range of programs consistent with state and approved local requirements;

and hereby further specifically acknowledges that by submitting this Statement of Interest Form, the Massachusetts School Building Authority in no way guarantees the acceptance or the approval of an application, the awarding of a grant or any other funding commitment from the Massachusetts School Building Authority, or commits the Town of Westwood to filing an application for funding with the Massachusetts School Building Authority.

Motion seconded by Anthony Mullin.

Result: 4-0-0 (Approved)

MOTION made by Amanda Phillips to approve transfer \$905,000 from the IA and ABA salary lines to contracted services as presented at this meeting. Motion seconded by Anthony Mullin.

Result: 4-0-0 (Approved)

MOTION made by Anthony Mullin to recommend an FY26 transfer of \$345,000 in Free Cash to the schools, an FY27 appropriation of \$600,000 of free cash to the special education reserve, and an FY27 appropriation of \$435,000 of free cash to schools. Motion seconded by JoAnna French.

Result: 4-0-0 (Approved)

MOTION made by JoAnna French to waive the third reading of Policy ADF: Wellness Policy. Motion seconded by Amanda Phillips.

Result: 4-0-0 (Approved)

MOTION made by Amanda Phillips to adopt the policy ADF: Wellness Policy. Motion seconded by JoAnna French.

Result: 4-0-0 (Approved)

MOTION made by JoAnna French to approve the February 23, 2026 meeting minutes. Motion seconded by Amanda Phillips.

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Result: 4-0-0 (Approved)

New Business

There was no new business.

Adjournment

MOTION made by JoAnna French to adjourn and enter into executive session for the following purposes: to comply with, or act under the authority of, law, specifically the Massachusetts Open Meeting Law, §§ 22(f) and (g), for the purpose of reviewing executive session minutes and determining whether continued nondisclosure is warranted; and to return to open session after executive session. Motion seconded by Amanda Phillips.

Roll-call vote:

Maya Plotkin: **Yes**

JoAnna French: **Yes**

Anthony Mullin: **Yes**

Amanda Phillips: **Yes**

Result: 4-0-0 (Approved)

The meeting adjourned into executive session at 7:25pm.

The meeting returned to open session at 7:46pm.

Action Items

MOTION made by Anthony Mullin to approve August 8, 2025 executive session meeting minutes. Motion seconded by Amanda Phillips.

Roll-call vote:

Maya Plotkin: **Yes**

JoAnna French: **Yes**

Anthony Mullin: **Yes**

Amanda Phillips: **Yes**

Result: 4-0-0 (Approved)

MOTION made by JoAnna French to approve August 22, 2025 executive session meeting minutes. Motion seconded by Amanda Phillips.

Roll-call vote:

Maya Plotkin: **Yes**

JoAnna French: **Yes**

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Anthony Mullin: Yes
Amanda Phillips: Yes

Result: 4-0-0 (Approved)

MOTION made by JoAnna French to approve September 11, 2025 executive session meeting minutes.
Motion seconded by Amanda Phillips.

Roll-call vote:

Maya Plotkin: Yes
JoAnna French: Yes
Anthony Mullin: Yes
Amanda Phillips: Yes

Result: 4-0-0 (Approved)

MOTION made by JoAnna French to approve October 17, 2025 executive session meeting minutes.
Motion seconded by Anthony Mullin.

Roll-call vote:

Maya Plotkin: Yes
JoAnna French: Yes
Anthony Mullin: Yes
Amanda Phillips: Yes

Result: 4-0-0 (Approved)

MOTION made by JoAnna French to approve October 24, 2025 executive session meeting minutes.
Motion seconded by Anthony Mullin.

Roll-call vote:

Maya Plotkin: Yes
JoAnna French: Yes
Anthony Mullin: Yes
Amanda Phillips: Yes

Result: 4-0-0 (Approved)

Ms. Plotkin clarified that the October 24, 2025 executive session meeting minutes will be released.

MOTION made by Anthony Mullin to approve November 7, 2025 executive session meeting minutes.
Motion seconded by Amanda Phillips.

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Roll-call vote:

Maya Plotkin: Yes

JoAnna French: Yes

Anthony Mullin: Yes

Amanda Phillips: Yes

Result: 4-0-0 (Approved)

Ms. Plotkin added that the April 7, 2025 and May 8, 2025 executive session minutes are being released.

Ms. Plotkin stated that the Committee has reviewed all of the other previously approved and not released executive session meeting minutes, including the ones approved at this meeting, and with the exception of the ones mentioned, has determined that they are not appropriate for release at this time.

MOTION made by JoAnna French to adjourn the meeting. Motion seconded by Amanda Phillips.

Result: 4-0-0 (Approved)

The meeting adjourned at 7:48pm.