East Haddam Board of Education
Regular Meeting Minutes
Municipal Office Complex, Meeting Room 1 & 2
January 21, 2026

MINUTES - CORRECTED

MEMBERS PRESENT:	Keira Thompson, Chair Jessica Hatfield, Secretary Jim Francese Thea Jansky Sean Morrissey Stephen Trojan Melissa Ziobron
MEMBERS ABSENT:	Dan Flack Terri Garrity
OTHERS PRESENT:	Dr. DeBrito, Superintendent of Schools Christine Bourne, Business Manager Megan Peterson, Elementary School Principal Mike Orfao, High School Teacher Kim Crysler, High School Paraeducator Joe Badala, Middle School Teacher Shaleen Thody, Middle School Teacher Sara Evans, High School Representative Faith Kalisz, High School Representative Approximately 20 audience members

I. CALL TO ORDER

a. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited

b. Exit announcement was made

II. MIDDLE SCHOOL HIGHLIGHTS

Middle School student leaders Neilly, Paige, Peyton, and Lillian from the Noisemakers Leadership Group shared highlights of recent activities. Students attended a leadership conference at Southern Connecticut State University, where they participated in breakout sessions and were the only group selected to present a workshop on leadership styles using the school's Compass Plan. Academic updates included a Math Team competition hosted at the middle school, with Berkley Anderson placing first and Gigi Cuscina and Cooper Valenti advancing to the Lightning Round. Students reported progress on the schoolwide reading challenge, with approximately 1,300 books read toward a goal of 3,000, and shared arts and athletics updates, including a chorus concert, girls' basketball team success, cheerleading

support, and Unified Sports practices. School culture highlights included a visit from motivational speaker Kendrick Moore and a January 8 Takeover Day focused on kindness, gratitude, and perseverance.

III. SCHOOL PRESENTATIONS

Ms. Thody and Mr. Badala presented updates on Project Lead the Way and Project Oceanology at the Middle School. They highlighted student participation in the fully funded Project Oceanology program, which includes multiple field experiences focused on marine science and the Connecticut River watershed. Staff noted the program, limited to 25 students selected through an application process, was last offered in 2019. Updates were also shared on Project Lead the Way coursework, including robotics and green architecture projects. Board members and audience members were invited to view student work and ask questions.

IV. TEACHER OF THE YEAR: MICHAEL ORFAO

Dr. DeBrito announced that Mr. Michael Orfao of Nathan Hale-Ray High School was selected as the district's 2026 Teacher of the Year. She presented him with a commemorative blanket highlighting attributes shared by staff, describing Mr. Orfao as dedicated, genuine, and caring, with a strong ability to connect with students, build rapport, and positively impact the school community.

V. SUPPORT STAFF OF THE YEAR: KIMBERLEY CRYSLER

Dr. DeBrito announced that Ms. Kimberley Crysler of Nathan Hale-Ray High School was selected as the district's 2026 Support Person of the Year. She noted that Ms. Crysler is a valued paraeducator in the Library Media Center and is widely recognized for the strong connections she builds with students, who often describe her as a "second mom." Dr. DeBrito expressed appreciation for Ms. Crysler's dedication and positive impact on the school community.

VI. ANTICIPATED SHORT RECESS

MOTION: A motion for a short recess was made by Mr. Francese and seconded by Mr. Trojan.

FAVOR: (6)
OPPOSED: (0)
ABSENT: (2)
ABSTENTIONS:(0)

MOTION: A motion to reconvene the meeting was made by Mr. Trojan and seconded by Ms. Ziobron.

FAVOR: (6)
OPPOSED: (0)
ABSENT: (2)
ABSTENTIONS:(0)

VII. HIGH SCHOOL REPRESENTATIVES

Sara Evans and Faith Kalisz shared recent highlights. Midterm exams were reintroduced to assess student learning, and students were commended for their effort and resilience. During midterm week, the National Honor Society provided academic support through a well-attended tutoring program. Kindergarten students visited the high school for hands-on activities led by child development students, and baking students concluded the semester with a cupcake bake-off. The school was also featured by WTNH in its "What's Right with Schools" series highlighting the agricultural science program. Additional highlights included an alumni panel for upperclassmen, combined middle and high school choir and band concerts, and recognition of Sara Evans as a Shoreline Conference Scholar-Athlete.

VIII. REPORT OF THE BOARD CHAIR

The Board Chair reported on district updates, including Connecticut Children's Medical Center Pajama Day fundraising totals from the Elementary School ($701) and Middle School ($764), and noted the start of budget season with meetings held January 7 and January 8, followed by the Tri-Board meeting on January 12. The Chair also noted Middle School Expo Night on January 15 and the Elementary School concert on January 16. The Board Chair addressed a recent social media post by a Board member and reported receiving 17 emails and that the Central Office received two phone calls regarding the matter. The Chair reiterated that individual members do not speak for the Board, reminded members to be mindful when posting on social media, and stated that CABE training would be scheduled. Board members then offered comments, including a statement read on behalf of Dan Flack, and the Board member involved provided remarks.

IX. REPORT OF THE SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS

The Superintendent reported a smooth return from the holiday break and noted continued student performances across the district. She highlighted the Elementary School concert, which featured a Beatles-themed program and was live streamed for the first time, allowing families to view remotely. She also noted the Middle School choral concert held that evening. The Superintendent shared that the district engaged in professional development focused on the Strategic Plan and the Vision of the East Haddam Learner, with administrators leading faculty work, and that staff participated in collaboration time focused on curriculum and data review. She concluded by noting that the district continues its NEASC work at the high school and that she will present the proposed budget to the Board next month, emphasizing fiscal responsibility while prioritizing student needs.

X. AUDIENCE OF CITIZENS

The Board Chair reviewed the procedures for public comment. The following individuals spoke during Audience of Citizens: Jacqui Endorf; Andrea Webster; Karianne Kendall-Rand; Lisa Cahill; Maureen Goff; Ryan Goff; Nicole Herold; Laurel White; Cindy Hughson; Adam Briget; Gary Terrain; Todd Gelston (First Selectman); Gary Sikorski; Bob Ryzowski; and Karen Blaschik. The Board Chair also noted receiving emails from Susan Kinsman and John Olin.

XI. ACTION ON THE MINUTES

MOTION: A motion to approve the Regular Meeting Minutes on December 10, 2025, was made by Ms. Ziobron and Mr. Morrissey.

FAVOR: (6)
OPPOSED: (0)
ABSENT: (2)
ABSTENTIONS:(0)

MOTION: A motion to approve the Special Tri-Board Meeting Minutes on January 12, 2026, was made by Mr. Trojan and seconded by Ms. Hatfield.

FAVOR: (6)
OPPOSED: (0)
ABSENT: (2)
ABSTENTIONS:(0)

XII. COMMITTEE REPORTS

a. Curriculum, Policy & Educational Programming Subcommittee Report – Have not met
b. Business & Planning Subcommittee Report - Met on January 7 to review preliminary budget presentations from the three schools and on January 8 to review the special education and systemwide budget presentations. The subcommittee noted the preliminary presentations are with Dr. DeBrito for review and will be reviewed by the Board in February. No additional meeting date has been scheduled at this time.
c. Personnel & Negotiations Subcommittee Report – Have not met.
d. East Haddam Schools Capital Improvements Committee Liaison Report - Mr. Trojan attended the December Capital Improvements Committee meeting and reported updates on HVAC projects at the Elementary School and High School. He noted that the projects are progressing as planned, with a brief power interruption related to an Eversource upgrade on December 22, which has since been resolved.
e. LEARN Liaison Report - The LEARN Liaison Report was distributed to Board members via email.
f. Ray Board Liaison Report – Mr. Morrisey and Ms. Jansky reported that neither liaison was able to attend the most recent meeting; however, bullet points were provided by Chris Eckert. It was noted that the Ray Board scholarship application is due April 10, with the scholarship dinner scheduled for May 12 at Fox Hopyard. The next Ray Board meeting is scheduled for March 16 at 3:30 p.m., at which time a budget proposal will be reviewed. It was clarified that the Ray Board budget process is separate from the district budget process and operates independently.
g. Long Range Capital Improvements Committee Liaison Report - Have not met
h. Safety and Security Committee Report - Have a meeting next week

XIII. OLD BUSINESS

A Board member raised a question regarding Board access to staff exit surveys. The Board member also expressed support for the Board Chair discussing volunteerism related to a former Board member.

XIV. NEW BUSINESS

MOTION: A motion to approve the art mural at the elementary school was made by Mr. Francese and seconded by Mr. Morrissey.

FAVOR: (6)
OPPOSED: (0)
ABSENT: (2)
ABSTENTIONS:(0)

b. Acceptance of the consent agenda 1-5
   i. Discipline Report
   ii. Enrollment Report
   iii. December 2025 Warrant
   iv. Resignation:
      1. Teresa Coronis, MS 12-Month Secretary, 12/12/2025
   v. Appointments
      1. Briana Goff, MS 10-Month Secretary, 12/22/2025
      2. Keli Humiston, ES Paraeducator, 1/5/2026 (*appointment approved as part of the consent agenda; individual did not commence employment*)
      3. Edgardo Quinones III, MS Hall Monitor, 1/5/2026

MOTION: A motion to approve the consent agenda items #2-5 was made by Mr. Francese and seconded by Mr. Trojan.

FAVOR: (6)
OPPOSED: (0)
ABSENT: (2)
ABSTENTIONS:(0)

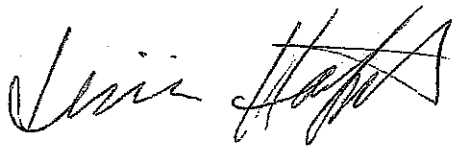
XI. ADJOURNMENT

MOTION: A motion to adjourn was made by Ms. Ziobron and seconded by Mr. Morrissey at 9:21pm.

FAVOR: (6)

OPPOSED: (0)
ABSENT: (2)
ABSTENTIONS:(0)

Respectfully submitted,



Jessica Hatfield
Board of Education Secretary