East Haddam Board of Education
Regular Meeting Minutes
Municipal Office Complex, Meeting Rooms 1 & 2
April 8, 2026, 7:00 PM

RECEIVED
APR 29 2026
KATHLEEN KLICK
EAST HADDAM TOWN CLERK

MINUTES

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Keira Thompson, Chairman
Jessica Hatfield, Secretary
Jim Francese
Terri Garrity
Thea Jansky
Sean Morrissey
Dr. Dan Flack
Melissa Ziobron
Steve Trojan

MEMBERS ABSENT:

OTHERS PRESENT:

Dr. Teresa DeBrito, Superintendent of Schools
Christine Bourne, Business Manager
Kevin Miller, 6th Grade Science Teacher
Lara Sullivan, 7th Grade Science Teacher
Courtney Harris, 8th Grade Science Teacher
Megan Peterson, Elementary School Principal
Dr. Rayna Northcutt, Middle School Principal

I. CALL TO ORDER

a. Chairman Thompson called the meeting to order at 7:07 PM
b. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited
c. The exit announcement was made pointing out both exit doors

II. SCHOOL PRESENTATIONS

a. Elementary School Highlights

Third grade student representatives presented highlights of recent elementary school activities and initiatives. In February, the school opened a "Play Café," offering students opportunities for self-directed play using donated materials from staff and families. The Elementary School celebrated "Read Across America" with a variety of literacy activities and guest readers. The Elementary School also completed a collaborative mural project with support from staff, volunteers, and the Board of Education. Across grade levels, students have been actively engaged in learning. Kindergarten students are studying life cycles through hands-on experiences such as planting seeds and observing caterpillars

transformed into butterflies. First grade students have demonstrated growth in literacy and math, completing phonemic awareness lessons, beginning chapter books, and participating in applied learning projects. Second grade students explored the life of Helen Keller, including learning Braille and creating Braille name tags for school use. Third graders are preparing for upcoming state assessments and practicing test-taking strategies.

Looking ahead, several field trips are planned for all grade levels. The school will also host upcoming events, including a Volunteer Appreciation Breakfast on April 24, 2026, a PTO Basket Bash fundraiser on May 8, 2026, "Get Out and Play Day" on May 26, 2026, and end-of-year celebrations in June.

b. NHRMS Science Presentation and Possible Action to adopt OpenSciEd
Nathan Hale Middle School science teachers presented an overview of their pilot of the OpenSciEd curriculum, which emphasizes student-driven, inquiry-based learning aligned with Next Generation Science Standards. The program is structured around anchoring phenomena that spark curiosity, followed by student-generated questions, investigations, and ongoing "consensus models" where students collaboratively refine their understanding. Teachers highlighted the use of strategies such as driving question boards, scientist circles, and progress tracking to make student thinking visible and encourage continuous questioning and exploration.

The presentation included a demonstration of "Building Thinking Classrooms," where participants engaged in a hands-on activity modeling a two-way mirror phenomenon. This approach promotes collaboration, engagement, and critical thinking through structured group work and shared problem-solving. Teachers emphasized that this model increases student participation, fosters productive struggle, and shifts the teacher's role from direct instruction to facilitation.

The curriculum integrates hands-on investigations, real-world applications, and interdisciplinary skills such as communication, collaboration, and problem-solving. Assessments include formative tools like initial models, peer feedback, and progress trackers, as well as summative tasks where students revise their models to demonstrate growth in understanding. The program also supports differentiation, accessibility, and both digital and non-digital learning.

Board members responded positively, noting high levels of student engagement, inclusivity, and alignment with best instructional practices. Questions were raised regarding assessment alignment with district curriculum and grading practices. The program is currently in a pilot phase and will be reviewed further by the curriculum subcommittee before any decision on adoption.

III. HIGH SCHOOL REPRESENTATIVES

The high school representatives were unable to attend; however, they drafted their updates in writing and Dr. DeBrito shared with the Board. They highlighted the recent production of "Seussical the Musical" presented by the Nathan Hale-Ray Drama Club on March 27, 2026 and March 28, 2026, which was well received and showed strong student talent and enthusiasm. They also announced an upcoming High School Art Night scheduled for Thursday, April 9, 2026, from 5:30 to 7:00 p.m., featuring student artwork along with performances by members of the Jazz Band and Tri-M Honor Society.

Additionally, the Hale Ray National Honor Society hosted a successful blood drive on March 20, 2026, with strong participation from students, staff, and community members. Members also attended their annual leadership conference, where students engaged in workshops and presentations; notably, two students were elected to state-level leadership positions, Nathan Hale-Ray juniors Mariz Gollayan and Kaelyn Cambi will be serving as President and Vice President next school year.

IV. AUDIENCE OF CITIZENS

There were no citizens who wished to speak.

V. REPORT OF THE BOARD CHAIR

On March 13, 2026, Ms. Thompson, Dr. Flack and Ms. Hatfield participated in a virtual meeting with Dr. Marcus Alexander as part of the development of the district's strategic plan. A CABE chairperson check-in was held on March 18, 2026, providing updates on ongoing matters at the state level.

On March 19, 2026, Ms. Thompson attended the elementary school to assist with the creation of a new student mural, which has since been completed and installed with participation from all students.

Additional updates included attendance at the high school musical, "Seussical the Musical" on March 28, 2026, which was well received, and a Board of Education budget meeting on April 2, 2026, followed by a public budget hearing on April 7, 2026. It was also noted that the upcoming week is April vacation.

Discussion included clarification on the cost associated with the strategic planning process, totaling approximately $13,000, which includes consultant services and training through the Connecticut Association of Schools. Board members also praised the completed elementary school mural, highlighting the collaborative effort and student involvement in its creation.

VI. REPORT OF THE SUPERINTENDENT

The Superintendent reported that the high school will host a NEASC visiting committee on April 27, 2026, and April 28, 2026, with a virtual session for Board of Education members scheduled for April 26, 2026. Appreciation was extended to staff for their preparation, as well as recognition of a student who provided valuable support to the IT team during a recent event.

The Superintendent also thanked Board members and community stakeholders for attending the recent budget public hearing. She emphasized the importance of careful fiscal responsibility while maintaining the district's core mission to serve students. The administrative team is currently reviewing all budget line items and noted that potential savings, such as staff retirements, may impact on final budget decisions. While reductions are being considered, the Superintendent expressed concern about cutting staff if viable alternatives exist, citing the importance of stability for students and the school community.

VII. ACTION ON THE MINUTES

a. **MOTION:** To approve the Regular Meeting minutes of March 11, 2026, was made by Ms. Hatfield and seconded by Mr. Francese. A discussion was then had, and a second motion was made with noted corrections by Mr. Francese and seconded by Ms. Garrity.

FAVOR: (8)
OPPOSED: (0)
ABSENT: (0)
ABSTENTIONS:(0)

b. **MOTION:** To approve the Special Meeting minutes of March 26, 2026, was made by Ms. Hatfield and seconded by Mr. Trojan. A discussion was then had, a second motion to approve the minutes with noted corrections was made by Ms. Jansky and seconded by Ms. Garrity.

FAVOR: (8)
OPPOSED: (0)
ABSENT: (0)
ABSTENTIONS:(0)

c. **MOTION:** To approve the Special Meeting minutes of April 2, 2026, was made by Ms. Hatfield and seconded by Ms. Jansky. A discussion was then had, a second motion to approve the minutes with noted corrections was made by Ms. Garrity and seconded by Mr. Francese.

FAVOR: (8)
OPPOSED: (0)
ABSENT: (0)
ABSTENTIONS:(0)

VIII. COMMITTEE REPORTS

a. **Curriculum, Policy and Educational Programming Committee Report**
It was noted that the committee had not met since the previous month. A concern was raised regarding the inclusion of a curricular program presentation on the meeting agenda without prior review by the appropriate committee. A Board member questioned the process, emphasizing that established protocols require committee review before items are brought forward for potential Board action.

b. **Business and Planning Committee Report**
The Business and Planning Committee has not met since the last Regular Board of Education meeting.

c. **The Personnel and Negotiations Subcommittee Report**
It was reported that the committee has held several meetings regarding ongoing negotiations. A session regarding stipends was held on March 30, 2026. Additionally, the committee met on March 25, 2026, for preparation and again on April 6, 2026, to continue negotiations with the UPSEU (United Public Service Employees Union). The committee is working toward a potential completion of these negotiations by the end of the month, with the next meeting tentatively scheduled for April 29, 2026, at 5:00 p.m.

d. **The East Haddam Schools Capital Improvement Committee Liaison Report**
An update was provided regarding the Improvements Committee. Ms. Thompson highlighted the HVAC project. It was also announced that representatives will transition from the Board Chairperson to Steve Trojan at the end of the month. The committee's next meeting is scheduled for April 30, 2026, with the previous meeting having been canceled due to a lack of agenda items.

e. **LEARN Liaison Report**
Ms. Garrity provided an update from the minutes of a recent LEARN meeting, featuring a presentation by Clinton Public Schools on aligning strategy, instruction, and culture. The report highlighted a district-wide shift from student compliance to cognitive engagement, emphasizing teacher agency and the role of educators as primary instructional decision-makers. Key priorities include personalized learning, social-emotional connections, and equitable academic access. Additionally, the district is expanding career and technical pathways in manufacturing, cybersecurity, culinary arts, and robotics through community partnerships and experiential learning. The presentation concluded that student achievement is fundamentally driven by engagement and a culture where students feel safe and regulated.

f. **Ray Board Liaison Report**
The virtual meeting on April 6, 2026, focused primarily on finalizing plans for upcoming events, including the Scholarship Award Night scheduled for May 12, 2026, at Fox Hopyard and Senior Awards on June 5, 2026. Overall, the meeting was procedural, concentrating on event planning and budget verification.

g. **Long Range Capital Improvements Committee Liaison Report**
The Long-Range Capital Improvements Committee, which is also a committee of the First Selectman, is in the process of reorganizing its membership. The First Selectman's assistant indicated that members would need to be reappointed, including two individuals from different political parties, along with the chair. The committee has not met since January 2025. Interested members will be contacted via email to confirm

participation, and the committee will resume its quarterly meetings with a renewed focus on planning and priorities for the town.

h. Safety and Security Committee
Have not met.

IX. NEW BUSINESS

Acceptance of the consent agenda 1-3

1. Discipline Report
2. Enrollment Report
3. March 2026 Warrant

The Board discussed the consent agenda, including the discipline report, enrollment report, and the March 2026 warrant. Clarification was requested regarding enrollment discrepancies at the high school and transition school. In reviewing the discipline report, members discussed the report's format and the balance between documenting referrals and formal disciplinary actions; suggestions were made for future administrative presentations to provide additional context on intervention protocols. Regarding the March 2026 warrant, the Board addressed budget variances in dues, fees, and early retirement allocations, noting that these reflect accruals or district-wide expenditures that will be adjusted in future reporting.

MOTION: A motion was made to approve the consent agenda items 1 & 3 by Ms. Jansky and seconded by Ms. Hatfield.

FAVOR: (8)
OPPOSED: (0)
ABSENT: (0)
ABSTENTIONS:(0)

X. AUDIENCE OF CITIZENS

There were no citizens who wished to speak.

XI. ADJOURNEMENT

MOTION: A motion was made to adjourn the meeting by Mr. Morrissey and seconded by Ms. Garrity.

FAVOR: (8)
OPPOSED: (0)
ABSENT: (0)
ABSTENTIONS:(0)

Meeting adjourned at 9:00 PM

Respectfully submitted,

Jessica Hatfield
Board of Education Secretary