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May 4, 2026 School Committee Meeting Link and Excerpts:
https://watertown.munitrac.ai/transcript?id=2026-05-04_TownMeeting-0u552.mp4&length=12000

- "The list of problems cited in the Athena K12 report is long, and among concerns are a lack of consistency, a lack of rigorous professional training and development, a lack of qualified instructors, a lack of following federal and state processes, a lack of delivery or consistent delivery of services, a lack of uniformity and equity throughout the system, etcetera. This consultant group found these issues without even talking to the parents of the children receiving special education. Not speaking with these stakeholders is a glaring omission. The other stakeholders in the education of our children are the residents of Watertown who believe it is their responsibility to provide a good education for the students who attend Watertown Public Schools."

- "Professionally, I'm a speech language pathologist with over20 years of experience. My child's needs are not complex. Dyslexia and ADHD areas that schools should be equipped to support and yet year after year, the system has failed to provide appropriate and timely services. We do everything within our power to support our child's learning externally, and we continue to feel this frustration. We have experienced compliance issues, inappropriate group sizes for reading intervention, and missed progress reporting. IEPs have been delayed or written with multiple errors slowing access to services for our child. Most concerning, we have received recommendations that directly contradict the data, such as exiting my child from special education while he is still not meeting benchmarks, and is reading at a third grade level in seventh grade. As parents, we feel defeated and marginalized. When we bring up these concerns to administration, to school committee, we have been told by some members to keep working with our team. Well, we have not stopped working with our team. We have been told that special education might not be their purview. If you work for Watertown Public Schools, every child is your child. So, I really, I have a lot of issues with that comment. These responses are dismissive and reflect a lack of accountability. We are now seriously considering an out of district placement, something we never wanted and something that will have a real emotional impact on our child. I'm asking you to act decisively and effectively to support the most vulnerable learners in this district. The information is there. The concerns have been raised repeatedly. It's time to confront a system and leadership structure that is failing students."

- “I am deeply disappointed in the current leadership of Watertown's special education department, and must express our need for our current school committee and administration for a vote of no confidence for her leadership. Teammeetings are frequently disorganized. LEA representatives and some special education staff appear unfamiliar with the IEP procedures and required paperwork,IEPs, progress reports, in accordance with DESE are not being followed for timelines. Also, students are not consistently receiving direct services or individualized instruction in the least restrictive environments as required. Progressreports and notes and IEPs we have received often lack current testing data, up to date baseline performance data, or goals and benchmarks that have adequate measurable and observable criteria. Although I am a teacher, we have had to hire an advocate to emphasize and ensure that the schools understand that we do not take our children's educational needs lightly. I know that other parents are also extremely frustrated with the lack of services provided for their children with specific learning disabilities, and have either taken their children out of the public schools or had to take on additional supplemental tutoring or direct support interventions. Many parents are told that their children are doing great while their children are not getting the academic support and instruction that they need.”

May 18, 2026 School Committee Meeting:
https://watertown.munitrac.ai/transcript?id=2026-05-18_TownMeeting-0u252.mp4&length=12000

- “I don't blame any teacher. I think every teacher shows up every day wanting to help students. I blame the system, and I believe that things need to change, and I believe it starts at the top.”

- “As we got going here at the school, I had very, very high expectations, but I felt very let down by the administration. As a matter of fact, his teacher at the beginning of this year, about a month and a half in, was fired. I assumed she left the school, and she was new toWatertown Public Schools. So I don't really know the details of what occurred there,but his experience was horrific. I had to pick him up early from school. Every single day, he was not being educated at all whatsoever. There was a teacher change, and then some of the patterns began to change, and it got better. But, you know, being a program where they're supposed to, you know, support behaviorally challenged students, I found that he was not getting the full support that he should have been getting, and we were not getting the full support from the administration that we felt that we should have been getting. So, this is my very first time attending any one of these, but I

felt that,you know, after a really difficult year for us, a really difficult start to a year, I just needed to say something and speak up."

- "I ask the chair of the school committee, and if the chair won't do this, one of the other five elected members will place a vote of no confidence in the director of student services on the agenda of the very next school committee meeting for discussion and action. Watertown residents cannot have elected school committee representatives and school officials committing wrongs against children. Somebody here has to be brave enough and responsible enough to do the right thing now and place this vote of no confidence on the next agenda."

June 1, 2026 School Committee Meeting:
https://watertown.munitrac.ai/transcript?id=2026-06-01_TownMeeting-0u198.mp4&length=12000

- "I'm here tonight as a parent representing 231 Watertown residents who have signed a petition asking the school committee to place on its agenda a discussion and action on a vote of no confidence in the director of student services. I'm formally submitting this petition for the public record and requesting that the school committee include this agenda item as part of the next regularly scheduled meeting. This request is not made lightly, and it's not based on a single incident or a moment of frustration. It reflects sustained concerns shared by a large and diverse group of community members over time. In less than 10 days, more than 200individuals signed this petition. These signatures represent parents, caregivers,residents, and community members who share concerns about the current state of special education and the need for meaningful change. The speed at which these signatures were gathered reflects the depth and urgency of these concerns. Families have consistently raised issues related to communication, trust, service delivery, accountability, and confidence in district leadership. Many feel that despite raising concerns over an extended period of time, their voices have not been adequately acknowledged or addressed. It is also important to note that while over 200 individuals did sign, a significantly larger number, or a significantly large number expressed support but chose not to do so, to actually sign the petition. Some shared that they felt uncomfortable attaching their names due to concerns about potential retaliation or negative impact on their families. There was about 60. That hesitation itself reflects the seriousness of the concerns within the community. Collectively, these concerns, along with multiple independent data sources, warrant public consideration by the school committee given its responsibility to oversee district performance, ensure legal compliance, and hold the superintendent accountable for district

operations. When there is sustained and significant concern about the effectiveness and transparency of a department's leadership, it merits formal public discussion by the committee.We respectfully request that you accept this petition and schedule the requested vote of no confidence for the next regularly scheduled meeting."

- "Strong systems require transparency, collaboration, and honest communication. Communication itself has become a major issue. Families are too often learning about changes through newsletters, word-of-mouth, or from their children after decisions have already been made. This stands in direct contrast to the reports which call for clear, more inclusive, and meaningful partnerships with families.Families cannot be true partners if they are only informed after decisions are finalized. There are also concerns about staffing. Families are hearing that mental health staff are assigned larger caseloads next year, which could disrupt longstanding relationships if staff is too limited. Students may not receive consistent support, and staff may struggle to collaborate effectively. Families are also concerned that staffing constraints may reduce co taught classes and increase the separation of specialized classrooms from peers. When staffing drives placement and services instead of student needs, it becomes harder to ensure equitable access to meaningful learning opportunities. If the district strategy and theory of action are intended to foster collaboration, shared responsibility, and student-centered decision making, then families are asking straightforward questions, how do current practices align with these commitments? I urge the committee to examine the individual decisions being made and the processes behind them. Families deserve to understand what changes are coming and why they're being made, and how those decisions serve students' needs. Most importantly, students deserve systems that prioritize their educational, social emotional, and mental health needs above administrative convenience."

- "Our child was refusing to attend school. My husband and I came to this building for an emergency team meeting in October 2025, during which we advocated for a 45 extended evaluation out of district. Our advocate attended with us. The director of student services arrived unannounced as we did not receive an official invitation with an attendance list for the meeting. The director asked our daughter's social worker and teacher to each give a brief update at the start, and then the director proceeded to tightly control the rest of the meeting. To be clear, the other four or five adults at the table did not say a single word. We explained why we believed our request was necessary, citing historic and current data, and the director shut us down repeatedly. At the end of the meeting, when we

admitted our trust in the process had eroded, the director suddenly declared, this isn't going to work. Just give them the 45 day. Everyone sat in silence and appeared stunned. Nobody said a word as we got the hint, gathered our belongings, and left. Later that day, we wrote to the superintendent explaining our concerns about the meeting dynamic despite receiving the outcome we had hoped for, and we followed up in more detail the following day. The superintendent sent us a formal response, but through a public records request that winter, we learned what happened next. The internal email chain revealed the superintendent then forwarded our message to the director of student services. The act of forwarding it makes sense, and an added FYI or to discuss later would be customary. Instead, she added a line we view as deeply dismissive and unacceptable for a leader discussing a family in crisis. At the top of the forwarded message, using her district email account, she wrote four words followed by three dots. Please don't leave me. As parents of two students,our firstborn has had a dream experience through elementary and middle school.And while our second child has not, it is no reflection on our individual teachers.Two things can be true at once. Teachers can give their absolute best, and a child can be in an environment that simply cannot meet their needs. Watertown teachers deserve every accolade. They are not why this system is failing. When the top administrator's public facing correspondence is directly contradicted by her private inner thoughts, clearly and in black and white, it leaves us as parents with a distinct impression. District leadership views a vulnerable student in need of support as nothing more than administrative annoyance. Our trust in the system is no longer eroded. It is completely shattered. Watertown has incredible educators, but it has more than one administrator who has lost our family's complete confidence."

- "Our October meeting connects to a systemic finding from the Athena K-12program review. Three months after we reported our concerns, the Athena report validated our experience using the phrase administrative gatekeeping. Our experience highlights four ways this gatekeeping operates within Watertown SpecialEducation. First, the legally mandated team dynamic was nonexistent. Educators and service providers who work with the student must have an active voice. Instead,a high level administrator controlled the discussion while the rest of the team sat in silence. This is not collaboration. Second, decision making authority was centralized and unilateral. Outcomes must be driven by data and team input. Our request was met with intense administrative resistance only to be suddenly reversed on a whim.A single administrator held sole authority to make a life altering decision for our child, not the team. Third, the district fails to consistently follow proper procedure.We have experienced multiple meetings

where administrators attended who are not listed on the meeting invitation as required. Arriving at a high stakes meeting to find an unexpected high level administrator instantly creates an imbalance of power.This disadvantages families in real time. Finally, internal district emails show gatekeeping is enabled from the top. When we blew the whistle months before Athena, the superintendent chose to shield the system rather than protect our child. She forwarded our crisis to the director with the phrase, please don't leave me. To us, this exposes the true culture of gatekeeping, a top down and defensive leadership team willing to dismiss families to protect the status quo. This is not a single family's grievance. Athena confirmed a district wide pattern. We also have many other examples and emails. This committee must act. Exercise your oversight authority, enforce accountability for the harm done to families, and guarantee no other child loses another day, nevermind a full year of their education, as our daughter has. Trust repair cannot wait until June 22 presentation or 2027 implementation. You have the independent data.You have the community testimonies. You know what needs to be done. The only question now is if you have the leadership accountability and moral integrity to do it."

- "I'm speaking to the facts of what our experience has been for our journey. And it was very hard for me to decide to speak about this because there was always that fear of retaliation, or we were too much, or that there was this idea of you don't know your child. You don't know what you're talking about. We'd bring in specialist IEP neuropsychs, people coming in who are trained in mental health, who are trained in social emotional, and it was discounted. There were many times that the teachers who were, sorry. I'm gonna cry because they were amazing, and they helped my son thrive, who were all of a sudden gone, and there was no communication or talk to us about it. Or social workers who helped him get through the day. We were told, when he came back from a placement, thatI'm going to reiterate that your child will not see your social worker anymore. This person had never met me, never met my child, but, yeah, was reiterating what's best for my child, taking away the one constant he had in the middle school to get through. There have been days that I parked outside this Lowell where my child avoided school, but I was told he's fine. He doesn't need an IEP. He doesn't need social emotional supports. Your parenting needs to be better. These are the stories that I was told. I've had to lock my car and walk out and had staff come out and take care of my child. And and it wasn't administration coming out to help my child. It was the teacher. It was the ABA who came out. There was no call for my child. One day, my child came home with major dysregulation. I was told, do better."

- “I’m a veteran occupational therapist with 25 years of experience, 13 of those in the public schools. I wanna give a special shout out to the Cunniff teachers, service providers and learning community. Our gratitude for their dedication is real. I'm not here to speak against the staff. I'm here to plead for change and the systemic framework that they are forced to work within and that families like mine are forced to contend with. Despite having personally attended and sat in almost 500 IEP meetings as a school OT, We were forced to hire outside counsel and private experts for my own child. We brought data and expert evaluations, but were met with a predetermined script and out of compliance documents riddled with errors. When additional administrators stepped in and joined our meetings, the tone, additional administrators stepped in, the tone became adversarial. Last year, after we filed a complaint with the state as an absolute desperate last resort, the director of special education told us at the end of a contentious meeting when no other staff was there that the tension in our meeting was because we had filed a complaint with the state.Let's be entirely clear. Retaliation against families for exercising their rights is illegal.Using a past complaint to justify an adversarial environment is an unacceptable abuse of power meant to gaslight parents into silence. The pattern continued this year. In the fall, the director shared that she likes to compare giving specialized instructions to administering chemotherapy, implying that reading support can be harmful and must be dosed appropriately. Not only is this completely inconsistent with the science of reading, it's deeply offensive, especially to my partner who lost her mother to cancer. I watched the March meeting when the Athena report was presented, and I saw confusion in the room over why students on IEPs in Watertown are underperforming. I was not surprised. The model in this district, at least in our experience, is the wait to fail model. We wait for students to fail, and we wait for the gap to widen before acting. Instead of providing the specialized instruction based on individual profiles that students require to develop skills and independent learners, the district ignores evidence, denies necessary services, and simply accommodates students in large classrooms. This is not a free and appropriate public education for all. Our families spend significant personal resources to fight this, resources most families do not have. That is not a reflection of our dedication.It is a reflection of the system that places the burden of proof on the most vulnerable. I'm asking this committee to close the distance between the district's stated mission of equity, belonging, and empowerment and our daily reality. The system is broken. It's time for a full, honest, and swift overhaul, and we need you to have the courage to lead it.”

- “In walking the streets for petition signatures, I met teachers. They were thrilled, and they thanked me.They didn't want to sign because they are afraid of

retaliation by the administration.Do not for a second think that what is happening in our schools is not traumatizing for all our students. Students see how their peers are treated by staff, and that treatment can be very frightening and anxiety provoking. No child wants to be treated this way. Their observations and concomitant feelings inform how every student learns. All our children are affected by our noncompliance. The only compassionate action and responsible resolution at this juncture is to place a vote of no confidence in the director of student services on the agenda for public discussion and action. It doesn't matter at this point that the director of student services is retiring. This needs to be done for transparency, for accountability, and for those wronged for way too long a time. Our school buildings are incredible, state of the art, and represent Watertown at its very best, its commitment to educating our children. Our programs have the potential to be superb. Unfortunately, what is happening inside these exceptional buildings doesn't reflect our commitment to our children or their education. Watertown residents want to be proud of what we give our children, not ashamed."

June 22, 2026 School Committee Meeting:
https://watertown.munitrac.ai/transcript?id=2026-06-22_TownMeeting-0u379.mp4&length=12000

- "I am reading this letter for the parents of [child's name], and this is his father. He's a former student at the Lowell School. He's currently a student at the Newton Public Schools. Their older son was supposed to read this letter but wasunable to attend at the last minute. The parents are Spanish speakers. [Child's name] teachers and the staff on his IEP team continuously recommended medication for [child's name] year after year at meetings. It was and is not necessary for [child's name] to be medicated as he is in a new school now and is doing well. One of the grade five teachers said that there was nothing more that could be done with [him] at the level, and we felt that the principal never paid attention to [his] education and did nothing to help. We felt that [he] was not getting the support that he needed in his classes and that staff and the principal were only interested in [him] taking medicine. [Child's name] did not feel safe at school this year, and as such, we decided to leave the school in January, and he is much happier in his new school in Newton. When we had to move out in an emergency to live with friends in Newton due to circumstances beyond our control, the interpreter provided documentation to the school of our new address. For some reason, we received repeated calls from the former school engagement staff asking about our address. This was stressful for us during a stressful time, and we did not feel welcome as the information that was asked of

us was already provided. We received weekly unwelcome calls regarding this, and we felt discriminated against as part of the Latinx community."

- "We believe the community deserves an independent climate and trust audit to be conducted that includes interviews with families who have filed complaints,withdrawn their children, and have rejected proposed placements. Organizations successfully rebuild trust do not run away from difficult feedback. They actively seek it out. Out. If the goal of this committee is genuine deep improvement rather than just political damage control, then understanding the painful experiences that led us here must be a formal part of the plan. To rebuild trust, accountability cannot be treated as an afterthought. It must become the foundation."

- "When a school district succeeds, leaders get the credit. But being a leader also means accepting responsibility when systems fail.For two consecutive years, the state has determined Watertown failed to meet special education requirements. An independent review documented significant concerns. Families and staff have shared experiences that mirror the same findings.When every single source points in the same direction, responsible leaders do not look away. They act. We know this committee does not manage day to day operations, but your job is oversight. Your job is accountability. Your job is to protect public trust. When statefindings, independent reviews, staff experiences, and family concerns all collide,oversight is not optional. It's your job. Imagine if this were any other part of districtoperations. If auditors found major financial weaknesses, you would act. If safetyinspectors found immediate building hazards, you would act. You wouldn't claimyou lacked the ability to step in. We know you would act because we've seen ithappen. This district knows exactly how to mobilize. You built a robust task force for cell phone policies and vocational tech options. You completely restructured operations for COVID. So I have to ask, why is there no school committee chaired task force to lead us through this crisis? When this committee uses urgent oversight for some issues but takes a passive approach to state documented crises, it sends a clear message. It tells families exactly where your priorities lie. Special education students deserve the same urgency as cellphones because every statistic is a child. Behind every noncompliance finding is a family, and behind every breakdown in trust are parents who believe the system would support their child, and it didn't. Meeting basic requirements is not an aspirational goal. It's the bare minimum, and the bare minimum should never be the limit of our ambition for Watertown children.Oversight is not path. It is not passive observation. It is active accountability. We do not need another report. We do not need another year of excuses. Please stop pretending that forward

facing procedural changes will undo the past harms done to our children. Down the line, Watertown will remember. We'll remember which of you stood up and fought for our children and which of you hid behind excuses to protect the failing system instead."

- "The problem resolution system, better known as PRS, exists for an important reason. It's the state's formal mechanism for addressing concerns when families believe special education laws, regulations, or student rights have not been properly upheld. It serves as an important system of oversight and accountability when local resolution efforts have been unsuccessful. As elected officials responsible for district oversight, the school committee should have a clear understanding of how often these families have felt compelled to use this process and what those complaints may reveal about district practices.Specifically, I asked the school committee to request information regarding the number of PRS complaints filed during the director of student services tenure, the nature and outcome of those complaints, any corrective actions required by DESE,and whether reoccurring concerns identified through PRS complaints also appear in BSEA proceedings, legal disputes, or other formal actions involving the district. I also ask that the committee review the number of special ed related legal proceedings and their associated costs to the district. The information would help determine whether concerns are being resolved effectively at the local level or escalating to costlier legal disputes. Finally, I ask that the school committee seek greater transparency regarding concerns raised during the superintendent's recent listening sessions. While communication was identified as a common theme, the public summaries provided limited information about the specific concerns shared by families, many of which overlap with the issues that have led parents to file PRScomplaints. I respectfully ask this committee to exercise oversight responsibilities by reviewing data, identifying concerning trends, and concerning considering whether additional transparency, accountability, or systemic improvements are needed within our special ed department. By addressing these issues proactively and helping to break patterns that may contribute to unnecessary conflict, the committee can strengthen trust between families and the district. You can reduce legal expenses and ensure that resources remain focused on supporting students. Ultimately, these efforts will better serve our children and the families who depend on our public schools."

- "During the March 23 school committee meeting, a vital question was asked. Why do students with disabilities have a separate hallway at the temporary high school? Administration acknowledged the setup violates the inclusion level expected by the state, but framed it as an unfortunate temporary hurdle of

construction. Massachusetts law says otherwise. DESE explicitly states that isolating students due to construction consideration violates civil rights. For a student navigating that isolated hallway today, the promise of a future building does nothing to lessen the negative impact of segregation.Superintendent Galdston, it is your fundamental duty to ensure no child inWatertown Public Schools is harmed and that your staff follows the law. For the sake of our students, you must hold your leadership team accountable and dismiss the director of student services immediately. In addition, I ask the school committee to mandate a proactive independent inclusion review for all temporary housing and construction plans for the upcoming middle school before ground is broken. We cannot build the future on a foundation of civil rights violations."

- "If families were truly viewed as equal partners in special education, why were we given such a limited role in shaping the distance district's response to the very concerns we've been raising for years? The Athena 12 review raises a similar concern. The review identified significant issues involving trust, communication,compliance, and service delivery without conducting direct interviews with parents.Aside from a conversation with CPAC leadership, family voices were largely absent from the process, yet serious concerns still emerged. Imagine what might have have learned if families who feared retaliation felt safe enough to share their experiences openly. Imagine if we had included a broader and more representative sample of parent voices than the 32% of families who participated in the district's internal survey.The findings may have revealed a more comprehensive understanding of the barriers families encounter when trying to access appropriate services and support their children. The limited roles of families played in both the review process and the development of this plan reflective concern many parents have expressed repeatedly. Families often feel dismissed, disregarded, and as stakeholders to be informed rather than partners empowered to help shape decisions. That is why the central irony of this plan is difficult to ignore. A plan whose statedpurpose is to be able to trust with families was created through a process that manyfamilies do not view as trustworthy. Trust is earned through action, not process. It is rebuilt when families are treated as true partners, invited to help identify problems,shape solutions, and ensure that students receive the services and support they need to succeed. Strong leadership does not simply ask families to trust thesystem. It creates the conditions that make it possible. If the district is serious aboutrestoring confidence in special education and improving outcomes for students,families must be present not only in feedback cycles, but in shaping the direction of the work itself."

- “I'm here tonight to speak on behalf of the many parents in this district who do not feel safe sharing their voices publicly. When I stood at this podium a few weeks ago pleading for systemic change, multiple families reached out to me. One parent explicitly thanked me for giving a voice to people who are simply, “Too terrified to come forward.” Am I terrified to stand here tonight? Honestly, a little bit. But my discomfort is nothing compared to the deeper fear running through this district, a culture where mandated reporters are too afraid to report child abuse because theyare scared of administrative retaliation. That should frighten everyone sitting in this room. I'm speaking directly about theformer teacher at the early steps program who taught my own child, who wasaccused of child abuse and had her license revoked. My child was in the classroom the year before, but I didn't learn about the safety crisis from the district. I found out years later on social media. I'll save the deep impact this has had on my family and many others for another time. But let's look at the root cause. When a system silences whistleblowers, our safety net fails, and our kids get hurt. In any healthy organization, open communication keeps people safe. It's a safety measure, not an institutional threat. Yet a pattern of fear of retaliation runs deep across Watertown. Just recently, the teachers union reported that educators. Those who shared their thoughts about special education did not want to be mentioned by name due to fear of retaliation, while parents are expressing that exact same hesitation when filling up district questionnaires or coming forward with complaints. This isn't an accident. It comes from the top down. When an administrator explicitly tells a family that an adversarial dynamic exists because they filed a state complaint and then applies this very same sentiment publicly at a CPACmeeting, it sends a clear message. If you look for accountability in this district, it's going to cost you. This pattern of fear of retaliation comes up repeatedly. It came up repeatedly during the superintendent's listening sessions. The district just released its draft special education improvement plan. It well, outlines goals for building family trust under priority one, but let's be real. Those goals are completely unmeasurable if the community is too afraid to tell you the truth on your surveys. Dismantling this culture of fear has to be added as a concrete core component of this formal plan. If this administration cannot eliminate this culture internally, the school committee needs to step in, do its job, and secure an independent objective third party to review our administrative climate and guide us forward. It is a sad sign for our community. In advocating for a child's basic educational needs requires an act of courage. Our educators, our families, and our students deserve a system built on safety, open communication, and mutual mutual respect.”

July 27, 2026 School Committee Meeting:
https://watertown.munitrac.ai/transcript?id=2026-07-27_TownMeeting-0u135.mp4&length=12000

- “Today, we're bringing forward documents obtained through an official public records request. The original email sent in September2019 by the former WEA President to district leadership, including the current superintendent and current school committee chair, along with the results of a survey conducted in conjunction with the Massachusetts Teachers Association,which contained nearly 30 pages of qualitative feedback from Watertown SpecialEducators. Public record shows the results were forwarded to every member of the2019 school committee. We formally request a copy of these documents be added to the record for tonight's meeting. They prove the issues families face today are not isolated or new, and that nobody at this podium has been overreacting. In 2019,educators warned leadership about the following items. These are direct quotes on culture and fear. I fear retribution for speaking up. Our department meetings are often run as shaming sessions. Attempting constructive dialogue leads to punitive measures. Quotes on predetermined meetings and budget cuts. The special education administration would determine what services the district would be willing to provide before meeting with the students and parents. Her number one priority is cutting costs, and if you don't adhere to that, she will target you. It's about numbers, not needs. Some of the quotes on targeting non-English speaking families. Watertown is made up of so many families that do not speak English as their first language, and it seems that they are being taken advantage of for not knowing their rights. On leadership demeanor, our director has personal vendettas against staff, families, and other administrators. In meetings, the director of student services is unprofessional,puffy, abrupt, openly hostile, and rude to parents and staff. Some of the quotes on student rights. They don't view our students as individuals who require individualized planning in accordance with federal law. Student services are taken away from deserving families and students daily. Families are lied to. A few quotes on human impact and broken trust. Morale is low, staff is overwhelmed,and the students are suffering. Watertown students deserve more than the bare minimum. Our special education administration causes families to be hurt and unsupported. When I make bridges between school and home, these bridges are frowned upon and then broken. Fast forward to today. Families are experiencing this exact same treatment, and I know it firsthand, many of us do. Accelerating a resignation is not accountability. It does not instantly erase a decade of institutional harm. Accountability requires acknowledging what happened and accepting responsibility for the decisions that allowed it to continue. The burden is no longer on parents to prove this harm

exists. It's on leadership to prove you have the courage to repair it."

- "In October 2025, my wife and I emailed the superintendent to report openly hostile behavior demonstrated by the director of student services towards a set of team meeting. We were met with indifference and told we could file with the state. At the time, we thought maybe we were the first to speak up given how deep the fear of retaliation runs in this district. It turns out we were not the first. We know now with absolute certainty that in September 2019, seven years ago, the Watertown Educators Association warned you in writing. They warned you of a senior administrator that rules through intimidation, venom, public humiliation, and retribution. They told you directly that students with social and emotional needs were being blocked from getting IEPs, and families were being lied to. They warned you that team decisions were being overturned, and services were being stripped from deserving students to meet bottom-line numbers. Anyone who saw these results and chose not to act directly is directly implicated in the harm caused to my child, to our family, and to countless families over the last decade. District leadership chose to protect the status quo over protecting our children. If these issues had been addressed in 2019, as they should have been, my child, who enrolled in elementary school that very year, could have had an entirely different childhood. Instead, her time as an elementary student was marred by trauma and a deep-seated fear of school. My child paid the price via silence while you sat on a survey detailing the exact harm done to families like ours. Future oversight does not restore years of denied services. Hiring an interim director does not repair the trauma experienced by parents who enter team meetings in good faith. A forward-facing strategy doesn't undo the financial strain in years of legal battles. Families with the means to do so needed to uphold the child's basic rights, nevermind the inequitable harm imposed on families without the means to enter litigation,and were forced to accept less than what the child was legally entitled to. And blocking a citizen petition with a public discussion about systemic concerns it raised certainly does not grant the superintendent and anyone of this committed seven years ago absolution for staying silent while our children suffered. Quietly ushering a director out the back door while thanking her for a decade of service isn't accountability. It's an institutional cover-up. Many of you looked away in 2019,but the community is paying attention now. You can't heal a culture without addressing what broke it in the first place. So, my question to leadership tonight is simple, are you going to continue covering up for the system, or will you finally do what it takes to repair it?"

- “I'm here to share feedback on two specific agenda items. The first is the draft language for the creation of an ad hoc student services subcommittee. While I appreciate the adherence to the outlined policy, the proposal is notably different from the task forces created for cell phones and vocational tech options, which included dedicated positions for parents and community members to directly serve on these temporary bodies. Oversight is necessary, but what's missing is centering of family voices, which has been quite limited. Listening sessions with the superintendent only reached parents who felt comfortable attending. The hope for many concerned families is that this subcommittee, if approved, will feature regular opportunities for open dialogue with the community.Also, it has been discussed by a number of families that the members assigned to the subcommittee, especially who is appointed as chair, is a vital piece of its formation. To demonstrate good faith, we urge the appointment of one of the two members who voted in public support of the community's petition to serve as chair. The community wants to be sure we are heard and valued in this process, and anyone who opted to move the conversation about systemic public concerns behind closed doors did not validate the experiences and issues raised in the petition. The second agenda item I'm addressing is the referral of the voting method policy to subcommittee to clarify its language. In the school committee bylaws, certain scenarios explicitly require a majority of all members, such as appointing the superintendent or voting to enter executive session. These high-stakes actions rightly necessitate an absolute majority or four yes votes out of seven. For standard motions, a majority of those, quote, present and voting is required. My understanding is that this is standard procedural language for the numbers of votes actually cast. Those present in voting are the ones who cast a yes or no vote. Members could also be present and not voting if they abstain rather than cast a vote. If the school committee rewrites the policy for any standard motion to require a fixed majority of all its members, that would effectively turn non-votes into negative votes. It would allow the majority to quietly kill motions without ever having to take a public stand by casting opposing votes. Imagine for a second if in a municipal election, uncast ballots were automatically counted as no votes against a measure. Watertown routinely sees less than 20% voter turnout. Should the city get to decide what the intent of the non-voting 80% was and count them as no's? Inferring intent was the explanation given on July 15th to justify declaring a 2-0 vote as failed,which isn't standard procedure. It's moving the goalposts, and it sets a dangerous standard. For special education families who often see regulations tend to justify noncompliance, these procedural maneuvers do not feel like good faith. We sincerely hope this dynamic changes so that one day we can stand at this podium to celebrate repair and shared successes rather than the continued need

to push for accountability and transparency."

- "Tonight, I'm here to advocate for something our community desperately needs; honest, transparent,and ongoing dialogue. For months, parents have stood before this committee and shared stories of significant failures within the district's student services department. These failures have had real consequences. Trust has been damaged,and parents have felt unheard, unsupported, and in many cases abandoned by the very system that's supposed to protect their children. Let's be clear, these concerns did not begin this year, they've been raised repeatedly for nearly a decade. For years, families have voiced their frustrations, their fears, and their experiences often with little acknowledgment. The reality is that we cannot move forward until we are willing to confront what has happened. We cannot rebuild trust without first acknowledging the pain that has caused it to break. I firmly believe that the path forward begins with more than simply inviting families to the table. It requires genuinely listening when they speak even what they have to say is difficult to hear. Recently, I had the privilege of serving on the committee responsible for selecting the incoming interim director of student services. I am grateful for that opportunity because for the first time in a long time, it gave me something that many families have been missing, hope. That experience was meaningful. It was refreshing. Most importantly, it demonstrated a simple truth.Collaboration works, but one positive step, no matter how encouraging, is not enough. If this district is truly committed to restoring trust, then it must create meaningful opportunities for families to be heard. So, let's stop avoiding difficult conversations, and let's stop treating parents who raise these concerns as obstacles to progress. They are not. While I appreciate the listening sessions recently hosted by our superintendent, I urge both the administration and this committee sitting here not to allow these conversations to end simply because leadership changes are now underway. In fact, this is precisely the moment when we need more dialogue, not less. I encourage this committee and our superintendent to invite every family who has navigated the special education system over the last 10 years, including parents of students with IEPs and 504 plans, families whose children have been placed out of districts, and families who are even denied services to the table. Bring them altogether. Hold public hearings before the full school committee. Allow families to speak honestly, openly, and without fear. Most importantly, ensure these conversations are facilitated by an independent 3rd party moderator so families can trust that their voices will be heard fairly and objectively. And please do not limit these families to 3 minutes. 3 minutes is not enough time to tell the story of 10years. 3 minutes is not enough time to explain the impact these experiences have had on children and families. If we truly want to prevent this from

happening, we should really give people the space to speak. Watertown is fortunate to have a passionate community of parents who want the same thing that all of you want. For every child to have the opportunity to learn, succeed, and thrive. These families are not the problem. They are part of the solution. Listen to them, learn from them, and give them the opportunity to heal."

- "I was in Germany during the last school committee meeting.Germany has a hideous past, but how they've handled that past is remarkable.When they rebuilt the Reichstag roof and dome, they made the dome transparent glass to symbolize a transparent government. There are memorials, museums,displayed documents, and reminders of the holocaust, including the stumblingstones on the sidewalks in front of buildings marking where Jews lived, their names,their deportation dates to where they were deported, and if known, their date of death. Watertown could take a page from Germany's book on how to deal with deep wrongs to others. In Watertown's case, our children and their families. I'm a psychologist who has a specialty in abuse and have worked with perpetrators and survivors. Given the survey that will be presented, documenting accounts of deep wrongs to the children of Watertown, and given the Athena K12 report, which did not include the parents of the children whose services they were evaluating. I echo the earlier speaker who said that the school committee must hold public meetings moderated by a third party in which the parents of children denied services or not given the services to which they were entitled are given the opportunity to speak. If the school committee can put cell phones and school buses on the agenda,holding meetings in which parents are invited to speak about the wrongs done to their children is the least the school committee can do. In fact, it is the only way there can be reparative justice or any way forward given the hurtful and deeply wrong behavior on the part of our elected school committee members and our superintendent. Last, having missed the last student school committee meeting, I watched the recording. I was appalled. The speaker at the podium was not visible to the public and wasn't visible to the members of the school committee unless they twisted their bodies. For the most part, they didn't. Instead of watching the speaker,they watched their screens. The only place for the attending public to sit and watch the school committee members was behind the school committee members looking at their backs. This configuration mirrors exactly what is so obvious. The lack of respect and dismissiveness by our elected school committee members for the public who elected them to these positions. Thus, I ask a new business, city council president Mark Sideris, to invite the entire school committee and superintendent to use the city council chambers for school committee meetings where school committee members will actually have to look at the public and the speakers, and

the room's video and mics will allow everyone to speak and hear. I ask the chair of the school committee, chair Kendra Foley, to kindly accept President Sideris' kind invitation."

“My family and I have asked for meaningful academic instruction and evidence-based curriculum. Our daughter is now in 1st grade and still does not know her letters. We have asked the district first to address safety concerns, bullying, preserve music therapy services that she's had since toddlerhood, and ensure accountability when services fail. Too often, responsibility has been shifted to my 6-year-old daughter and onto me. The district continues to hire unqualified, untrained nurses that have put my child's safety in jeopardy. The district does not allow direct communication between my family and the nurse or the agency. When concerns about safety or education are raised, our family is met with barriers instead of solutions. These examples reflect the same broader problems with communication, transparency, accountability, and special education practices that were identified in the staff survey. Many families, including mine, continue to experience those same concerns. Many families do not disappear when it was announced that the current director of student services would be leaving. District leadership is aware of these concerns, yet they continue to persist. District leadership, including the director of student services,continues to make decisions regarding my daughter's education, safety, placement,and continues to recommend mediation. The superintendent and out of district and compliance coordinator are aware of all of these concerns. It is still happening. The reality requires more than an acknowledgment. It requires action. These problems did not end with the survey as they will not end with the departure of one administrator. Families have spoken. Staff have spoken. These excuses need to end right now. I ask the district to take accountability, to take action. Everyone's daughter or child, they cannot wait for actions to be taken. It needs to happen right now."

- “The district frequently boasts about CPAC's involvement in decision-making. Leadership points to CPACrepresentation as proof that families have a voice. This includes granting automatic seats to CPAC on the strategy development team and the hiring committee for the new interim director, and presumably, for the permanent director search as well.Under Massachusetts General Law Chapter 71b, the school committee is legally responsible for establishing and overseeing a legitimate CPAC. But there are growing community concerns about whether Watertown maintains a legally compliant and truly representative CPAC. State law requires the district to host an annual basic rights training in conjunction with CPAC. During the entire 2025, 2026 school year,no such

training was held. CPAC's own bylaws mandate two annual presentations tothe school committee. That hasn't happened since the 2023 school year. An annualCPAC officer election is required to be held every May, yet no election been held since May 2024, May 2025, or May 2026. CPAC representation participated in the listening sessions this spring, but nobody has seen their feedback or notes. There has been no outreach for priorities or input for in the interim director search. So, who exactly is CPAC representing when its officers' terms are long expired and only three general meetings are held in a school year? Who are they representing when families copy CPAC on emails detailing severe compliance issues and receive zero response? Yet, when the district hiredAthena to evaluate student services, two CPAC chairs were only parents interviewed. They speak on behalf of all families without interfacing with the majority of families. The district cannot continue to use an unelected CPAC as a rubber stamp to claim parent buy-in. You cannot fix a broken special education system by partnering with a phantom board while ignoring the actual experiences of families. Tonight, I am issuing a formal call for CPAC reform. The district must fulfill its statutory oversight duties under state law. It is time to enforce compliance, to restore legitimacy, and give Watertown families their voice back."

- "I did write a letter to everyone here or most people here, kind of cataloging our experiences from the last few years, starting with [child's name]'s eligibility for a 504 in 4th grade. Then we were switched to an IEP with very minimal services,and then back to a 504 for the middle school transition, which went disastrously.Then, [child's name] had a breakdown because of an assault in the middle school that we learned of later before giving a police report. So, a lot of time has elapsed. I think the most painful part of this besides seeing the suffering of your child, is just the abuse and the disregard that the student services director showed us in everyZoom meeting, promising things that she would go back on such as referrals for tours, just basically criminal behavior. So, I think we probably spent almost $70,000 paying a lawyer to fight this woman. We have come so close to moving from here so many times, but we knew our child needed these services or he would die, basically.In and out of hospitals, we did not need this treatment. I'm still very angry, and I don't know where to direct the anger. I know everyone's trying to do a good job, andI know that, like, it's hard to sleep at night if you're not doing a good job. So, I just hope that everyone in this room gets a really good sleep in the next few years and does the right thing."

August 17,2026 School Committee Meeting:
https://watertown.munitrac.ai/transcript?id=2026-08-17_TownMeeting-0u553.mp4&length=12000

- “I want to address the chair’s recent comment regarding a reported social media threat. Not to minimize any legitimate concern,but to ask the committee to consider how these incidents are characterized and what criteria elevate them to an official public forum. At the July 27 meeting, ChairFoley stated, about 10 days ago, I got a phone call from the Watertown Police. They were checking in because someone had posted a threat to me on the WatertownSpecial Education Alliance Facebook page. She did not specify it was a reported,possible, or perceived threat, nor that the comment was not made or endorsed by the advocacy page. She also failed to specify that the comment did not cite her or anyone by name. The Watertown Police Department was later contacted for more information regarding their investigation on this matter. On August 3, a detective confirmed that the police report had not yet been completed. I want to be clear that this admission does not establish that there was no police contact, no investigation,or no possible concern, but it raises the question of using a public forum without clearly distinguishing between a questionable comment and an official determination that a particular comment constitutes a credible threat. A simple online search for the comment in question defines the statement made as a harsh political ultimatum. And political speech, as the Watertown Strong SchoolsFacebook page demonstrated a decade ago, is clearly protected speech. A school committee member later stated on the same social media page that verbal and physical threats have been made by different sources to other school committee members and district staff that have involved the police. And, generally, these situations are not formally discussed by the committee. While it's possible for anyone in the public to request the exact number of times this has happened, I'monly asking for consistent governance. Publicly linking an advocacy page to police involvement can have consequences beyond the individual incident. Parents who participate in that forum may wonder if their legitimate advocacy is being associated with threatening conduct. The chair's official statement went on to encourage using emails, phone calls, and private meetings with her instead of engaging on social media. I ask the committee to recognize the potential chilling effect when an advocacy forum is publicly connected with law enforcement, while families are simultaneously being urged by the chair of a public body to move their concerns to private channels. Advocacy is not hostility. Criticism is not a threat, and disagreement with public leadership should not be conflated with either. I respectfully ask the committee to establish a consistent approach to publicly discussing potential threats that distinguishes carefully between verified facts and interpretations, and to preserve all public avenues for families to raise systemic concerns without being pushed to

address them behind closed doors."

- "At the last school committee meeting, I stood here and I suggested that this committee invite every family who has navigated the special education system over the last decade to a hearing where they could speak about their experiences. Tonight that hearing is on your agenda for a vote. This will be a critical step in starting the process to rebuild trust with families. As you prepare for this meeting, I urge you to consider some key parameters because the logistics do matter. Families are looking for a safe and intentional space where they can speak openly. They deserve, first and foremost,the opportunity to have adequate time to speak uninterrupted. These stories, as I mentioned last time, cannot be told in three minutes that are allowed during public forums. Three minutes is not enough time to explain issues that span over a decade,provide context, or convey the true impact these experiences have had on children and families. Meaningful listening requires meaningful time, which means creating a space that allows these experiences to be shared fully, thoughtfully, and without the pressure of a ticking clock, so this sends a clear message that you are willing to listen at length. The space is just as important. When families come forward to share deeply personal experiences, it's more respectful to genuine dialogue for them to speak directly before the committee rather than beside or behind its members. Speaking face to face acknowledges the courage it takes to tell these stories and reinforces the importance of eye contact. It indicates that you, the committee, both hear and see the speaker. I see tonight we've changed the setup a little bit, so we appreciate that. Thank you. When people are asked to speak from a location where they cannot easily see the listener, it can create a sense of distance and disconnect. A hearing intended to rebuild trust should be structured in a way that allows openness,attentiveness, and, most importantly, respect for every person who bravely chooses to speak up. And finally, attendance. Out of respect for every speaker, the meeting should be held on a night when every committee member is available to be present,along with the superintendent, and the new interim director of student services.After many years of neglect, this topic really does require the collective presence of those responsible for listening, learning, and serving the best interests of all students and families in this community."

- "I previously sent an email regarding this matter, but I'm here tonight to formally place a request on the record for a school committee agenda item addressing the governance and bylaw compliance within the WatertownSpecial Ed Parent Advisory Council or SEPAC. Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 71b Section 3 requires the school committee to establish a parent advisory council on special

education and provides that the council shall establish bylaws governing its officers and operational procedures. Watertown SEPAC's own adopted bylaws are equally clear. Article 4 provides that SEPAC officers are elected by the voting membership and hold office for one year. Article 7 states that election shall be the first order of business at the main meeting, and article 8 specifically states SEPAC,quote, shall hold an annual meeting of the voting members each year for the purpose of electing officers. These provisions do not contemplate officers serving indefinitely without an election. The community deserves public clarity as to why the required annual officer elections have been omitted for three consecutive years and under what authority the officers continue to serve. I therefore respectfully request two specific actions. First, that the SEPAC leadership reconsider its current plans to hold an election only for vacant officer seats and conduct a full open election for all officer positions this fall for the first time since January 2024. Second, that the school committee place SEPAC practices and bylaw compliance on an official meeting agenda. SEPAC is intended to provide parents of children with special needs a meaningful voice in the district's special education process. Its governance should therefore be transparent, accountable, and consistent with the rules established for the organization."

- "Tonight, I want to extend our sincere recognition and gratitude to the committee members who use their written comments in the superintendent's evaluation to directly address the ongoing painful challenges in special education experienced by manyWatertown families. Acknowledgment is an essential first step in repairing trust, in repairing broken trust. Excuse me. To Sheila Krishnan, thank you for openly validating how difficult and challenging this past year has been for our entire district community and so much that has come to light. To Mark Sideris, thank you for your honesty, and committing to further scrutiny, and recognizing that despite a plan moving forward, not all students are currently receiving the services that they need.To Lisa Capoccia, thank you for officially documenting the hard truths. That fear of retaliation kept many families from speaking freely in listening sessions, and for holding leadership accountable for delays in acknowledging and addressing special education concerns, which only further harmed relationships with many families. To Jessica Middlebrook, thank you for a fair assessment that noted an overall rating of exemplary is hard to justify when there remains limited evidence of meaningful change on concerns raised repeatedly by parents. To Rachel Kay, thank you for pragmatically centering special education as the primary area for improvement and voicing the vital need to repair the damage done over recent years. Our lived experiences being reflected in these comments matters. It tells us that our voices are

beginning to break through. While we want to believe in the hope expressed throughout the evaluation, I must share the reality that multiple families within the district have continued to experience distress throughout this summer. Families who do not feel safe speaking at this podium have contacted those of us who have joined together to continue speaking out. Even as the district's public rhetoric emphasizes the importance of rebuilding trust, administrative practices have continued to occur well into the month of August. Rebuilding trust requires total alignment between what is stated publicly and how families are actually treated. We urge you to use your oversight authority to turn these written acknowledgments into immediate verifiable relief and ensure that accountability becomes the new standard in Watertown."

- "Speaking with residents of Watertown, I hear a special ed crisis. This is not a crisis except in the sense that the outcome considered by Watertown can either lead to more disaster or to recovery. Watertown's noncompliance with legal mandates has long been known. The superintendent and the current chair of the school committee have known about this lack of compliance for years. The WEAsurvey, which was completed and submitted in 2019, seven years ago about the prior three years, was known to both and hidden, thus the term that should be used is scandal or cover up, not crisis. In addition, school committee members and others are blaming parents or groups of parents by calling them angry or too angry.These parents are blamed for the deep wrongs committed for years by the school department. Supposedly, it is their anger that is the problem, not the behavior of the school department or the school committee, who have committed these deep wrongs against the children and residents of Watertown. First, I have yet to experience this anger, and I'm one of the residents speaking about this issue.Second, blaming others, in this case parents, is often the best offense. But as the saying goes, if you're not angry, you're not paying attention. To blame an association of parents is to scapegoat parents. Everyone in Watertown should welcome every resident's concern and distress about the behavior of the Watertown School Department because wrongs to a generation of children deserve every ounce of concern, distress, and, yes, outrage,should there be outrage. The evaluation of the superintendent has been posted. It was a relief to see that in the evaluations, at least one member of the school committee detailed the scandal and cover up of the long standing lack of compliance with federal and state legal mandates for the education of all children,including those with 504s and IEPs. When these failures are not discussed in detail and do not have an impact on the overall evaluation of a superintendent, Watertown makes a mockery, not only of the evaluation process, but of the laws that govern us.Next, I ask the president of city council, President Mark Sideris, to offer in new

business the use of council chambers to the chair of the school committee, KendraFoley, who should graciously accept this offer. The fact that this committee holds meetings in a manner that is so dismissive of the public, which elected them to office, is appalling. We residents of Watertown deserve way better than what we've had even though today is a little bit changed. And we deserve to have school committee members who watch. This setup is beyond appeal in disrespect and acceptability on the part of elected city representatives. At the last school committee meeting, the WEA survey was presented, and each of you received a copy. I asked a member of the school committee to place, in new business, a public discussion of that survey. It is not too late to discuss a matter that should have been made public seven years ago."

September 14, 2026 School Committee Meeting:
https://watertown.munitrac.ai/transcript?id=2026-09-14_TownMeeting-0u619.mp4&length=12000

- "I'm here tonight as the parent of a child who is currently not attending school because we do not yet have a safe,transparent, and workable nursing plan in place for her return. The central issue is simple, can my daughter safely access her education when the people responsible for her medical care are assigned without meaningful parental involvement, without adequate preparation, and without allowing us to communicate directly with the nurse or nursing agency responsible for her care? These concerns are not new.They are the same safety and communication issues we raised in 2022 and remain unresolved today. The practical consequence is that my daughter is not currently in school. Her IEP requires an RN at all times, yet two of the last four nurses assigned to her were LPNs. We only learned this after one of those nurses was removed due to safety concerns. While that nurse continued working with my daughter, the district waited before sending a brief email notifying us of the termination. This raises serious concerns about compliance, transparency, and trust. Those same four nurses arrived at my house without my daughter's current seizure action plan,medical orders, or other required documentation. One nurse did not even know my daughter's name. I have repeatedly explained that nurses must have medical orders from a prescribing physician, yet the district and nursing agency have failed to provide those orders to the last four nurses assigned to my daughter, and have instead blamed me for the resulting problems. Ensuring that nurses have the documentation required to perform their duties safely is not my responsibility. That is precisely why the district contracts with and pays a nursing agency. Parents should not have to monitor whether basic nursing requirements are being met before they can feel safe to send their child to school. Tonight, we

are asking for a concrete plan for our daughter's safe return to school, including implementation of the RN requirement in her IEP, identification of the assigned nurse and agency, an opportunity to meet the nurse before services begin, direct and appropriate communication with the nurse and agency, confirmation that current medical documentation is available, and a clear process for notifying us of staff changing and incidents. My daughter should not have to remain out of school because adults responsible for coordinating her care have not yet established a safe, transparent, and working nursing plan. From a parent's perspective, the faces in central office may change but the structural failures remain exactly the same. The same lack of transparency, the same breakdown in basic operational oversight,and the same communication barriers that put my daughter at risk in 2022 are happening today in 2026. Shifting blame to families when internal logistics fail is an old pattern that new leadership has yet to break. When basic medical protocols,current doctor's orders, and IEP credentials fall through the cracks year after year, it proves that our central office systems are fundamentally broken, regardless of who is managing them. We want our daughter in school. We want her to receive an education. We want to work collaboratively with the district and the nursing agency to make that possible. I respectfully ask the school committee and the district leadership to help move these barriers so that my daughter can return to school safely."

- "I want to begin by reminding our community that the first SEPAC meeting of the school year is this Wednesday from 6:30 to 8:00 right here in the Lowell Learning Commons. I encourage all parents and caregivers to attend.Whether your child receives special ed services, you're new to the process, or you simply have questions about your child's learning or development, SEPAC is a resource for you. That's why I'm here tonight. I believe Watertown SEPAC is an important resource, but right now, it needs stronger structure, participation, and support. Our SEPAC has eight board positions, but only four are currently active.We're beginning this school year at 50% capacity with four seats vacant. TheSEPAC bylaws call for annual elections. The last election was held in January 2024.There have been no elections during the past two school years. A parent advisory council cannot remain effective without opportunities for new parents to step into leadership. So I'm asking the school committee and administration to hold the current SEPAC leadership accountable to its own bylaws and ensure that a full board election is held as soon as possible. An election is an opportunity to welcome new parents to step up, and bring their experiences to the table, and shape the future of the SEPAC. But an election is only part of the solution. Parents have to know SEPAC exists.Average attendance at SEPAC meetings last year was only about 15 people. I believe that's because parents don't know

what SEPAC is and how it can help them.At 5:15PM today, the superintendent sent the first district communication informing the community about Wednesday night's meeting. At tonight's school committee agenda, there's a single bullet point stating only the time and location of the meeting. Before these items, the only communication from SEPAC was presented via Facebook. Our community was not formally informed until 5:00 today, 48 hours before the first meeting. That's not enough to reach the families who need this resource. Facebook is not a district wide communication system, nor is it an equitable way to reach our entire school committee. We've established communication channels that are routinely used to make families aware of school and district events. SEPAC deserves that same level of visibility. When does the district stop doing the bare minimum for the special ed community and start going above and beyond? The district communicates regularly about school councils, FTOevents, conferences, back to school nights, classroom representatives, and school committee meetings. SEPAC deserves that same visibility. There's also an accessibility concern. With only 48 hours notice, parents are not able to plan accordingly. I'm asking the schoolcommittee to work with the SEPAC chairs and establish a virtual option forWednesday's meeting. If we want more parents participating, we should be making it easier, not harder for our families to attend. Going forward, I'm asking the district to consistently promote SEPAC through ParentSquare, newsletters, superintendent and principal communications, FTO communications, and other district wide channels. Because this isn't simply about getting people into a meeting. It's about making sure that when a parent has a question about special ed, they know where to turn for information, resources, and support. We have the people. What we need is the structure, the opportunity, and the support. So tonight, I'm asking for fourthings. Follow the bylaws, hold a full SEPAC election as soon as possible, provide a hybrid option for SEPAC meetings, and make SEPAC a regular part of the district's communication network. If we do those things, we have an opportunity to build astrong effective SEPAC for Watertown's special ed community."

- "Hannah Arendt has said, when government lies, chaos ensues. Again, at the last meeting, data from evaluations of students receiving academic support was presented. The data was presented and received as acceptable. If I understood the information correctly, of the middle school students receiving support, at the end of the school year, only 15.4 were at or above grade level in language based skills, and 16.7% were at or above grade level in math. We are failing to educate a very large population of students. How can this be acceptable? Watertown special ed teachers don't have to be certified or licensed. The licensing for these professionals is only preferred, not required. Would any of you go to a hospital

where the doctors and nurses did not have to be licensed? Would you seek the counsel of an unlicensed lawyer? Even our school buildings are LEED certified, not just certifiable. This lack of professionals contributes to our unacceptable performance. Those of you who know me know that I have given my heart and soul to making sure our school buildings will give our children our most precious resource, a future. However, if we continue to fail to give our children the basic reading, writing, and math skills on the inside of these buildings, how are we giving them a future? What happens inside our incredible buildings needs to be as productive and sustainable as the structural outside of our buildings."

- "A number of us are here tonight to ask the district to revisit the special education strategy plan. What we are presenting cannot fit into a single threeminute comment, so several parents will be speaking consecutively. We would like to echo concerns explicitly raised by multiple school committee members in their comments on the superintendent's recent evaluation. As committee members noted, this plan focuses heavily on administrative tasks rather than measurable student outcomes. We agree that the plan details what staff members will do differently, but it does not address what families will experience and what students will achieve. Most critically, while the Athena K-12 report flagged out of compliance service delivery and overwhelmed chairs, team chairs, this plan does not address compliance metrics. There are no targets for 100% IEP service delivery, no tracking of missed service hours, and no IEP quality review rubrics. Structural changes are only meaningful if they result in better outcomes for students. And that requires the district to verify that services are being delivered as written. There is also concern about how the District plans to measure community trust. The superintendent's draft goals for this school year mentions hosting more listening sessions and hiring a partner to review existing survey data. But as school committee members themselves noted, fears of retaliation, limited participation in past administration-led listening sessions may be an issue to consider. The data collection process is fundamentally flawed when families who have been harmed are expected to speak openly in a discussion led by the administration that oversaw that harm. It is highly likely that the previous listening sessions have already reached everyone willing to participate in them, and structural changes should be considered such as having them hosted by an independent party if more are to be held. Furthermore, hiring a consultant to audit existing survey data is equally concerning because the process for designing, collecting, and reviewing those results were all done internally. Reviewing potentially skewed data does not create transparency or fix the root problems. Genuine accountability requires an independent third party to conduct fresh, confidential surveys and lead neutral community conversations. Until this

plan includes measurable student outcomes and true accountability, it remains just a description of internal activity. We ask that these critical gaps be addressed and that the strategy plan be revisited under newleadership and third party review with meaningful family participation."

- "Every year, families un-enroll their children, seek private school options, or place their children out of district at their own expense, yet it doesn't appear that the district performs any outreach to learn why. I could list more than a dozen students from the current 6th grade cohort alone who have left Watertown Public Schools over the last three to four years for a variety of very valid and, in many cases, concerning reasons. Years ago, this school committee discussed implementing exit interviews for un-enrolling families, but it's unclear if this was ever implemented as no public reporting has taken place. Multiple families here tonight who've removed their children from Watertown Public Schools this year can attest that they received no exit survey. It's a missed learning opportunity when there's no effort to collect data,no push to understand root causes, and no strategy to fix the systemic issues driving families away. When families walk out the door after years of struggle and hear nothing from leadership, it reinforces the feeling that our children are treated as expendable data points rather than valued members of the community. Amidst the current special education landscape in Watertown, we believe a family exit survey and interview protocol implemented as another immediately actionable initiative. This protocol should automatically offer every departing family a confidential survey and an optional interview with trends reported publicly to the committee. If Watertown wants to improve its special education outcomes and build real community trust, it must stop ignoring the families who leave and start using their feedback to identify the issues. Another concrete suggestion relates to data integrity, specifically how the district collects caregiver feedback following IEPmeetings. If you visit the student services page on the district website right now,the active IEP meeting feedback form instructs parents to request follow-up fromKathy Desmarais or Jason DelPorto. Neither of those administrators work forWatertown Public Schools anymore. Outdated forms reflect a lack of basic administrative oversight. More importantly, there's a severe flaw in how this survey has been distributed. Among parents questioned in our community, those who hadsmooth, positive IEP meetings routinely received the feedback survey, while parentswho went through difficult or contentious meetings were never sent the link at all.When a feedback mechanism is selectively distributed, the data collected is completely skewed. It gives leadership a false narrative of satisfaction while silencing the very families experiencing systemic failures. We're requesting two immediate operational fixes. First to update the personnel contacts on the district feedback form and second

to establish an automated survey to every family of anyIUEP or 504 meeting regardless of how the meeting went or whether or not a consensus was reached. To stand by the claim that the district is listening to families, it must implement an honest universal feedback system that captures the full reality of all experiences."

- "I'm here to ask the district for two additional action items that should be prioritized as part of the special education strategy moving forward. First,we ask that the district accelerate its timeline for delivering essential specialeducation information to all families. Under the current draft goals for this schoolyear, the release of a parent facing special education handbook is scheduled for midwinter. Waiting months to provide families with information that already existsregarding their rights and procedures only prolongs the perception of administrative gatekeeping that was highlighted in the Athena K-12 report. Caregivers should nothave to search, question, or hire advocates in order to understand how evaluation timelines work, how to request an evaluation, or how to pursue their proceduralsafeguards. This is basic foundational information that the district already possesses. I know that this information would have greatly helped a family like mine when starting out our own process. It should take weeks, not months, to assembleand distribute this information. Therefore, we ask the administration to prioritizereleasing initial caregiver special education rights and navigation guide as soon as possible. Proactively handing parents the tools they need to navigate the system shows that the district views families as true partners. Please do not defer this simple essential deliverable into next year. And, additionally, families need immediate clarity on Watertown's special education programs, of which there are many. Specifically, there needs to be a published program guide with explicit entrance and exit criteria for programs like ISP, LSP, and connections. Athena K-12 concluded that such a guide is not publicly available.Right now, these programs feel like moving targets. For example, the integrated support program, it's been described to one family as a standalone therapeutic program, while it's referred to as a subseparate behavioral program to others. When a program's definition changes depending on who the administration is speaking to,that's what damages trust. Families cannot participate as equal partners on IEPteams if they do not have the clear objective standards for what a program offers,who it serves, and what criteria are required for a student to step down, excuse me,to step down into a less restrictive environment. Creating a clear guide for each specialized program is achievable. Defining our programs publicly will remove ambiguity, protect student rights, and build the structural transparency identified as missing in the Athena report. These requests that we've made this evening are concrete and attainable. They would immediately improve transparency,collaboration, and communication

for families. So rather than have a plan with more than 70 action items that are not measurable, we believe the district should focus on a small number of explicit actions that will have an immediate impact.”