

CITY OF HOLYOKE
SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES

SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES

MONDAY, APRIL 14, 2025

TIME: 6:00PM

PRESENT: Mayor Joshua Garcia, Receiver Anthony Soto, Dr. Yadilette Rivera-Colón, Devin Sheehan, Mildred Lefebvre, Rosalee Tensely- Williams, Gladys Lebron-Martinez, Orlando Isaza, Jay Whelihan, William Collamore, Stephen Mahoney, Principal Lori McKenna, Marianne Currier, Principal Felipe Johnson, Sarita Gaveline, Rebecca Tomlison, and Student Representative: Nicholas Rodriguez

CALL TO ORDER – ROLL CALL – PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

School Committee Vice-Chair Dr. Rivera-Colón called the meeting to order at **6:01 p.m.** and announced that pursuant to M.G.L. c. 30A, s. 20, attendees are hereby informed that a video and audio recording is being made of the meeting and the meeting is being live-streamed on Zoom.

Roll call: Mayor Garcia-present, Dr. Rivera-Colón-present, Mr. Sheehan-present, Ms. Lefebvre-present, Ms. Lebron-Martinez-present, Ms. Tensley-Williams-present, Mr. Isaza-present, Mr. Whelihan-present, Mr. Collamore-present, Mrs. Wilson – **absent**

- Ms. Lefebvre asked for a Personal Point of Privilege/ Congratulated Mr. Sheehan on his induction to the National School Board Association for the 2025-2026.

1. STUDENT SHOWCASE - McMahon School

- Principal Karen McDermott introduced her 6 students along with Mr. Adam Brownschwei to sing a song for the School Committee. Great performance from the Cheetahs.

2. PUBLIC COMMENT-

- Kyle Chambers, 85 Lincoln St, Holyoke discussed the partial decision on local control. Mr. Chambers urges the school committee to push back on as it creates unknown variables on how decisions are made. DESE has used the MCAS scores to place the district in receivership and this has failed the educators, students and parents. Educators deserve to have a safe working environment. The district and community need to come together and full local control is important.
- Brandy Bellaciccio, 10 Smith St, South Hadley asked that the district make a public comment statement of support of full local control, with

no exit assurances, and that the Holyoke Teachers Association expects to bargain with Holyoke. We are asking for a contract that is comparable to neighboring districts, to increase teacher retention and set guidelines that affect our most vulnerable populations in special education.

- Peter Duffy, 446 Appleton St, Holyoke expressed his frustration that teachers are leaving. The only way to keep teacher retention is to bargain for a contract that is competitive with other districts. Teachers deserve better compensation, benefits and shorter work year. It's important to let DESE know that they had their chance and it's now important for the school committee and district to have their chance.
- Nick Cream, 7 Warner St, South Hadley who is also the President of the Holyoke Teachers Association. Would like local control so they are able to determine their working conditions and be at the table. They should be at the table with full collective bargaining rights. He urges the school committee for full exit from the State receivership.
- Mr. Sheehan asked to comment in general. He said that he encourages members present to email the members of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education. It's important to have your voices heard because the committee is hearing your voices.

3. COMMUNICATION AND REPORTS

A. Student Reports

- HHS North- Nicholas Rodriguez
 - Mr. Rodriguez expressed that 10th and 11th graders are participating in a variety of field trips. Students are visiting various colleges like Clark, Baypath, Westfield State and many more. Students with passing reports cards on term 3, received ice cream sundays at lunch. Wrapped up March Madness and raised \$269, with MS. McKenna being taped on the wall. Student Summit members met and focused on core values, how they see value in these and how this will be used for the remainder of the year. Lil Shop of Horror was amazing and congrats to all the performers.
- HHS Dean Campus-Evan Kenndey via email to the Vice-Chair
 - Mr. Kennedy sent an email that summarized. Jaden Gunnerson received the prestigious award in vocational. Spirit week went without a hitch, it was teachers vs. students in the volleyball tournament. Attendance rate was 98% for the ELA MCA States.

B. Superintendent's Report

- [Alternative Program](#)
 - Receiver/ Superintendent Soto explained that they will present the slide and it will hopefully clarify any questions the committee might have reading the alternative program that would like to be started next year.
 - Ms. Lefebvre shared her concerns with the program as this had already been approved by DESE. At this time, she feels that the opinions of the committee don't matter. Can this affect the direction of local control if we don't agree? Receiver/ Superintendent Soto explained that the application was submitted but he is looking for the approval of the school committee also. This is not set in stone but took a proactive approach in getting the approval of DESE. Ms. Lefebvre wanted it on record that her major concern was that she did not want to see this another Center of Excellence. Students with IEP and Behavioral disorders were moved to separate schools. Receiver/ Superintendent Soto said that this was not a separate school but another program from the Opportunity Academy. This program will provide students access to social, emotional learning, mental health support and opportunities to explore their passion again.
 - Principal McKenna explained the program will allow them to address some of the challenges in grades 7th through 10th. These are students who had a history of low academic performance, gaps in learning and chronically disruptive behaviors where general education doesn't support them enough. This leads to failure and we are trying to buffer this by providing this program. Mr. Mahoney clarified this program will be for the younger students who are too young for the student profile for the Success Center. The team has reviewed the feedback from the School Committee and also past mistakes to ensure that a well thought and developed program is presented. Ms. Currier said they looked backwards through the Center Excellence and the issues that arose from the program. The district has worked hard for students of disadvantaged backgrounds and disabilities. Have partnered with Opportunity Academy, Lighthouse and a number of out of districts schools placements that house our students with significant needs. Our focus is to ensure the success of our students in this model. They are invested in the maintaining of the access and support of the individual students. Students will be able to participate in all extracurricular activities, that their grade level peers would have access to school, related events along with all access to college and career. There will be very clear entrance and exit criteria with that transparency about that process, so that it's clear when a student is to enter and what students need to do to then exit the alternative program and return to one of the other settings, whether it be a high school campus or a middle school campus. Mr. Johnson the program has

4 primary goals, the 1st one being to address behavioral root causes and prepare students for social and emotional success in a general education setting. The intent is for this to be done through daily sel support through structured morning and afternoon circles. A dedicated SEL course and consistent goal monitoring, with additional individualized behavioral supports, including a primary person model which we currently use at OA check-in/checkout system and regular case conferencing. Additionally, there will be small class sizes and a trauma-informed approach, students building trusting relationships that encourage self-regulation, conflict, resolution, and emotional growth. and finally, a clear entry and exit criteria framework. Second goal is to close academic learning goals. Targeted academic interventions built into the schedule. And then you'll notice that the schedule has daily instructional blocks that are intentionally scheduled to align with peak focus times to support attention and stamina. Finally, students will engage in monthly goal reviews. The intent here is that student-led conferences reflect on academic progress supported by families and staff. The 3rd goal is to maintain student access to health, fitness and the arts, so daily instruction, health, fitness, and the arts will be part of the daily schedule along with the schedule intentionally including creative movement-based courses. The 4th goal is to maintain student connection to middle school and high school extracurricular programming students will fully be eligible to participate from their sending school, and the school schedule will mirror those of Dean and North and other middle schools to ensure access to extracurricular and after school opportunities.

- Mr. Sheehan asked for details on how the ability for students to participate in extracurricular activities looks like. Mr. Johnson explained that it would be communication with the athletic department and directors and working the schedules to meet this requirement. Follow up question from Mr. Sheehan about if transportation is provided and is a budget being created. Receiver/ Superintendent Soto said that in unique circumstances we need access we do have vans and do what is available but PVTa is also provided. Ms. Thompson showed a schedule example, which is provided in the slide. A block schedule will not will not be able to serve the social and emotional needs of the students. Mr. Sheehan asked if they will be able to access vocational programs or exploratories? Receiver/ Superintendent Soto said they would not be able within the program. Mr. Sheehan said a better path needs to be paved in this section.
- Next year would be about 15 of students that would start and with the 10th grade. Councilors will be identifying the students with needs in both high schools.
- Ms. Lefebvre shared her frustration that this has been the same alternative

- program as the TIP. This doesn't seem like it's a different program, at all.
- Finally, student-led conferences. That's another thing that will be adopted from this program at OA. It's called a case conference. So students have smart goals that they're setting, both reflecting on their wins and their challenges. And then, finally, is a behavior incentive system, so the point of this system is that we intend to focus on progress and not punishment. Students advance by demonstrating growth rather than being penalized. Ms. Currier expressed that the biggest difference is that students did not have the ability to integrate with their peers in general education.
- This program will be housed at the Metcalf School with Opportunity Academy and Success Center.
- Dr. Rivera-Colón asked about staffing the program and is it in line with our budget. Receiver/ Superintendent Soto said that they haven't hired anyone yet, as they are waiting for the approval of the School Committee and it is included in the budget.

Motion- Mr. Isaza made the motion to give authorization to the Receiver/Superintendent to pursue planning and implementation of the alternative program. 2nd by Ms. Tensley-Williams

Mayor Garcia-yes, Dr. Rivera-Colón-yes, Mr. Sheehan-yes, Ms. Lebron-Martinez-yes, Ms. Tensley-Williams - yes, Mr. Isaza-yes, Mr. Whelihan – yes, Mr. Collamore – yes,

Vote passed unanimously

- Class Rank-
 - Receiver/ Superintendent Soto explained that counselors have brought forward a recommendation to change class rank from the traditional ways. Instead of being ranked 4th in your class or 5th in your class, you would move towards a class rank that groups kids, so you would be in the top 10% or top class 20%. Some of the concerns are students opting for easier classes and not taking challenging classes due to jeopardizing class rank.

Motion: Ms. Lefebvre made the motion to move the classroom class rank and proposed changes to the Leadership, Accountability, and Measurements Subcommittee. 2nd Mr. Isaza

Mayor Garcia-yes, Dr. Rivera-Colón-yes, Mr. Sheehan-yes, Ms. Lefebvre-yes, Ms. Lebron-Martinez-yes, Ms. Tensley-Williams -yes, Mr. Isaza-yes, Mr. Whelihan – yes, Mr. Collamore – yes

Vote passed unanimously

- Middle School Work Group (FYI)-
 - Receiver/ Superintendent Soto announced that this has been happening all year and continues to plan a strong middle school experience next year. This informational purpose only.

C. Vice Chair Report

- Evaluation Plan -
 - Ms. Lefebvre asked the Vice-Chair to remove the recommendation as they will be using the DESE model for the evaluation process.

4. NEW BUSINESS

A. Out of State Field Trips-

Motion: Mr. Sheehan made the motion to accept the out-of-state field trip to New England Air Museum on May 1, 2025. 2nd by Ms. Lefebvre

Mayor Garcia-yes, Dr. Rivera-Colón-yes, Mr. Sheehan-yes, Ms. Lefebvre-yes, Ms. Lebron-Martinez-yes, Ms. Tensley-Williams -yes, Mr. Isaza-yes, Mr. Whelihan – yes, Mr. Collamore – yes

Vote passed unanimously

Motion: Mr. Sheehan made the motion to accept the out-of-state field trip to Brownstone Outdoor Adventure Park on May 27, 2025. 2nd by Ms. Lefebvre

Mayor Garcia-yes, Dr. Rivera-Colón-yes, Mr. Sheehan-yes, Ms. Lefebvre-yes, Ms. Lebron-Martinez-yes, Ms. Tensley-Williams -yes, Mr. Isaza-yes, Mr. Whelihan – yes, Mr. Collamore – yes

Vote passed unanimously

Motion: Mr. Sheehan made the motion to accept the out-of-state field trip to Brownstone Outdoor Adventure Park on June 6, 2025. 2nd by Ms. Lefebvre

Mayor Garcia-yes, Dr. Rivera-Colón-yes, Mr. Sheehan-yes, Ms. Lefebvre-yes, Ms. Lebron-Martinez-yes, Ms. Tensley-Williams -yes, Mr. Isaza-yes, Mr. Whelihan – yes, Mr. Collamore – yes

Vote passed unanimously

B. Approval of Meeting Minutes

Motion: Ms. Lefebvre made the motion to accept and approve the meeting minutes of [11.21.24 Finance and Operations Subcommittee Meeting Minutes](#). 2nd Ms. by Tensley-Williams

Mayor Garcia-yes, Dr. Rivera-Colón-yes, Mr. Sheehan-yes, Ms. Lefebvre-yes, Ms. Lebron-Martinez-yes, Ms. Tensley-Williams -yes, Mr. Isaza-yes, Mr. Whelihan – yes, Mr. Collamore – yes

Vote passed unanimously

Motion: Ms. Lefebvre made the motion to accept and approve the meeting minutes of [12.17.24 Finance and Operations Subcommittee Meeting Minutes](#). 2nd by Ms. Tensley-Williams

Mayor Garcia-yes, Dr. Rivera-Colón-yes, Mr. Sheehan-yes, Ms. Lefebvre-yes, Ms. Lebron-Martinez-yes, Ms. Tensley-Williams -yes, Mr. Isaza-yes, Mr. Whelihan – yes, Mr. Collamore – yes

Vote passed unanimously

C. Orders

- Attendance: How many high school students have met the threshold for the District to officially withdraw them and are still on the books affecting our attendance rate?
- CTE: How many students currently out of district at the CTE program were enrolled in Holyoke District school during their 8th grade year.

Motion: Ms. Lefebvre made the motion to postpone this for our next meeting, motion to table the order introduced by Committee Member Miss Eleanor Wilson, that the Receiver/ Superintendent, gather information the following and present it back to the school committee. 2nd by Mr. Sheehan

Mayor Garcia-yes, Dr. Rivera-Colón-yes, Mr. Sheehan-yes, Ms. Lefebvre-yes, Ms. Lebron-Martinez-yes, Ms. Tensley-Williams -yes, Mr. Isaza-yes, Mr. Whelihan – yes, Mr. Collamore – yes

Vote passed unanimously

D. Updates of Committees

- Policy and Governance Subcommittee
 - April 23rd next meeting at noon.
- Finance and Operations Subcommittee
 - April 17th next meeting at 5:30pm
- Joint City Council/School Committee
 - No update
- Local Control Subcommittee
 - Waiting for next dates from DESE.
- Leadership, Accountability and Measurement Subcommittee
 - No update

6. ONGOING BUSINESS

A. Policy Updates/ Removal/ Addition

Motion: Ms. Lefebvre made the motion to table recommendation to vote to accept and approve that all School Committee policy updates, including adding and removing policies will be effective July 1, 2025. 2nd by Mr. Sheehan

Mayor Garcia-yes, Dr. Rivera-Colón-yes, Mr. Sheehan-yes, Ms. Lefebvre-yes, Ms. Lebron-Martinez-yes, Ms. Tensley-Williams -yes, Mr. Isaza-yes, Mr. Whelihan – yes, Mr. Collamore – yes

Vote passed unanimously

7. ANNOUNCEMENTS

- April 17th, Morgan Family Fun Night: Bingo for books at 5:30pm
- April 30th, Lawrence Presents: Earth Day Celebration at 3:30pm-5:00pm

Motion: Mr. Sheehan made the motion to enter executive session, not to return to open session, because discussion could have a detrimental effect on the public body with topics of collective bargaining and non-union contract negotiations. 2nd by Mr. Collamore

Meeting adjourned 7:36pm