

**Nantucket School Committee  
Meeting Minutes  
December 16, 2025**

Present Members: Chair Laura Gallagher Byrne, Vice-Chair Shantaw Bloise-Murphy (arrival 6:30), Timothy Lepore, Esmeralda Martinez, Vincent Murphy, Student Representative Danielle Lewis, and Superintendent Elizabeth Hallett

The December 16, 2025, School Committee meeting was called to order at 6:02 PM in the Nantucket High School, Large Instruction Room (LGI) by Chair Laura Gallagher Byrne. A motion was made by Esmeralda Martinez, seconded by Vincent Murphy. The agenda was approved unanimously.

Announcement: this meeting is being audio and video recorded

**Public Comment**

Annie Ard, a senior student and cheerleader, provided public comment regarding accessibility concerns at school athletic facilities. She shared her family's experience, explaining that her father has a T4 spinal cord injury and uses a wheelchair, which has made attending her high school events extremely difficult due to limited accessible seating, steep terrain, and rough gravel pathways. She described how existing handicap areas provide obstructed views and require unsafe or strenuous travel, creating barriers not only for her father but for other spectators with disabilities. Ms. Ard emphasized that current facilities limit access for families and community members and expressed the need for new or improved facilities to ensure equitable access for student athletes' supporters and the broader community.

Madison Massey, a student and JV girls soccer player, spoke in favor of a turf field. She stated that the current grass fields are in poor condition, lead to injuries, and cannot handle heavy use. She expressed that turf would be a safer and more durable long-term solution and urged the committee to choose the turf option in the best interest of student athletes.

Erin Myers spoke about accessibility concerns affecting families with disabilities. She stated that the current athletic fields do not allow individuals with disabilities to attend events and that this group is being overlooked. Ms. Myers raised concerns about ADA compliance, potential liability, and the risk of lawsuits or loss of federal funding. She questioned what future athletic seasons would look like if improvements are delayed and emphasized that continuing to postpone action is unacceptable for students and the community.

Richard Brannigan thanked the committee and community for their efforts and stated that PFAS and drinking water are the central concerns. He shared a personal example of his granddaughter losing a soccer season due to an injury on a grass field. Based on the information presented, he expressed support for a turf field as the safer option and noted that other environmental impacts already exist, citing runoff from a nearby car wash, including detergents and wax. He urged the community and upcoming boards to support the turf proposal moving forward.

Madden Myers, a student athlete and soccer goalie, spoke in support of installing a turf field. She described multiple injuries she sustained while playing on the grass fields, which she attributed to poor and unsafe field conditions rather than maintenance efforts. She noted that since moving to a turf field last season, she has not experienced any injuries. Ms. Myers emphasized that grass fields cannot safely support the level of use they receive and that frequent reconditioning is not feasible. She stated that turf would provide a safer, more consistent playing surface, require less maintenance over time, and support the large number of students who participate in athletics, helping keep them safe and engaged.

RJ Turcotte from the Nantucket Land and Water Council spoke about the ongoing discussion regarding artificial turf. He stated that while student athletes deserve the best possible playing surface, questions raised in 2022 about field maintenance practices, costs, and alternatives to turf have not been fully answered. He emphasized the need for clearer information on maintenance, long-term impacts, and finances before moving forward. Mr. Turcotte urged the committee to carefully vet the project to ensure it is the best decision for student athletes, the

community, and water quality.

Lisa Wisentaner thanked the committee for their time and effort and acknowledged the difficulty of the decision. She stated that the discussion should focus on needs rather than wants, emphasizing that the school and its athletic programs are growing and will continue to grow. She expressed that current facilities cannot support the increasing level of student participation and that decisions must address both current and future needs. Wisentaner urged the committee to invest in facilities that will support students and prevent the same issues from recurring.

### **Superintendent's Update**

Superintendent Hallett reported on the presentation of the Massachusetts Association of School Superintendents Certificate of Academic Excellence. She apologized for not having the physical awards available at the meeting and noted they would be delivered to the students at school. She explained that the award is given annually to a senior in the top five percent of the class who demonstrates outstanding academic achievement and character. She announced Danielle Lewis as the recipient and highlighted her strong academic performance, interest in STEM, involvement in theater, community service, and future college aspirations.

Dr. Hallett then presented the first National School Development Council Award for Academic Growth and Student Leadership and Learning, which honors seniors who demonstrate strong academic effort, positive leadership, and admirable character. She announced Dayanara Garcia Turcios as a recipient, highlighting her journey from El Salvador to Nantucket, her determination to pursue challenging courses, and her goal of becoming a nurse to promote empathy. Dr. Hallett also noted Ms. Garcia Turcio's involvement as a mentor in the Big Brother Big Sister program and her core values of family and kindness. She plans to attend UMass Boston or Fairfield University in the fall.

Superintendent Hallett announced the second National School Development Council award recipient, Sayam Thapamager. She described him as an energetic and positive student with a passion for STEM, particularly AP Chemistry and math, and an interest in culinary arts. Mr. Thapamager enjoys building helpful devices and hopes to become a mechanical engineer, possibly designing prosthetics. He also gained research experience in scalloping and values kindness and family, lessons from his mother. Sayam plans to attend Wentworth or WPI. Hallett congratulated all three award recipients and noted their promise for future success.

Dr. Hallett provided an overview of the 2026–2027 Nantucket Public Schools calendar. She noted that the schedule was developed collaboratively with the Nantucket Teachers Association. Pre-service days will run from August 31 to September 3, with the first day of school on September 8, the day after Labor Day. There will be no additional half day in March, and November 25 is now a full vacation day. December 23 is proposed as a half day to allow families to travel for the holidays. Vacation weeks remain unchanged, and the last day of school is June 23, with five potential snow days before the fiscal year ends on June 30. The calendar reflects agreement between administrators and the union and is submitted for school committee approval. She then invited Nantucket High School Principal Mandy Hilemn to present the John and Abigail Adams Scholarships.

Ms. Bloise-Murphy arrival - 6:30 pm

Ms. Hilemn highlighted the achievements of students receiving the John and Abigail Adams Scholarship, which provides tuition credit for Massachusetts public colleges for up to four years. She explained that eligibility is based on MCAS scores, ranking in the top 25% of their district, and Massachusetts residency. Students may retake assessments if needed for other programs, such as the Seal of Biliteracy. She emphasized that this merit-based scholarship is a significant honor and encouraged students to keep their award letters, which can be used toward tuition. This year, 39 students received the scholarship, including some who have since moved to other schools but remain Massachusetts residents.

### **Presentations and discussions of issues to the Committee**

The YONDR Initiative presentation moved to January 6.

### **Committee discussions and votes to be taken**

The committee moved onto the discussion and possible vote on potential revisions to Vito Capizzo Stadium.

Mr. Murphy shared that he has carefully examined all sides of the issue over multiple meetings, taking detailed notes from public comment and discussion, which he noted has generally reflected support for turf by an approximate four- or five-to-one margin, despite strong emotions surrounding the topic. As a scientist, he acknowledged the existing research, noting that while some studies are informative, others remain incomplete,

and cautioned against relying solely on science without considering broader context. He emphasized the importance of weighing scientific information alongside demonstrated student and school need, highlighting student testimony as particularly compelling, as well as the financial implications of continued delays. Mr. Murphy stated that prolonged debate has significantly increased project costs, rising from approximately \$13 million to \$23 million and continuing to grow annually. He explained that while some concerns, such as PFAS, have been addressed and others like microplastics remain under-studied, decisions must be based on available data rather than fear alone. Taking into account science, student and school needs, and fiscal responsibility, he expressed confidence in his position and indicated that student need was ultimately the most persuasive factor in his thinking, while welcoming further input before any formal motion is made.

Ms. Martinez said she didn't have much to add, explaining that she agrees with what Mr. Murphy had already said.

Ms. Bloise-Murphy shared that she remains conflicted on the issue, agreeing that decisions should be guided by the science currently available while also expressing concern about the unknowns and the possibility that future findings could change current understanding. She noted that, as elected officials, the committee has a responsibility to represent what constituents are clearly and strongly asking for. She also expressed concern about how the proposal will be received at town meeting and whether it will ultimately pass, identifying that as a major source of her hesitation. Despite these concerns, she agreed that a decision needs to be made, as costs continue to rise and students deserve a field they can be proud of and able to use successfully.

Dr. Lepore said he supports most of the proposed revisions, including making the facility handicap accessible and improving the concession stand, fieldhouse, bathrooms, and track. However, he stated that he is opposed to installing turf fields, citing concerns about PFAS, microplastics, long-term environmental impact, disposal of turf materials, and overall cost. He expressed a preference for improving natural grass as a safer and more responsible option and noted uncertainty about the specific type of turf being proposed and whether it has been adequately tested. While he acknowledged and appreciated student input and community engagement, he said he does not believe turf is the right long-term solution and would not support any proposal that includes turf fields.

Ms. Lewis thanked the Nantucket community for attending and sharing their voices, noting that the level of student and community engagement was powerful and meaningful. She acknowledged the effort students put into expressing their views, including written statements, and emphasized how seriously the issue has been taken. Speaking as a student representative, she stated that injuries occur under current conditions and that frozen grass fields pose real risks to student athletes. She expressed that students need safer playing conditions and stressed that, even for those who are graduating or have already moved on, the situation should not continue unchanged.

Chair Gallagher Byrne said that her perspective has changed since the issue was discussed several years ago and that she had previously shared concerns similar to Dr. Lepore's. After hearing extensive public comment, reviewing research, and listening to committee discussion, she said her thinking shifted. She emphasized that sports should be viewed as a requirement rather than a privilege and noted that the strong show of support from students for turf and a synthetic track was the most compelling factor in her decision. She concluded by stating that she believed the committee was ready to move forward and asked for a motion.

Dr. Lepore made a motion to table stadium revisions until they receive more information.

Committee members expressed confusion about the purpose and procedure of the vote, asking for clarification on what a yes or no vote would mean. There was confusion if a second motion was required to table the vote. Ms. Bloise-Murphy accidentally made a second, but no one moved the motion. Point of order - if there is no second the motion fails. The vote did not carry.

The committee discussion moved on.

Chair Gallagher Byrne made a motion to amend the proposed revisions to the Vito Capizzo Stadium project to include turf fields and a synthetic track. Ms. Bloise-Murphy amended the motion to require that any turf ultimately selected be independently tested in accordance with the recommendations of the project's consultants. Dr. Lepore asked about the field hockey field. Through the chair, Dr. Hallett explained that the proposed revisions are from the September 22, 2025 plans that do not include changes to the field hockey field. This motion was not moved.

Point of order from the audience to Madam Chair, clarification if Ms. Bloise-Murphy seconded Dr. Lepore's motion. The response was no.

Ms. Gallagher Byrne made a motion to amend the revisions to Capizzo Stadium presented to the School Committee on September 22, 2025, changing the grass field to a synthetic turf field and the asphalt track to a

polyurethane gel track. Mr. Murphy seconded the motion, with Ms. Martinez, Ms. Bloise-Murphy in favor, and Dr. Lepore opposed.

Point of order: Ms. Bloise-Murphy wants to amend the motion to include testing requirements that any turf ultimately selected be independently tested in accordance with the recommendations of the project's consultants.

Ms. Gallagher Byrne made a motion to amend the revisions to Capizzo Stadium presented to the School Committee on September 22, 2025, to replace the grass field with a synthetic turf field and the asphalt track with a polyurethane gel track, with the added requirement that the chosen synthetic turf be tested for PFAS by an independent lab. Ms. Bloise-Murphy seconded the motion and the committee proceeded in a roll call, Mr. Murphy - yes, Ms. Martinez - yes, Ms. Boise-Murphy - yes, Ms. Gallagher-Byrne - yes, Dr. Lepore, no. The motion carries.

The committee moved on to discuss policy IKF and IKFE. Dr. Hallett explained these are recommendations from MASC. Explaining the policy committee met yesterday and recommended the vote.

Vote to approve the changes to Policy IKF, Graduation Requirements and adopt IKFE, Competency Determination. *Shantaw Bloise-Murphy made a motion to approve, seconded by Vincent Murphy, and with no opposed vote, the motion was approved unanimously*

Vote to approve the donation from the Russell Family for \$1065.52 to Nantucket Intermediate School to be used for NIS library books. *Shantaw Bloise-Murphy made a motion to approve, seconded by Vincent Murphy, and with no opposed vote, the motion was approved unanimously*

Vote to approve the NIS Grade 5 field trip to Outdoor Classroom, Yarmouth Port, MA, June 1 - June 4, 2026. *Shantaw Bloise-Murphy made a motion to approve, seconded by Vincent Murphy, and with no opposed vote, the motion was approved unanimously*

Vote to approve the donation from Friends of Nantucket Public Schools to Nantucket Intermediate School for \$1,900.00 to be used for the Grade 5, YOG 2033, transportation to Outdoor Classroom. *Shantaw Bloise-Murphy made a motion to approve, seconded by Vincent Murphy, and with no opposed vote, the motion was approved unanimously*

Vote to approve the donation from the Nantucket Education Trust to Nantucket Intermediate School for \$6,000.00 to be used for the Grade 5, YOG 2033, field trip to Outdoor Classroom. *Shantaw Bloise-Murphy made a motion to approve, seconded by Vincent Murphy, and with no opposed vote, the motion was approved unanimously*

Vote to approve the donation from 11 North Water Street Manager LLC: Brass Lantern for \$600.00 to the NHS/CPS Music Department's Disney field trip. *Shantaw Bloise-Murphy made a motion to approve, seconded by Vincent Murphy, and with no opposed vote, the motion was approved unanimously*

Vote to approve grant from the Community Foundation for Nantucket to Nantucket Community School for \$28,500.00 to provide dignity index training to NPS staff. *Shantaw Bloise-Murphy made a motion to approve, seconded by Vincent Murphy, and with no opposed vote, the motion was approved unanimously*

Vote to approve Transfers & Invoices. *Shantaw Bloise-Murphy made a motion to approve, seconded by Vincent Murphy, and with no opposed vote, the motion was approved unanimously*

#### **Student Council Representative - Danielle Lewis**

Ms. Lewis stated that she had nothing to present at the meeting tonight.

#### **Sub-Committee/Work Group Report**

Ms. Gallagher-Byrne noted that the policy updates approved previously by the committee had been completed. Then asked about Cape Cod Collaborative meetings. Ms. Martinez replied she hasn't seen them posted. Dr. Hallett will look into. Ms. Bloise-Murphy reported teacher negotiations had kicked off.

**Agenda for the next meeting** - January 6, 2026, Student Enrollment, Bullying Update, Budget Development - Facilities & Grounds, IT/Tech, Athletics, ESL Update, YONDR Initiative

#### **Adjournment**

Motion to adjourn at 7:18 PM by Esmeralda Martinez, seconded by Shantaw Bloise-Murphy, and with none opposed, the motion was approved unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,  
Katie Bedell  
School Committee Clerk