



FAIRHAVEN SCHOOL COMMITTEE MINUTES
April 15, 2026

FAIRHAVEN TOWN CLERK
RCUD 2026 AUG 13 AM8:19

MEMBERS PRESENT: Nicole Pacheco, Erik Andersen, Kelly Ochoa, Donna McKenna

STAFF PRESENT: Superintendent Tara Kohler, Assistant Superintendent Mark Balestracci, School Business Manager Nicole Potter

The meeting was called to order by Mrs. Pacheco at 6:38 pm.

Approval of Minutes:

A motion was made by Ms. Ochoa to approve the March 18, 2026 Regular Session Minutes, seconded by Mr. Andersen, approved (4-0).

A motion was made by Ms. Ochoa to approve the March 19, 2026 Joint Session Minutes with the Select Board and Finance Committee, seconded by Ms. McKenna, approved (4-0).

A motion was made by Ms. Ochoa to table the March 31, 2026 Acushnet Sub Committee minutes and the March 31, 2026 Joint Session Minutes with the Select Board and Finance Committee until the next meeting, seconded by Mr. Andersen, approved (4-0).

Report of the Student Advisory Committee:

Vishka Patel advised the Committee that the Day of Service is this Friday, as well as what is involved in the Day of Service.

Reports & Recommendations of the Superintendent:

Update on the FY27 Budget

Superintendent Kohler told the Committee she participated in a joint weekly update with Town Administrator Keith Hickey to discuss the school budget and potential override, emphasizing their shared commitment to securing necessary funding and educating the public. She said that the non-override, Article 8, budget would require maintaining existing cuts, including preschool consolidation and reduced professional development. The proposed override, Article 9, which includes approximately \$480,000 for schools, would primarily restore previously cut services, specifically two elementary teaching positions and a special education program. She also noted ongoing concerns about Net School Spending and the district's ability to perform well despite financial constraints. While acknowledging the limitations of the non override budget, she noted it would allow the District to continue operating without severe additional cuts and stressed the importance of community unity and support for the override to maintain the quality of education and uphold community pride in the school system.

Update on Facilities:

Superintendent Kohler stated that some playground swings are being replaced due to normal wear and tear. Mrs. Potter noted they are on back order. Superintendent Kohler also provided an update on the "Paper Street" access road at Elizabeth Hastings Middle School, which is heavily used for student drop off. She noted that the roadway has been an ongoing issue for years and that recent snowstorms have significantly worsened conditions, creating a safety concern. Joshua Crabbe from the Department of Public Works, has reached out with a proposal that has been developed to address the issue with a more durable solution. The Superintendent stated she would like to use operational funds for this repair. Mr Andersen asked what the cost will be. Superintendent Kohler stated approximately \$25,000.

Upcoming Events:

The Annual Town Meeting is on May 2, 2026. The next School Committee Meeting will be held May 20, 2026. There will be a School Committee training toward the end of June.

New Business:

A motion was made by Ms. Ochoa to establish a Fairhaven High School gift fund, seconded by Mr. Andersen, approved (4-0).

A motion was made by Ms. Ochoa to accept a donation of \$700 from various donors for the Fairhaven High School Athletic Program in memory of Steven Gorden, seconded by Ms. McKenna, approved (4-0).

A motion was made by Ms. Ochoa to accept a \$1,600 mini grant donation from the Fairhaven High School Alumni Association to fund buses for a field trip to the Lloyd Center for 130 students, seconded by Ms. McKenna, approved (4-0).

A motion was made by Ms. Ochoa to accept a \$1000 donation from an anonymous donor for the Fairhaven High School Drama Club, seconded by Ms. McKenna, approved (4-0).

A motion was made by Ms. Ochoa to accept a \$425 donation from FAME for the Worcester All-State Chorus Festival, seconded by Ms. McKenna, approved (4-0).

A motion was made by Ms. Ochoa to accept a \$500 donation from the Elizabeth Hastings Middle School PTO for the EHMS Hardship Fund, seconded by Ms. McKenna, approved (4-0).

A motion was made by Ms. Ochoa to accept fifty, \$50 Market Basket gift cards from an anonymous donor for the Family Center, seconded by Ms. McKenna, approved (4-0).

A motion was made by Ms. Ochoa to allow the Fairhaven High School PTO use of the Turf Field for the Class of 2026 end of year celebrations, seconded by Ms. McKenna, approved (4-0).

Unfinished Business:

Update on Acushnet Tuition Agreement:

Mrs. Pacheco stated she and Mr. Monroe attended the first Acushnet Sub Committee meeting on a March 31, 2026. Also in attendance was Superintendent Kohler as well as the Acushnet Public Schools leadership, including their superintendent, business manager, and school committee representatives, to discuss a potential tuition agreement. Acushnet shared their expectation of equality, and explained that it currently has five year agreements with Old Rochester Regional School District and New Bedford High School, with tuition set at \$10,000 per student for years one through three and \$10,500 for years four and five, noting that New Bedford waived tuition for the first two years. Acushnet requested that Fairhaven consider lowering its current tuition rate to \$10,000 per student for incoming freshmen, citing a higher than anticipated number of students enrolling at Fairhaven High School that is affecting their budget. Additional discussion included Acushnet's intent not to continue funding a 0.5 counselor position in a future agreement and the possibility of exploring shared transportation arrangements to reduce costs, though no specific plans are in place. Both districts are working to schedule follow up meetings and discussions remain in the early stages. Superintendent Kohler stated the proposal would require further analysis, including financial impact, and will bring that back to the Committee before any decision is made. The Committee agreed this will need to be looked at regarding impact to our budget.

Any Business Not Reasonably Anticipated 48 Hours Prior to the Posting:

Assistant Superintendent Balestracci stated we have a student from DECA that made Nationals and did not know if they were going to be able to attend, but has since confirmed they can. He asked for leniency on the 30 day notice policy for Out of State Travel. Discussion of the trip ensued regarding trip details.

A motion was made by Ms. McKenna to allow a student and chaperone to attend the National DECA Conference out of state as long as all district policies and best practices are followed, seconded by Ms. Ochoa, approved (4-0).

A motion was made by Ms. Ochoa to meet in executive session pursuant to the Massachusetts General Law

Chapter 30A, section 21(A) to discuss strategy with respect to collective bargaining or litigation if an open meeting may have detrimental effect on the bargaining or litigation position of the public body, and the Chair so declares, to discuss strategy with respect to negotiations for non-union personnel, and not be returning into open session, seconded by Ms. McKenna, roll call vote, approved (4-0).

Adjourned at 7:19 pm.

Sheri Souza
Secretary to the School Committee
Fairhaven Public Schools

Approved May 20, 2026