

# South Hadley Public Schools School Committee Meeting Minutes

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June 2, 2022

Video Conference Meeting Accessible via SHCTV1 or SHCTV1.com

## I. Call to Order

Noticing a quorum, Vice Chairperson, Allison Schlachter called the virtual School Committee Meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. A Zoom video conference meeting accessible via SHCTV15 and SHCTV.com made possible by Governor Baker's June 16, 2021, remote meeting provision to the March 12, 2020, COVID-19 Emergency Order.

**In Attendance:** Allison Schlachter, Chairperson  
Danielle Cooke, Member  
Eric Friesner, Member  
Lynda Pickbourn, Member  
Mark McLaughlin, Acting Superintendent of the South Hadley Public Schools  
Jennifer Voyik, Acting Assistant Superintendent of Finance and  
Business Operations for South Hadley Public Schools

**Guests:** Amy Foley, President of SHEA

**Absent:** Jackson Matos, Chair  
Junoon Giridhar, Student Representative

Vice Chairperson, Allison Schlachter acknowledged the tragedy that happened in Texas and the loss of those precious lives. It reminds us of the value of our children, of life and our safety. She sent **LOVE** to Texas

Allison Schlachter continued that our current Chair, Dr. Jackson Matos experienced a significant health challenge. Dr. Matos is doing okay and provided the following statement:

"Good evening to the members of the School Committee and the South Hadley Learning Community.

The weekend after our last school committee meeting, I survived a heart attack and have been recovering in the times since my acute health crisis. This is my second heart attack and I have been advised by my physicians and my family to reduce stressors in my life and to make changes to my lifestyle. Regrettably, one of these changes include my resignation as a member of the School Committee.

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I have greatly enjoyed serving the learning community of South Hadley through work on this committee. My colleagues on this committee are serving for all the right reasons and they all take this work seriously. This is more than a volunteer position for all of us. I now have a deeper appreciation of and respect for this service. I was very much looking forward to working with our Acting Superintendent and Acting Assistant Superintendent and I was excited about the direction that this committee was headed in. I'm especially proud of the strides that we made in our DEI work. I know that this important work will continue and grow.

While I will not be serving in this capacity, I will always remain a supporter of our district. I urge all the members of South Hadley to service and strengthening the cornerstone of our community – our schools. I wish my colleagues and neighbors a restful summer in good health.

All Best Wishes,  
Jackson Matos"

Allison Schlachter can't say how much Jackson has added to this committee in just a year and how much he'll be missed by all of them.

Vice Chairperson Schlachter discussed the reorganization of the School Committee.

## II. Reorganization of the School Committee

Lynda Pickbourn stated that Jackson Matos' presence was really valued within the School Committee. There was a brief discussion with regards to Allison Schlachter's standing on returning as Chair to the School Committee. Lynda Pickbourn proposed a motion to nominate Allison Schlachter as Chair of the School Committee, which was seconded by Eric Friesner. No further discussion. Motion passed 4/0. (Pickbourn, Friesner, Cooke, Schlachter)

Chairperson Schlachter states that it lends to continuity and that they are a good committee that has been through an extreme number of challenges in a short period of time and they keep on going.

Lynda Pickbourn proposed nomination of Eric Friesner as Vice Chair for the School Committee. She has had the opportunity to work with Eric with the Budget sub-committee and she realizes that he started with the School Committee this year, she realizes that he has worked with the committee prior to becoming a member and he has put in a lot of work for the committee.

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Chairperson Schlachter entertained a motion for the nomination of Eric Friesner as Vice Chair of the South Hadley School Committee, which was moved by Danielle Cooke and second by Allison Schlachter.

Eric Friesner thanked the committee for not nominating him for Chairperson. He's honored to be nominated and wished that it was under different circumstances. He's glad that Jackson Matos stepped away to take care of his health but sad to see him go. He's grateful for Allison Schlachter for stepping in as Chair and believes that it's important for continuity.

Chairperson Schlachter agrees that it's a great nomination. She states that he is a hard-worker, smart, a straight shooter, respectful and a strong member of the committee. She looks forward to working with him.

No further discussion. Motion passed unanimously 4/0 (Pickbourn, Cooke, Friesner, Schlachter)

Danielle Cooke asked what the new role call order is. Chairperson Schlachter stated that it would be: Friesner, Cooke, Pickbourn and Schlachter.

Chairperson Schlachter announced that they are looking for a new School Committee member that will be posted through the Selectboard.

### III. Approval of Minutes

Chairperson Schlachter confirmed the review of the minutes for April 28, 2022, and May 19, 2022.

Eric Friesner interrupted the discussion to ask who would take over the Custodial Negotiations that were held by Jackson Matos. He was hoping that another school committee member could take on that responsibility. Chairperson Schlachter asked if anyone was interested in taking on that role. Lynda Pickbourn was willing to step in and assist with the negotiations. There are some resources that can assist her in learning what is needed with negotiations, such as Eric, our attorneys and past members that have been in this role to help her. Eric Friesner stated that she would be phenomenal and would be willing to help her, too.

Eric Friesner continued if there could be alternates for each other groups, in case if someone can be there, someone else can cover for other groups. Eric Friesner stated that the attorneys have confirmed that regardless of the MTA status of Chairperson Schlachter and Lynda Pickbourn, they can be in other groups because there is no financial group. Chairperson

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Schlachter if there were any other subcommittees that Jackson Matos participated in that needed their immediate attention. There were no immediate matters. However, Danielle Cooke stated that the Racial Justice Task Force will be having their last meeting next week; and they will resume in the Fall. It will be something to think about for the fall.

Chairperson Schlachter returned to the minutes and entertained a motion to accept the minutes of April 28, 2022, and May 19, 2022, which was moved by Eric Friesner and second by Danielle Cooke. No further discussion. Motion passed: 4/0. (Friesner, Cooke, Pickbourn and Schlachter).

#### IV. Approval of Warrants

Danielle Cooke made a motion to approve the following:

<u>Date</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Amount</u>
May 12, 2022	Bi-Weekly Payroll	\$742,305.09
May 17, 2022	Warrant #2022-269	\$113,251.92

Chairperson Allison Schlachter thanked Danielle Cooke for the motion, which was second by Eric Friesner. No further discussion. Motion passed 4/0 (Friesner, Cooke, Pickbourn and Schlachter).

Danielle Cooke requested all eligible voting members to approve a motion for Warrant #2022-275 dated May 24, 2022, in the amount of \$59,967.00. Chairperson Allison Schlachter entertained the motion to accept the warrant from Lynda Pickbourn, which was second by Eric Friesner for the following:

<u>Date</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Amount</u>
May 24, 2022	Warrant #2022-275	\$59,967.00

No further discussion. Motion passed: 4/0 (Friesner, Cooke – Abstain, Pickbourn and Schlachter).

#### V. Reports of Standing Committees

- a. School Committee Liaison Reports
- b. Advisory Committees
- c. Site-Based Committees

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### Units A,C, D & E Negotiations

Eric Friesner stated that the Teacher Negotiation Units continue to meet, and they tend to agree and moving forward, but in other areas they are not seeing eye-to-eye. They have some sessions scheduled before the end of the year. Hopefully, they can make everything work and have those contracts in place by the end of the school year.

### Racial Justice Task Force

Danielle Cooke stated that there was some feedback with regards to the policies that we recently talked about and shared with Dr. McLaughlin. They noticed that each school had their own handbooks. They suggested that each handbook is uniform and following one policy. If there needs to be different allowances for different schools depending on age. They think they should take a more restorative approach with regards to attendance. She asked if there would be options for students to buy-back or earn-back time that they missed? She discussed excused absences that it's not equitable or accessible for everyone through parent phone calls, etc. More allowances for parent phone calls. The bullying policy was in line with the state recommendations. The dress code policy again was an example of where each school had their own handbook for what actually happens in practice. Making sure that wording is more uniform across the district and the wording like "distractive clothing" wasn't great and had room for improvement. They also agreed some more cell phone policy observances in our district.

### Appreciations

Allison Schlachter acknowledges Dr. McLaughlin and Jennifer Voyik for all of their hard work and roles as Acting Superintendent and Acting Assistant Superintendent. She thinks that Central Office tends to go really unappreciated. She knows that a lot of the work that you're doing in behind the scenes and they work long hours.

Eric Friesner discussed the Field Day at Plains today. He appreciated all the work that the PTO and the Plains faculty and staff did to put this together. It was fun to see all the faces with ice cream on their faces, bounce house, etc.

Danielle Cooke shared appreciation for those who handled the school threat in our community. All they individuals that handled the situation and the communications that came out about it. The staff held it together all day long, it was a difficult situation, but they were able to keep the students safe and not worried throughout the day.

Dr. McLaughlin wanted to thank the police with regards to the situation that Danielle Cooke discussed and how resourceful and present they were during the matter. He also commended the teachers and staff who rose to the occasion. He also gave a personal appreciation to Dr. Matos and that he's taking care of himself. The short time that they were able to interact

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together was just delight. He realizes that being a School Committee member is not easy and that they are doing the job well. Finally, he wanted to express his appreciation for the Class of 2022, who themselves have not had an easy time. Their lives have been affected by COVID and he knows that they will have a great celebration tomorrow no matter the weather.

### VI. Public Comment

Tara Cole provided a scripted speech about Team Teaching as follows (adapted):

She's speaking to you tonight as a resident taxpayer and concerned parent. She has a child at Mosier and a child at Plains Elementary School. It has come to her attention that Mosier is planning to remove Team teaching next year. This change has a few implications for South Hadley's youngest learners. She does believe that this change will have severe negative ramifications, not only for her children, but for all of our learners going forward.

This year her child has benefited from Team Teaching in second grade through smaller class sizes; the ability to have multiple teachers to connect with; being taught by teachers that are experts in their content; the opportunity for his teachers to give one-on-one attention; and the ability for him to develop his independence. Her child has benefited from small classes this year, as do all learners, and an increase in student class sizes means there's an increase of academic differences and social, emotional needs, in one room at one time, with one teaching figuring out the balance. This creates a challenge for teachers to be able to build community in their room. A strong room community will build a safe learning environment and one in which children feel confident to learn in. This is imperative for all learners, but especially our youngest as they are navigating the world and learning new skills, both academically and socially.

This proposed changed also means that our children only have one chance to connect with teachers throughout their day with the exception of their specials. We all know that teacher connections can vary from year to year and that there's nothing wrong with this and that every style will work with every learner. However, without team teaching, this means if our children are struggling to connect with their teacher, they have no reprieve from that. They have no opportunity to find connections with another teacher.

Team Teaching means that the teachers are specialized in either the humanities or S.T.E.M. Her son has one teacher who teaches ELA and social studies and one that teaches math and science. This has been the case for decades at Mosier. Now going into third grade, her son will have one teacher. If his teacher is specialized in the humanities, they are obviously well versed in that curriculum, however, they may not have looked or taught the S.T.E.M. curriculum since they are being trained to be an educator. So, this means the quality of children's education could be

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negatively impacted. In this scenario, her son will no longer have a S.T.E.M. specialist and the delivery of the humanities curriculum could be impacted by one teacher preparing for four (4) different curriculums as opposed to two.

Team Teaching has allowed the children to grow as people. They have to navigate their school building and adjust to a new environment. Allowing them to develop into independent people. Team Teaching at the elementary level also allows students the ability to be prepared for middle school, where they could see up to five (5) different teachers throughout the course of the day. Removing this practice means that learners will have one content with a teacher in fourth grade and then make a jump to five in fifth grade. Currently, her son loves that fact that he gets to move around his building, go to a different space throughout the day...

[Three-minute alarm sounded, but School Committee allowed 30 seconds to continue speech from parent]

She does wonder how he will internalize the change from Team Teaching to single teacher model. Would he feel like the students did something wrong? Would he feel shame or punishment? Because right now, he sees having two teachers as a privilege: a sign that he's growing up, that he's maturing. The negativities that this proposed change will be with our children long past the time they leave Mosier. Second through fourth grade are interictal times of learning and development for children growing up in our town. These grades set the foundation for not only learning, but for the love of learning. [speaker continued their speech after the timer went off again] The impact of this will follow them throughout their journey which has already been riddled with disruption. She asks why we would make such a bold structural change coming off the heels of COVID and remote learning. Since there is no school counsel at Mosier school, a place where all stakeholders get to be present about the going ons at a monthly meeting. She's respectfully submitting that the School Committee officially put this issue on the agenda for the next School Committee meeting. Before any permanent decisions are made, she is asking for consultation with the relative stakeholders; an understanding for the need for this change; and a deeper dive into the ramifications for the children of our town.

Chairperson Schlachter thanked her for Tara Cole and stated that it was nice to have public comment.

No further public comment. Chairperson Schlachter stated it was really nice to have public comment.

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## VII. Discussion and Action Items

### a. Michael E. Smith Endowment for Excellence in Education

Ryan Mainville discussed that she recently took over the MESMS Endowment. She gave a brief review of the endowment, and recited their mission statement:

“The Michael E. Smith Endowment in Education is to provide funding and support in excellence of education for the South Hadley Public School System. The intent is to augment the public-school experience by providing South Hadley children with unique and innovative resource materials, hands-on experiences, and opportunities for growth which exceed those possible through the annual budget of the school department.”

For the first fifteen (15) years they would have many school fundraisers like balls and golf tournaments. At this point, they don't need to provide fundraising any more and it is growing on its own. Some of the items they have provided in the past are smart boards, trips to Camp Shepherd, Shakespeare theater, greenhouses at middle school and high school, etc.

They do have some requirements:

1. They don't fund building maintenance.
2. Basic or learning materials – textbooks, pencils, etc.
3. Staff salaries or bonuses
4. Fund school operating budget

They have seen their numbers decreased for their services. They have moved their deadline to May 1<sup>st</sup> to supplement applications for funding. There has been a lot of new faces on the board and the school committee. If they were aware of any project that requires funding, we should keep them in mind.

Chairperson Schlachter asked what is the average grant amount. Ms. Mainville stated that they can range from \$200 to \$6,000 or more. It depends on the cost of the supplies for the project as long as it's within their mission.

Dr. McLaughlin stated that they are going to partner with Ms. Mainville and her team and make sure that our facilities are aware that this is a resource available to them.

Lynda Pickbourn was pleased that there was a source that teachers can apply for, but she wanted to know if they fund student-led. Ms. Mainville said it would have to be presented by the teacher / administrator.

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### **b. Donation of Playground Equipment at Plains Elementary**

Danielle Jajko, President of Plains PTA, asked to donate playground equipment in Principal Hank Skala's name. Following Principal Skala's passing, his family requested donations be made to the Plains Elementary School PTA and they thought how they could use those donations for the benefit of the children. After reviewing their options, they remembered how Principal Skala put the students first before anything else, so they wanted to provide something that they can enjoy. They agreed on Musical Flowers, which is playground equipment. It's a set of four (4) metal flowers that are durable for all weather conditions that would be mounted in the ground. There are no reoccurring costs for the school. The PTA would cover the cost, installation and contacting Dig Safe. Each flower has a different height and color and when the petals are struck, they make different sounds. They're about 48 ½ inches high. They're ADA accessible. They're autotuned and DEI compliant. It's a great permanent addition to the playground in memory of Principal Hank Skala.

Chairperson Schlachter stated that it's a wonderful memorial to Hank Skala. Her only question is there a certain person that the PTA group would have to work with to set all of it up? Jennifer Voyik responded that they could work with herself, Principal Carla Lussier and Gary Dearman, Plains Head Custodian to coordinate to have them installed. She also asked if the PTA could write a letter for the School Committee outlining everything that she has mentioned during this meeting for their records. Chairperson Schlachter stated that they have to vote on it once they receive the letter, which is simply a formality after the presentation.

### **c. Contract approval of Acting Superintendent, Mark McLaughlin, and Acting Assistant Superintendent of Finance and Business Operations, Jennifer Voyik (vote)**

Chairperson Schlachter stated that they were appointed to these new positions last meeting. They have completed their contracts and requires voting on the contract that will end on June 30, 2022. Chairperson Schlachter entertained a motion to approve the contracts for Acting Superintendent, Mark McLaughlin, and Acting Assistant Superintendent of Finance and Business Operations, Jennifer Voyik, which was moved by Danielle Cooke and seconded by Eric Friesner. No further discussion. Motion passed: 4/0 (Friesner, Cooke, Pickbourn and Schlachter).

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### **d. SHEA Updates**

Amy Foley, SHEA President, suggested that they attend Baccalaureate Ceremony next year if they have an opportunity. She also wanted to give a thank you to Dr. Jackson Matos from SHEA for their service. They know that becoming a school committee member is no small task and they wish him the best of luck and all the health in the future.

President Foley discussed School Safety in light of another school shooting in Uvalde, Texas. She thinks for the most part, our educators in South Hadley feel really good about the protocols that we have in place to protect our students. But she thinks one of their biggest concerns is that our new generation of school shooters unfortunately, have been through these protocols, as well, which really frightens us on many levels. When you identify the mental health needs of our students, consider that when reviewing the funding. Know that there are strategies that help them. One of them is smaller class sizes so they can build strong relationship with our students. Hopefully, they can come to us if they're struggling, and it helps teachers identify when a student is struggling and their needs.

Amy Foley asked the School Committee to partner with them to support the Fair Share Act, which is a proposed tax on the wealthy (the 1%) and that money would go specifically towards education.

### **e. Report of the Acting Superintendent**

Dr. McLaughlin briefly discussed the Tri-Board Meeting, which was held with Town Administration and a special guest, Chief Gundersen that all came together to speak about safety and security in schools and the community. It was useful to see the different perspectives because they have different roles. Some discussions included communications, emergency plans and other resources that need to be evaluated and re-evaluated to evolve and increase their current plans.

Dr. McLaughlin discussed how the administration is viewing this time, emerging from COVID. What it's going to mean to us moving forward? Life pre-COVID is over – too much has happened and we learned too much. We can't go back, nor should we. If there's any value that COVID provided was that it was an opportunity to look at our practices and to question to say do we continue to do what we have always done. In the next meeting, when they provide the School Improvement and District Improvement Plans, you will see their desire to reimagine teaching and learning.

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### **f. Report of the Chair and School Committee**

Chairperson Schlachter also reviewed the Tri-Board meeting. She stated that Police Chief Gundersen had planned to be at this meeting for a different discussion and the agenda went to the side in order for them to have a conversation of what happened the day before in Texas. It was a collaborative, meaningful and open conversation. They had a lot of reflection and discussion on what can happen for the future in the district. They spoke about the SRO program in the schools and the potential of the Chief coming to the meeting again in the Fall.

She acknowledged that working on a School Committee has given her multiple perspectives and how challenging this year has been... She's glad it's June because people need a break. They need some decompression time. The beginning of this year they were dealing with mold; plus the ups and downs of COVID; the violence in Texas and she knows that everyone needs a break and it's coming.

### **g. Report of Student Representative**

Junoon Giridhar was absent and unable to provide Student Representative Report.

### **h. MASC Workshop Overview**

Lynda Pickbourn discussed the MASC Charting the Course for New School Committee Members that she attended on May 21, 2022. It was really helpful and she's glad that she did it. It helped to clarify many things that were still unclear to me.

There were several suggestions that the speakers had for Best Practices, that she shared in case they wanted to use it for the upcoming year, which included:

- Annual Calendar for the School Committee
  - Adopting an annual calendar for the School Committee to help with planning the year and setting key dates, e.g., for starting the budget conversation; approval of the final budget; draft of the academic calendar for the next year; school choice plans, etc.
  - Budget conversations
  - Academic Calendar
- Quarterly Budget Reports

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- Recent Directive from AG Office, the agenda should include details of the subcommittee report on the posted agenda
- Use of the summer to develop Superintendent Goals
- Handbook for School Committee
  - Protocol
  - Orienting New Members
  - Samples from other districts
  - Not a policy handbook for the schools, unique to South Hadley
  - Creation through a subcommittee

Chairperson Schlachter will get information about the subcommittee agenda items.

## **i. DESE Recommendations on COVID Update**

Acting Superintendent McLaughlin reviewed the discussion from DESE with regards to COVID on behalf of Mary Walsh, Director of Health Services. The State is dismantling most of its COVID operations. We have been able to benefit from the support through CIC for the purpose of assisting our nurses with COVID testing and contract tracing. Those people who were assigned to South Hadley have been meeting with districts to confirm that we still need assistance. Dr. McLaughlin states that we don't know what's around the corner. However, by the end of June we are on our own. Mary Walsh has ordered the last of the available tests to get us through the summer. Anything we want to do in the future will be on our time and on our dime. Mary Walsh is working with the nurses to provide a proposal what the fall will look like and what the summer plans are for the district. Each school will have to have hard conversations to figure out what resources that we have with the staffing and funds available to us. If there is another variant, that's up to DESE as to what they will or will not do in the future. Jennifer Voyik stated that we do have some funds in ESSER III that can be used in case in the future another variant happens, and we need to purchase masks, etc. The district thought that they would have to put a little bit of money aside, just in case.

## **j. MOA for Educator Evaluations**

Dr. McLaughlin stated that this will be how we will have to modify our evaluation protocols. This will be available for the next meeting.

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**k. Keyboard Donation from Judy Izzat to MESMS Music Department**

Chairperson Schlachter read the letter from Ms. Izzat with regards to her donation of a keyboard to Michael E. Smith Middle School Music Program (see attached).

Chairperson loved the story and the history. She entertained a motion to accept the keyboard donation from Judy Izzat to the MESMS Music Department, which was moved by Eric Friesner and seconded by Lynda Pickbourn. No further discussion. Motion passed: 4/0 (Friesner, Cooke, Pickbourn and Schlachter).

**VIII. Information Only**

None.

**IX. Unfinished Business**

None.

**X. New Business**

None.

Chairperson Schlachter stated that they will be entering executive session. They will not be coming back to Open Session after Executive Session. She notated that one of the items listed under the Executive Session has been resolved, so they will be entering Executive Session under M.G.L. c. 30A, Section 21(a)(3): To discuss strategy with respect to Collective Bargaining for all Bargaining Units (A, C, D and E). She will entertain a motion to leave Open Session and enter Executive Session, which was moved by Danielle Cooke and seconded by Eric Friesner. No further discussion. Motion passed unanimously: 4/0 (Friesner, Cooke, Pickbourn and Schlachter) With no further business to discuss, the School Committee Meeting adjourned at 7:44 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,  
Christina Stevenson  
Executive Assistant, South Hadley Public Schools.

Reviewed and Approved by,  
Allison Schlachter  
Chairperson, South Hadley School Committee  
Date: June 16, 2022