Needham School Committee

Broadmeadow School
Performance Center

Tuesday, March 17, 2026

6:30 p.m.

Watch: The meeting will be broadcast on the Needham Channel and live streamed at https://needhamchannel.org.

Testify: Public comment may be given in person or virtually using this Zoom link: https://needham-k12-ma-us.zoom.us/j/81677755319

Please note: The Zoom webinar will close immediately following public comment.

Needham Public Schools

Needham School Committee Hybrid Meeting

March 17, 2026 at 6:30 p.m.

Broadmeadow Elementary School Performance Center
120 Broad Meadow Road, Needham, MA 02492

Next School Committee Meeting:
April 7, 2026 at 6:30 p.m.

Watch: The meeting will be broadcast on the Needham Channel and livestreamed at https://needhamchannel.org

Testify: Public comment may be given in person or virtually using this Zoom link: https://needham-k12-ma-us.zoom.us/j/81677755319
Please note: The Zoom webinar will close immediately following public comment.

6:30 p.m.	**Public Comment**
6:35 p.m.	**School Committee Chair and Subcommittee Updates**
6:40 p.m.	**Superintendent's Comments**
6:45 p.m.	**Consent Items**

1. School Committee Meeting Minutes: February 24, 2026; and March 3, 2026
2. Disposal of Surplus
3. FY26 Donations

Discussion Items

6:50 p.m.	Mitchell Elementary School Improvement Plan
7:35 p.m.	Pollard Middle School Project Schematic Design Update
8:30 p.m.	Needham High School Student Achievement Report
9:15 p.m.	Stephen Palmer Building Discussion
9:40 p.m.	**Action Item**
	Revised Service Animals and Emotional Support Dogs Policy IMG
9:45 p.m.	**School Committee Comments**
9:50 p.m.	**Adjourn**

Needham School Committee

March 17, 2026

Agenda Item: **Public Comment**

Background Information:

- The School Committee Chair will offer the opportunity for the public to speak to the School Committee on issues not on the agenda.

Needham School Committee

March 17, 2026

Agenda Item: **School Committee Chair and Subcommittee Updates**

Background Information:

- The Chair and Subcommittee members may offer brief updates on issues not on the agenda.

Members of the School Committee available for comment:

Michael E. O'Brien, Chair
Alisa Skatrud, Vice Chair
Sri Baqri
Michael Greis
Elizabeth Lee
Andrea Longo Carter
Matthew Spengler
Jack Arvedon, Student Representative

Needham School Committee

March 17, 2026

Agenda Item: **Superintendent's Comments**

Background Information:

- Superintendent Daniel E. Gutekanst will apprise the School Committee of events, information, and matters of interest not on the agenda.

Needham School Committee

March 17, 2026

Agenda Item: **Consent Items**

1. School Committee Meeting Minutes: February 24, 2026; and March 3, 2026
2. Disposal of Surplus
3. FY26 Donations

Chair: "Does anyone wish to remove any items from the consent agenda?"

If none removed:

"There being no objection, these items are approved by unanimous consent."

Needham Public Schools

Needham School Committee

Minutes of the Needham School Committee Meeting
February 24, 2026
Broadmeadow Performance Center
120 Broad Meadow Road
Needham, MA 02492

School Committee Chair Michael E. O'Brien called the meeting of February 24, 2026 to order at approximately 6:30 p.m.

Members of the School Committee present:

Michael O'Brien, Chair
Alisa Skatrud, Vice Chair
Sri Baqri (remote)
Michael Greis
Elizabeth Lee
Matthew Spengler (remote)
Jack Arvedon, Student Representative

Members of the School Committee absent:
Andrea Longo Carter

Members of the Central Administration present:

Daniel E. Gutekanst, Superintendent
Anne Gulati, Assistant Superintendent for Finance and Operations
Mary Lammi, Assistant Superintendent for Student Support Services
Alexandra Montes McNeil, Assistant Superintendent for Human Resources
Carmen Williams, Assistant Superintendent for Instruction and Innovation

Public Comment Public Comment

Chair O'Brien opened the floor for public comment, reminding speakers to state their name and affiliation and to limit their remarks to three minutes.

Christine Chaplin, guardian, expressed concern about how school nursing staff have handled her students' medical needs. Chair O'Brien requested that she conclude her public comment as she had reached the three minute limit. Ms. Chaplin continued speaking, despite multiple additional reminders from Chair O'Brien that she had exceeded her time limit. Chair O'Brien thanked Ms. Chaplin for her comments and noted that she had been in contact with district administration, who would continue to follow up on the matter.

School Committee Chair and Subcommittee Updates

School Committee Chair and Subcommittee Updates

Chair O'Brien welcomed students back from the extended February recess due to the additional snow days and confirmed school would be back in session on February 25th.

Superintendent's Comments

Superintendent's Comments

Superintendent Gutekanst thanked the Department of Public Works, public safety workers and custodians for clearing the snow in order to open schools on Wednesday, February 25th. The Superintendent explained that the closure was necessary due to the Governor's state of emergency and regional driving bans. He also thanked the nutrition and transportation staff who worked through the snow closures to prepare meals and ready the buses for the following day.

Consent Items

Consent Items

Chair O'Brien entertained a motion to approve the following consent items:

1. School Committee Meeting Minutes: February 3, 2026
2. FY25/26 Budget Transfers

With there being no objections, the Committee approved the consent items by unanimous consent.

Discussion Items

Newman School Improvement Plan

Newman School Improvement Plan

Jessica Peterson, Principal of Newman Elementary School, reported that the school achieved a state accountability ranking of 92nd, with nearly all student subgroups meeting or exceeding performance targets in English Language Arts and Mathematics. Principal Peterson invited the staff and parents to discuss the School Improvement Plan (SIP) strategic goals. Grace Gilarde, fifth grade teacher, explained the goal of fostering academic achievement for all through the implementation of a literacy curriculum rooted in the science of reading and enhanced Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) procedures. Abbey Gannon, fourth grade teacher, explained the goal of promoting social-emotional learning (SEL) by utilizing tiered counseling supports and monitoring student well-being via attendance data and the Panorama survey. Kristen Antonio, a parent, explained the goal of strengthening family engagement. Jon Lee, a parent, noted family engagement was possible through the launch of digital student portfolios in grades three through five. Stefanie Forman, parent and PTC president, explained the "New to Newman" initiative for

transitioning families. Irene Berlinsky, parent, explained the Home-School Communication enhancements between parents, students, and educators.

Chair O'Brien commended the Newman team for identifying growth opportunities and noted the importance of standardizing homework practices and increasing engagement through surveys.

Ms. Baqri inquired about social-emotional learning (SEL) trends and demographic shifts. Principal Peterson reported that while SEL scores remain high due to the Second Step curriculum, recent data showed a slight discrepancy for male students, prompting the counseling team to pilot a new K–2 survey to ensure responsive instruction for all learners.

Ms. Lee asked for further clarification on refined academic and emotional interventions. Principal Peterson described a new data-driven criteria form designed to streamline short-term support for regulation and executive functioning, allowing the school to better align SEL with academic structures and partner with families.

Chair O'Brien requested more details on the "New to Newman" initiative for mid-year families. Principal Peterson highlighted a three-part approach involving Parent Teacher Council (PTC) outreach, administrator check-in calls, and feedback lunches with new students to ensure they feel integrated into the large school community.

Mr. Greis asked about the practical implementation and teacher workload regarding digital portfolios. Principal Peterson explained that the initiative began with a fall learner showcase where students led their parents through their own learning goals and accomplishments. She noted that teachers will use the Canvas platform to "tag" specific items students are proud of, empowering learners to reflect on their own growth while creating a digital trajectory that students can look back on through high school graduation.

Vice Chair Skatrud asked for an update on the "What I Need" (WIN) blocks and the school's use of OpenArchitect data cycles. Principal Peterson reported that the WIN blocks remain central to providing both remediation and enrichment, now enhanced by intentional data cycles where teachers triangulate literacy and math data. She noted that teachers have responded positively to the increased intentionality and the ability to target instruction more discreetly to individual student needs.

Human Resources Assessment

<u>Human Resources Assessment</u>

Superintendent Gutekanst explained the district's comprehensive response following previous employee arrests last year, including enhanced mandated training

and student safety lessons. He noted that the district collaborated with the state's Internet Crimes Against Children (ICAC) Task Force and engaged outside consultants to ensure human resource processes meet security standards.

Marie Altieri, Associate of the Collins Center at UMass Boston, presented the findings of a comprehensive Human Resources (HR) Assessment focused on student safety, compliance, efficiency, and equity. She explained that the study involved a deep dive into core functions such as recruitment, onboarding, licensure, and staff retention strategies. Ms. Altieri reported that the district's hiring and background check processes were exceptionally thorough, often exceeding state requirements by re-screening employees every time they re-entered the district. The Collins Center team concluded that Needham Public School administrators could not have known about or prevented the alleged illegal activities of former staff members, as proper checks were completed and the incidents occurred outside the school community. While she offered minor recommendations to improve system efficiency and training, she praised the human resources department for its strong commitment to equity and its success in recruiting educators of color.

Superintendent Gutekanst and Ms. Montes McNeil thanked the consultants for their thorough review and reaffirmed the district's commitment to evolving its practices.

Ms. Lee asked how the district's incidents compared to others, noting that background checks only catch those with existing records. Ms. Altieri and Monica Visco, Associate of the Collins Center at UMass Boston, confirmed that no legal screening can predict future criminal behavior and that similar issues have surfaced in other districts. Superintendent Gutekanst added that police viewed the cluster of cases as isolated individuals whose actions coincided.

Mr. Greis inquired if state-level (CORI & SORI) background checks were sufficient given the proximity of other states. Ms. Altieri and Ms. Visco clarified that national fingerprinting already captures out-of-state records. Mr. Greis asked if the consultants had identified any specific strategies to streamline the hiring process. Ms. Visco noted that integrated software is rare and communication with hiring managers often needs improvement. Ms. Montes McNeil added that the district is now including fingerprinting instructions in offer letters to clarify and speed up the process. Superintendent Gutekanst acknowledged that his personal interview requirement can cause delays and committed to being more accessible.

Ms. Baqri questioned if hiring tools have evolved to proactively screen an applicant's online behavior. Ms. Altieri explained that much of the proactive work still relies on rigorous staff training and orientation. Ms. Visco added that interview teams often perform informal "deep dives" into social media and utilize their professional networks to vet finalists beyond standard background checks. Ms. Baqri asked if exit interviews effectively capture the experiences of diverse staff. Ms. Visco shared that

while exit surveys can collect data, in her last district "stay interviews" were conducted by DEI directors and were often more effective for addressing issues in real time before a staff member decided to leave.

Chair O'Brien inquired about how the district managed the challenge of bias within the hiring process. Ms. Altieri explained that the district used research-based training to mitigate bias and noted her impression of Needham's strong diversity and retention data. Chair O'Brien then asked for deeper insight into the emotional impact of past breaches of trust on staff. Ms. Altieri and Ms. Visco replied that the pain among frontline staff was still palpable and noted that she found no areas where the district's immediate response or communication could have been improved.

Mr. Arvedon asked how the district monitors educators throughout their careers following the initial background check. Ms. Visco explained that criminal checks were rerun every three years and noted that the small-town nature of the community, along with annual evaluations, provided ongoing oversight. Mr. Arvedon inquired whether there was encouragement for students to speak up if they observed poor or changing behavior in a teacher. Ms. Altieri stated that while that specific question wasn't asked, the interviews confirmed that misconduct reports were taken seriously and supported by the district's central office. Ms. Visco emphasized that students were often an administrator's best source of information because they were the primary focus of the school's work.

The Superintendent explained that he and Ms. Montes McNeil would begin their annual review of pre-professional teachers, a process that serves as an ongoing supervisory check to ensure only the most appropriate educators continue their tenure.

Needham Education Foundation (NEF) Winter Grants

Needham Education Foundation (NEF) Winter Grants

Kristi Daly and Amy Chan, co-chairs of the Needham Education Foundation (NEF), presented eight grants totaling $27,971 for the winter 2026 cycle, noting that the recipients included a diverse group of teachers, parents, administrators, therapists, and librarians. Four grants targeted social and emotional support by funding sensory supplies, fidget seats, audiobooks, and a restorative justice space. Three grants promoted innovation through murals at High Rock, garden beds at Broadmeadow, and upgraded robotics kits at Pollard. One final grant funded professional development for 12 high school teachers to attend a summit on AI in education.

Chair O'Brien expressed excitement regarding the professional development grant for Artificial Intelligence, noting its alignment with the earlier presentation from High Rock School.

Mr. Greis thanked the NEF and its donors for their support of district educators. He specifically highlighted the "Seed City" and Pollard robotics grants as evidence of the long-term success of previous NEF pilots. He commended the foundation for its commitment to upgrading and replacing successful programs, ensuring high-quality materials remain available for future students.

Chair O'Brien invited the presenters to share details regarding the upcoming NEF Trivia Bee, noting that the School Committee intended to field a team to compete with students, parents, and teachers. Ms. Daly and Ms. Chan announced that the annual Trivia Bee, the foundation's largest fundraiser, was scheduled for Wednesday, March 11th, at 7:00 PM. They encouraged community members to visit the NEF website to participate in the fundraising efforts that directly support these grant opportunities. Ms. Daly mentioned the deadline for Spring grant applications would be due April 10th.

Action Item

Action: Approve NEF Winter Grants

Approve NEF Winter Grants

Superintendent Gutekanst recommended that the Needham School Committee vote to accept the Needham Education Foundation's 2026 Winter Grant Awards totaling $27,971.

Chair O'Brien entertained a motion to approve the winter grants as submitted. Michael Greis moved and Andrea Longo Carter seconded the motion.

Chair O'Brien opened the floor for discussion.

Chair O'Brien initiated a roll call vote and reminded the Committee that they may invoke the "Rule of Necessity," which allows members to vote who would typically be excluded from the vote on the fees due to potential conflict of interest.

All members of the School Committee present voted "aye" which resulted in a unanimous 6-0-0 approval of the NEF Winter Grants.

Pollard Middle School Project Update

Pollard Middle School Project Update

Superintendent Gutekanst announced that the MSBA Board of Directors would vote the following morning on the Pollard Middle School Project's Preferred Schematic Design, with a recommendation for approval and Chair O'Brien serving as the town's spokesperson. He noted that the design team is incorporating extensive feedback and that staff are visiting modern facilities in Saugus and Natick to observe current educational designs in practice.

Vice Chair Skatrud reported that the Permanent Public Building Committee is interviewing three finalists for the Construction Manager at Risk (CMR) position, with a vote expected at the next PPBC/SBC meeting. She emphasized that the selected manager must navigate the complexities of an occupied site, including strict safety protocols, parking logistics, and mandatory CORI checks for all contractors.

Chair O'Brien detailed a productive "abutters" meeting where the design team addressed questions from approximately 40 residents. He praised Principal Bibbo for her proactive community outreach and described the upcoming MSBA vote as a pivotal moment for the district, marking a major milestone in the design process.

Vice Chair Skatrud updated the Committee on recent design refinements aimed at reducing the building's height and maximizing the portion of the project constructed during Phase 1 to improve cost-efficiency.

The Superintendent concluded by noting that the project designers would return to the School Committee on March 17th to provide a more detailed update on the schematic design and the results of the MSBA vote.

Stephen Palmer Building Discussion

Stephen Palmer Building Discussion

Matthew Spengler, School Committee member and representative on the Stephen Palmer Building Development Review Committee, expressed his desire to align the redevelopment of the Stephen Palmer building with the school district's mission, noting that the School Committee holds jurisdiction over the property. He described potential uses such as providing affordable housing for district employees, creating a student-run entrepreneurial space, and developing a multi-generational housing model focused on continuous learning.

Ms. Lee expressed her concern that giving the land to the town might weaken the School Committee's future negotiating position, despite the potential benefits of collaboration.

Mr. Arvedon voiced support for using the space for real-world student learning.

Mr. Greis expressed that the Committee should maintain jurisdiction because school purposes should be viewed to include any property use that enriches the student and family experience.

Vice Chair Skatrud emphasized that the location's proximity to the town center made it ideal for long-term needs like workforce housing to attract teachers or additional space for universal preschool.

Ms. Baqri expressed excitement about the inclusive possibilities for the space, stating that whether used for preschool or staff housing, the project should enrich the community.

Mr. O'Brien agreed that providing local housing for dedicated educators would be highly beneficial and noted that a final usage decision was expected by June 2026.

The Superintendent suggested keeping the project as a recurring agenda item and noted that the Committee needed to clarify who would ultimately oversee the building if the school department retained jurisdiction.

Mr. Spengler clarified the time of the next development meeting and thanked the Committee for providing perspectives that he could share with the review Committee.

Ms. Lee concluded by reminding the Committee that retaining jurisdiction also meant taking responsibility for the building's physical maintenance.

School Committee Comments — School Committee Comments

Chair O'Brien noted the inclusion of an information item in the supplemental packet regarding a revised policy for service animals and emotional support dogs.

All documents shared at the School Committee meeting are available at: https://www.needham.k12.ma.us/district_info/school_committee/packets. — Meeting Documents

At approximately 8:45 p.m., Chair O'Brien entertained a motion to adjourn the School Committee meeting of February 24, 2026. Michael Greis moved and Elizabeth Lee seconded the motion. The motion carried. The roll call vote was 6-0-0. — Adjournment

Respectfully Submitted,

Mariah Tsolirides,
Assistant to the Superintendent

Needham Public Schools

Needham School Committee

Minutes of the Needham School Committee Meeting
March 3, 2026
Broadmeadow Performance Center
120 Broad Meadow Road
Needham, MA 02492

School Committee Chair Michael E. O'Brien called the meeting of March 3, 2026 to order at approximately 6:30 p.m.

Members of the School Committee present:

Michael O'Brien, Chair	Elizabeth Lee
Alisa Skatrud, Vice Chair	Andrea Longo Carter
Sri Baqri	Matthew Spengler
Michael Greis	Jack Arvedon, Student Representative

Members of the Central Administration present:

Daniel E. Gutekanst, Superintendent
Anne Gulati, Assistant Superintendent for Finance and Operations
Alexandra Montes McNeil, Assistant Superintendent for Human Resources
Carmen Williams, Assistant Superintendent for Instruction and Innovation

Public Comment Public Comment

Chair O'Brien opened the floor for public comment, reminding speakers to state their name, affiliation, and to limit their remarks to three minutes.

Christine Chaplin, guardian, expressed concern about how school nursing staff have handled her students' medical needs. Chair O'Brien requested that she conclude her public comment as she had reached the three minute limit. Ms. Chaplin continued speaking. Chair O'Brien thanked Ms. Chaplin and then ended her time as she exceeded the limit.

School Committee Chair and Subcommittee Updates

School Committee Chair and Subcommittee Updates

Mr. Spengler reported that the Stephen Palmer Building Committee met on February 26th to narrow down site development options. They eliminated several options, including standalone open space, private community centers, single-family housing, and reusing the building in the current state. A community feedback session is scheduled for March 30th.

Superintendent's Comments

Superintendent's Comments

Superintendent Gutekanst congratulated Brooke Kessel, Social Studies Department Chair Grades K-8. The Massachusetts Council for Social Studies selected her for the 2026 Charles Mitsakos Award for Outstanding Supervisor Award. Superintendent Gutekanst noted that she was chosen from a strong field of candidates and highlighted her commitment to critical thinking and active citizenship. He announced the award ceremony would be in Sturbridge on March 13th.

Consent Items

Consent Items

Chair O'Brien entertained a motion to approve the following consent items:

1. Adjust Vehicle Expense Reimbursement Rate for School Employees

With there being no objections, the Committee approved the consent items by unanimous consent.

Discussion Items

Pollard Middle School Improvement Plan

Pollard Middle School Improvement Plan

Chair O'Brien opened the presentation by inviting the Pollard Middle School community to share their school improvement plan (SIP).

Principal Tamatha Bibbo congratulated Brooke Kessel, Social Studies Department Chair Grades K-8, and emphasized a deep commitment to student-centered learning through the inclusion of four students on the School Council. She explained that the Pollard and High Rock councils had recently begun collaborating to ensure a coherent transition as the schools prepare to reunify into a single grade 6–8 building. Principal Bibbo noted that every department had completed a curriculum audit to integrate Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and culturally responsive practices. She also noted several goals of the SIP highlighted the pilot of a "Portrait of a Needham Graduate" model for student self-assessment, a variety of community

outreach initiatives and ongoing collaboration with architects to design the future reunified school spaces.

Ms. Kessel shared details of a new, year-long eighth-grade civics course. She explained that the Democratic Knowledge Project (DKP) will help students become informed participants in society through a non-partisan, thematic examination of United States history and civil rights.

Dillon McCutcheon, grade 8 social studies teacher, explained a unit on individual rights where students adopted professional roles like historians and advocates. His students, Zachary Feigenbaum, Aiden Fava, and Oliver Fisher, shared their experience creating a podcast about the First Amendment, noting that they learned how the law protects symbolic actions while also discovering the importance of interpersonal trust in group projects.

Nate St. Germain, grade 8 social studies teacher, introduced an assessment that required students to act as lawyers by writing legal briefs on presidential power. Students Rowan Nelson and Ritika Ray detailed their research into Executive Orders and the incarceration of Japanese Americans during World War II. They reflected on how the assignment helped them master professional citations and the art of formulating a sophisticated argument.

Ms. Kessel concluded by sharing the upcoming Civic Action Project, a capstone experience where students will identify local issues and contact officials to enact real-world change. She concluded with an invitation for the Committee to attend a showcase in June to witness the final results of the students' work.

Chair O'Brien thanked the educators and students for their work and opened the floor for discussion.

Ms. Lee asked the students on how this curriculum differed from their past learning and what stood out to them most. The students explained that the new civics project allowed them to move beyond general history to discover their own personal values and beliefs.

Ms. Baqri asked the students how they navigated misinformation and source reliability during their research. The students responded that the resources provided by teachers helped them identify reliable databases and trustworthy sources. Ms. Baqri inquired how the students managed disagreements and differences of opinion while working toward a common group goal. The students noted that the group learned to compromise in order to produce the best possible project, and helped them develop collaborative skills.

Vice Chair Skatrud asked the educators to provide examples of how "Universal Design for Learning" (UDL) functioned within the civics curriculum. Mr. McCutcheon explained that UDL involved meeting students where they are by allowing students to choose different ways to execute their research and assignments. Principal Bibbo detailed that UDL gave students the ability to choose how they represented their learning, such as through podcasts, essays, or slide decks, to universally engage with the material. Vice Chair Skatrud expressed her appreciation for the professional skill required by educators to tailor learning to each student's progress.

Mr. Greis commended the students for producing high school-quality work and asked them what they would like to have more choice over in future projects. Students requested a final assessment to demonstrate their learning, which Principal Bibbo noted will happen at the upcoming civics action project showcase. Mr. Greis asked for the teachers' reflections on transitioning to a student-led classroom model. Mr. St. Germain noted that he hoped to further develop current events protocols that would allow students even more choice in analyzing global and domestic issues.

Mr. Arvedon asked what students would change about the curriculum in the future. Students responded that they primarily desired more time to complete their projects more thoroughly. Mr. Arvedon followed up by asking the educators if they observed a higher level of engagement with this curriculum compared to past years. Mr. McCutcheon confirmed that engagement was significantly higher because students were more invested when given the autonomy to pick their own topics. Ms. Kessel shared that the goal of the curriculum was to educate for democracy through conversation and collaboration, noting that the program would continue to evolve based on student feedback.

Mr. Spengler thanked the staff for advocating for student control over learning and highlighted how past eighth-grade civics projects had successfully led to real-world local environmental changes.

Needham High School Attendance and Credit Update

Needham High School Attendance and Credit Update

Principal Aaron Sicotte and Assistant Principal Mary Kay Alessi presented an update on Needham High School's attendance and credit policy. Principal Sicotte explained that the current policy would result in a potential loss of credit if a student missed six classes in a subject during a single term, though students were given opportunities to earn those credits back by improving their attendance in subsequent terms.

Ms. Alessi detailed a holistic support system that included family outreach, graduation tracking, coordination with outside mental health providers, and

specialized testing for students with chronic attendance challenges. Principal Sicotte noted that while a severe flu season impacted numbers, there was a concerning post-pandemic trend of students missing school for family vacations. The speakers then shared mid-year data, noting that while the total number of absences per student had risen, the number of individual students losing credit had actually decreased compared to the previous year. They emphasized that the data would shift as students earned credits back by the end of the academic year. Finally, the presentation acknowledged that students with IEPs and those from specific demographics were disproportionately represented in credit loss data. Principal Sicotte explained that the disproportionality reflected the unique challenges these students faced within the school environment rather than a failure of the policy itself.

Chair O'Brien observed an increase in high school families taking vacations during academic periods. Principal Sicotte confirmed that vacation-related absences have risen significantly over the last several years. Ms. Alessi added that club sports travel impacts high school attendance in ways not seen at the elementary level.

Chair O'Brien inquired whether there were any policy successes regarding attendance within specific student subgroups. Principal Sicotte highlighted progress with English Learners..

Mr. Arvedon asked if the data reflected students skipping the first block of the day simply to sleep in with parental permission. Ms. Alessi stated that the majority of her daily attendance conversations involve students who have missed the first block and are consequently at risk of losing credit.

Vice Chair Skatrud inquired about a prior online form for parents to note absences. Principal Sicotte explained that the online absence reporting form was discontinued because students were using it to bypass parents, whereas direct emails from parents provide more accurate data. Vice Chair Skatrud asked how students in single-semester classes can earn back lost credits, particularly for students on IEPs. Principal Sicotte clarified that it is difficult to recreate comparable environments for semester-end credit recovery.

Mr. Greis stressed the importance of a welcoming environment, noting that a student's sense of isolation can heavily influence their desire to attend school. He requested data on the total scope of lost credits versus credits earned. Principal Sicotte responded that while he didn't have the exact figures on hand, the vast majority of students successfully earn their lost credits back and would gather data.

Mr. Spengler acknowledged the hard work of the staff but shared a statement that the current policy has a disproportionate, inequitable impact on Black students and low-income households. He formally requested an equity and outcomes review,

stating the district has an obligation to revise policies that unintentionally widen opportunity gaps or create long-term academic barriers.

Ms. Longo Carter asked if the Committee could provide specific resources or if attendance issues were too individualized for a broad solution. Principal Sicotte explained that current challenges are highly personal, often centering on the difficulty of physically getting students into school rather than policy-related credit loss. Ms. Alessi emphasized that attendance is frequently tied to family crises, highlighting the need for community partnerships to support parents who feel unable to meet their child's needs.

Ms. Lee questioned the implications of separating credit from attendance. Principal Sicotte responded that while accredited online programs exist, it is difficult to award a Needham High diploma without the "Needham High experience" of in-person learning. He noted that the school works creatively to help students progress, even when presence is not possible. Ms. Alessi clarified that very few students fail to graduate solely due to the attendance policy, noting that excessive absences usually lead to failing the class because the student cannot access the material.

Ms. Baqri inquired about attendance barriers, such as immigration-related concerns. Principal Sicotte identified mental health as the primary driver of high absences, especially for students with IEPs and 504 plans, but noted the school provides legal and safety resources for those facing immigration challenges. Ms. Baqri emphasized the need for resource awareness, while Principal Sicotte highlighted the role of dedicated teams in supporting individual student success.

Revised Service Animals and Emotional Support Dogs Policy IMG

Revised Service Animals and Emotional Support Dogs Policy IMG

The Superintendent presented a revision to the district’s service animals policy that would now include guidelines for emotional support dogs, noting their increasing role in student focus and regulation. He cited public safety dogs, Rocket and Ghost, as current examples and explained that the revision established clear rules for staff members bringing emotional support animals into district schools. Ms. Lee added that the subcommittee had focused on clarifying the policy's vocabulary and structure.

Vice Chair Skatrud inquired whether the Special Education Parent Advisory Council (SEPAC) or current service dog users had been consulted. The Superintendent clarified that the service animal portion of the policy remained unchanged from its original version, which had been developed specifically to meet a past student needs.

Pollard Middle School Project Update

Pollard Middle School Project Update

The Superintendent announced that the Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA) had unanimously approved the preferred schematic report, officially moving the project into the schematic design phase. This next stage involved refining the site plans, determining funding agreements, and hiring a construction manager at risk (CMR) to ensure cost efficiency on the site.

Vice Chair Skatrud noted that the search for a CMR was nearly complete, with a recommendation expected for a vote on March 9th. Carmen Williams shared insights from recent visits to schools in Saugus and Natick, where they observed how modern physical spaces positively impacted student engagement and programming. The Superintendent concluded by stating that designers would provide a more detailed schematic update at the next School Committee meeting and reminded the community that project information was available on the district's website.

Action Item

Action: Approve the Request for May 2026 Special Town Meeting to Pay an Invoice of a Prior Fiscal Year

Approve Request May 2026 Special Town Meeting Approval to Pay Invoice of a Prior Fiscal Year

Superintendent Gutekanst recommended that the Needham School Committee approve the request for May 2026 Special Town Meeting to pay an invoice in the amount of $8,125 from FY2025.

Chair O'Brien entertained a motion to approve the request. Michael Greis moved and Andrea Longo Carter seconded the motion.

Chair O'Brien opened the floor for discussion. No comments were shared.

The motion carried. The vote was a unanimous 7-0-0 approval of the payment of an invoice in the amount of $8,125 from FY2025.

School Committee Comments

School Committee Comments

Chair O'Brien promoted the high school's upcoming production of *Shrek the Musical* and the Needham Education Foundation (NEF) Trivia Bee. He thanked Vice Chair Skatrud for her coordination with the NEF and encouraged the community to participate in the organization's auction to support the school district.

Vice Chair Skatrud noted that students from the 2020 cast of *Shrek*, whose show was canceled due to the pandemic, were invited to join the finale of the Saturday night

performance. She also urged parents of students with IEPs or 504 plans to complete a state-mandated survey from the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) as part of a review. Finally, she shared that the High School Jazz Band had won a gold medal at a recent music festival, with Seth Feigenbaum named the festival's MVP.

All documents shared at the School Committee meeting are available at: https://www.needham.k12.ma.us/district_info/school_committee/packets. Meeting Documents

At approximately 8:45 p.m., Chair O'Brien entertained a motion to adjourn the School Committee meeting of March 3, 2026. Michael Greis moved and Vice Chair Alisa Skatrud seconded the motion. The motion carried. The vote was 7-0-0. Adjournment

Respectfully Submitted,

Mariah Tsolirides,
Assistant to the Superintendent

NEEDHAM SCHOOL COMMITTEE

Agenda Item #: _____ **Date:** March 17, 2026

Item Title: **Disposal of Surplus: Eliot Elementary School, Sunita Williams Elementary School, Mitchell Elementary School, Newman Elementary School, High Rock Middle School**

Item Description: This request seeks approval to dispose of the following items, which are either obsolete, non-functioning, or the repair cost exceeds the value of the equipment.

From Eliot:
- 41 Old and Damaged Books

From Sunita Williams:
- 204 Old and Damaged Books

From Mitchell:
- 57 Old and Damaged Books

From Newman:
- 633 Old and Damaged Books

From High Rock:
- 142 Old and Damaged Books

Issues: Chapter 30B Section 16 of the Massachusetts General Laws permits a governmental body to dispose of a tangible supply no longer useful to the governmental body, but having a resale or salvage value, at less than the fair market value to a charitable organization that has received a tax exemption from the United States by reason of its charitable nature. Transactions between governmental entities also are exempt from Ch30B. Chapter 30B Section 15 and Needham School Policy #DN further authorize the disposal of surplus school property, other than real estate, having a net value of less than $10,000 through the exercise of sound business practices by the Procurement Officer.

Recommendation/Options: That the Needham School Committee be informed of the disposal of the above items, to the Town Transfer Station of the aforementioned surplus equipment in accordance with MGH30B Section 15&16.

Rationale:

Implementation Implications:

Supporting Data: None.

School Committee (circle one)

Action Information Discussion Consent Calendar

Central Administrator Town Counsel Sub-Committee: _____

Will report back to School Committee (date): _____

Respectfully Submitted,

Anne Gulati

Assistant Superintendent for Finance & Operations

NEEDHAM SCHOOL COMMITTEE

Agenda Item#: _____ **Date**: March 17, 2026

Item Title: **Approve School Department Donations**

Item Description:

Donations have been received in the amount of $32,473.91, which are listed on the attached page.

Issues:

M.G.L. Chapter 44, Section 53A and School Committee policy #DFC/KH authorize the School Committee to accept any grant of gifts or funds given for educational purposes by the federal or state government, charitable foundations, private corporations, PTCs or an individual. M.G.L. Chapter 44, Section 53A further stipulates that any monies received and accepted by the School Committee may be expended without further appropriation.

Recommendations/Options:

That the School Committee accept with gratitude the attached donations totaling $32,473.91.

School Committee:

Consent Calendar

Respectfully Submitted,

Anne Gulati
Assistant Superintendent for Finance and Operations

Donor	Recipient	Amount
Abigail Isenberg of Needham	Donation "You've been Flocked"	$ 25.00
Arbella Insurance of Boston	Donation for Transportation for the BSO Youth concerts	$ 300.00
Arbella Insurance of Boston	Donation for Transportation for the BSO Youth concerts	$ 300.00
Bake Sale	Bake Sale Proceeds to the NHS Shelterbox	$ 50.00
Bake Sale	Bake Sale Proceeds to the NHS Latino Hispanic Student Union	$ 25.00
Bake Sale	Bake Sale Proceeds to the NHS Space Club	$ 22.00
Bake Sale	Bake Sale Proceeds to the NHS Christian Student Union	$ 26.00
Bake Sale	Bake Sale Proceeds to the NHS Science Team	$ 55.00
Bake Sale	Bake Sale Proceeds to the NHS Christian Student Union	$ 19.00
Chipotle Fundraiser	Donation to the NHS for Donate 2 Dance	$ 42.10
Chipotle Fundraiser	Donation to the NHS for Model UN	$ 77.04
CoffeePond Photography & Yearbooks Commission	Donation (Newman) Class of 2033	$ 231.59
CoffeePond Photography & Yearbooks Commission	Donation (Newman) Class of 2034	$ 231.58
CoffeePond Photography & Yearbooks Commission	Donation (Newman) Class of 2035	$ 231.58
CoffeePond Photography & Yearbooks Commission	Donation (Newman) Class of 2036	$ 231.58
CoffeePond Photography & Yearbooks Commission	Donation (Newman) Class of 2037	$ 231.58
CoffeePond Photography & Yearbooks Commission	Donation (Newman) Class of 2038	$ 231.58
CoffeePond Photography & Yearbooks Commission	Donation (Sunita Williams) Class of 2033	$ 195.36
CoffeePond Photography & Yearbooks Commission	Donation (Sunita Williams) Class of 2034	$ 195.36
CoffeePond Photography & Yearbooks Commission	Donation (Sunita Williams) Class of 2035	$ 195.36
CoffeePond Photography & Yearbooks Commission	Donation (Sunita Williams) Class of 2036	$ 195.36
CoffeePond Photography & Yearbooks Commission	Donation (Sunita Williams) Class of 2037	$ 195.36
CoffeePond Photography & Yearbooks Commission	Donation (Sunita Williams) Class of 2038	$ 195.36
CoffeePond Photography & Yearbooks Commission	Donation (Broadmeadow) Class of 2033	$ 195.47
CoffeePond Photography & Yearbooks Commission	Donation (Broadmeadow) Class of 2034	$ 195.47
CoffeePond Photography & Yearbooks Commission	Donation (Broadmeadow) Class of 2035	$ 195.47
CoffeePond Photography & Yearbooks Commission	Donation (Broadmeadow) Class of 2036	$ 195.47
CoffeePond Photography & Yearbooks Commission	Donation (Broadmeadow) Class of 2037	$ 195.46
CoffeePond Photography & Yearbooks Commission	Donation (Broadmeadow) Class of 2038	$ 195.46
CoffeePond Photography & Yearbooks Commission	Donation (Mitchell) Class of 2033	$ 1,041.04
CoffeePond Photography & Yearbooks Commission	Donation (Eliot) Class of 2033	$ 138.04
CoffeePond Photography & Yearbooks Commission	Donation (Eliot) Class of 2034	$ 138.03
CoffeePond Photography & Yearbooks Commission	Donation (Eliot) Class of 2035	$ 138.03
CoffeePond Photography & Yearbooks Commission	Donation (Eliot) Class of 2036	$ 138.03
CoffeePond Photography & Yearbooks Commission	Donation (Eliot) Class of 2037	$ 138.03
CoffeePond Photography & Yearbooks Commission	Donation (Eliot) Class of 2038	$ 138.03
CoffeePond Photography & Yearbooks Commission	Donation to the NHS Student Council	$ 2,643.36
Dave and Tracy Zendzian of Needham	Donation to the NHS for Speech & Debate Club	$ 100.00
Elizabeth Gardner Charitable Trust	Donation to the Elizabeth Gardner Scholarship at NHS	$ 10,807.75
Elizabeth Sackett of Needham	Donation "You've been Flocked"	$ 25.00
Friends of Needham Cross Country of Needham	Donation for Cross Country Uniforms	$ 3,000.00
Gear Sale	Donation to the NHS for Black Student Union	$ 406.00
Habitat for Humanity Fundraiser	Donation to the NHS for Habitat for Humanity	$ 30.00
Karthik Krishnan of Needham	Donation to the NHS for Robotics Club	$ 500.00
Kelly Franklin of Needham	Donation "You've been Flocked"	$ 25.00
Kristi Daly of Needham	Donation to the NHS for Animal Rescue League	$ 50.00
Laerning Forward of Richardson, TX	Donation to Fine & Performing Arts	$ 400.00
Lindsay Kilduff of Needham	PNO Proceeds to the NHS Class of 2027	$ 50.00
Megan Alderman of Needham	Donation to the NHS for Animal Rescue League	$ 25.00
Meredith Kristall of Needham	Donation "You've been Flocked"	$ 75.00
Meredith Kristall of Needham	Donation "You've been Flocked"	$ 50.00
MetroWest Dining / The Common Room of Needham	Donation to the NHS for Best Buddies	$ 440.00
Movie Night Fundraiser	Donation to the NHS for Habitat for Humanity	$ 1,200.00
Nancy Borzain & J. Kevin Dougherty of White Plains, NY	Donation to the James Morrison Memorial Fund	$ 400.00
Nancy Nakano of Needham	Donation to the NHS for Animal Rescue League	$ 100.00
Pumpkin Silent Auction	Silent Auction Proceeds to the Class of 2032	$ 1,150.00
Stephanie Meininger of Needham	Donation to the NHS for Best Buddies	$ 75.00
Vanessa Pascoe of Needham	PNO Proceeds to the NHS Class of 2027	$ 50.00
Aggregate Recognition	Proceeds from NHS Coffee Cart Sales to Benefit Best Buddies	$ 22.00
Aggregate Recognition	Birthday Book Donations (Aggregate Recognition)	$ 4,304.98
	TOTAL	**$ 32,473.91**

Needham School Committee

March 17, 2026

Agenda Item: **Discussion**

Mitchell Elementary School Improvement Plan

Background Information:

- The Mitchell School Council has worked collaboratively with Principal Greg Bayse to develop and maintain the School Improvement Plan (SIP).

- In accordance with M.G. L. Chapter 71, Section 59c, the Superintendent has reviewed the Mitchell School Improvement Plan and is pleased to present it to the School Committee.

Person(s) Available for Presentation:

Greg Bayse, Mitchell Principal
Gabrielle Oliveira, School Council Member and Parent
William Davis, Mitchell Student
Victoria Wulff Gonzalez, Mitchell Student

Mitchell Elementary School

Needham School Committee Presentation

March 17, 2026

NEW Strategic Priorities

Priority 1: Growth – Each and every student grows academically, socially, and personally.

Priority 2: Innovation – Enhanced learning through new structures and paradigms.

Priority 3: Communication – Greater Collaboration with families and communities.

Priority 4: Infrastructure – Support for implementation of the district plan.

DESE Accountability Targets

Bright Spot:
SEL & School Culture

- **Progress:**
  - Successful school-wide renewal of **Responsive Classroom (RC)** and **SEL Tier 1 instruction**.

- **Key Highlights:**
  - **Thematic Community Meetings** for shared language and skills.
  - Integrating **Social-Emotional Mental Health (SELMH)** support (e.g., Mindfulness, Child Protection, Panorama) into daily routines.
  - **Building community** through programs: Buddy Classrooms, SEL Reporters, Safety Patrol, Veterans, and Grand-Friends.

Bright Spot:
Data-Informed Instruction

- **Successes:**
  - Teachers report that increased access to academic data (DIBELS, STAR, Amplify Math) is directly guiding classroom instruction.

- **Evidence of Growth:**
  - **Open Architects:** All teachers have been trained in OA and have completed three data cycles to inform classroom instruction.
  - **Data Cycles:** Teams meet regularly to review data and ensure differentiated, targeted instruction, so every student gets what they need.

Lived Experience:

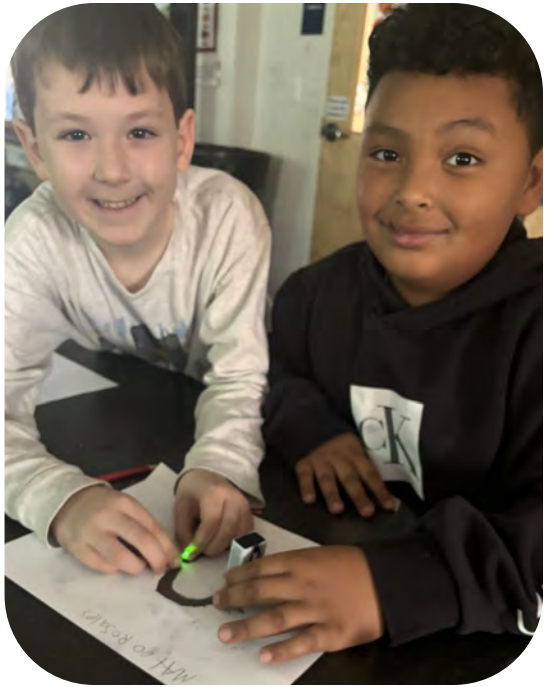
Dr. Gabrielle Oliveira, Parent

Bright Spot:
Innovation and Student Agency

- **Universal Design for Learning (UDL):**
  - Many teams now allow students to demonstrate mastery through various methods like drawing, writing, or digital presentations instead of traditional tests.

- **Interdisciplinary Learning:**
  - Examples can be seen in the **5th Grade Independent Research Projects (IRP)**, **3rd Grade State Fair**, **2nd Grade Country Project, and Art Integration.**

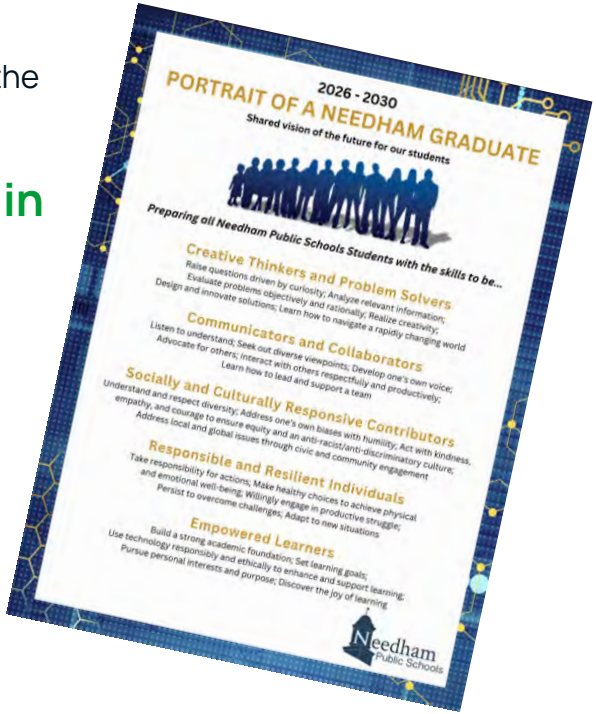
- **Inclusion:**
  - We are in the second year of a **co-teaching model**, providing greater access to the general education curriculum for students on IEPs.



Portrait of a Needham Graduate Spotlight:
Etta Dildine & Dylan MacManus

Finalists in the "**Letters About Literature**" competition sponsored by the Massachusetts Center for the Book.

Etta and Dylan are in the top 4% of contestants in the Commonwealth!



Bright Spot:
Culturally Sustaining Practices

- **Experiential Learning:** Our social studies curriculum has expanded, and this year included visits from Anawan Weedan (Mashpee Wampanoag/Pequot/Narragansett).

- **Curriculum Enrichment:** Presenters, such as ArtQuest, have been brought in to enhance student engagement with content and expose students to non dominant cultures.

Bright Spot: Culturally Sustaining Practices

Supportive Relationships

Mitchell Students

Black Students

Panorama Survey results indicate that 95% of Mitchell students report having supportive relationships at school, including 100% of our students who identify as Black.

Sense of Belonging

Mitchell Students

Black Students

Panorama Survey results indicate that 90% of Mitchell students report a sense of belonging at school, including 86% of our students who identify as Black.

Lived Experience:

Will Davis and Victoria Wulff Gonzalez
Mitchell Student Council Co-Presidents

Strategic Challenge:
Time and Consistency

- **Curriculum Demands:** Teacher feedback indicates that curriculum requirements currently exceed the available minutes in a school day.
- **Consistency:** Ensuring **consistent behavioral expectations** and student experiences across all classrooms, regardless of the assigned teacher.
- **Professional Development:** Staff expressed the need for more dedicated time to train effectively for new district initiatives, such as social studies and literacy curriculum.

Strategic Challenge: Infrastructure and Resources

- **Technology Needs:** We are transitioning from Chromebooks to iPads and continue to roll out classroom management and filtering tools. Different employee groups have access to different technologies.

- **Facility Maintenance:** Keeping our building clean and well-maintained is of ongoing importance. We have faced challenges with heating, electrical issues, and pests throughout the year.

Goals for 2026-2027

- **Support for Diverse Learners:** Ensure all students can access Tier 1 instruction by growing models that **support students with complex learning needs.**
- **Staff Development:** Continue prioritizing staff well-being and professional growth by **establishing Learning Labs** for peer observation and consultation.
- **Behavioral Structures:** Continue to build more **proactive, school-wide structures** to reinforce learning habits and behavior.

Thank You!

William Mitchell Elementary School

School Improvement Plan

2024-2027

Updated, 03-17-26

Mitchell School Council Members:

Gregory Bayse, Principal
Joseph Chiu, Parent Representative
Gershona Fein, Faculty Representative
Karen Hodys, Parent Representative
Samantha Johnston, Parent Representative
Samantha Mazzochi, Alum / Community Representative
Megan McQuivey, Faculty Representative
Gabrielle Oliveira, Parent Representative
Sara Rosin, Parent Representative
Melissa Rotman, Parent Representative

Collaboratively developed by the faculty, staff, parents, and alumni of Mitchell Elementary School

Mitchell School Improvement Plan
2024-2027

A Legacy of Community Involvement

Founded in 1950 and named after Needham pediatrician and land donor Dr. William Mitchell, Mitchell Elementary School is a thriving hub of learning dedicated to academic excellence and strong character development. With roughly 430 students and 80 dedicated staff, it is the fourth-largest elementary school in Needham, Massachusetts.

Mitchell boasts a rich history. Many current parents were once Mitchell students, and countless volunteer hours are donated annually by community members with fond memories of their time at the school. This enduring spirit extends beyond the school walls, positively impacting the broader community for over 75 years. Additionally, the school receives valuable support from the School Council, Parent Teacher Council (PTC), Boston Family and Friends (BFF), and Needham Education Foundation (NEF). Strong parent and staff involvement in the PTC fosters a collaborative and purposeful school environment.

Embracing Diversity, Building Community

Mitchell is dedicated to equipping children for a diverse and inclusive future, integrating these values into its educational setting. This approach enables students to acquire the necessary skills and insights to thrive in a multicultural society. As a METCO partnership school, Mitchell enrolls students from Boston, creating a more diverse learning environment that minimizes racial isolation. Furthermore, the school includes children of Needham Public School employees, which enhances the student body with a variety of backgrounds and experiences. Such an inclusive atmosphere permits students from all cultures, backgrounds, and abilities to learn and grow side by side, promoting a sense of belonging and respect. At Mitchell, every individual is appreciated and honored. This commitment inspires the school's mission to develop passionate learners, encourage excellence, and foster integrity.

A Commitment to Educational Excellence and Equity

Mitchell emphasizes a strong, culturally aware academic program that employs evidence-based curriculum and teaching strategies. Committed faculty work together to provide consistent and challenging instruction at every grade level. The school adopts the Responsive Classroom approach and the principles set forth by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) to support academic and social-emotional development.

Living Our Values, Shaping the Future

As a community, Mitchell embodies three core values:

- **Take Care of Myself:** Personal Responsibility
- **Take Care of Others:** Responsibility to and for Others
- **Take Care of Our School:** Responsibility as a Group - Fostering a positive and inclusive environment.

This School Improvement Plan (SIP) details objectives and actions for the next three years (2024-2027). Created collaboratively following a difficult public health crisis, it represents numerous discussions and the hard work of faculty, staff, leadership, and the School Council. The plan aligns with the Portrait of a Needham Graduate and the Mitchell Elementary School Vision, setting a foundation for future learning, growth, and community engagement.

Mitchell Elementary School Vision

All members of the Mitchell School are valued for their diverse range of backgrounds, experiences, and abilities. We are socially and culturally responsive contributors to the community. We respect diversity and act with empathy and courage to promote equity and an anti-racist culture.

Students at Mitchell are expert learners who are curious and engaged in their learning. They are able to adapt to change, persist to overcome challenges, and actively contribute to the community.

Staff at Mitchell demonstrate a commitment to ongoing learning and an understanding of current research and best practices in education. Staff employs a universally designed, inclusive, tiered instructional model that includes a rigorous, comprehensive curriculum.

Families at Mitchell feel welcome and engaged in their children's education. A diverse representation of parent voices works collaboratively with the school to support student academic and social-emotional growth.

Everyone at Mitchell feels a sense of belonging, and the school is a physically and emotionally safe space for all students, staff, and members of the community.

Needham Public Schools

MISSION

A school and community partnership that creates excited learners, inspires excellence, & fosters integrity.

VISION

Preparing ALL Needham Public Schools students to be:

- Creative Thinkers and Problem Solvers;
- Communicators and Collaborators;
- Socially and Culturally Responsive Contributors;
- Responsible and Resilient Individuals;
- Empowered Learners

CORE VALUES

- Scholarship
- Community
- Citizenship
- Personal Growth

NEEDHAM STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

1. **All Students Are Drivers of Their Own Learning**
    a. *Incorporate opportunities for student choice, independent learning, & personalized pathways*
    b. *Provide structures & experiences that enable student efficacy, leadership, and voice*
    c. *Teach students the content & skills necessary for them to grow personally and academically.*

2. **All Students Experience Integrative Teaching & Learning**
    a. *Extend interdisciplinary teaching and learning practices Pre-K to 12*
    b. *Embed Portrait Competencies, Technology, Inclusive Practices, SEL, and Equity into all curricula and instructional practices*
    c. *Provide opportunities for students to demonstrate knowledge and skills through multiple means of expression.*

3. **All Students Learn & Grow Within Adaptable Environments**
    a. *Support and design classroom models and environments that foster collaboration & innovation*
    b. *Provide time, schedules, and spaces that promote learning objectives*
    c. *Complement instruction with accessible learning beyond the classroom, within the community, and in partnership with families.*

4. **Infrastructure Supports Needs of All Students**
    a. *Provide staffing, facilities, and budget resources aligned to district priorities*
    b. *Implement a recruitment, retention, and development process for staff growth and diversity*
    c. *Establish a professional learning structure supporting equity and the Portrait vision.*

NPS PRIORITIES & MITCHELL SCHOOL GOALS

District Priority 1: ***All Students Are Drivers of Their Own Learning***

School Goal 1.1: - Foster student agency, voice, and choice in all aspects of learning.
School Goal 1.2: - Ensure Equity & Culturally Proficient practices across all students' experiences

District Priority 2: ***All Students Experience Integrative Teaching & Learning***

School Goal 2.1: - Develop common understandings and intentional opportunities for interdisciplinary learning.
School Goal 2.2: - Embed SELMH strategies and mental health supports across the school.
School Goal 2.3: - Implement with fidelity Responsive Classroom

District Priority 3: ***All Students Learn & Grow Within Adaptable Environments***

School Goal 3.1: - Expand learning opportunities by utilizing varied resources and voices
School Goal 3.2: - Provide learning access and opportunity across all students' experiences

District Priority 4: ***Infrastructure Supports the Needs of All Students***

School Goal 4.1: - Provide structures in support of Mitchell staff retention and professional development

DISTRICT PRIORITY 1:
All Students Are Drivers of Their Own Learning

DISTRICT FOCUS:
Continue to expand UDL with a phased implementation that increases opportunities for agency, voice, & choice.

SCHOOL GOAL 1.1:
Foster student agency, voice, and choice in all aspects of learning.

Action Step	Process	Priority	Person(s) Responsible	Status
Provide opportunities for professional development on UDL	❖ *Pre- and post-training assessments:* Measure teachers' knowledge and skills related to UDL before and after the training. ❖ *Teacher feedback:* Gather feedback from participants on the quality and effectiveness of the training, and on their confidence in integrating UDL concepts. ❖ *Observe classroom instruction:* Look for evidence of UDL strategies like multiple means of presentation, engagement, and action and expression. ❖ *Observation of classroom practice:* Create opportunities for teachers to observe interdisciplinary practice at other NPS schools.	1	Mr. Bayse; Ms. Hayden	In Progress
Implement UDL principles in lesson planning and curriculum development.	❖ *Review lesson plans and curriculum documents*: Use rubrics or checklists aligned with UDL principles to assess whether the instruction accommodates diverse learners. ❖ *Observe classroom instruction:* Look for evidence of UDL strategies like multiple means of presentation, engagement, and action and expression. ❖ *Student feedback:* Ask students how lessons cater to their individual needs and learning needs.	2	Curriculum Coaches	In Progress
Create opportunities for student choice in learning activities and assessments.	❖ *Review choice menus or project options:* Ensure diverse choices are available and cater to different learning needs and interests. ❖ *Student engagement metrics:* Track student participation in chosen activities and assessment types. ❖ *Student self-reflection:* Ask students how their chosen activities helped them learn.	3	Teachers	In Progress
Provide opportunities for student leadership and self-reflection.	❖ *Observe student leadership* in classrooms and school activities. ❖ *Review evidence of student self-reflection* journals or portfolios. ❖ *Student surveys:* Ask students how leadership and self-reflection activities impacted their learning.	4	SEL Committee; Teachers	In Progress

DISTRICT PRIORITY 1:
All Students Are Drivers of Their Own Learning

DISTRICT FOCUS:
Establish content and learning standard objectives for culturally responsive instructional practices by grade level.

SCHOOL GOAL 1.2:
Ensure Equity & Culturally Proficient practices across all students' experiences.

Action Step	Process	Priority	Person(s) Responsible	Status
Audit school-wide practices in need of attention and develop plans for improvement.	❖ *Identify areas* where content, experiences, or instructional practices may be culturally insensitive or biased. ❖ *Develop* plans and timelines to address identified gaps in equity and cultural proficiency..	3	MLT	Not Started
Integrate culturally responsive practices and Equity education across the students' experience.	❖ *Establish content and learning objectives* for culturally responsive instructional practices and content. ❖ *Integrate* the work of the REAL Coalition into the practices at Mitchell ❖ *Student self-reflection:* Have students reflect on their learning through written, creative, or interactive opportunities.	2	Curriculum Leadership; REAL Reps	In Progress
Audit systems, protocols, and polices for areas needing attention and develop improvement plans.	❖ *Review systems, protocols, and polices* with standards and CP principles. ❖ *Identify areas* where content and structures may be culturally insensitive or biased. ❖ *Track progress* on internal and external structures, policy documents, and district surveys.	1	Mr. Bayse; Ms. Hayden	Not Started

DISTRICT PRIORITY 2:
All Students Experience Integrative Teaching & Learning

DISTRICT FOCUS:
Expand Interdisciplinary Learning

SCHOOL GOAL 2.1:
Develop common understandings and intentional opportunities for interdisciplinary learning.

Action Step	Process	Priority	Person(s) Responsible	Status
Provide opportunities for professional development on effective interdisciplinary teaching practices.	❖ *Pre- and post-training assessments:* Measure teachers' knowledge and skills related to interdisciplinary teaching before and after the training. ❖ *Teacher feedback:* Gather feedback from participants on the quality and effectiveness of the training, and on their confidence in implementing interdisciplinary approaches. ❖ *Observation of classroom practice:* Look for evidence of interdisciplinary instruction in classrooms after the training, such as collaborative projects, thematic units, or guest speakers from other disciplines. ❖ *Observation of classroom practice:* Create opportunities for teachers to observe interdisciplinary practice at other NPS schools.	1	Teachers MLT Building Admin	In Progress
Identify opportunities for interdisciplinary connections within the existing curriculum.	❖ *Review existing curriculum documents* and identify themes, concepts, or skills that can be connected across disciplines. Look for natural overlaps or shared learning goals. ❖ *Teacher brainstorming sessions:* Facilitate discussions among teachers from different disciplines to explore potential interdisciplinary connections. ❖ *Student feedback:* Ask students to identify topics or interests that could be explored through multiple disciplines.	2	Teachers MLT Building Admin	In Progress
Create interdisciplinary projects and units that require collaboration across disciplines.	❖ *Project evaluation:* Develop rubrics or assessment tools that focus on collaboration, critical thinking, problem-solving, and integration of knowledge from multiple disciplines. ❖ *Project implementation:* Each grade level and special area will be able to identify one interdisciplinary project or unit at their grade level or special area. ❖ *Student self-reflection:* Have students reflect on their learning through journals, exit tickets, or presentations, focusing on how they used knowledge from different disciplines and collaborated effectively. ❖ *Pre- and post-assessments:* Conduct assessments before and after the project to gauge student understanding of core concepts and their ability to apply them across disciplines.	3	Teachers MLT Building Admin	Completed

DISTRICT PRIORITY 2:
All Students Experience Integrative Teaching & Learning

DISTRICT FOCUS:
Implementation of the District's SELMH Framework

SCHOOL GOAL 2.2:
Embed SELMH strategies and mental health supports across the school

Action Step	Process	Priority Step	Leaders(s) Responsible	Status
MLT will Examine the SELMH Framework to understand the foundational principles necessary for all students to be successful.	❖ *Examine the framework*'s text, identify key components, goals, and guiding philosophies. ❖ *Explore each domain* individually, understanding its intended role in student success. ❖ *Identify* how different domains and elements within the framework interrelate and support each other.	1	MLT	In Progress
Integrate SELMH practices into core Tier 1 instruction.	❖ *Identify* the interrelated aspects of the SELMH Framework and existing SEL practices. ❖ *Establish* a layered scope and sequence of SEL practices and instruction that meets the needs of Mitchell students.	2	SEL Rep & Committee	In Progress
Provide professional development to teachers on integrating SELMH Strategies with Responsive Classroom and across disciplines.	❖ *Pre- and post-training assessments:* Measure teachers' knowledge and skills related to Social Emotional and Mental Health support strategies before and after the training. ❖ *Teacher feedback:* Gather feedback from participants on the quality and effectiveness of the training, and on their confidence in implementing SELMH approaches. ❖ *Observation of classroom practice:* Look for evidence of preventative practices for all students and target group intervention for some students.	3	SEL Rep; Mr. Bayse	In Progress
Prioritize and support staff well-being.	❖ *Staff feedback:* Gather data on staff's level of feeling of belonging, respect, value, and trust. ❖ *Examine the causes* of staff-reported areas of stress and reductions in well-being ❖ *Identify and implement* resources and activities that positively support well-being and ensure they are readily available to all staff	1	Mr. Bayse; Ms. Hayden	In Progress

DISTRICT PRIORITY 2:
All Students Experience Integrative Teaching & Learning

DISTRICT FOCUS:
Implement with fidelity Restorative Practices

SCHOOL GOAL 2.3:
Implement with fidelity Responsive Classroom

Action Step	Process	Priority	Leaders(s) Responsible	Status
Learn, develop, and implement the practices of Responsive Classroom across the school community.	❖ *Build understanding and a shared vision* of Responsive Classroom ❖ *Identify common practices and protocols* that will be expected across the school. ❖ *Fully implement identified common practices*, allowing for gradual learning and adjustments	1	District Leadership; Mr. Bayse	Completed
Integrate Restorative Practices into Responsive Classrooms.	❖ *Identify* Mitchell-specific restorative practices for community building and responding to unexpected and unacceptable behaviors. ❖ *Provide Opportunities* for staff to practice Restorative Practices as they relate to Responsive Classroom	2	MLT	In Progress
Monitor student behavior data to assess the effectiveness of Restorative Practices	❖ *Develop* a consistent method of tracking behavioral data ❖ *Share* behavioral data with staff in an ongoing manner in order to identify behavioral trends. ❖ *Adapt* new and existing Restorative Practices to the identified behavioral trends. ❖ *Integrate* Panorama student surveys into the model of Restorative Practices	1	Ms. Hayden; Guidance Staff	Completed

DISTRICT PRIORITY 3:
All Students Learn & Grow Within Adaptable Environments

DISTRICT FOCUS:
Explore additional pathways to learning

SCHOOL GOAL 3.1:
Expand learning opportunities by utilizing varied resources and voices

Action Step	Process	Priority	Leaders(s) Responsible	Status
Support the Mitchell PTC in growing the diversity of its volunteer base.	❖ *Survey Families:* Use new and existing survey data to understand the sense of belonging and connection of diverse Mitchell families. ❖ *Expand Relationships* with the Mitchell PTC and support the PTC leadership in recruiting a diverse representation of Mitchell families.	*2*	Mr. Bayse; School Council	In Progress
Ensure that field trips and curricular enrichment activities are engaging and representative of our diverse community.	❖ *Pre- and post-activity surveys:* Conduct surveys with students before and after participating in community activities to gauge their engagement, knowledge gain, and overall satisfaction. ❖ *Build relationships with Needham and Boston community, business, organizations, and civic leaders* that provide learning opportunities.	*2*	MLT	In Progress
Expand student learning through the use of parent and community member knowledge and professions.	❖ *Develop monthly community meetings* that are thematic in nature, include varied speakers, and highlight the diversity of our community and world. ❖ *Survey* existing volunteer programs to ensure adequate opportunities exist for families to participate in their child's education. ❖ *Create new pathways* for families to be involved in their child's education.	*1*	Guidance Staff; SEL Rep	In Progress

DISTRICT PRIORITY 3:
All Students Learn & Grow Within Adaptable Environments

DISTRICT FOCUS:
Pilot and assess new scheduling options and models that provide consistent time on learning, student support, targeted intervention, collaboration, and teaming.

SCHOOL GOAL 3.2:
Provide learning access and opportunity across all students' experiences

Action Step	Process	Priority	Leaders(s) Responsible	
Review and improve scheduling at Mitchell to ensure that time is being allocated in a manner that benefits student learning and growth	❖ *Establish a data-inquiry cycle* that measures the effectiveness of student learning and growth of classroom intervention blocks (WIN). ❖ *Continue to grow* an adaptable model for intervention blocks that supports all students in academic achievement and becoming expert learners.	2	Curriculum Coaches	Completed

DISTRICT PRIORITY 4:
Infrastructure Supports the Needs of All Students

DISTRICT FOCUS:
Implement a recruitment, retention, and development process for staff growth and diversity

SCHOOL GOAL 4.1:
Provide structures in support of Mitchell staff retention and professional development

Action Step	Process	Priority	Leaders(s) Responsible	Status
Review and improve Mitchell models for new staff induction in the first three years of employment.	❖ *Partner with HR* to survey schools in the MetroWest area to learn best practices for new teacher induction within the first three years. ❖ *Identify* new teacher induction practices to adopt at Mitchell ❖ *Establish* a structure and timeline for implementation	3	Mentor Rep Mr. Bayse	Completed
Establish a model for learning labs at Mitchell	❖ *Collaborate* to determine the best learning lab model for our school size and structure. ❖ *Establish* a structure and timeline for implementation ❖ *Identify* priority focus areas for learning labs	1	Curriculum Coaches; Mr. Bayse	In Progress

Glossary of Terms

ALICE (Alert, Lockdown, Inform, Counter, Evacuate)
Training to prepare individuals to handle the threat of an armed intruder. ALICE teaches individuals to participate in their own survival while leading others to safety.

Benchmark Assessments
Benchmark assessments are short tests administered throughout the school year that give teachers immediate feedback on how students meet academic standards.

CASEL
Collaborative for Academic and Social/ Emotional Learning. SEL learning standards and benchmarks articulate what students should know and be able to do in SEL from PreK to grade 12 and allow districts to outline intersections of SEL with standards in academic content areas, including the Common Core State Standards.

Collaboration Time
Weekly time devoted to grade level and department teams to consult, collaborate, and discuss problems of practice and possible instructional implications.

Common Core State Standards
The Common Core State Standards provide a consistent, clear understanding of what students are expected to learn in each grade level and in every content area.

Community Meetings
Monthly school assemblies that follow a Responsive Classroom meeting format, which invite the school community to greet one another, share their accomplishments, participate in an activity, and hear about class/school news and announcements.

Cultural Proficiency (CP)
A paradigm shift from viewing cultural differences as problematic to celebrate and learn how to interact effectively with other cultures.

Enrichment/Extension
Learning that extends beyond mastery of grade-level standards. Based on student achievement, enrichment opportunities can be provided in all content areas as needed.

Flexible Grouping
A method of splitting students into groups for instruction based on specific goals, interests, and learning needs, rather than grouping the students by ability alone. Assessment data is used to determine which group students should participate in, and these groups are fluid, as student needs change.

Formative Assessment
Formative assessment, including diagnostic testing, is a range of formal and informal assessment procedures conducted by teachers during the learning process to modify teaching and learning activities and improve student learning.

Elementary Leadership Team
Stipend positions at the elementary level that allow classroom grade level representatives to meet with school administration and one another monthly to collaborate on school-related Issues.

Growth Mindset
In a growth mindset, people believe that their most basic abilities can be developed through dedication and hard work—brains and talent are just the starting point. This view fosters a love of learning and resilience, which are essential for great accomplishment (Courtesy of C. Dweck).

High Needs
For purposes of state assessment and accountability, this category refers to all students in a school or district belonging to at least one of the following individual subgroups: students with disabilities, English language learners (ELL), former ELL students, or low-income students.

IDEAS
Initiatives for Developing Equity and Achievement for Students. IDEAS will extend the professional learning opportunities available to school districts as they work to enhance the culturally proficient practices identified in Standards II and III of the MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education Model Teacher Rubric.

MLT
The Mitchell Leadership Team brings together our building administration, grade-level representatives, and special-area teachers to problem-solve and address critical issues in our school. MLT members coordinate collaboration at their grade level.

MTSS
A Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) is a framework for how school districts can build the necessary systems to ensure that every student receives a high-quality educational experience.

Professional Development (PD)
Education for teachers and other school staff regarding school—and district-based initiatives. Currently, PD time is provided during staff meetings, early release days, and during the school day as needed.

Professional Learning Community (PLC)
Grade-level teams that collaborate to develop strategic goals aimed at increasing student achievement.

Responsive Classroom (RC)
Responsive Classroom is a research- and evidence-based approach to elementary education that leads to greater teacher effectiveness, higher student achievement, and improved school climate.

Response to Intervention (RTI)
A framework to provide early interventions to students based on data in order to reduce referrals to special education.

Social-Emotional Learning (SEL)
Social-Emotional Learning is how children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions.

Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) SEL Representative
The Social and Emotional Learning Representative (SEL Representative) is a stipend position in each school in the Needham Public Schools. The SEL Representative's role is to support and promote social and emotional learning within the school community.

TAT—Teacher Assisting Teachers Team
A group of Mitchell classroom teachers, special educators, guidance counselors, literacy specialists, and administrators that meets weekly to discuss individual and small groups of students and provide strategies and/or targeted interventions that can be implemented to support student growth. Data is collected based on student progress to determine if interventions have been successful.

Tiered Interventions (Tier 1, Tier 2, Tier 3)
Tiered intervention refers to levels of support offered to individual students who struggle academically. Tier 1 refers to in-class support provided by the teacher. Tier 2 refers to support offered by a specialist teacher (e.g., a literacy coach). Tier 3 refers to a very high level of support, such as the modified special education curriculum.

Dear Jesica Khoury,

I love your book The Mystwick School of Musicraft and all your other books because of so many different reasons. I love fantasy books and they really let me connect with the different characters in the book. I'm always rereading them. They really inspired me because before I read them I had no love for music. I didn't really care, but then when I read it I got inspired. I started practicing all sorts of different music. I play piano, viola, clarinet, xylophone, drums and recorder. I started loving music more and more with the goal of playing every instrument family thanks to your book. It made me realize that music was more than just notes, it's magic. Your books also made me feel like I was there too, having an adventure within the pages. Your books are also my favorite series in this world! Your books made playing music so much fun, they made my imagination grow bigger and bigger. Every time I am playing music I imagine the wisps of magic coming out of my instrument. Your books made me believe that there is more to music. Before I read them I really didn't like books or reading at all until I tried reading your book and it all changed. I never thought that long chapter books would draw me in so much. After that I started to love reading and writing books all thanks to that book. Now I can never get my head out of a book and I find myself saying "Just one more chapter!" All the time. Your books inspired me and made an impact on my life of loving music and that will always stick with me. I once had no interest in music and didn't want to play or listen to any of it. Thanks to your books that all changed. Now I have found what I love to do best all because of your book The Mistwick School of Musicraft.

Anna

Dylan MacManus

William Mitchell Elementary School

Grade 5

Dear Mr. Sandbrook,

I recently came across your book “The First World War” in your series “Adventures In Time” since my Dad and I listen to your podcasts on almost every long drive we take. My Dad took a glance at the history section to find a book that would interest me. Once he found your books, he knew that they were right for me because I’ve always told him how much I love history. I finally had the ability to tear into the book and, hours later, the vivid wording choices and the amount of action kept me immersed in the book. I was finally done with the book but, not my questions so, I made the decision to buy the whole rest of your series with all of my savings. And I still cherish the decision.

Your books did more than provide entertainment for me, they interested me in many different ways reaching beyond simple enjoyment. They sparked so much interest for me from always wanting to know what would happen next all the way to attempting to memorize all of the dates of important events and battles. History even became a permanent interest of mine! But why do I like history so much? The answer is because well, I didn't live then and I wouldn’t know what the world was like back then. And learning more about history now feels like the only pathway I can take. Now that I think about it, history is everything, without the past there is no present and if one slight action had changed in history, it would’ve changed everything nowadays. Also, I find it important to learn history because you can learn how actions can cause changes and what not to do when in charge, or in other decision making positions.

Additionally, you helped me to understand multiple perspectives on the war. For example, maybe it wasn’t all the Germans fault, maybe it was the Russians for getting involved in the Serbian Campaign. Or maybe it was Austria-Hungary’s fault for responding too harshly to the assasination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand. Or perhaps it was an individual leader like Lenin for starting one of the most violent civil wars in history. But, you helped me see how it wasn’t just one country or leader who sparked the second biggest war in history, every leader and nation had made their fair share of mistakes.

Another reason I felt so connected to this war was because some of my great great grandads were fighting for Britain in France (Particularly Flanders) in which one of them had their arm shot of in the battle of the Somme, and one of my great grandads fought in Burma (Now Myanmar) in the Second World War but survived. That made me think about the sacrifices that they all made, they sacrificed their life, their relationships, even their kid’s dad! It began to make me feel so emotional to the point where I almost felt like I had to learn about the huge contribution people like them made to the eventual victory of their nation and the Allies. But I also felt so intertwined

with the war because while my great great grandads were fighting in World War One, my great great grandmas were left in England. In my great great grandma's position I would have felt enraged and even worried or depressed! It must've been hard on my family to see their relatives leave, but, each of them changed history.

Your book also encouraged me to travel around the globe when I'm older to discover the hotels where meetings were held, the roads where assassinations occurred and the balconies, on which some of the world's biggest alliances were confirmed. Or maybe I could go and visit the factories where bombs and planes were made or visit Verdun and see where the toxic gas was set off. That interest began about two years ago and, since then we have visited many places that I wouldn't have been without this book. For instance, I went to Versailles and visited the Hall of mirrors where the Versailles Treaty was signed.

Overall your book changed my view on one of the biggest issues in world history, not only that but it gave me an infinite spark of curiosity and let me picture war. Last but not least it showed me how good and bad our fascinating world could be.

Sincerely,
Dylan MacManus

Dear Shannon Messenger,

I love the *Keeper of the Lost Cities* series. I have so many feelings about your characters. The world that you created is so elaborate. When I read your books I feel like I'm inside of them. I feel like Dex is my best friend, I feel like I go to Foxfire, and like Grady and Edaline are my parents. The first time I read your books, I started thinking about what it would be like to live in a completely different world, and I was inspired to create my own.

As I was reading your books they inspired me to start writing. I am writing a fantasy story with my three best friends. We are telling the story from four different perspectives: Ivy, Dawn, Rachel, and Onya. Each of us writes from one of the girl's perspectives. I write Ivy. They are students at a school called KMT or Kids Magic Training. Your books always had an amazing plot and every single detail you included was important. A lot of things in my book were inspired by things in *Keeper of the Lost Cities*. When I read the book *Unlocked*, where you added recipes, pictures, and explained the Lost Cities in more detail, I started to think of more ideas for my own world.

One of my favorite things about the *Keeper* series is the time that Sophie spends at Foxfire being a normal kid. At the beginning of my book, Ivy, Dawn, Rachel, and Onya go to classes, have school dances, go on field trips, and hang out in the dormitories. Another part I really love about your series is all the small details about the Lost Cities that you introduce, for example treats like Mallowmelt and sports like Bramble. I think these details really help with world building, so I tried to create some of my own by making my own new foods, animals and even something called "E-ping" which is like a social media app for hexers (the inhabitants of my world). I also like that Sophie has the nervous habit of tugging on her eyelashes because it's a good way to show that she is nervous without saying it straight up. I decided to add something like that to my book: Ivy fiddles with her necklace when she's worried.

One part of your series that stood out to me is how not everything in the Lost Cities is perfect and there are lots of problems and stereotypes just like there are in our own world. I think these flaws are really important when you're writing a fantasy because if the world you write about is perfect it won't seem very realistic. In my book one of the main events involves conflict between my world and another, kind of like the

way you have conflict between the elves, ogres, goblins, gnomes and trolls. I think this helps make my world seem more real and more like ours.

Another thing that I was inspired by in your book was that the characters weren't perfect either, for example, Sophie makes the mistake of not talking to Marella, and Keefe hides behind his humor. I tried to add flaws to my characters too: Ivy is afraid to break rules, even if it's the right thing to do, Rachel can be mean sometimes when she's just trying to tease, Dawn gets a bit **too** excited, and Onya pretends she wants something she's not actually happy with. If the characters have imperfections, it makes them more relatable, vulnerable, and realistic.

Thank you for writing this book series, it inspired me to write my own series and have fun with it. I'm so excited to read book ten!

From,

Etta Dildine

Needham School Committee

March 17, 2026

Agenda Item: **Discussion**

Pollard Middle School Project Schematic Design Update

Background Information:

- Pollard Middle School Project Lead Architects and Project Managers will provide an update on the project's schematic design phase.

Person(s) Available for Presentation:

Dan Gutekanst, Superintendent of Schools
Tina Stanislaski, Principal, HMFH
Matt LaRue, Associate Principal, HMFH
Hank Haff, Director, Director of Design and Construction, Building Design & Construction Department
Meryl Nistler, Senior Project Manager, Building Design and Construction Department, Town of Needham

Pollard Middle School

NEEDHAM, MA

School Committee Meeting

March 17, 2026

HMFH ARCHITECTS

Needham Public Schools

NEEDHAM 1711

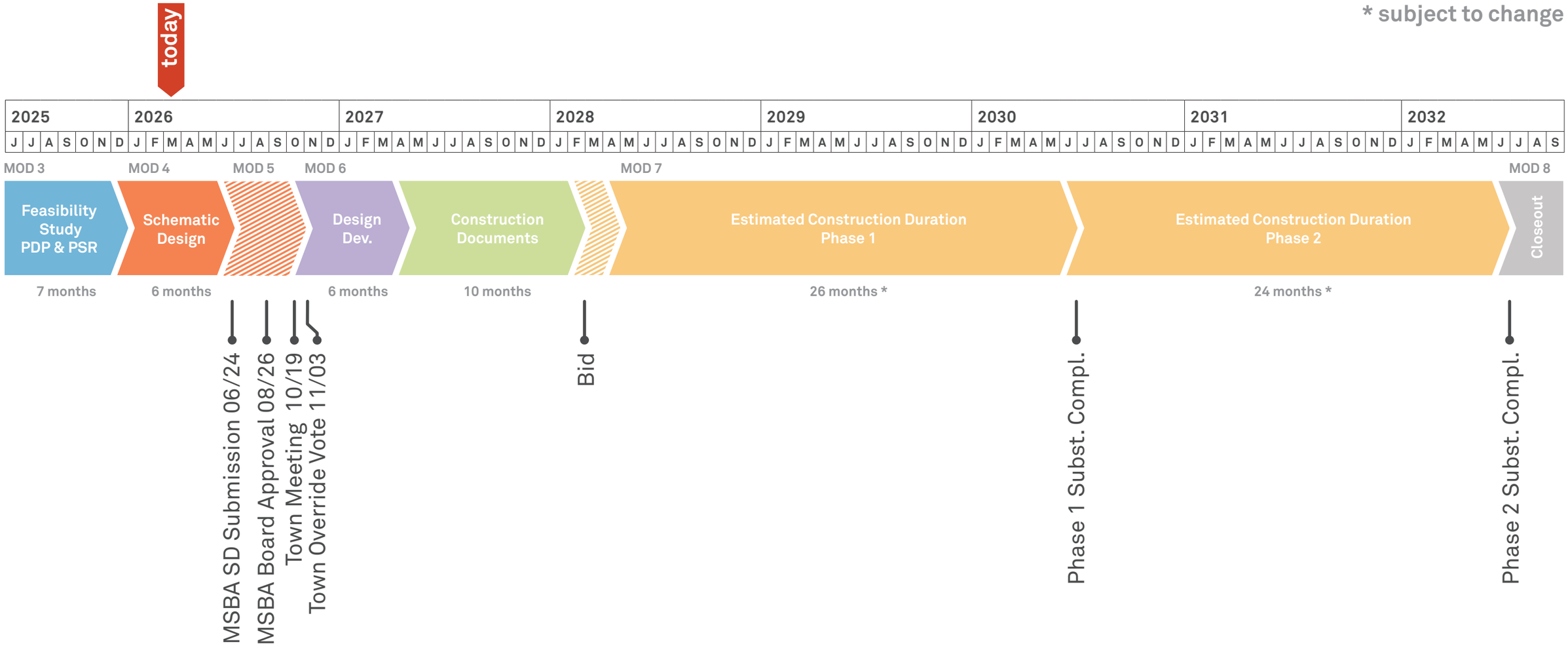
Massachusetts School Building Authority

LiRo-Hill

Project Timeline

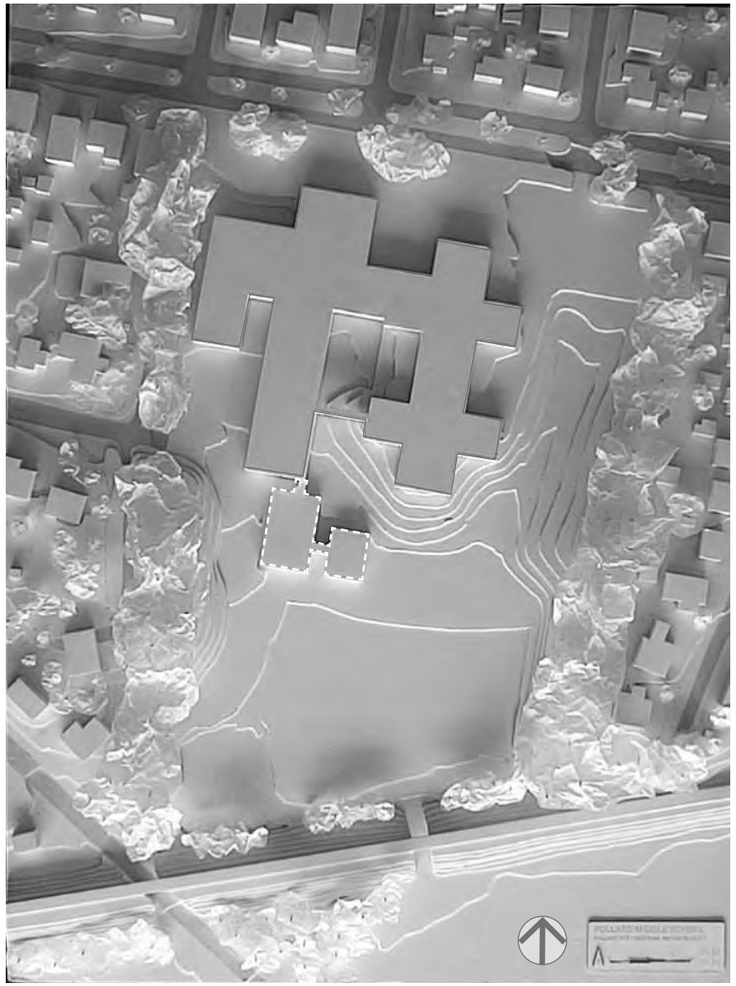
Current Phase: Schematic Design

* subject to change

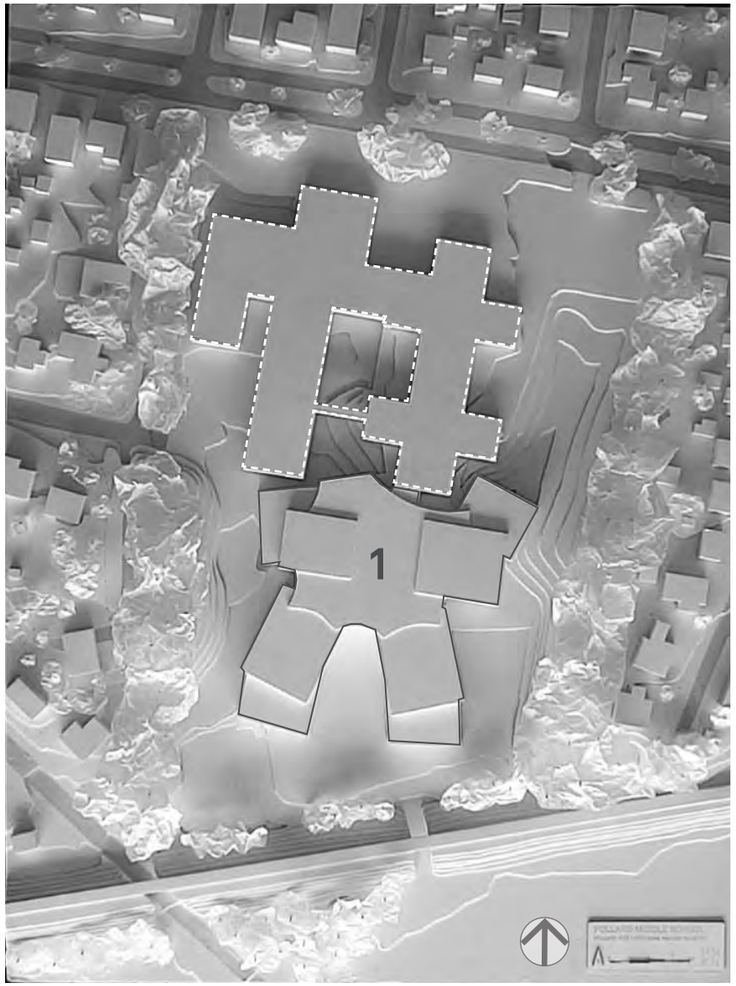


Schematic Design Progress

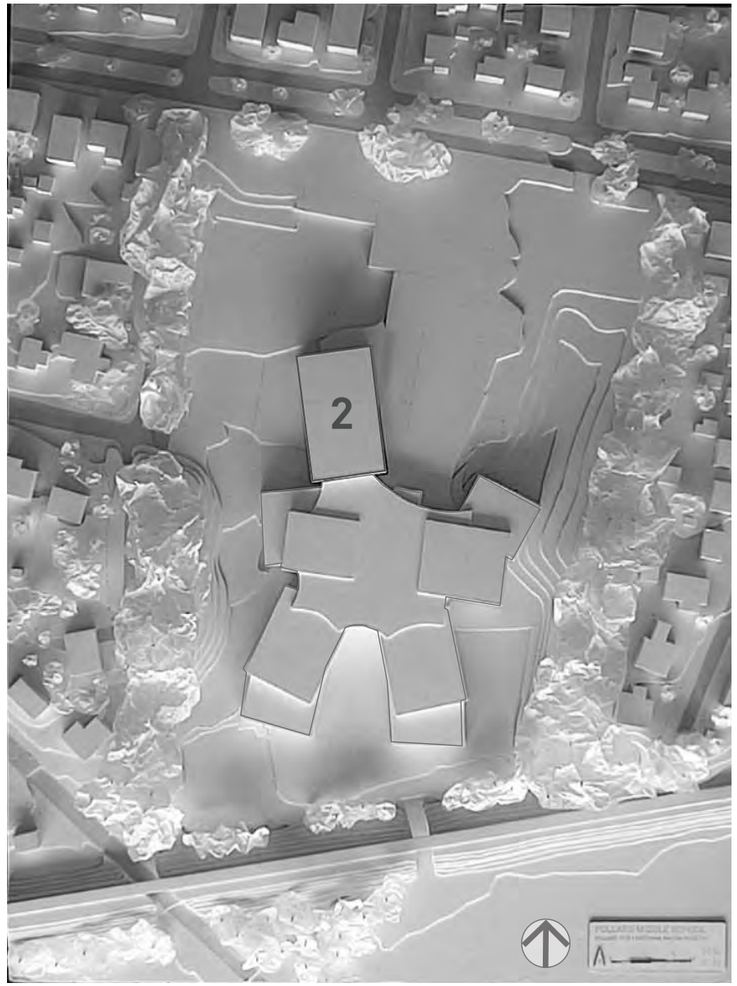
Schematic Design Progress



existing



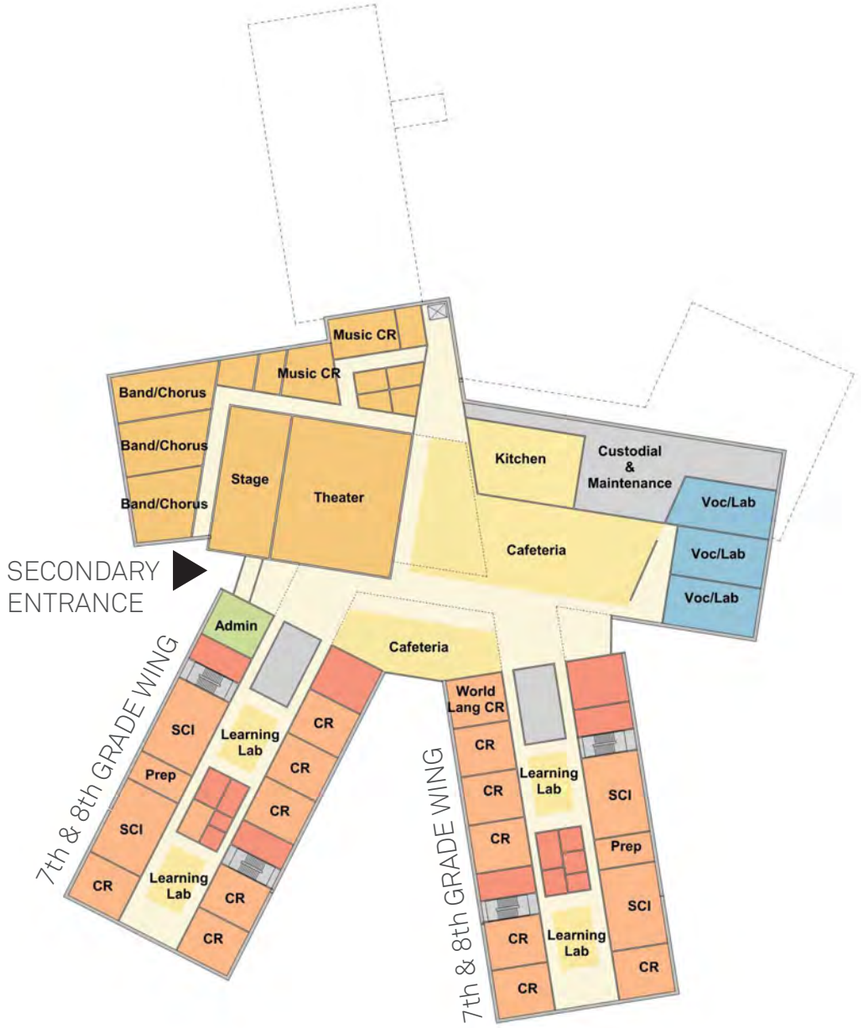
phase 1



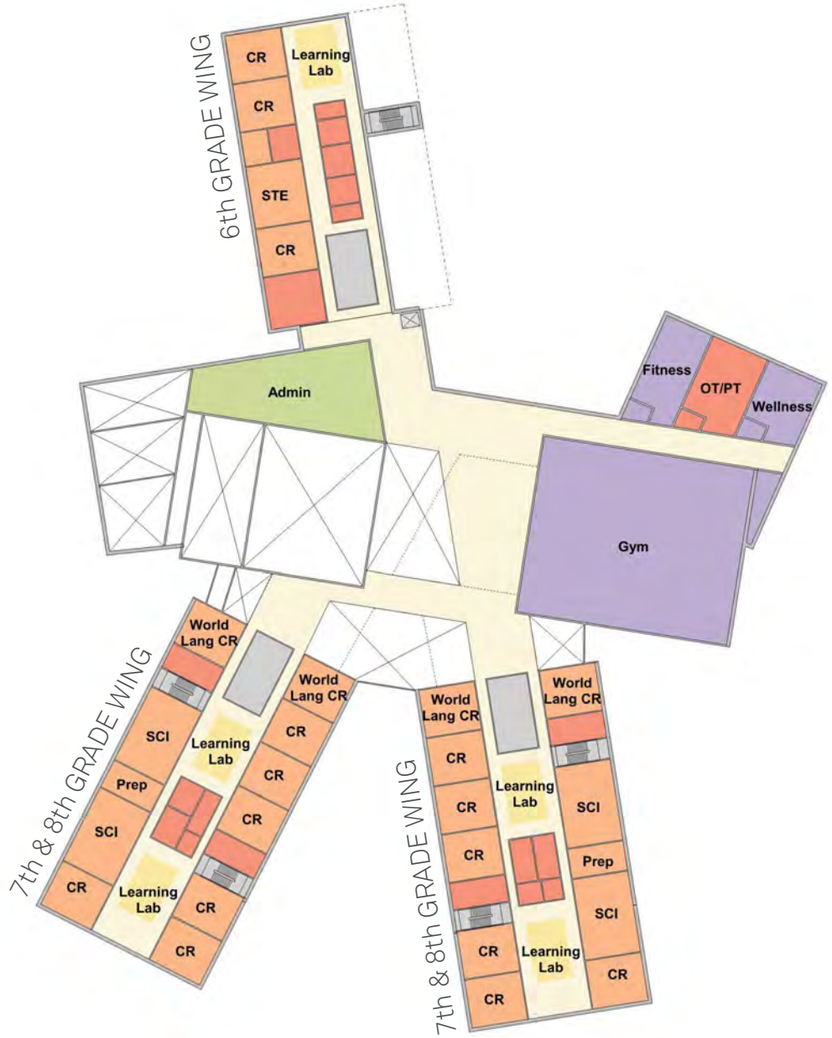
phase 2

Schematic Design Progress

CIRCULATION
SHARED
ADMIN / TEACHER
ART / MUSIC
CLASSROOM
SPECIAL EDUCATION
ATHLETICS
VOCATIONAL
SUPPORT

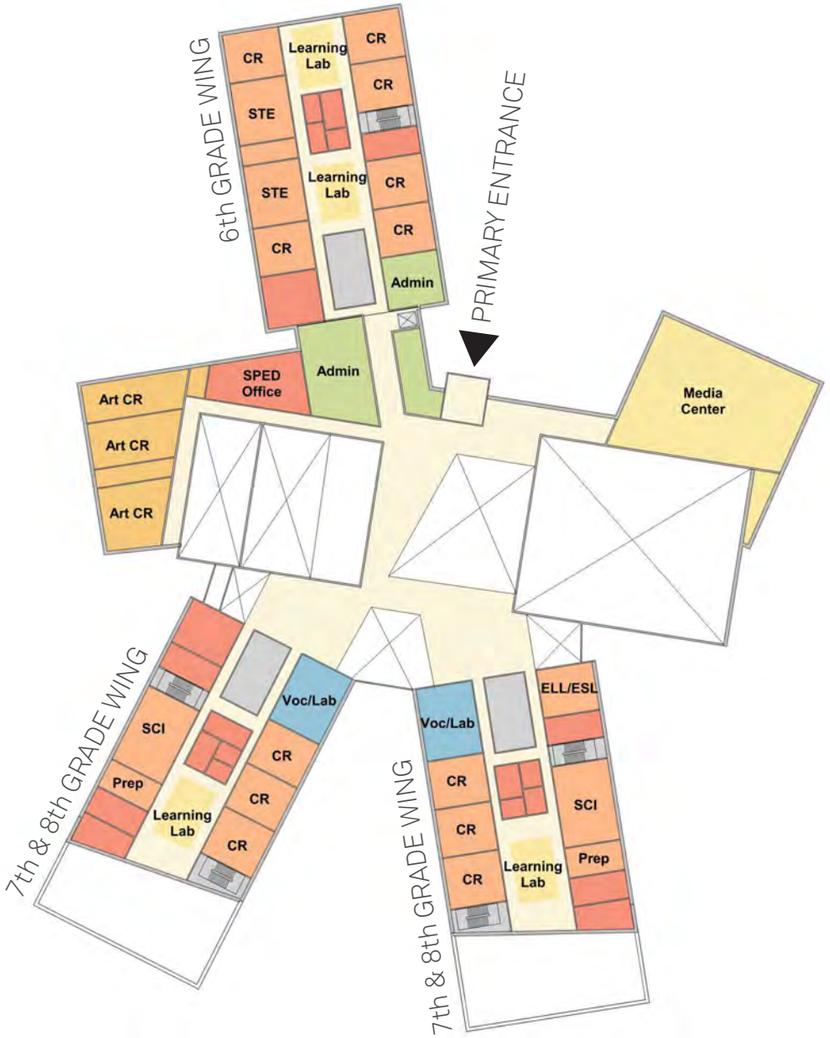


First Floor Plan

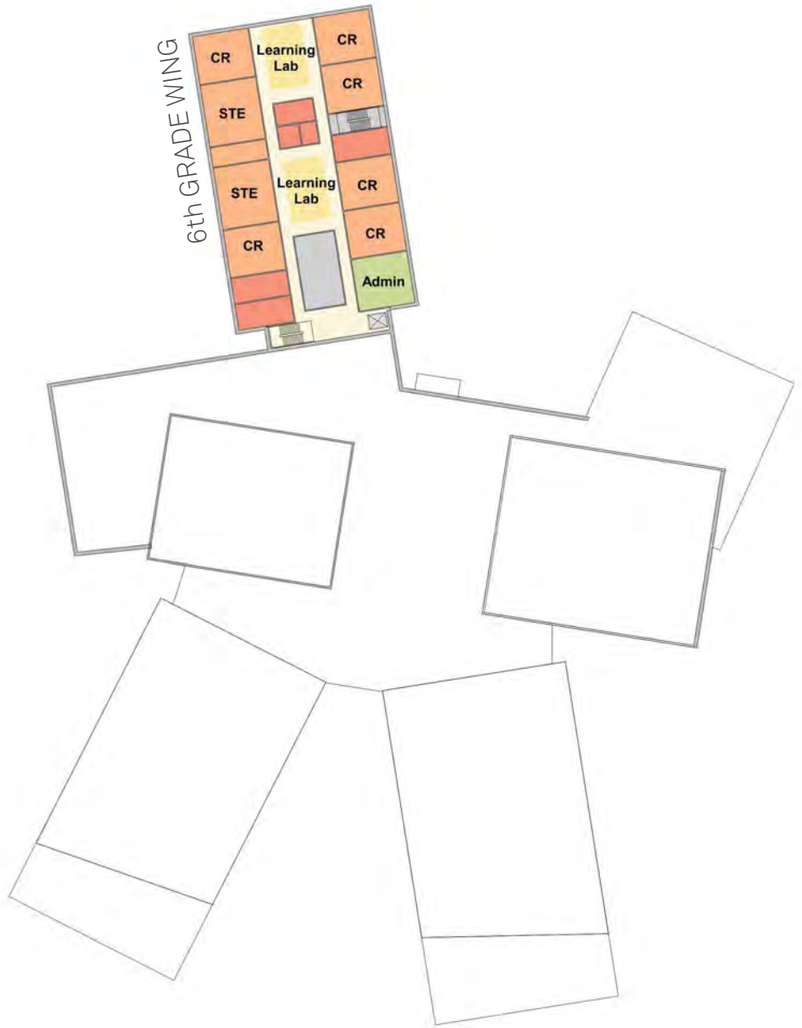


Second Floor Plan

Schematic Design Progress



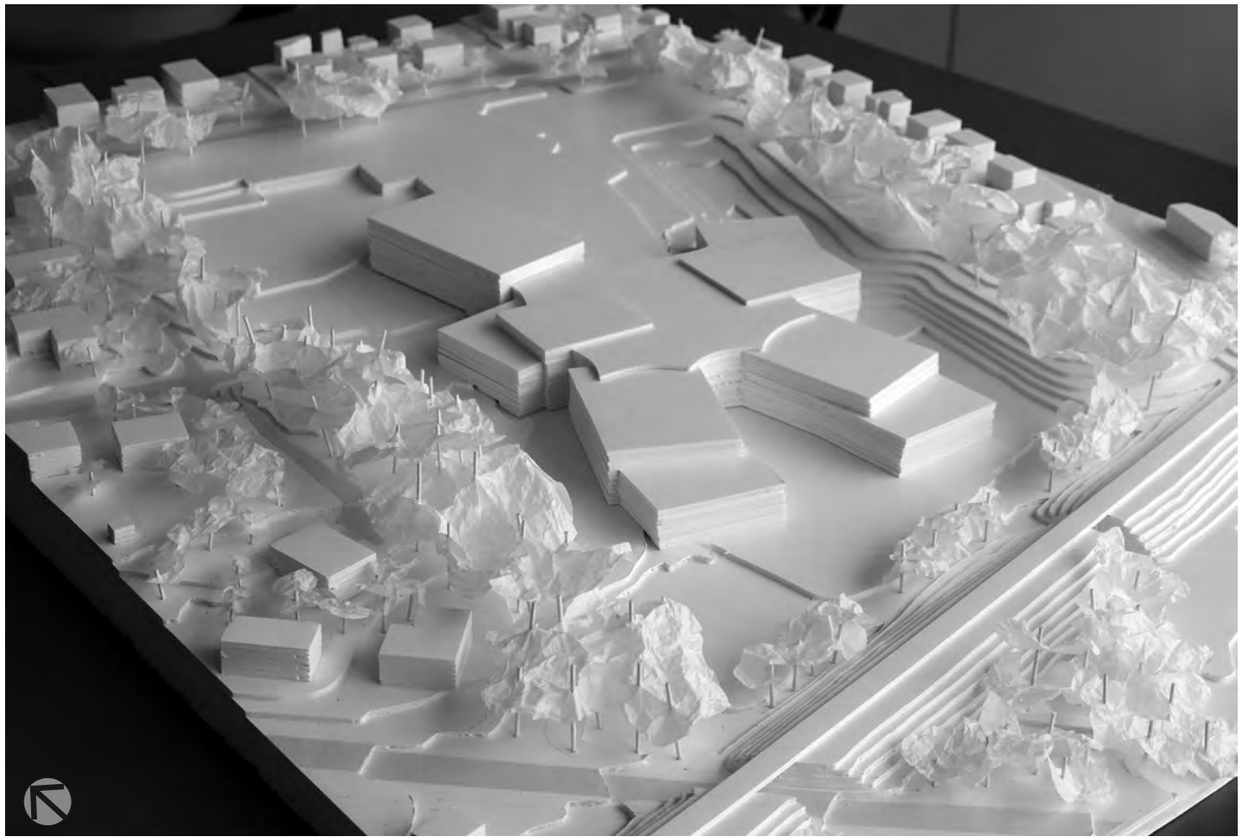
Third Floor Plan



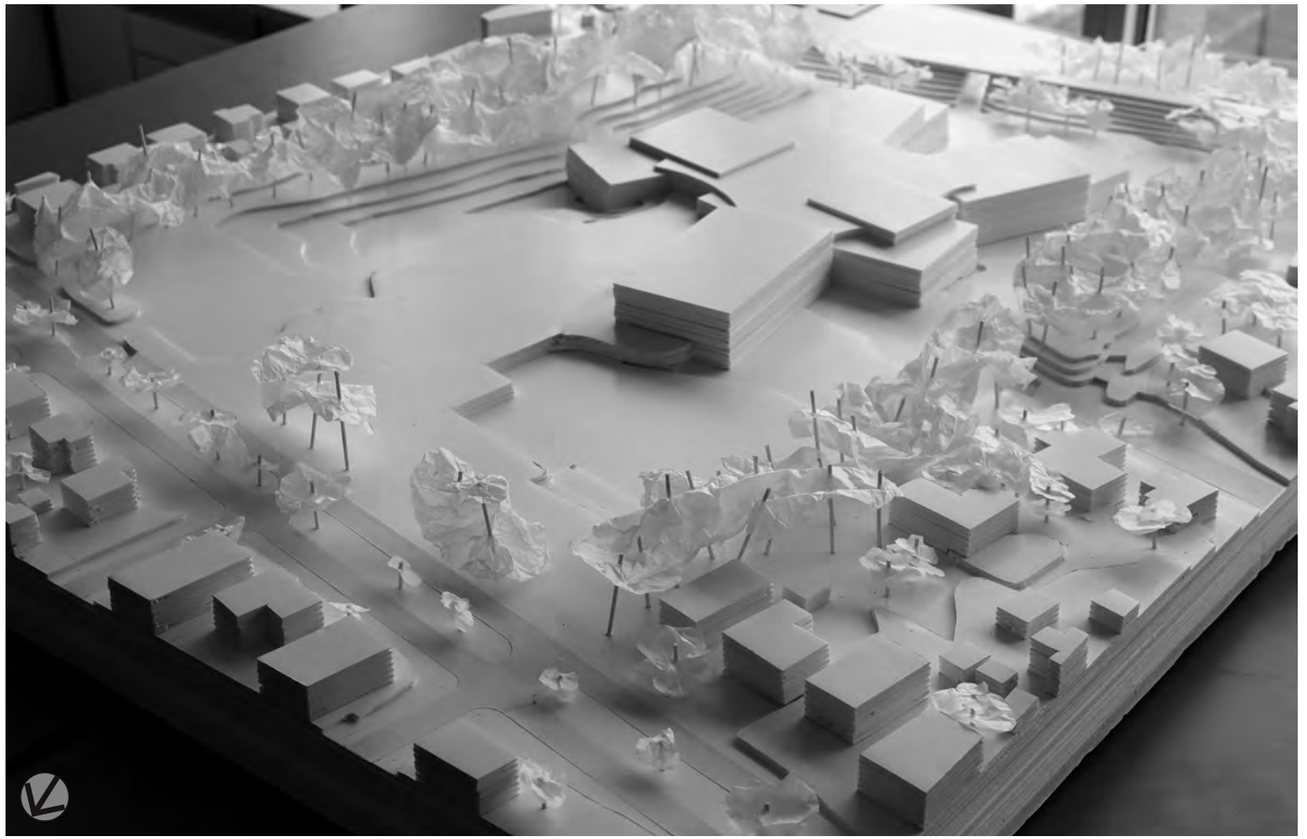
Fourth Floor Plan

CIRCULATION
SHARED
ADMIN / TEACHER
ART / MUSIC
CLASSROOM
SPECIAL EDUCATION
ATHLETICS
VOCATIONAL
SUPPORT

Schematic Design Progress

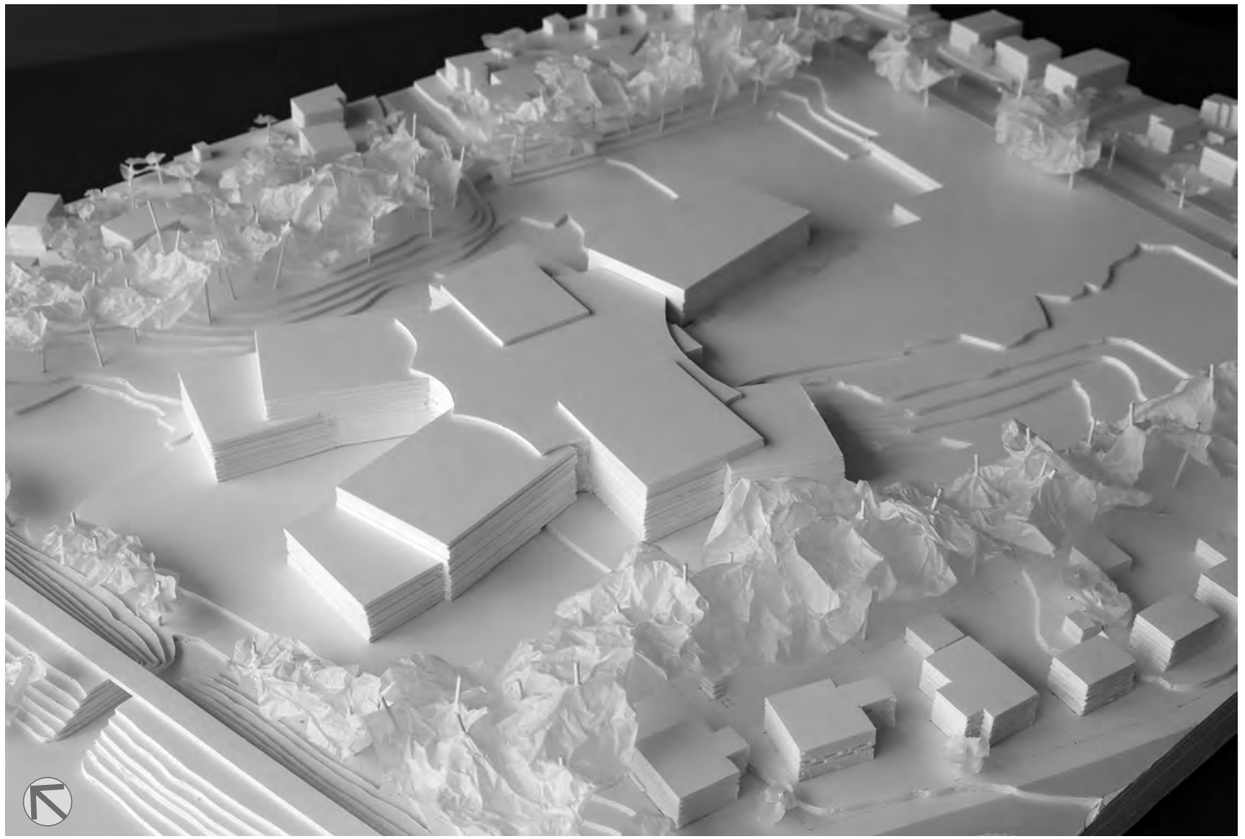


view looking northeast

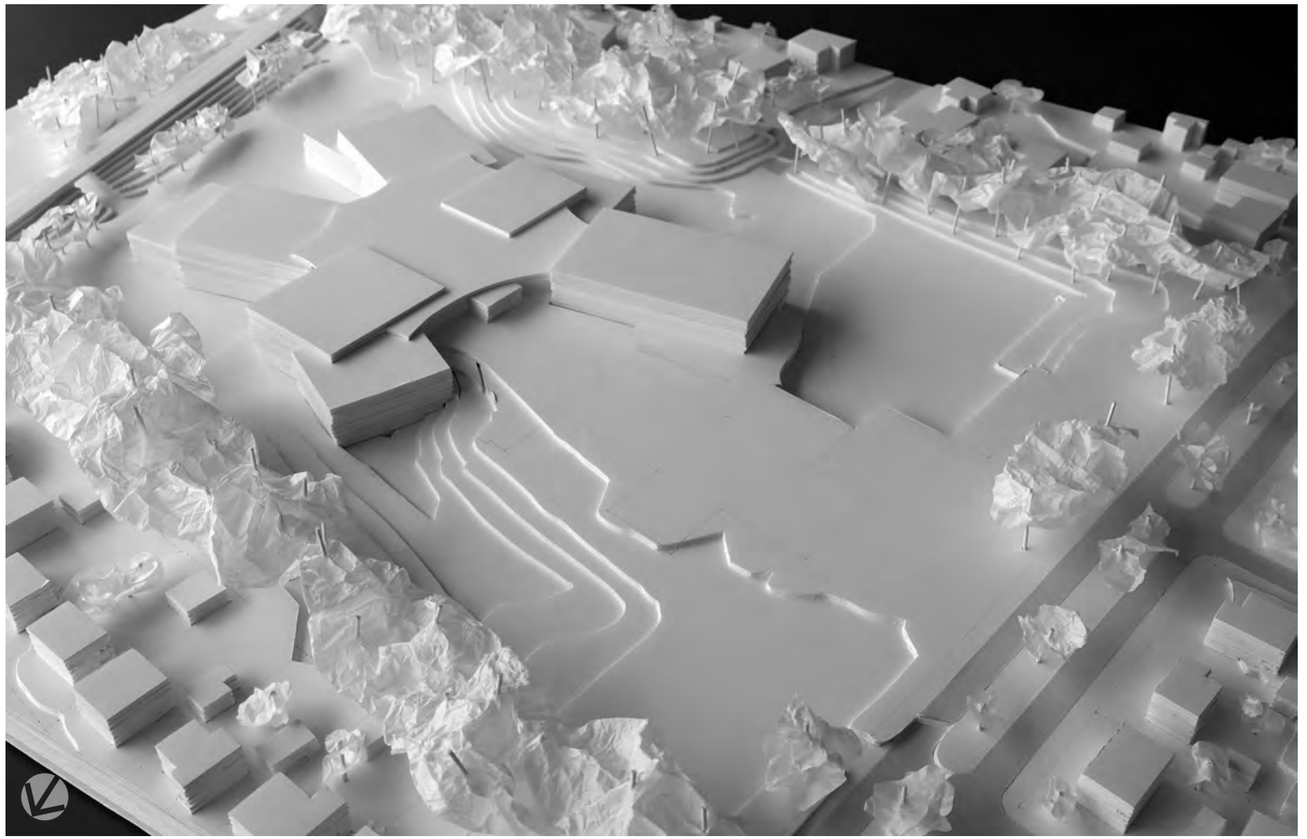


view looking southeast

Schematic Design Progress

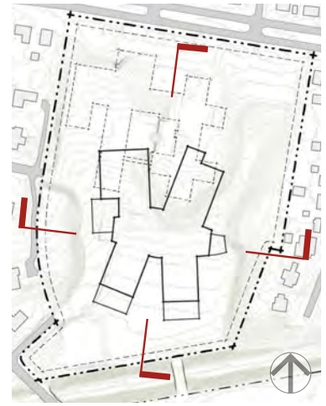


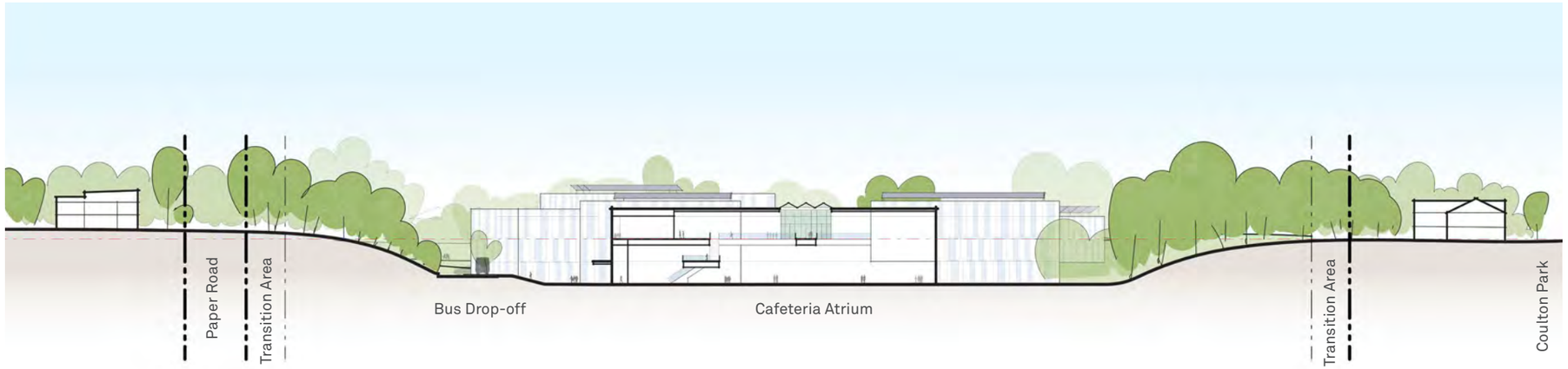
view looking northwest



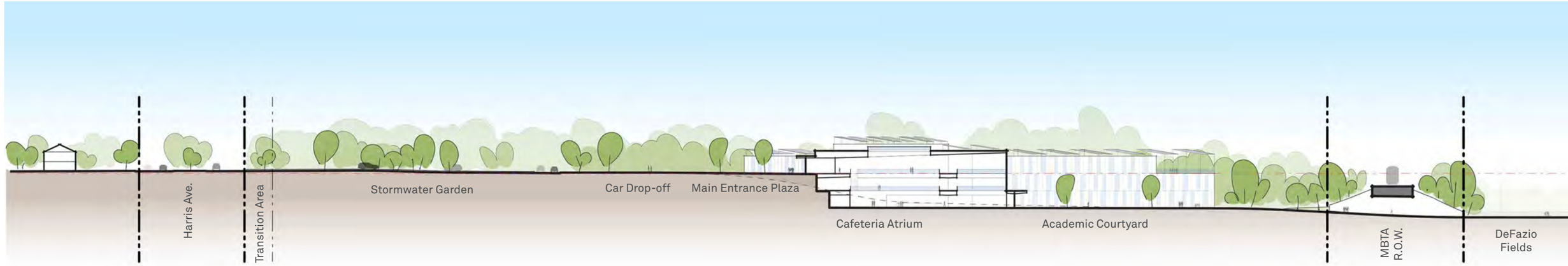
view looking southwest

Site Sections





East-West Section



North-South Section

Administrator / Educator Meetings

Schematic Design

MARCH 3rd

- Department Heads
- ELA/SS/Math
- World Language
- Technology / Media Lab
- Science
- Engineering
- Common Areas

MARCH 4th

- Food Service / Dining
- Custodial
- Fine Arts
- Performing Arts
- SPED
- METCO

MARCH 10th

- Counseling
- Administration Team
- Nursing / EL
- PE / Wellness
- Reading / Math Intervention
- Library
- Administration / Main Office

Needham School Committee

March 17, 2026

Agenda Item: **Discussion**

Needham High School Student Achievement Report

Background Information:

- Needham High School Principal Aaron Sicotte will share an update about testing data and student achievement. The presentation will include information about SAT, ACT, and Advanced Placement performance, as well as artistic, athletic, and co-curricular student accomplishments.

Person(s) Available for Presentation:

Aaron Sicotte, Principal

Needham HS Achievement Report

2026

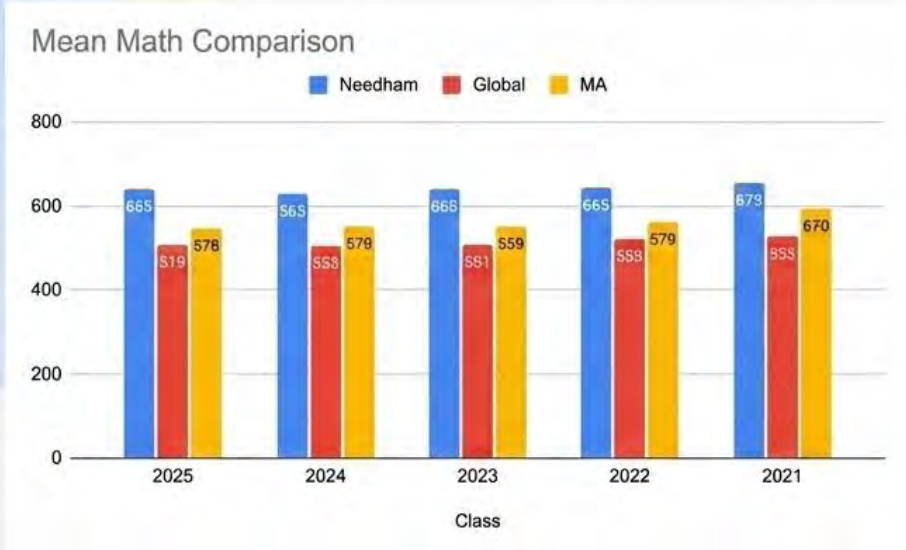
SAT Highlights

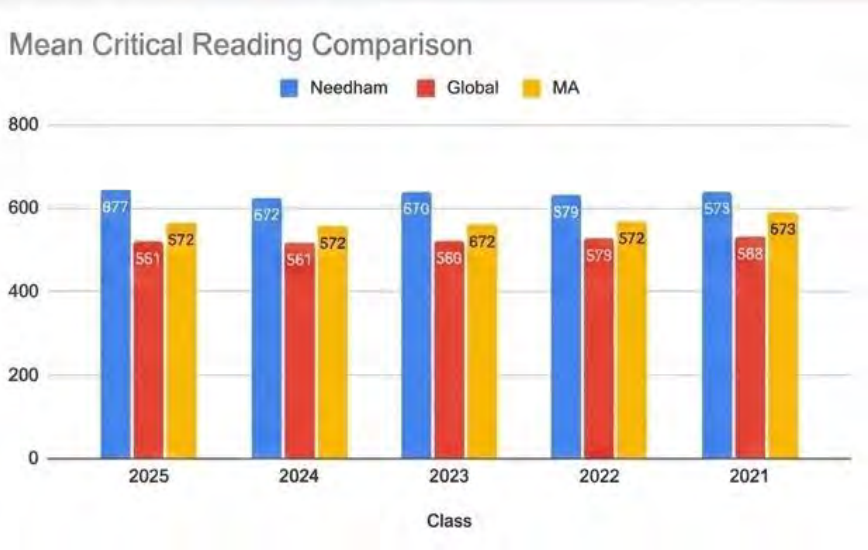
72% of the class took the SAT test - the highest in 5 years.

% Who Scored a 600+ (out of 800)

71% - Reading/Writing

66% - Math





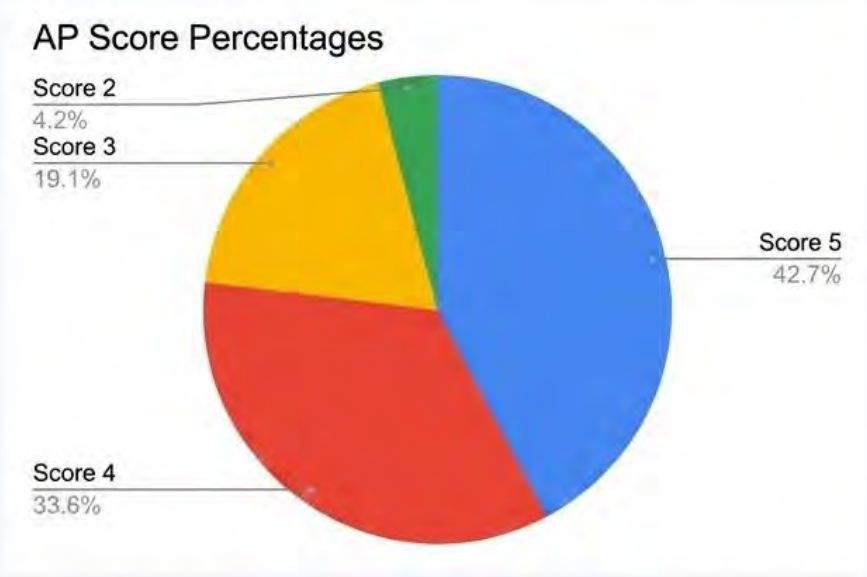
ACT Highlights

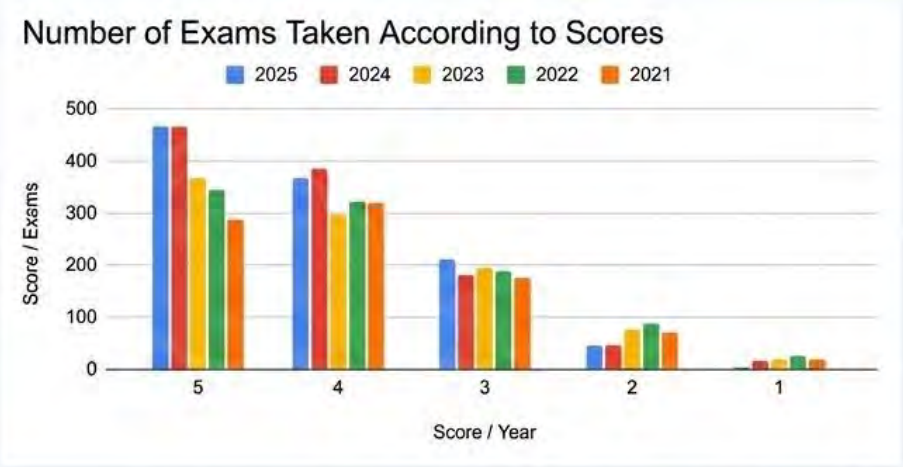
Class of 2025 - Average Scores Compared

AP Highlights

96% of all test takers earned a qualifying score (3-5)

69% of all US History test takers earned a 5 – the highest score





7 tests resulted in ALL students getting qualifying scores (min. 5 test takers)

- English Literature and Composition
- Macro Economics
- Research
- Spanish Language and Culture
- Studio Art 2D
- Studio Art Drawing
- US History

Creative Thinkers and Problem Solvers

Math Department

Prioritizing inquiry-based "rich tasks" over drills. Students think flexibly, develop models, and persist through ambiguity for real-world application.

9th Grade Interdisciplinary Program (9IP)

Dynamic project-based learning connecting literature to themes like Systems, Power, and Revolutions. Fosters creative thinking and problem-solving through analysis and synthesis.

Media & Digital Learning Department

Video Game Design students collaborate across English and Fine Arts, applying game theory and narrative to create original digital worlds, proving technical skill and artistic vision are linked.

Communicators and Collaborators

Counseling Department

Supports students in becoming strong self-advocates and developing productive relationships based on effective communication and collaborative skllls.

Math Department

Has shifted the focus of daily instruction toward student-led discourse, by utilizing "vertical non-permanent surfaces" (whiteboarding) to make mathematical thinking visible. In these collaborative spaces, students are challenged to articulate their reasoning, listen to diverse perspectives, and work together to solve complex, non-routine problems.

English Department

The design and experimentation with hexagonal thinking exercises in AP Language & Composition courses encourages students to collaboratively identify and explain connections between complex ideas, fostering meaningful dialogue and shared reasoning.

By articulating and defending organizational choices within small teams, students strengthen both their capacity for shared critical inquiry and their ability to communicate nuanced interpretations effectively.

Media and Digital Learning Department

Our TV Communications students are the "voice of the building," actively producing the NHS News Advisory. By synthesizing sports updates, essential PSAs, and school-wide news into a professional broadcast format, these students ensure our entire community stays informed and connected. Their teamwork in the studio mirrors real-world media environments, proving they are capable of delivering engaging and relevant storytelling to the school community and beyond.

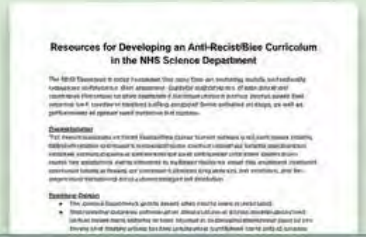
Socially and Culturally Responsive Contributors

The Greater Boston Project

Course empowers student groups to design all phases of a Community Action Project (CAP), engaging them in collaborative problem-solving that connects school and community needs. Through brainstorming, refining, and debating real-world issues across multiple scales—from NHS to Greater Boston—students learn to analyze diverse perspectives, evaluate feasibility and ethical impact, and practice civic-minded decision-making rooted in cultural awareness and social responsibility.

Fine and Performing Arts and Social Studies Departments

For the annual Martin Luther King Jr. Day event at Needham High School, members worked with groups including the Black Student Union and the Bomb Squad step group to honor Dr. King and celebrate our nation's 250th anniversary. The work resulted in students crafting sculptural forms activated on stage, as well as performances of spoken word recitations and dances.



Resources for Developing an Anti-Racist/Bias Curriculum in the NHS Science Department

The Science Department

Created a guide to make transparent the ways they are centering socially and culturally responsive contributors in their classroom, highlighting the importance of the work and ensuring that students experience it in a lived manner within their science classes over their four years.

Responsible and Resilient Individuals

Counseling Department Support

Provides counselors and clinicians to help students navigate social/emotional development and decision-making processes.

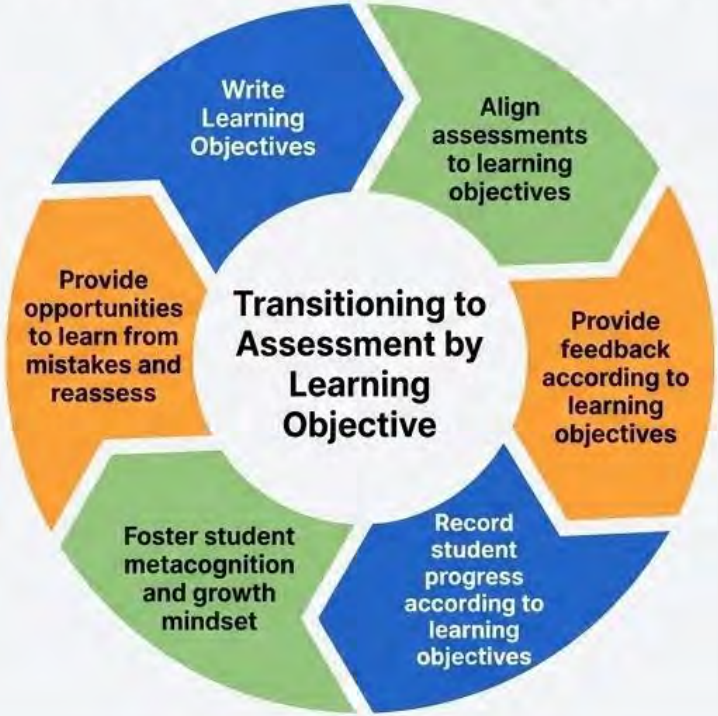
Students Acting to Make a Difference (SAMD)

Inclusive student-led theater company. Produces annual shows to raise funds for nonprofits like OrigiNation, supporting arts and history education for Boston youth.

Science Department: Standards-Based Grading

Integrates standards-based grading to shift focus from grades to learning objectives, fostering deeper understanding of content and skills.

Standards-Based Learning Cycle



Empowered Learners

- The **Math Department** is making progress toward asking the students to reflect on their work after receiving their assessment(s) back. Instead of just looking at a score, **teachers are increasingly asking students to use Claim-Evidence-Reasoning** (CER) templates to analyze their mistakes and justify their new understanding. This helps to shift the focus from "getting a grade" to mastering the math.

- The **NHS Library** is a **high-energy hub for inquiry**, hosting over 1,000 student visits per week. Currently, a dedicated group of **students** from the Greater Boston Project is taking their learning a step further by **treating the library** as a 'living lab.' They are researching and pitching a formal **capital improvement proposal** for t proposal for a furniture redesign, taking direct agency in shapıral for a furniture redesign, taking direct agency in shaping the physical environment where their peers study, collaborate, and grow.

- In the **Fine and Performing Arts Department**, the Needham Rocket Robins small choral ensemble, were the opening act for the 2025 National Learning Forward Annual Conference held in Boston.

- The **Counseling Department** works one on one to support students making thoughtful course selections and academic plans during their high school trajectory. Additionally, the department supports students to make thoughtful decisions about their post-secondary plans.

Thank you

Questions?

NEEDHAM HIGH SCHOOL

A CARING COMMUNITY
STRIVING FOR PERSONAL GROWTH AND
ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE

TO: Dan Gutekanst, Superintendent
FROM: Aaron Sicotte, Principal
RE: NHS Achievement Report
DATE: March 17, 2026

I am pleased to present the 2026 Achievement Report for Needham High School. It represents the multitude of ways our students continue to thrive and excel, both on traditional assessments and on our Portrait of a Needham Graduate competencies.

Will Grannan, NHS School Counselor, has once again been instrumental in capturing the testing results for NHS students from this past year and providing a range of comparison points looking back over recent years and looking around at our neighboring districts. The testing data demonstrates our students' continued high performance on standardized tests in comparison to national and state-wide performances. The data demonstrate that Needham students continue to perform well above both global and state averages on the SAT and the ACT, and on Advanced Placement (AP) tests our students' qualifying scores are at the top of our comparison schools, with 96% achieving qualifying scores. While test performance is just one measure of our students' performance and success, they are certainly doing quite well on the measurements. The scores are a testament to the strong academic experience NHS provides.

Since the NHS experience goes well beyond academics and also centers the competencies of the Portrait of a Needham Graduate, I am also excited to share some of the varied ways Needham High School provides opportunities for students to demonstrate their abilities in these areas within the school day. A rich sampling is provided at the end to close the report.

In total, this report attempts to capture a sense of the many varied ways the students of NHS continue to demonstrate their growth and achievement in all areas. They are engaged in exciting and empowering work, improving the world around them, and partnering with a wide range of people and groups to excel in a multitude of ways. I hope you enjoy the glimpse into the many achievements of the students of Needham High School.

Needham High School Achievement Report 2026

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SAT I – Critical Reading/Evidenced Based Reading and Writing and Math Tests

For the Class of 2025 we can break down the scores by range for the 296 test takers who took the test at least once during high school (if taken more than once only the most recent test result is included).

Table 1:
Needham SAT Score Percentages By Scoring Band

296 Total Test Takers Range	Evidenced Based Reading & Writing (EBRW) Results & %	Math Results & %
700-800	91 - 31%	98 - 33%
600-690	117 - 40%	98 - 33%
500-590	69 - 23%	73 - 25%
400-490	19 - 6%	25 - 8%
300-390	0	2 - <1%
200-290	0	0
SAT Mean	642	638

The CollegeBoard provides mean SAT I data for Massachusetts (EBRW – 566; Math – 548) and the Total Group (EBRW – 521; Math – 508). DESE reports the total test takers for a given year (not by graduating class); the 459 test takers for the 24-25 testing cycle at Needham High reported SAT I averages as EBRW – 634 and Math – 636 (from DESE website).

Table 2:
Needham Mean Critical Reading/EBRW SAT Scores Compared with the Global and MA Scores*

Class	Needham	Global	MA
2025	642 (+)	521	566
2024	626 (+)	519	559
2023	639 (+)	520	560
2022	632 (+)	529	567
2021	639 (+)	533	591

*SAT data gathered from all test takers during a graduating class, including only the most recent test score from a given test taker
(+) = Above Both Global and MA averages; (-) = Below Global and/or MA averages

Table 3:
Needham Mean Math SAT Scores Compared with the Global and MA Scores*

Class	Needham	Global	MA
2025	638 (+)	508	548
2024	630 (+)	505	550
2023	641 (+)	508	551
2022	644 (+)	521	561
2021	655 (+)	528	593

*SAT data gathered from all test takers during a graduating class, including only the most recent test score from a given test taker
(+) = Above Both Global and MA averages; (-) = Below Global and/or MA averages

Table 4:
Number and Percent of the Class Taking the SAT

Year	Graduates in Class	# Taking the SAT	Percent
2025	414	296	72
2024	417	297	71
2023	380	263	69
2022	441	272	62
2021	426	201	47

Table 5:
SAT I Reasoning Comparisons 2025*

Public High School	Participants	EBRW	Math	Composite
Lexington	784	665	684	1349
Newton South	542	646	657	1303
Brookline	574	649	652	1301
Wellesley	354	647	652	1299
Weston	212	643	655	1298
Winchester	418	644	651	1295
Wayland	231	639	647	1286
Dover-Sherborn	212	642	641	1283
Concord-Carlisle	365	640	637	1277
Hopkinton	401	633	639	1272
Needham	459	634	636	1270
Westwood	222	636	633	1269
Newton North	513	628	636	1264
Holliston	211	621	611	1232
Medfield	202	606	608	1214
Natick	423	605	596	1201
Walpole	237	599	588	1187
Framingham	353	583	576	1159
Dedham	145	575	579	1154
Norwood	141	572	552	1124

*SAT data for this chart taken from the DESE website. From 2024 to 2025, Needham students took 42 more SAT tests (459-417)

ACT TEST

The number of ACT test takers from Needham High rose steadily until 2017, fluctuated between 2018-2022, and has been dropping for the last three years. For the graduating class of 2025, seventeen percent (16.9%) took at least one ACT test. This is a decrease in total test takers from the 3 years prior and lowest total in 5 years. The lower numbers are consistent with MA trends. Nationally, total ACT test takers rose over the past year.

Included in the following chart is the ACT section and composite averages over the past five years for Needham High test takers. The Class of 2025 test takers achieved higher ACT scores across all sections than the year before and 2nd highest composite in the last 5 years.

Table 6:
Number and Percent of the Class Taking the ACT

Year	Test Takers	English	Math	Reading	Science	Composite
2021	85	29.4	28.1	29.6	27.3	28.7
2022	109	28.5	27.7	29.3	27.5	28.4
2023	76	29.3	28.6	29.7	28.2	29.0
2024	74	27.8	26.4	28.4	26.7	27.4
2025	70	29.3	28.3	29.5	27.6	28.8

Table 7:
Needham Average ACT English Section Scores Compared to Nationwide and MA Averages

Class	Needham	Nationwide	MA
2025	29.3	18.4	26.0
2024	27.8	18.6	26.0
2023	29.3	18.6	26.4
2022	28.5	19.0	26.6
2021	29.4	19.6	27.6

Table 8:
Needham Average ACT Math Section Scores Compared to Nationwide and MA Averages

Class	Needham	Nationwide	MA
2025	28.3	18.9	25.7
2024	26.4	19.0	25.4
2023	28.6	19.0	25.7
2022	27.7	19.3	25.6
2021	28.1	19.9	26.9

Table 9:
Needham Average ACT Reading Section Scores Compared to Nationwide and MA Averages

Class	Needham	Nationwide	MA
2025	29.5	20.0	27.3
2024	28.4	20.1	27.0
2023	29.7	20.1	27.2
2022	29.3	20.4	27.3
2021	29.6	20.9	28.4

Table 10:
Needham Average ACT Science Section Scores Compared to Nationwide and MA Averages

Class	Needham	Nationwide	MA
2025	27.6	19.6	26.0
2024	26.7	19.6	25.6
2023	28.2	19.6	25.8
2022	27.5	19.9	25.8
2021	27.3	20.4	26.8

Table 11:
Needham Average ACT Composite Scores Compared to Nationwide and MA Averages

Class	Needham	Nationwide	MA
2025	28.8	19.4	26.4
2024	27.4	19.4	26.1
2023	29.0	19.5	26.4
2022	28.4	19.8	26.5
2021	28.7	20.3	27.6

ADVANCED PLACEMENT (AP) EXAMINATIONS

Five hundred and eleven (511) students took one thousand and ninety-four (1,094) AP tests. Ninety-five percent (95.4%) of the scores were 3 or better. Seventy-six percent (76.3%) of the scores were 4's and 5's.

Table 12:
Number of Advanced Placement Tests by Discipline

Test / Year	2025	2024	2023	2022	2021
Art History	-	-	-	-	1
Biology	59	60	57	58	36
Calculus AB	87	122	87	101	80
Calculus BC	47	57	56	55	52
Capstone	21(research)	19(seminar)	16(research)	23(seminar)	14(research)
Chemistry	19	21	15	28	13
Chinese Lang	10	8	3	9	6
Comp Sci A	46	36	27	38	24
Comp Sci Prin	2	-	1	-	-
Econ: Macro	5	2	4	2	2
Econ: Micro	-	2	3	-	-
English Lang & Comp	148	143	137	127	129
Engl Lit & Comp	34	22	24	12	15
Env. Science	1	-	1	-	-
European Hist	-	-	-	1	-
French Lang	21	17	20	19	12
German	-	1	2	1	-
Music Theory	8	7	5	4	2
Physics 1	-	-	1	-	1
Physics C: Mechanics	55	42	42	44	48
Physics C: Elec. & Mag.	48	40	33	40	35
Precalculus	1	-	-	-	-
Psychology	101	170	177	137	126
Spanish Lang	30	37	31	23	20
Statistics	104	66	63	67	72
Studio Art Drawing	8	10	7	9	7
Studio Art 2D Design	16	29	4	10	27
Studio Art 3D Design	-	2	4	4	-
U.S. Gov. & Politics	118	79	54	73	56
U.S. History	104	105	87	86	100
World Hist: Modern	1	1	-	1	-
Total Grades Reported	1094	1098	961	972	878
Total Candidates	511	515	465	486	458

Table 13:
2025 AP Score Summary

Test / Result	5	4	3	2	1
Biology	20	19	16	4	-
Calc AB	47	35	4	1	-
Calc BC	32	14	-	1	-
Chemistry	17	1	1	-	-
Chinese Lang. & Culture	5	-	2	-	3
Comp. Sci. A	17	15	9	5	-
Comp. Sci. Prin.	-	2	-	-	-
English Lang. & Comp	73	55	17	3	-
English Lit. & Comp	15	16	3	-	-
Env. Science	-	1	-	-	-
French Lang. & Culture	1	6	9	5	-
Macroecon.	-	2	3	-	-
Music Theory	3	1	3	1	-
Physics C: Elec & Magnetism	14	9	23	2	-
Physics C: Mechanics	11	15	25	4	-
Precalculus	-	1	-	-	-
Psychology	18	48	28	7	-
Research	2	9	10	-	-
Spanish Lang. & Culture	11	13	6	-	-
Statistics	55	34	10	4	1
Studio Art 2D Design	5	5	6	-	-
Studio Art: Drawing	1	5	2	-	-
US Gov. & Politics	47	33	29	9	-
US History	72	29	3	-	-
World History: Modern	1	-	-	-	-
Total (1094)	467	368	209	46	4

Table 14:
Number of Exams Taken According to Scores

Score / Year	2025	2024	2023	2022	2021
5	467	468	369	347	291
4	368	387	300	323	322
3	209	181	194	188	175
2	46	45	78	89	71
1	4	17	20	25	19
Totals	1094	1098	961	972	878

Table 15:
AP Performance Comparisons 2025*

Public High School	Tests Taken	% Non Qualifying (1-2)	% Qualifying (3-5)
Hopkinton	1,495	4	96
Wellesley	1,234	4	96
Needham	1,076	4	96
Concord-Carlisle	697	4	96
Dover-Sherborn	650	4	96
Wayland	605	4	96
Lexington	3,031	5	95
Brookline	1,603	6	94
Natick	1,336	7	93
Westwood	1,026	7	93
Weston	675	7	93
Walpole	573	7	93
Winchester	1,263	8	92
Medfield	485	8	92
Newton South	1,512	9	91
Newton North	1,655	10	90
Holliston	409	15	85
Framingham	1.001	17	83
Dedham	512	35	65
Norwood	573	37	63

*AP data for this chart taken from the DESE website. Please note a difference in the total number of Needham AP test takers reported by the state (1,076) versus the total reported by the College Board (1,094). The following total number of test takers by subject were under/over-reported by the state, resulting in the difference of 18: Studio Art: 2D Design (-1), English Lang and Comp (-4), US History (-1), Psychology (-3), Calculus AB (-1), Calculus BC (-2), Statistics (-2), Biology (-1), Physics C: E & M, (-1), Physics C: Mech (-1), Capstone Research (-1), and African American Studies (+1).

Creative Thinkers and Problem Solvers

- In the **Math Department**'s common curriculum units, teachers are prioritizing inquiry-based "rich tasks" over procedural drills. This requires students to think flexibly, develop their own mathematical models, and persist through ambiguity, fostering the creative problem-solving skills necessary for real-world application.
- Students participating in the ***9th Grade Interdisciplinary Program (9IP)*** experience dynamic interdisciplinary, project-based learning that connects literature to broad themes such as Systems, Power, and Revolutions. Students additionally develop their capacity for creative thinking and problem solving by analyzing diverse literary forms and synthesizing ideas across disciplines; they learn to recognize patterns, question assumptions, and craft original interpretations—skills that foster intellectual flexibility and innovation in both writing and discussion.
- The **Media and Digital Learning Department**'s Video Game Design students are currently immersed in a massive, cross-disciplinary collaboration with the English and Fine & Performing Arts departments. By applying game theory and narrative structure to create original digital worlds from the ground up, they are proving that technical skill and artistic vision are two sides of the same coin.

Communicators and Collaborators

- The **Counseling Department** supports students in becoming strong self-advocates and developing productive relationships based on effective communication and collaborative skills.
- The **Math Department** has shifted the focus of daily instruction toward student-led discourse, by utilizing "vertical non-permanent surfaces" (whiteboarding) to make mathematical thinking visible. In these collaborative spaces, students are challenged to articulate their reasoning, listen to diverse perspectives, and work together to solve complex, non-routine problems.
- In the **English Department**, the design and experimentation with hexagonal thinking exercises in AP Language & Composition courses encourages students to collaboratively identify and explain connections between complex ideas, fostering meaningful dialogue and shared reasoning. By articulating and defending organizational choices within small teams, students strengthen both their capacity for shared critical inquiry and their ability to communicate nuanced interpretations effectively. Above all, this student-centered design process showcases just how much agency and creativity students wield within the confines of a common exercise with the same "cards" (e.g., resources and information).
- Within the **Media and Digital Learning Department**, our TV Communications students are the "voice of the building," actively producing the NHS News Advisory. By synthesizing sports updates, essential PSAs, and school-wide news into a professional broadcast format, these students ensure our entire community stays informed and connected. Their teamwork in the studio mirrors real-world media environments, proving they are capable of delivering engaging and relevant storytelling to the school community and beyond.
- Since 2008, the **Fine and Performing Art Department** has partnered with Temple Beth Shalom Garden Club for Needham's Art in Bloom. The Art in Bloom exhibit at the Needham Public Library features floral interpretations of Needham High School (NHS) student artwork by members of Beth Shalom Garden Club and other local garden clubs. By engaging in the creative process—creating, performing, responding, and connecting—students develop essential skills in critical listening, artistic collaboration, and creative problem-solving. Our arts-based learning curriculum empowers students to become resilient individuals and culturally responsive

contributors, preparing them for success in their future endeavors and throughout their lives. The artwork is intentionally selected to highlight the breadth and depth of NHS Visual Arts curriculum, celebrating student artistry at every stage, from introductory coursework to advanced portfolio art in Senior Studios.

Socially and Culturally Responsive Contributors

- The **Greater Boston Project** course empowers student groups to design all phases of a Community Action Project (CAP), which engages them in collaborative problem-solving that connects school and community needs. Through brainstorming, refining, and debating real-world issues across multiple scales—from NHS to Greater Boston—students learn to analyze diverse perspectives, evaluate the feasibility and ethical impact of their ideas, and practice civic-minded decision-making rooted in cultural awareness and social responsibility.
- For the annual Martin Luther King Jr. Day event, hosted at Needham High School, members of the **Fine and Performing Arts** and **Social Studies Departments** worked with students from groups including the Black Student Union and the Bomb Squad step group to honor Dr. King and celebrate our nation's 250th anniversary. The work resulted in students crafting sculptural forms that were activated on stage for the event, as well as performances of spoken word recitations and dances.
- The **Science Department** created a guide, *Resources for Developing an Anti-Racist/Bias Curriculum in the NHS Science Department*, to make transparent the ways they are centering socially and culturally responsive contributors in their classroom, highlighting the importance of the work and ensuring that students experience it in a lived manner within their science classes over their four years.

Responsible and Resilient Individuals

- In the **Counseling Department**, counselors and clinicians work with students to navigate the challenges of their social/emotional development and decision-making processes in service to their needs.
- Students Acting to Make a Difference (SAMD) is a student-led theater production company, supported by the **Fine and Performing Arts Department**. The goal of SAMD is to provide an inclusive theatrical experience for students to use their creative talents to support the work of a nonprofit in our community. SAMD produces one show each school year to raise funds for a local nonprofit. This year's selected nonprofit is OrigiNation. OrigiNation offers quality dance, theater arts, and African history education to over 1500 young people in Boston each year.
- The **Science Department** has been incorporating standards-based grading into classes to help students have clarity about what they are learning and mastering. It helps shift the focus away from discussions of grades to learning objectives and deep understanding of content and skills.

Empowered Learners

- The **Math Department** is making progress toward asking the students to reflect on their work after receiving their assessment(s) back. Instead of just looking at a score, teachers are increasingly asking students to use Claim-Evidence-Reasoning (CER) templates to analyze their mistakes and justify their new understanding. This helps to shift the focus from "getting a grade" to mastering the math.
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- In the **Fine and Performing Arts Department**, the Needham Rocket Robins small choral ensemble, were the opening act for the 2025 National Learning Forward Annual Conference held in Boston.
- The **Counseling Department** works one on one to support students making thoughtful course selections and academic plans during their high school trajectory. Additionally, the department supports students to make thoughtful decisions about their post-secondary plans.

Needham Public Schools

Needham School Committee

March 17, 2026

Agenda Item: **Discussion**

Stephen Palmer Building Discussion

Background Information:

- The School Committee may wish to discuss the disposition of the Stephen Palmer Building as it relates to the building's future and the district's overall building needs.

- The Stephen Palmer Building, a former 1914 elementary school currently serving as a 28-unit senior housing complex, is in transition as its 50-year lease with Crowninshield/Stephen Palmer Associates is set to expire on May 3, 2027. While recent structural assessments by consultants Barrett Planning Group and Gamble Associates indicate the building and its mechanical systems are in good condition, the building is not handicapped accessible and requires significant upgrades (e.g., sprinklers, energy efficiency) in order to be reused or repurposed.

- The Town of Needham has mandated that all tenants vacate by October 31, 2026 to allow for an orderly reversion of the property to municipal control. The 37,000 square foot building and its 1.5-acre parcel remain under the School Committee's jurisdiction unless the School Committee declares it no longer has an educational purpose and Town Meeting votes to change jurisdiction to the Select Board.

- To guide the transition from the current lease structure, the Select Board established the Stephen Palmer Development Review

Committee (SPDRC) in 2025, which is currently evaluating some primary redevelopment scenarios based on community feedback. Matt Spengler serves as the School Committee representative on the SPDRC.

- During recent community meetings held by the SPDRC, the Committee narrowed down potential uses.

- A final recommendation from the SPDRC to the Select Board is expected by June 2026. However, before the SPDRC can make any recommendations, the School Committee must decide if the parcel/building is required for current or future school building needs.

Members of the School Committee available for comment:

Michael E. O'Brien, Chair
Alisa Skatrud, Vice Chair
Sri Baqri
Michael Greis
Elizabeth Lee
Andrea Longo Carter
Matthew Spengler
Jack Arvedon, Student Representative

Needham School Committee

March 17, 2026

Agenda Item: **Action**

Revised Service Animals and Emotional Support Dogs Policy: IMG

Action Recommended:

- Upon recommendation of the Superintendent, the Needham School Committee approves the revised Service Animals and Emotional Support Dogs Policy: IMG as submitted.

SCHOOL COMMITTEE POLICY
NEEDHAM PUBLIC SCHOOLS

FILE: IMG

Policy for: SERVICE ANIMALS AND EMOTIONAL SUPPORT DOGS		Revision 1
Date Approved by School Committee:	Signature of Chair:	Page 1 of 3

I. Purpose and Non-Discrimination

Needham Public Schools does not permit discrimination against individuals with disabilities, including those who require the assistance of a service animal. The District complies with Massachusetts law and the American Disabilities Act (ADA) concerning the rights of persons with service dogs. Additionally, the District recognizes the role of emotional support dogs in specific educational contexts and has established protocols for their limited use.

II. Definitions

- **Service Animals**: Defined as dogs individually trained to do work or perform tasks for people with disabilities. The work or task must be directly related to the person's disability, such as guiding individuals with sight impairments, pulling wheelchairs, alerting to seizures, or alerting to sounds. Dogs whose sole function is to provide comfort or emotional support do not qualify as service animals under the ADA.

- **Emotional Support Dogs**: Also referred to as therapy, comfort, or social-emotional assistance dogs. These animals provide companionship and affection to improve physical, social, emotional, or cognitive functioning. Unlike service animals, they do not have special training to perform specific disability-related tasks and are not considered service animals under the ADA or Massachusetts law.

III. Access and Approval

- **Service Animals**: Students or individuals with disabilities may bring service animals onto school premises and transportation. Parents or guardians must

notify the building principal as soon as possible and at least 45 days in advance of the start date to allow for staff training, transportation arrangements, and notification of other parents. In accordance with federal regulations, the only exception to the definition of a service animal as a dog is a miniature horse, provided it meets specific assessment criteria as defined by the ADA.

- **Emotional Support Dogs**: An Emotional Support Dog may only be brought into a Needham Public School or any of its affiliated programs or facilities by a staff member under the direction of the school principal or designee and with the permission of the Superintendent or their designee. Other emotional support animals, including requests for Emotional Support Dogs from individuals, are not permitted in the Needham Public Schools.

  All requests must be submitted to the school principal in writing and approved by the Superintendent or their designee. The Superintendent or their designee reserve the right to request documentation supporting all requests. Such documentation may include documentation from a veterinarian that the Emotional Support Dog is in good health and up-to-date on all vaccinations as required by local ordinances and regulations. If a request for an Emotional Support Dog is granted by the Superintendent or their designee, the owner of the Emotional Support Dog is responsible for ensuring that the Emotional Support Dog does not unduly interfere with school activities and is solely responsible for any damage to persons or school property caused by the Emotional Support Dog.

IV. Documentation and Health Requirements

All animals must meet the following standards before being permitted on school property:

- Health:
  - Written documentation from a veterinarian must prove the animal is in good health and up-to-date on all vaccinations required by local law, including rabies.
  - Affirmation that the dog has regular flea prevention treatment and will be well-groomed while on school property or at school activities/events.
- Licensing: The animal must adhere to local dog licensing and registration requirements.

- Insurance: Evidence that the owner has liability insurance covering any damages or injuries caused by the dog's presence at school and/or school activities and events.
- Requirements Specific to Service Animals:

    1. Service animals must already be trained before they can be taken into public places.
    2. Service animals must be harnessed, leashed, or tethered, unless these devices interfere with the service animal's work or the individual's disability prevents using these devices. In that case, the individual must maintain control of the animal through voice, signal, or other effective controls.
    3. The District will provide reasonable accommodations for use of service animals to assure non-discrimination on the basis of disability.
    4. If, in the opinion of the school principal or their designee, any service animal is not in the control of its handler, or if it is not housebroken, the service animal may be excluded from the school. The service animal can also be excluded if it presents a direct and immediate threat to others in the school. The parent or guardian of the student having custody and control of the animal will be required to remove the service animal from school premises immediately.
    5. When there is a legitimate reason to ask that a service animal be removed, staff must offer the person with the disability the opportunity to obtain goods or services without the animal's presence.
    6. When a person who is allergic to dog dander and a person who uses a service animal must spend time in the same room or facility, for example, in a school classroom, they both should be accommodated by assigning them, if possible, to different locations within the room or different rooms of the school.
    7. If an individual on school transportation suffers an allergic reaction to a service animal, an alternate transportation plan will be developed in coordination with the appropriate school, District, and transportation staff and the parent/guardian of the student.
    8. The District will provide education to staff and students regarding the role of the service animal.

- Requirements Specific to Emotional Support Dogs:

1. Statement that the handler is responsible for any damages caused by their Emotional Support Dog.
2. Evidence that any Emotional Support Dog has received an Emotional Support Dog certification from a national therapy dog organization. Exceptions may be made for Emotional Support Dog(s) undergoing training by the Needham Police Department to serve as a therapy dog for the benefit of the schools.
3. The Emotional Support Dog must be obedient and calm as well as affectionate and friendly to strangers.
4. The Emotional Support Dog will only be permitted in authorized areas within and outside of the school building.
5. When using an Emotional Support Dog in a school setting, the dog must always be under control of the handler with either a harness or a leash no longer than four feet, unless holding such a leash would interfere with the Emotional Support Dog's safe, effective performance of its work or tasks. The handler shall maintain control of the Emotional Support Dog at all times and shall not tether the Emotional Support Dog to any individual or object. The school is not responsible for providing the handler or for handling the dog.
6. The handler and Emotional Support Dog will wear appropriate identification.
7. Volunteer handlers shall sign themselves and their Emotional Support Dog in upon arrival at any school and shall sign both out on departure from the building.
8. The handlers of an Emotional Support Dog are responsible for the supervision and care of the animal while on school property including feeding, exercising, and cleaning up after the animal.
9. The School Principal will notify families, students, and staff whenever an Emotional Support Dog will be present on school property or at school activities and events. Families, students, and staff will have the opportunity to express their wish to avoid the Emotional Support Dog.
10. The handler shall remove the Emotional Support Dog to a separate area as designated by the school administrator in such instances where any student or school employee who suffers dog allergies or aversions is present in an office, hallway, or classroom. Students who are unable to participate in class activities will be provided with an alternative learning experience or be provided with accommodations, as appropriate.

11. The handler shall confirm whether or not there will be any other Emotional Support Dog(s) on site prior to scheduling any visit with an Emotional Support Dog and shall take steps with appropriate staff to ensure that the dogs do not engage inappropriately while on school property. When multiple Emotional Support Dogs are engaged in a planned activity on school district property, the handlers shall ensure that the dogs have an opportunity to greet each other prior to entering the school building. Once inside the building, the handlers shall ensure that the dogs are each on a four-foot leash, given work space at least eight feet from each other, and are given no opportunity for contact or socialization with each other while working.
12. The Superintendent or his/her designee may not approve or may withdraw approval for an Emotional Support Dog at any time at their sole discretion.
13. Exceptions to these provisions may be made by the Superintendent for the inclusion of the Needham Police Department's Emotional Support Dog in school-related activities and events.

V. Control, Care, and Liability

- Supervision: The District does not assume responsibility for the care, feeding, or supervision of any animal. Handlers are solely responsible for toileting, feeding, exercising, and grooming.
- Control
    - Service animals must be harnessed, leashed, or tethered unless these devices interfere with their work, in which case voice or signal control must be maintained.
    - Emotional Support Dogs must always be on a leash no longer than four feet and may not be tethered to any individual or object.

- Liability: The owner or handler is solely liable for any damage to persons, premises, or property caused by the animal, including cleanup and stain removal.

- Identification: Emotional support dog handlers must wear appropriate identification and follow school sign-in and sign-out protocols.

VI. School Environment and Safety

- Allergies and Aversions: If a student or staff member suffers from dog allergies or aversions, the school will provide reasonable accommodations for impacted individuals.

- Multiple Animals: When multiple emotional support dogs are present, handlers must ensure they greet each other outside and maintain a workspace at least eight feet apart inside the building with no contact during work.

- Exclusion: An animal may be excluded if it is not housebroken, is out of control, or presents a direct and immediate threat to the safety of others.

VII. Education and Notification

The District will provide education to staff and students regarding the role of service animals. For emotional support dogs, the school principal will notify families and staff in advance, allowing them to express a wish to avoid the animal.

References:

Americans with Disabilities (2010) Service Animals

U.S. Department of Justice (2020) Frequently asked questions about service animals

ADA National Association of School Nurses (NASN) (2024) Position Statement, Service Animals in Schools

Needham School Committee

March 17, 2026

Agenda Item: **School Committee Comments**

Background Information:

- Members of the School Committee will have an opportunity to report on events, information, and matters of interest not on the agenda.

Members of the School Committee available for comment:

Michael E. O'Brien, Chair
Alisa Skatrud, Vice Chair
Sri Baqri
Michael Greis
Elizabeth Lee
Andrea Longo Carter
Matthew Spengler
Jack Arvedon, Student Representative