



NORTHSHORE  
EDUCATION  
CONSORTIUM

**Board of Directors Meeting Minutes**  
**February 4, 2026**

**Present:**

Beverly:	Dr. Cushing
Danvers:	Mr. Bauer
Gloucester:	Mr. Lummis
Hamilton Wenham:	Mr. Tracy
Ipswich:	Dr. Blake
Lynn:	Ms. Cohen
Marblehead:	Mr. Robidoux
Masconomet:	Dr. Harvey
North Reading:	Dr. Daly
Pentucket:	Dr. Bartholomew
Reading:	Dr. Milaschewski
Swampscott:	Mr. Calichman
Tri- Town:	Dr. Morrison
Triton:	Mr. Forget

**NEC:**

F. Rosenberg	L. Fleming
K. Mahoney	
B. Carrapichano	NEC/AFT president
B. Santo	E. Aldrich
W. Bowditch	J. Orlando - Connections

**Guests:**

Steve Amanti	Amanti Brothers
Suresh Bhatia	Atlantic Construction
Jennifer Dos Santos	Atlantic Construction

**Absent:**

Lynnfield:	Mr. Geary
Manchester Essex:	Ms. Beaudoin
Nahant:	Mr. Liebow
Peabody:	Dr. Vadala
Rockport:	Dr. Branco
Salem:	Dr. Zrike

1. **Call to Order:** Dr. Harvey called the meeting to order at 8:06 a.m.
2. **Approval of Consent Agenda**  
**MOTION:** A motion was made by Mr. Bauer and seconded by Mr. Tracy to approve the Consent Agenda, which included December Board Meeting Minutes, January Finance Committee minutes, February 2026 appointments, and warrants.  
**VOTE:** The motion was moved unanimously

3. **Executive Director Report and Mid-Year Financial Concerns** - Ms. Rosenberg presented her report and reviewed mid-year financial concerns. She started with noting some positive programmatic activities. She then expressed concern that the new transportation contract is placing a significant strain on cash flow, which is highlighting concerns about the operating budget shortfall and the need to replenish NEC's surplus. She emphasized the need for NEC to remain flexible and able to meet immediate district needs, while planning strategically for the next 3–5 years.

Ms. Rosenberg noted that enrollment was lower than anticipated, and that although some of this reflected typical fluctuations, it was more extreme than usual, particularly at the therapeutic high school. She discussed efforts to review the data and better understand district needs, as well as to look at any internal factors that may be impacting enrollment.

Ms. Rosenberg outlined current internal actions to address the budget concerns, including a soft hiring and spending freeze. She reviewed plans to look closely at staffing patterns, and to create a high level strategic planning subgroup.

Ms. Rosenberg concluded by requesting Board members complete the survey that she has previously sent to help NEC better understand anticipated district needs and inform ongoing data review.

#### **Board Discussion**

Mr. Lummis asked about the timeline for setting tuition rates for the upcoming year.

Dr. Branco emphasized the need for Board members to communicate with their school committees that NEC is an extension of their districts and a critical public resource. He noted that while tuition rates may increase, districts would otherwise face significantly higher private school tuition costs to meet student needs.

Ms. Rosenberg shared that work has begun on FY27 budget, and that Mr. Fleming would be presenting it at next month's meeting.

She stated that the NEC tuition rates will increase but still remain below the rates at similar private placements. She stressed the importance of increasing reserves in order to meet bank covenants and have the flexibility to meet changing needs.

Ms. Rosenberg also noted that a decision will be needed regarding continuation of the transportation contract. While the model was developed at the Board's request and remains sound, it is placing strain on cash flow. She asked the Board to review the pros and cons of continuing the contract, and stated that it will only be worth continuing if enough districts are committed to the contract and to making some changes that address cash flow.

In response to a question from Mr. Tracy, Ms. Rosenberg confirmed that eight districts currently participate.

Ms. Rosenberg concluded by noting that underutilized programs, including the Connections program, may require capacity reductions and encouraged districts to consider their needs before personnel cuts are made.

4. **Finance Committee Report:** Mr. Fleming presented the November and December Treasurer's Reports in Mr. Mahoney's absence. Mr. Fleming noted that cash flow is lower than at this time last year, due in part to the ongoing capital project and revenues lagging as enrollment projections were not met. He noted that as Ms. Rosenberg discussed, the administration is discussing midyear budget adjustments. He also reported that the regional transportation contract continues to create cash flow strain due to early monthly vendor payments, increasing reliance on the line of credit. As of the meeting date, cash on hand was approximately \$1.2 million. Mr. Fleming stated he is meeting weekly with Mr. Mahoney to monitor cash flow.

**MOTION:** A motion was made by Dr. Bartholomew and seconded by Mr. Bauer to approve the November and December 2025 Treasurers Reports.

**VOTE:** The motion passed unanimously.

**Revised FY26 Budget Discussion-** Mr. Fleming reviewed the revised FY26 budget, including projected revenues, transportation impacts, and cash flow concerns. He noted enrollment is below projections, contributing to revenue shortfalls.

Mr. Forget asked what items were being held or frozen. Mr. Fleming and Ms. Rosenberg reviewed these items, including the delay of non-critical capital spending.

Significant discussion focused on the regional transportation contract and current financial stress.

Several suggestions were made including monthly communication with districts about enrollment, ways to look at regional metrics

Board members emphasized the importance of building sufficient surplus and maintaining required cash reserves, acknowledging the difficulty of balancing financial realities with program needs. Mr. Forget reminded the Board of its collective responsibility, noting the need to maintain three months of cash reserves and the need to adapt and right-size programs when necessary.

Ms. Rosenberg emphasized the long-term importance of NEC to the region, noting the Board's prior approval of major capital investment and the essential services provided to medically fragile students as well as students with emotional and behavioral challenges who would be difficult to place if NEC did not exist. She stressed that difficult decisions lie ahead and that districts must engage school committees in understanding NEC's value compared to private placements.

Dr. Harvey asked for a vote on the revised FY26 budget.

**MOTION:** Mr. Bauer made a motion to approve the revised FY26 budget, and Dr. Blake seconded the motion.

**Vote:** The motion passed unanimously.

5. **HVAC Project Update with Board Discussion-** Representatives from Atlantic Construction including Suresh Bhatia and Jennifer Dos Santos, along with General Contractor Steve Amanti, provided an update on the HVAC project.

Mr. Amanti stated that while some progress has been made, ongoing issues remain with system controls. He emphasized that the team is not leaving the project until these issues are resolved.

Ms. Rosenberg noted that Ms. Dos Santos has been on site frequently, assisting with project management and addressing control and temperature issues. Ms. Dos Santos explained that after several months of investigation, the issue now appears to be related to equipment rather than system design.

Mr. Amanti reported that the team has identified two actionable next steps, including further data collection. He noted that these steps will not result in additional cost to the district. He also expressed appreciation for the time and expertise of Facilities Director Monique Bourgault.

Dr. Branco asked whether clear solutions had been identified. Mr. Amanti stated that if the Daikin equipment is found to be defective, the matter would fall under manufacturer warranty. He confirmed that the manufacturer remains involved and that an extended warranty has been requested. Dr. Cushing asked whether the manufacturer is stepping away and when the warranty period begins. Mr. Amanti confirmed continued manufacturer involvement.

Mr. Robidoux asked whether thermostats were contributing to the issue. Mr. Amanti responded that the problem appears to lie with the Daikin system, not thermostats. Ms. Dos Santos confirmed this remains an active focus.

Mr. Lummis and Dr. Bartholomew shared that similar HVAC issues are occurring in other districts.

Dr. Morrison questioned whether Daikin representatives should be present at future board meetings. Mr. Amanti stated that manufacturer representatives have attended prior HVAC meetings.

Dr. Cushing emphasized the importance of resolving the issue given the \$12 million project and the needs of medically fragile students.

Board members thanked the Atlantic Construction and Amanti team for attending and acknowledged the complexity of the project.

At the conclusion of the discussion, Ms. Rosenberg requested that the minutes reflect the Board's appreciation to Facilities Director Monique Bourgault for her exceptional work managing this project in addition to her broader responsibilities. The Board agreed.

6. **Update on Recovery High School Planning and RFP-** Ms. Rosenberg stated that an RFP has been drafted and is about to be posted and that the Board will be asked to vote on a proposed lease in early April.

7. **Update on Connections Program and Clinical Consultation-**

Ms. Bowditch provided an update on the Connections Program and related clinical consultation services. She noted that the program began prior to the pandemic and was initially funded through a Tower Grant. The program supports students with high clinical and behavioral needs. Ms. Bowditch emphasized that the goal of the program is to support districts in maintaining students within their home districts. She stated that while the program may be subject to future budget review, the intent of the update was to clearly explain the scope and value of the services provided before any decisions are made about reducing staffing. Ms. Orlando shared enrollment

and participation data, noting that the program has served approximately 60 students across 18 member districts and 6 non-member districts, including Swampscott, Lynn, Manchester, Boxford, Peabody, Lynnfield, and Hamilton-Wenham. She described how the program operates, including district-based support and the use of outside funding in certain cases. Ms. Orlando indicated she is available to meet with districts individually to discuss services.

Ms. Rosenberg noted that Ms. Orlando has been with the program since its inception and emphasized the importance of increasing awareness of the Connections Program. She stated that a more detailed presentation could be planned for the March Board meeting and/or that a Zoom session may be scheduled to provide additional information.

## **8. Additional Discussion**

At 9:47 a.m., the Board continued its discussion regarding the transportation contract.

Dr. Branco expressed that there has been significant frustration with the contract from both finance and special education leaders. He asked whether participation could be opened to non-member districts prior to June, noting concern that the opportunity may otherwise dissolve.

Mr. Bauer stated he appreciated the candor of the discussion, noting that districts initially supported the contract for potential local cost savings, but outcomes have not met expectations, and that his district, like others, had rebid shorter routes in order to save money.

Dr. Bartholomew acknowledged the challenges, stating the model was expected to be difficult initially. He emphasized the need to involve Special Education Directors, and suggested that expanding participation to non-member districts could help stabilize the program. He expressed confidence that the issue is solvable with broader engagement and trust.

Mr. Tracy acknowledged the support provided by staff.

Dr. Morrison stated that his district is not currently participating and raised concern about the impact on NEC staff capacity, noting that transportation should not consume disproportionate administrative time at the expense of other budget priorities.

Ms. Rosenberg highlighted concerns related to cash flow and billing structure, including pre-billing versus post-billing. She stated that while ending the program would provide immediate relief for NEC, continuation would require strong regional commitment and an understanding that results may take multiple years to achieve.

Mr. Fleming explained that challenges with shared routes have resulted in increased costs for remaining districts when participation changes.

Mr. Lummis asked about available ride-sharing data, which staff confirmed exists.

Ms. Rosenberg noted that 11 districts initially expressed interest, though several did not ultimately follow through. She emphasized that there were non-financial benefits in terms of safety and liability. Board members discussed whether outcomes might improve in a second year but acknowledged the long-term implications for NEC.

The Board emphasized the need for a decision and clearer alignment among the Board, Special Education leadership, and transportation stakeholders. Ms. Rosenberg stated that the program must be a regional commitment to be viable.

Board members expressed shared frustration but also agreement that the issue remains solvable. Ms. Rosenberg referenced similar long-term success seen in other regional models, noting that stabilization can take several years.

There was consensus that this discussion would continue in March, after the upcoming meeting.

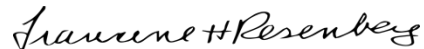
**MOTION:** A motion was made by Dr. Branco and seconded by Mr. Lummis to adjourn from the meeting at 10:06 am.

**VOTE:** The motion passed unanimously.



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***Kathy Mahoney, Administrative Assistant to Executive Director***



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***Francine Rosenberg, NEC Executive Director***