

MANCHESTER SCHOOL DISTRICT SAU #37
COMMITTEE ON STUDENT CONDUCT

September 16, 2026

5:00 p.m.

1. Chair Hamer called the meeting to order at 5:15 p.m.
2. The Clerk called the roll.

Present: Committee Member Hamer, Want, Stewart, St. John, Taylor and Smith.

Absent: Committee Member Bergeron.

3. Public Forum

There was no one present to give public comment.

6. Approval of the Minutes of the following meeting: August 19, 2026

*On motion of **Committee Member Want**, duly seconded by **Committee Member Stewart**, it was moved to approve the minutes of the August 19, 2026 meeting. All were in favor and the motion passed.*

7. Presentations

- a. Beech Street Elementary School – School Report Card Presentation – by
Kelly Newman, Principal

Principal Kelly Newman and Sara Lievens, Assistant Principal, presented an overview of the school's mission, student population, goals, and current initiatives. Principal Newman shared Beech Street's mission of helping every student become persevering, resilient, optimistic, understanding, and dedicated while teaching students to learn from mistakes and treat others with kindness and respect.

The school serves a significant population of students with disabilities and multilingual learners and has the largest percentage of students qualifying for free and reduced-price lunch in the District. Beech Street also serves a notable number of students experiencing homelessness or foster care.

Academic Goals and Reinforcement Block

The school's academic focus is to continue refining and strengthening differentiated instruction to better meet individual student needs during its extended reinforcement block. Beech Street expanded the intervention/reinforcement block during the previous school year and reported significant growth in students' phonemic-awareness skills. The school plans to continue building upon those gains while beginning to expand its focus on mathematics. The reinforcement block is approximately 75 minutes for most grade levels, with kindergarten receiving approximately 65 minutes. Student groups are reassessed approximately every six weeks based upon skill development and academic need.

Principal Newman emphasized that the reinforcement period does not replace students' core grade-level instruction. Rather, it provides additional targeted support. During this period:

- Multilingual learners continue receiving English language services while also participating in targeted small-group interventions;
- Students with disabilities receive services connected to their IEP goals as well as additional targeted instruction; and
- Students who need additional academic support participate in skill-based groups.

The school is beginning to expand mathematics intervention, with second grade piloting additional mathematics support during the current school year. It was explained that reading and literacy had initially received greater emphasis because reading skills affect students' ability to access mathematics, particularly word problems and other language-based assessment items.

Academic Progress Monitoring

Beech Street established a goal for each grade level to reach 90% proficiency in the foundational skills associated with that grade level. Staff developed a tracking system aligned with grade-level standards and diagnostic information to help teachers identify specific skill gaps and create targeted instructional groups. Student data is reviewed during Professional Learning Communities, and staff continue working to strengthen differentiated Tier I instruction to prevent students from falling further behind.

Attendance

Beech Street is focusing on increasing student attendance through positive recognition and stronger connections with families. The school recognizes attendance during monthly student assemblies by grade

level and conducts monthly attendance-team meetings to review outreach efforts and determine appropriate interventions for students experiencing attendance challenges. The school's community schools liaison is also developing a "Family Village" initiative intended to make families more comfortable entering the school and provide additional opportunities for families to participate in their children's education. The school is exploring ways to help families make neighborhood connections that could support student attendance, including the possibility of parent-organized walking arrangements.

Student Behavior and Social-Emotional Supports

Beech Street's behavioral goal is to increase positive behaviors while reducing repeated behavioral incidents. Rather than focusing solely on the overall number of office referrals, administration intends to identify students demonstrating repeated behaviors and provide more targeted interventions. The school has an MTSS-B Tier II and Tier III team that reviews students requiring additional behavioral support. The school also provides targeted social-emotional learning through its counseling team using the Toolbox curriculum. Students are recognized monthly for demonstrating the school's Proud code of character and associated positive behaviors.

Enrollment

Principal Newman reported that Beech Street currently serves approximately 510 students. She explained that enrollment can fluctuate significantly at the beginning of the school year. The school had anticipated approximately 460 students before the start of school but experienced a substantial increase as additional students enrolled and returned. Staff continue outreach to families whose children have not yet returned to school.

Questions and comments from the committee included:

1. Committee members discussed the construction of the new Beech Street school. Ms. Newman and Mrs. Lievens reported that students are beginning to become more engaged and excited about the project as construction progresses. A model of the new building has been displayed at the school, including during the school's meet-and-greet event. Plans are also being developed to provide students with opportunities to tour the construction site and learn more about the project. The new school is expected to be completed approximately two years from groundbreaking, with the current second-grade students anticipated to be among the first students to attend the completed facility as fourth graders.

2. Committee members discussed the significant number of Beech Street students experiencing homelessness or foster care and asked how the school supports those students. Ms. Newman and Mrs. Lievens emphasized the importance of providing stability and consistency for students whose lives outside school may involve considerable uncertainty. Students have access to meals, clothing through the school's clothing closet, social workers, behavioral interventions, and other community-school resources.
 3. The Administration provided an example of a Beech Street family that had recently become homeless following a fire. School staff immediately contacted the family and were able to provide gift cards and other assistance for essential needs.
 4. The Committee also discussed educational stability for students entering foster care. Administration explained that when a foster placement takes a student outside the Beech Street attendance area, consideration is given to the best interests of the child, and students may often remain at Beech Street while longer-term decisions are made.
 5. The Committee thanked Principal Newman and the Beech Street team for their presentation and their work supporting students and families.
8. Chronic Absenteeism Attendance Information – by Dr. Kelly Espinola, Assistant Superintendent

Dr. Kelly Espinola presented information regarding chronic absenteeism and the District's developing attendance initiatives. She recognized Joyce Lewis, Director of Comprehensive School Counseling, for her work supporting the District's attendance efforts and developing systems that allow schools to identify and intervene with students earlier.

Chronic Absenteeism Data

Continued progress in reducing chronic absenteeism was reported. The District's chronic absenteeism rate was:

- **50.5% in 2021–2022;**
- **40.9% in 2022–2023;**
- Just over **30% in 2024–2025;** and
- Approximately **31% at the conclusion of the most recent school year.**

The District's current goal is to reduce chronic absenteeism to 25%. For 2024–2025, chronic absenteeism was approximately:

- **21% at the elementary level;**
- **27% at the middle school level;** and
- **37% at the high school level.**

The Administration described its attendance strategy as **protect, prevent, and intensify**: protect gains at the elementary level, prevent problematic attendance patterns from becoming established in middle school, and intensify engagement and intervention efforts at the high school level.

Chronic Absenteeism vs. Truancy

The distinction between chronic absenteeism and truancy was clarified. Chronic absenteeism is defined as missing 10% or more of the school year for any reason, including excused absences, unexcused absences, and suspensions. In a 180-day school year, this represents approximately 18 days. Truancy focuses specifically on unexcused absences. Under New Hampshire law, habitual truancy is based upon 10 half-days of unexcused absence during the school year.

The Administration emphasized that a student can therefore be chronically absent without meeting the legal definition of habitual truancy.

Tiered Attendance Tracker

The District has developed a new tiered attendance-tracking system to help identify students requiring intervention. The categories include:

- **Reachable Risers:** Students attending approximately 85%–89% of the time;
- **Movable Middle:** Students attending approximately 80%–85% of the time; and
- **High Need:** Students attending less than 80% of the time.

It was explained that the system allows staff to match interventions with the severity of a student's attendance problem and, whenever possible, intervene before attendance deteriorates further.

Family Wellness Visits

Beginning in October, the District plans to pilot family wellness visits for families of chronically absent students. The visits are intended to emphasize early intervention and relationship-building rather than having the District's first significant interaction with a family occur through a formal truancy notice. Social workers and interested school counselors will conduct the visits. When possible, personnel from feeder schools will coordinate so a family with children at multiple schools receives one coordinated visit rather than several separate contacts. The goal is to identify barriers preventing students from attending school and determine whether the District can help resolve them.

Attendance Communication Pilot

The District also plans to pilot an automated attendance communication system at Bakersville Elementary School, Hillside Middle School, and Central High School. Ms. Lewis explained that staff have developed a process using Aspen attendance data to create individualized monthly attendance "report cards" for families. The reports will identify a student's attendance percentage, display missed days on a school calendar, and provide messaging based upon the student's attendance level.

Families requiring additional support will receive contact information for school personnel and opportunities to meet virtually, by telephone, or in person.

Following the pilot, administration will evaluate the process, address any problems, and determine whether to expand the system to additional schools.

Project Graduation

The Administration discussed the development of **Project Graduation**, a Saturday credit-recovery initiative for high school students at risk of not graduating. The program is being supported through opioid-abatement grant funding and is expected to begin by the end of October. Students will participate at Central, Memorial, and West high schools. MST students will also be able to access the program through an appropriate comprehensive high school. Two teachers will receive stipends to work with participating students on Saturdays and maintain contact with them throughout the school week. The program will use a person-centered approach and may include communication with parents, trusted adults, and employers to remove barriers and help students complete graduation requirements.

Committee Member questions and comments included:

1. Committee members expressed support for providing students with multiple pathways to credit recovery.
2. Discussion also occurred regarding the Virtual Learning Academy Charter School (VLACS) as another option available to students.
3. Student Member Hanneman discussed personal experience with VLACS and noted that students may use virtual courses both to recover credits and to accelerate their academic progress.
4. Committee members noted that virtual options can also provide flexibility for students whose employment, family responsibilities, or other circumstances make traditional scheduling difficult.
5. Committee members asked whether chronic absenteeism may also reflect broader student engagement issues. Discussion included the value of examining attendance and class-cutting data by school, grade level, subject area, and student population to better understand why students disengage.
6. The Administration reported that class-cut data is being collected at the high school level and that student engagement is an ongoing focus in meetings with principals and during classroom walkthroughs.
7. Committee members suggested examining schools and programs with strong student engagement, including MST and other competency-based or hands-on instructional models, to identify practices that could potentially inform work elsewhere in the District.
8. Student voice was also identified as important when evaluating engagement.
9. Committee members requested additional historical information to help place current chronic absenteeism data in context. The Administration stated that reliable pre-COVID District data was limited because chronic absenteeism had not always been tracked consistently.
10. Discussion included national chronic-absenteeism data and whether comparisons with similar urban school districts might provide a more meaningful benchmark than comparing current data solely with pandemic-era rates.
11. Nashua was identified as one possible New Hampshire comparison because of demographic similarities.

12. Committee members emphasized that comparative data should be interpreted carefully because demographic differences and reporting methodologies can affect results.
13. The Committee requested that future reports include additional information regarding:
 - Truancy rates in addition to chronic absenteeism;
 - Projected chronic absenteeism based upon current-year attendance patterns;
 - School-level and grade-level trends;
 - Longitudinal information showing whether students who were previously chronically absent improved their attendance;
 - Class-cutting data; and
 - Additional information regarding student engagement.
14. Administration agreed to bring additional truancy and projected-attendance information to a future meeting.
15. The Committee thanked administration for the presentation and emphasized that while numerical goals are useful, the primary purpose of the work is to identify and support individual students and families.

**10. Updated Student Conduct Codes and Definitions – by Dr. Kelly Espinola,
Assistant Superintendent**

Stacy Champey, Executive Director of Safe and Supportive Schools, presented updated student conduct codes and definitions. Ms. Champey explained that administration reviewed existing conduct codes over the summer and compared them with New Hampshire Safe Schools reporting requirements and federal Civil Rights Data Collection reporting. The review identified gaps and areas requiring better alignment.

The updated coding system is intended to:

- Improve the accuracy of student conduct data;
- Align District codes with state and federal reporting categories;
- Give administrators clearer definitions when entering incidents;
- Reduce reliance on narrative descriptions that must later be manually reviewed;
- Allow the District to identify patterns more quickly; and
- Better target staffing, resources, prevention programs, funding, and future grant applications.

Other Weapon Category

Ms. Champey noted that an additional Level Four category for **“Other Weapon”** would be added. The category would address weapons that do not fall within existing categories for firearms, pellet guns, or destructive devices and could include knives, clubs, razor blades, and similar weapons. The Administration explained that adding the code would prevent administrators from having to enter these incidents under an inaccurate category and later manually determine the appropriate state reporting classification. An updated conduct-code list will be provided to the Committee.

Questions and comments from the committee included:

1. The Committee discussed how bullying incidents progress through the District’s disciplinary levels when behaviors are repeated. Ms. Champey explained that repeated behavior has historically been difficult to consistently identify and track. Aspen now includes a field asking whether a Level One, Two, or Three incident represents repeated behavior. This allows school teams and District administration to more readily recognize patterns. Ms. Champey reviews conduct data from all schools weekly and can follow up with individual schools when repeated behavior appears without appropriate interventions or escalation.
2. The Administration explained that the offense levels identify a starting point rather than an automatic final consequence. If a Level Three behavior is repeated after interventions and consequences have been attempted, the behavior may escalate to Level Four. Continued serious behavior may ultimately reach Level Five, although administration emphasized that expulsion is used cautiously.
3. The Administration further clarified that bullying may initially appear as lower-level conduct or harassment and later be identified as bullying once a pattern, imbalance of power, or interference with a student’s educational opportunities becomes evident.
4. Ms. Champey explained that improved conduct codes are important not only for reporting but also for accurately understanding what is occurring within schools. For example, the District has developed more precise codes to distinguish between different types and levels of assault or battery so incidents are not inaccurately reported as more serious Safe Schools events. The updated codes are being aligned with the broader revisions to the Student Code of Conduct being considered by the Policy Committee.

5. Administration stated that additional Aspen programming is also underway with the goal of eventually allowing administrators to generate required reports more efficiently.
6. Committee members noted that improved behavioral data will also allow schools to better identify patterns in individual student behavior and determine appropriate interventions and supports.
7. The Board Clerk recognized Ms. Champey's work developing the District's MTSS-B structures and improving behavioral systems and data collection.

11. NEW BUSINESS

There was no new business presented.

ADJOURNMENT

- 12.** If there is no further business, a motion is in order to adjourn.

*On motion of **Committee Member Want**, duly seconded by **Committee Member Taylor**, it was moved to adjourn. All were in favor, meeting adjourned at 6:24 p.m.*

True Copy. Attest.

Respectfully Submitted,



Clerk of Committee