

Community PTO Meeting Minutes
May 19, 2026

1. Call Meeting to Order
2. Executive Board: Jen Pettit, Crystal Soule, Erin Barnicle & Julie Rushe present
3. Principal Ms Norris: Present
4. Superintendent Dr. Marisa Mendonsa & Interim Assistant Superintendent For Special Education & Student Services Dr. Lisa Kingley: Present
5. President Jen Pettit addressed the Meeting, Introducing the panel and gave a brief overview as to the meetings need and intent:
 - a. Parents & Teachers have expressed concerns about frequent behavioral disruptions and the presence of emergency vehicles at the school
 - b. The superintendent was unable to attend the previous meeting, however Dr. Porch came as a representative from their office and listened for 90+minutes
 - c. An additional meeting was subsequently added to have the Superintendent address concerns directly
 - d. REMINDER: PTO meetings are meant to be kept as a safe space for families and teachers to share openly. Details from the meeting should not be shared outside of the Plympton community as many parents do not wish for their child's experiences to be exploited.
6. Parent Tim Pettit expressed concern regarding younger students sharing hallways with the Bridge program.
 - a. Dr Marisa Mendonsa first addresses Jen's comment regarding social media. It's been a challenge with some misinformation being put out. District leadership identified a need for improved training for all staff members, including custodial and cafeteria workers, to support an inclusion model. There is a focus on ensuring new educators receive the same level of training as veteran staff, particularly as best practices and state regulations evolve. New state regulations from DESE regarding timeout spaces and restraints will be implemented in the fall, requiring updated professional development. The district is working on providing parents with specific language and talking points so they can support school messaging when discussing these topics with their children at home.
 - b. - Tim expressed worry that budget cuts and increased class sizes would hinder a teacher's ability to manage student emotions and needs.
 - c. The district has seen a 4 million dollar increase in costs for out-of-district special education placements. Leadership argued that investing in internal resources and training is necessary to prevent even higher costs that would eventually force class sizes to reach 22 to 25 students. For the upcoming year, 1.5 full-time equivalent positions are being added specifically to the Bridge program to provide more intensive support. The district tracks kindergarten enrollment monthly to

make staffing adjustments and build in contingencies for new families moving into the area. While the school committee aims for elementary class sizes of 20 or under, physical space is becoming a significant limitation. Several schools, such as Stanley and MacArthur, are at or near capacity with very few to no available classrooms for additional sections. New housing developments in the area pose a challenge to maintaining small class sizes, as the district must legally absorb new students regardless of current class numbers. Leadership noted that while middle and high schools have adequate space, the elementary level is reaching a critical point regarding physical footprint.

7. Parent Jessica Nicholson shared her experience in hearing the behavior issues and it's not isolated to the Bridge program and if there are new circumstances
 - a. Dr Mendonsa addressed the evolving challenges in student behavior and the district's strategic response through administrative restructuring. Participants discussed the impact of digital media on younger children and the difficulties of recruiting specialized staff in the current labor market. The session concluded with a focus on improving organizational systems to better support classroom teachers. The educational landscape has changed significantly due to increased student exposure to digital media and screens. Students are frequently using tablets and YouTube, often without parental controls, leading to an uptick in dysregulation. Content and behaviors previously associated with secondary schools, such as mature language and exposure to drugs or alcohol, are now appearing at the elementary level. The district is increasing the use of School Adjustment Counselors (SACs) to deliver Social Emotional Learning (SEL) lessons directly in classrooms. A specific model is currently being monitored at Northeast to track improvements in student behavior. Engagement with community health organizations has begun to provide additional resources for both students and adults. The district is prioritizing administrative roles to handle systems work, policy development, and training so that teachers can focus exclusively on instruction. A comparison was made to Arlington High School, noting that while both schools have 1,800 students, the local high school has 50 more staff members. Some departments have staff members who are not currently assigned to courses, allowing for natural staff reductions or repurposing. The current ratio of administrators to teachers is low, which creates heavy workloads for principals. One principal, Adrienne, oversees 70 staff members and may personally evaluate 30, a process that requires significant time for observations and feedback. New administrative positions are being designated as 12-month roles to ensure professional development and system planning can occur during the summer months. Dr. Mendonsa noted that previous administrative structures relied on union-aligned schedules that prevented summer planning, leading to delays in implementing plans during the school year. There has been a decline in the desirability of the teaching profession post-COVID, resulting in a smaller pool of applicants. Finding skilled educators for therapeutic programming within special education is a primary challenge for the district. Many new hires lack the specific skill sets required for high-need

programs, requiring the district to provide intensive training as the school year progresses. Positions that once drew 40 applicants now only draw approximately eight. The district is working to establish stronger support systems to help new teachers manage the needs of vulnerable and challenging student populations. The district will continue to monitor the behavioral improvement model at Northeast. Administrative staff will focus on pre-developing professional development plans during the summer to ensure they are ready by the start of the school year. Efforts will continue to utilize grants, such as the one involving Dr. Porch and Newton North, to fund specialized administrative roles before they are absorbed into the general budget.

8. Dr Kingsley addressed the Implementation of Behavioral Support Staff and Partnership
 - a. - The district is partnering with the Stepping Stones Group to provide specialized staff, including Applied Behavior Analysis Instructors (ABAI) and Board Certified Behavior Analysts (BCBA). The ABAI will be present in the building full-time to provide real-time coaching to teachers and paraeducators while supporting students. The BCBA will work part-time, approximately two to three days a week, to develop and oversee behavior plans. A fifty-thousand-dollar grant will be utilized for summer staff development, response guides, and professional development resources that staff can access throughout the year. The partner organization conducted a needs assessment to ensure the support is tailored to the specific requirements of the school.
 - b. Regulatory Constraints and Restorative Discipline Practices - State regulations from the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education limit the use of external suspensions. Schools must document progressive interventions and lead-up work before a student can be externally suspended, unless a major significant situation occurs. If a student has calmed down and does not pose an immediate danger, the focus shifts to restorative education and family conferences. High rates of out-of-district suspensions, particularly for special education students, can trigger state audits and mandatory course corrections. Natural consequences, such as losing recess privileges, are used and documented as part of the progressive discipline process to justify further action if needed.
9. Erin Barnicle asked about student discipline for the challenging behavior we're seeing
 - a. A new twelve-month position for an administrator of student engagement and discipline has been created to lead the redesign of the code of conduct. This new administrator will involve students, families, and teachers in a community effort to update disciplinary standards and analyze behavior data. Students in specialized programs follow individualized behavior plans that outline specific consequences tailored to their needs. Consequences may include the loss of preferred activities or trade-ins, often replaced by alternative activities if a student is deemed unsafe for a specific class like art. Disciplinary actions for students in third grade or below require mandatory consultation with the central office. Staff must ensure that discipline does not penalize a student for manifestations of a documented disability or violate their educational plan. Specific disciplinary

actions are not publicized to the broader student body or community to protect student privacy and dignity. The new administrator of student engagement and discipline will begin analyzing data and developing the new code of conduct. Summer planning will focus on staff development and the creation of accessible professional development materials using grant funding.

10. Schools must track suspension days for any student on an IEP or 504 plan.
 - a. - A manifestation determination meeting is required once a student reaches 10 days of suspension. The team must determine if the behavior in question was a manifestation of the student's disability. If the behavior is a manifestation, the school cannot proceed with a suspension. Alternative measures must be considered for students whose behavior is linked to their disability. While suspension may be prohibited, students still face consequences that do not involve being out of school. New DESE regulations impact how schools handle phone calls to parents regarding behavioral issues. School staff cannot suggest that a parent come to pick up their child from school. Any suggestion of removal from the educational setting is legally defined as a suspension. These legalities must be considered every time a suspension is proposed.
11. Parent- Anna Antoniak touched on both social emotions learning as well as the out of district budget concerns
 - a. The district is facing significant costs related to tuition and transportation for students in public and private separate day schools. There has been a notable increase in out-of-district referrals during the current year. A primary driver for this increase is new students moving into the district who already have established out-of-district placements.
 - b. The elementary level currently lacks a systemic and normed social-emotional learning curriculum. This gap follows the discontinuation of a previous curriculum that was deemed unsuccessful. There is a recognized need to implement a consistent framework across all elementary schools to ensure student support.
 - c. The district is looking into repurposing staff positions vacated by high school retirements and resignations. These repurposed roles would be used to address counseling needs at other educational levels where demand is higher. Concerns were raised regarding state funding, specifically the difficulty of using short-term grants to cover long-term staffing requirements. Contract costs for specialized services, including speech therapy and para-educators within out-of-district placements, are increasing.
 - d. The director of counseling will prioritize determining a specific social-emotional curriculum for the district's elementary schools. The selection of the new curriculum is intended for implementation in the upcoming school year.
12. Principal Norris shared the shifting the primary focus of the school improvement plan from academic discourse to social-emotional learning.
 - a. Establishing a common shared language among all students and staff.
 - b. Implementing monthly themes to provide a structured approach across all grade levels from kindergarten through fifth grade.

- c. - Using morning announcements, community meetings, and uniform lessons to reinforce the shared language. Increasing communication with families to provide resources and common language for home reinforcement. The team agreed to pause the previous focus on academic discourse and vocabulary to prioritize social-emotional learning. The new initiative will take effect starting next year. The Instructional Leadership Team and the SEL team will collaborate to finalize the shared language and lesson plans for the K-5 curriculum.
- 13. Parent Renee Castro addressed concern regarding disturbing behavior another student was exhibiting in front of her children having a meltdown using extreme language directed at the teacher telling them they were going to kill them. The next day the student is back at school with no apparent consequence. The limitation administration faces is something not overlooked, but the message it sends kids without an underlying issue is that behavior is acceptable and not worth punishment
 - a. Trying to prevent students from seeing those moments is a goal and the hope is to divert others from witnessing it. Administrators agree there is more to improve on.
- 14. Parent Mary Sullivan is very concerned over children and teacher safety after significant injuries have been sustained. She also addressed the impact it has on all learners; her child has learned defensive techniques to avoid physical violence. It appears often during specialist visits A perception exists among some parents that the school's primary attention is focused on Bridge program students at the expense of the safety and needs of traditional learners. It's also suggested that the high-energy environment of specialists may be a trigger for students who struggle with self-regulation.
 - a. Principal Norris clarified that Bridge students typically attend specials with support from one or two paraprofessionals. Procedures are in place to prevent dysregulated students from attending specials, providing alternatives like calm-down corners or the school adjustment counselor's office. Challenges arise when students become stubborn or embarrassed, making it difficult to remove them from the classroom once an incident begins. The school has piloted alternative specials, such as sessions with the librarian, which proved successful in a smaller environment. Staff members Mr. Rock and Ms. Arrick have been going directly into Bridge classrooms to lead activities in a calmer setting, which has been effective for certain groups of students
 - b. Dr Kingsley outlined plans to use the summer to develop capacity building response guides to create predictable, standardized responses to specific behaviors. Behavior coaches, referred to as ABAI, will be integrated into settings alongside paraeducators to provide additional support. There is a priority to provide ongoing, in-the-moment support for specialist teachers who only see students once or twice a week and face the challenge of managing mixed cohorts. The administration aims to ensure that both students and teachers feel safe within the school environment through these upcoming structural changes. The school will conduct planning sessions over the summer to improve behavioral response predictability and create specific guides for

specialists. Implementation of behavior coaches to support paraeducators in classroom and special settings.

- c. Principal Norris explained they have continued exploration and potential expansion of alternative specials that take place within the Bridge classroom to provide a calmer environment for students who struggle with self-regulation.
 - d. Dr Mendonsa explained there is a critical need for high-level training and support for educators across the district. The district acknowledges that untrained staff members are currently supporting students, which is an area requiring significant improvement. Professional development time has historically been insufficient for staff to organize effectively. Changes for the upcoming school year include:
 - i. - The addition of a second day of support and organization before students return.
 - ii. - A focus on moving away from placing untrained staff in high-needs environments.
 - e. Current Challenges within the Bridge Program, while the Bridge program has been operational for several years, the current year has seen a decline in success compared to previous years. The intensity of behaviors within the program has increased public visibility and concern. Aggressive behaviors such as pushing and shoving are present in schools, though not all incidents are attributable to the Bridge program. The district maintains a responsibility to provide education access while addressing these behavioral intensities.
 - f. The final weeks of the school year are expected to be intense due to several factors including rising temperatures and heat affecting the school environment, A high volume of scheduled activities including testing, concerts, moving-up ceremonies, and field trips. These activities cause a disruption in routines, leading to increased student anxiety. Students are experiencing nervousness regarding the transition to summer and the requirements of the next grade level.
 - g. - Different planning strategies are being implemented for the final weeks of the current school year to manage the expected increase in behavioral intensity. A high-intensity level of support is scheduled for the summer, with a specific focus on Plympton. The district is working toward ensuring the next school year operates differently through better preparation and increased staff support.
15. Lynn Caissie, a parent and an educator in Waltham. focused on addressing learning gaps caused by classroom disruptions, expanding professional development, and implementing crisis intervention training.
- a. Both Dr Mendonsa and Dr Kingsley explained the district is developing a professional development plan that includes training sessions during the summer.
 - b. Two dedicated training days will occur at the start of the school year, followed by ongoing additional time for staff growth. The goal is to ensure all educators, including those new to the building, are prepared to support students from the first day of school.
 - c. The district has increased its number of Crisis Prevention and Intervention (CPI) trainers from one to five. One of the new trainers is a teacher at Plympton who volunteered to serve as a resource for de-escalation and crisis response within

the building. CPI training focuses largely on de-escalation strategies and classroom management, with a smaller portion dedicated to restraint training. Training will now be conducted during regular work hours to ensure higher staff participation and immediate training for new hires, such as para-educators. The long-term goal is for every educator in the district to have the opportunity to be CPI trained to support all students, not just those in special education. Strategies for addressing interrupted learning and student anxiety

- d. - Lynn expressed concern regarding students who have missed instructional units or experienced anxiety due to behavioral outbursts in the classroom.
 - e. Dr Mendonsa emphasized the need for a formalized response plan following incidents, which could include immediate check-ins or support from the School Adjustment Counselor (SAC). The district plans to prioritize data cycles, reviewing student progress every eight weeks to identify where interventions are needed. There will be a focus on optimizing "WIN blocks" (What I Need) as a structured time for targeted student support.
 - f. Lynn suggested that for certain subjects like Foundations, teachers may need to finish units from the previous grade level to bridge the gap before starting new curriculum. She also acknowledged the dedication of current teachers, including our amazing kindergarten teacher Mrs Leonelli. She's happy about the new plan and just wishes it was happening sooner
16. Parent Janet Neville expressed that the current year feels significantly more chaotic than her previous five years as a parent in the building. Inquiry was made into whether the atmosphere is a result of staffing shortages, an influx of students with high needs, or other systemic changes.
- a. Dr Mendonsa acknowledged that the current year feels different and that parents' concerns are valid. Staffing gaps during the fall semester negatively impacted the initial structure and startup of the school year. These early challenges created a cumulative effect that influenced overall school outcomes. Privacy regulations limit the ability of the administration to discuss specific student-related factors or individual cases. There is a recognized need for more highly trained staff to manage the current student population effectively. The district has a legal obligation to ensure every student makes adequate progress, which may involve specialized programs like the Bridge program. Families have the legal right to reject specific elements of an Individualized Education Program (IEP). Rights include the ability to decline out-of-district placements or to remove a child from the Bridge program. The administration must work to mediate and support students within the district when families exercise their right to decline recommended external placements. Strategic improvements and resource allocation The district has partnered with an organization called Steppingstones to assess needs and provide immediate support. A Steppingstones Board Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA) is currently on-site one day per week to supplement the two existing district BCBA's.
 - b. Dr. Kingsley reported that a 50,000 dollar grant was secured to support these initiatives. 40,000 dollars of the grant is earmarked specifically for the elementary

school level. 10,000 dollars is dedicated to training new Crisis Prevention Institute (CPI) trainers.

- c. The administration expressed confidence that the resources and plans currently being implemented will lead to improved outcomes for the upcoming school year.
 - d. The school committee meeting will feature a presentation by Steppingstones regarding their assessment and recommendations. The district will continue to monitor the effectiveness of the Bridge program and consider alternative support if students do not make adequate progress. Training for staff will be prioritized using the newly allocated grant funds to ensure better support for educators and students.
17. Zac Kolar, the technology teacher at Plympton reported recurring safety issues and felt forced to choose between personal safety and following established protocols. He noted that while de-escalation training is desirable for general educators, there is a fear that becoming restraint-certified creates a liability. There is a specific concern among staff that being trained in physical intervention will lead to being called for student escorts, potentially resulting in physical injuries such as broken limbs.
- a. - The staff expressed a need to feel that obtaining professional training will not inadvertently put them in harm's way.
 - b. It was clarified that the primary goal of CPI training is to teach trauma-informed approaches and de-escalation to avoid the need for physical contact. The administration intends to increase the number of training seats and trainers so that these skills become a normed practice across the staff. The training is not intended to imply that an educator is automatically expected to engage in physical restraints or join a specific response team. The focus is on growing the capacity of skilled educators to handle dysregulation through non-physical means.
 - c. An audit conducted through Stepping Stone groups has identified the need for targeted behavior plans specifically designed for the most vulnerable learners. Research indicates that implementing these targeted plans should lead to a decrease in incidents requiring physical responses. It was acknowledged that the current school year has seen a higher-than-normal baseline for student escalation and behavioral incidents. The administration aims to re-establish a lower baseline for behavioral issues by utilizing the expertise of current staff and implementing new structural supports. There is a plan to move the physical location of the program within the building to create a different atmosphere for the students. Principal Norris and the administration believe that changing the environment will allow students to feel that the upcoming year is a fresh start. This relocation is intended to help break the behavioral patterns that have been difficult to recover from during the current year.
18. Teacher Roni Sue Bower expressed concern over the remaining days of the current school year. Despite the well intended plans for the upcoming year, what support / strategies can be helped to assist teachers

- a. Dr Mendonsa expressed utilizing support staff, including Utilize support staff, including Student Assistance Coordinators (SACs) and Board Certified Behavior Analysts (BCBAs), more effectively by mapping out specific response plans. Implement a hold in passing protocol during public student crises to manage building movement and ensure safety. Provide standardized language for staff to use once a hold is lifted, including instructions for students on how to access counselors or administrators. Increase the visible adult presence in classrooms after an incident occurs to help students feel more secure. Encourage administrators and available staff to pop into spaces following a disruption to provide additional support. Offer compensation to staff members who are willing to use their prep periods to provide an extra set of hands during behavioral incidents. Identify students who appear off or dysregulate immediately upon their arrival at school to intervene before behaviors escalate. Move away from a reactive approach by responding to student needs in the moment rather than waiting to see how the day progresses. Investigate whether students feel unheard or if they believe certain behaviors are expected of them to facilitate better course correction. Use social stories to prepare students for changes in their routine, such as teacher absences, field trips, or schedule shifts. Provide students with clear agendas and advance notice of transitions to reduce anxiety, particularly for those sensitive to changes in their environment.
 - b. -Noted that Adrienne and Amanda are already actively implementing many of the suggested behavioral and support strategies. The school is currently in a second round of interviews to bring in an additional staff member to support the team within the next 21 days. The new hire is intended to provide additional support for both the student body and the current administrative team. Recognition was given to the fact that behavioral challenges affect the entire school community, not just specific programs like the Bridge program. Finalize the hiring process for the additional staff member to ensure they can begin supporting the team as soon as possible. Continue the use of proactive behavioral check-ins and social stories to manage student transitions through the end of the year. Tighten the specific response protocols so all staff members know exactly what to expect when a crisis occurs or when support is requested.
19. Parent Mary Sullivan circled back to a point Dr Mendonsa expressed about Bridge Students parents have the rights. She is wondering what her rights are as she expressed significant frustration regarding the placement of their son in a bridge room for a second consecutive year. She stated that a specific request to avoid this placement was ignored by the school administration. Concerns were raised regarding the child's physical safety, with the parent reporting that the child claimed to be hit at school. She also noted observable negative changes in the child's behavior at home which they attributed to the school environment.
- a. Dr Mendonsa explained that in a public education inclusion setting, students have a right to be in specific classrooms based on their Individualized Education Program (IEP). The school cannot generally restrict which students are placed together in an inclusion environment. It was noted that the school cannot

guarantee families that their children will not be in spaces with students from sub-separate programs. Dr Mendonsa identified documented bullying as the primary legal avenue for a parent to request that their child be separated from another student. If a specific instance of bullying is documented and discussed with the school, the administration can then move to ensure the students are not in the same classes.

- b. Mary concluded the discussion by stating that the current policies and the requirement for documented bullying feel unfair to the family.
 - c. Dr Mendonsa representative suggested that documentation of specific incidents is the necessary step for changing the current placement situation.
20. Kerrie Blanchard, teacher at Plympton for 33 years and has seen the Bridge program from the beginning and expressed her love for her Bridge students but this year feels different. She asks if DESE or the restrictions are different for next year removing the reset room?
- a. Dr Kingsley confirmed the room cannot be used for seclusion or for students to be left alone marking a significant shift in how the space is utilized. The school has received grant money specifically to manage the transition away from time-out and seclusion practices. The administration plans to use the summer to rethink and redesign student support responses to align with these new regulations. The discussion addressed the practice of blocking doors or holding them shut when students attempt to dart or run from a room.
 - b. Dr Kingsley clarified that such actions are considered a last resort and that current practices are being adjusted to ensure they meet existing regulations. It was acknowledged that staff are still in the process of learning and growing their practices regarding student containment and safety.
 - c. Kerrie Blanchard expressed concerns regarding the safety of students during upcoming field trips, specifically citing the risk of students darting in public environments like a zoo.
 - d. Dr Kingsley stated that all students have a baseline right to participate in field trips and that participation cannot be made unconditional. It was clarified that the school is not allowed to require a parent to accompany a student as a prerequisite for that student attending a field trip. It is noted that while students have rights to access these activities, specific circumstances may require individual planning. She proposed a follow-up meeting to discuss specific student cases and safety plans for field trips, as the current setting was not appropriate for discussing confidential student details. The school will continue to work on transitioning its support practices over the summer months to comply with DESE shifts.
21. Parent Janet Neville posed the question about Staff. What are the reductions occurring this upcoming year?
- a. The school expects a reduction from 21 classrooms to 19 for the next academic year. Two classroom teacher positions are being removed from the general pool. One of these positions is being repurposed as a staff member for the Bridge program. Staff members affected by these changes may be transferred to other

school buildings rather than losing employment. Grade-level teacher distribution is planned with specific targets for each group. Fourth grade is projected to have four teachers to accommodate the rising third-grade class. Most other grade levels are expected to have three teachers. Kindergarten staffing remains flexible and will be determined by final enrollment numbers. Principals maintain the discretion to reallocate teachers based on student needs. This includes the flexibility to keep lower class sizes in kindergarten through second grade. Larger class sizes may be utilized in fifth grade to prepare students for middle school environments. The effectiveness of new systems will be monitored through a data-driven approach focused on continuous improvement. Individual student progress will be the primary metric for success. If a student is not making progress, the IEP team will reconvene to adjust the plan. While a three-month assessment period was discussed, adjustments can be made much sooner if a student is consistently unresponsive to interventions. The administration aims to avoid abandoning initiatives too quickly, choosing instead to recalibrate based on data. The specific department involved will focus on students with disabilities and school-wide calibration to ensure the system functions correctly. Concerns were raised regarding how the new program affects students outside of the Bridge program. Observations were shared regarding general education students noticing disruptions, highlighting the need for a holistic approach to classroom management. There is a shared goal to prevent staff turnover by ensuring the new systems are supportive and well-calibrated. The administration emphasized the importance of letting staff skills grow and develop within the new framework rather than pivoting to a different strategy at the first sign of difficulty.

- b. The administration will continue to monitor enrollment numbers to finalize kindergarten staffing. The principal will exercise discretion in final teacher assignments across grade levels to balance class sizes. The district will implement a data-driven monitoring process, as referenced by Dr. Miranda, to evaluate the Bridge program and make necessary adjustments for individual student success.
22. Parent Jill McElroy expresses that while she's happy there are plans in place to improve the school environment around the Bridge program, is there a consideration for moving it to another school or even spreading it throughout the district so the burden doesn't fall entirely on Plympton?
- a. Dr Kingsley stated the district representative explained that in a district of 6,000 students, there are typically not enough students with specific low-incidence disabilities to justify multiple versions of the same program. Specialized programs are currently centralized to provide specific instructional methodologies, such as the TASC program for autism at Sandy and the Connections program at Northeast for medically fragile students. The district only considers creating multiple cohorts for a specific program if there is a significant increase in the number of students requiring that specific level of support.
 - b. Refinement of student referral and placement processes - The district is working to move away from reactive recommendations that shift students to specialized

environments before attempting to adjust instructional practices in their home schools. Efforts are being made to ensure that students referred to the Bridges program actually match the therapeutic profile the program is designed to support. The commitment to adding a BCBA and ABAI support at Plympton next year is intended to free up other district BCBA's to support different elementary schools. This increased support aims to help staff distinguish between students who truly need therapeutic programming and those whose behaviors can be managed with different approaches in a standard classroom. The district is prioritizing the least restrictive environment by exploring ways to keep students in their home schools longer. The district will share more details regarding the commitment to BCBA support and the evolving referral processes during the school committee meeting scheduled for the following night. Administrators will continue to explore system-wide effects of instructional shifts to ensure student needs are met appropriately across all elementary locations.

23. Teacher Lauren Palkey made a statement for administration to consider additional student supports, noting the program's therapeutic nature. Additional counselors, yoga, music therapy, mediation, etc. It was noted that administrative attention has been directed toward the program's development during its time at Stanley. She expressed the importance of continued and future administrative monitoring to address the increasing needs of the program.
24. Parent Crystal Soule expresses concern at the idea of the kindergarten classes being reduced from 4 to 3, given the attention the young students need as they are most likely entering this setting for the first time. The need for bathroom assistance and academic catch up would be concerning. Is the decision made by the numbers or need?
 - a. Dr Mendonsa noted that the school committee follows specific guidelines for classroom numbers but acknowledged the need for a better adult-to-student ratio. The cost of adding paraprofessionals to all kindergarten classrooms is estimated between 150,000 and 175,000 dollars per school. A ratio of one adult per 13 or more students was suggested as a potential threshold for assigning a second adult to a classroom. There is a perceived gap in the city regarding accessible, five-day-a-week pre-K programs. A proposal is being considered by the 617 building committee to repurpose portions of that building into a dedicated pre-K center. Plans are underway to form a consortium with the Boys and Girls Club, Waltham Family School, and the YMCA. The consortium aims to share resources and align curriculum and daily structures across all partners. This alignment is intended to create a seamless transition for children entering the public school kindergarten system by ensuring they have shared foundational experiences. Long-term Early Childhood Strategy and High School Integration - Data from other districts suggests that students attending district pre-K programs outperform peers by approximately 20 percent by second grade. The district has hired an early childhood coordinator to oversee the opening of new pre-K spaces. New childcare spaces will be integrated into the high school Career and Technical Education (CTE) areas. Two spaces are planned to open next year, with a third space planned for the following year. Long-term planning involves

evaluating whether a model of two teachers or a teacher and a paraprofessional is more effective for classrooms of 18 students.

- b. Budget Cycles and Advisory Committees - The administration intends to address the need for kindergarten paraprofessionals starting in the next budget cycle. It is announced the formation of two new advisory groups for the upcoming year to gather feedback on budget priorities. A student advisory committee will be established. An educator advisory committee will be formed with representatives from every building. The educator committee will likely exclude union representatives to ensure a different type of representation and direct feedback on building-specific needs. The early childhood coordinator will begin organizing the expansion of pre-K spaces and the opening of the high school childcare areas. The administration will seek feedback from the newly formed advisory committees regarding building needs and budget priorities in the coming weeks. Further evaluation of the 617 building's capacity to meet pre-K regulations, such as specific bathroom requirements and financing, will continue.
25. Cheryl Reynolds, grandparent and dedicated volunteer expressed that while being at the school she sees the incredible need for paras. She voiced her experience and the demand from young students is greater than what staff is currently available. She also kindly offered additional volunteer services for Ms Norris.
26. Meeting Adjourned