

BOARD OF EDUCATION MINUTES  
Regular Meeting  
Tuesday, January 13, 2026  
5:32 pm  
NES Library/Zoom

Member Tahbone called the meeting to order at 5:32 pm Tuesday, January 13, 2026 with a quorum present.

Member Tahbone led the Pledge of Allegiance in Inupiaq.

Member Tahbone read the Nome Public Schools Mission Statement.

**School Board Members Present:**

Marjorie Kunaq Tahbone	Darlene Trigg (excused)	Jon Gregg
Nancy Mendenhall	Sigvanna Tapqaq (via Zoom)	
Student Representative, Sara James		

**Others in attendance included:**

Jamie Burgess	Alisha Papineau	Genevieve Hollins (via Zoom)
Mary Donaldson (via Zoom)	Anne Madonia (via Zoom)	Amber Otton (via Zoom)
Tricia Schambach (via Zoom)	Krystal Hensley	Stan Burgess
Jonathan Duarte	Ben Townsend	Ariana Crockett O'Harra
Michelle Carton	Erin Nelson	Yevheniia McDowell
Heather Berg	Garrett Savok	Jesse Blandford
Jessica Blandford	Jessica Farley	Elizabeth Korenek-Johnson
Sophia Pantelis	Rhonda Sparks	Jim Shreve
Jennifer Shreve	Emily Annas	Peggy Simpson
Faith Berg	Damara Sobie	Rachel Ventress

**APPROVAL OF AGENDA**

Member Mendenhall moved to approve the agenda as presented.

The motion carried by a roll call vote with the following results:

Marjorie Kunaq Tahbone: yes	Darlene Trigg: (excused)	Jon Gregg: yes
Nancy Mendenhall: yes	Sigvanna Tapqaq: yes	
Sara James (Advisory Vote): yes		

**CONSENT AGENDA**

Member Gregg moved to approve the minutes from Regular Meeting: December 9, 2025; the December 2025 disbursements; the December 2025 Gifts, Grants and Bequests; and the December 2025 personnel report.

The motion carried by a roll call vote with the following results:

Marjorie Kunaq Tahbone: yes	Darlene Trigg: (excused)	Jon Gregg: yes
Nancy Mendenhall: yes	Sigvanna Tapqaq: yes	
Sara James (Advisory Vote): yes		

### **CORRESPONDENCE**

Correspondence included were letters to the school board from Rhonda Sparks; and from Gracy Lust and Adam Lust.

### **INTRODUCTIONS OF GUESTS AND VISITORS**

NONE

### **STUDENT CELEBRATIONS**

NBMHS Principal, Teriscovkya Smith celebrated students Faith Berg and Damara Sobie.

### **PRESENTATIONS**

Assistant Superintendent/HR Manager, Elizabeth Korenek-Johnson presented for the Calander Committee. Before her presentation she gave recognition to Tom Gray who had recently passed away and took a moment of silence to honor him.

### **OPPORTUNITY FOR PUBLIC COMMENT ON AGENDA/NON-AGENDA ITEMS**

Parent, Rhonda Sparks welcomed and introduced herself to Student Representative, Sara James.

Mrs. Sparks gave kudos to Member Gregg, also an Assistant Coach, for the boys basketball team winning at the Subway Showdown.

Mrs. Sparks informed that the Fish and Game Advisory Committee is meeting to discuss a potential change to the start of the harvest season.

Mrs. Sparks discussed her child experiencing numerous SPED Directors while being in the SPED program. She discussed her thoughts on why the board should reconsider the contract terms for the SPED Director position so that Mary Donaldson wouldn't resign; even if it meant allowing her to stay working remote.

Mrs. Sparks said she was pleased with how engaged Paraprofessional, Stan Burgess was at the FASD workshop. She also noted that the room was packed with educators and Paraprofessionals from all over the region.

Mrs. Sparks reminded the board of her concern over the years about the significant suspension rate of Alaska Native students in the SPED program. Her child was one of them and they sought a due process claim for compensatory education. She said her child was not provided access to their education and they continue to face the same struggle today.

Mrs. Sparks said she was thankful for Rachel Ventress overseeing the Extensions Program that her child was able to enroll in and is now doing well.

Mrs. Sparks asked again for the board to reconsider keeping the SPED Director position remote or transition over time to be in person again. She was concerned about the fallout the loss of Mrs. Donaldson would have on families and students who are in the SPED program.

Mrs. Sparks encouraged the board and student body to reach out to her if they had any questions.

Parent, Jessica Farley talked about how SPED Director, Mary Donaldson and the staff that follow her to different districts had given her child consistency, real care and met their needs for the first time ever.

Mrs. Farley said for the past four years her child had gotten the services they were entitled to and believed the other students in the SPED program were also thriving.

Mrs. Farley said she didn't care that Mrs. Donaldson's position was hybrid because she kept in constant contact.

Mrs. Farley asked the board to reconsider terminating Mrs. Donaldson's hybrid contract so that she would stay.

Mrs. Farley also stated that if Mrs. Donaldson left and the schools couldn't maintain a SPED Director and SPED teachers, that her child would not be successful in school anymore. She said she would be forced to relocate just so her child could get the basic education they deserved and were entitled to.

Mrs. Farley expressed that she didn't understand why this was the second time the public had to beg for Mrs. Donaldson to stay and felt that Mrs. Donaldson was targeted by administration. She felt that the SPED department was the one bright spot in the district.

Mrs. Farley also pointed out the staff in the SPED department that follow Mrs. Donaldson to whatever district she is employed. She was concerned about also losing them once Mrs. Donaldson leaves and having to restart with brand-new teachers who would have to learn the students and community.

Parent, Krystal Hensley showed her support in keeping SPED Director, Mary Donaldson's position remote if that would keep her employed with the district. She noticed great strides in her children's education in the SPED program since Mrs. Donaldson became the Director.

Ms. Hensley talked about safety concerns she had regarding the recent firearm incident at NBMHS.

Ms. Hensley wrote an email with her concerns and sent it to Superintendent Burgess and the school board but received no response or acknowledgement that her email was received. She then reached out to school administration directly and received an acknowledgment from NBMHS Principal, Teriscovkya Smith but she did not answer her questions. ACSA Principal, Emily Annas responded to Ms. Hensley informing her about ACSA's safety training with their staff and students.

Ms. Hensley questioned if NBMHS had done the same thing that school year and if they debriefed or had a safety review with students after the recent firearm incident. Her children informed her that none of that had happened when she asked them.

Ms. Hensley recapped the email she had sent out.

SPED Teacher, Peggy Simpson talked about her experience working with SPED Director, Mary Donaldson over the years. She highlighted that even though Mrs. Donaldson is remote, she does the paperwork for all of the new international NBMHS SPED teachers because they do not understand the intricacies of it yet. Ms. Simpson estimated that paperwork is 50 – 60% of a SPED teacher's job. She said they need to be transparent with SPED Director candidates that they would also have to pick up that extra work until the international SPED teachers are fully trained.

### **SUPERINTENDENT REPORT**

Superintendent Burgess reported. The report is attached to the original of these minutes.

### **INFORMATION AND REPORTS**

Student Representative, Sara James reported. The report is attached to the original of these minutes.

NEA President, Rachel Ventress reported. The report is attached to the original of these minutes.

NES Principal, Michelle Carton reported. The report is attached to the original of these minutes. Discussion followed.

ACSA Principal, Emily Annas reported. The report is attached to the original of these minutes.

NBMHS Principal, Teriscovkya Smith reported. The report is attached to the original of these minutes. Discussion followed.

Director of SPED, Mary Donaldson reported. The report is attached to the original of these minutes. Discussion followed.

Director of Federal Programs, Karen Dixon reported. The report is attached to the original of these minutes.

Director of Technology, Jim Shreve reported. The report is attached to the original of these minutes. Discussion followed.

Director of Facilities, Jonathan Duarte reported. The report is attached to the original of these minutes. Discussion followed.

CFO, Genevieve Hollins reported. The report is attached to the original of these minutes.

### **SECOND PUBLIC COMMENT OPPORTUNITY**

Parent, Rachel Ventress commented that she stood in solidarity with Krystal Hensley who spoke during the first public comment opportunity.

Mrs. Ventress wanted the school board and Superintendent to realize that as parents, they do not know what is happening in the moment of a safety concern incident such as the recent one with the firearm. She explained that it is scary for them, and parents communicate via social media about it because it's where the community can gather to converse. Mrs. Ventress said the communities' conversations matter and their concerns are valid but she felt that the district tried to minimize these things instead of acknowledging them.

She was heartened to hear about a potential town hall meeting to address safety concerns and urged the board not to put it off.

Mrs. Ventress also brought up that she had been asking for secure entry doors since 2021 and was given excuses on why it couldn't happen. She said that parents were left feeling that the school district didn't take it seriously.

Mrs. Ventress said there needed to be more communication and assurances.

Parent, Amber Otton said she was concerned with the late response from the district regarding the recent firearm incident.

Mrs. Otton discussed how firearm incidents have also happened in elementary schools around the USA and that should also be considered. She was concerned that she did not know what the safety procedures would be for her child at NES during such a scenario. She wanted the schools to be transparent with parents and students about safety procedures and to be considerate of their fear.

Mrs. Otton was pleased to hear that NBMHS did a debrief and timeline of events with the students after the incident. She requested for that to be shown at the town hall meeting if possible.

Parent, Jesse Blandford commended the students at NBMHS who came forward when they noticed the firearm. He believed they should be held in very high regard for what they did in that situation and hoped it encouraged other students to do the same thing.

Mr. Blandford expressed he felt it was unacceptable that the security update had been put off for so long and needed to be made a priority now. He recommended collaborating with community partners and to keep pushing the city to make an effort.

Mr. Blandford would like the schools to practice better communication in preparation for any future safety concern incidents.

Parent, Sophia Pantelis said she felt the same as other community members who voiced their concerns regarding the recent firearm incident. Mrs. Pantelis talked about how disheartening it was that more safety measures were not put in place by now.

Parent, Rhonda Sparks thanked ACSA Principal, Emily Annas for talking with her students about the recent firearm incident.

Mrs. Sparks also gave kudos to NES Principal, Michelle Carton for her outreach regarding school closures.

Mrs. Sparks encouraged the board to attend the cultural events held by the schools. She also encouraged getting student input for cultural events.

Mrs. Sparks informed that ACSA wasn't notified of the recent firearm incident when it occurred.

Mrs. Sparks highlighted that SPED Director, Mary Donaldson made it possible for SPED students to attend the Special Olympics.

KNOM News Director, Ben Townsend offered to publicly livestream the town hall meeting for free.

Parent, Jessica Farley recommended to put out an RFP to have school building doors locked by the end of the week.

#### **ACTION ITEMS**

Student Representative, Sara James moved to approve the offer of FY27 administrative contracts for Elizabeth Korenek-Johnson, Teriscovkya Smith, Holly Harlow and Emily Annas as presented.

The motion carried by a roll call vote with the following results:

Marjorie Kunaq Tahbone: yes	Darlene Trigg: (excused)	Jon Gregg: yes
Nancy Mendenhall: yes	Sigvanna Tapqaq: yes	
Sara James (Advisory Vote): yes		

Member Mendenhall moved to approve the FY27 detailed calendar and the templates for FY28 and FY29 as presented by the Calendar Committee. Discussion followed.

The motion carried by a roll call vote with the following results:

Marjorie Kunaq Tahbone: yes	Darlene Trigg: (excused)	Jon Gregg: yes
Nancy Mendenhall: yes	Sigvanna Tapqaq: yes	
Sara James (Advisory Vote): yes		

Member Gregg moved to approve the updated Reduction in Force Plan.

The motion carried by a roll call vote with the following results:

Marjorie Kunaq Tahbone: yes	Darlene Trigg: (excused)	Jon Gregg: yes
Nancy Mendenhall: yes	Sigvanna Tapqaq: yes	
Sara James (Advisory Vote): yes		

Member Gregg moved to approve the use of the SuperEval platform to conduct the Superintendent's evaluation for the FY26 school year. Discussion followed.

The motion carried by a roll call vote with the following results:

Marjorie Kunaq Tahbone: yes

Darlene Trigg: (excused)

Jon Gregg: yes

Nancy Mendenhall: yes

Sigvanna Tapqaq: yes

Sara James (Advisory Vote): yes

### **BOARD AND SUPERINTENDENT'S COMMENT & COMMITTEE REPORTS**

Student Representative, Sara James emphasized the need to improve safety in the schools.

Member Mendenhall gave appreciation to the those who gave public comments about their concerns. Member Mendenhall said the board would spend more time discussing safety issues in future work sessions.

Member Gregg acknowledged the public that attended the board meeting. Member Gregg expressed his respect and gratitude to staff who gave their best effort for the school district every day.

Member Tapqaq thanked the public for their feedback.

Member Tapqaq thanked the staff for their work.

Member Tapqaq appreciated how much information on cultural relevant place based education was included in the board packet.

Member Tapqaq looked forward to the town hall meeting regarding safety in the schools.

Member Tahbone congratulated the Students of the Month.

Member Tahbone thanked Mrs. Korenek-Johnson for acknowledging the passing of community member and school partner, Tom Gray. She mentioned how the yearly Cultural Camp hosted by Tom and BeeJay Gray might not be able to happen next year.

Member Tahbone gave kudos to the Calander Committee for listening to the community.

Member Tahbone acknowledged the community's concern regarding SPED Director, Mary Donaldson's resignation. She stated that the board would be further discussing all concerns brought to the school board.

Member Tahbone thanked KNOM for offering to stream the town hall meeting.

Member Tahbone enjoyed seeing the gymnasium packed full of people for the Christmas program.

Member Tahbone stated for the record that safety is a huge concern and understands the atmosphere of fear students and parents feel during safety concern incidents. She gave her appreciation to the community for publicly speaking about it.

Member Tahbone thanked the school board members for their work.

Member Tahbone wished everyone a happy New Year.

Superintendent Burgess commented on the challenges faced over the last week.

Superintendent Burgess gave her appreciation to the families who spoke in regards to their safety concerns within the schools.

Superintendent Burgess said she would be responding with what the district needs to do better.

Superintendent Burgess intended to work harder at communication, including hosting a town hall meeting regarding school safety. She also commented that it was wonderful KNOM offered to stream the town hall meeting.

Superintendent Burgess informed she was planning a facilities walk through with the school board and city council. At the same time, she also wanted to discuss with the city prioritizing funds for the school's security updates and highlight some of the school's programs.

Superintendent Burgess wished everyone a happy New Year.

Superintendent Burgess talked about how funding is still a challenge.

Superintendent Burgess looked forward to more information from Academy Director, Kacey Miller on ANSEP.

Superintendent Burgess also looked forward to talking with the Student Council.

#### **UPCOMING EVENTS**

- Tuesday, January 27, Work Session/Special Meeting/Executive Session, 5:30 pm, NES Library
- Tuesday, February 10, Regular Meeting, 6:00 pm, NES Library/Zoom
- Tuesday, February 24, Work Session, 5:30 pm, NES Library
- Tuesday, March 10, Regular Meeting, 5:30 pm, NES Library/Zoom
- Tuesday, March 24, Work Session, 5:30 pm, NES Library

#### **ADJOURNMENT**

Student Representative, Sara James moved to adjourn at 7:55 pm.

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Marjorie Kunaq Tahbone                      Date  
President, Board of Education

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Darlene Trigg                                      Date  
Vice President/Clerk, Board of Education