Abby Kelley Foster Charter Public School
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APPROVED

Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes
Tuesday, September 22, 2026
6:30 PM
High School Auditorium

Trustees present: Karina Abeddy, Margaret Asante, Kathleen Greenwood, Nicole Mikucka, Amy Vernon, Shelly Yarnie, Bibiche Zagabe-Ndiku

Trustees absent: Adam Beaudry

Staff members present: Amelie Cabral, Michael Cournoyer, Jeffrey DiPadua, Katie Donahue, Anne Duke, Grace Howard-Donlin, Robert Kerr, Nardella Thomas, Yumei Yao

Guests: Lindsay Richard – QPD; Emma Blackney - QPD

Chair Shelly Yarnie called the meeting to order at 6:37 p.m.

Chair Yarnie facilitated roll call for trustee attendance as follows:

Margaret Asante - present	Bibiche Zagabe-Ndiku - present	Amy Vernon - present
Karina Abeddy - present	Nicole Mikucka - present	Kathleen Greenwood - present
Shelly Yarnie - present	Adam Beaudry - absent	

Chair Yarnie read the Abby Kelley Foster Charter School mission into the meeting.

"*The mission of the Abby Kelley Foster Charter Public School is to assist families in their role as primary educators of their students by providing a liberal arts education representative of diverse works and global perspectives aimed at academic excellence, musical competence, and character formation.*"

Attachments:
None

Public Comments:
Chair Yarnie opened the meeting to receive public comments. Four people addressed the trustees and submitted their written comments into the meeting.

- Katie Donahue - Endorse Acting Executive Director, Grace Howard-Donlin, for the permanent position of Executive Director.
- Michael Penney - Recommended an internal search committee and endorsement of Grace Howard-Donlin for the position of Executive Director.
- Brian Morse - Support for an internal search Executive Director search committee.
- Robert Kerr - Opposed an outside Executive Director search committee.

Abby Kelley Foster Charter Public School does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, religious creed, national origin, sex, ancestry, sexual orientation, as defined by law, or on the basis of age, as defined by law, disability, gender identity, genetic information, veteran's status, military service or application for military service.

Old Business - Conflict of Interest

Chair Yarnie explained to trustees that earlier this month, Trustee Abeddy and Trustee Asantet submitted letters each disclosing a conflict of interest and formally recusing themselves from matters related to the long-term Capital School Construction Project. Mrs. Yarnie sought legal counsel regarding the appropriate process for addressing these disclosures. Based on that guidance, Chair Yarnie and Abby Kelley Foster Charter School have followed the process, including sharing the letters with the Board and bringing this matter forward for awareness/discussion at tonight's meeting.

Chair Yarnie further stated that sharing the procedures followed at the public board meeting will ensure appropriate transparency and that the Board's records accurately reflect the disclosures and appropriate Trustee Abeddy and Trustee Asante recusals. Chair Yarnie addressed the Trustees and the public, that counsel clarified that any potential conflict of interest applies to the individual Trustees and does not extend to the Board as a whole or to the School. Chair Yarnie emphasized that no one should ever contact the State Ethics Commission on someone else's behalf unless they have an attorney-client relationship.

No further Board action is required at this time. When asked, Chair Yarnie provided historical context that led to the clarification of Conflict of Interest and the process handled by Board leadership and legal counsel.

Review of the August 4 and August 26, 2026 Meeting Minutes

Motion: VOTE to approve the August 4, 2026 meeting minutes.

a. Margaret Asante made the motion.
b. Amy Vernon seconded the motion.

Roll call vote:

Margaret Asante - yes	Bibiche Zagabe-Ndiku - yes	Amy Vernon - yes
Karina Abeddy - abstain	Nicole Mikucka - yes	Kathleen Greenwood - yes
Shelly Yarnie - yes	Adam Beaudry - absent	

Action: August 4, 2026 meeting minutes approved.

Motion: VOTE to approve the August 26, 2026 meeting minutes.

a. Margaret Asante made the motion.
b. Amy Vernon seconded the motion.

Roll call vote:

Margaret Asante - yes	Bibiche Zagabe-Ndiku - yes	Amy Vernon - yes
Karina Abeddy - abstain	Nicole Mikucka - yes	Kathleen Greenwood - yes
Shelly Yarnie - yes	Adam Beaudry - absent	

Action: August 26, 2026 meeting minutes approved.

Protect Act - Shelly Yarnie, Grace Howard-Donlin

Chair Yarnie briefly explained the law signed by Governor Healey on August 5th, requiring school compliance by September 2026. Chair Yarnie noted the board has a motion to vote on adopting the Protect Act Policy on the agenda. Mrs. Yarnie turned the meeting over to Mrs. Howard-Donlin to present to the trustees. Mrs. Howard-Donlin referred trustees to their meeting packet. Grace Howard-Donlin: Explained the new policy was adapted from state model language to fit AKF's staffing and building structure. Noted the bus company has its own directives aligned with the Act and will contact the school immediately if an incident occurs. Confirmed staff training will follow board approval, using DESE-provided model training materials.

Trustees engaged in question and answer with Mrs. Howard-Donlin on several issues, including staff training timelines, school bus transportation, video recording rules (open vs. secret), parent and family communication, enrollment and immigration data, field trips and off-site activities, public events like basketball games, identifying administrators at these events, and whether the Act applies during emergencies such as active shooter situations. The PROTECT Act pertains to civil enforcement. Active shooter or crisis protocols are managed separately. Mrs. Howard-Donlin assured that district communication will be included and a communication plan will be worked on. Mrs. Howard-Donlin added that other charter schools are swiftly adopting similar policies.

Motion: VOTE to approve a policy specific to Interacting with Law Enforcement Officers Engaged in Civil Law Enforcement

a. Karina Abeddy made the motion
b. Bibiche Zagabe-Ndiku seconded the motion

Roll call vote:

Margaret Asante - yes	Bibiche Zagabe-Ndiku - yes	Amy Vernon - yes
Karina Abeddy - abstain	Nicole Mikucka - yes	Kathleen Greenwood - yes
Shelly Yarnie - yes	Adam Beaudry - absent	

Action: Trustees approve PROTECT ACT policy specific to interacting with Law Enforcement Officers Engaged in Civil Law Enforcement

Governance Committee - Margaret Asante

Committee Chair, Mrs. Asante provided an overview of the Governance Committee. AKFCS Employee Handbook has been reviewed and, with minor updates, will be reviewed in October before being presented to the Board. Massachusetts Charter Public School Association (MCPSA) published its professional development opportunities. Committee recommends trustees attend a minimum of two professional development trainings. Ms. Thomas will track trustee professional development activity. Governance will follow up on student dress

code policy. Governance committee will meet monthly. AKF Charter Renewal and AKF Annual Report will be on the October agenda. Mrs. Asante concluded the Governance report. Trustees commented that the Governance Committee will prepare for the DESE site visit and review findings.

Education Committee - Karina Abeddy

Ms. Abeddy provided an update from the September Education Committee meeting and referred trustees to the meeting materials. Draft District Academic Goals were presented: Academic Excellence and Family Partnership; Future Ready, Empowered Professional Culture; Strategic Infrastructure and Organizational Sustainability. Committee received an update on IB results and course explanations. Six teachers will receive IB training. There was a presentation of the Special Education framework and purpose (K-12 consistency; data-driven decisions, expanded co-teaching). Committee received enrollment update: 1,423 current (3 onboarding) - 476 Elementary School; 493 Middle School; 454 High School. 491 on the waitlist. Principals' updates - High school - MTSS revamp progressing. Middle school - Reading assessment results will be shared in October. Writing assessment results will be shared in November. Elementary school - Fully staffed, expecting several teachers out on maternity leave.

Ms. Abeddy concluded the Education Committee report. Trustees inquired about the AKF Academy and its progress. Mrs. Howard-Donlin credited Mr. Gitkind for launching the teacher profile; instructional coaches Ms. Burns and Mrs. Polucha are in place, and offerings have expanded to all faculty. Mrs. Howard-Donlin shared the TeachPoint evaluation and improvements. Mr. Penney confirmed new IB courses will be added. High School is discussing whether to expand with Science or History courses. The goal is to add two full IB courses within the next two to three years.

Facilities and Finance Committee - Nicole Mikucka

Trustees Karina Abeddy and Margaret Asante recused themselves from this portion of the board meeting and left the auditorium at 7:32 p.m. Ms. Mikucka noted Lindsay Richard from QPD is participating remotely via ZOOM.

Ms. Mikucka reported on the Facilities and Finance September 18 meeting in committee chair Mr. Beaudry's absence. Committee members were introduced to Building Committee members (Devin Canton, Matthew Foster - parents; Nyell Conyers and Rejoyce Mobindo - students; Brian Morse and Rob Kerr (absent) - faculty). Lindsay Richard from QPD and Adam Beaudry are on the committee. Additionally, Katie Donahue, Director of Finance, and Grace Howard-Donlin, Acting Executive Director.[1]

[1] Voted Interim Executive Director 9/22/26

Committee received construction project sources, usage, and timeline updates from Mrs. Richard. Current cost is $26 million, covering the High School building, field, and Elementary School playground. Overall financing is $32 million, with $13 million in school cash reserves to pay off existing loans. $1.4 million spent on soft costs. Timeline - Groundbreaking: December. Grade Seven space, roof, and field, expected completion August 2027. Gym completion: December 2027. Human Resources will conduct mandatory CORI checks on all construction personnel.

Mrs. Donahue updated the committee on school finances. Mrs. Donahue reported that school audit documents were submitted on time. The school closed with a $2.2 million net position, with $20 million in assets, with $13 million slated for a construction project. Approximately $7 million in reserves. School moving from Middlesex to Salem Five.

Director of Facilities Mr. DiPadua provided an update to committee members on completion of summer projects and preparing for the opening of school.

Director of Information Technology Mr. Beltran updated the committee on 300 new Chromebooks and integration with PowerSchool and TeachPoint. Committee discussed cybersecurity and current protocols in place. Committee discussed the Artificial Intelligence (AI) framework and task force meeting in October.

Ms. Mikucka brought before the board the recommendation by the Facilities and Finance Committee to approve the school's formal letter to the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) signed by the Board Chair, Mrs. Yarnie, to request approval of the repayment terms for the school's proposed debt financing project with the incorporated provisions.

Ms Mikucka read the motion as follows:

Motion: Board of Trustees vote to adopt the following action:

To authorize the submission of a formal letter to the Commissioner of the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, with a copy to the Office of Charter School and School Redesign, requesting approval of the repayment terms for the school's proposed debt financing, incorporating the following required provisions:

- **Loan Specifications:** A description of the proposed loan outlining its purpose, expected maximum term length, anticipated financing structure, and a statement detailing how the loan will benefit the school.
- **Open Meeting Law Compliance:** The required formal attestation that the Board of Trustees *"voted to request approval of the term of repayment of this financing on September 22, 2026, at a meeting held in compliance with the Open Meeting Law."*
- **Signatory Authority:** A statement explicitly authorizing Shelly Yarnie, Board Chair, to sign and submit the request letter on behalf of the Board of Trustees.

- Bibiche Zagabe-Ndiku made the motion.
- Amy Vernon seconded the motion.

Roll call vote:

Margaret Asante - (recused)	Bibiche Zagabe-Ndiku - yes	Amy Vernon - yes
Karina Abeddy - (recused)	Nicole Mikucka - yes	Kathleen Greenwood - yes
Shelly Yarnie - yes	Adam Beaudry - absent	

Action: Trustees approve formal letter to DESE signed by Board Chair, Shelly Yarnie, requesting approval of repayment terms with required provisions.

Ms. Mikucka concluded the Facilities and Finance Committee report. Trustees Karina Abeddy and Margaret Asante returned to the meeting at 7:44 p.m. Lindsay Richard left the meeting at 7:46 p.m.

Acting Executive Director's Report - Grace Howard-Donlin

Chair Yarnie requested that the trustees move to Mrs. Howard-Donlin's self-evaluation report, with no objections from the trustees.

Acting Executive Director's Self-Evaluation and Board Discussion - Grace Howard-Donlin

Mrs. Howard-Donlin highlighted her self-evaluation matrix scores.

District Operations and Leadership Alignment - 80%
Facilities Leadership Transition and Summer Project Execution - 100%
Fiscal Oversight and Budget Stabilization - 91.7%
Special Education Redesign, TeachPoint and Professional Development - 80%
Handbooks, AI Policy, and Screen Time Guidance - 42%
Community Engagement and State of Our Schools - 100%
Governance, Compliance, and Board Development - 83.3%

Mrs. Howard-Donlin noted her 53 days in the position, the challenges of working with a new team during the summer schedule and key personnel changes, yet finding success to onboard the Director of Facilities, completing the summer project, and having all buildings prepared for the opening of school. Also noted the successful State of Our Schools. Mrs. Howard-Donlin acknowledged setting high expectations for herself and will continue to work on her areas of challenge with needed support. Mrs. Howard-Donlin concluded by expressing her gratitude for the opportunity to serve the AKF community. She stated she looks forward to continued progress of AKF, working closely with trustees, building the leadership team, and supporting the faculty.

Trustees commented that Mrs. Howard-Donlin has worked very hard during her brief tenure in the Acting Executive Director position.

Chair Yarnie provided the overall evaluation conclusion of Mrs. Howard-Donlin as Acting Executive Director. The Board is in agreement with Grace's scoring on the self-assessment, recognizing that she has demonstrated strong leadership and meaningful progress during the initial 90-day transition period, with particularly strong results in facilities and school readiness, community engagement, fiscal oversight, and governance and compliance.

The Board also recognizes that Mrs. Howard-Donlin assumed this role during a period of significant transition, including staffing changes, operational challenges, and the opening of a new school year. She has established important systems, advanced key organizational priorities, maintained compliance, strengthened community engagement, and successfully positioned the school for the start of the academic year, earning an impressive **83%** of the possible points on the Acting Executive Director Goal Monitoring Rubric, and achieving the majority of the goals she set for the Acting Executive Director term. There are areas that require continued attention, including organizational role clarity, completion of policies and guidance, TeachPoint implementation, and strengthening Board governance processes. The Board views these areas as appropriate priorities for continued development during the next phase of leadership.

Appointment of Interim Executive Director
Chair Yarnie called for a motion to appoint Grace Howard-Donlin as Interim Executive Director for the remainder of the 2026-2027 academic year.

Motion: Appoint Grace Howard-Donlin as Interim Executive Director for the remainder of the 2026-2027 academic year.

- Margaret Asante made the motion.
- Kathleen Greenwood seconded the motion.

Roll call vote:

Margaret Asante - yes	Bibiche Zagabe-Ndiku - yes	Amy Vernon - yes
Karina Abeddy - yes	Kathleen Greenwood - yes	Nicole Mikucka - yes
Shelly Yarnie - yes	Adam Beaudry - absent	

Action: Grace Howard-Donlin appointed AKFCS Interim Executive Director for the remainder of the 2026-2027 academic year.

Chair Yarnie noted the Board appreciates Mrs. Howard-Donlin's commitment to AKF, her willingness to be held accountable to measurable expectations, and the progress demonstrated during this transition. The Interim period should build upon this foundation while providing the structure and accountability necessary to continue strengthening the organization. Congratulations.

Chair Yarnie called for a motion to appoint trustees to work with legal counsel on Mrs. Howard-Donlin's Interim Executive Director contract. Noted the contract needs to be updated to include term limits, salary, and other terms.

Motion: Appoint Trustee A _____ and Trustee B_____ to work with legal counsel on Mrs. Howard-Donlin's Intermin Executive Director contract.

- Margaret Asante made the motion.
- Kathleen Greenwood seconded the motion.

Board discussed a consensus modify motion to have three trustees work with legal counsel on Mrs. Howard-Donlin's Interim Executive Director contract. Motion amended.

Motion: Appoint Trustee A _____ and Trustee B_____, and Trustee C _____to work with legal counsel on Mrs. Howard-Donlin's Intermin Executive Director contract.

- Margaret Asante made the motion.
- Kathleen Greenwood seconded the motion.

Roll call vote:

Margaret Asante - yes	Bibiche Zagabe-Ndiku - yes	Amy Vernon - yes
Karina Abeddy - yes	Kathleen Greenwood - yes	Nicole Mikucka - yes
Shelly Yarnie - yes	Adam Beaudry - absent	

Action: Trustee Kathleen Greenwood, Trustee Nicole Mikucka, and Trustee Shelly Yarnie will work with legal counsel on Mrs. Howard-Donlin's Interim Executive Director contract.

Trustees Kathleen Greenwood, Nicole Mikucka, and Shelly Yarnie were selected.

Executive Director Search

Chair Yarnie reported the board will discuss and vote on how to proceed in the search for a permanent Executive Director. Trustee Greenwood updated the board on the executive search firm outreach. She contacted 10 firms and six responded. Each described a similar process. Time frame likely October-February. Range of costs: $55K to $80K. Board retreat: John Carvin, search consultant, presented an internal candidate.

Chair Yarnie reported that V-Chief, a search firm recommended by MCPSA, recently supported Rising Tide Charter Public School's head of school search for $3,700 per month over approximately four months. V-Chief proposed a rate of $3,300 per month for a 20-hour-per-month engagement.

Board members discussed four options: a full external search with a firm; a firm-facilitated internal evaluation only; a full search conducted by an internal search committee; or an internal search committee with limited firm support.

Chair Yarnie called for a motion

Motion: Vote to approve an Executive Director <u>search firm</u> or develop an internal Executive Director search committee.

- Margaret Asante made the motion.
- Amy Vernon seconded the motion.

The board engaged in lengthy discussion on hiring a search firm, the logistics of where a firm is based, and familiarity with Massachusetts and charter schools. Trustees also discussed costs and input from the AKF community. Key concerns included the cost of a full external search; the fairness and integrity of a purely internal process; the risk of bias; the importance of cultural fit for any external candidate; candidates' location, with a preference for Central Massachusetts or New England; and the significant workload of running a search committee independently. Concern was raised about searching "in a bubble" without validating candidates against the broader market. It was noted that if the Interim Executive Director, who can apply for the permanent position, would not be a candidate through the process, should be informed by February to have sufficient time to explore other opportunities. The board recorded the vote as follows.

Roll call vote:

Margaret Asante - yes	Bibiche Zagabe-Ndiku - yes	Amy Vernon - yes
Karina Abeddy - yes	Kathleen Greenwood - nay	Nicole Mikucka - nay
Shelly Yarnie - yes	Adam Beaudry - absent	

Action: Vote set aside for an amended vote.

Upon continued discussion by trustees, the board voided the previous vote and requested an amended motion and vote. The board formed a consensus on a hybrid model with an external search consultant to work with an internal search committee. The committee will have clearly defined goals and will be made up of trustees, senior administration, faculty, parents, students, and external stakeholders. Goal set to seek Letters of Interest from AKF community for search committee selection and identify the scope of the internal committee.

Chair Yarnie called for an amended motion for trustees to vote to engage an external search firm and establish an internal search committee, with the external firm supporting and working with the internal Executive Director Search Committee.

Motion: Vote to approve engaging a search firm to work in conjunction with and to support an internal Executive Director search committee.

- Margaret Asante made the motion.
- Karina Abeddy seconded the motion.

Roll call vote:

Margaret Asante - yes	Bibiche Zagabe-Ndiku - yes	Amy Vernon - yes
Karina Abeddy - yes	Kathleen Greenwood - nay	Nicole Mikucka - nay
Shelly Yarnie - yes	Adam Beaudry - absent	

Action: Trustees approved engaging an external search consultant and creating an internal Executive Director Search Committee, and an external consultant to work with and support the internal Executive Director Search Committee.

Chair Yarnie asked Mrs. Greenwood to reach out to vChief consulting firm. Chair Yarnie asked for three trustees to form the Executive Search Committee. Kathleen Greenwood volunteered to be the committee chair. Trustees Nicole Mikucka and Karina Abeddy volunteered to be on the internal search committee.

Adjournment – Mrs. Shelly Yarnie, Chair

Chair Yarnie called for a motion to adjourn.

- Bibiche Zagabe-Ndiku made the motion.
- Kathleen Greenwood seconded the motion.

Chair Yarnie recorded the roll vote to adjourn as follows.

Margaret Asante - yes	Bibiche Zagabe-Ndiku - yes	Amy Vernon - yes
Karina Abeddy - yes	Kathleen Greenwood - yes	Nicole Mikucka - yes
Shelly Yarnie - yes	Adam Beaudry - absent	

Action: Meeting adjourned at 9:10 p.m.