

— January 23, 2025 —

# Thursday Thoughts

By Superintendent William Burkhead



## Scituate Public Schools Advance Educational Excellence - A Look Back at the Last Five Years

Over the last five years, Scituate Public Schools (SPS) has achieved remarkable progress through collaborative efforts among the School Committee, leadership team, teachers, staff, town leadership, and our community. As we kick off a new year, I am happy to share a summary of key advancements and initiatives.

### Exciting Educational Initiatives

The school district is gearing up for a transformative educational year with a series of innovative initiatives, some of which are in progress and others that are planned for 2025.

In FY24, the district implemented lexile level assessments for English Language Arts for grades 6-12, marking a significant step in personalized learning. Additionally, a new science program was adopted for grades 7-12 as part of the district's push to enhance STEM education. Advanced Placement (AP) offerings reached an all-time high, with the number of AP exams increasing from 462 in 2020 to 729 in 2024. Notably, nearly two-thirds of students participated in AP mock exams, highlighting a rise from 34% in 2023 to 62% in Science. Our students are able to attend elite institutions as evidenced by the list of over 200 colleges/universities found [here](#).

The district has also been designated as an Innovation Career Pathway for Environmental and Life Sciences and an Innovation Career Pathway for Business, which will enhance educational opportunities in these vital sectors. New rigorous coursework, including the Project Lead the Way engineering program funded by the One8 Foundation Grant, further supports this initiative. The rollout of Civic Action Projects at both local and regional levels is set to enrich students' community engagement experiences, while the establishment of the AP Capstone Diploma Program at SHS will cultivate advanced research skills.

Thursday Thoughts is a monthly newsletter intended to keep community stakeholders connected to SPS.

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The focus on student well-being continues, with enhanced social emotional programming through initiatives like Character Strong and integration with Holistic Student Assessment, a well being survey offered through Partnerships in Education and Resilience. Initial steps are being undertaken to establish the MEFA Pathway and MyCap academic and career programming for students in grades 6-10. The MEFA Pathway and MyCap assist students in determining possible career interests and the skills and courses needed in those areas.

In 2024-2025, we are implementing the enVision Math program for grades 6-12, as well as continue expanding AP offerings. Spring 2025 will see a further increase in the number of AP exams available to students.

A full launch of the Whole Child Review Process and Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) at Gates, in collaboration with the Systemic Student Support Academy, is slated for FY25. The Teacher Leader Coaching Program aims to foster leadership within the district, and the implementation of a mid-year data review K-12 will facilitate ongoing assessments of student progress and necessary interventions.

These initiatives reflect the district's commitment to academic excellence and support for student growth, setting the stage for a bright future in education.

## **Scituate Schools Expand Special Education Services and Programs**

The Scituate School District has made notable strides in enhancing its Special Education services, with new initiatives designed to support a diverse range of student needs.

This school year, a new Language-Based Program was launched at Scituate High School to serve students requiring more intensive support than co-teaching provides. The program is tailored to help students achieve their high school diploma through specialized instruction and targeted interventions. Staffing for the program includes a Special Education teacher, a paraprofessional, and a Speech and Language Therapist, ensuring a comprehensive approach to student success.

The district has also implemented a new Individualized Education Program (IEP) format mandated by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE). This transition was made possible through grant funding, which enabled teachers to attend workshops over the summer and begin converting existing IEPs to the updated format.

In addition to these advancements, the district has prioritized specialized training for educators to better support students with dyslexia. Over the past two years, several elementary Special Education teachers have received grant-funded training in phonetic reading instruction, allowing them to pursue Orton-Gillingham certification. This certification equips teachers with evidence-based strategies to meet the needs of students with language-based learning differences.

These initiatives reflect the district's ongoing commitment to expanding its continuum of services, equipping educators with advanced skills, and ensuring every student has access to the support they need to thrive.

## **Deepening Commitment to Equity, Inclusion, and Community Engagement**

Scituate Public Schools continue to advance their mission of fostering Love, Inclusion, and Trust (LIT) with a range of impactful initiatives. The recent “This Is Our House “ (TIOH) event showcased more student voices than ever, reflecting the district’s commitment to amplifying perspectives that emphasize positivity, unity, and belonging.

Human Resources has broadened its approach to recruiting by expanding the diversity of outlets used in candidate searches, ensuring a wider and more inclusive pool of applicants. New hires now receive a “one-pager” introducing them to the district’s LIT initiatives and its designation as a METCO District. The Scituate METCO program has also grown, with the addition of two new roles: a Program Coordinator and a Student Success Liaison, further supporting students and families who reside in Boston.

Training and collaboration have also been key priorities. All staff have completed training on “How to Stop Harm in the Moment,” equipping them with strategies that foster a safe and inclusive environment. The District LIT Committee is presenting results of the SPS comprehensive Equity Audit to staff, ensuring transparency and actionable insights. To reflect the growing scope of this work, the district’s DEI Director has adopted the new title of Director for LIT.

Community-building initiatives remain at the heart of these efforts. The 3rd Annual Unity Basketball Game brought together students, staff, community members, and families, celebrating collaboration and shared values. As Scituate Schools continue to lead in creating a sense of belonging for all, these initiatives reinforce goals in our strategic plan of a supportive and welcoming educational community.

### **Human Resource Department Moves to Digitize and Streamline the Hiring Process**

The Human Resources department is revolutionizing its new hire onboarding process by transitioning from a traditional paper-based system to a streamlined electronic platform using DocuSign. This initiative aims to enhance efficiency, reduce administrative burden, and create a more seamless experience for new employees. By adopting an electronic process, HR is not only improving accessibility and organization but also supporting the district’s commitment to sustainability by significantly reducing paper usage. The upgrade reflects a broader effort to modernize operations and ensure new hires can quickly and easily complete essential documentation, setting the stage for a smooth start in their roles.

### **Prioritization of Safety, Functionality, and Community Support**

The Scituate School District over the last five years has undertaken a sweeping series of renovations and upgrades to its facilities, with a focus on accessibility, modernization, and creating welcoming environments for students and staff. By prioritizing timely repairs and proactive upgrades, the district aims to minimize the need for costly building replacements in the future.

Wampatuck School has seen the replacement of flooring throughout the school and the replacement of the parking lot. Additionally, a new portico was added at Wampatuck, enhancing both aesthetics and safety. Wampatuck School is also seeing extensive improvements aimed at enhancing accessibility. Among the upgrades are accessible mats in the outdoor garden and playground, as well as ramps to key exterior exits. A newly-designed nurse's office and cafeteria serving area will provide greater ease of use, with the latter scheduled for completion by spring 2025. Accessibility improvements will continue with the addition of ADA-compliant restrooms and interior painting, set for summer 2025. To further modernize the school, new ceilings and LED lighting have been installed in several classrooms, while outdoor areas benefit from fresh pavement and a planned ramp connecting the building to the playground.

The district has also addressed structural and safety improvements, such as replacing the roof and upgrading stairs at Jenkins, while new windows are planned for installation by the summer of 2025. Cushing and Hatherly schools saw the installation of smoke detectors.

At Gates Middle School, students and staff are enjoying updates to the Black Box Theatre, where the floor has been resurfaced and painted, and a folding electronic wall has been repaired, enhancing the functionality of the space.

Scituate High School has undergone one of the most comprehensive renovations in the district. Key projects at Scituate High School include a phased replacement of flooring, now completed across three stages, refreshing the Coby Cutler Fitness Center. Accessibility improvements include automatic door openers for gym foyer restrooms, supported in part by the Scituate Commission on Disabilities. Other upgrades include modernized business classrooms with new furniture, renovated locker rooms, and updated Consumer and Family Science labs with new countertops, sinks, and faucets. The school's communal spaces have been refreshed with new flooring in the cafeteria and main entrance, bright LED lighting throughout, and a prominent new sign at the building's entrance.

The high school's gymnasium also received attention, with new mats, basketball hoops, and electric hoists installed to improve both safety and functionality. Additional updates include new water bottle filling stations, a freshly sprayed roof, and a renovated teachers' lounge.

Beyond facilities, Scituate Schools have worked to ease financial burdens on families. The implementation of a fee free full-day kindergarten has saved families an estimated \$520,000, while reduced athletic fees have generated an additional \$220,000 in savings per year. This represents nearly \$3M in savings to SPS families.

These improvements demonstrate a strong commitment to providing modern, accessible, safe and dynamic learning environments for all students while supporting families and investing in the long-term sustainability of its schools.

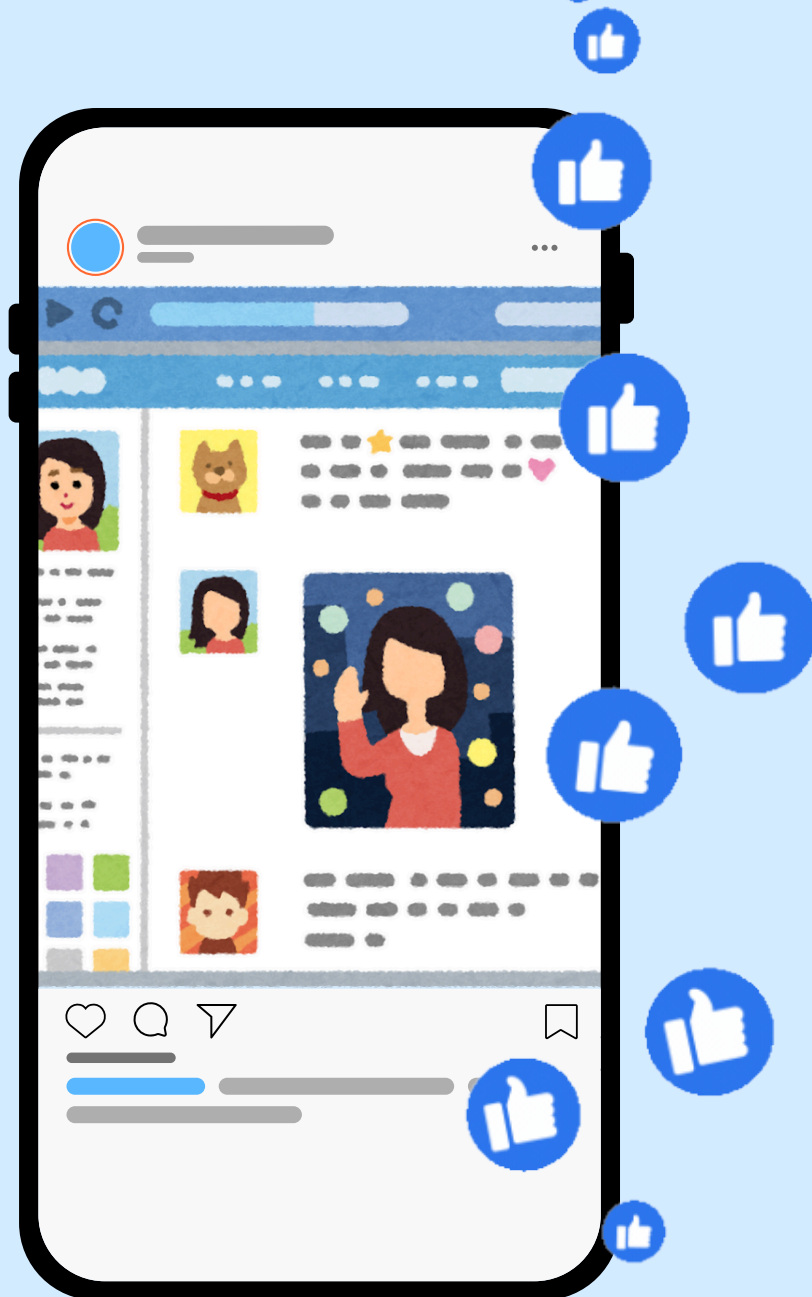
With many projects already completed as well as more scheduled through 2025, the Scituate School District is setting a high standard for excellence in education. WE are guided by a visionary school committee and appreciate the strong partnership with our town partners and supportive community.

**William Burkhead**  
Superintendent

# What do you think?

We want to hear your thoughts on communication, especially when it comes to social media! Which social media platform do you use daily? Share your input by visiting the link below.

## Social Media Communication





# News & Noteworthy:



L/R: Maria Fenwick, Nicole Brandolini,  
Janice Lindblom, Dr. Carey Borkoski.  
Missing: Peter Gates

We are excited to share that the Scituate School Committee members will be participating in the weekly broadcast of the Town of Scituate News. Broadcasts appear on SCTV's [YouTube Channel](#) on Mondays.

Members will participate on a rotating basis to provide relevant school community updates. This is a great opportunity for everyone to stay up-to-date on what is going on in our school district.

A huge thank you to the Committee members for taking the time to share!

## FY 2026 Budget



There are plenty of opportunities for the community to be heard regarding next year's 2025-2026 budget. The School Committee will be having two meetings dedicated to budget discussions on January 27, 2025 and February 3, 2025 at 6:00 pm in the Scituate High School library. The final vote of the School Committee will take place on February 10, 2025.

All are welcome to attend and learn more about the budget. Community input is welcome and encouraged at the meetings. We decided to cancel the February 1, 2025 meeting and back up the discussion to January 27, 2025 allowing more time for input, feedback and discussion.

If you have any questions about the School Budget, do not hesitate to reach out to Dr. Thomas Raab, Director of Business and Finance at [traab@scit.org](mailto:traab@scit.org).



## WE Inspire

*“WE Inspire” is a monthly “Sailor Shoutout” to those SPS staff who inspire us to greatness through their own actions.*

### Scituate School’s Holiday Spirit Shines Amid Elevator Mishap

The holiday season brought an unexpected twist at Jenkins Elementary in Scituate, where a routine school day turned into a memorable event on the eve of winter vacation. In a creative retelling penned by staff member Michele Boebert, the tale unfolded like a festive rhyme inspired by ‘Twas the Night Before Christmas. (Scituate version.)

On the morning before break, an elevator malfunction left seven students and paraprofessional Kim Brown temporarily stranded between floors. The group, en route to a holiday assembly as special guests with the school mascot Sharky, found themselves in an unexpected predicament.

Despite the situation, Kim Brown’s calm demeanor and resourcefulness kept the students engaged and at ease while she maintained communication with staff using her cell phone. Meanwhile, Ms. Antenore and Ms. Mulcahy sprang into action, calling the fire department and school resource officers for assistance.

Efforts to free the group were led by Facilities Director Chris Cataldo and custodian Ed, who worked tirelessly to open the doors. Staff, families, and teachers rallied around, offering moral support and reassuring parents during dismissal.

After a tense wait, Chris Cataldo and his team successfully opened the elevator doors, freeing the group to a chorus of cheers. The students and Kim emerged unharmed, much to the relief of families and staff alike. The incident showcased the teamwork, patience, and holiday spirit of everyone involved.

The event will undoubtedly go down as a lighthearted and heartwarming story in Jenkins Elementary’s history. As the community celebrated the safe resolution, they joined together in holiday cheer, declaring, “Happy Holidays to all, students, staff, and each family!”



# SPS Spotlight

## SCITUATIONS

The Scituate High School journalism program provides a valuable platform for students to engage in practical project-based learning. While developing online and print content for the school newspaper, *The Scituation* ([scituation.net](http://scituation.net)), and *What's the Scit?* Instagram videos, students practice skills that can be transferred to many different academic disciplines and career pursuits. In particular, students learn the importance of teamwork, curiosity, research, writing, editing, and marketing. With a deep emphasis on accuracy and journalistic integrity, the program allows students to learn first-hand the First Amendment's value and the media's critical role in a free society.



*The 2024-25 Scituation staff*

The 2024-25 Scituation staff is composed of 22 bright and energetic students. Staff Writers are members of the Advanced Journalism course, a full-year elective course open to juniors and seniors. This year's Editor Leadership Team includes seniors Leona Breitenstein, Bridget Norris, Patricia (Tricia) Gibbons, Savana Garabedian, and Bailey Young. Selected based on maturity, dedication, and experience, editors work collaboratively with *The Scituation* faculty advisor, SHS English teacher Catherine Hall, to assign and edit articles, organize special projects, and develop fundraising and marketing efforts. Additionally, the team works with the South Shore Regional Vocational Technical High School graphics department to design and print a magazine-style publication, *The Scituation Graduation Edition*, distributed free of charge during the SHS graduation ceremony.

Aligning with its core mission, the journalism program strives to promote inclusion, diversity, and cultural humility by amplifying voices, advancing equity, and inspiring positive change in the community. All SHS students are encouraged to contribute by writing articles or opinion essays, taking photographs, participating in the Journalism Club, or helping produce videos for social media. Contributing Writers to *The Scituation* also include members of the Introduction to Journalism class. In this one-semester elective course, students (freshmen through seniors) learn the fundamentals of journalistic writing while creating articles for publication.



Writing for *The Scituation* has inspired many SHS graduates to pursue college degrees and professional careers in journalism. Over the years, these ambitious graduates have remained connected to the program by returning to SHS during the annual “Scituation Holiday Homecoming” or meeting with journalism classes to share their experiences in the field. Notably, Jack Nelson, a 2020 SHS graduate and professional sports writer, has been a dedicated volunteer with the journalism program. This year, students interested in reporting on high school, college, or professional sports have received assistance from Jack in writing and editing, which has substantially enhanced *The Scituation* sports department.

At SHS, students have a voice, and their school newspaper represents one vehicle to express substantive ideas, commentary, and community action. This month, SHS junior Shea Neri was compelled to write an open letter to the Scituate School Building Committee explaining why sinks should be installed in every cafeteria and classroom space of the new elementary school planned to replace Cushing and Hatherly schools. After her writing was published on [scituation.net](https://scituation.net), NewsBreak, a regional news app that regularly publishes *Scituation* content, also posted her opinion essay, demonstrating that high school students have a respected voice in community matters.

Recently, a Scituate family looking to donate to an educational program that cultivates students’ interest in STEAM subjects read a *Scituation* article highlighting the SHS robotics team. Based on the information in this article, the family was inspired to contribute a substantial grant to an extraordinary extracurricular program. Family members remarked that the robotics team's mission aligns with their family values and vision of opportunity for young people.

Student journalists at Scituate High School proudly recognize *The Scituation* as a vital resource for the community and understand the importance of maintaining the newspaper’s reputation as a credible news source. To read articles that help define the spirit of excellence at SHS, please visit this link:



# School Start Time Survey Results

Our most recent survey asked stakeholders if the elementary school start time should be earlier than it currently is? (Before 8:55 AM), garnering responses from 172 individuals across various groups, including Parents/Guardians, Staff Members, Students, and Community Members.

## Key Findings

Staff Members, with 89 respondents constituted the largest respondent group, showed stronger support for the change, with 64% (57 respondents) in favor of the earlier start time. However, a notable minority (31%, 28 respondents) preferred the current schedule, and four respondents had no opinion.

With 67 participants, Parents/Guardians were the second largest represented group. A slight majority (52%) favored the earlier start time (35 respondents), while 46% (31 respondents) preferred to maintain the current schedule. Only one respondent expressed no opinion.

Students, comprising 14 respondents, also leaned towards the earlier start time, with 64% (9 respondents) in favor, 14% (2 respondents) against, and 21% (3 respondents) having no opinion.

## Insights and Group Dynamics

- Across all groups, the "Yes" response for the earlier start time was predominant, driven significantly by Staff Members and Parents/Guardians. Students and Community Members, while supportive overall, had less influence due to their smaller representation in the survey.
- The proportional breakdown of responses highlighted differing tendencies among groups:
- Community Members were evenly split.
- Parents/Guardians showed a balanced split with a slight preference for "Yes."
- Staff Members strongly favored "Yes," with a substantial minority preferring "No."
- Students overwhelmingly supported "Yes," with fewer expressing opposition or no opinion.

## Overall Trends and Implications

The survey indicated majority support for the proposal to start elementary school earlier. This support was strongest among staff members, students, and a slightly narrower majority of parents/guardians. The presence of dissenting voices as well as accompanying comments primarily within the parents/guardians and staff members suggests varying concerns or priorities within these groups.

Importantly, the scarcity of "no opinion" responses suggests that respondents hold firm opinions on the issue, underscoring its significance within the community.

## Conclusion:

As SPS contemplates potential changes to elementary school start times, the survey results provide a slight preference from stakeholders, particularly staff and parents/guardians, for earlier start times. While some concerns remain among a minority, the overall consensus points towards a shift in favor of the proposed adjustment. The administration and school committee now face the task of weighing these insights as they consider potential adjustments to better meet the needs and preferences of their community.

Thank you to everyone who participated in the survey! Your feedback is invaluable in shaping our school start times

