



MARS Annual Board of Directors Meeting
Tuesday, July 22, 2025
9:30 AM – 11 AM
Zoom Meeting Minutes

Present (Remote):

Howie Barber, Tina Games, Paul Haughey, Ernest Houle (joined at 9:55), Denise Pigeon, Beth Regulbuto (joined at 10:18), Deb Boyd, Charles Ellis, Lynn Ryan, Sheryl Stanton, Suzanne Wallace.

Also Present:

Mauren Marshall, Executive Director, and Sheila Muir, Assistant Executive Director

Absent:

Matt Ehrenworth, Brad Morgan, Mark Morris

1.0 Call to Order –Dr. Maureen Marshall, Executive Director, called the meeting to order at 9:35 AM.

2.0 Approval of Minutes from BOD Annual Meeting July 22, 2025

Mr. Ellis motioned to approve the minutes from February 11, 2025. Mr. Houle seconded the motion. The motion was approved, with nine votes in favor (Mr. Ellis, Dr. Haughey, Dr. Pigeon, Ms. Wallace, Ms. Ryan, Mr. Barber, Ms. Games, Mr. Houle, and Ms. Stanton) and one abstention (Ms. Boyd).

3.0 Board Membership Mr. Ellis Motioned with Mr. Barber 2nd

a. Current Board

Dr. Muir provided the board with a document outlining the proposed FY 26 MARS Board of Directors. The document noted Board member terms that were expiring, membership, and open positions. She explained that there were currently two open positions due to the retirement of Dr. Fitzpatrick and the resignation of Dr. Regulbuto. Also, she explained the terms of Dr. Haughey and Mr. Morris. Ms. Ryan, Mr. Houle, Dr. Pigeon, and Mr. Ehrenworth were expiring, and that each of these members had expressed interest in remaining on the Board of Directors.

b. Nominations for open Board positions

Mr. Ellis made a motion to appoint the proposed Board members. Mr. Barber seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken and the motion was approved unanimously with nine members voting to approve (Dr. Pigeon, Dr. Haughey, Ms. Boyd, Mr. Ellis, Ms. Wallace, Ms. Ryan, Mr. Barber, Ms. Stanton, and Ms. Games).

Dr. Marshall noted that we will seek nominations for the remaining open Board Positions.

c. Nominations for Associate Members

4.0 Nominations for Officers

a. President

Ms. Boyd made a motion to nominate Dr. Haughley for the position of President. Ms. Ryan seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously.

b. Vice President

Mr. Ellis made a motion to nominate Ms. Ryan for the position of Vice President. Ms. Boyd seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously.

c. Secretary/Clerk

Ms. Ryan made a motion to nominate Dr. Muir, Assistant Executive Director, for the position of Secretary/Clerk. Mrs. Ellis seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously.

d. Treasurer

Mr. Ellis made a motion to nominate Gail Stanton for the position of Treasurer. Ms. Ryan seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously.

5.0 FY 25 Membership and Summary of FY 25 Budget

Dr. Marshall reviewed the summary of the FY25 budget sheet that had been provided to the Board before the meeting. She explained that in the FY 25 budget, some line items have not been fully expended, while others have been over-expended, particularly for insurance. Additionally, she mentioned that the cost for tax preparation services has increased significantly. She also explained that professional development costs had increased in FY 25 due to the frequency of Help Desk sessions that were not budgeted for in FY25. She also referenced the funds in the MARS reserve fund and the income generated by the MARS consulting group.

6.0 Proposed Membership Fee Increase to \$1150.00 for FY 26 - Vote to Approve

Dr. Marshall explained that, due to the increase in expenses previously discussed, there is a recommendation to increase the MARS membership fee by \$100.00 per year, from \$ 1,050.00 to \$ 1,150.00.

Mr. Barber discussed that the \$100.00 is not a significant increase, but he cautioned that discussing a fee increase at this time of year is not ideal, as districts have already approved their FY26 budgets. He recommended that, in the future, proposed membership fee increases be discussed earlier in the fiscal year. Dr. Pigeon noted that she agreed with the comments made by Mr. Barber and added that there is room for growth in both the dues structure and salary increases, suggesting that this be examined in the future. Mr. Houle mentioned that there may be opportunities for grants and legislative earmarks. In his experience on the Massachusetts Partnerships for Youth Board, these sources of revenue have been productive for the organization.

Mr. Ellis made a motion to increase membership fees for FY26 to \$1150.00. Mr. Barber seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken. Nine members voted in favor of the motion (Mrs. Ellis, Ms. Wallace, Ms. Ryan, Mr. Barber, Dr. Pigeon, Mr. Houle, Ms. Stanton, Ms. Games, and Dr. Haughey). One member voted against the motion (Ms. Boyd). The motion passed by a majority vote.

7.0 MARS Staffing/contract renewal - proposed salary increases - Vote to Approve

Dr. Marshall explained the proposed salary increases for MARS staff as follows: a salary increase for the MARS Research Analyst, Julie Kelley, of \$1000.00, a salary increase for

MARS Treasurer Gail Stanton of \$1000.00, a salary increase for the MARS Executive Director of \$1000.00, and a salary increase for the Assistant Executive Director of \$1000.00.

Mr. Barber commented that, in his opinion, the proposed salary increases are reasonable based on the responsibilities of the positions of Executive Director, Assistant Executive Director, Treasurer, and Research Analyst.

Mr. Barber made a motion to approve the MARS contract renewal as recommended. Ms. Pigeon seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken. The motion was approved, with ten votes in favor (Mr. Ellis, Ms. Wallace, Ms. Ryan, Mr. Barber, Dr. Pigeon, Mr. Houle, Ms. Stanton, Ms. Games, Ms. Boyd, and Dr. Haughey), and one abstention (Dr. Regulbuto).

8.0 FY 26 MARS Operational Budget - Vote to Approve

Dr. Marshall reviewed the recommended FY26 budget document that had been provided to the Board prior to the meeting. She explained that the Proposed FY26 budget was developed with the expectation that the Board would approve an increase in the MARS membership fee from \$1,050.00 per year to \$1,150.00 per year. The proposed FY26 budget also assumes Board approval of a salary increase for the MARS Research Analyst, Julie Kelley, of \$1000.00, a salary increase for MARS Treasurer Gail Stanton of \$1000.00, a salary increase for the MARS Executive Director of \$1000.00, and a salary increase for the Assistant Executive Director of \$1000.00.

Ms. Ryan made a motion to approve the FY26 MARS operational Budget. Ms. Boyd seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken. Ten members voted in favor of the motion (Mrs. Ellis, Ms. Wallace, Ms. Ryan, Mr. Barber, Dr. Pigeon, Mr. Houle, Ms. Stanton, Ms. Games, Ms. Boyd, and Dr. Haughey). The motion passed unanimously.

9.0 FY 26 Board Meeting Calendar (Proposed) - Discussion

Dr. Muir summarized the proposed meeting schedule for the Board of Directors, which is similar to the meeting schedule from FY 25. She also summarized the professional development schedule, which is also similar to the schedule from FY25.

Ms. Wallace noted that the Board meeting scheduled for November 11, 2025, is on Veteran's Day. Dr. Muir will reschedule the meeting for November 18, 2025.

Mr. Barber asked about the recording of meetings and suggested that recording professional development meetings and posting them for members to view at a later date would be helpful to members who were not able to attend. Dr. Muir explained that the MARS Help desk meetings have not been recorded at the request of Julie Kelly and Steve Hemman, in order to make the meeting environment safe for participants to ask questions. She also shared that other professional development meetings are recorded and that the meeting recording and the presentation slides are sent to all who have registered for the meeting.

10.0 MARS Consulting Group Update

Jay Barry, MARS Consulting Group Lead Consultant, provided the Board with a summary of the document. He explained that the work with the 6 town planning board (Bernadston, Gill-Montague, and Northfield) that has been the MARS dominant project. The MARS consulting group has collaborated with this group intermittently throughout various phases of this project. The group has submitted a regional agreement to DESE for review and

approval. The MARS consulting group worked with a subcommittee to draft this regional agreement.. He also mentioned a project in the Groton-Dunstable Regional District, which involves a preliminary review of the regional agreement and presentation of alternative assessment calculations due to budget constraints in recent years. He stated that there is an upcoming project to work with Martha's Vineyard to explore making a K-12 regional district. He mentioned that many districts are struggling financially and have received numerous calls from other districts seeking to investigate regionalization. The list of these districts is included at the bottom of the summary sheet.

Dr. Hemman provided further details related to the Martha's Vineyard project. He also provided the Board with an update on the monthly Help Desk meetings, E&D training, and End-of-Year Report training that MARS conducts in partnership with the Abrahms Group. Dr. Hemman praised the contribution of Julie Kelley to the work of the MARS Consulting Group.

11.0 MARS Year in Review

Dr. Marshall summarized the MARS Year in Review document. She emphasized MARS leadership in the establishment of Project 211 to highlight the challenges faced by Held Harmless Districts and Rural School Districts.

Dr. Marshall emphasized that the professional development sessions offered by MARS are provided free of charge to our members, with no limit on the number of members from a district who can attend.

12.0 Other

Mr. Barber brought up the MARS Website. Dr. Marshall explained that she has contacted an individual to provide services to update our website. She discussed assessing a proposal from this individual and making it a priority in FY26.

Ms. Stanton discussed the necessity of connecting with DESE and the legislature to bring awareness to the issues faced by rural and regional school districts. Dr. Marshall shared that we are partnering with MASS, MASC, MABSO, and other organizations to work on this matter. But cautioned that the representation of these communities in the legislature is problematic in this regard. Mr. Ellis recommended that MARS reach out to MASC to work in partnership with them. Mr. Haughey noted that utilizing our respective organizations to support these efforts is essential.

13.0 Adjournment

Mr. Ellis motioned to adjourn the meeting. Mr. Barber seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously. The meeting was adjourned at 10:44 AM