



CAMBRIDGE SCHOOL COMMITTEE

(Official Minutes)

Regular Meeting

December 16, 2025

Called for 6:00 p.m. in the Dr. Henrietta S. Attles Meeting Room, Cambridge Rindge and Latin School, 459 Broadway, Cambridge, for the purpose of discussing any and all business that may properly come before the Committee.

Members Present: Member Harding, Member Hudson, Vice Chair Hunter, Member Rachel, Member Rojas, Member Weinstein, Mayor Simmons

Others Present: Dr. Chad Leith, Chief Accountability Officer; David Murphy, Superintendent of Schools; Damon Smith, Interim Chief Operation Officer

Mayor Simmons in the Chair.

A quorum of the School Committee being present, the Chair called the meeting to order at 6:02 p.m. and read the call of the meeting.

The meeting proceeded to the first order of business with a roll call of members present: Member Harding, ~~ABSENT~~, Member Hudson, PRESENT, Member Rachel, PRESENT, Member Rojas, PRESENT, Member Weinstein, PRESENT, Vice Chair Hunter, PRESENT, Madam Mayor, PRESENT

Member Harding arrived at 6:05 p.m.

1. Public Comment

The following individuals were heard:

- John Summers, Fairmont Street Street, spoke regarding **#25-309**.
- Fred Fantini, spoke on behalf of the resolutions honoring Member Rojas and Vice Chair Hunter, **#25-310** and **#25-311**.
- Chris Montero, Warren Road, spoke regarding **Superintendent's Presentation and #25-309**.

On a motion by Member Rojas, seconded by Vice Chair Hunter, public comment was closed on a voice vote.

2. Student School Committee Report:

Student members did not attend. There was no student report.

3. Presentation of the Records for Approval:

- December 2, 2025, Regular Meeting
- December 2, 2025 Special Meeting

On a motion by Member Rachel seconded by Vice Chair Hunter the records were accepted as presented on a voice vote.

On a motion by Member Weinstein, seconded by Member Rachel, the rules were suspended to bring forth **#25-310 and #25-311** on the following roll call vote: Member Harding, YEA; Member Hudson, YEA; Member Rachel, YEA, Member Rojas, YEA; Member Weinstein, YEA; Vice Chair Hunter, YEA; Madam Mayor, YEA

#25-311 Resolution honoring Member Rojas – Member Rachel and Member Weinstein

WHEREAS: Member José Luis Rojas Villareal has been an active and committed member of the Cambridge community for more than 25 years, formerly served on the Amigos School Council, and is a proud parent of two sons who benefitted from the Cambridge Public Schools; and

WHEREAS: Member Rojas brought to the School Committee his own experience as an immigrant from Mexico and a multilingual student, he has been a steadfast champion for multilingual education and for addressing the needs of English learners, firmly believing that a diverse community enriches learning and strengthens the district overall; and

WHEREAS: Since joining the Cambridge School Committee in 2020, he has drawn on his extensive experience in economic development and community investment finance, including his work as Managing Director at LEAF, a nonprofit supporting cooperatives and small businesses throughout Massachusetts; and
WHEREAS: He consistently emphasized the importance of experiential learning as a powerful tool for student engagement, recognizing that meaningful learning also happens beyond the classroom and serves as essential preparation for life after high school; and

WHEREAS: Member Rojas served as Chair of the Buildings and Grounds Subcommittee during the unprecedented challenges of the global COVID-19 pandemic, listening to and partnering closely with community members, and helping draft the district's Health & Safety Manual, which allowed Cambridge to reopen classrooms safely and earlier than most districts; and

WHEREAS: As Co-Chair of the Budget Subcommittee, he helped shift the district's budget discussions toward monitoring, evaluation, and continuous improvement, ensuring that resources were aligned with program effectiveness and evolving student needs; and

WHEREAS: Member Rojas helped bring to the forefront the need for thoughtful integration of artificial intelligence (AI) in the classroom, encouraging the district to examine how emerging technologies can better meet students' needs while ensuring responsible implementation; and

WHEREAS: He worked to strengthen transparency and accountability within School Committee operations, championing the Committee's self-assessment process and advocating for ongoing Massachusetts Association of School Committees training to ensure members remained grounded in current laws and good governance standards; and

WHEREAS: Member Rojas approached his role as a lifelong learner, consistently seeking information, studying best practices from other districts, and participating in local and national conferences to help inform his fellow Committee members and to better serve Cambridge's students; and

WHEREAS: Member Rojas served with deep humility, integrity, and thoughtfulness, never speaking more than necessary, always preparing for meetings, and voting alone when his conscience called him to; and

WHEREAS: Member Rojas demonstrated his deep respect for and support of Cambridge Public Schools teachers, administrators, and staff in his collaborative approach to crafting policy and setting priorities to meet the needs of Cambridge students; and

WHEREAS: Member Rojas is known for his ability to bring people together across differing viewpoints, often serving as a trusted "voice of reason," and fostering collaboration in service of the district's shared mission to provide the best possible education for all Cambridge students; now therefore be it

RESOLVED: That the Cambridge School Committee extends its deepest gratitude and appreciation to Member Rojas for his dedicated service, thoughtful leadership, and steadfast commitment to the students and families of Cambridge; and be it further

RESOLVED: That a formal copy of this resolution be prepared by the Executive Secretary to the School Committee and presented to Member José Luis Rojas Villareal with profound gratitude and respect.

A discussion followed **#25-311**. Committee members and Superintendent Murphy gave heartfelt sentiments regarding Member Rojas' impactful contributions to the School Committee and wished him all the best.

On a motion by Member Weinstein, seconded by Mayor Simmons **#25-311** was adopted and made unanimous on the following roll call vote: Member Harding, YEA; Member Hudson, YEA; Member Rachel, YEA, Member Rojas, YEA; Member Weinstein, YEA; Vice Chair Hunter, YEA; Madam Mayor, YEA

#25-312 Resolution honoring Vice Chair Hunter – Member Rojas

WHEREAS: Vice Chair Hunter was born and raised in New Orleans during segregation and as a first-generation college graduate, she earned her undergraduate degree Xavier University and Master of Education degrees from both Antioch and the Harvard Graduate School of Education; and

WHEREAS: Vice Chair Hunter is a proud parent of her daughter, Lisette Williams, whom she raised in Cambridge, and who benefited from a full CPS education, attending Cambridge Public Schools from kindergarten through graduation at CRLS; and

WHEREAS: Early in her career, demonstrating courageous leadership and advocacy, Vice Chair Hunter worked as a chemist at the Polaroid Corporation and helped organize a worker-led movement that successfully pushed Polaroid to divest from apartheid South Africa; and

WHEREAS: Vice Chair Hunter's leadership and advocacy have earned national and international recognition from distinguished organizations, with honors that include the Dr. Effie Jones Humanitarian Award, the Rosa Parks Memorial Award, and the Amandla Award, among many others; and

WHEREAS: Vice Chair Hunter went on to serve the Cambridge Public Schools in a wide range of roles at Cambridge Rindge & Latin School, including, math teacher, student government advisor, supervisor of the student teaching program and assistant vice principal; and

WHEREAS: Vice Chair Hunter co-authored the Concerned Black Staff Report at CRLS which analyzed racial disparities in achievement at CRLS, helping to launch the district's longstanding practice of publishing disaggregated student achievement data and informing ongoing efforts to close opportunity and achievement gaps; and

WHEREAS: In 1996, Vice Chair Hunter, determined to expand high quality educational opportunities for all of Cambridge's students, co-founded the Benjamin Banneker Charter School, recognized as one of the more successful urban charter elementary schools in Massachusetts; and

WHEREAS: In her role on the School Committee, Ms. Hunter has consistently centered educational equity, focusing on closing academic opportunity gaps, notably in third-grade reading and eighth-grade math. She has been a tireless advocate for Black and Brown scholars and students from historically marginalized communities; and

WHEREAS: Vice Chair Hunter devoted countless hours in partnership with Attorney MacFarlane to successfully negotiate eight union contracts, helping to build a cooperative and respectful labor environment with the district's educators, clerks, family liaisons, custodians, safety specialists, food service staff, and facilities personnel, all of whom she recognized as the lifeblood of a thriving and successful school district; and

WHEREAS: During her tenure, Vice Chair Hunter worked tirelessly in service to the Cambridge Public Schools, regularly visiting schools and classrooms, participating in student story times, supporting student volunteer initiatives, and engaging in community events, demonstrating an unwavering commitment to listening, learning, and uplifting the voices of students, families, and educators; and

WHEREAS: In her role as Vice Chair, she demonstrated steadfast support for the Executive Secretary and the Confidential Secretary, meeting with them regularly to exchange ideas, offer mentorship, and ensure their work was supported; and under her leadership, the School Committee Office digitized hundreds of meeting minutes and policy orders, improving accessibility and significantly enhancing operational efficiency; and

WHEREAS: Vice Chair Hunter approached her responsibilities with integrity, humility, and deep respect for students, families, and colleagues, modeling what it means to serve as both a public official and a community activist whose "service never stops"; now therefore be it

RESOLVED: That the Cambridge School Committee extends its deepest gratitude to Vice Chair Hunter her decades of unwavering leadership and steadfast advocacy for Cambridge's children; and be it further

RESOLVED: That a formal copy of this resolution be prepared by the Executive Secretary to the School Committee and presented to Vice Chair Hunter with profound gratitude and respect.

A discussion followed **#25-312**. Committee members and Superintendent Murphy gave heartfelt sentiments regarding Vice Chair Hunter's long history in the district and the impact of her leadership.

On a motion by Member Rojas, seconded by Member Rachel, **#25-312** was adopted and made unanimous on the following roll call vote: Member Harding, YEA; Member Hudson, YEA; Member Rachel, YEA, Member Rojas, YEA; Member Weinstein, YEA; Vice Chair Hunter, YEA; Madam Mayor, YEA

4. Reconsiderations: None

5. Unfinished Business/Calendar: None

6. Awaiting Reports: None

7a. Superintendent's Update:

The Superintendent will provide an update on pending matters and highlight various initiatives. The report will include a follow up overview of the school committee's pending consideration of the high school competency determination policy as well as the administration's analysis of the efforts to improve on-time performance for district-funded transportation and the implications for the elementary and upper school start time system

7b. Presentation

The Superintendent and members of the administration will take any questions from members of the school committee on the items posted on the agenda including the aforementioned policy considerations.

As part of the Superintendent's update and presentation, the Superintendent shared the following highlights. There were no presentation slides.

Graduation Requirements & Competency Determination Policy

- The Superintendent provided clarification on the second reading of the competency determination policy, **#25-202**. He explained that graduation requirements in Massachusetts are largely governed at the local level.
- Historically, state-sanctioned requirements included MCAS passage (now eliminated by voters) and physical education.
- The Committee previously adopted a health course requirement effective for the Class of 2028 and beyond, which is now being codified.
- The total credit requirement will increase from 224 to 240 credits beginning with the Class of 2028.
- The state has advised districts not to use MCAS passage for competency determination.
- Districts are now required to establish local competency determination policies based on end-of-course assessments.
- CPSD's proposed policy aligns competency determination with core courses taken in the first two years of high school.
- He noted interest in further discussion around incorporating civics and community service into the district's vision of a graduate.

Following the Superintendent's remarks, Committee members, raised questions regarding the district's responsibility to ensure that students are adequately prepared for post-secondary pathways, particularly four-year colleges, under a system of local control. Emphasis was placed on the importance of transparency for families about college readiness expectations and the distinction between graduation requirements and post-secondary admissions standards.

The Superintendent was noted that more than 97% of Cambridge Rindge and Latin School graduates complete the MassCore requirements/ While many students graduate well prepared for post-secondary options, the district acknowledged that ensuring consistent guidance and support for all students remains ongoing work.

Clarification was requested regarding the relationship between course completion, end-of-course assessments, and graduation eligibility. It was explained that students must both earn the required credits and successfully pass designated end-of-course assessments in order to graduate. A formal process is in place to support students who earn course credit but do not initially pass a required assessment, allowing them additional opportunities to demonstrate competency.

Concerns were also raised about the rigor of assessment systems and perceived discrepancies between MCAS and iReady data and graduation outcomes. In response, it was emphasized that the MCAS historically functioned as a minimum competency measure rather than a comprehensive indicator of readiness. The vast majority of Cambridge students passed the MCAS.

Transportation Vendor (NRT Beacon) Update

In response to public comment, the Superintendent addressed concerns regarding student transportation. He confirmed that misconduct by a transportation employee was unacceptable and that the individual would no longer transport Cambridge students. He described the district's relationship with NRT Beacon as "challenging" and a work in progress. While some responsiveness has occurred, expectations are not being consistently met. Committee members urged continued exploration of all options to ensure student safety. Members requested improved communication with the Committee regarding transportation incidents.

7c. CPS District Plan: None

7d. Consent Agenda:

On a motion by Member Rachel, seconded by Member Rojas the Consent Agenda was brought forward on a voice vote.

#25-302 Recommendation: Approval to Cambridge Public Schools Competency Determination Policy be adopted as follows: That the School Committee approve the Cambridge Public Schools Competency Determination Policy as detailed in the [attached document](#).

#25-303 Recommendation: Approval Revisions to the High School Graduation Requirements Policy be adopted as follows: That the School Committee approve the revisions to the High School Graduation Requirements Policy as detailed in the [attached document](#).

#25-304 Recommendation: Day & Residential Program Services not Available from the Cambridge School Department be adopted as follows: That the School Committee award contracts to the institutions on attached list in amounts not to exceed the shown rates, having been approved by the Operational Services Division of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, funds to be provided from the general fund and/or grant fund budget.

	#	Amount
Day Program Tuition Contracts:		
Residential Program Tuition Contracts		
45 Day Program Contracts:	<u>1</u>	<u>\$32,221.08</u>
Total	1	\$32,221.08

#25-305 Recommendation: Contract Award: Star Dance School LLC (FY26 Contract) be adopted as follows: That the School Committee approve a contract with the following vendor, funds to be provided in accordance with the budget reference listed below. Procurement procedures for this purchase have complied with Chapter 30B of the laws of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

Star Dance School LLC, 323 Washington Street, Brighton, MA for the period of January 1, 2026 to June 30, 2026 in the amount of \$29,900.00.

#25-306 Recommendation: Grant Award FY26 Municipal ADA Improvement Grant (SC26871) be adopted as follows: that the School Committee accept and approve the grant award below in the amount and for the period indicated:

FY26 Municipal ADA Improvement Grant (SC26871) - State -Targeted in the amount of \$185,248.00 for the period of December 15, 2025 to June 30, 2026.

On a motion by Vice Chair Hunter, seconded by Member Rachel, **#25-302, #25-303, #25-304, #25-305 and #25-306** were adopted on the following roll call vote: Member Harding, YEA; Member Hudson, NAY; Member Rachel, YEA, Member Rojas, YEA; Member Weinstein, YEA; Vice Chair Hunter, YEA; Madam Mayor, YEA

9. School Committee Agenda (Policy Matters/Notifications/Requests for Information):

#25-307 School Climate Subcommittee Report – November 6, 2025

#25-308 Buildings and Grounds Subcommittee Report – November 20, 2025

On a motion by Member Rojas, seconded by Member Hudson, **#25-307** and **#25-308** were adopted on a voice vote.

#25-309 On Time Bus Arrivals and Start Time Adjustments for School 2026-2027 – Member Hudson & Member Rojas

WHEREAS: All students have the right to arrive to school via district-funded transportation on time with sufficient time to prepare for the instructional day; and

WHEREAS: The Cambridge Public Schools have struggled for years to consistently and reliably deliver all students to school in a timely manner via school district-funded transportation; and

WHEREAS: The Superintendent has provided data suggesting that the current three-tiered system of start and end times across CPS schools implemented in 1993 and revised in 2024 represents a significant impediment to ensuring all students traveling via district-funded transportation arrive on time (because some buses that serve multiple schools back to back don't have sufficient time in between those start times to begin the second route on time); and

WHEREAS: The Superintendent has provided evidence that a modification to a two-tiered start and end time system would significantly improve the prospects of on-time arrivals for all students via district-funded transportation (by allowing more time between routes); now therefore be it

RESOLVED: That the Superintendent is directed to determine start and end times of all CPS schools for the 2026 - 2027 school year no later than January 20, 2026; and be it further

RESOLVED: That any changes to the start and end times for CPS schools in 2026 - 2027 school year shall not exceed a 15 minute difference than the current start and end times for any respective school; and be it further

RESOLVED: That the Superintendent will present publicly by no later than February 3, 2026 a full schedule of caregiver and labor engagement to ensure any school community affected by such a change is fully informed and any impact of such a change is taken into account prior to implementation.

A lengthy discussion followed **#25-309**. The Superintendent explained that many buses currently operate consecutive routes with insufficient time between them, resulting in chronic delays. By modestly adjusting start times, the district would increase the interval between routes to at least 45 minutes, improving on-time arrivals while avoiding the significant cost of adding buses. The proposed adjustment would impact approximately one quarter of students and is considerably smaller in scope than the prior 30-minute start-time change implemented for the 2024–2025 school year.

Committee members raised questions regarding family impact, after-school programming, and communication with community partners. The Superintendent confirmed that major after-school providers, youth-serving agencies, principals, charter schools, and other partners had already been notified of the potential change and that additional, robust communication efforts would continue through multiple channels and languages. He emphasized that the

later dismissal tier would remain unchanged and that simplifying the transportation tiers could actually improve coordination with after-school programs. The Superintendent also noted that the proposal would eliminate very early bus pickups, ensuring no student is picked up before 7:00 a.m., and could provide added benefits such as more consistent access to breakfast and smoother morning transitions for students.

Questions were also raised about cost implications. The Superintendent indicated that the transportation changes themselves are largely cost-neutral, as they do not require additional buses. Some limited staffing costs may be necessary to open school buildings earlier, but these were described as manageable.

Several members expressed support for the proposal, citing the importance of ensuring students arrive on time and receive their full instructional day. Others voiced concerns about the timing of the vote and the perception of approving a change before further community feedback, noting the importance of continued engagement with caregivers. These concerns were acknowledged, and the Superintendent reiterated his commitment to ongoing communication leading up to the start of the 2026–2027 school year.

On a motion Member Hudson, seconded by Member Rojas, **#25-309** was adopted on the following roll call vote: Member Harding, YEA; Member Hudson, YEA; Member Rachel, YEA, Member Rojas, YEA; Member Weinstein, YEA; Vice Chair Hunter, YEA; Madam Mayor, PRESENT

**#25-310 Proposed Changes and Amendments to the School Committee Rules
– Mayor Simmons and Vice Chair Hunter**

That the School Committee adopt the attached proposed changes and amendments as a working document, to be reviewed and provisionally adopted at the Meeting of Organization, with the understanding that further revisions may be made at a later date.

A lengthy discussion followed **#25-310**. The School Committee discussed proposed revisions to its Rules, prompted by the recently adopted City Charter changes affecting the selection of the School Committee Chair. The Mayor and Vice Chair explained that the draft revisions were developed collaboratively over the past several months by the School Committee Executive Secretary, City Council staff, and legal counsel to streamline the Rules, align certain procedures with City Council practices, and ensure compliance with the new Charter. Particular emphasis was placed on Chapter 1, Section 1, which would remove language stating that the Mayor shall serve as Chair and instead provide for the Chair to be elected by roll call vote of the Committee as outlined in the new City Charter.

Members discussed several options, including adopting only the necessary Charter-related change, provisionally adopting the full draft, or deferring action to the incoming School Committee. Members emphasized the importance of not binding the next Committee as well as the lack of time to review the proposed changes by the motion makers. Legal guidance from the City Solicitor was referenced, clarifying that the Charter itself permits the election of a Chair and Vice Chair regardless of existing Rules.

On a motion by Member Weinstein, seconded by Vice Chair Hunter, Chapter 1, Section 1 of the Rules was changed to reflect the new City Charter, “The Chair and Vice Chair shall be elected by roll call votes” on the following roll call vote: Member Harding, NAY; Member Hudson, NAY; Member Rachel, YEA, Member Rojas, YEA; Member Weinstein, YEA; Vice Chair Hunter, YEA; Madam Mayor, YEA

On a motion by Member Weinstein, seconded by Vice Chair Hunter to refer the proposed draft of the Rules to the new School Committee on the following roll call vote: Member Harding, YEA; Member Hudson, YEA; Member Rachel, YEA, Member Rojas, YEA; Member Weinstein, YEA; Vice Chair Hunter, YEA; Madam Mayor, YEA

11. Announcements:

- **Vice Chair Hunter** gave an update on projects that she initiated during her tenure as Vice Chair.
- **Mayor Simmons** thanked Dr. Turk, and School Committee and CPS staff members for supporting her during her tenure as Chair of the School Committee.

12. Late Orders: None

13. Communications and Reports from City Officers:

City Council/School Committee Joint Roundtable, November 10, 2025 Meeting Minutes

School Committee Office Report Out – Vice Chair Hunter

On a motion by Vice Chair, seconded by Member Rachel, the meeting was adjourned on a voice vote. (9:00 p.m.)

Email Communications:

None

Attest:



Katherine Christo
Executive Secretary to the School Committee

Meeting Documents:

- Current Rules with Proposed Changes
- Draft- Incorporated Rule Changes
- Proposed Changes to the School Committee Rules – December 2025