



CAMBRIDGE SCHOOL COMMITTEE

(Official Minutes)

Regular Meeting

January 6, 2026

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 de Paula Santos, Vice Chair Dube, Member Harding, Member Hudson, Member Jaikumar, Chair Weinstein, Mayor Siddiqui

Others Present: Student Member Asraf, Student Member Jama, David Murphy, Superintendent of Schools, Damon Smith, Chief Operating Officer, Ivy Washington, Chief Financial Officer

Chair Weinstein in the Chair.

A quorum of the School Committee being present, the Chair called the meeting to order at 6:01 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: Vice Chair Dube, PRESENT, Member Harding, PRESENT, Member Hudson, PRESENT, Member Jaikumar, PRESENT, Mayor Siddiqui, PRESENT, Member de Paula Santos, PRESENT, Chair Weinstein, PRESENT

Chair Weinstein introduced new **Vice Chair Caitlin** and opened the floor for public comment.

1. Public Comment

The following individuals were heard:

- Chris Montero, Warren Road, **Superintendent's Presentation** and **#26-001**, emphasized the importance of collaboration and addressing challenges, the need for peace and stability in contract negotiations.
- Lilly Havstad, Granville Rd, **Superintendent's Presentation** and **#26-001**, requested a Budget Subcommittee to increase public engagement and expressed concerns about the patchwork of law firms handling district legal hires and requests more information about contracts.

On a motion by Mayor Siddiqui, seconded by Member Hudson, public comment was closed on the following roll call vote: Vice Chair Dube, YEA; Member Harding, YEA; Member Hudson, YEA; Member Jaikumar, YEA; Mayor Siddiqui, YEA; Member de Paula Santos, YEA; Chair Weinstein, YEA

2. Student School Committee Report:

Student Member Eva Asraf, provided the following update:

- On the first day back for students after winter break, there were some Wi-Fi issues but overall smooth operations.

3. Presentation of the Records for Approval: None

4. **Reconsiderations:** None

5. **Unfinished Business/Calendar:** None

6. **Awaiting Reports:** None

7a. Superintendent's Update:

An update on pending matters and highlight various initiatives taking place across CPS school communities that have occurred since the last meeting of the school committee and/or are anticipated to be taking place in the coming weeks across the Cambridge Public Schools.

Superintendent Murphy shared the following update:

- Superintendent Murphy reported that the district held an all-day, all-school Professional Development (PD) Day Monday, January 5, which was successful.
- He expressed gratitude to administrators, district leaders, and educators for facilitating and participating in the professional learning.
- He shared that students returned the following day for a successful school day, despite ongoing Wi-Fi issues.

7b. Presentation

The superintendent and the chief financial officer will provide the administration's annual presentation with respect to FY26 budgetary and enrollment projections.

CFO Ivy Washington joined Superintendent Murphy for the presentation which can be found on this [website](#).

Highlights of the presentation and discussion include:

- Budget Development Timeline and Community Engagement
 - An outline of the budget development timeline, the importance of community engagement and stakeholder meetings
 - Governance structure for the budget process, including the roles of the Superintendent, City Manager, School Committee, and City Council
 - Accessibility and inclusivity in the budget process, including multilingual presentations, childcare, and transportation support
- Student Enrollment Projections
 - Enrollment projections, indicating steady enrollment with a slight anticipated decline
 - Elementary schools comprise the largest enrollment group, followed by upper schools and grades 9–12
 - Changes in the English learner population and the impact of emergency shelter placements on enrollment
- Expenditure and Revenue Projections
 - Review of expenditure and revenue projections, including a 4.5% increase in the operating budget (\$12.75 million), bringing the total to approximately \$293.0 million.
 - Most increases are allocated to salaries and benefits (\$10.32 million), including:
 - Salary increases (COLA and step/grade advancements): \$6.8 million
 - Health insurance increases: \$3.3 million
 - Other cost drivers: transportation contracts, facilities/energy for new school building, and out-of-district special education tuition (3.04% increase mandated by the state).

- Potential impacts of federal funding changes (approximately 2.5% of total budget) and the need to plan for uncertainties related to grants and meal reimbursements
- Detailed Budget Breakdown
 - Detailed breakdown of the district's budget, including personnel costs, facilities, transportation, and special education
 - Balancing expenses and revenues and the need for flexibility in budgeting
 - The need for the district to be responsive to the priorities identified by the School Committee and the community

Superintendent Murphy closing points included:

- The need for ongoing communication and collaboration to ensure the district's budget reflects the community's values and priorities
- Staying informed and engaged throughout the budget process
- Responsibility to strive for high standards in public education and
- High expectations for staff and students

Committee Members' Feedback and Questions:

- **Chair Weinstein** thanked Superintendent Murphy and CFO Ivy Washington for their presentation. He requested that each committee member be allowed to ask two questions to ensure everyone has a chance to participate.
- Student Member Jama asked about data investment as a priority and special education tuition percentages. Superintendent Murphy explained the conceptual framework for data investment and uncertainty in federal funding.
- CFO Washington clarified the \$7.6 million vs. \$7.7 million discrepancy in special education tuition and described blended funding sources for transportation and special education.
- **Member Hudson** inquired about building in-house capacity for special education and specific academic outcomes and success metrics.
- Superintendent Murphy discussed keeping students in-district, developing necessary programs, the need for improved execution, and the importance of staffing and planning.
- **Member Jaikumar** asked about the process and attendance at community engagement sessions and the role of the Budget Subcommittee in Phase Two of budget formulation.
- Superintendent Murphy responded that budget co-chairs partnered with the administration to run sessions and receive feedback. He deferred to the School Committee on how to utilize the Budget Subcommittee, including holding additional hearings, and expressed support for expanding input via school councils and other engagement forums.
- **Vice Chair Dube** asked for more information on the co-created strategic plan and its funding. She also requested school improvement plan (SIP) budgets and explanations of how building-level discretionary funds are spent. Superintendent Murphy highlighted alignment between budget planning and strategic priorities and emphasized execution and a clear theory of action.
- **Member Harding** stressed the importance of substantive conversations after budget proposals are shared. He highlighted addressing short-term issues and student achievement challenges. Superintendent Murphy acknowledged the urgency, need for higher standards, and discussed structural budget limitations and the importance of community input.

- Student Member Jama mentioned a budgeting project with student government to gather school ideas. CFO Washington explained the participatory budgeting process at the high school and city level.
- **Mayor Siddiqui** asked whether the March 17 community budget meeting could be rescheduled or supplemented due to proximity to the budget adoption date. She expressed concern about the long gap between January 21 and March 17 and suggested earlier or additional community sessions. Superintendent Murphy agreed and said one or two earlier sessions could be added before March 17. CFO Washington clarified that March 17 is the legally required public hearing, but additional sessions can be held beforehand.
- Student Member Asraf asked for clarification on the 3% increase in out-of-district tuition. Ms. Washington explained that the increase is primarily for students attending special education programs outside the district, providing examples and noting varying costs for day vs. residential students.
- **Member Hudson** suggested collecting feedback on whether community sessions met expectations, emphasized better preparation for incisive questions, and requested clear labeling of fixed costs and identification of review dates or endpoints for programs. Superintendent Murphy acknowledged the need for greater transparency on programs or positions eliminated due to lack of efficacy, discussed messaging challenges, committed to more transparent communication, and highlighted the importance of strategic decision-making.

7c. CPS District Plan: None

7d. Consent Agenda:

On a motion by Member Harding, seconded by Member Jaikumar, **#26-003, #26-005 and #26-006**, were adopted on the following roll call vote: Vice Chair Dube, YEA; Member Harding, YEA; Member Hudson, YEA; Member Jaikumar, YEA; Mayor Siddiqui, YEA; Member de Paula Santos, YEA; Chair Weinstein, YEA

#26-003 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:	1	\$75,146.94
Residential Program Tuition Contracts		
45 Day Program Contracts:		
Total	1	\$75,146.94

#26-005 Recommendation: Contract Award: TCJA Transportation (FY26 Contract) be adopted as follows: That the School Committee accept and approve the grant award below in the amount and for the period indicated:

TCJA Transportation, 11 Tag Way, Hanson, MA for the period of July 1, 2025 to June 30, 2026 in the amount of \$36,058.00.

#25-006 Recommendation: Contract Award: Ascentis Corporation (FY26 Contract) be adopted as follows: That the School Committee accept and approve the grant award below in the amount and for the period indicated:

Ascentis Corporation, 9680 Haven Avenue #200, Rancho Cucamonga, CA for the period of January 25,

2026 to January 24, 2027 in the amount of \$59,459.76.

On a motion by Member Jaikumar, seconded by Member Weinstein, **#26-003 and #26-006** was adopted on the following roll call vote: Vice Chair Dube, YEA; Member Harding, YEA; Member Hudson, YEA; Member Jaikumar, YEA; Mayor Siddiqui, YEA; Member de Paula Santos, YEA; Chair Weinstein, YEA

8. Non-Consent Agenda:

#25-001 Recommendation: Approval of Amendment of the Contract with the Law Firm of Morgan, Brown & Joy, LLP be adopted as follows: That the School Committee approve an amendment of the contract with the law firm of Morgan, Brown & Joy, LLP in an amount not to exceed \$133,000.00 (One Hundred Thirty-Three Thousand Dollars) to provide legal services for labor and employment matters in accordance with M.G.L. c. 71, §§37E & 37F.

A brief discussion followed regarding **#26-001. Member de Paula Santos** expressed concern about approving and retroactively approving contracts without adequate committee review and transparency. She stated she does not support retaining Morgan, Brown & Joy, citing concerns about the firm's anti-union reputation and its potential impact on good-faith collective bargaining.

Member Jaikumar noted that past collective bargaining has been contentious and raised concerns about continuing with the same legal firm. He requested clarification on whether the contracts were for school committee or district counsel and on the breakdown of costs between completed and anticipated work. **Member Jaikumar** expressed a desire for the committee to select its own counsel and supported delaying a decision until additional information was provided and the committee had an opportunity to meet with the attorneys, with openness to re-evaluating the relationship with current firms.

Superintendent Murphy stated that Morgan, Brown & Joy has provided effective legal counsel to the district across multiple bargaining cycles and emphasized the value of continuity and institutional knowledge as the district enters a new bargaining period. He acknowledged concerns about retroactive approvals, noted the necessity of paying for work already performed, advised against halting legal representation given ongoing matters, and explained that Norris, Murray & Pelikan was retained at the City Solicitor's recommendation during the in-house counsel vacancy. He respected the committee's authority and expressed comfort with tabling the contracts for further review.

Vice Chair Dube emphasized that the School Committee should interview counsel thoroughly, clarify the roles of in-house versus committee counsel, involve all members in the process, and approach collective bargaining in a cooperative manner. Superintendent Murphy acknowledged the committee's authority to choose its own counsel and clarified that Morgan, Brown & Joy were previously retained by the committee, not the administration. He noted the firm's effective and strategic counsel, explained the in-house counsel role and vacancy, confirmed that the committee will approve the new appointment, and recommended an upcoming executive session to set bargaining priorities and meet with counsel.

Member Hudson acknowledged a prior comment and asked Member de Paula Santos to clarify her characterization of Morgan, Brown & Joy as "notoriously anti-union," requesting specific examples or history beyond the general label. **Member de Paula Santos** clarified that she was referring to Morgan, Brown & Joy, stating that the firm has a history of opposing union formation and taking hard-line positions against labor. She believes that the district should seek counsel that is more collaborative and supportive of workers' rights, and therefore does not support retaining the firm.

Member Harding emphasized that the teachers' contract is a critical agreement and that legal counsel must have full support from the executive team and bargaining members. He stated that counsel should be student- and family-focused, competent, and able to advocate effectively for classroom instruction and accountability, noting that past controversial cases should not automatically disqualify a firm. **Mayor Siddiqui** noted the immediate need for legal representation for upcoming negotiations and the broader question of how the committee selects counsel.

She acknowledged time constraints make switching firms before bargaining unlikely, expressed openness to exploring alternatives for the future, and supported tabling a vote on the contracts while beginning a longer-term review of the committee's hiring process. **Chair Weinstein** preferred tabling the item to the next meeting to allow members to receive more information and potentially hold an executive session or individual discussions to better understand the negotiations and legal representation.

On a motion by Member Weinstein, seconded by Member Jaikumar, **#26-001** was placed on the unfinished business calendar on the following roll call vote: Vice Chair Dube, YEA; Member Harding, YEA; Member Hudson, YEA; Member Jaikumar, YEA; Mayor Siddiqui, YEA; Member de Paula Santos, YEA; Chair Weinstein, YEA

#26-002 Recommendation: Approval of Amendment of the Contract with the Law Firm of Norris, Murray & Peloquin, LLC be adopted as follows: That the School Committee approve an amendment of the contract with the law firm of Norris, Murray & Peloquin, LLC in an amount not to exceed \$60,000.00 (Sixty Thousand Dollars) to provide general legal services for matters in accordance with M.G.L. c. 71, §37F.

A brief discussion followed **#26-002**. **Member de Paula Santos** requested clarification on the scope of the contract and expressed concern that prior work by the firm preceded a disability discrimination lawsuit, raising issues of litigation risk and public trust. She questioned whether the district should continue retaining the firm and stated hesitancy to support its retention.

Superintendent Murphy explained that the firm was engaged by the City Solicitor's Office to provide coverage during the vacancy in the in-house counsel position and that part of the contract reflects work already completed. He stated the firm has provided competent and collaborative legal counsel, emphasized the need for continued legal coverage during the vacancy, and acknowledged the committee's authority to determine whether and when to proceed with the contract. **Member Harding** stated that since the departure of in-house counsel in July, the Superintendent has been handling much of the district's legal work, which he viewed as problematic. He emphasized that CPS must have dedicated legal counsel in place to manage day-to-day legal matters and prevent issues such as the prior unapproved legal spending.

Member Jaikumar strongly agreed that the district must act quickly to hire full-time in-house counsel, noting it would be more cost-effective and efficient than continued reliance on outside firms. **Vice Chair Dube** requested clarification on legal roles, stating her understanding that the School Committee should have its own attorney and the district should have separate in-house counsel. She emphasized she supports in-house counsel for CPS but wants clarity on how the Committee will exercise its authority to hire and retain its own legal counsel, distinct from the Superintendent's hire.

On a motion by Member Jaikumar, seconded by Member Hudson, **#26-002** was placed on the unfinished business calendar on the following roll call vote: Vice Chair Dube, YEA; Member Harding, YEA; Member Hudson, YEA; Member Jaikumar, YEA; Mayor Siddiqui, YEA; Member de Paula Santos, YEA; Chair Weinstein, YEA

#26-004 Recommendation: Contract Award: Epoch Healthcare 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.

Epoch Healthcare LLC, 1 Central Street, Suite #113, Norwood, MA for the period of July 1, 2025 to June 30, 2026 in the amount of \$70,000.00.

A brief discussion followed **#26-004**. **Member Harding** asked Interim COO Damon Smith whether the Epoch transportation contract was a new, separate expenditure or part of the larger transportation contract previously approved, and whether the additional \$70,000 reflected exhausted funds from the prior contract or covered different students or services. Mr. Smith explained that CPS currently uses Epoch Healthcare to provide transportation for four students this school year (wheelchair and/or disability-related). He clarified that the contract

reflects additional, specialized student services rather than exhaustion of the previously approved transportation funding.

On a motion by Mayor Siddiqui, seconded by Member Hudson, #26-004 was adopted on the following roll call vote: Vice Chair Dube, YEA; Member Harding, PRESENT; Member Hudson, YEA; Member Jaikumar, YEA; Mayor Siddiqui, YEA; Member de Paula Santos, YEA; Chair Weinstein, YEA

9. School Committee Agenda (Policy Matters/Notifications/Requests for Information): None

11. Announcements:

- **Mayor Siddiqui** announced community members are invited to attend the City of Cambridge’s Martin Luther King Jr. Day Commemoration on Monday, January 19, from 11:00 a.m. to 1:45 p.m. at St. Paul AME Church (37 Bishop Allen Drive), with both in-person and virtual attendance options. A Many Helping Hands Day of Service will also take place at City Hall, and additional details about both events will be shared with the School Committee via email.
- **Chair Weinstein** announced an upcoming VPA Danceworks performance on Friday, January 9, and Saturday, January 10, at the Fitzgerald Theatre at CRLS, as well as Winter Jazz Night on Thursday, January 22 in the CRLS Main Cafeteria and the Winter Festival on Friday, January 23.

12. Late Orders: None

13. Communications and Reports from City Officers: None

On a motion by Mayor Siddiqui, seconded by Member Hudson, the meeting was adjourned on a voice vote: Vice Chair Dube, YEA; Member Harding, YEA; Member Hudson, YEA; Member Jaikumar, YEA; Mayor Siddiqui, YEA; Member de Paula Santos, YEA; Chair Weinstein, YEA (9:30 p.m.)

Email Communications:

- ✓ Chris Montero
- ✓ Jonah Badanes-Katzman
- ✓ Anna B. Shin

Attest:



Aunjalee Galloway
Confidential Secretary to the School Committee