



CAMBRIDGE SCHOOL COMMITTEE

(Official Minutes)

Regular Meeting

January 20, 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 Hudson, Member Jaikumar, Mayor Siddiqui, Member de Paul Santos, Vice Chair Dube, Member Harding, Chair Weinstein

Others Present: Jennifer Amigone, Director of Research and Assessment Evaluation; Student Member Asraf; Deena DePamphilis, Director of Science; Dr. Heather Francis, Executive Director of Academics; Yi-An Huang, City Manager; Student Member Jama; Dr. Chad Leith, Chief Accountability Officer; David Murphy, Superintendent of Schools; Claire Spinner, Assistant City Manager; Adrienne Stang, Director of History and Social Science, 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 6:02 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 Hudson, PRESENT; Member Jaikumar, PRESENT; Mayor Siddiqui, PRESENT; Member de Paula Santos, PRESENT; Vice Chair Dube, PRESENT; Member Harding, PRESENT; Chair Weinstein, PRESENT

1. Public Comment

The following individuals were heard:

- Banke Oluwole, Bolton Street, spoke regarding the **Superintendent's Update**/Budget Priorities
- Jane Hirschi, Rindge Ave, spoke regarding the **Superintendent's Presentation**/MCAS Results
- Alyssa Tyler, Main Street, Medford, spoke regarding the **Superintendent's Update**/Budget Priorities
- Sarah Blout Rosenberg, Putnam Ave, spoke regarding **#26-001** and **#26-002**.
- Christopher Montero, Warren Road, Framingham, spoke regarding **#26-001** and **#26-002**.
- Jacob Augenstern, Elm Street, spoke regarding the **Superintendent's Update**/Budget Priorities.
- Anne Coburn, Otis Street, spoke regarding **Superintendent's Update**
- Tony Clark, Mass Ave, spoke in support of **#26-014**.

On a motion by Mayor Siddiqui, seconded by Member Hudson, public comment was closed on a voice vote.

2. Student School Committee Report:

Student members Asraf and Jama gave the following updates:

- Today marked the first day of Semester 2 at CRLS and students started their new schedules
- The successful implementation of Yondr pouches for the second semester with fewer delays for students entering the building.

3. Presentation of the Records for Approval:

- December 16, 2025, Regular Meeting
- January 5, 2026, Special Meeting (Organizational Meeting)

On a motion by Mayor Siddiqui seconded by Member Hudson the records were accepted as presented on the following roll call vote: Member Hudson, YEA; Member Jaikumar, YEA; Mayor Siddiqui, YEA; Member de Paula Santos, YEA; Vice Chair Dube, YEA; Member Harding, YEA; Chair Weinstein, YEA

4. **Reconsiderations:** None

5. **Unfinished Business/Calendar:**

#26-001 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 discussion followed **#26-001**.

The **Vice Chair Dube** stated that some requested information had been received shortly before the meeting and, as a result, indicated her intention to abstain from the vote.

New members expressed concern regarding the timing of the decision, noting the difficulty of reconsidering legal representation less than ten days prior to the start of negotiations. While acknowledging the challenges of changing counsel at this stage, that the timing limited the Committee's ability to fully engage in selecting its own representation and placed the Committee in a difficult position.

Mr. Murphy provided clarification, noting that the item before the Committee was a request for financial authorization to cover legal services already rendered, as well as anticipated legal costs related to the upcoming bargaining cycle. He explained that additional costs were also associated with the ongoing recruitment and retention of in-house counsel, a position that has remained vacant since the summer. Mr. Murphy acknowledged the challenges faced by newly seated Committee members and expressed regret regarding the timing, emphasizing that the issue stemmed from the overlap between the bargaining cycle and the election cycle.

Member DePaul-Santos acknowledged the arguments related to continuity and expediency but raised concerns regarding trust with labor partners. She expressed hope that the Committee would prioritize hiring permanent counsel with expertise in collaborative labor relations to support long-term systemic improvement and more constructive bargaining relationships.

Mayor Siddiqui stated her intention to support the contract amendment, citing the importance of timeliness and continuity as negotiations approach. She acknowledged the concerns raised by members and expressed openness to working collaboratively on establishing clearer criteria and processes for future counsel selection.

On a motion by Member Harding, seconded by Mayor Siddiqui **#26-001** was adopted on the following roll call vote: Member Hudson, YEA; Member Jaikumar, NAY; Mayor Siddiqui, YEA; Member de Paula Santos, NAY; Vice Chair Dube, ABSTAIN; Member Harding, 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 discussion followed **#26-002**.

Mr. Murphy explained that the amendment addresses legal services rendered beyond the previously authorized financial amount. He noted that both law firms had contracts approved by the School Committee, but costs exceeded initial authorizations due to the inherent unpredictability of legal matters. He emphasized that while forecasted costs are included, there can be no guarantee that additional authorization may not be required later in the fiscal year. He further explained that the absence of in-house counsel has contributed significantly to the reliance on outside legal services and that, even once the position is filled, some external legal costs may still occur due to complexity or subject-matter expertise.

Vice Chair Dube emphasized the value of the comparative legal spending information provided to the Committee and suggested that this information be shared more broadly for transparency. She also reiterated the importance of access to initial contracts and invoices as part of the Committee's fiduciary responsibility. **Member Hudson** stressed the importance of fully utilizing opportunities to question legal counsel when available and encouraged more thorough engagement in future discussions. **Member Jaikumar** clarified that their concerns related primarily to process and fiduciary responsibility rather than the specific firm, emphasizing the importance of having complete information available to both the Committee and the public when authorizing expenditures.

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

6. Awaiting Reports: None

7a. Superintendent's Update:

The Superintendent will provide an update on pending matters and highlight various initiatives taking place across the Cambridge Public Schools.

The Superintendent will be joined by the district's Chief Financial Officer and representatives from the City Manager's office to discuss the macroeconomic conditions under which the FY 27 operating budget is being developed and to take questions from the School Committee with respect to the anticipated financial appropriation and broader budgetary context.

Mr. Murphy reminded the Committee of the upcoming community budget meeting scheduled for the following evening at the King Open/Cambridge Street Upper School complex. He confirmed that school start and end times for the 2026–2027 school year were finalized and communicated to school communities, consistent with the January 20 deadline and within the established 15-minute parameters for PreK–8 schools. Mr. Murphy expressed appreciation to representatives of the Cambridge Education Association (CEA) for attending and emphasized the administration's commitment to constructive, professional, and collaborative collective bargaining negotiations.

Following the update, Mr. Murphy was joined by City Manager Huang, Assistant City Manager Spinner and CFO Washington and gave the following presentation that can be found on this [website](#).

- City leaders emphasized the importance of early and ongoing joint budget discussions between the School Committee and City Council, describing the process as a year-round budget cycle rather than a single spring action.
- The City Manager outlined a multi-year economic slowdown, including:
 - Declining commercial property values
 - Reduced development activity
 - Significant decreases in new growth and building permit revenue
- It was reported that commercial property values declined by approximately 12.5%, new growth dropped by more than 40%, and excess levy capacity decreased, limiting long-term financial flexibility.

- City officials explained that Cambridge is increasingly more reliant on property taxes due to stagnating or declining non-property tax revenues.
- Concern was expressed about a potential shift in the property tax burden from commercial to residential taxpayers, which could result in higher residential tax increases.
- City leaders outlined the need for budget moderation, emphasizing this is not a reduction in services but a strategy to manage growth responsibly.
- For FY27, the City is targeting an operating budget increase of approximately 4.8% to limit the property tax levy increase to no more than 7%.
- Departments have been asked to identify approximately 2% in efficiencies or savings, minimizing impacts on services.
- City leaders discussed efforts to:
 - Moderate capital spending and debt service growth
 - Review health insurance costs for efficiencies
 - Preserve long-term fiscal stability and flexibility
- Members highlighted the following topics:
 - Long-term budget sustainability
 - Constraints on increasing compensation and programming
 - Limitations of relying on free cash for ongoing expenses
 - The interconnected nature of school and city budgets
- City officials reiterated that while Cambridge remains comparatively well-resourced, not all priorities can be funded simultaneously, underscoring the need for careful prioritization and transparent decision-making.

7b. Presentation

The Superintendent and members of the administration will continue their presentations on student achievement data, focusing on the most recent data pertaining to the Science and Social Studies MCAS results. The administration will also brief and take questions from the School Committee regarding curriculum planning and development in these two content areas.

Mr. Murphy was joined by Dr. Francis, Ms. Amigone, Ms. Stang and Ms. DePamphilis and gave the following presentation that can be found on this [website](#).

Highlights of the discussion include:

- The Committee received a presentation on 2025 MCAS results for Grade 5 and Grade 8 Science, and the first administration of the Grade 8 Civics MCAS.
- Staff reviewed the purpose of MCAS assessments and noted that science and civics do not include a growth model due to non-consecutive testing years.
- Cambridge Public Schools performed above the state average in Grade 5 Science, Grade 8 Science, and Grade 8 Civics.
- Grade 5 Science results showed a significant year-over-year increase and represented the highest performance since comparable testing began in 2019.
- Grade 8 Science results placed the district above the state average during a period of statewide decline.
- Benchmarking data indicated Cambridge outperformed all DESE-identified comparable districts in combined Grade 5 and Grade 8 Science and in Grade 8 Civics.
- Staff acknowledged ongoing disparities in outcomes across student groups, consistent with trends in English language arts and mathematics.
- The presentation highlighted curriculum alignment work, common pacing guides, assessments, and professional learning as contributing factors to improved outcomes.
- A shift toward strengthening instructional practice and classroom implementation was discussed, along with ongoing curriculum review in upper school and high school science.

- Civics instruction was described as emphasizing civic knowledge, media literacy, student engagement, and project-based learning supported by district and community partnerships.
- Staff reviewed family MCAS reports and noted ongoing efforts to strengthen family understanding and engagement with assessment data.
- Members acknowledged areas of progress while expressing concern that overall outcomes remain below desired levels. They emphasized the need for clearer explanation of how data is used to inform instruction, greater consistency in instructional time for science and social studies, and stronger alignment between curriculum and classroom practice. Members requested future presentations include additional measures of student learning beyond MCAS, such as classroom-based assessments and project evaluations.
- The Superintendent and staff emphasized curriculum fidelity, instructional quality, educator support, and family engagement as key strategies moving forward.

7c. CPS District Plan: None

7d. Consent Agenda:

On a motion by Member Harding, seconded by Mayor Siddiqui, **#26-007, #26-008, #26-009, #26-010 and #26-011** were adopted on the following roll call vote: Member Hudson, YEA; Member Jaikumar, YEA; Mayor Siddiqui, YEA; Member de Paula Santos, YEA; Vice Chair Dube, YEA; Member Harding, YEA; Chair Weinstein, YEA

#26-007 Recommendation: Approval of Authorization for the Superintendent to Submit an Initial Compliance Certification to enter into a Feasibility Study/Schematic Design Agreement with the Massachusetts School Building Authority for the Replacement of the Cambridgeport School Building Roof and to Appropriate Funds for this Agreement be adopted as follows: That the City of Cambridge hereby appropriates the amount of one hundred thousand (\$100,000) Dollars for the purpose of paying feasibility study and schematic design costs related to a potential Accelerated Repair Project involving the roof replacement at the Cambridgeport School located at 89 Elm Street in Cambridge, MA, including the payment of all costs incidental or related thereto (the "Project"), which proposed repair project would materially extend the useful life of the school and preserve an asset that otherwise is capable of supporting the required educational program, and for which the City of Cambridge has applied for a grant from the Massachusetts School Building Authority (the "MSBA"), said amount to be expended under the direction of the School Committee of Cambridge Public Schools. To meet this appropriation, the City Council, with the approval of the City Manager, is authorized to appropriate from available funds said amount under M.G.L Chapter 44, or any other enabling authority. The City of Cambridge acknowledges that the MSBA's grant program is a non-entitlement, discretionary program based on need, as determined by the MSBA, and if the MSBA's Board of Directors votes to invite the City to collaborate with the MSBA on this proposed repair project, any project costs the City of Cambridge incurs in excess of any grant that may be approved by and received from the MSBA shall be the sole responsibility of the City of Cambridge.

#26-008 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 the attached list in amounts not to exceed the shown rates, having been approved by the Operational Services Division of the laws of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, funds to be provided from the general fund and/or grant fund budget.

	#	Amount
Day Program Tuition Contracts:	1	\$65,518.20
Residential Program Contracts:	1	\$125,473.60
45 Day Program Contracts:		
Total	2	\$190,991.80

#26-009 Recommendation: Contract Award: Cartwheel Health Services P.C.: Mental Health Service Amendment 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.

Cartwheel Health Services P.C., 625 Massachusetts Ave, 2nd Floor, Cambridge, MA for the period of July 1, 2025 to September 30, 2026 in the amended amount of \$128,150.00.

#26-010 Recommendation: Contract Award: WW Grainger: Facilities Equipment & Supplies 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.

WW Grainger, 100 Grainger Parkway Lake Forest, IL for the period of January 1, 2025 to December 31, 2026 in the amount of \$150,000.00.

#26-011 Recommendation: Contract Award: Pinnacle Rock Mechanical: On Call Equipment & Repair Service for CPS Food Services Department 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.

Pinnacle Rock Mechanical Services, LLC, 187 Union Street, Peterborough NH for the period of December 4, 2025 to December 3, 2026 in the amount of \$119,900.00.

8. Non-Consent Agenda

#26-012 Recommendation: Grant Award: FY26 Special Support Earmark (SC26865) be adopted as follows: that the School Committee accept and approve the grant award below in the amount and for the period indicated:

FY26 Special Support Earmark (SC26865) - State -Targeted in the amount of \$25,000.00 for the period of July 1, 2025 to June 30, 2026.

Chair Weinstein acknowledged Senator Sal DiDomenico for his continued support of visual and performing arts.

On a motion by Chair Weinstein, seconded by Member Harding, **#26-012** was adopted on the following roll call vote: Member Hudson, YEA; Member Jaikumar, YEA; Mayor Siddiqui, YEA; Member de Paula Santos, YEA; Vice Chair Dube, YEA; Member Harding, YEA; Chair Weinstein, YEA

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

#26-014 Public Comment – Member de Paula Santos, Member Harding, Member Hudson

WHEREAS: The School Committee seeks to make certain that all stakeholders feel empowered to express their opinions through public comment to the School Committee and the Superintendent within a reasonable time frame; and

WHEREAS: Meaningful public participation is a cornerstone of democratic governance and public trust, and the School Committee recognizes that urgent matters of public concern may arise which are not yet reflected on a published agenda but which fall squarely within the Committee's responsibility to oversee the district; and

WHEREAS: The Committee wishes to provide the Chair with flexibility to adjust public comment time based on the number of speakers and meeting constraints, while ensuring that any such adjustments are applied uniformly to all speakers; now therefore be it;

RESOLVED: That the School Committee amend Rule 4.2 (Public Comment) as follows:

1. Public comment shall be permitted on agenda items and on any matters within the jurisdiction and authority of the School Committee.
2. The default time allotted for public comment shall remain three (3) minutes per speaker.

3. When ten (10) or fewer speakers are signed up for public comment, the Chair may increase the time allotted per speaker to no more than five (5) minutes.
4. When the number of speakers or time constraints require, the Chair may reduce the time allotted per speaker to no less than two (2) minutes, consistent with current practice.
5. Any adjustment to the time allotted for public comment:
 - o Shall be announced at the start of the public comment period; and
 - o Shall apply uniformly to all speakers during that public comment period.
6. All other provisions of Rule 4.2 shall remain in full force and effect.

A discussion followed **#26-014**.

Member Hudson noted that many community members are interested in the topic and explained that there have been multiple proposed ideas related to meeting procedures. She indicated her intent to refer the motion to the Governance Subcommittee so potential changes could be discussed more holistically once other co-sponsors and members had an opportunity to weigh in. **Member Jaikumar** expressed strong support for the proposed change and supported referral to the Governance Subcommittee once it is constituted. He emphasized the importance of setting a report-out timeline so the referral is not perceived as delaying action, and noted that a subcommittee process could allow for broader public participation. **Mayor Siddiqui** supported referral to the Governance Subcommittee and suggested that the administration's existing data and recommendations could inform the discussion. She raised concerns about potential unintended consequences of broadly expanding public comment and the impact this could have on the Chair's role.

On a motion by Member Hudson seconded by Member Harding, **#26-014** was referred to the Governance Subcommittee on the roll call vote: Member Hudson, YEA; Member Jaikumar, YEA; Mayor Siddiqui, YEA; Member de Paula Santos, YEA; Vice Chair Dube, YEA; Member Harding, YEA; Chair Weinstein, YEA

11. Announcements:

- **Member Harding** thanked the City's Peace Commission, the Mayor, St. Paul AME Church, and others for the City's Martin Luther King Jr. event, describing it as inspiring and a strong reflection of the Cambridge community.
- **Member Jaikumar** highlighted the return of the CRLS Mock Trial Team. The community was invited to the final competition at Chelsea District Court.
- **Mr. Murphy** announced the community budget meeting scheduled for the following day,
- **Chair Weinstein** shared the CRLS Jazz Band performance on Thursday evening in the cafeteria.

12. Late Orders: None

13. Communications and Reports from City Officers:

On a motion by Member Jaikumar seconded by Member Harding, the meeting was adjourned on the following roll call vote: Member Hudson, YEA; Member Jaikumar, YEA; Mayor Siddiqui, YEA; Member de Paula Santos, YEA; Vice Chair Dube, YEA; Member Harding, YEA; Chair Weinstein, YEA (9:53 p.m.)

Email Communications: None

Attest:



Katherine Christo
Executive Secretary to the School Committee