

**MINUTES OF THE JOINT ROUNDTABLE/WORKING MEETING OF THE CITY  
COUNCIL AND THE SCHOOL COMMITTEE  
WEDNESDAY, MARCH 4, 2026**

**A Joint Roundtable/Working Meeting of the Cambridge City Council and the School Committee was held on Wednesday, March 4, 2026. The meeting was called to order at 4:00 p.m. by the Honorable Mayor Sumbul Siddiqui. Pursuant to Chapter 20 of the Acts of 2025 adopted by the Massachusetts General Assembly and approved by the Governor, this public meeting was remote via Zoom.**

**Mayor Siddiqui called the meeting to order and asked the Clerk of Committees to call the roll of both bodies.**

**City Council**

Councillor Al-Zubi – Present  
Vice Mayor Azeem – Absent\*  
Councillor Flaherty – Absent  
Councillor McGovern – Absent\*  
Councillor Nolan – Present  
Councillor Simmons – Present  
Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler – Present  
Councillor Zusy – Present  
Mayor Siddiqui – Present

**Present – 6, Absent – 3. Quorum established.**

\*Councillor McGovern was present at 4:05p.m.

\*Vice Mayor Azeem was present at 4:15p.m.

**School Committee**

Vice Chair Dube – Absent\*  
Member de Paula Santos – Absent\*  
Member Harding – Absent\*  
Member Hudson – Present  
Member Jaikumar – Present  
Member Siddiqui – Present  
Chair Weinstein – Present

**Present – 4, Absent – 3. Quorum established.**

\*Vice Chair Dube and Member de Paula Santos were present at 4:07p.m.

\*Member Harding was present at 4:11p.m.

Mayor Siddiqui offered opening remarks and noted that the Call of the meeting was to hold a joint Roundtable with the School Committee to discuss the FY27 Cambridge Public Schools budget priorities. Present at the meeting was Budget Director, Taha Jennings. Present from Cambridge Public Schools was Superintendent, David Murphy and Chief Financial Officer, Ivy Washington.

Mayor Siddiqui recognized Chair Weinstein and Superintendent Murphy for opening remarks.

Mayor Siddiqui recognized Superintendent Muphy and Ivy Washington who gave a presentation titled “FY2027 Proposed Budget Roundtable”. The presentation was provided in advance of the meeting and included in the Agenda Packet.

Mayor Siddiqui recognized Councillor Nolan who thanked Superintendent Murphy and CFO Washington for their presentation. Councillor Nolan raised concerns about the rise in facility and energy costs even though the City has invested in more efficient buildings. Councillor Nolan noted the importance of reducing out-of-district placements and asked if CPS is adopting practices from other districts that provide similar support at lower costs. Superintendent Murphy shared that CPS collaborates with other districts and applies practices when they are beneficial for Cambridge students. Superintendent Muphy noted that special education costs are increasing across all districts and stressed the importance of supporting students in-district when possible. He added that while buildings are more environmentally efficient, they are also more expensive to operate, with long-term costs still uncertain. Councillor Nolan shared concerns about costs being due to structural reasons and suggested that staffing may be a factor in higher spending. Councillor Nolan urged for more review for finding resource allocation and better efficiency.

Mayor Siddiqui recognized Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler who thanked staff for their presentation and asked why special education costs are rising, adding if it could be more students being identified to have more support or if there are higher costs due to services and technology. Superintendent Murphy explained that many factors contribute to the rising costs, such as economic pressures, and added that it is a national issue. Ivy Washington shared that added rising costs can be unpredictable, with some set by the state. Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler raised concerns about staff affordability with paraprofessionals and the high costs of living in Cambridge and asked if there have been ongoing conversations on how compensation is being addressed. Superintendent Murphy shared that CPS is currently in contract negotiations while also making investments in staff roles that have the most impact on students, their experiences, and their outcomes.

Mayor Siddiqui recognized Councillor Zusy who asked how many students are in out-of-district placements, including day and residential programs. Councillor Zusy also asked if school buildings are at capacity and if there should be discussions about closing schools if they are not. Superintendent Murphy shared that school buildings are not at capacity and pointed out how important it is to think strategically across the district about how programs are structured for students to succeed. Superintendent Murphy added that decisions about the number of schools is part of CPS’s broader planning process. Ivy Washington provided an update on student placement, sharing that the number of students is a total of 138, adding that they can vary year to year. Councillor Zusy asked if there would be the possibility of creating in district programs in the future. Superintendent Muphy emphasized that developing in district programs is not a new initiative and is something that is ongoing. Superintendent Muphy shared that CPS is always assessing student needs and looking for opportunities to provide support to students in district.

Mayor Siddiqui recognized Vice Mayor Azeem who asked for clarification on whether newer school buildings have higher maintenance costs than older buildings. Superintendent Murphy explained that while the newer buildings are environmentally efficient, they are more complex and can be expensive to maintain and repair, which increases costs. Superintendent Muphy added

that while these are beneficial long-term investments, they do affect the short-term as it relates to cost. Ivy Washington shared that because of maintenance and staffing needs that are required to maintain the newer buildings, it does play a role in higher operating costs. Vice Mayor Azeem asked if school enrollment has been impacted due to the lower birth rates during COVID. Superintendent Murphy shared that enrollment declined during the pandemic but has been more stable now, noting that it has not returned to the same number since pre-COVID. Superintendent Murphy shared what projections are for future enrollment, sharing that they should maintain stability or have a slight decline, with high living costs in Cambridge being a possible factor.

Mayor Siddiqui recognized Councillor McGovern who thanked the School Department and School Committee for all their work related to the budget, noting it's not an easy process. Councillor McGovern shared that out-of-district placements are necessary to meet the needs of specific needs of students, adding that Cambridge wants to prioritize what is best for the student. Councillor McGovern agreed that in district programs are beneficial for the students to feel connected to their community, but out-of-district placements can offer better support for some students. Councillor McGovern offered comments related to the importance of investing in district programs that will support student needs.

Mayor Siddiqui recognized Councillor Al-Zubi who thanked staff for their work and asked for more information related to the structure of staffing across the schools and asked how CPS is connecting the budget to successful student outcomes. Superintendent Murphy shared that staffing is based on school and student needs rather than an exact system, adding that Cambridge invests more in instructional support and interventionists compared to other school districts. Superintendent Muphy noted that CPS maintained certain staffing levels in a strategic way to support student needs. Superintendent Murphy shared that a well-funded school system can focus on using resources effectively for all students to provide positive experiences and outcomes that are consistent and effective. Councillor Al-Zubi emphasized the importance of the role paraprofessional and other staff have in supporting student learning, adding that housing and cost of living are both factors that impact the school system. Councillor Al-Zubi shared that she looks forward to having continued discussions to address those challenges and supporting students and families.

Mayor Siddiqui recognized Chair Weinstein who thanked Councillor Al-Zubi for her comments and emphasized the need for improving and coordinating student support beyond the school system. Chair Weinstein added that the success of students is also influenced by factors that are outside of school, such as social and community needs. Chair Weinstein spoke in strong support of having continued conversations with the City Council to discuss ongoing support for students and families.

Mayor Siddiqui recognized Councillor Nolan who shared concerns about how the school district evaluates program effectiveness, adding that there has been a high level of spending on professional development compared to other school districts. Councillor Nolan noted the importance of investing to improve classroom outcomes and asked how CPS will be monitoring and reviewing the success of programs going forward. Superintendent Murphy acknowledged the higher level of investment and agreed that the district needs to assess and evaluate programs to be accountable. Superintendent Murphy shared how programs should be measured and reviewed how efforts are aligned with the curriculum. Superintendent Murphy shared that CPS would continue to monitor programs and investments and that they are producing the expected student

outcomes. Councillor Nolan provided additional comments on the importance of evaluating programs and identifying what works and what does not work for best practices.

Mayor Siddiqui recognized Councillor Zusy who asked if investing more in one-on-one tutoring would be more effective than funding paraprofessionals. Councillor Zusy shared concerns raised by a community member related to standardized testing and how it may be limiting creativity and project-based learning in schools. Superintendent Murphy shared that CPS is investing in both paraprofessionals and tutoring, adding that it is important to align the right support to students. Superintendent Murphy shared that there have been positive results from tutoring partnerships because of coordination with the school's curriculum and identifying student needs. Superintendent Murphy noted that CPS does not see standardized testing and creativity as competing priorities and believes both can be achieved together. Councillor Zusy shared that having a strong balance between equity and creativity is important.

Mayor Siddiqui thanked everyone for attending.

**Mayor Siddiqui recognized Councillor Zusy who made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Clerk of Committees Erwin called the roll of both bodies.**

#### **City Council**

Councillor Al-Zubi – Yes

Vice Mayor Azeem – Yes

Councillor Flaherty – Absent

Councillor McGovern – Yes

Councillor Nolan – Yes

Councillor Simmons – Absent

Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler – Yes

Councillor Zusy – Yes

Mayor Simmons – Yes

**Yes – 7, No – 0, Absent – 2. Motion passed.**

#### **School Committee**

Vice Chair Dube – Absent

Member de Paula Santos – Yes

Member Harding – Absent

Member Hudson – Yes

Member Jaikumar – Yes

Member Siddiqui – Yes

Chair Weinstein – Yes

**Yes – 5, No – 0, Absent – 2. Motion passed.**

**The joint meeting the City Council and School Committee adjourned at approximately 5:33p.m.**



# City of Cambridge

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March 30, 2026

Minutes of the Joint Roundtable/Working Meeting of the Cambridge City Council and the School Committee was held on Wednesday, March 4, 2026.

In City Council March 30, 2026.  
Adopted by Affirmative Vote of Nine Members:-  
Attest:- Paula M. Crane, Interim City Clerk  
A true copy;

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Paula M. Crane".

ATTEST:-  
Paula M. Crane

Interim City Clerk