

**MINUTES OF THE CAMBRIDGE CITY COUNCIL
FINANCE COMMITTEE
Wednesday, May 6, 2026**

FINANCE COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Councillor Nolan, Co-Chair
Councillor Al-Zubi, Co-Chair
Vice Mayor Azeem
Councillor Flaherty
Councillor McGovern
Councillor Simmons
Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler
Councillor Zusy
Mayor Siddiqui

A public meeting of the Cambridge City Council’s Finance Committee was held on Wednesday, May 6, 2026. The meeting was Called to Order at 6:00 p.m. by the Co-Chair, Councillor Nolan. Pursuant to Chapter 20 of the Acts of 2025 adopted by Massachusetts General Assembly and approved by the Governor, this public meeting was hybrid, allowing participation in person, in the Sullivan Chamber, 2nd Floor, City Hall, 795 Massachusetts Avenue, Cambridge, MA and by remote participation via Zoom.

At the request of the Co-Chair, Interim City Clerk Crane called the roll.

Councillor Al-Zubi – Present/In Sullivan Chamber
Vice Mayor Azeem – Present/In Sullivan Chamber
Councillor Flaherty – Present/In Sullivan Chamber
Councillor McGovern – Present/In Sullivan Chamber
Councillor Nolan – Present/In Sullivan Chamber
Councillor Simmons – Absent*
Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler – Present/Remote
Councillor Zusy – Present/In Sullivan Chamber
Mayor Siddiqui – Present/In Sullivan Chamber

Present – 8, Absent – 1. Quorum established.

*Councillor Simmons was present in the Sullivan Chamber at 6:19p.m.

Co-Chair Nolan offered opening remarks and noted that the Call of the meeting was to discuss the School budget covering the fiscal period July 1, 2026 to June 30, 2027. Present from Cambridge Public Schools was Superintendent David Murphy and Chief Financial Officer, Ivy Washington. Present from the School Committee were School Committee Chair, David Weinstein and Vice Chair Caitlin Dube. Member Elizabeth Hudson and Member Arjun Jaikumar were present via Zoom.

Co-Chair Nolan recognized Chair Weinstein and Mayor Siddiqui, who serve as Co-Chairs for the School Committee’s Budget Committee, for opening remarks.

Co-Chair Nolan recognized Superintendent Murphy for opening remarks. Superintendent Murphy and Ivy Washington gave a presentation titled “FY27 Budget Submission”. The presentation was provided in advance of the meeting and included in the Agenda Packet.

Co-Chair Nolan recognized Councillor Flaherty who asked how the budget will help ensure third grade students are reading at grade level and how students who move on to higher grades will continue to get reading support if they are behind. Superintendent Murphy shared how important it is that students read at or above grade level throughout their school years, noting that CPS does very well in some areas versus others, and support will continue for those who need it. Ivy Washington added that the budget also includes literacy coaching at the elementary level. Chair Weinstein shared that CPS has invested in a more consistent reading curriculum across schools. Councillor Flaherty emphasized that students need support right away and he encouraged more investment in professional development, so teachers have the tools and support they need to help students succeed.

Co-Chair Nolan recognized Councillor Simmons who asked for more information on the Student Success Plan and what needs to be done for staff to help put the plan in place. Superintendent Muphy reviewed the Success Plan, noting that the pilot started at the Rindge Ave Upper School and that CPS is still reviewing how they would want to implement it with their work towards a larger strategic plan. Superintendent Muphy added that they have tried different approaches at different schools and grade levels, with the pilot helping to create a clearer system and plan. Chair Weinstein provided information related to staff and added that it is not a large new cost at this stage of planning. Chair Weinstein noted that the work that is being done now is using existing structures and giving educators more support for the work they are already doing. Councillor Simmons shared that she wished the plan was further along. Ivy Washington provided additional information on how the plan reflects the proposed budget, noting that the Wayfinder software is not considered an extra cost.

Co-Chair Nolan recognized Councillor McGovern who thanked the School Committee and CPS staff for their work on the budget. Councillor McGovern noted that the 4.7% increase was smaller than past school budget increases, and that increases usually reflect salaries and health insurance. Councillor McGovern emphasized how Cambridge continues to fund programs and services that other communities are making cuts to, but more information related to per-pupil spending would be beneficial for the City Council and residents. Councillor McGovern echoed comments related to supporting students who struggle with reading. Councillor McGovern highlighted the efforts being made towards mental health and social and emotional support, adding how important that support is for students to be successful in school. Councillor McGovern asked for more information related to the FTE reduction and short-term therapeutic classrooms. Superintendent Murphy explained that the reduction was connected to the vacancies and staffing changes after the Kennedy Longfellow School closed and that the classrooms are a tool that is being used to help students transition back into school with support after they have had an interruption in their education.

Co-Chair Nolan recognized Councillor Zusy who pointed out that the Baldwin School is very desirable among residents and questioned how all schools can be as successful. Superintendent Murphy highlighted that the Baldwin School has strong educators and leadership, which has created a positive environment for students to succeed. Councillor Zusy offered comments related to maintaining high academic standards across all schools and mindfulness being

included within mental health support. Ivy Washington explained that mindfulness practices are already included in the Wayfinder social-emotional learning curriculum from preschool through fifth grade, and that social workers and therapists also use mindfulness in individual and group sessions.

Co-Chair Nolan recognized Vice Mayor Azeem who asked if CPS believes the School Department budget is expected to continue to grow and increase faster than the overall City budget within the next years. Superintendent Murphy noted that is not a question he has a direct answer to but emphasized that CPS will continue to advocate for the funding that is needed to continue to serve students. Superintendent Muphy added that the budget growth over the last years was unusual and that the district needs to be focused on spending money wisely and improving practices, so the investment leads to better student outcomes. Vice Mayor Azeem asked if MCAS scores will improve as the budget grows. Superintendent Murphy shared that the district has made progress, especially in grades 3 through 8 in math, and emphasized the need to keep improving professional learning and accountability so student results continue to improve.

Co-Chair Nolan recognized Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler who thanked the School Committee for naming Pre-K as a priority because it aligns with the City Council future budget priorities around Pre-K and afterschool programs. Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler shared he looks forward to having a continued partnership with the School Committee on those programs. Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler noted the importance of paraprofessional salaries, especially in financially uncertain times. Superintendent Murphy shared that CPS is currently in contract negotiations for new collective bargaining agreements but agreed that paraprofessionals and other educational support staff should be compensated fairly.

Co-Chair Nolan recognized Co-Chair Al-Zubi who thanked the team for their work and highlighted how important education is. Co-Chair Al-Zubi asked for more information related to the staffing changes at the Fletcher Maynard. Superintendent Murphy explained how enrollment changes were a factor with staffing changes. Ivy Washington added that elementary staffing changes reflect enrollment shifts and special education staffing across schools. Co-Chair Al-Zubi asked for an update related to staffing in the Office of Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging. Superintendent Murphy explained how CPS is trying to connect equity work better with school-based work and reduce management level positions. Co-Chair Al-Zubi shared concerns about roles shifting within Office of Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging.

Co-Chair Nolan had questions related to the drop in enrollment from grades 5 to 6 and if exit surveys are conducted to better understand why families are leaving. Superintendent Murphy agreed with comments made by the Co-Chair and pointed out that the goal should be to build school communities where students and families want to stay and others want to join. Superintendent Murphy added that an exit survey is something worth considering. Co-Chair Nolan asked how CPS is reviewing cost effectiveness when there are still achievement gaps. Superintendent Murphy pointed out that it is less about needing more money, but more about better execution, adding that the district needs stronger professional learning, better instructional practice, consistent curriculum use, educator effectiveness, and family engagement, and by investing in those it will help lead the district to stronger student outcomes. Councillor Simmons shared strong support for comments made by Co-Chair Nolan.

Co-Chair Nolan recognized Councillor Flaherty who asked for clarification related to student-staff ratios, which Ivy Washington reviewed.

Co-Chair Nolan asked whether curriculum funding was increased for immersion programs because those schools need materials and professional development in more than one language. Ivy Washington said the cost is more than double in some cases, especially for dual immersion, special education, SEI, and ESL classrooms. Co-Chair Nolan also asked about the investment in making sure all eighth graders can take algebra. Superintendent Murphy shared all eighth graders are now taking algebra concepts, supported by staffing, interventionists, coaches, and special education staff, but the district will need to watch the data closely to make sure students are prepared and supported.

Co-Chair Nolan recognized Councillor McGovern who moved to forward the School Department FY27 proposed budget to the full City Council with a favorable recommendation.

Co-Chair Nolan recognized Co-Chair Al-Zubi and Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler for discussion on the motion. Co-Chair Al-Zubi and Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler shared that they would not be supporting the proposed budget.

Co-Chair Nolan recognized Councillor McGovern who disagreed with Co-Chair Al-Zubi and Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler for not supporting the budget. Councillor McGovern pointed out that the School Committee is an elected body, and creating the school budget is one of its main responsibilities, adding that they understand the schools' needs better than the City Council does. Councillor Simmons agreed with Councillor McGovern.

Co-Chair Nolan recognized Councillor McGovern who moved to forward the School Department FY27 proposed budget to the full City Council with a favorable recommendation.

Interim City Clerk Crane called the roll.

Councillor Al-Zubi – No

Vice Mayor Azeem – Absent

Councillor Flaherty – Yes

Councillor McGovern – Yes

Councillor Nolan – Yes

Councillor Simmons – Yes

Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler – No

Councillor Zusy – Yes

Mayor Siddiqui – Yes

Yes – 6, No – 2, Absent – 1. Motion passed.

Co-Chair Nolan recognized Councillor Simmons who made a motion to adjourn the meeting.

Interim City Clerk Crane called the roll.

Councillor Al-Zubi – Yes

Vice Mayor Azeem – Absent

Councillor Flaherty – Yes

Councillor McGovern – Yes

Councillor Nolan – Yes

Councillor Simmons – Yes

Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler – Yes
Councillor Zusy – Yes
Mayor Siddiqui – Yes
Yes – 8, No – 0, Absent – 1. Motion passed.

The Finance Committee adjourned at approximately 8:16p.m.

Attachment A – Questions from Committee members.

Clerk’s Note: The City of Cambridge/22 City View records every City Council meeting and every City Council Committee meeting. The video for this meeting can be viewed at:
[May 06, 2026 Finance Committee - Cambridge, MA](#)

In City Council June 1, 2026.
Adopted by Affirmative
Vote of Eight Members:-
Attest:- Paula M. Crane, Interim City Clerk
A true copy;

ATTEST:-



Paula M. Crane
Interim City Clerk

Crane, Paula

From: Nolan, Patricia
Sent: Wednesday, May 6, 2026 12:21 AM
To: David Murphy; Ivy Washington
Cc: Crane, Paula; Hayes, Patrick
Subject: Budget questions CPS

Supt Murphy and CFO Washington:

I look forward to seeing you at the budget hearing. Below are my questions - which will likely not surprise you, since they are consistent with how I approach the CPS budget as a councillor.

- Patty

School Dept. – May 6, 2026

The district continues to see a drop-off in enrollment from grades 5-6, (the largest attrition of any level) and than a large jump UP from grades 8-9. That fact that our middle schools are not seen as delivering a quality education. Have we continue to do exit surveys so we know if that will change in the future as we improve? It would have a potentially significant impact on the budget if we did not lose students in the middle grades, since our upper schools are configured for the 100 students /grade/school and are already stretched.

With more than \$40,000 per student, which is almost double the state average, what areas are being examined for greater cost effectiveness and use of budget dollars, for example the district still appear to be spending far more on professional development than other districts, yet the results suggest that investment is not delivering.

With less than one-third of low income and AfAmer students meeting standards in both ELA and Math, how are budget allocation changing to reach the goals of greater proficiency?

Is the budget fully aligned with the goal and expectation that the district will meet students needs - catch up those who need extra support, and provide appropriate education for advanced learners?

How have programs been evaluated and outcomes measured and included in budget adjustments?

What is the status of the investment made in ensuring all 8th graders have the opportunity to successfully complete algebra?

--
Patricia Nolan
Cambridge City Council
She/her/hers
Co-Chair, Finance
Chair, Health & Environment
Vice-Chair, NLC University Communities Council

Sign up for my council newsletters by emailing my aide or [follow this link](#)

Aide: Patrick Hayes
He/him/his
phayes@cambridgema.gov

Crane, Paula

From: Catherine Zusy <cathzusy@gmail.com>
Sent: Monday, May 4, 2026 10:46 PM
To: Siddiqui, Sumbul; Nolan, Patricia; aa-zubi@cambridgema.gov
Cc: Sandoval, Natalie; Crane, Paula
Subject: Cathie's CPS questions

How much does the City receive per students with Chapter 70? I thought we got \$150 per students... (p. 6 & 7)

Does it cost \$8m or \$20m for out of district placements for 100 students? (p. 8 & 18) Maybe you're saying that Federal grants cover the \$12m?

How many Cambridge students are on the spectrum, requiring 57 SCALE paraprofessionals? (p. 9)

Enhanced data systems: What does this entail? Goals? Current expenditure: \$3,541. Additional in FY27: \$201k? (p. 21)

Do we know if the CRLS students are using the MBTA passes costing \$500k? (p. 15) (MIT negotiated passes for its staff where they only pay for rides taken. Is that what we do as well?)

Why didn't we reduce staff further with K-Low closing—1 less school-- and new comer enrollment down? (p. 25) We let go overall 5 teachers and 10 paraprofessionals. Very few administrative positions have been reduced as well. I know staff reductions are painful, but won't this be necessary going forward?

About 21% of our students are noted as having disabilities. (p. 32) Overall, in the US, the average is 15-17% of our students. Why is our % higher?

I understand that the Baldwin has added an extra kindergarten and 5th grade class, requiring the art room to move to the basement and eliminating an afterschool space. How can the City make other schools more desirable so that the Baldwin isn't so crowded and space constrained?

Crane, Paula

From: Simmons, Denise
Sent: Wednesday, May 6, 2026 2:00 PM
To: Nolan, Patricia; Al-Zubi, Ayah; David Murphy
Cc: Crane, Paula; Alpert, Neal
Subject: Questions For Tonight's Budget Hearing

Dear Chairs Nolan and Al-Zubi and Superintendent Murphy,

I am writing to request more information regarding the Student Success Plan. Specifically, I have a few questions regarding the implementation and staff requirements:

- Does the Student Success Plan require any prior training for its implementation?
 - If training is required, what is the associated cost?
 - How are current staff members expected to be involved in this process?
 - How are the current staff identifying the needs and how are the current staff involved in the implementation of the program and what cost associated with the plan and implementation plan?
- Lastly how are you quantifying the result to determine the monetary cost effectiveness of the program

Thank you for your time and for providing these details.

Best regards,

Denise Simmons