

**LEXINGTON SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING**  
**Thursday, January 22, 2026**  
**Meeting Minutes**

**AGENDA:**

**CALL TO ORDER AND WELCOME: 8:00 AM**

**SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT**

Eileen Jay, Chairperson

Kathleen Lenihan

Sarah Carter

Sara Cuthbertson and Larry Freeman did not attend this meeting.

**SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS PRESENT**

Dr. Julie Hackett, Superintendent

Dr. Chris Scully, Assistant Superintendent for Finance and Operations

The minutes were taken by Julie Kaye, School Committee Meeting Recording Secretary.

The School Committee convened remotely. Members of the public can view and participate in the meeting webinar from their computer or tablet by clicking on the link provided with the meeting agenda. Please note that this meeting is being recorded, and attendees are participating via video conference. This evening's meeting is being broadcast live and also taped by LexMedia for future on-demand viewing. All supporting materials that have been provided to members of this body are available on the Town's website unless otherwise noted.

**PUBLIC HEARING**

Presentation: Superintendent's FY 2027 Recommended Budget

Full Budget Book: LPS FY 2027 Recommended Budget

Dr. Scully presented a brief overview presentation of the LPS FY 2027 budget, highlights from the report include:

**FY27 Revenue Allocation**

- Strategic goals were reviewed to reaffirm alignment of the budget with student needs.
- The FY 2027 budget timeline was reviewed, including the upcoming Town "White Book" draft budget; potential additional revenue was noted.
- Town projected FY 2027 revenue is approximately \$321 million, with \$7 million in new revenue; 74% allocated to schools, resulting in a \$5.2 million increase for LPS.
- The proposed FY 2027 budget reflects a 3.56% increase, one of the smallest increases in the past decade.
- The FY 2027 requested budget totals \$151.2 million: \$131.5 million for salaries and

wages and \$19.7 million for expenses.

- Expense growth is primarily driven by transportation and out-of-district tuition costs.

#### LPS Measures for Balanced Budget

- Budget balancing measures include a reduction of 14.5 FTE from current staffing levels and a total reduction of 42 FTE since approval of the FY 2026 budget.
- The proposed FY 2027 staffing level is 1,213 FTE.
- Additional measures include use of Circuit Breaker funding, implementation of line-item budgeting, and exploration of future fee adjustments.
- Federal, State, and private grant funding continues to support district programs.
- Comparative data shows controlled spending growth relative to peer districts.
- The presentation concluded with a reaffirmation of the district's commitment to providing a high-quality education.

Dr. Hackett added that the Town reported that projected health insurance costs are lower than anticipated, with the increase revised from approximately 15% to 9%. As a result, the revenue allocation model may be updated, potentially increasing the school department's allocation. The Town may recommend that one-time funds previously included in the 3.6% increase not be used, with further discussion expected at the Town Summit.

#### **PUBLIC COMMENTS**

Dawn McKenna - 9 Hancock St: Ms. McKenna noted that the presentation was excellent and it addressed several of her outstanding questions. She emphasized Lexington's commitment to educational excellence and the importance of considering the budget within that context. It was suggested that the Town, municipal departments, and schools each clearly articulate their funding priorities to support transparency and informed decision-making. Ms. McKenna noted the availability of reserves, including free cash, and encouraged thoughtful use when operating resources are insufficient, while recognizing that schools face mandates not applicable to the municipal side. The importance of maintaining a unified "one town" approach to budgeting was reiterated. She also commented on the value of clarifying LEF grant funding, improving public notice of budget hearings, and recognizing the long-term impact of staff reductions on institutional knowledge and relationships.

Mona Roy - 36 Bertwell Rd: Ms. Roy expressed appreciation for the presentation and thanked staff for their careful and responsible approach during challenging financial conditions. She emphasized the importance of communicating the rigor and thoughtful planning behind the budget to the public, highlighted the value of retaining teachers whenever possible, and acknowledged the hard work of Dr. Scully and his team.

Dawn McKenna - 9 Hancock St: Ms. McKenna added that the presentation was well done and emphasized the need for clear, well-publicized public outreach to build community understanding and support for the budget. She suggested additional public hearings at varied times and formats. She also noted the importance of explaining the impact of staff reductions,

and reaffirmed that school staff are central to the district's success.

School Committee Questions/Comments:

Ms. Carter asked how many of the 14.5 projected staff reductions are based on enrollment and the needs identified by school leaders. Dr. Scully responded that almost all of the 14.5 projected FTE reductions fall into two main categories. Most are based on enrollment changes, particularly in special education programs, where a drop in student numbers allows for staffing reductions. The other major category involves support personnel at schools, where staffing ratios are adjusted based on enrollment and contractual guidelines. These two areas account for about 12–13 of the 14.5 FTEs. The remaining reductions are more targeted and will be determined in the spring as enrollment numbers are finalized. Dr. Hackett explained that the projected 20–30 FTE reductions are linked to the use of one-time funds, including Circuit Breaker funding and unallocated positions. Reducing reliance on one-time funds allows for more sustainable budgeting, but also increases the number of required staff reductions. She noted that if these reductions are enacted, the total FTE count would fall below 1,200, down from the current 1,213. Dr. Hackett also highlighted that rising costs, such as health insurance and transportation, impact both school and municipal budgets. She praised Dr. Scully and staff for their work on the budget, encouraged the use of freed-up revenue and free cash to support the budget, and noted that the current 3.56% increase falls short of the original 4.6% request, leaving a remaining funding gap of approximately \$1.5 million.

**PUBLIC COMMENT CONTINUED**

Dawn McKenna - 9 Hancock St: Ms. McKenna asked for the amount of funds that are in the circuit breaker line item.

- Dr. Scully explained that Circuit Breaker funding is received from the State over multiple years and is used the following year. For FY 2025, we will receive \$7.9 million, with just over \$3 million included in this year's budget and about \$4 million available for next year. For FY 2027, projected funding is \$7.3 million, with roughly \$4.4 million usable. It acts like one-time funding, giving flexibility but requiring careful planning.
- Ms. McKenna noted that the detailed explanation of Circuit Breaker funding is important for the public to understand. She emphasized that in challenging years careful planning is needed, while in years with more funding the district can rebuild reserves, and suggested including this explanation in the next budget hearing for clarity.

School Committee Questions/Comments:

Ms. Jay asked for clarification regarding the FTE reductions, noting public confusion about the 42 FTE figure. She understood that the budget includes a 14.5 FTE reduction for next year and asked how the potential additional 20–30 FTE reductions were determined and when those numbers would be revisited. Dr. Hackett explained that a frequently asked questions document is being prepared, which will address the timeline and details for potential FTE reductions. She indicated that answers are expected by the end of March. The next steps include working with administrators to identify potential reductions and communicating them clearly to staff as part of the reduction-in-force process. Dr. Hackett emphasized that even with additional funding, this

process is necessary to reduce reliance on circuit breaker funds, maintain a cushion for unallocated positions, and prepare for contract negotiations. She reassured staff that, due to normal turnover of 40–50 positions annually, individuals affected by reductions may be able to transition to other openings, though no guarantees can be made.

Ms. Jay also asked about the Legal Services line item. She noticed that the FY27 amount is lower than in previous years. Ms. Jay would like to know if the ongoing contract negotiations and an ongoing lawsuit might cause legal costs to be higher than projected. Dr. Hackett replied that higher legal costs are a definite possibility. While some legal services are covered through the town's insurer, contract negotiations typically lead to increased expenses beyond what is budgeted for school-based legal counsel. Dr. Scully added that some legal costs, particularly from contract negotiations, are likely to occur in the second half of the current FY2026 fiscal year. A mid-year financial report will track this and all accounts and spending will be monitored closely, and adjustments will be considered as needed.

Dr. Hackett added that several budget line items, including legal services and substitutes, may not fully reflect actual spending from previous years. Adjustments can be made if the committee wishes, but changes would require offsetting funds elsewhere. Highlighting areas where the budget may not be realistic could help the community better understand the process and funding needs. Ms. Jay then asked if we are seeing a sustained need for substitutes and if there is a way to track and manage that. Dr. Hackett followed up with a statement about how our generous benefits around parental leave, sick bank, and things like that are impacting substitutes. Dr. Scully explained that the substitute line has fluctuated over the past several years, especially following the pandemic, due to higher absences for various reasons. Currently, the line is being closely tracked through payroll, and while January and February typically see higher usage, the spending so far is on target. He noted that next year's budget may allocate more to this line, but there is some flexibility to adjust if needed. Monitoring this line is an ongoing focus to understand spending patterns throughout the year. Dr. Hackett noted that staff are using more of their allotted leave than in the past. Younger employees and post-pandemic attitudes mean people value time off for personal and family needs. This affects the budget because more leave is being taken. Ms. Jay asked how the substitute line item compares to previous years, Dr. Scully replied that it is significantly higher.

## **ADJOURNMENT**

**Ms. Lenihan made a motion to adjourn at 9:00 AM, Ms. Carter seconded. Ms. Jay took a roll call vote, passed 3-0.**