CAMBRIDGE SCHOOL COMMITTEE

(Official Minutes)

Regular Meeting **October 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: Vice Chair Dube, Member Harding, Member Hudson, Member Jaikumar, Mayor Siddiqui Member de Paula Santos, Chair Weinstein

Others Present: Jennifer Amigone, Director of Data, Assessment, and Accountability; Dr. Heather Francis, Chief Academic Officer; Student Member Imogene Goode; David Murphy, Superintendent of Schools; Student Member Maia Shen

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: Mayor Siddiqui, PRESENT; Member de Paula Santos, PRESENT; Vice Chair Dube, PRESENT; Member Harding, ABSENT; Member Hudson, PRESENT; Member Jaikumar, PRESENT; Chair Weinstein, PRESENT

Member Harding arrived at 6:30 p.m.

1. Public Comment
The following individuals were heard:

- Lio Caravan, Prentiss Street, **#26-229,** urged the committee to allow parent-excused sick absences, stating that the current attendance policy pressures students to attend school while ill and puts chronically ill and disabled students at greater risk and described barriers to obtaining medical documentation and having treatment appointments excused.
- Jasper Caravan, Prentiss Street, **#26-229,** stated that requiring separate doctor's notes for recurring absences related to the same illness creates unnecessary barriers and pressures students to attend school while sick and noted inconsistent treatment of reported absences and called for a simpler, clearer policy.
- Fred Fantini, **Superintendent's Update & Presentation**, expressed support for the Amigos School moving to East Cambridge but requested the Kennedy name remain prominent in the school's naming and suggested providing proximity points for East Cambridge families and maintaining community access for local events at the new site.
- William Taub, Clinton Street, **#26-229,** expressed that the current attendance policy forces sick students to attend school to avoid losing academic credit and noted that unlike districts like Somerville, the current policy lacks flexibility for parents to excuse absences without a doctor's note.
- Johanna Homan, School District, **Superintendent's Update & Presentation,** emphasized that the expansion of Amigos should prioritize accessibility for students with IEPs.
- Susan Diller, Mass Ave, **Superintendent's Update & Presentation,** advocated for early science learning through hands-on garden experiences that connect students to nature and culture.

- Marco Curnen, Assistant Principal of the Amigos School, **Superintendent's Update & Presentation,** voiced enthusiastic support for the move to 158 Spring Street, noting it offers better facilities for arts, creativity, and staff potential.
- Anurag Bhargava, Bellis Circle, **#26-229,** stated that the "no credit" policy creates a public health hazard by encouraging symptomatic students to attend class.
- Hannah Lee, Hamilton, **#26-229,** shared that the requirement for a doctor's note is a significant barrier for students living with host families.
- Chris Montero, Warren Road, **#26-230,** urged the committee to ensure the expansion is sustainable and aligns with the expertise of current educators and encouraged the committee to involve student representatives when discussing the impact of social media platforms like Instagram on student life.
- Jess Goetz, Pemberton Street, **Superintendent's Presentation & #26-230,** questioned how MCAS data is utilized to assess student needs and whether it is used punitively or constructively for teachers and advised the committee to find realistic communication replacements if social media use by clubs and athletics is restricted.

On a motion by Mayor Siddiqui seconded by Vice Chair Dube, public comment was closed on a voice vote.

2. Student School Committee Report:

Student Members Maia Shen and Imogene Goode gave the following update:

Athletics Updates
- CRLS Crew (Head of the Charles Regatta):
  - The Boys 1V boat finished 11th overall, achieving the highest finish in CRLS history for the boys' team.
  - Three of the four other competing boats successfully re-qualified for next year's race.
- Football:
  - The annual Thanksgiving football game will be held at Fenway Park on November 24th at 5:00 PM.
- Boys Soccer:
  - Currently ranked 2nd in the state, the highest ranking in program history.

Student Activities & School Events
- Senior Picture Day: Held last Wednesday and Thursday with assigned time slots for senior portraits.
- Falcon Pride Day: Student government is actively planning events, including a talent show, games and the student/staff basketball game

Academic & Senior Updates
- College Applications:
  - The initial October 15th deadline has passed, with many seniors submitting their first round of applications.
  - Current focus is on finalizing essays and application details for upcoming Early Action (EA) and Early Decision (ED) deadlines on November 1st.

3. Presentation of the Records for Approval:

- October 6, Regular Meeting
- October 13, Special Meeting

On a motion by Mayor Siddiqui, seconded by Member Harding the records were accepted as presented on a voice vote.

4. Reconsiderations: None

5. Unfinished Business/Calendar: None

6. Awaiting Reports: None

7a. Superintendent's Update

The Superintendent will present to the school committee on various matters pertaining to the Cambridge Public Schools.

The Superintendent's update will include a request that the Cambridge School Committee approve the Superintendent's recommendation that the Amigos School move its physical location from 15 Upton Street to the building that formerly housed the Kennedy-Longfellow School located at 158 Spring Street in East Cambridge effective the start of the 2028 - 2029 school year as presented at the special meeting of the Cambridge School Committee held on October 15, 2026.

Superintendent Murphy gave the following update which can be found on this website.

Superintendent Murphy formally recommended relocating the Amigos School from 15 Upton Street to 158 Spring Street, effective at the start of the 2028–2029 school year. He noted the following benefits:

- The relocation offers district-wide operational advantages, programmatic flexibility, and expanded capacity for the Amigos School.
- East Cambridge Community: Capitalizes on the investments by the City of Cambridge in the campus/building and addresses the high school-age/CPS student population in East Cambridge.
- Admissions Policy: Recommendation to eventually incorporate proximity points into the school's admissions policy to reflect added capacity and serve the East Cambridge neighborhood.

On a motion by Chair Weinstein, seconded to Vice Chair Dube to approve the Superintendent's recommendation to move the Amigos School from 15 Upton Street to 158 Spring Street effective at the start of the 2028–2029 school year was adopted on the following roll call vote: Mayor Siddiqui, YEA; Member de Paula Santos, YEA; Vice Chair Dube, YEA; Member Harding, YEA; Member Hudson, YEA; Member Jaikumar, YEA; Chair Weinstein, YEA

7b. Presentation

The Superintendent and the Director of Data, Research & Accountability will present to the committee an overview of the district's recent accountability data as released by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts in late September. The presentation will include a report on the Math and Science MCAS achievement and growth data, including year over year comparisons and the district's data contrasted against state averages. The presentation will encompass various efforts underway or under consideration for the purpose of continuously improving the educational experiences of all students.

Superintendent Murphy, Dr. Francis and Ms. Amigone shared the following presentation which can be found on this website.

Presentation Highlights

- Recognition of the Martin Luther King, Jr. School
  - The King School was highlighted in the *Boston Globe* and ranked at the very top of *U.S. News & World Report's* elementary school rankings (just two years after receiving a Blue Ribbon School award from the U.S. Department of Education).
  - Special praise was given to King School's high-need students who are excelling well beyond peers in other districts.
- General Highlights Across Disciplines:
  - The district continues to outperform the state in every grade and subject, often by significant margins.

  - Cambridge Public Schools is one of 37 districts across the state to return to pre-pandemic (2019) levels in math for the second consecutive year.
  - All schools are achieving above the state average in ELA and math.
- Persistent Challenges: Ongoing achievement gaps remain for specific demographic groups, and statewide declines were noted in high school ELA and science, as well as grade 5 science.
- Grades 3–8 Math Performance:
  - In 2017, the district was 1 point away from the state average; currently, a 16-point gap separates the district from the state average due to overall district growth.
  - Achievement has exceeded pre-COVID levels, with every grade level now above 2019 benchmarks.
- Growth Metrics: Grade 8 demonstrated high growth for three consecutive years (and a 5-year trend of high growth overall). Grade 6 growth has also improved from historically low levels to average/solid growth.
- Math Acceleration Impact (Grades 6–8):
  - Sixth-grade proficiency increased significantly from 42% in 2024 to 55% in 2026 (a 13-percentage-point increase).
  - Grades 7 and 8 show early, encouraging gains, though leadership noted a need to evaluate ongoing supports closely.
- Four-Part K–8 Math Strategy:
  1. High-quality, consistent curriculum from kindergarten up through high school.
  2. Upper-school acceleration and expanded challenging math pathways.
  3. Strategic use of assessment data to drive interventions and enrichment.
  4. Centering equity, access, and high expectations for all students.

  High School Math & Departmental Focus
- Grade 10 Math & High School Performance:
  - Grade 10 math saw a 5-point increase in the most recent year, contrasting positively with statewide trends.
  - All student groups achieved high or near-high growth.
- Instructional Strategies:
  - Implementation of complex instruction (emphasizing collaborative problem-solving, active student participation, and the belief that all students bring mathematical strengths).
  - Common planning time and alignment on priority standards among educators.
  - Expansion of advanced math access through the "Move Up for All" initiative (resulting in all students in the cohort completing Honors Algebra 1 and Honors Geometry by the end of 10th grade).
- Leadership highlighted that while meaningful progress has been made disparities remain when disaggregating demographic data (notably regarding low-income students and African American/Black students).

7c. CPS District Plan: None

7d. Consent Agenda:

On a motion by Member Jaikumar, seconded by Member Hudson **#26-223, #26-224** and **#26-226** were adopted on the following roll call vote: Mayor Siddiqui, YEA; Member de Paula Santos, YEA; Vice Chair Dube, YEA; Member Harding, YEA; Member Hudson, YEA; Member Jaikumar, YEA; Chair Weinstein, YEA

#26-223 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	$93,955.86
Residential Program Tuition Contracts		
45 Day Program Contracts:		
Total	1	$93,955.86

#26-224 Recommendation: Contract Award: Shore Educational Collaborative 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.

Shore Educational Collaborative, 11 Revere Beach Parkway, Chelsea, MA for the period of July 1, 2026 to June 30, 2027 in the amount of $40,000.00.

#26-226 Recommendation: Contract Award: Cambridge Housing Authority 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.

Cambridge School Volunteers, 459 Broadway, Cambridge, MA, for the period of July 1, 2026 to June 30, 2027 in the amount of $246,365.00.

8. Non-Consent Agenda

#26-225 Recommendation: Contract Award: Breakthrough Greater Boston c/o CRLS 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.

Breakthrough Greater Boston c/o CRLS, 459 Broadway, Cambridge, MA for the period of September 1, 2026 to June 30, 2027 in the amount of $96,910.00.

A brief discussion followed **#26-225**.

Member Harding asked about the current status and district investment in Breakthrough asking about student participation following its expansion to Breakthrough Greater Boston. Superintendent Murphy shared that 160 students participated over the summer and 250 took part throughout the school year, noting that all existing data point to a meaningful, positive impact.

On a motion by Member Harding, seconded by Mayor Siddiqui **#26-225** was adopted on the following roll call vote: Mayor Siddiqui, YEA; Member de Paula Santos, YEA; Vice Chair Dube, YEA; Member Harding, YEA; Member Hudson, YEA; Member Jaikumar, YEA; Chair Weinstein, YEA

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

#26-227 Communications and Community Relations Subcommittee Report – October 5, 2026

#26-228 Buildings and Grounds Subcommittee Report – October 8, 2026

On a motion by Mayor Siddiqui, seconded by Member Jaikumar **#26-227** and **#26-228** were adopted on the following roll call vote: Mayor Siddiqui, YEA; Member de Paula Santos, YEA; Vice Chair Dube, YEA; Member Harding, YEA; Member Hudson, YEA; Member Jaikumar, YEA; Chair Weinstein, YEA

#26-229 Attendance Policy & Illness - Member Jaikumar, Vice Chair Dube & **Member de Paula Santos**

WHEREAS: On September 2, 2025, the School Committee unanimously voted to amend the District's Student Attendance Policy, to combat chronic absenteeism in the Cambridge Public Schools; and
WHEREAS: The revised Policy states that a student's absence from school because of "personal illness or quarantine" will be considered excused so long as "supporting documentation is provided,"; and

WHEREAS: The revised Policy does not require such supporting documentation to be from a physician or health care provider; and
WHEREAS: In the event of chronic or irregular absences, district policy permits — but does not require – a principal to "request a physician's statement certifying such absences to be justifiable"; and
WHEREAS: The 2026-27 Cambridge Rindge and Latin School ("CRLS") Student Handbook does not include any provision stating that absences because of personal illness or quarantine may be excused with supporting documentation, irrespective of whether that documentation is from a caregiver or from a physician or healthcare provider; and
WHEREAS: Under CRLS's Attendance and No Credit policies and individual course grading systems, accumulation of too many Reported or Unexcused absences may affect a student's grade or result in a student receiving no credit for a course; and
WHEREAS: Financial and physical barriers to healthcare often create inequitable and disparate access to physicians and medical care among the CRLS student population; and
WHEREAS: Students with certain illnesses, particularly communicable or infectious diseases such as COVID-19, are often discouraged from seeing doctors so as to avoid further infection; and
WHEREAS: Certain students have chronic illnesses which can force them to miss school semi-regularly, rather than having a transient illness where they will miss days consecutively, and as such getting a doctor's note is not always possible for them; and
WHEREAS: Students may be incentivized to attend school while sick to avoid academic penalties, further endangering the rest of a school community, especially students with chronic illnesses, who are already particularly vulnerable; and
WHEREAS: The School Committee is committed to addressing the issue of chronic absenteeism without endangering the student population or exacerbating existing inequities; now therefore be it
RESOLVED: That the Superintendent shall instruct building leadership that a student's absence because of personal illness or quarantine may be counted as an excused absence if a caregiver provides the school with supporting documentation in a timely manner, and that such documentation need not be from a physician; and be it further
RESOLVED: That this policy be effective as of the passage of this Motion; and be it further
RESOLVED: That the change in policy applies retroactively to the beginning of the CRLS 2026-2027 school year; and be it further
RESOLVED: Nothing in this Motion shall be interpreted to amend or alter the district's Student Attendance Policy as amended on September 2, 2025.

A lengthy discussion followed **#26-229.**

Committee members, students, and administrators discussed confusion surrounding the high school's attendance and illness policies, particularly concerns that students felt forced to come to school sick due to strict rules and a perceived requirement for doctor's notes. Committee members questioned whether the issue stemmed from district policy or poor building-level implementation and communication. Motion makers noted discrepancies between district guidelines and the CRLS handbook regarding absences, tardiness, and appeals. Superintendent Murphy clarified that district policy does not require a doctor's note for an absence to be excused, acknowledging that some staff incorrectly communicated this expectation. He emphasized that the policy aims to balance flexibility with addressing high chronic absenteeism rates. **Member Hudson** highlighted the importance of maintaining accountability standards to combat chronic absenteeism and ensure students actually receive instructional time.

On a motion by Vice Chair Dube, seconded by Member Harding moved to refer **#26-229** to the Superintendent with a report back no later than the December 1 Regular Meeting on the following roll call: Mayor Siddiqui, YEA; Member de Paula Santos, YEA; Vice Chair Dube, YEA; Member Harding, YEA; Member Hudson, YEA; Member Jaikumar, YEA; Chair Weinstein, YEA; Non-Binding Student Votes Student Member Goode: YEA; Student Member Shen: YEA

#26-230 Social Media Use by CRLS Clubs and Athletics – Vice Chair Dube

WHEREAS: Instagram and other social media platforms present concerns related to student privacy, online safety, social comparison, and adolescent mental health; and

WHEREAS: School-sponsored clubs, athletic teams, and extracurricular activities should communicate with students and families through district-approved platforms that do not require students to maintain social media accounts to access information or participate fully; now therefore be it
RESOLVED: That the School Committee request that the Superintendent establish and implement a policy prohibiting all Cambridge Rindge and Latin School (CRLS) athletic teams, clubs, and school-sponsored extracurricular organizations from maintaining or operating official Instagram or other social media accounts; effective no later than July 1, 2027; and be it further
RESOLVED: That the Superintendent ensure that all affected organizations have access to district-approved communication platforms for sharing announcements, schedules, events, and other information with students, families, and the school community; and be it further
RESOLVED: That the Superintendent investigate the feasibility of developing or adopting an in-house, district-managed social media platform that would allow CRLS students, clubs, athletic teams, and extracurricular organizations to share information, celebrate achievements, and build community in a safe, accessible, and age-appropriate digital environment, with consideration of student privacy, moderation, accessibility, implementation costs, and ongoing maintenance; and be it further
RESOLVED: That the Superintendent report back to the School Committee within 90 days with findings, recommendations, and a proposed implementation timeline, including opportunities for student participation in the design and evaluation of alternative platforms.

A lengthy discussion followed **#26-230.**

Vice Chair Dube highlighted that many families avoid commercial social media due to safety and privacy concerns. A custom platform would serve as a positive STEM project, ensure equitable access to club/sports announcements, and potentially offer a safer environment. **Member Hudson** expressed doubts, calling the idea a distraction and putting unnecessary work onto district staff instead of focusing on core academic achievement. Student members noted that existing communication tools (e.g., Google Classroom, email) already reach students who avoid social media. They also raised questions regarding whether existing club accounts would be banned and whether a new platform was actually needed.

On a motion by Vice Chair Dube, seconded by Member Harding moved to refer **#26-230** to the Superintendent on the following roll call: Mayor Siddiqui, NAY; Member de Paula Santos, YEA; Vice Chair Dube, YEA; Member Harding, NAY; Member Hudson, NAY; Member Jaikumar, YEA; Chair Weinstein, YEA; Non-Binding Student Votes Student Member Goode, NAY; Student Member Shen:, NAY

10. Resolutions: None

11. Announcements:

- **Member Harding** commented the City staff for organizing the annual Domestic Violence Vigil in honor of Domestic Violence Awareness Month, emphasizing unity against gender-based violence.
- **Mayor Siddiqui** shared participating in the coin toss alongside the Mayor of Somerville for an upcoming high school game at Fenway.
- **Vice Chair Dube** called attention to the CRLS Varsity Girls Soccer Senior Night at the upcoming match.
- **Chair Weinstein** shared several upcoming CRLS Visual & Performing Arts events.

12. Late Orders: None

13. Communications and Reports from City Officers: None

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

Email Communications:

- ✓ Susan Johansen
- ✓ Joseph Rose
- ✓ Nate Emerton
- ✓ Christina Lively
- ✓ Jodi Ekelchik

Attest:



Katherine Christo
Executive Secretary to the School Committee