



**Melrose School Committee**  
Regular Meeting

Tuesday, March 24, 2026, 7:00 PM  
562 Main Street, Melrose, MA 02176  
Council Chamber, First Floor, Melrose City Hall

**MINUTES**

**1. CALL TO ORDER/PLEDGE**

<b>Attendee Name</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Status</b>	<b>Arrived</b>
Margaret Raymond Driscoll	Member	Present	
Mayor Grigoraitis	Mayor	Present	
Matt Hartman	Vice Chair	Present	
Melissa Holleran	Member	Present	
Seamus Kelley	Chair	Present	
Sheri Leo	Member	Present	
Jen Razi-Thomas	Member	Present	
Cari Berman	Interim Superintendent	Present	

Also in attendance: Interim Deputy Superintendent, Ken Kelley, and Recording Secretary, Kristen O'Connor. With a roll call vote with seven (7) present, the meeting convened at 7:00 PM.

A motion was made to change the order of the agenda and move the Report of the Student Representatives first on the agenda.

<b>MOTION:</b>	To move the Report of the Student Representatives as the first item on the agenda.
<b>RESULT:</b>	<b>ACCEPTED [UNANIMOUS]</b>
<b>MOVER:</b>	Margaret Raymond Driscoll
<b>SECONDER:</b>	Melissa Holleran
<b>AYES:</b>	Jennifer Razi-Thomas, Jennifer Grigoraitis, Seamus Kelley, Margaret Raymond Driscoll, Matt Hartman, Melissa Holleran, Sheri Leo

**2. REPORT OF THE STUDENT REPRESENTATIVES**

MHS senior Teagan Altman provided recent updates including: MCAS testing at the high school and the adjusted schedule, internships starting on April 6th, students finishing up on non-AP classwork, and National Honors Society applications due for sophomores and juniors.

**3. PUBLIC COMMENT**

Without objection, the Chair opened Public Comment.

**Ani Breay**, a Melrose teacher and parent, listed her years of involvement in the community and in Melrose Public Schools. She discussed the passing of the override and feels the city is reprioritizing the needs of the teachers and also feels that voters passed the override to see Melrose teachers paid more fairly. She also discussed the challenges teachers face today, the lack of finding qualified candidates and asked for a contract that reflects their dedication and respects their work.

**Kerri Pegoraro**, Melrose paraprofessional, parent and member of the negotiation team spoke to the override which she voted for because it was necessary, with the belief that a large portion would be given to the schools to be well-supported in the future, and wonders whether the city intends to follow through with their campaign promise. She discussed teachers on the top of the step scale being stuck, school administrative assistants being underpaid and overworked, and paraprofessionals being underpaid and not having holidays or vacations.

**Nicole Goodhue**, teacher at Horace Mann came again to discuss her concerns. She discussed the year teachers took a zero, the time she spent canvassing neighborhoods for the override, and said the city sends the message that the teachers' growth and professionalism are not valued, and that students deserve better.

**Emily Resigno**, teacher at Horace Mann, is concerned about the future of the district. She expressed that when we underinvest in the teachers, we underinvest in the students, and she urged the Committee and the Mayor to fight for a larger share of the budget and fully fund the schools.

**Christine Hyatt**, Melrose educator for 25 years, shared her experience as a new educator years ago having a mentor and the proper essential support. She expressed that now they are getting more children and less help and there is no benefit to staying an educator in Melrose. She feels that teachers are undervalued, and the district won't be able to obtain quality educators if we continue on this path. She finished by saying that Melrose needs to do better for our schools, it's what students and families deserve.

**Heather Ruppel**, special education teacher at Franklin, is new to the area. She discussed her years of moving around and having experienced school systems in other states, chose to stay in MA because of it's high standards and reputation for education. She continued by sharing that Massachusetts is more expensive compared to other parts of the country, but the salary is lower in Melrose. She also discussed how the district has high expectations for its staff, and asked what the District will do to help staff afford to meet those expectations.

**Chris Mahoney**, Melrose parent came to discuss the proposal to eliminate the 3:30 pick-up from Ed Stations. He expressed that this would not bring in the money people think, how it's a small group that need this pick-up time. The change for his family would cost nearly \$400 a month for one child, and they have two children. He asked for other options, such as rolling the 3:30 kids in with the 5:30 staff and having an earlier pick-up.

**Jennifer Mazzei**, Melrose teacher for over 20 years, is happy the override passed, and expressed how proud she is of all her colleagues who step up every day to meet the needs of all their students. She talked about the PDPs they earn while only moving over one salary lane, how discouraging it is to see a 2% raise for teachers, how the expectations of teaching have grown with social emotional learning, class size and personalized learning, and a 2% increase

does not keep pace with the cost of living or reflect the scope of the work they do.

**Leslie Means**, teacher and president of the Melrose Educators Union discussed how the teachers who came to show support would rather not be here, but rather be communicating with families or focusing on their students. She discussed how teachers want to trust that the District will provide the funding to settle a fair contract and ensure that the students will have the learning experience they deserve, but they feel when that trust is uncertain they need to speak up. She ended by asking the Committee to do their job, so the teachers could do theirs.

**Jean Bernard**, parent of two children at the Horace Mann, came to talk about the possible elimination of the 3:30 pick-up at Ed Stations. She expressed her research and noted that there are other districts that offer tiered pick up options. She felt there was no discussion of the financial impact of this change on families who utilize this pick-up, and the increase would triple her family's cost for this, and this change should not be taken lightly.

Without objection, the Chair closed Public Comment.

#### 4. ANNOUNCEMENTS OF THE SUPERINTENDENT

##### 1. Updates: Registration

Superintendent Berman provided updates on registration for the 2026-2027 school year, noting that Pre-K enrollment has reached 217 students, an increase of two since the last report. Kindergarten registration currently stands at 225 students, noting there are 250 students enrolled in the current year's classes, and shared that the registration pace remains on par with the previous year's trends.

Superintendent Berman announced the conclusion of the three budget listening sessions, which gathered feedback both in person and electronically. All families and staff received the presentation slides and supporting information, and the Superintendent noted that the survey remains open until tomorrow.

#### 5. CONSENT AGENDA

Mr. Hartman requested that the meeting minutes for March 10, 2026 be removed. They will be moved to the Announcements of the Chair. All other Consent Agenda items were approved as presented.

<b>MOTION:</b>	To approve the Consent Agenda
<b>RESULT:</b>	<b>ACCEPTED [UNANIMOUS]</b>
<b>MOVER:</b>	Matt Hartman
<b>SECONDER:</b>	Jennifer Razi-Thomas
<b>AYES:</b>	Jennifer Razi-Thomas, Jennifer Grigoraitis, Seamus Kelley, Margaret Raymond Driscoll, Matt Hartman, Melissa Holleran, Sheri Leo

##### 1. Warrants

FY26 School - [S26069](#) - \$395,584.19

FY26 Refunds - [S26070](#) - \$729.95  
 FY26 March Debit Card #2 [S26071](#) - \$1,242.00

2. Regular Meeting Minutes: March 10, 2026
3. Cafeteria Report

**6. SUBCOMMITTEES (COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE)**

1. Finance and Facilities - Margaret Driscoll/Melissa Holleran
- A Vote: Monthly Budget Summary/Grants

Interim Deputy Superintendent Kelley shared the grants report from the packet and offered to answer any questions.

<b>MOTION:</b>	To approve the Grants Report
<b>RESULT:</b>	<b>ACCEPTED [UNANIMOUS]</b>
<b>MOVER:</b>	Sheri Leo
<b>SECONDER:</b>	Matt Hartman
<b>AYES:</b>	Jennifer Razi-Thomas, Jennifer Grigoraitis, Seamus Kelley, Margaret Raymond Driscoll, Matt Hartman, Melissa Holleran, Sheri Leo

- B Report: Special Education Expense Update

Interim Deputy Superintendent Kelley presented the Special Education Expense Update, followed by a discussion on new DESE monitoring requirements for out-of-district placements. Superintendent Berman explained that these annual mandates now require more in-depth observations and data collection, prompting the district to engage a consultant to ensure compliance and proper student placement. The Committee also discussed when students arrive mid year, the significance of the April 1st deadline, and the challenges of planning for variables like transportation, budget planning for the students we know and allocating funding for those that may be coming to the district.

- C Vote: FY27 Fees

Interim Deputy Superintendent Kelley provided a recap from the last meeting regarding fee structures for the Ed Stations and Franklin programs, along with secondary-level extracurricular fees. He clarified that the proposal to adjust Ed Stations pick-up time from 3:30 PM to 5:30 PM is driven by logistical and staffing challenges rather than budgetary goals. Mr. Kelley explained the early time program is increasingly difficult to staff, often requiring the Director to provide direct coverage.

Ms. Driscoll suggested that the Committee look at each of the fees separately for discussion and potential votes starting first with Ed Stations.

Discussion included: delaying the vote on Ed Stations fees, families affected by this change, whether there are scholarships or fee waivers for families experiencing hardship, procedural timeline (noting that March is the month fees are considered) as the Business

Office needs to start implementing those fees for FY27, and what authority the School Committee has regarding programming and fees.

<b>MOTION:</b>	To delay the discussion of Ed Stations FY27 proposed tuition until the next meeting
<b>RESULT:</b>	<b>ACCEPTED [UNANIMOUS]</b>
<b>MOVER:</b>	Jennifer Razi-Thomas
<b>SECONDER:</b>	Matt Hartman
<b>AYES:</b>	Jennifer Razi-Thomas, Jennifer Grigoraitis, Seamus Kelley, Margaret Raymond Driscoll, Matt Hartman, Melissa Holleran, Sheri Leo

Ms. Driscoll announced that the Committee would circle back to the fees discussion after the presentation of the Budget Book.

**D Discussion: FY27 Budget**

Superintendent Berman and Interim Deputy Superintendent Kelley presented the FY27 Budget Book, noting a structural shift this year toward a more data/numbers- centered format with a streamlined narrative. Mr. Kelley explained that the new layout is aligned with the DESE series.

During the presentation, Mr. Kelley emphasized that while the past two years were defined by reductions in staffing and services, the FY27 budget marks a transition toward stabilization. With additional revenue available, the district is now focused on strategic opportunities, specifically restoring positions and the alignment of fiscal resources with the district’s strategic plan. The [accompanying slides](#) provided a comparative analysis of budget categories and appropriations from FY24 through FY27, while also outlining the core priorities and objectives for the upcoming fiscal year.

Discussion included: the intention to lower class sizes at the elementary level, the proposed restoration of the team model for the sixth and seventh grades, a review of the proposal to consolidate the middle school and high school budget categories, an analysis of rising out-of-district and transportation costs, while noting that the number of out-of-district students has remained consistent over several years, the associated tuition costs have increased significantly, creating an impact on the FY27 projections.

**E Vote: FY27 Fees**

Interim Deputy Superintendent Kelley reviewed the MHS and secondary participation fees, proposing no increases for the upcoming year following last year’s 10% adjustment. The single exception was a proposal to reduce the fee for boys and girls hockey back to the FY25 level of \$650 per student, which was supported by Principal Merrill and Director Stephen Fogarty. Discussion included: the increase in financial support requests, the creation of an advisory committee to study extracurricular costs, and the data supporting the reduction of hockey fees.

<b>MOTION:</b>	To accept the fees proposed for FY27 except to keep the hockey fees at \$715
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<b>RESULT:</b>	<b>FAILED</b>
<b>MOVER:</b>	Seamus Kelley
<b>SECONDER:</b>	Jennifer Razi-Thomas
<b>AYES:</b>	Jennifer Razi-Thomas, Seamus Kelley, Margaret Raymond Driscoll
<b>NAYS:</b>	Jennifer Grigoraitis, Melissa Holleran, Matt Hartman
<b>ABSTAIN:</b>	Sheri Leo

<b>MOTION:</b>	To adopt the secondary fees recommendation for FY27
<b>RESULT:</b>	<b>PASSED</b>
<b>MOVER:</b>	Seamus Kelley
<b>SECONDER:</b>	Melissa Holleran
<b>AYES:</b>	Jennifer Grigoraitis, Seamus Kelley, Matt Hartman, Melissa Holleran, Sheri Leo
<b>NAYS:</b>	Jennifer Razi-Thomas, Margaret Raymond Driscoll

Interim Deputy Superintendent Kelley presented the proposed FY27 tuition and program options for Franklin, as originally presented by Principal LaCau during the previous meeting. The proposal recommends a 4% increase to account for rising costs, staff salary adjustments, and projected enrollment. Discussion included whether delaying the vote on Ed Station fees would negatively affect families enrolling in the Franklin program and whether to postpone the final vote until the Ed Stations fee structure is determined.

<b>MOTION:</b>	To approve the recommended 4% Franklin tuition increase for FY27
<b>RESULT:</b>	<b>PASSED</b>
<b>MOVER:</b>	Seamus Kelley
<b>SECONDER:</b>	Sheri Leo
<b>AYES:</b>	Margaret Raymond Driscoll, Jennifer Grigoraitis, Matt Hartman, Melissa Holleran, Seamus Kelley, Sheri Leo, Jennifer Razi-Thomas

*(Jen Razi-Thomas left at 9:55 PM)*

2. Policy and Planning - Matt Hartman/Margaret Driscoll

A Discussion: Strategic Plan Update

Superintendent Berman [shared slides](#) while presenting the strategic plan created in 2023, noting her role in its development and her belief in its continued relevance. She reviewed the district's current goals —academic excellence, equity, global engagement, professional culture, and finance—while emphasizing their role in current decision-making. To move forward, she proposed extending the plan by one year, integrating the global engagement goal into the remaining categories, and aligning school improvement plans for a progress review this fall.

Discussion included: looking at what the district has accomplished in terms of the goals and having the extension to think more about the process and resources, and potentially reviewing again after budget season.

3. Educational Programs and Personnel - Jen Razi-Thomas/Sheri Leo

## 7. ANNOUNCEMENTS OF THE CHAIR

Chair Kelley presented the regular meeting minutes from March 10th as they were removed from the Consent Agenda.

<b>MOTION:</b>	To approve the regular meeting minutes of March 10, 2026
<b>RESULT:</b>	<b>ACCEPTED</b>
<b>MOVER:</b>	Sheri Leo
<b>SECONDER:</b>	Melissa Holleran
<b>AYES:</b>	Seamus Kelley, Margaret Raymond Driscoll, Melissa Holleran, Sheri Leo
<b>ABSENT:</b>	Jen Razi-Thomas
<b>ABSTAIN:</b>	Jennifer Grigoraitis, Matt Hartman

1. Report: Rolling Agenda

Chair Kelley will continue to look at the rolling agenda for future meetings.

2. Report: Outreach

Mayor Grigoraitis spoke to the House passing a supplemental budget which will be for renovations to the Hoover All -Purpose Room which was identified in the Capital Improvement Plan, AV equipment to be replaced in the Horace Mann All- Purpose Room, and a traffic study of the Lincoln School area.

Ms. Holleran spoke to the next office hours for the community at La QChara on Saturday March 28th. Ms. Driscoll mentioned the Capital Improvement Plan, the wonderful committee that had great discussions about the community, and she noted that the plan is posted on the city website. Ms. Leo spoke to the Lincoln traffic study as City Council members and School Committee members have been spending time there observing safe routes to school, and she also noted that tomorrow is Crossing Guard Appreciation Day.

Chair Kelley noted the need for an additional meeting given there were some missed meetings.

<b>MOTION:</b>	To add an additional School Committee meeting on April 7th at 7:00 PM
<b>RESULT:</b>	<b>ACCEPTED</b>
<b>MOVER:</b>	Margaret Raymond Driscoll
<b>SECONDER:</b>	Melissa Holleran

<b>AYES:</b>	Jennifer Grigoraitis, Seamus Kelley, Margaret Raymond Driscoll, Matt Hartman, Melissa Holleran, Sheri Leo
<b>ABSENT:</b>	Jen Razi-Thomas

**8. ADJOURN**

<b>MOTION:</b>	To adjourn
<b>RESULT:</b>	<b>ACCEPTED</b>
<b>MOVER:</b>	Matt Hartman
<b>SECONDER:</b>	Sheri Leo
<b>AYES:</b>	Jennifer Grigoraitis, Seamus Kelley, Margaret Raymond Driscoll, Matt Hartman, Melissa Holleran, Sheri Leo
<b>ABSENT:</b>	Jen Razi-Thomas

The meeting adjourned at 9:12 PM.

# School Committee Meeting

March 24, 2026

## FY27 Budget Book Highlights



Cari Berman, Interim Superintendent  
&  
Ken Kelley, Interim Deputy Superintendent

# M

# FY27

Shifting from “reduction thinking”  
to “strategic opportunity thinking.”



Reduction  
Thinking



Strategic  
Opportunity  
Thinking





# MPS Teaching and Learning FY26 to FY27

## MPS OPERATING BUDGET SC CATEGORIES

	FY26		
	FY26 ORIGINAL	SUPPLEMENTAL	FY27 PROPOSED
Franklin/ECC	\$2,122,157.16	\$2,219,157.16	\$2,395,997.27
Elementary	\$16,030,818.54	\$16,686,818.54	\$17,929,824.86
MVMMS	\$7,774,386.49	\$8,307,386.49	\$18,669,164.15*
MHS	\$8,554,988.37	\$8,917,988.37	
Athletics/EC	\$1,009,766.03	\$1,009,766.03	\$1,029,961.35
Teaching and Learning	\$728,761.05	\$2,198,261.05	\$1,106,917.36
Special Education	\$9,052,011.56	\$9,052,011.56	\$9,754,101.55
Administration/DW	\$2,674,985.81	\$3,375,285.81	\$3,051,033.46
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$47,947,875.00</b>	<b>\$51,766,675.00</b>	<b>\$53,937,000.00</b>
<b>Increase FY26 to FY27</b>		<b>\$3,818,800.00</b>	<b>\$5,989,125.00</b>

\*SECONDARY

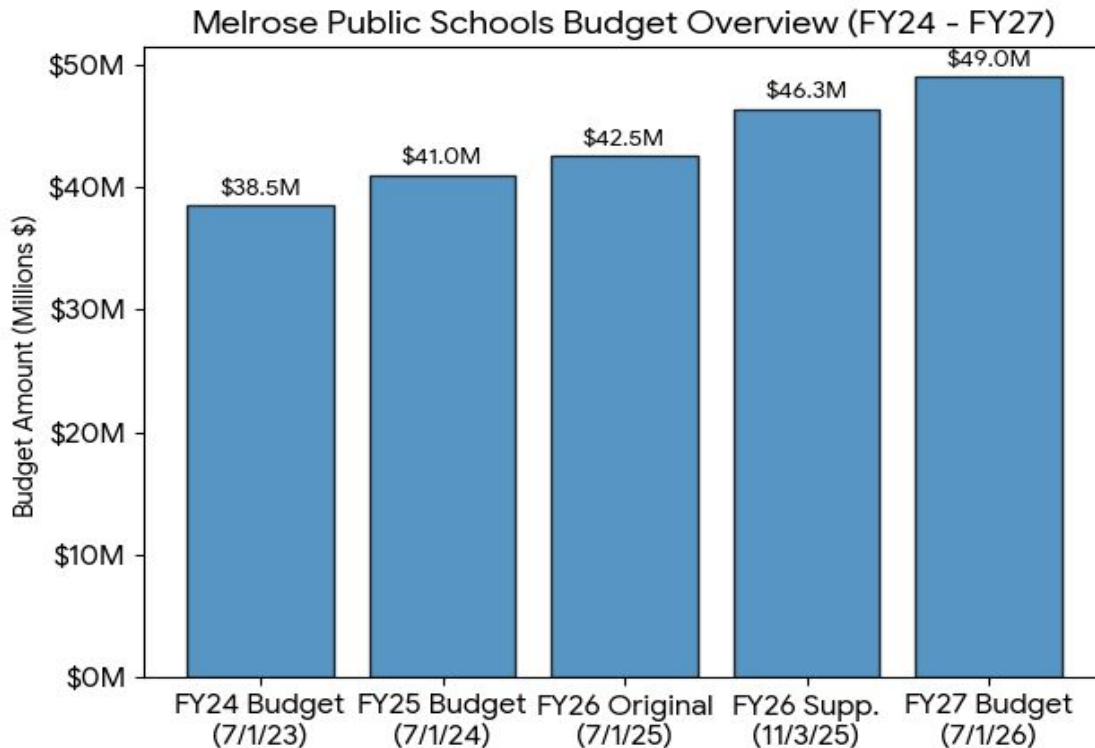


# Local Appropriation FY24 - FY27

7/1/23	FY24 Budget	\$38,511,659	
7/1/24	FY25 Budget	\$41,000,000	6.5% increase
7/1/25	FY26 Original Budget	\$42,523,875	3.7% increase
11/3/25	FY26 Supplemental Budget	\$46,342,675	9% increase
7/1/26	<i>FY27 Budget</i>	<i>\$49,000,000</i>	<i>27.2% overall increase from FY24</i>



# Local Appropriation



## Key Priorities for FY 27



### **MVMMS Team Model:**

Reestablishing the team model in grades 6 and 7 to support social-emotional and academic transitions.



### **Class Size:**

Prioritizing staffing resources to keep class sizes low.



### **Capacity Building:**

Increasing our capacity for research based curriculum and ensuring access to high quality quality materials to continue to develop and support educators.



### **Intervention:**

Increasing focus on core subjects and Tier 2 intervention at the Elementary Schools and the Middle School.



### **Compliance:**

Maintaining a primary focus on federal and state special education laws and contractual obligations.



### **Contract Negotiations:**

Negotiate a mutually beneficial agreement with the MEU (teachers, paraprofessionals, and secretaries) that provides market-competitive compensation and a benefits package while maintaining the city's long-term fiscal health.



# Our Strategic Framework

Our FY27 planning is guided by the MPS Strategic Plan, ensuring every student graduates as an engaged, challenged, and self-directed learner.

All budgetary decisions are filtered through these five core pillars:

## #1 Academic Knowledge and Skills



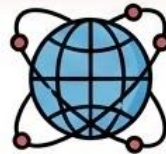
Ensuring rigorous, high-quality instruction.

## #2 Personalized and Equitable Opportunities



Meeting individual student needs and removing barriers.

## #3 Global Engagement



Preparing students for a connected world.

## #4 Professional Culture



Investing in our staff through support and competitive contracts.

## #5 Finance and Operations



Practicing responsible stewardship of all resources.

## FY27: The Year of Stabilization

**Primary Goal:** Rebuilding with fiscal responsibility and data-driven research in order to stabilize spending in our schools.

### Structural Breakdown:



#### Variable Costs

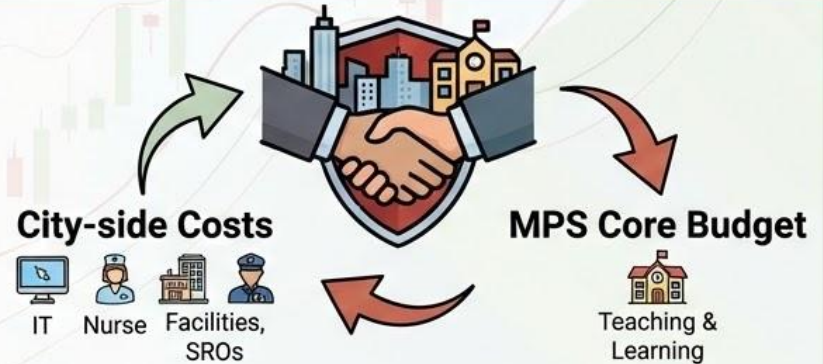
Supplies, materials, and infrastructure.

>92%

#### Fixed Costs

Salaries and mandated services.

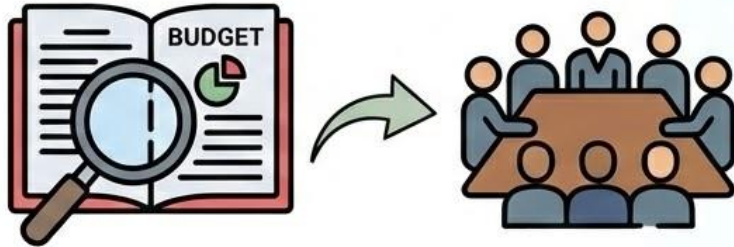
### Collaborative Success:



**City-side costs** (IT, Nurses, Facilities, SROs) are stabilized to ensure that the core MPS budget remains focused on its primary mission of Teaching and Learning.

## The Path Forward (Items in Motion)

### Transparency:



- Detailed line-item budget published in March.
- School Committee deliberation and approval.
- Referral to City Council in April.

### Variables:



- Accounting for three pending Collective Bargaining Agreements (CBAs).
- Awaiting Governor's Chapter 70 budget figures.

# Key Takeaways and Next Steps

## Key Takeaways



Restores - 17 FTEs, class sizes, team model at MVMMS.  
*the supplemental budget restored to FY25 service levels*



Melrose received minimal CH70 increase



City contribution increased almost 9% in FY26

## Next Steps



Monitor the current FY27 MA state budget in the legislature



Deliberate and send approved FY27 budget to City Council in April

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MPS



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# **School Committee Meeting**

March 24, 2026

## **Strategic Plan Next Steps**



Cari Berman, Interim Superintendent



## Our Current **Strategic Plan** 2023 - 2026



#1 Academic Knowledge and Skills



#2 Personalized and Equitable Opportunities



#3 Global Engagement



#4 Professional Culture



#5 Finance and Operations

[Executive Summary](#) and [Implementation Guide](#)

# M Proposed Next Steps

- Extend this plan by at least one year.
- Remove goal #3 and embed it into the other four goal areas.
- Assess where the district is based on this current plan, and create next steps for school year 26-27.
- An extension will support the continued development of the school improvement plans, which will be presented in the coming months for the 26-27 school year.
- Bring this document back to the school committee in the fall for an explanation of what we have achieved and areas of focus.

