



FINANCE COMMITTEE

COMMITTEE MEETING

~ MINUTES ~

Wednesday, May 11, 2022

6:00 PM

Sullivan Chamber
795 Massachusetts Avenue
Cambridge, MA 02139

Finance Committee will meet to conduct hearing on FY 2023 school budget

Attendee Name	Present	Absent	Late	Arrived
Dennis J. Carlone	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Patricia Nolan	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Burhan Azeem	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Alanna Mallon	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Marc C. McGovern	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Sumbul Siddiqui	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
E. Denise Simmons	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	6:30 PM
Quinton Zondervan	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

A communication transmitted from Louis A. DePasquale, City Manager, relative to the FY2023 submitted budget and appropriation orders. REFERRED TO THE FINANCE COMMITTEE IN COUNCIL MAY 2, 2022

A communication was received from the School Department, transmitting a presentation from the Finance Committee meeting on May 11, 2022.

Minutes Acceptance: Minutes of May 11, 2022 6:00 PM (Committee Reports)



CAMBRIDGE CITY COUNCIL FINANCE COMMITTEE

COUNCILLOR PATRICIA M. NOLAN, CHAIR

COMMITTEE MEETING

TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS

MAY 11, 2022

6:00 PM, SULLIVAN CHAMBER

Minutes Acceptance: Minutes of May 11, 2022 6:00 PM (Committee Reports)

COUNCILLOR PATRICIA M. NOLAN: The time of the meeting having arrived, I call this meeting of the Finance Committee of the Cambridge City Council to order. The call of the meeting is to conduct a hearing on the FY 2023 School Department budget.

Pursuant to chapter 20 of the Acts of 2021, adopted by Massachusetts General Assembly and approved by the Governor, the city is authorized to use remote participation at meetings of the Cambridge City Council. To watch the meeting, please tune into Channel 22 or visit the open meeting portal on the city's website.

Today's meeting will be conducted in a hybrid format. If you would like to provide public comment, please go to www.cambridgema.gov/publiccomment, all one word to sign up. We will not be in allowing any additional public comment sign up after 6:30 p.m. With that I welcome all of you here. All of today's votes will be by roll call, Clerk Wilson, if you could take a roll call of the members present.

City Clerk Anthony Wilson called the roll:

Councillor Burhan Azeem - Present

Councillor Dennis J. Carlone - Present

Vice Mayor Alanna M. Mallon - Present

Councillor Marc C. McGovern Present

Mayor Sumbul Siddiqui - Present

Councillor E. Denis Simmons - Absent

Councillor Paul F. Toner - Present

Councillor Quinton Y. Zondervan - Present

Councillor Patricia M. Nolan - Present

Present-8, Absent-1. Quorum established.

COUNCILLOR PATRICIA M. NOLAN: Thank you, Clerk Wilson. We do have just one speaker signed up for public comment. Is that correct?

CITY CLERK ANTHONY WILSON: That is correct. I however, I do not see that speaker's name in the Zoom.

COUNCILLOR PATRICIA M. NOLAN: Okay, then we will keep public comment open and move on to--I would like to turn over the meeting to Mayor Siddiqui, Chair of the School Committee.

MAYOR SUMBUL SIDDIQUI: Thank you, Madam Chair. Um, Hi everyone, it's great to be here. I have a few brief opening remarks and then I will toss it to one

of my colleagues but I want to welcome all my School Committee colleagues, member Fantini, Member Weinstein, Member Rojas, we have, um, member Wilson on our way and we have member Rachel on the Zoom.

So, uh, also under the leadership of Dr. Victoria Greer or superintendent, I would like to thank her, uh, and Dr. Carolyn L. Turk and CFO Spinner and the entire team, the school committee for all their work in putting the FY 2023 budget together.

Thank you for the time--all the time and the commitment towards making sure this budget reflects the needs in our schools. The budget process was a collaborative process that involved significant stakeholder engagement.

The process was intentionally aligned to the superintendent's entry plan uh, extra planning and the district planning to ensure-- To date to ensure alignment of the district resource allocation. The adopted budget, you see addresses the most critical areas of need to support improvements in both academic and social emotional needs.

For example, we're hiring an additional social worker in the high school and a director of social emotional learning. We're expanding learning programs that occurred during school vacation throughout the year and summer to increase learning for math and English.

We're also intentionally trying to address the inequities that exist in our schools by providing more funding for any loss learning that might have occurred--that has occurred due to the pandemic. I also want to, uh, I'd like to add that the school committee voted unanimously to support to approve the budget that will go over today and with that I want to acknowledge the co-chairs of the budget committee, Vice Chair Rachel and Member Rojas for all their work, uh, involved and I will give it over to-- And the entire School Committee of course. I will toss it over to Member Rojas to say more.

MEMBER JOSE LUIS ROJAS VILLARREAL: Thank you, Madam Mayor and I want to thank the Co-Chairs of the Finance Committee for--for hosting us for this hearing. Um, want to also thank, um, Chair Nolan for

sending questions in advance for the meeting and as, um, Mayor said, I want to thank Member Rachel and her for their help during the process as well as past Co-Chair Member Fantini, for all his collaboration as well as all the members of the school committee and administration and community.

Um, I look forward to the presentation by the administration and the discussions that will follow but before that I wanted to take the opportunity to provide some context, um, for the Finance Committee and the public, uh, some of these things, um, the Mayor has already covered like the budget being a collaborative engagement with significant stakeholders, um, regarding the--the district plan and I just wanted to highlight that with--that the current district plan is under development.

We're scheduled to finish it by the autumn of 2022 of this year and this will replace the last district plan that expired at the beginning of COVID, um, so this budget process was intentionally aligned with the supreme sentence entry and ESSER planning, um, as well as the evolving district plan.

Um, so--so you'll see that--that we--we don't quite have a district plan but that's-- We--we addressed in different ways. Um, and yeah, the other two points, yeah, the--the adopted budget addresses the most critical areas, the need for in academic aspects as well as social emotional aspects, um, and yes, I mean the--the school committee voted unanimously to approve it and but that was after analyzing and revising the original proposals.

I hope this background is useful. Um, and it's my pleasure to hand it back to, I guess Miss-- Chair Nolan.

COUNCILLOR PATRICIA M. NOLAN: Thank you, Member Rojas, I would like to turn it over to the School Department to Dr. Superintendent Greer.

DR. VICTORIA GREER: Good evening everyone and thank you all for hosting us and having us this evening. It is my pleasure to share with you an overview of the School District's FY '23 budget. I would like to also acknowledge Members Rojas and Vice Chair, um, Rachel who chaired the budget subcommittee and also Mayor Siddiqui and all of the

members of the school committee who have engaged throughout the process offering us feedback and support

Next slide please. Tonight, we will not go into each line item of the district's FY '23 budget. But we will give a general overview of our process, our-

COUNCILLOR PATRICIA M. NOLAN: Dr. Greer? Right, we need to have your slides up on the-- is that the correct--

DR. VICTORIA GREER: We're actually on the next slide. Thank you. Um, uh, tonight, as I said, we're not going to go into each line item of the district's FY '23 budget but we will give a general overview of our process, our priorities and the rationale of how we arrived at our proposed budget.

There will be time at the end for questions and discussion in which I will ask members of the executive leadership team to assist me. Next slide please. From the onset of planning for the school year and for the budget process, we had an intentional strategy to leverage the federal COVID-

19 relief grants with our general fund budget process to create a comprehensive plan for FY '23. Our adopted budget includes an additional \$8.7 million dollars in projected expenditures that will support increases in salary, benefits and operational costs in addition student and school based needs and also new investments to support key priority areas for the district. Uh, Miss Spinner, will you--

CFO CLAIRE SPINNER: Next slide. So, as the Superintendent mentioned during our budget process, we both focused on our General Fund as well as our federal, uh, ESSER funds. So, our General Fund budget projected expenditures for next year and our budget is \$232.4 million, that's an increase of \$8.7 million or almost 4% over our current year budget. The majority of this increase, uh, funds the cost, um, of our current staff, which would be, uh, KOLA expenditures, uh, as well as benefit costs.

In addition, we're projecting about almost 600,000 additional costs related to enrollment in school based changes, uh, which includes about 28.9

FTEs. Uh, those changes include, um, an additional class in our autism spectrum disorder program at the Tobin School, uh, in addition, it includes adding a second building substitute to each of our elementary and upper schools.

We've found, particularly since the pandemic, uh, a greater need for, uh, consistent substitute, um, support in our buildings. And so we piloted the second building sub this year and are making that a permanent addition to our school building staff. Uh, in addition, we have increased our family liaisons in our elementary and upper schools to 40 hour week positions.

Again, that was piloted this year and going to be made permanent in the upcoming budget. We've also increased lunch eight hours at schools, um, to support, um, the sort of expanded lunchtime, particularly in these sort of pandemic, uh, days when we need to spread our students out, eating classrooms, eat outside etcetera.

Um, as we do every year, we--we, uh, continue to budget some reserve teachers and aid positions which

are basically positions that remain vacant until needed, um, in addition this budget or this--the almost 600,000 is really net of in addition of reduction of, um, two elementary and three kindergarten classrooms based on enrollment, um, at particular schools.

Uh, in addition to that we have about a \$1.2 million increase in our budget related to operations in central administration. The majority of those increases are related--relate to facilities maintenance, uh, and, uh, space rental. The district is now renting some space, um, due to the closure of the Tobin School and the, um, moving of the Tobin School into the Longfellow building, uh, for swing space. We then needed to rent some space for our special start, um, admin--administration, uh, which is our special education, um, preschool program as well as a recovery team--special education recovery team.

Um, and so that has increased our budget for next year. In addition technology, transportation and clerical support. In addition, our General Fund

has about \$1.2 million that has been allocated to some strategic investments in our budget priorities which Dr. Greer will go into more detail. Next slide please. As Dr. Greer mentioned, we intentionally leveraged the budget process this year, uh, to also include planning for our federal COVID-19 relief grants. The Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief fund or ESSER.

Uh, in total, CPS has received \$12.6 million in ESSER funding over three allocations, um, and are projected remaining balance as of this coming June, 30th is approximately \$8.4 million. This funding can be spent through September of 2024. And, uh, so we are planning accordingly but in the upcoming FY '23, our plan which is outlined in our budget book is to expend approximately \$5.6 million dollars in our ESSER funding to support strategic investment budget priorities, which the Superintendent will go into more detail. That is leaving approximately \$2.8 million which will be expended in FY '24 in the first quarter of FY '25. Next slide please.

DR. VICTORIA GREER: Thank you. I'm sure by now

that everyone has reviewed my entry plan and also the findings from the entry planning and process. As stated before, this process was designed as a comprehensive assessment of the current condition of the school district. Very early on, I realized that to ensure alignment of our work, our processes and also to better leverage our resources, it would behoove us to intentionally plan to align the entry process and entry findings with planning for the use of our ESSER funds, the FY '23 budget process in the district planning process for which we are currently in the midst of.

Therefore, the investments that we are making in FY '23, are aligned to data information and feedback to support this--to support student growth and also educator effectiveness. Next slide please. When I started as the Interim Superintendent in July, 2021, the district plan at that time had expired and due to COVID and schools being closed, the district planning process had been delayed.

Those conditions made an imperative that the inter-process serve as conditions--as a condition

study of the district to plan the work ahead for the year and also set the foundation for the pending school district, um, planning process. The entry findings were categorized into four district categories that were used to develop the FY '23 budget guidelines.

Those categories are student success, culture and climate engagement and communication, organizational capacity and alignment. The entry findings showed that there were several areas of needed growth that aligned with these four categories that became our budget guidelines.

Some of those areas of needed growth, included inconsistencies around district decision making, um, a lack of clear reporting of--of the primary area of responsibility as it relates to teaching and learning. A lack of alignment of the curricular areas including our intervention, special education services and support and also our instructional coaching support.

There is also a lack of clearly articulated principle supervision and coaching framework as well

as a clearly articulated district instructional vision and framework. And so our budget guidelines are directly correlated in addressing those areas of need. Next slide please.

The budget guidelines are the broad categories and the budget priorities are the more explicit and distinct areas that we will prioritize and allocate our resources. While we are slowly moving out of the heightened state of emergency as it relates to COVID, we are still vigilant and also we need to ensure that we implement thoughtful and responsive mitigation strategies and learning recovery-- recovery strategies.

We continue to work towards strengthening academic outcomes for all students and are making significant investments, um, to support that work. While we want to ensure that each and every student is well prepared academically, we also want to ensure that they have the social, emotional and mental health supports that are also impaired to their overall success.

Therefore, we are investing in continuing to

build structures of support for our students.

Students success is hinged upon educators success in building educated capacity and support through high quality, robust and relative professional learning which includes the recruitment, hiring and retention of diverse--of a diverse workforce along with our educators having the opportunity to share their expertise to develop curriculum and support each other's learning and growth.

Finally, we are also making investments to align our resources and systems to ensure equitable educational opportunities for all by which we, um, are investing in our equity audits, which I'll speak of a little bit more later. Also creative and comprehensive family engagement opportunities, time on learning and also scheduling--school schedule analysis and investments to also enhance and support students in the visual and also performing arts. Next slide please.

As you can see, we've made significant investments again this school year to support students in the learning process by implementing

targeted interventions and also intervention support. We also realized that while we are on the road to recovery and COVID is beginning to stabilize the landscape of COVID continues to evolve and the impact on schools is still happening.

Our school principals, assistant principals, district administration and other support staff have been spending much of their time this school year managing COVID in their buildings. This is taken away from focusing on support for teachers and students with the teaching and learning process. Therefore, we are planning to manage COVID and schools for one more year, but we want to plan to refocus our administrators and staff time back on teaching and learning.

We are planning to hire someone to work closely with us to manage the day-to-day work related specifically to COVID such as testing supplies, sending out notices, communication and--and--and other things that are impacted, um, when we have, uh, certain things happen in buildings and across the district related to COVID.

The additional custodial staff that we are maintaining is also needed because we continue to, um, make sure that we have alternate spaces to have indoor and outdoor lunches which has increased the need for clean up across and on various campuses and the more spaces it requires more cleanup.

Next space, I mean next slide please. The entry findings revealed that the district has structural issues that has and is impacting the academic outcomes for our students. Specifically, the district currently does not have a dedicated division focused on curriculum instruction and student support with a dedicate leader who is also responsible for the oversight and supervision of schools.

What I found is that we have a lot of people working very hard but in silos and are moving in different directions, which need to be changed and be addressed immediately hence the focus on academic leadership. Additionally, we have been slow to build a comprehensive system for college and career readiness and career pathways.

We have a lot of great people working very hard again in silos without a clear structure for their work. Therefore, we are building the structures and systems so that we can provide access to students through our early college initiative by--also by improving our career and technical education offerings and opportunities, including stronger and more strategic--strategic work based learning coordination and partnerships. We are continuing to expand and also enhance our summer weekend and school vacation programs and offerings.

Next slide please. We are committed to investing and improving the student experience and ensure healthy students and also healthy and supportive school cultures. We are continuing to invest in tiered social emotional learning, health and mental health supports as well as athletics, visual and performing arts and supporting youth leadership by expanding our peer mediation program.

Next slide please. To support students success, we must also invest in our educators with high quality professional learning. Education--educators

support through our affinity groups and also the paraprofessional teacher pipeline program through our partnership with Lesley University so that we can continue to build our talent from within. Next slide.

Last, we are making investments to improve our system so to ensure that they are free of bias, racism and discrimination by conducting equity audits in our schools and also at Central Office. I will be working with the Office of Equity, Inclusion and Belonging to create an equity road map that maps the structure's practices for-- to improvement that will lead back to improve student outcomes and improve student experiences.

Supporting and, um, supporting family and community engagement is also another focus that we have. We are also going to analyze and address our schedule and workload challenges and concerns that continue to, um, come up as we continue to move the work forward. And last slide.

Um, I will now turn it over to Mayor Siddiqui, thank you all for listening and we're happy to take

questions and discussion.

MAYOR SUMBUL SIDDIQUI: I wanted to add, there were some I think Councillor Quinton Y. Zondervan who sent questions to me directly, which I forwarded on and I think some questions were sent directly and the team has them. So, with that, Madam Chair, if you want to go ahead and facilitate that'd be fine.

COUNCILLOR PATRICIA M. NOLAN: Thank you. Why don't we go to public comment. There's one person who has joined the Zoom. Mr. Clarke, yes, Mr. Clarke, we can hear you go ahead.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

Tony Clarke, no address provided, indicated that he hopes that the body is disciplined and moving away from merely talking about dollar and cents and if the budget passes, he hopes it's incumbent upon all of the members. Also indicated the facts that if anyone loves Cambridge City, they should work with the members and also in their schools to make sure that they can have the best district in the world.

COUNCILLOR PATRICIA M. NOLAN: Thank you, Tony

Clarke. Uh, that concludes public comment I believe. Yeah. What, uh, what we can do now is our usual practices. Any member of the council who has questions just indicate that you have questions or comments to--to ask and we'll go around the room. We'll start with Councillor Paul F. Toner.

COUNCILLOR PAUL F. TONER: Thank you, Madam Chair. I just have one question, uh, somebody inquired of me questions about our Chapter 70 allocation and how it's determined. Um, essentially that we have a projected Chapter 70 allocation that's in the budget, but in the budget being proposed at the state level, there's a larger dollar amount.

COUNCILLOR PATRICIA M. NOLAN: Excuse me, one second. Councillor Toner, if you could speak more closely into your mic so that we can hear, you that would be terrific.

COUNCILLOR PAUL F. TONER: Okay, sorry. That better? Sorry. Going back, this is about the Chapter 70 allocation from the state. And I just had a question sort of about the, um, the projected amount

that's in the budget versus what appears to be the promised amount that may come out of the state budget in the end and over the years past there's been projections that are, you know, mostly lower, sometimes right on the money, um, and the inquiry I received was what happens with the Chapter \$70 that we received from the state if they're more than what was in the projected, uh, dollar amount. So, if Miss Spinner or the Superintendent or somebody whose able to take that one. Thank you.

CFO CLAIRE SPINNER: Sure. Thank you for the question Councillor Toner. Uh, so every year when we begin our conversations with the city in late December, early January, um, with the City Manager and his fiscal team about, um, the upcoming years, um budget. Um, our conversation always starts first with, um, CPS projections for our ongoing costs as well as additional needs. And it's really about our need in general, not really about a specific revenue--fixed revenue amounts.

And so as we, uh, continue our conversations with the city about the amount of support that the

School Department will need in the upcoming year, we typically come to an agreement about what that amount would be and about part of the city charter, the City Manager establishes the School Department's annual allocation and also has the authority to determine each individual revenue source, which, um, typically, I mean our revenue sources are predominantly property taxes.

Um, about 8% of our revenue is state revenue, which comprises of the Chapter 70 funding as well as general state aid, um, that the city, uh, receives. So, in total, I believe we have about \$22 million is our overall state revenue amount. Some piece of that is the Chapter 70 aid and some piece of that is the general state aid. What happens is that we're making those determinations or the city is making those determinations early in the states process.

So, towards the end of January, typically the governor comes out with, um, House Bill 1, in which there is a projection of what the Chapter 70 amounts will be for each, uh, school district. And then as we all probably know now, the--the House ways and

means committee is now working through their part of the--of the process and, um, so essentially the cities, uh, typical process has been to just for a very conservative projection reasons, estimate that the Chapter 70 will be what the current year amount is as a projection for next year.

Revenue is a projection and but that they will continue to provide 22 million, uh, I think it was 22 million ish in state aid. And so that will be, uh, allocated between the Chapter 70 and the general state aid. When the actual Chapter \$70 amount comes in, the 22 million stays the same and the relative allocation between what is Chapter 70 and what is general state aid shifts.

Um, and, um, but I think the most important thing for--for everyone to understand is, you know, \$22 million versus \$32 million dollar budget, the vast majority of our budget is property taxes and the increases that we need each year to, um, to meet the ongoing costs of the district first and also, you know, the city has very generously supported the school district over the years in strategic

investments.

Those increases are funded through--from property tax. And so I think that as, um, it is a complex formula and it's a complex thinking and for the city where one department of many and so as they're thinking about revenue and how revenue is-- is allocated across all departments, um, again it is within the purview of the City Manager to make the right decisions across the board for all city departments.

COUNCILLOR PAUL F. TONER: Thank you all.

COUNCILLOR PATRICIA M. NOLAN: Thank you. Next, I have Councillor Quinton Y. Zondervan and then Councillor Marc C. McGovern. Councillor Quinton Y. Zondervan you have the floor.

COUNCILLOR QUINTON Y. ZONDERVAN: Thank you, Madam Chair through you. Thanks for that very helpful presentation. So, my first question is about the teachers union. The teachers have been working without a contract since August of last year and they've made a lot of proposals for better wages, anti racist training, more support for teachers of

color, more manageable--manageable workloads for special educators.

So, I know that the contract negotiations are still ongoing but how does this budget account for those demands that are--that are still outstanding?

DR. VICTORIA GREER: Thank you, Councillor for your question. I do want to do a quick point of correction, um, the teachers are actually not working without a contract. The contract, um, that was last ratified as the contract that we're working under. So, we don't have an updated current contract but they actually still do have a contract.

So, I wanna-- That's a point of clarification. Um, of course, I cannot get into the details of the negotiations, but, um, also pointed to areas in the--in the budget for which we are supporting things that are important to us as a district and that includes our educators, such as supporting the recruitment and retain--retaining of teachers of color, creating opportunities for pipeline programs for people to the, um, teacher--to become a teacher who are currently paraprofessionals, um, and also,

um, in creating opportunities for teachers to have that collaboration time as well as to help develop responsive curriculum to our students.

COUNCILLOR QUINTON Y. ZONDERVAN: Thank you. Um, you know, I--I appreciate the focus on retention and--and hiring of teachers of color and but it's--it's very difficult to do when--when their needs are not being met. So, I hope that these negotiations are--are fruitful and concluded very--very soon. Um, can you say more about how this budget, um, advances our anti-racism goals and--and closing the persistent equity gaps that we're seeing?

DR. VICTORIA GREER: Thank you, through your Chair. Um, I will begin to respond and then I will ask Mr. Fernandez also to share some of the work that's happening. He's online to share some of the work that's happening through the Office of Equity Inclusion and Belonging.

So, um, we've started, uh, this year where every school and also including the central office, we've developed what we call equity teams and it is-- Those are teams in the buildings that are made up of

various stakeholders, including our educators, families and various communities support, um, community stakeholders.

Um, those equity teams are actually doing an--an assessment around equity and practice structure allocation of the school based, school improvement fund so forth and so on. And so that's some of the beginning work that we've done that's related to, um, removing those structures that, um, persist in, um, and create inequities amongst groups, um, but I'll ask Mr. Fernandez, I was supposed to share in a little bit more detail in regards to some of the other work that's happening in his department.

MANUEL J. FERNANDEZ: Through you, Madam Chair and nice to see you Councillor. Um, we are doing--we have been engaged in a lot of work with the, uh, educators of color coalition in particular around ways that we can support the retention of--of educators of color.

Um, some of that will, uh, some of that is several activities--spring activities that will bring people together around the conversation of,

um, what's working for you, what do you need support in, what can we do, um, at the central office and-- and--and with the employee resource groups to support you.

We are looking at, um, there has been a request to--to find a mentor for every, um, educators of color that we request one. Um, sadly we don't have the numbers in place, but what we do have is an opportunity to, uh, use the existing employee resource groups to create a more robust system of mentoring and affinity groups and cohorting, um, that we have been talking about and--and we are--we are all excited about that possibility, um, and, um, in terms of, um, anti-racist initiatives in general, we're working with a lot of students, were working with a lot of educators and caregivers through listening sessions, through other meetings.

We're having a, uh, educators, excuse me, um, apparent lead, um, equity summit, um, in June, we're having, um--um, we're planning to do a teachers of color, staff of color, uh, summit in the fall with, uh, with centering paraprofessionals.

I like to call them instructional assistants, um, and not just, you know, faculty and--and teachers, but those who are in our pipeline is--is Dr. Greer referred to who know our system and know our district and know our students and need a lift up to--to go on and get their teachers, um, a certification, uh, through the pipeline that she was talking about.

Um, there are a lot of other initiatives going on right now from the equity teams. Every school has an equity team and every equity team is assessing, uh, you know, equity--equitable issues or inequitable issues that may exist in their schools and then finding ways to come up with goals to--to--to mitigate those or to eliminate those and then to, um, implement those goals into a plan that will be a part of their school improvement plan.

So, updating the school improvement plan so that they center equity. Um, we're doing a lot of work with students around, um, what works for you, what doesn't work for you starting with our summit that took place in September.

It, um, it catapulted our relationship with students throughout the district in ways that we're very proud and we--and we've been very successful in amplifying student voice and making changes throughout the district that--that supports students.

So, there are a lot of things going on and, um, more specific questions I could--I could respond to, um, but, um, over the next, um, few weeks, we will be, um, sharing, uh, publicly all of the things that we have done this year that have moved us closer to--to closing these gaps as well as all the things that we're planning to do in collaboration with all the stakeholders of the makeup the Cambridge public school community. I hope that helped.

COUNCILLOR QUINTON Y. ZONDERVAN: Yes, thank you through--through you, Madam Chair, thank you for those answers and always good to see you and I really appreciate the work you do. So, thank you for that.

MANUEL J. FERNANDEZ: Thank you Councillor.

COUNCILLOR QUINTON Y. ZONDERVAN: Um, so, my--my

last question is on The Range School of Technical Arts, I know that we were in the process of doing improvement--improvement plan and I see \$100,000 in the budget, but I'm not clear on exactly what that's doing and--and I'm also not seeing any new staffing or programs being proposed, particularly in--in green jobs areas which we know are up and coming areas like electrical and solar panel installations. So, I'm just curious where we are with--with the RSTA improvement plan.

DR. VICTORIA GREER: Sure. Thank you, through you, Chair. Um, thank you again for that question. Um, currently our ESSER budget includes funding as you said for our risk of improvements and also the related work based learning improvements for all of our students.

Um, The Range School of Technical Arts programs review is underway so it is not completed yet. So, uh, at this point in time we do not have all of the recommendations. We will have some, uh, we do have some emerging findings, um, that actually aligned to the entry findings.

Um, one is around the need to address some of those fundamental issues regarding the governance of the program, the capacity and the culture of the program. Many of those types of issues are not necessarily tied to needing a funding. It's really some structural things that just need to change.

Um, we also will be having more comprehensive conversations about the findings, um, including, um, having round tables with the school committee. We've been having those discussions with them. We will be able to include short term and long term actions that may or may not be, um, there may or may not be required funding for.

I can say that the budget forms will, um, the \$100,000 that are set aside will focus primarily on those short--short term actions and responses that are needed, um, I call them the low hanging fruit things that we can do very quickly to see really quick and robust change.

I also want to highlight two early findings that come through, um, in our systems review and also in the student surveys, um, it shows that there is a

lack of awareness amongst our students and our families about what we have and there are options in our offerings that's not just in risk of though, that is actually across the whole entire high school and across the board.

Um, not just-- And I shouldn't say just the high school is also thinking in the upper schools, what are we doing in order to engage students and families, uh, and understanding what we have to offer. That's--that's a huge gap that we have.

We also want to strengthen our college and career planning for all of our students and start that much earlier, even down into the elementary schools. And so, you'll see us putting together a map from K through 12 in regards to career pathways and career planning, where students are being able to do different types of explorations even very young, um, that will become part of our structural changes that we will make and you'll see that happening fairly quickly and over the next year.

We also, um, based on, um, the systems reviewing the student surveys, we found that there is, um, we-

-we've had three very good, um, educators who've been working very hard to create, uh, internships and co-op experiences with employers, but really not a good structure to support their work.

And so, there will be a structural change that you will see happening moving forward within the next year. We are currently in conversations, I actually met with Principal Smith and Dr. Giddens, who's the Assistant Superintendent of secondary school, along with Dr. Brown on last week, to talk about and, um, the-- How we can better design, um, the high school schedule for students to get them to support that they need and understanding their pathways, understanding what career options they may have and understanding how to access what we have.

Um, the deeper part of the RSTA review when we get into some of those longer term findings and also begin to work with our industry partners are things that you just name Councillor in regards to looking at some of the most prevalent careers that we need to make sure that we have options for, for our students in the high school and through our RSTA

program.

So, I will stop and pause here, but those are just some of the things that I would like to highlight in regards to your question.

COUNCILLOR QUINTON Y. ZONDERVAN: Thank you. Through you, Madam Chair, do we have a sense of when this review will--will be completed because it's--it's been over a year now, I believe.

DR. VICTORIA GREER: Yes. Based on-- I'm sorry, can I answer? Okay, thank you. Based on, um, our--our timeline at this point, we intend to have a comprehensive--a comprehensive report that will be ready for us, um, starting right before school is out and then we'll have an additional report and findings, um, in September when we return.

COUNCILLOR QUINTON Y. ZONDERVAN: Thank you very much. Look forward to that report, um, as has been the case every year so far that I've been on the council. I can't in--in good conscience vote for this budget, but I do appreciate all the efforts and--and all the work that's happening and I'm hopeful that we will get to a point where I can

support it. So, thank you again for your work and-- and for answering my questions. Thank you, Madam Chair, I yield.

COUNCILLOR PATRICIA M. NOLAN: Thank you, Councillor Quinton Y. Zondervan. Councillor Marc C. McGovern.

COUNCILLOR MARC C. MCGOVERN: Thank you, Madam Chair, through you, um, first, thank you to the School Committee, the Mayor, the Administration. Um, I did 10 school committee budgets in my--in my time and I know the work that goes into it and I really want to congratulate you on, um, Councillor Nolan when she was on the committee really pushed for this and you guys have taken the ball and run with it in terms of your process, um, including a lot of different stakeholders and the public you really-- you really put in the time and--and--and reach out to a lot of people to help form this budget and I think that's great and I really want to thank the Co-Chairs for doing that.

Um, couple things, uh, first I'm really excited to see the continued investment in social, emotional

learning and mental wellness, um, happy to see the, uh, some additional funds going to the Mediation Program. Um, when I was a senior in college, I was-- My internship was with Steven Bryan Maysles, who sadly passed away a few years ago in starting the Peer Mediation Program, um, in--in the, uh, well, they weren't middle schools then in the--in the elementary schools.

So, um I think that's really a program we need to continue to have and grow because those skills aren't just, they don't just take place when there's an official mediation meeting, but those mediators become peacemakers, uh, as Steven used to say on the playground and in the school because they have those skills.

So, I'm excited to see that, um, on the BRIGHT Program, also very exciting to see this, having worked with, I can't tell you how many children over my career, um, trying to transition them back from psychiatric hospitalizations or residential programs, um, back into the public schools and that--that transition is often very difficult, not just

for the--for the student, but the family, um, you know, you go from having tons and tons of support and small class sizes and--and a lot of eyes on you to, you know, a big public high school and that's scary. So, I'm really excited to see that.

I see in the--in the budget it--in the book it's, um, it's gonna--it's at the high school and then-- It's the plan is to expand to the upper schools. Um, we then maybe next year once the upper schools get rolling, look at elementary schools as well because that transition happens. I've seen kids as young as kindergarten be hospitalized. And so, would that be the plan to expand it across K to 12?

DR. VICTORIA GREER: Yeah, thank you for that question. Um, yes. And I need to--to point out that the answer is yes. We will make sure that there is some iteration of a BRIGHT Program that students can access, um, because of the way the program is designed, it takes about a year.

Even at the high school, it took us about a year, um, it takes about a year, year and a half to really build out all of the structures that you

need, um, to make it happen. One of the nuances that we're working with--with the upper school is that we have to decide, are we gonna have one program in every school or are we gonna have a center based kind of site?

So, really working with our partners in Brooklyn, who helped us design our high school program. We will do the same there. Um, they actually have started a middle school program because they have K. A School so we definitely will be dependent on them to help us support that. Elementary is a little bit more nuanced, I agree with you.

We do need something for our elementary students. Um, it may not look like the high school of the upper school program and it definitely be a grassroots effort because there are not many districts that have elementary programs such as BRIGHT.

COUNCILLOR MARC C. MCGOVERN: Okay, thank you. Through you Madam Chair, um, and then that sort of brings me to just my next question and I think I

read this correctly that, um, out of district tuition is going to be decreased by 795,000. Is that-- Why is that?

CFO CLAIRE SPINNER: You want--you want me to go for that? Okay. We have just in the last few years seen a decrease in the number of our students who are in out of district placements. Um, this year was particularly, um, the number was low, it was about 135 students whereas you probably remember numbers more like 180.

Um, so some of it, it sounds like it's because, um, you know, um, these schools were having trouble with staffing and they were not, um, spaces but because in the last two years we have had, um, a fewer students going, our circuit breaker balance has, um, has actually grown a bit and so we feel comfortable reducing the general fund budget because overall our budget between our, um, circuit breaker and our general fund will be ample to be able to pay for the projected number of students for next year.

DR. VICTORIA GREER: I will also give a little antidote that I think we should be proud of. We

actually have several students that are actually returning to the district in this upcoming school year. Of course, it doesn't account for \$700-\$1,000. But I did want to highlight that we also have students returning to the district to our genetic programs into our in district programs as well.

COUNCILLOR MARC C. MCGOVERN: Great. Through you, Madam Chair and that's, you know, all things being equal. It's--it's usually better for the students to be in district than--than out of district, but--but certainly one of the things I've always been proud of, of--of Cambridge having worked with a lot of districts around, I've never once sat in a meeting with a--with a student that I was working with and had Cambridge say, "Well, we're not gonna-- We know the student needs that and we're not paying for it."

And I have sat in districts that have said that. Um, and so, um, it's great. But on the other hand, let's make, you know, I also want to make sure that we're bringing kids back to a program that still meets their needs and not bringing them back as a

cost saving measure because we should give them what they need regardless of, you know, the cost.

So, um, it's good to see but, um, you know, if somebody needs it, let's--let's make it happen. Um, couple last things, um, in terms of the--the RSTA piece, um, I am--I'm excited to see what comes of the, um, the investment in the high quality work based learning and internships and things like that.

Um, you know, certainly around, uh, you know, helping graduates get into unions and getting apprenticeships early on. Um, so that they can maybe by the time they graduate they can step right into--to union jobs, um, and then just one thing I--I hope you consider is or two things actually, um, when I toured RSTA, now over a year or two years ago, um, one of the things I noticed was, you know, we have these--these two machines that are these metal fabrication machines that I don't understand exactly how they work but they look really cool and, um, I had asked about our workforce program for-- On the city side, you know, our young--young adults because those are jobs that they're like 70 to \$80,000 a

year right out of the gate.

And they're right in Kendall Square and I had asked about, you know, maybe a--maybe a company is not gonna hire an 18 year old but they might hire 23 or 24 year old. And I asked is DHSP working with the schools to--to-- For our young adults in the workforce program and I--and I was told, "Well, no those are school things and those--"

So, I just, you know, as much synergy as we can get because we have, you know, many young people that were trying to get employed and there's a lot of great resources at--at RSTA and, you know, let's look at this is how we can collaborate and--and work together because I think there's some great opportunities there.

And, um, hold, I'll off my other point, um, the interventionists and paraprofessionals 12 of each, I'm assuming is that one per school, is that why there's 12? Okay, thank you.

And lastly Madam Chair, through you, um, the Summer Weekend and Vacation Programs, are--are those going to be, um, sort of geared towards students who

could benefit and from that extra support or is it opened? I-- Sometimes we do these programs and they get filled up with kids who may not necessarily need the extra support and the kids who do don't take advantage of them or don't get in.

So, I want to make sure that we're really targeting that to students who really need it to close those persistent gaps that we have. So, how-- how-- Do you--do you know yet how that's gonna play out?

COUNCILLOR MARC C. MCGOVERN: Sure, through your Chair, um, to Mr. McGovern, I'll probably ask Dr. Turk to chime in as well. Um, specifically in the planning that we've been doing, um, and actually we'll be doing an update to the school committee next week about our summer program and in camps, um, but we focused on targeting using, um, the new assessment data system that we have already and so based on the benchmark scores we're actually targeting students to then support them to various programs.

Um, the team has been also working with our out

of school time partners to make sure that we also do the type of parent outreach that we need. So, families know exactly which programs we want--we want and need the students in and why. So, that we can make sure the students are getting access to them. But I'll let Dr. Turk chime in as well.

DR. CAROLYN L. TURK: Sure, thank you. And good evening everyone. Yes, I mean one of the things that certainly Cambridge has learned and the end is research from all across the country that the highest leverage opportunities for students, especially if they are, uh, young people who are in need of additional supports is typically one of three things.

It's either targeted tutoring--tutoring, targeted summer programs or targeted out of school at some point during the day or week programs. The key there is the word targeted and really focusing in both on need and, um, also expansion of student exploration. So, everything that the Superintendent described is--is clearly right on the mark in terms of the planning that has taken place for our young

people this summer.

And we have been working closely with DHSP as well as many of our other community partners through the work of, um, are out of school time, uh, staff as well so that it can be a full day experience for students or young people that will include both a focus on the academics but also an opportunity to just enjoy summer. And we feel as though both of those pieces are--are really needed and can be utilized during the summer time frame.

COUNCILLOR MARC C. MCGOVERN: Thank you, um, and I would just-- On page 25 under the support healthy students and school cultures. I think you can throw another icon up there for strengthening academic outcomes because we know that if kids are dealing with mental health issues and anxiety and depression, they're not going to achieve their, uh, academic success.

So, I think that those-- We need to start making that connection that it's--it's, you know, that there's a connection there between why we do this and keeping kids safe and healthy. So, thank you

very much for all your work and I look forward to supporting this budget tonight.

COUNCILLOR PATRICIA M. NOLAN: Thank you Councillor Marc C. McGovern. Um, Councillor-- Vice Mayor Mallon?

VICE MAYOR ALANNA M. MALLON: Thank you, Madam Chair, through you to the Superintendent and your team, thank you for being here tonight and thanks to the school committee for working and the school department for working so hard to bring us a budget, um, that we can be-- I think we can be proud of tonight.

Um, I did have--I had a few questions about RSTA that were answered by, um, some previous questions, so I'll just move on to, um, 8th grade math. I think this was the first year where there was a full, um, a full year where the advanced math pathway wasn't in place. The first year was hit by COVID, the second year was kind of a mixture. This year is the first full year.

So, I'm curious, do we have any sense of how many of our 8th graders are gonna be placing out of

algebra 1? Um, and then my other question is around a district math coordinator. I understand that position has been missing this whole year and I'm just curious, I think that it was posted in March. Do we know-- Have we hired somebody for that really critical position? So, those are my questions about algebra.

DR. VICTORIA GREER: Um, thank you for those questions, I'll--I'll go backwards through your questions. Um, as far as the district math coordinator, we actually posted--initially posted the position for hire as soon as the former math coordinator gave notice and the pool wasn't robust. This is unfortunately a difficult position to feel with the right individual and so we posted it, reviewed applications and then we pulled it down and reposted it a better time.

So, that's why you saw it in March, um, and those interviews actually are getting ready to, um, launch. Dr. Turk is leading network. She's also been working very closely. Dr. Turk has been working very closely with our district math coaches and also

Shevon, Mulligan, who's the dean of mathematics at the high school and they have been laboring and carrying the math department, the three of them together this year.

And I'll let Dr. Turk speak a little bit more about the algebra 1, um, courses.

DR. CAROLYN L. TURK: Thank you and thank you for acknowledging the--the math team. I wanted to make sure that, that did happen. Throughout the school year, we have had three individuals, two coaches and one dean coaches representing, uh, JK through 5. 6 through 8 and then the dean representing the high school, who have worked consistently throughout the year and have taken on all of the responsibilities of the math coordinator, um, and have done a really outstanding job.

So, we have been very appreciative of the work that they have done to continue making sure that the math department is moved forward this year, that professional learning continued with educators, uh, and that all of the work that would typically be done with students did move forward.

So, I want to acknowledge them publicly and say thank you. In terms of the question that was asked around, um, math students, uh, math and students placing, uh, in the algebra exam, uh, I actually looked at this last week and the information that I had as of last week, was that based on the registration because registrations are happening now that we have about 33% of our rising ninth grade students who have already registered for a class beyond register--beyond algebra 1 at the high school.

And so what that means is that those students have already, um, been able to participate in, uh, or--or demonstrate, I should say their readiness to place out of algebra 1. Now that number will continue to, uh, increase, um, as both registrations continue between now and the end of the school year. And then also there is an opportunity during the summer which is one that we have had for, I believe this will be the third year, uh, where students also have an opportunity to participate in something called the Cambridge Bridge Program, which is a math

program. It is a comprehensive, self paced program designed for ninth grade students to be able to engage in algebra 1 content.

And that allows for another opportunity as well for students to then be able to have some flexibility in, uh, the math courses that they participate in as ninth grade student.

VICE MAYOR ALANNA M. MALLON: Thank you, Madam Chair, through you. So, how does the 33% compare to previous years in terms of placing out of algebra 1?

DR. CAROLYN L. TURK: For this particular time period, it is just--it's in the same ballpark.

VICE MAYOR ALANNA M. MALLON: Okay. And then, um, through you, Madam Chair, the Cambridge Bridge Program, has the registration information been posted for, um, parents to sign up for that if--if their--if their child has not placed out of algebra 1 but has a desire to, is that registration information already posted?

DR. CAROLYN L. TURK: My hesitations with the reposted because I'm not--I'm not sure what you mean by posted. I know that information is conveyed to

families, um, and I would have to make sure that I am accurate in the way in which it is sent out to families through the math department. But I know there is a communication to students and families.

VICE MAYOR ALANNA M. MALLON: So, I guess I could just ask it a little bit differently. If I'm an eighth grade parent, do I--am I able to register my child now for that program or is that coming in the next month?

DR. CAROLYN L. TURK: Registrations are in the process of happening right now.

VICE MAYOR ALANNA M. MALLON: Okay. Alright. I-- I think those are my math questions. I think the one question that the Superintendent didn't get too was, um, I understand the district math coordinator, the first pool wasn't great. We posted again in March. Are those interviews happening? Do you have a good pool? Do you have a good sense of somebody that will be coming on board?

DR. VICTORIA GREER: Yes, I'm sorry. Uh, yes, the pool is very good and, uh, interviews are going to happen. Did you say March--May, 20th. May, 20th

are the interviews.

VICE MAYOR ALANNA M. MALLON: Great, thank you.
I yield back.

COUNCILLOR PATRICIA M. NOLAN: Thank you, Vice Mayor Mallon. I have Councillor Azeem and then Councillor Carlone.

COUNCILLOR BURHAN AZEEM: Thank you, Chair Nolan. Um, I had two questions and then just some general comments. Um, one is, um, I think that, you know, there's a very reasonable 3.9% increase, um, and in general like our city budget has gone up a fair amount this year, um, and in general we hope that it keeps going up so we can fund more great programs.

Um, there's always the, you know, I don't think it's necessarily likely but there's always a chance that property values go down and the city budget stabilizes for a number of years or goes down for a number of years. I don't think it's going to crash but it could stabilize or go down.

I was wondering if you thought that this budget was, um, resilient in case of, you know, are we

setting in expectations that for the next few years will have to necessarily have the same increases because of contracts or the things that we've made or is it resilient and that if we have to stabilize the budget or modify it slightly downward that, that would be possible in future years, not necessarily expecting it, but in case that happens?

DR. VICTORIA GREER: Actually, I'm going to ask CFO Spinner to respond.

CFO CLAIRE SPINNER: Thank you for the question. And I think we are all, you know, obviously very grateful that we have, um, you know, had such generous budget allocations from, um, the city and we're able to both, uh, meet the needs of our current existing operations, including staff salaries as well as, you know, over the past several years, um, had the additional funding for, um, strategic investments for improvement.

Um, we also have this year, you know, into, um, FY '24 and the first quarter of '25, we have our ESSER funding which we are carefully, um, making sure that we still have some funding even in that

last year. Um, also being mindful of understanding that, um, you know, that is, uh, one time money and trying to use that money in a way, um, that really is impactful for the district and not necessarily something that would get baked in for, um, you know, the future.

That being said, you know, a school district is predominantly a people business. And so the vast majority of our cost increase each year really are related to our existing staff, um, and the KOLAS that get negotiated with collective bargaining as well as the, um, as well as the--the benefits costs, um, other cost, you know, increases for a cost drivers for us is student transportation, which is very, um, expensive, especially in our controlled choice system, um, and the fact that we have, um, you know, uh, a number of small schools, so we have a lot of schools and--and students can go to school from any part of the city to another part of the city.

So, we have certain things in our budget that make us an expensive system. Um, and so I think, you

know, if, you know, we came to a point where, um, you know, the city needed to sort of tighten its belt and that has happened in the past.

I remember 2008, I think it was the first year I was, uh, CFO, uh, we had that situation and we do have a very strong history of collaborating very closely with the city just to make sure that, um, we can continue to, um, fund what we need to fund and yet be, you know, supportive of the city's goals as well.

COUNCILLOR BURHAN AZEEM: Wonderful. Thank you. Um, my second question is focused on student enrollment. I remember at an earlier budget meeting, uh, seeing the projections about, um, student enrollment, um, particularly as it goes down because both some, uh, students have opted out of the school system, but also because of, uh, less children being born in the last couple of years.

Um, I was wondering, uh, what the impact is if either we end up having more children in the school system or both because more children decide to return or, um, you know, more children moving into

the system, um, than expected, especially like this fall and in general what impact that would have on the budget?

DR. VICTORIA GREER: Thank you for that question. In regards to, um, having numbers of students return if our--if our enrollment began to increase, um, that's--that's one of the reasons why we keep, um, reserve a--reserve teacher, uh, teachers in the budget. And it's also not just enrollment, it's needs. Sometimes we have students that enroll that have vast needs. And we want to be able to respond to those as well. And so, that's part of our contingency in the budget is, uh, to, um, have, um, a teacher reserve.

CFO CLAIRE SPINNER: Can I just have one just additional fact is that, um, throughout our system, in--in most schools and certainly in all grades across the system, we have capacity. So, we are not filled-- Every seat is not filled grade from grade. You know, there may be, um, and there's still, uh, what a family might have if they come in perhaps. They don't have 12 schools to choose from because

they need a, you know, a fifth grade spot.

And there's--the fifth grade spot is only at one or two schools, you know, especially within our constraints of our controlled choice. But I think that we do have capacity in our system in all grades and so we are, uh, we--we feel confident that, you know, between our reserve teachers and also the capacity that's in the system that we're well set up for the upcoming year.

COUNCILLOR BURHAN AZEEM: Thank you for those answers. Um, I just wanted to share a little bit about my thinking in general on the school budget. Um, you know, uh, I come out of this with a little bit of humility. Both a lot of my fellow councilors have been on the school committee and I know the school committee in general has spent a lot of time on this. Um and so in my head there's, uh, three part test.

The first is--is to ask reasonable, um, and I think both the expected increases, um, less than inflation and comparable the prior year so, that's a check. The second is like, are there problems being

brought up in the school system or other issues that we think we can fix by having, uh, more allocated than is being asked? Um, and it's certainly, uh, a number of issues have been brought up with tonight, but in general and conversations but none of them to immediately seem like there's a specific budget asked that if we met that need, we would be able to solve those problems.

So, at that time--at this time I don't see that concern. And the third is, you know, um, budgets are about trade offs. I think all of us would like to spend more on things, um, but there's only so much money to go around and so, uh, a lot of it is in the minutia and the details and that kind of goes to me as a question of, uh, do I have faith in the Superintendent, uh, the Mayor and, uh, and, uh, school committee in having put together like a thoughtful proposal, take into account a lot of these details.

And the answer to that, um, is unequivocally, yes. So, I will easily support this budget and thank you so much for all the hard work you've put into

this. Thank you.

COUNCILLOR PATRICIA M. NOLAN: Thank you, Councillor Azeem. Councillor Carlone, you have the floor.

COUNCILLOR DENNIS J. CARLONE: Thank you, Madam Chair. Um, first of all, I want to apologize that I'm not there tonight. I'm not suffering from school budget blues, but from allergy headache blues. And, um, that is the only reason I'm not there actually. Enjoy our conversations a lot and I learned a lot every year. Um, I really wanted to say just a few things.

One is Mr. Fernandez is, um, optimistic tease that the gap has improved somewhat was very encouraging. I'm not saying that you said it's all gone, so don't worry, I'm not putting pressure on you, but we all care about that. And Mr. Fernandez, of course cares the most, but I would love to hear that and now, but I get we're gonna wait a couple of weeks.

Um, the thing I wanted to focus on was on page 31 where it mentions the junior kindergarten and

kindergarten program has declined--the enrollment is declined by 16.5%. And as many of you know, many of us on both sides, uh, council and school board and school staff and manager, care about pre-K.

And the notion of someday obtaining--obtaining a universal pre-K. I'm a little stunned because people can't get into the Pre-K Program and we don't have enough. And yet, somehow we've lost 16.5% of students that would not have to pay I believe. Um, could someone explain what's happening there?

CFO CLAIRE SPINNER: From what we've read, you know, this seems to be something that's happening across the country. Um, and so I think, you know, just our own data shows, um, you know, the birth four years ago and five years ago were, you know, and also, uh, were less, you know, have--have gone down to the birth, you know, which we look we do keep track of the birth rates each year.

And, um, and actually, uh, keep track of the percentage of the births four years ago, you know, coming into JK, the birth five years ago, coming into K. Um, in general, in Cambridge, right? The

number of students--children who are age zero versus in population, the number of children who are a range four, there are far fewer four year old's than zero year old.

So, the Cambridge population, um, does in those age groups, uh, declines essentially, um, really until you get to age 18, right? And we have, you know, students coming back into, um, Cambridge to go to college. So, you know, we too are, um, but we did--we--we have seen a steeper decline than we thought and--and we were surprised to see that we were not so surprised last year, right? Where we were offering a lot of remote learning that people might not choose to enroll their four year old's, who they don't need to enroll into kindergarten--into a remote kindergarten opportunity.

We were a bit more surprised that the numbers this year, you know, continued to be as low as they were last year. So, I don't think any of us have answers, you know, did more people move out of Cambridge, um, during this time because of the flexibility for working, right?

Um, so we have, you know, taken the, um, the, uh, we--we've decided to take the step of asking Mass, uh, Donahue Institute who did a comprehensive population and enrollment study for us as part of the early childhood work that we did four or five years ago to take a look again, um, at um, population enrollment growth projections for us and to update those projections because they can look across the region really and see, I mean, at the time, even early in January or February, we took a look at places like Brooklyn, Newton. They saw even steeper declines in enrollment than--than we have. So, I don't think this is a Cambridge specific issue.

I don't think it is people in Cambridge not sending their students, their four year old's and five year old's to school. I do think it's, you know, a regional and a national moment. And, um, and so some of it is us sort of staying a little nimble, you know, because maybe next year or the year after or three years, you know, people would get more confident, have more children, you know, things will

change again.

So, um, that's just one of the things that we have to grapple with as a school district, right, is that we have to obviously always be at the ready to provide the education, um, for students who are, you know, in our district and at the same time, you know, this in this current year, we left a lot of capacity in the system not really knowing, you know, if last year was just an anomaly or not.

For next year, we've taken a little bit, a few seats out of the system, still leaving a lot of capacity in the system, but thinking that it made more sense financially that it was, uh, to redirect those--those funds towards, um, other programming, um, that we needed to spend that money on.

Again, as Dr. Greer mentioned, you know, leaving, um, some reserve funding, some contingency funding for us to respond should things change.

DR. VICTORIA GREER: And may I say one-- I'd also want to point out, um, this is something that, um, the team and I working with Dr. Grayn on Universal pre-K, we've talked about is not going to

stop our plans and planning for universal pre-school. Um, we do need this enrollment study in this population study though. That will help us just in our overall planning for the district.

COUNCILLOR DENNIS J. CARLONE: Well, thank you both-- Through the Chair, thank you both for explaining that. It's--it's hard to believe-- I'm not questioning you, but it's hard. I'm sure the statistics are right from the Donahue Group, but there must be four year old's who desperately need care during the day and but free care you would think would be taken up as quickly as one heard about it. So, it's--it's a little sad, um, but thank you for explaining it.

Um, one last thing my fellow Councillor, Councillor Azeem brought up the budget and the concerns. Uh, Cambridge is a very rare place. I know our beloved manager won't be thrilled for me to say this, but we're loaded. The question is, will we spend the money? And, um, and I'm proud. Like, I know the manager is that we do spend so much money on education. I can't imagine a better area to spend

a good deal of money. Um, it changed my life. I'm sure it changed most of us, our lives, education, um, but we use much less of our tax base than other greater Boston cities.

And, um, so if there was a crisis, there is a reservoir. We'd have to do it cautiously. But there is a reservoir that makes us very unique. Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you all. I yield.

COUNCILLOR PATRICIA M. NOLAN: Thank you, Councillor Carlone. So, I think then I will go to questions which all of which I sent to the school department a week ago. Um, so I will start with that, um, and then talk, you know, overarching about the budget which is a lot of good in it.

Um, the first question was around something, the Vice Mayor mentioned 8th grade algebra, which as we all know, has been a topic since Bob Moses started the algebra project here in Cambridge 40 years ago. The budget mentions on page 11, the calculus project but not the algebra project. Um, we heard a little bit from Dr. Turk.

So, what I'd asked was what is the percent

preferably by sending school of eighth grade students from CPS schools who start the high school year having successfully completed algebra 1 since that was the subject of, I think when we looked at it 20 different policy orders on school committee, starting probably maybe even before Mr. Fantini started on school committee when Mr. Moses started work here.

Um, and I also asked what the percent of students who enter CRLS from non CPS schools who start their high school year career having successfully completed algebra 1. And I asked because, um, the latest report I had from my time from, uh, 2019 was that only 25% of CPS graduates from our five 8th grade's collectively successfully passed the algebra exam and that I believe the blended rate of understanding that about 30 or 35% of CRLS students start--CRLS, they're first class at CRLS is not algebra 1, is a blended rate with a much higher percentage of those coming from outside than inside that may have changed, but I'm curious as to what we know specifically about, um, the percentage

and particularly if we see the same variation we did from before, which is wide variation among the schools in terms of the how prepared the students are for starting.

DR. VICTORIA GREER: Sure. Um, Councillor Nolan, I am sorry to say that we are actually still pulling that data, that is data that we have our folks working on and we'll get it to you, um, hopefully by the end of the week, if not early next week.

COUNCILLOR PATRICIA M. NOLAN: Okay. And I--and I ask because not just do I want to know it, it's obviously critically important but it's something I'm sure you all want to know and the whole community should know. It has been a marker for 20 or 30 years. It has been a civil rights equity issue for longer than that. So, we should all know whether we are successfully preparing students and as all of you from your time are not surprised here.

I think we should have an explicit goal and--and work hard and it is distressing to me personally that we don't have an explicit goal and success rate. Not just a goal of 100% of 8th grader

successfully completing algebra, everyone can do it. It was a promise started by was just recently passing by the mural to Bob and Janet Moses who worked on this.

So, I'm--I'm hoping that data is available soon. I'm disappointed it's not here. And I hope whatever it shows we commit then too increasing it and getting to that goal of 100%. It really is something, there's no reason not to.

The second question I had asked and sent--and again I sent these all in advance was the goal for more than a decade has been proficiency in reading and writing for every grade three student going by MCAS and the reports in the budget book CPS is doing better than the state, which is really great.

I think it has increased over the last few years. That's terrific news. And yet every student is not meeting that critical benchmark, which we know a lot of research shows that you need to be reading or writing on at a proficient level by grade three in order to predicate success for the future.

So, do we have a plan and what is our plan to

getting all third graders to proficiency in reading? I think that I would phrases, can we commit to 100% within three years, meaning the current kindergarten class within three years, we'll get there every single kid.

DR. VICTORIA GREER: Thank you for that question. Um, there are quite a few things that we are doing. Um, I'm very excited about the work that our new curriculum coordinator, um, Miss Emily Brian has been doing with workgroup, um, with her entry plan and creating an actual strategy plan in regards to literacy to meet the goal that we all want and that's proficiency by third grade.

Um, and so it starts there. There in the midst of doing some curriculum reviews, um, looking specifically starting at that early literacy in JKK and first grade and implementing strategies and approaches district wide to begin to address the literacy skills early on. We also have trained the early elementary teachers in the rand screener and that helps to detect reading challenges very early on and be able to be responsive to that.

Um, we've also, um, some of the next steps are also to train educators on what we discussed at one of our school committee meetings early in the year on the science of reading. And that's where we really are trying to ensure that each and every educator, especially those who teach reading and literacy, understand those high yield strategies that help build literacy skills across the board for all students. Dr. Turk is there anything else you would like to add?

DR. CAROLYN L. TURK: Thank you, Madam Chair. The two things that I would add and these are both new this year with our new coordinator. One is a district wide literacy leadership team that is made up of educators representing all grade levels. And that has been, I think a really important, uh, addition in terms of, uh, full engagement with--with our educators, uh, to be able to both share expertise from within and then learn expertise from those around us in other communities.

So, that is I think a very strong addition to being able to, um, be successful with--with our

goal. And the other piece, um, is the addition of three assessment teams. And that's not a matter of just bringing on more assessments, but it's looking at ways in which we can make sure that we are identifying the needs of, uh, students and being able to match the appropriate supports and interventions. And there's actually one for grades K-2, another for 3-5, another for 6 through 8. And again, full, uh, educator engagement in that.

COUNCILLOR PATRICIA M. NOLAN: Okay, I know you can't answer the question will definitely be there, but it's so critically important. Right? And we know we have had some success, but again, we also know that success is not even across, uh, socioeconomic and racial category. So, that sounds like hopefully in a few years we really will be at 100%.

My next question has been is what is the CRLS data on school choice, the kindergarten choices for this year's lottery and what has been done in response to the directive to bring programmatic change to help even out school choices bring more stability and implement the full plan.

And just I happen to know, since it was the last year on school committee, the school committee has on presumably still on record. You know, there's actually been four or five different directions over the years to really follow up the control choice plan, which is they use the data to help schools and bring programmatic change when warranted and--and I'm just curious as to what has happened with that recognizing that COVID has intervened.

But it's obviously something we all want, which is a balanced school with, uh, evenly chosen schools across that--that people, uh, deserve and our community deserves to make sure that happens. So, I'm curious as to what the choices showed this year and where the plans stand for programmatic change.

CFO CLAIRE SPINNER: We do have that in the report. I mean, I think that it would be easier for us to, um, just send you the chart of--of where the choices were.

COUNCILLOR PATRICIA M. NOLAN: Yeah. So, just to remind you, I asked for this a week ago, it would have-- And I asked for it in writing a week ago. So,

it's a little-- I get that, it isn't here. But as I said at the time, all of this information is probably readily available. The 8th grade algebra should be, the third grade reading the choice. So, I look forward to reading it when you send me the chart. And--and-- But the chart probably doesn't show what is the response to the director to bring programmatic change.

DR. VICTORIA GREER: If I can be honest, I'm-- I'm not understanding your question about the directive to bring programmatic change. Maybe I'm missing something.

COUNCILLOR PATRICIA M. NOLAN: Yeah, a couple of times over the last years, certainly while I was still on it, there were votes on the school committee orders passed to say use the data in the controlled choice to understand and help schools by bringing programmatic change to schools that, um, that warranted and it was voted upon policy. I don't think it disappears with the new school committee. So, that's what I'm referring to and--and it's actually written into the control choice plan.

That's the whole point of the plan is to use the data.

COUNCILLOR MARC C. MCGOVERN: Point of information. How is this related to the budget?

COUNCILLOR PATRICIA M. NOLAN: It's related to the budget because I want to know if programmatic change is going to be brought into the budget and if they're planning for it. But it sounds like you haven't been apprised of this or it hasn't been a discussion.

DR. VICTORIA GREER: No, I think now I know what you're--what you are asking and I'm trying to think about--thinking the best way to respond to you in regards to programmatic changes. Has there been a discussion about what we need to do in order to support our under enrolled schools? Yes. And currently our enrollment is slipping up, like, declining across the district.

So, a first stab at this is better understanding why our enrollment is declining in order to use that data to inform then what the next steps are. And so that--that study, we've already started doing the

leg work to get that study done.

COUNCILLOR PATRICIA M. NOLAN: Okay. I appreciate getting that report too. Um, the other question is, um, the level up program was one that was instituted a few years ago. We brought in a lot of change including additional teachers and--and budget items to support that program. Do we have a sense of, is that program then evaluated? And is it--is it leading to any other changes or how has it worked out those--those investments and what will be the investments going in the future to either expand it or build on it?

DR. VICTORIA GREER: I'll let that Dr. Turk respond.

DR. CAROLYN L. TURK: Thank you. Uh, in terms of an evaluation, we have not had an outside evaluator come in to look at the program. However, during the last, uh, a couple of years and it actually looked a little bit different obviously during the COVID period, but we were using, um, what is called a TNTP, self evaluation, um, that, uh, was brought forward to the teachers at the high school, uh, and

they were part of a process of going through a series of questions, uh, looking at, uh, both the rigor as well as the, uh, the concerns or areas of improvement that could take place.

Uh, and quite honestly that happened in a much more rigorous way just before the pandemic. It did not happen to the same extent during these last two years but based on the information that we were able to call from the time that we did have in a strong way, we were able to make, uh, some adjustments in terms of just delivery, in terms of supports for students, in terms of professional development for the teachers.

And there have been, uh, conversations around, um, expanding beyond the two, uh, content areas of ELA and social studies and trying to look at what that might be, uh, in the area of science with the-- the next iteration. So, there has been an expansion of moving from, uh, incoming freshmen to freshmen and sophomores, freshmen to sophomores and juniors and then seniors, we have not been able to do the, uh, what I would call a more horizontal expansion

because we just caught up--got caught in sort of an unexpected, uh, global concern.

COUNCILLOR PATRICIA M. NOLAN: The global pandemic meaning throwing us all off course. Now that's good to hear because it was a big investment and if I'm just curious as to whether the numbers are right or it should be smaller classes or bigger classes because that would have an impact on staffing and budget. So, hopefully this will be over and you'll be able to do the full evaluation.

Um, this budget has a lot for the paying attention to the mental health of students and I'm curious as to whether they are included in all those budget allocations are ensuring that we are basically taking, um, uh, the temperature of understanding and assessing the mental health of the students because that's so critical to all of their learning and I recognize there's the addition of some of the social workers, there was also a past investment in a lot of social emotional learning and in the--in the schools. Is that also built into this budget?

DR. VICTORIA GREER: Yes, it is. Actually it was implemented last--actually, it was in this year's budget and it was implemented this year. Um, we use a quick assessment. Well, I shouldn't say quick assessment, an assessment called the [inaudible 01:35:44] of many and that, um, is a scale to help us evaluate where students are in their social emotional needs.

COUNCILLOR PATRICIA M. NOLAN: Okay, that's terrific. Those are the questions I sent. Um, I think some of the other questions were answered by, uh, by folks, there is so much to celebrate and applaud in this budget. I just want to highlight a few of the things that one of them, I mentioned, the results in grade three literacy were, um, quite, uh, what good to see.

The reduction in the out of the office of student services, out of district placement, meaning that it's always better for students to be in district if their needs can be met for a whole host of social reasons. It's as Councillor McGovern says it's not just money, it really is to ensure that

we're meeting the needs of students. So, that was, um, really good to see. I also was, um, saw and recognized that, um, the school district is taking on addressing the challenge of organizational structure, which is something that had been identified as an issue I believe in the district a decade ago and it's something that has always been ongoing of how is it that we do this?

I hope that this new organization structure, which includes some additional, um, positions, is something that--that leads the district to a better place. The programs like BRIGHT are helping the most vulnerable students and expanding. It is--was mentioned to the middle schools really good.

The intentional focus on equity and social emotional learning, um, is also good. I want to highlight what I think is kind of been mentioned. Dr. Turk mentioned summer support as all of, you know, also it's something, uh, that--that we know needs, if students need support, we can't forget them over the summer and--and there's an intentional focus on trying to improve some of those programs.

Uh, the budget also highlights that some areas of--of laps have persisted. It was a little distressing to see that advanced learner seems to have actually gone backwards that only now is a strategy beginning to identify the needs, which is a huge equity issue. We have students across all sorts of categories who have those needs.

And--and from literally 15 years ago, when my own children were in the school, it was something we had made advancements on and it seems like according to what I read, uh, in the budget, it is--it is now coming back to the idea that we have to do it. It's--it's a little hard to read that it's just beginning, um, and the upper school athletics is a really good addition to the budget. Again, it's something that was promised 10 years ago and we started the upper schools.

But I am glad even if it's 10 years later, that it--it is, uh, part of the budget and coordinating, um, MTSS, is also something that was good to see and yet, um, it's unfortunate that--that whole program is not yet delivered, which is why we need to

coordinate it. So, as I said, what matters most to me is evaluating and monitoring the evidence of success. Um, so it'll be-- I am--I would love to see the--the data that I asked for, um, but I recognize that will be coming later. So, I'm not sure if that's my comments any-- Okay, Mayor Siddiqui, did you want to wrap us up at all or?

MAYOR SUMBUL SIDDIQUI: No, I'm all set. Well, I wanna--I do wanna give my--my--my--my members and my my school committee colleagues a chance to say anything before we go ahead and take a vote. Anyone want to add anything? You all came.

COUNCILLOR PATRICIA M. NOLAN: The floor is yours. Member Wilson? [inaudible 01:39:13] Member Wilson, can you just speak a little closer to the mic so that you recorded?

MEMBER WILSON: Okay, great. Thank you all so much for the time today.[inaudible 01:39:34]

MAYOR SUMBUL SIDDIQUI: Member Weinstein?

MEMBER WEINSTEIN: Uh, thank you, Mayor. Thank you Chair Nolan. Uh, yes, I want to echo the appreciation for this conversation, um, and also,

you know, again for the, uh, budget Co-Chairs from the school committee, Vice Chair Rachel and Member Rojas, um, and for the work of the entire administration.

Um, you know, as has been said, we are in this fortunate position of, uh, not needing to, uh, determine, you know, where we're going to, uh, make cuts with funding, but instead where we're going to allocate funding and where we can strategically, um, you know, use our funds best and, uh, you know, that--that's also the result of the--the working contribution of our entire community and of course of the City Council and the City Manager and I know we're very appreciative of that and take seriously the responsibility of really allocating these funds in a way that we have some evidence, uh, will get us closer to our goals.

One thing I'm excited about is that we are at this stage of, uh, the strategic planning--the multi year strategic planning for the district that was essentially put on hold because of the need to focus on pandemic response, uh, and, uh, I think this

budget sets us up well to do that planning, to begin to make whatever adjustments we need to do to get to those goals and then to move forward, you know, in a robust way, uh, following that--that planning. Um so again, I appreciate this conversation.

I think the surface a lot of some--a lot of questions that we've been discussing and will continue to need to discuss and--and that we're addressing both in this budget and some of the upcoming work. And I'm really excited to continue that in partnership and, um, I too hope that you support this budget and I look forward to future conversations and partnership, thank you.

MAYOR SUMBUL SIDDIQUI: Member Fantini?

MEMBER FANTINI: Thank you. I wanted to just-- This was a great conversation, great questions and I appreciate the thoughtfulness by which the councillors, uh, you know, ask questions and challenged us to be a better school committee and I think that was all well done.

Um, you know, I think for me the equity issue of the day is student achievement and I think that's

kind of what I've heard from--from a lot of folks, which I--which I think so we're on the same page and I--and I also think the investments that the City Council has made in the previous, um, you know, 3--3--2 years, um, you know, I think that you will start to see fruit from that--those investments in additional staffing. We just, you know, we--we had a two year delay and with--with COVID but I think the investment--the previous investments will also be kicking in as well.

So, I'm looking for, uh, you know, I think we're--we're--we're, you know, we're a great school committee team. We all have a lot of respect for each other. We work real hard together where we are a real team with our Superintendent and leadership team. And I think that with the support of these resources I--I think, and I'm confident that you will see the improvements, uh, that you're asking for. Thank you.

MAYOR SUMBUL SIDDIQUI: Member Rojas.

MEMBER ROJAS: Thank you, Mayor. Thank you to my colleagues for those comments. Um yeah, I wanna--I

wanna start by saying that yes, all the questions that we heard tonight, some of them we might have already touched on, but many of them actually were new. So, I appreciate hearing people's questions.

I think a lot of those questions will feed into our minds and when we're looking at the district line as far as how can we--how should we be looking at ourselves for the next five years. So, I appreciate having that--that information from hearing those questions for me because they'll make us think and hopefully come up with a better district plan.

Um, and I also wanted to thank, uh, Councillor Carlone for the questions on enrollment. I--I think that--that picks my question as far as how can we maximize JK enrollment without changing the whole structure, but just how can we take advantage of this little dip in enrollment so we can offer JK-2 more students. Um, so yeah, I appreciate every comment tonight.

DR. VICTORIA GREER: Thank you all. And I would move that we adopt.

COUNCILLOR PATRICIA M. NOLAN: Then we move this budget with a favorable recommendation to City Council.

MAYOR SUMBUL SIDDIQUI: Yes, to favor our recommendation.

CITY CLERK ANTHONY WILSON: On that motion and again, the motion is to refer this budget to the full City Council with a favorable recommendation.

Councillor Burhan Azeem - Yes

Councillor Dennis J. Carlone - Yes

Vice Mayor Alanna M. Mallon - Yes

Councillor Marc C. McGovern - Yes

Mayor Sumbul Siddiqui - Yes

Councillor E. Denis Simmons - Yes

Councillor Paul F. Toner - Yes

Councillor Quinton Y. Zondervan - No

Councillor Patricia M. Nolan - Present

Yes-7, No-1, Present-1. Motion passed.

COUNCILLOR PATRICIA M. NOLAN: And with that I'll entertain a motion to adjourn. Motion Moved.

CITY CLERK ANTHONY WILSON: On adjournment,

Councillor Burhan Azeem - Yes

Councillor Dennis J. Carlone - Yes

Vice Mayor Alanna M. Mallon - Yes

Councillor Marc C. McGovern - Yes

Mayor Sumbul Siddiqui - Yes

Councillor E. Denis Simmons - Yes

Councillor Paul F. Toner - Yes

Councillor Quinton Y. Zondervan - Yes

Councillor Patricia M. Nolan - Yes

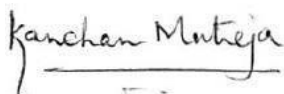
Yes-9, No-0, Absent-0. Motion passed.

**The Cambridge City Council Finance Committee adjourned
at approximately 7:45 pm.**

C E R T I F I C A T E

I, **Kanchan Mutreja**, a transcriber for Datagain, do hereby certify: That said proceedings were listened to and transcribed by me and were prepared using standard electronic transcription equipment under my direction and supervision; and I hereby certify that the foregoing transcript of the proceedings is a full, true, and accurate transcript to the best of my ability.

In witness whereof, I have hereunto subscribed my name this 7th day of February 2022.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Kanchan Mutreja". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above a horizontal line.

Signature of Transcriber

Minutes Acceptance: Minutes of May 11, 2022 6:00 PM (Committee Reports)