



OFFICE OF THE MAYOR

Sumbul Siddiqui
Mayor (2020-21, 2022-23, 2026-27)

To: Cambridge City Council
From: Sumbul Siddiqui, Mayor
Date: May 28, 2026
Subject: Communicating Information from the School Committee

To the Honorable, the City Council:

I write to provide an updated summary of recent Cambridge School Committee activity.

The May 19, 2026 Cambridge School Committee meeting focused primarily on district leadership transitions, long-term facilities planning, and a presentation on student screen use in Cambridge Public Schools. Overall, the meeting reflected a district navigating the tensions between instructional modernization and innovation and growing community concerns about student well-being, attention, and transparency.

Leadership Hiring Updates

The Superintendent outlined [updates on several active or recently completed leadership searches](#), including ongoing searches for the Cambridge Rindge & Latin and Fletcher Maynard Academy principalships and Assistant Superintendent of Elementary Education position, recently filled positions of Chief Operating Officer and Director of Family & Community Engagement, and recommendations for the Assistant Superintendent of Secondary Education and Legal Counsel positions included in that evening's consent agenda.

The district conducted broad outreach throughout these processes, including surveys, staff listening sessions, student participation, family forums, and small group discussions. Feedback from hundreds of educators and caregivers informed both leadership profiles and finalist interview questions. Search volume was substantial—the Assistant Superintendent of Secondary Education position drew 71 applicants, and the Fletcher Maynard principalship attracted 25.

Facilities Planning: 158 Spring Street

The Superintendent's update also included a discussion of the future of 158 Spring Street, the former Kennedy-Longfellow School. The building has become a planning priority given its location in East Cambridge, its large student capacity, and its proximity to Ahern Field. District leaders emphasized the importance of maintaining an elementary school presence in East Cambridge and the potential to better



serve high-need student populations through thoughtful programming decisions.

Several potential future uses for the building were outlined, including:

- Relocate an existing school to the building
- Merge two elementary schools
- Merge two upper schools
- Establish a new school or early learning center
- Retain as swing space or administrative space
- Relinquish the building entirely

Student Screen Use and Technology in CPS Classrooms

The largest presentation of the evening focused on student screen use and technology in CPS classrooms. The report, titled [*Toward High-Quality Screen Use in CPS*](#), examined not merely how much time students spend on screens, but how, when, and why screens are used during the school day. The study employed a “multi-source, mixed-methods approach,” combining Chromebook analytics, classroom observations, educator surveys, student focus groups, and principal feedback sessions.

The report found that screen use increases steadily and predictably by grade level, ranging from approximately 17 minutes per day in kindergarten to 71 minutes in grades 9–12. The vast majority of that use was instructional and curriculum-aligned—98% in the early grades and 91.4% overall—with technology embedded within broader instruction rather than replacing it. Strong teaching continued to rely heavily on discussion, writing, collaboration, and hands-on learning.

While the data did not suggest widespread recreational or inappropriate screen use during the school day, the presentation acknowledged community concerns about distraction, multitasking, diminished attention spans, off-task behavior, and the role of AI tools in academic integrity. The report stressed the importance of protecting non-screen learning time, particularly in the upper grades.

The district introduced an emerging definition of “high-quality screen use,” characterized by instructional purpose, active rather than passive engagement, standards alignment, developmental appropriateness, and intentionality. Examples of stronger uses include collaborative writing, curriculum-based research, and student-created projects, while lower-quality uses included passive video consumption, unstructured browsing, and disconnected “skill-and-drill” activities.

The district identified the following priorities going forward:

- Develop clearer districtwide guidance on screen use
- Strengthen educator training and support
- Protect non-screen instructional time



- Streamline digital platforms and tools
- Improve communication and partnership with families

Additional guidance and implementation work will continue through the summer and into the 2026–27 school year.

Please do not hesitate to reach out with any questions or requests for additional information.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Sumbul Siddiqui".

Sumbul Siddiqui
Mayor of Cambridge (2020-21, 2022-23, 2026-27)