



YI-AN HUANG
City Manager

City of Cambridge

Executive Department

CMA 2026-261
IN CITY COUNCIL
September 14, 2026

To the Honorable, the City Council:

Please see attached a memo from Cheryl Ohlson, Executive Director Cambridge Office of Early Childhood, regarding the Cambridge Preschool Program and the establishment of a joint Task Force charged with identifying policy solutions to expand supports for families with young children.

Very truly yours,

Yi-An Huang
City Manager



ATTACHED MEMO

TO: Yi-An Huang, Cambridge City Manager
FROM: Cheryl Ohlson, Executive Director Cambridge Office of Early Childhood
CC: Joseph Corrazini, Assistant City Manager for Human Service Programs
Sumbul Siddiqui, Mayor of Cambridge
DATE: September 10, 2026
RE: The Cambridge Preschool Program

Cambridge has long recognized the importance of the first five years of a child's life and has been a leader in establishing policies and programs that support children and families during this critical time period. Research has demonstrated that the experiences that children have during the early years are essential to building strong foundations for lifelong learning. Children enrolled in high-quality early childhood programs are more likely to demonstrate stronger cognitive, language, and socio-emotional skills; to experience success throughout their schooling; and even to graduate high school and secure higher-paying jobs.

Families with young children, however, continue to face significant challenges—including high living costs, complex caregiving demands, and the need to balance work or school. Access to high-quality childcare has been proven to improve family wellbeing by expanding employment and educational opportunities, increasing earning potential, and enhancing economic stability.

The City's implementation of the Cambridge Preschool Program (CPP), which provides universal preschool to all four-year-olds and many three-year-olds, reflected Cambridge's bold commitment to fostering children's development and school readiness, while simultaneously supporting families' economic wellbeing and mobility. Through CPP, all four-year-olds and many three-year-olds have access to free, high-quality preschool. Additionally, all families with income-based Priority status (incomes at or below 65% AMI) have access to free extended day and summer care, providing those families with comprehensive childcare services.

To continue narrowing gaps in access and affordability, the Mayor and City Manager are establishing a joint Task Force charged with identifying policy solutions to expand supports for families with young children by providing increased access to high-quality childcare for infants and toddlers,

thereby promoting children's development and school readiness while also reducing the financial burdens that families currently experience, especially for families furthest from resources. The Task Force will bring together City Council members, City staff, community stakeholders, and subject-matter experts. Over ten months, the group will assess Cambridge's current early childhood and childcare landscape; review local and national models for expanding access; and develop policy proposals aligned with budget constraints and long-term planning priorities.

This effort builds on the City Council's identification of childcare expansion as a top priority through the Finance Committee's prioritization process. It follows [CMA 2026 #92](#), delivered on April 27, 2026, outlining CPP expansion opportunities and related policy considerations, as well as ongoing analyses from Harvard Kennedy School researchers and the Citywide Infant-Toddler Working Group. These findings were discussed at the June 29, 2026 Joint Roundtable Meeting of the City Council and School Committee.

Task Force Scope

The Task Force will:

- Examine the current landscape of the early childhood and childcare system;
- Evaluate policy options for expanding access, affordability, and sector stability; and
- Develop an implementation plan that outlines feasible strategies for increasing access to affordable, high-quality childcare.

Timeline

- September-December 2026: Establish scope, review data, and examine national models
- January 2027: Joint Roundtable Meeting of the City Council and School Committee for alignment and feedback
- January-May 2027: Develop implementation plan, including staffing, facilities, regulatory, and cost considerations
- June 2027: Final report submitted to City Council

Key Areas of Exploration

The Task Force will focus on issues including:

- access and affordability for families, including supports for infant/toddler care;
- provider stability, quality enhancement, and facility expansion needs;
- workforce compensation, benefits, professional development, and pipeline strategies;
- program models across mixed-delivery systems;

- funding strategies, revenue planning, and opportunities for alignment with state and federal resources;
- equity across demographics, language groups, and children with disabilities;
- operational improvements to enrollment systems, data collection, and governance.

The Task Force will draw on both new and existing community input to inform its work. This will include broad engagement with families, caregivers, early childhood providers, and other stakeholders, as well as insights from recent initiatives that have already undergone significant community engagement—such as CPP feedback efforts, the Infant-Toddler Working Group, and the Out of School Time Expansion Study Report. Together, these perspectives will help shape the Task Force’s understanding of family needs and sector challenges and support the development of thoughtful, informed recommendations.