



**OFFICIAL MINUTES OF THE VIRTUAL  
BOSTON SCHOOL COMMITTEE FY25 BUDGET HEARING**

**February 15, 2024**

The Boston School Committee held a virtual FY25 budget hearing on February 15, 2024 at 5 p.m. on Zoom. For more information about any of the items listed below, visit [bostonpublicschools.org/schoolcommittee](https://bostonpublicschools.org/schoolcommittee), email [esullivan3@bostonpublicschools.org](mailto:esullivan3@bostonpublicschools.org) or call the Boston School Committee Office at (617) 635-9014.

**ATTENDANCE**

School Committee Members Present: Chairperson Jeri Robinson; Stephen Alkins; Chantal Lima Barbosa; Rafaela Polanco Garcia; and Student Representative Diego Mehta.

School Committee Members Absent: Vice Chairperson Michael D. O'Neill; Brandon Cardet-Hernandez; and Quoc Tran.

**DOCUMENTS PRESENTED**

[Agenda](#)

[FY25 Budget Memo](#)

[FY25 School Budget Presentation](#)

[Additional FY25 Budget Documents](#)

**CALL TO ORDER**

Chair Jeri Robinson called the meeting to order and led the pledge of allegiance. She said that a recording of tonight's hearing will be posted at [bostonpublicschools.org/schoolcommittee](https://bostonpublicschools.org/schoolcommittee) and on YouTube. She announced that simultaneous interpretation services were available virtually in Spanish, Haitian Creole, Cabo Verdean, Vietnamese, Cantonese, Mandarin and American Sign Language (ASL). Translated documents were posted at [bostonpublicschools.org/schoolcommittee](https://bostonpublicschools.org/schoolcommittee) prior to the start of the hearing.

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## WELCOME

Chair Robinson briefly reviewed the School Committee’s budget process. On the first Wednesday in February, as outlined in the City of Boston Charter, the Superintendent presented her preliminary FY25 budget proposal to the Committee. Starting tonight, the Committee will hold a series of budget hearings to take a deeper look at the Superintendent’s budget proposal. Tonight’s presentation will focus on school budgets. On Monday, March 4th, the Committee will hold a budget hearing to focus on the central budget. The Committee will hold a third and final hearing on March 20th, immediately followed by a regular School Committee meeting. Over the course of the next few weeks, Committee members are invited to ask questions and suggest modifications to budget items. The community is also invited to ask questions and provide feedback about the Superintendent’s recommended budget by offering live, written, and video testimony. The Superintendent and her team will work diligently to respond to the Committee member’s questions and suggested modifications, as well as clarify areas of concern before presenting a revised budget to the Committee on March 20th. Ms. Robinson asked members to reserve action on the budget items until after the Committee receives all of the budget hearing presentations so that any proposed action is taken in the context of the impact on the budget as a whole and after the Superintendent and her team have had an opportunity to provide responses to members’ questions and incorporate feedback from both the Committee and the community in her revised budget that will be presented on March 20th.

## FY25 SCHOOL BUDGET PRESENTATION

The Superintendent presented a report on her FY25 budget proposal with a focus on school budgets. She was joined by Budget Director Serena LaRocque, Director of State and Federal Programs Shira Decovnick, Tynan Elementary School Principal Leslie Gant and Brighton High School Head of School Andrew Bott.

The Superintendent is proposing an FY25 budget totaling \$1,526,629,446. Once again this year, the City is providing additional funding, specifically focused around the investments for inclusive education. This year, an added complexity to the budget is that a one-time infusion of \$400M in federal COVID relief dollars (ESSER) spent over the past three years is coming to an end. ESSER funding allowed BPS to maintain operations during the pandemic, protect against learning loss, and subsidize schools with declining enrollment. It also allowed BPS to make investments in our district’s literacy programs, reading coaches, and many other classroom supports, many of which the district is committed to continuing.

BPS, like every other large urban school district, has also seen declining enrollment over the last decade. While the enrollment decline has slowed down over the last few years, the district must now take steps to invest in the things that benefit students most.

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The FY25 budget is the first year of many that prioritizes the work differently than the past. Over the next several years, BPS will:

- Move away from the Weighted Student Formula that no longer adequately funds schools.
- Ensure all schools can serve all our students by making major investments in the resources required to close the opportunity gaps for our Black and Brown students and provide a continuum of services to meet the needs of our Students with Disabilities and Multilingual Learners.
- Finally, BPS will be shifting the footprint of schools so that physical spaces better support the learning and experiences that students deserve.

The Superintendent explained that her team is beginning to make structural changes in a subset of grades districtwide that will afford students opportunities to experience inclusive education based on flexibilities in service delivery through the inclusion planning team process (IPT). As BPS transitions to be a fully inclusive district, the district must adjust the way its technical systems work, including financial and human resources databases and how staffing and classroom information is recorded. As BPS moves away from a model that segregated students into language-specific SEI classrooms, the district has begun to recode those classrooms and educators in the system. As a result, the budget tables that appear to show a decrease in bilingual educators are actually only the result of coding changes in the database and are not due to a reduction in bilingual educators. She clarified that the proposed budget is making significant investments in staffing for multilingual learners and for students with disabilities. She said that the IPT allocations of staff are in addition to what is required for compliance.

Tynan Elementary School Principal Lesley Gant and Brighton High School Head of School Andrew Bott described their budget process experiences, merging instructional leadership teams with inclusion planning teams to embed the inclusion work in the instruction work. Brighton High has launched a new early college initiative.

## **PUBLIC COMMENT**

John Mudd, Cambridge resident and community advocate, testified regarding a program budget for English Learners.

Saquoya Craig, Jamaica Plain resident and co-chair of the Mel King School Parent Council, parent, testified regarding conditions at the King School.

Edith Bazile, Hyde Park resident and community advocate, testified regarding conditions at the King School.

Rob Talevi, West Roxbury resident and Lyndon K-8 Pilot School parent, testified regarding budget concerns and the potential loss of a social worker.

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## **SUMMARY OF DISCUSSION**

Ms. Polanco Garcia asked clarifying questions about how Title One funding was used to support multilingual learners. Ms. Decovnick said that any unspent Title I funds are redeployed primarily for summer programming. The district conducts annual reporting to ensure that a proportional amount of Title One funding is specifically reaching multilingual learners. Ms. Decovnick offered to follow up with more details.

The Superintendent clarified for Ms. Polanco Garcia that the budget for multilingual staffing is not decreasing, but rather is the result of recoding. The Superintendent asked Ms. La Rocque to provide the Committee with additional information identifying by school the number of changes in positions.

Ms. Robinson requested that the Committee receive a program budget to better understand the district's investments.

Ms. Lima Barbosa requested more details about staffing positions in school budgets and how \$15 million in ESSER funds was used to support schools. She asked how IPT members were selected. Ms. Decovnick said that generally speaking schools used that funding to move a combination of employees and non-personnel from ESSER funding onto the General Fund. Ms. Lima Barbosa asked if the district has received resistance from schools in response to expanding inclusion. Deputy Superintendent for Academics Linda Chen said that some schools expressed concerns about having the right resources to serve students well.

Dr. Alkins requested a separate meeting with district staff to review the budget spreadsheets in more detail. He asked how savings from efficiencies and consolidations will be reinvested. He asked how schools who feel like they did not receive the IPT resources they requested will be supported. The Superintendent said that savings will be reinvested in the system where there are areas of need. Ms. La Rocque shared some examples. Dr. Alkins asked if fuller classrooms need more support. The Superintendent said that impacted classrooms are actually just being brought up to typical class size. Dr. Chen said that budget planning is an iterative process.

Ms. Robinson asked how many classrooms are less than 75 percent full. Director of Planning and Analysis Jamie Racanelli said he will compile the numbers to quantify the answer. Ms. Robinson questioned if BPS will ever reach a stage when home harmless and soft landings are no longer needed because all students will have what they need. The Superintendent said that the district has been moving away from hold harmless funding. She said that the capital planning work to right-size the district will allow BPS to provide all students with a high quality experience. She added that it is a multi-year process that will take time. Ms. La Rocque said the current hold harmless funding is about \$30 million.

Ms. Polanco Garcia commended the Roger Clap School community which she recently visited. She asked how schools such as the Clap can keep making strides when faced with budget challenges. The Superintendent said that the facilities decision-making rubric will help the district decide the role of single strand school buildings as BPS works to provide all students

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with a high quality experience.

Ms. Robinson requested information on the range of per-pupil costs by school. The Superintendent said that the finance team would follow up, adding that the information will be in the context of the population those schools serve. Ms. Robinson spoke about the importance of meeting students' academic, social-emotional and recreational needs. The Superintendent said that the Hub School model and partnerships with the business and non-profit community address those needs.

Mr. Mehta asked about the expansion of Hub schools. The Superintendent offered to provide more information on the Hub School model in her presentation on the central budget at the March 4th budget hearing.

### CLOSING COMMENTS

Chair Robinson encouraged people to review the FY25 budget documents and share their feedback by visiting [bostonpublicschools.org/budget](https://bostonpublicschools.org/budget). Comments can also be emailed to the School Committee. The Committee will hold its next virtual meeting on February 28th at 5 p.m. The next virtual budget hearing will take place on March 4th at 5 p.m. at which time the Committee will receive a presentation focused on the central budget. The final virtual budget hearing will take place on March 20th at 5 p.m., prior to the 6 p.m. School Committee meeting.

Dr. Alkins requested an update on the structure and role of the Committee's task forces, as well as the structure of meetings. Ms. Robinson said that the Opportunity and Achievement Gaps Task Force is welcome to provide comments to the Committee on the budget. She added that the Committee will further discuss the structure of meetings and task forces near the end of budget season.

### ADJOURN

**Approved** - At approximately 7:40 p.m. the Committee unanimously approved a motion by roll call to adjourn to the budget hearing.

Attest:



Elizabeth Sullivan  
Executive Secretary