

The School Committees Report: METCO President & CEO Joins Joint School Committee Meeting; FY26 Recommended Operating Budgets

METCO President & CEO Milly Arbaje-Thomas Visits Joint School Committee Meeting

Members of the Concord and Concord-Carlisle Regional School Committees hosted METCO President & CEO Milly Arbaje-Thomas at their latest regularly scheduled meeting. Ms. Arbaje-Thomas relayed that she has been involved in the METCO program for seven years and has been very involved with Concord and CCHS on a consistent basis during that time. She stated that, “I’m very impressed with the work happening in Concord” pointing to the investments the Districts are making in both the METCO program and diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging efforts. These investments include staff at both the elementary K-8th and at CCHS dedicated to METCO, a Director of DEIB position, METCO representation on the School Committees, and a DEIB Strategic Plan. Due to these efforts, she said that she uses Concord and Concord-Carlisle School Districts as examples for other METCO districts to look for best practices.

Other actions that she referenced include the Districts’ focus groups with students and families which result in recommendations that are being implemented such as the late and Saturday buses so students can participate in athletic and other after school programs and organizations. At CCHS, there are METCO student ambassadors that meet with school leadership on a regular basis to share experiences, offer suggestions, and maintain an open dialogue, all of which Ms. Arbaje-Thomas serves to enhance the student experience and promote a sense of belonging. In looking at academic performance for METCO students, Ms. Arbaje-Thomas was pleased to know that the Districts have developed and are implementing strategic approaches to addressing the achievement gap and the opportunity gap of CCHS METCO students participating in honors level courses while noting that these are issues for many of the state’s 33 METCO Districts.

FY 26 Operating Budgets

District leaders shared their operating budget recommendations for FY26 with the School Committees. The budgets that are designed to be fiscally responsible while supporting teachers, staff, and students with the necessary resources for the Districts’ teaching and learning mission. Both budgets are level service and reflect the goals and priorities identified in the Five-Year Strategic Plan. The budgets are created using a zero-based budget model and begin at the department level and each school site and include recommendations from the individual school improvement plans. Other budget goals include maintaining existing programs and support for students, meeting legal mandates for special education, and homelessness while balancing student needs with fiscal capacity of the Towns of Concord and Carlisle.

The recommended Concord Public Schools operating budget increase is 2.4% higher than the current year and is within the Concord Finance Committee budget guideline. For the Regional School District, the recommended operating budget is 3.86% higher than the current year but will impact the two towns differently based on the percentage of enrollment from each community. Based on enrollment changes and the formula outlined in the Regional Agreement, there is an approximately \$75,000 shift in expenses for the Town of Concord. Given the small delta between the recommended budget and Concord Finance Committee recommendation, school leaders have identified areas for adjustments that would allow the recommended budget to be consistent with the Concord Finance Committee budget guideline.

Key budget drivers for both Districts include teaching and instruction supports, out of district tuitions, and software costs. For CPS, the District is planning to realize savings for consolidating two school sites into the new Ellen Garrison Building at the Concord Middle School that total \$576,000.

As part of their review of the Administration's recommendations, the School Committees will hold a public hearing on both budgets on February 4th.

Upcoming School Committee Meetings:

February 4,	6pm	Joint School Committee Meeting
February 26,	6pm	Joint School Committee Meeting

Zoom links are available on the District website: www.concordps.org.