

ROCHESTER SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING

ROCHESTER PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Rochester, Massachusetts

16 Pine Street - Rochester, MA 02770

MEETING MINUTES

BUDGET HEARING

March 20, 2025

Regular meeting of the Rochester School Committee was held on Thursday, March 20, 2025 at 5:30pm. This meeting was held full in-person and there was also a zoom link available. The meeting start time was delayed due to tech updates for the hybrid option via zoom.

COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT: Sharon Hartley, Katherine Duggan, Anne Fernandes, Robin Rounseville and Joshua Trombly (all in-person).

COMMITTEE MEMBERS ABSENT: None

OTHERS PRESENT: Michael S. Nelson, Superintendent of Schools (in-person); Sharlene Fedorowicz, Assistant Superintendent of Teaching & Learning (in-person); Howard Barber, Assistant Superintendent of Finance and Operations (in-person); Jaime Curley, Assistant Superintendent of Student Services (remote); Heidi Letendre, Principal (in-person); Charley West, Assistant Principal (in-person); Melissa Wilcox, Executive Assistant to the Superintendent (in-person).

Meeting was called to order at 6:01pm by Chairperson Hartley. Ms. Hartley stated in accordance with Massachusetts Open Meeting Law, the agenda has been set and the meeting is being recorded. The school committee, administration and everyone present stood and recited the Pledge of Allegiance.

FY26 BUDGET PUBLIC HEARING

Chairperson Hartley opened the Budget Public Hearing at 6:03 p.m.

Superintendent Nelson began the discussion thanking all five school committee members for serving on the Budget Subcommittee and participating in the budget process and the school administration. He explained that as the committee has been updated throughout the last few months, this has been a difficult budget season with main budget drivers being salary obligations and the rise of student services expenses. He also thanked Town Administrator Cameron Durant, Finance Director Suzanne Szyndlar, the Select Board and the Finance Committee for their feedback and open conversations about the school department budget throughout this budget preparation season. He recognized that it is difficult times for the towns in our districts, and across the state. He reminded those present that Rochester School District continues to be in 'hold harmless' status as does over 200 out of about 300 districts in the State. This means that the district is receiving the minimum state aid based off the current Chapter 70 formulas and the limited revenue streams are not keeping up with the rise in the cost of doing business for the school, therefore creating serious fiscal sustainability issues. Tonight, he believes the district is presenting a proposed budget that is as fiscally and programmatically responsible.

Mr. Barber, Assistant Superintendent of Finance and Operations, presented the proposed FY26 budget. He thanked the Rochester Memorial staff and administration for their feedback and input on building the budget based on what they see day to day in the building. He also thanked the administrators, building leaders, town administrator and finance committee representatives for their ongoing collaboration during the budget season.

Mr. Barber shared the vision for the schools:

- Is dedicated to creating a safe and nurturing learning environment that offers inclusive and engaging educational experiences.
- Through collaborative relationships with our school community members, we strive to foster a respectful culture that prioritizes academic excellence and social emotional readiness.
- Our primary objective is to provide every student with the necessary skills and developed mindset to embrace future opportunities and become responsible, lifelong learners and contributing global citizens.

He then discussed the core values for the schools:

THINK:

Cultivate a culture of academic rigor and integrity, which encourages critical thinking, creative thinking, collaboration and effective

March 20, 2025

communication.

LEARN:

Strive for academic excellence in educating the whole child through authentic, rigorous and evidence-based learning opportunities that foster real world application and a continuous pursuit of learning.

CARE:

Ensure a caring and safe environment for all school community members by promoting a sense of belonging and respect for all.

Mr. Barber explained the administration and budget subcommittee worked to create a budget the supports the following priorities:

- Ensuring high expectations of teaching and learning for all students
- Efficiency and cost-effectiveness measures
- Strategic staffing and professional development
- Data-driven decision-making

Mr. Barber reviewed the budget development process, which primarily takes place from October through May each year.

Preparation and Planning:

Superintendent, school administrators and other stakeholders analyze past budgets, assess current financial status and set budgetary goals for the upcoming fiscal year.

Budget Proposal Creation:

Based on the planning stage, a preliminary budget proposal is developed. This proposal outlines anticipated revenues, expenditures and allocations for different programs and departments.

The budget proposal may include funding for personnel salaries, benefits, instructional materials, technology, facilities maintenance, transportation and other operational costs.

Budget Review and Revision:

The preliminary budget proposal(s) undergoes a thorough review by school administrators and budget subcommittee. Adjustments and revisions are made based on feedback, financial constraints and any changes in priorities or mandates.

Input and Hearings:

Superintendent holds meetings where the school’s Budget Subcommittee, Town Administrator and Town Representatives can provide input, ask questions and provide feedback about the budget proposal. Feedback from the attendees may influence further revisions to the budget.

School Committee Budget Approval:

After incorporating feedback and making necessary adjustments, the final Superintendent’s Budget proposal is presented to the School Committee and community at a Budget Public Hearing for approval. The School Committee reviews the budget, conducts discussions and may vote to approve or make additional changes before finalizing the budget.

Final Budget Approval:

Once the budget is approved by the School Committee, the School Committee’s Proposed Budget is presented at the Annual Town Meeting. The Superintendent or designated representative attends the Annual Town Meeting to offer any additional information in support of the School Committee’s Proposed Budget.

The next part of the presentation, Mr. Barber reviewed the budget information items for Rochester School District, which consists of three items:

- Bristol County Agricultural High School
- Grants and Other Special Revenues
- General Funds

Eight (8) Rochester resident students attend Bristol County Agricultural High School.

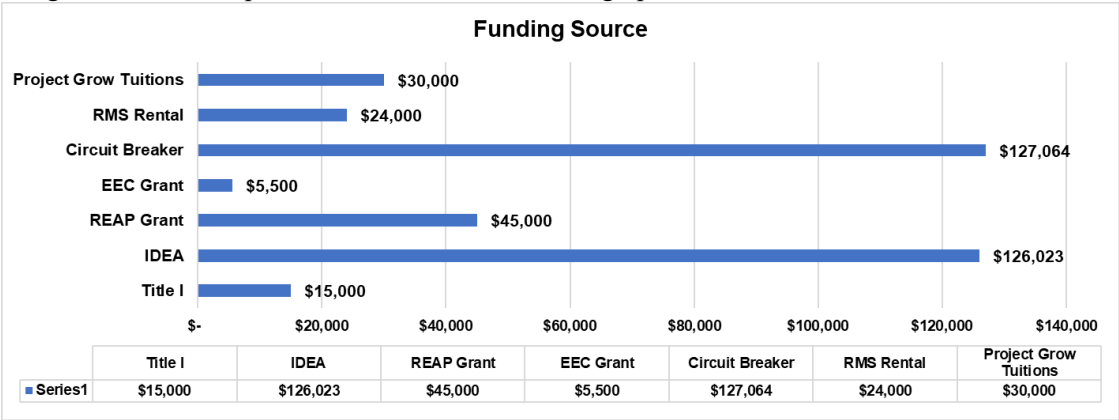
Expenditure	Amount	Note
Tuition	\$ 190,634	8 Students Enrolled
Debt Service	\$ 47,837	
Transportation	\$ 46,440	Bus Contract Split Between 2 Districts
Total BCAHS	\$ 284,911	

- Tuition – Total Cost of Student Placement
- Debt Service – Total Cost of BCAHS Building Construction by Student Assessment
- Transportation – Total Contracted Transportation to Transport from Rochester to BCAHS

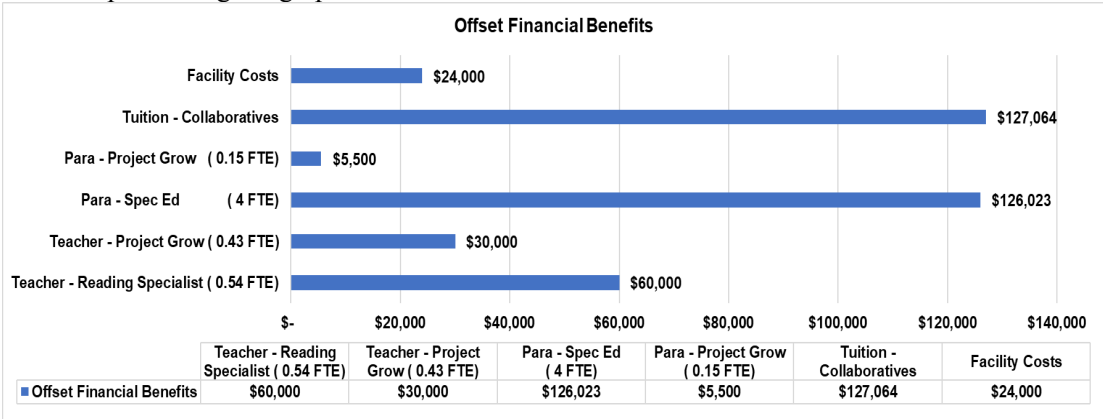
Grants and other special revenues are alternative funding used to supplement and reduce necessary general funds, typically called funding offsets. The information below shows buildings/departments supplemented by alternate funding.

Building or Department	Funding Offsets
Rochester Memorial School	\$ 221,523
Student Services	\$ 127,064
Facilities	\$ 24,000
Total FY26 Budget	\$ 372,587

The sources of these grants and other special revenues is shown in the graph below.



Mr. Barber continued to explain using the graph below where these funds are used.

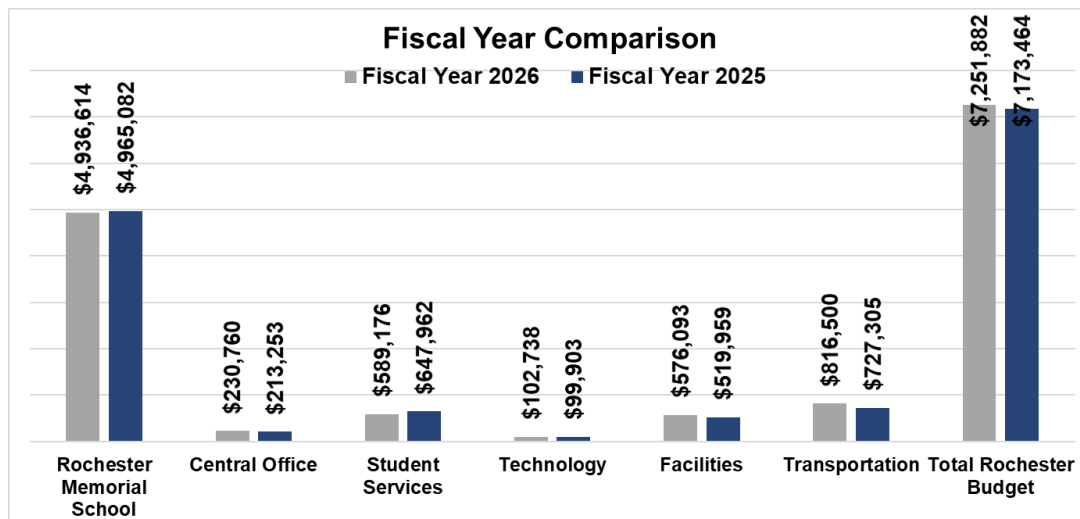


Next, Mr. Barber discussed the general funds for Rochester Memorial School. This the primary source of funding for academics, student services, facilities, technology and transportation for the school. The following image shows the amount by building/department for the proposed budget.

Building or Department	Budget Amounts
Rochester Memorial School	\$ 4,936,614
Central Office	\$ 230,760
Student Services	\$ 589,176
Facilities	\$ 576,093
Technology	\$ 102,738
Transportation	\$ 816,500
Total FY26 Budget	\$ 7,251,882
Total FY25 Budget	\$ 7,173,464
	\$ 78,418
	101.09%

The next slide of the presentation reviewed a comparison of the approved FY25 budget and the proposed FY26 budget by building/department.

Building or Department	Fiscal Year 2026	Fiscal Year 2025	Department Changes
Rochester Memorial School	\$ 4,936,614	\$ 4,965,082	\$ (28,468)
Central Office	\$ 230,760	\$ 213,253	\$ 17,507
Student Services	\$ 589,176	\$ 647,962	\$ (58,786)
Technology	\$ 102,738	\$ 99,903	\$ 2,835
Facilities	\$ 576,093	\$ 519,959	\$ 56,134
Transportation	\$ 816,500	\$ 727,305	\$ 89,195
Total Rochester Budget	\$ 7,251,882	\$ 7,173,464	\$ 78,418



Next, Mr. Barber review the changes by department as depicted below.

Department Code	Department	Proposed Fiscal	Approved Fiscal	Budget Variance	Proposed	Approved	FTE Variance
		Year 2026 Budget	Year 2025 Budget		Fiscal Year 2026 FTE	Fiscal Year 2025 FTE	
001	School Committee	\$ 10,300	\$ 10,300	\$ -	-	-	-
004	Superintendents Office	\$ 191,460	\$ 167,453	\$ 24,007	1.50	1.48	0.02
007	Administration Reg Day	\$ 357,580	\$ 350,282	\$ 7,298	5.00	5.00	-
010	Classroom Teachers	\$ 1,946,324	\$ 2,079,222	\$ (132,898)	21.00	23.00	(2.00)
013	Kindergarten	\$ 421,173	\$ 327,930	\$ 93,243	6.00	5.00	1.00
016	Art Program	\$ 104,979	\$ 103,149	\$ 1,830	1.00	1.00	-
022	Reading	\$ 138,940	\$ 129,293	\$ 9,647	2.00	2.00	-
024	ELL Program	\$ 23,848	\$ 23,213	\$ 635	0.20	0.20	-
025	English	\$ 2,050	\$ 2,050	\$ -	-	-	-
037	Mathematics	\$ 2,050	\$ 2,050	\$ -	-	-	-
040	Media Services	\$ 111,946	\$ 109,977	\$ 1,969	1.00	1.00	-
043	Music	\$ 151,025	\$ 146,771	\$ 4,253	1.80	1.80	-
049	Physical Education	\$ 136,110	\$ 133,799	\$ 2,311	1.30	1.30	-
052	Science	\$ 112,401	\$ 110,432	\$ 1,969	1.00	1.00	-
055	Social Studies	\$ 2,050	\$ 2,050	\$ -	-	-	-
061	Curriculum Development	\$ 49,500	\$ 43,000	\$ 6,500	-	-	-
076	Health Services	\$ 89,426	\$ 88,340	\$ 1,086	1.00	1.00	-
079	Transportation Reg Day	\$ 521,500	\$ 460,000	\$ 61,500	-	-	-
085	Miscellaneous	\$ 2,200	\$ 2,200	\$ -	-	-	-
088	Operation & Maintenance	\$ 576,093	\$ 519,959	\$ 56,135	1.17	1.16	0.00
093	Computer Program	\$ 102,738	\$ 99,903	\$ 2,835	0.83	0.82	0.01
100	Special Needs Administration	\$ 62,819	\$ 58,636	\$ 4,183	0.33	0.33	0.00
102	Project Grow	\$ 144,368	\$ 99,324	\$ 45,044	3.57	2.87	1.13
103	Learning Support Center	\$ 699,525	\$ 747,373	\$ (47,848)	10.00	11.00	(1.00)
118	Speech	\$ 230,977	\$ 272,440	\$ (41,463)	2.00	2.00	-
121	Support Services	\$ 261,637	\$ 260,502	\$ 1,134	1.10	1.10	-
127	Psychological Services	\$ 305,456	\$ 291,132	\$ 14,324	3.00	3.00	-
130	Sped Transportation	\$ 259,000	\$ 235,305	\$ 23,695	-	-	-
133	Programs W/Others Sped	\$ 234,407	\$ 297,376	\$ (62,969)	-	-	-
		\$ 7,251,882	\$ 7,173,464	\$ 78,418	64.81	66.07	(0.83)

More information was shared to illustrate the major changes in the FY26 budget, including union contract obligations and a reduction of an academic interventionist position that is currently not filled after a retirement, facilities and transportation. \$300,000 of Fiscal Year 2026 Special Education costs are to be supplemented by a warrant article at town meeting and are not part of this operating budget.

**Rochester Public Schools
Proposed Superintendent's Budget
for June 30, 2026**

Building or Department	Fiscal Year 2026	Fiscal Year 2025	Department Changes	Notes
Rochester Memorial School	\$ 4,936,614	\$ 4,965,082	\$ (28,468)	Staff Reduction - 1 FTE, Union Contract Compensation
Central Office	\$ 230,760	\$ 213,253	\$ 17,507	Immaterial - No Changes
Student Services	\$ 589,176	\$ 647,962	\$ (58,786)	Special Education Costs - Supplemental
Technology	\$ 102,738	\$ 99,903	\$ 2,835	Immaterial - No Changes
Facilities	\$ 576,093	\$ 519,959	\$ 56,134	Contract Costs of Utilities
Transportation	\$ 816,500	\$ 727,305	\$ 89,195	Contracted Regular and Special Education Busing
Total Rochester Budget	\$ 7,251,882	\$ 7,173,464	\$ 78,418	1.093%
Student Services	\$ 300,000	\$ -	\$ 300,000	Special Education Costs - Free Cash Supplement
Total Alternative Funds Budget	\$ 300,000	\$ -	\$ 300,000	
Total Rochester Budget Obligations	\$ 7,551,882	\$ 7,173,464	\$ 378,418	5.275%

For building based costs, retiree payouts increased by about \$13,000 and the reduction of an educational interventionist was a reduction of about \$60,000. For student services, level service of programs for tuition-based student programs was an increase of \$237,000 increase but there will be a one-time free cash supplement separate town article in the amount of \$300,000 to net a decrease of \$63,000 for student services. In facilities, a \$41,000 net increase was accounted for in PPA electricity cost and MASS fuel contact costs. Lastly, in transportation, the second year of the current bus contract accounted for a \$61,000 increase and an additional \$28,000 increase due to placement and route changes and bus monitoring for special needs transportation.

Next, Mr. Barber reviewed the below information from the Governor's Proposed Budget of Chapter 70 aid which has aid at just a slight increase of \$27,9000 or 2.33% more than FY25.

Comparison to FY25

	FY25	FY26	Change	Pct Chg
Enrollment	388	372	-16	-4.12%
Foundation budget	5,105,842	5,064,173	-41,669	-0.82%
Required district contribution	3,952,749	4,004,960	52,211	1.32%
Chapter 70 aid	1,195,102	1,223,002	27,900	2.33%
Required net school spending (NSS)	5,147,851	5,227,962	80,111	1.56%
Target aid share	17.50%	17.50%		
C70 % of foundation	23.41%	24.15%		
Required NSS % of foundation	100.82%	103.23%		

Superintendent Nelson added that this information articulates the ‘hold harmless’ status with only an increase of \$27,9000 from state funding with the rest of the increase falling to local communities.

Mr. Barber explained that current proposed budget for Rochester School District is \$7,251,882 or 1.093% of an increase from FY25 separate from the additional \$300,000 town article.

Fiscal Year 2025 Proposed Budget	\$ 7,251,882
Fiscal Year 2024 Approved Budget	<u>\$ 7,173,464</u>
Net Increase:	<u>\$ 78,418</u>
Net Percentage Increase	1.093%

School Committee Feedback:

Ms. Rounseville shared that these numbers do not include things the school committee would have liked to include in this budget and it is disheartening. Ms. Fernandes said there are no surprises this evening as they have been working on it for months with town involvement. Ms. Duggan asked to confirm the position being reduced is currently vacant due to a retirement. The administration confirmed that was correct.

There was no community feedback.

Chairperson Hartley closed the public hearing at 6:35pm.

IV. General

A. Approval of FY26 Budget

Recommendation:

That the School Committee review for approval the FY26 budget.

MOTION: by Ms. Rounseville to approve the Superintendent’s Proposed Fiscal Year June 30, 2026 Budget in the total amount of \$7,536,793 for the Rochester School District. The total amount of \$7,536,793 recognizes the two (2) segments of its funding: 1. Rochester Elementary Schools General Operating in the amount of \$7,251,882, and 2. Bristol County Agricultural School District in the amount of \$284,911.

SECONDED: Ms. Duggan

MOTION PASSED (5:0)

MOTION: by Ms. Rounseville to approve the Superintendent’s Proposed Fiscal Year June 30, 2026 Budget in the total amount of \$70,000 for the Rochester School District. The total amount of \$70,000 is for acquiring a Department of Elementary and Secondary Education approved high quality Math instructional materials.

SECONDED: Ms. Duggan

MOTION PASSED (5:0)

MOTION: by Ms. Rounseville to approve the Superintendent’s Proposed Fiscal Year June 30, 2026 Budget in the total amount of \$300,000 for the Rochester School District. The total amount of \$300,000 is to be authorized from Free-Cash or other Town Funding to supplement Special Educational Costs recognized outside of the General Operating Budget.

SECONDED: Ms. Duggan

MOTION PASSED (5:0)

ADJOURNMENT:

That the School Committee adjourn the Regular Session of the Rochester School Committee at 6:39 p.m.

MOTION: by Ms. Fernandes to adjourn at 6:39 p.m.

SECONDED: Ms. Rounseville

MOTION PASSED (5:0)

Respectfully Submitted,

Melissa Wilcox, Recording Secretary

Meeting Resources:

Budget Hearing Presentation

Budget Motion