

**ROCHESTER SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING  
ROCHESTER PUBLIC SCHOOLS  
16 Pine Street  
Rochester, Massachusetts  
Budget Subcommittee**

**January 8, 2026 at 4:30 p.m.**

**MEMBERS PRESENT:** Kate Duggan, Chairperson (in-person), Robin Rounseville (in-person), Kirstin Jimenez (remote) and Josh Trombly (in-person).

**MEMBERS ABSENT:** None

**OTHERS PRESENT:** Michael S. Nelson, Superintendent of Schools, Shari Fedorowicz, Assistant Superintendent of Teaching and Learning, Jaime Curley, Assistant Superintendent of Student Services, Heidi Letendre, Principal, and Melissa Wilcox, Recording Secretary.

**I. Meeting to Order**

The meeting was called to order at 4:31pm by Chairperson Duggan.

Superintendent Nelson welcomed the School Committee and administrators present. He shared that as he eluded to at the last meeting, changes in the special education services for students has caused a significant increase in the draft FY2027 budget for Rochester Memorial School. He reminded those present that the mandated services and tuition rates for out-of-district placements are set by the Department of Education and the Operational Services Division, and not the district. He shared the initial draft FY2027 budget which incorporates the anticipated special education expenses and salary increases in a level-service proposal is an increase of 13%. This number does incorporate the special education expenses that last year, the Town of Rochester allocated separately for \$200,000. On Monday, Superintendent Nelson and Mr. Barber will be meeting with Town Administrator, Cameron Durant and Finance Director, Suzanne Szyndlar to discuss the situation at Rochester Memorial School.

Next, Mr. Barber provided an overview by department, including Rochester Memorial School, Central Office, Student Services, Facilities, Technology and Transportation. In Teaching and Learning, DIBELS was previously grant funded but FY2027 is the first year the district must pay for this early screening assessment, which is a state requirement. Superintendent Nelson added that writing is something that is being worked on in the district, but also state-wide, so funds have been allocated for this. Aligning all three of the elementary districts in the Tri-town has been part of the strategic plan focus in recent years, but Rochester will likely have tough decisions on some of these items moving forward.

Superintendent Nelson expressed his concerns for this current budget season but it is very straightforward as far as the budget drivers this year, reiterating special education expenses and salary increases.

**School Committee Feedback:**

Ms. Rounseville expressed that it is hard because nothing is the control of the district as the majority are mandated special education expenses. She inquired as to when the last time Chromebooks were replaced. Mr. Barber said the district went two years without replacement. Chairperson Duggan inquired about Bristol County Agricultural High School. Mr. Barber said it is a separate allocation for the town and not included in the RMS budget, but he will provide information at the next meeting. Rochester's enrollment at Bristol-Aggie has increased.

Superintendent Nelson anticipates a meeting for the Budget Subcommittee next week after he and Mr. Barber meet with the Town Administrator and Finance Director on Monday and receive more information. He anticipates multiple meetings in preparation for a variety of 'what-if' situations and many discussions with Town Officials. The Subcommittee will work with the administration to identifying potential worse case scenarios and prioritize decisions. The School Committee members confirmed they are comfortable with Superintendent Nelson and Mr. Barber sharing the information discussed this evening with Mr. Durant and Ms. Szyndlar. Principal Letendre

added that is an unfortunate situation and they are decisions they do not want to make. Superintendent Nelson will also begin communication with union representatives for transparency and so they may be able to think about potential scenarios and options for FY2027.

II. **Adjournment**

**Motion** to adjourn at 5:28pm by Robin Rounseville

**Seconded** by Josh Trombly

Roll Call (Duggan; yes, Rounseville; yes, Jimenez; yes, Trombly; yes)

**Motion Carries 4-0**