

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

January 15, 2026 at 2:00 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT: Kate Duggan, Chairperson, Robin Rounseville, Kirstin Jimenez and Josh Trombly (all remote).

MEMBERS ABSENT: None

OTHERS PRESENT: Michael S. Nelson, Superintendent of Schools, Howard Barber, Assistant Superintendent of Finance and Operations, 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 2:09pm by Chairperson Duggan.

Superintendent Nelson welcomed the School Committee and administrators present. He reminded the members they discussed at the last meeting changes in the special education services have caused a significant increase in the draft FY2027 budget for Rochester Memorial School. At the last meeting an initial draft FY2027 budget which incorporated the anticipated special education expenses and salary increases in a level-service proposal was an increase of 13%. The administration reviewed the information and had some additional changes to the special education department so the collaborative and special education transportation expenses lines were able to be reduced. These changes reduced the overall proposed FY2027 budget to an increase of 11.5% since the last meeting.

Superintendent Nelson informed the School Committee that he and Mr. Barber met with Town Officials earlier in the week to review this information with them and hear their feedback on the budget for the entire Town of Rochester. The administrators shared the level-service budget but understood it was likely not feasible. The Town will also need the ORR budget for the whole picture. Superintendent Nelson explained an override was discussed but the Town has not taken a position on it, or if an override would be only for the schools or the entire Town. The District would still have to prepare for a budget without an override in the event that it was proposed and did not pass. The School Committee would be called upon to advocate for funding for the schools and all members were supportive. In anticipation of the Town asking the District to reduce further, Principal Heidi Letendre has begun reviewing potential reductions at RMS.

School Committee Feedback:

Ms. Duggan expressed being able to lobby for an override and also has already worked on a draft letter to legislators to submit on the School Committee's behalf. Ms. Rounseville also supported lobbying for what RMS needs and requested to meet with the Select Board and Finance Committee sooner rather than later. Ms. Duggan shared she wants the residents of Rochester to understand that they are advocating in other areas and the first step is not to go right to the townspeople for more funds. Ms. Rounseville agreed that it is important how information is shared. Ms. Duggan asked if the Rochester Memorial Teachers' Association was informed of the current budget situation. Superintendent Nelson did have an initial conversation with the President and plans to talk with her again later today. Principal Letendre explained that she and Assistant Principal Charles West meets monthly with the Union and this was the topic of their recent meeting. They are working to review enrollment and project reductions based on student numbers but have agreed there will be no reductions in the special education department.

Superintendent Nelson shared the Town has not given a specific number to the District to work towards as they await information from Old Colony, ORR, etc. He added that per the Collective Bargaining Agreement with the Association, reductions must begin with nonprofessional staff.

Ms. Rounseville expressed that she did not want to put anyone on the spot but wondered if the other school committee members had any thoughts. Mr. Trombly is happy to advocate for what is needed to keep as many teachers as possible. Ms. Jimenez agreed. Ms. Rounseville inquired with the administration as to when the Town would share the number they would be looking for from the District. Superintendent Nelson explained the Town Administrator is meeting with all the departments and schools in the next week or two so he anticipates after that. He will continue to work with the Town ahead of sending out any communication to stakeholders so that all parties are on the same page.

II. **Adjournment**

Motion to adjourn at 3:08pm by Robin Rounseville

Seconded by Josh Trombly

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

Motion Carries 4-0