



Springfield Public Schools
Office of the School Committee
1550 Main Street, 2 FLR
Springfield, MA 01103-1410

SPRINGFIELD PUBLIC SCHOOLS

MINUTES OF THE SCHOOL COMMITTEE

SPECIAL MEETING

Monday, March 30, 2026

LOCATION

Springfield Public Schools, 1550 Main Street, 2FLR, New England Boardroom, Springfield, MA

I. CALL TO ORDER – SPECIAL MEETING – ROLL CALL

Mayor Sarno, Chair called the Special Meeting to order at 5:30 PM.

Roll Call Attendance:

Ms. Valentin - Present
Ms. Crawford - Present
Ms. Hurst - Absent
Mr. Gomez, Jr. - Present
Ms. Gresham - Present
Ms. Monroe-Naylor (Vice Chair) - Present
Mayor Sarno (Chair) - Present

A. Invocation

A moment of silence was held.

B. Pledge of Allegiance

The pledge of allegiance was led by Mayor Sarno.

II. PRESENTATIONS:

A. Presentation on Innovation School Prospectus and Innovation School Plans:

- i. High School of Commerce Innovation Plan
- ii. Aspire Academy Innovation Plan (program within Commerce)
- iii. Polytech Early College Innovation Plan (program within Commerce)
- iv. Springfield Honors Academy Innovation Plan (program within Commerce)
- v. Rise Prep Early College Innovation Plan (program within Commerce)
- vi. Chestnut Accelerated Middle School (TAG) Innovation Plan
- vii. John J. Duggan Academy Innovation Plan
- viii. Van Sickle Academy Innovation Plan

Superintendent Dr. Dinnall opened the presentation by expressing appreciation for the extensive work completed by Michael Calvanese, the school principals, and staff members who



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collaborated on the plans. She emphasized that the proposals were research-based, innovative, and intentionally designed to address the individual needs of each school community. Dr. Dinnall noted that the plans had undergone multiple rounds of review to ensure they would continue moving schools forward in support of both students and staff.

Mr. Calvanese then provided an overview of the transition process. He explained that the schools involved had operated under the Springfield Empowerment Zone Partnership (SEZP) for nearly a decade, functioning with significant autonomy in areas such as curriculum, instruction, assessment, professional development, staffing, and budgeting. As the schools transitioned back under Springfield Public Schools, district leadership sought a model that would preserve those successful autonomies while aligning educators with the Springfield Public Schools' contract structure. The Innovation School model, established under Massachusetts law in 2010, was identified as the best pathway because it legally allows schools to maintain operational flexibility while also permitting negotiated modifications to collective bargaining agreements with teacher approval.

Mr. Calvanese highlighted the academic progress achieved by several of the schools during their time under the empowerment zone structure, citing substantial gains in percentile rankings and overall school performance. He stressed the importance of maintaining and expanding upon that success under Springfield Public Schools' leadership.

He also carefully outlined the statutory process required to establish Innovation School status. The process began with the development of a prospectus, followed by review and approval from a screening committee made up of district leadership, a School Committee representative, and the Springfield Education Association president. The approved prospectus then moved to individual Innovation Planning Committees at each school, where principals, teachers, parents, and union representatives participated in public meetings to shape the final plans. Once completed, the plans were presented to educators for a formal vote requiring a two-thirds majority approval.

Mr. Calvanese emphasized that the Innovation School framework was designed to maintain consistency for students and families while strengthening existing successful practices. Students would continue to benefit from strong academic programming, career technical education opportunities, early college partnerships, enrichment programs, and school-specific support already in place. He noted that teacher leadership teams would remain central to school planning and decision-making, allowing educators and administrators to collaboratively shape school calendars, instructional priorities, and working conditions around student needs and data-driven instruction.

A major point of the presentation focused on educator participation and support for the transition. Mr. Calvanese reported that approximately 90 percent of eligible educators participated in the vote and that more than 90 percent of those voting approved the innovation plans, significantly surpassing the state-required two-thirds threshold. He described the results as evidence of the strong trust and collaboration that exists between school leaders and educators.

The presentation also highlighted several unique strengths across the schools. High School of Commerce was recognized for expanding career technical education and early college



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programming, including pathways in health sciences, early education, and robotics. Discovery Polytech was praised for its nationally recognized STEM and early college model. Springfield Honors Academy was noted for its strong Advanced Placement and dual enrollment offerings. Rise Prep's continued commitment to early college programming was also acknowledged, despite declining enrollment. Duggan Academy, Chestnut TAG, and Van Sickle Academy were recognized for innovative enrichment programs, academic acceleration, and successful turnaround efforts.

During the discussion, members expressed appreciation for the high level of teacher support reflected in the voting results. Questions were raised regarding the impact of the transition on paraprofessionals and other non-teaching staff. Mr. Calvanese explained that district leaders had worked closely with staff members throughout the process to address concerns about hours, compensation, and working conditions. He assured the committee that staff schedules and pay structures would remain consistent through the transition and emphasized the district's efforts to communicate transparently through meetings, office hours, webinars, and written updates.

Several School Committee members praised the collaborative work of the principals, teachers, district leadership, and planning committees. Ms. Valentin reflected on her participation throughout the planning process and commended the schools for developing plans that aligned with and exceeded district expectations. District leaders also acknowledged the dedication and professionalism of the educators, principals, and families who contributed to the months-long process.

III. PUBLIC HEARING:

A. Public Hearing on Innovation School Plans (M.G.L. c.71 §92)

- i. High School of Commerce Innovation Plan
- ii. Aspire Academy Innovation Plan (program within Commerce)
- iii. Polytech Early College Innovation Plan (program within Commerce)
- iv. Springfield Honors Academy Innovation Plan (program within Commerce)
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- vi. Chestnut Accelerated Middle School (TAG) Innovation Plan
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During the public comment portion of the meeting regarding the proposed Innovation School plans, several educators spoke in strong support of the transition and the opportunities it would create for students and staff.

One speaker, a mathematics teacher who has taught in Springfield for approximately sixteen years, addressed the committee and described the proposal as an “unbelievable opportunity” for the city. He emphasized the importance of preserving the progress that the schools have made over the years, particularly through the use of data-driven instruction and the flexibility educators have within their classrooms. Santi explained that the ability to make instructional decisions in real time, rather than waiting for rigid district directives or standardized lesson pacing, allows teachers to respond directly to student needs and perform their jobs more effectively. He



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described the Innovation School model as deeply important to him professionally and personally, expressing gratitude that the district was supporting the continuation of these practices.

Another educator, identified as a sixth-grade teacher at Duggan Academy, also spoke passionately in favor of the innovation plans. She described education as “the most powerful weapon we can use to change the world” and stressed the importance of creating learning environments tailored to the individual needs of students rather than relying on a “one-size-fits-all” approach. She highlighted how the schools’ instructional model embraces differentiated learning and focuses on essential 21st-century skills such as communication, collaboration, creativity, and critical thinking.

The teacher further explained that classrooms within the innovation model are intentionally student-centered, allowing students to have a voice in classroom decision-making while teachers serve more as facilitators of learning. She praised the opportunities students are given to become problem solvers, collaborate with peers through peer teaching, and communicate effectively. According to her remarks, these innovations help schools continue developing independent learners and critical thinkers who are prepared for future success.

Throughout the public comment period, speakers repeatedly emphasized the strong sense of community and family culture within the schools, as well as the trust that has been built between educators, students, and school leadership. Their comments reflected widespread enthusiasm and optimism about maintaining and expanding the innovative practices that have contributed to student growth and school improvement over the past several years.

At the conclusion of public comment, meeting leadership thanked the speakers for their heartfelt remarks and closed the public speaking portion of the hearing.

IV. VOTING ITEMS:

A. Vote to approve the High School of Commerce Innovation Plan.

On a motion made by Ms. Monroe Naylor and seconded by Ms. Crawford, a roll-call vote was taken.

Roll Call Vote:

Ms. Valentin - Yes
Ms. Crawford - Yes
Ms. Hurst - Absent
Mr. Gomez, Jr. - Yes
Ms. Gresham - Yes
Ms. Monroe-Naylor (Vice Chair) - Yes
Mayor Sarno (Chair) - Yes

Motion passes to approve the High School of Commerce Innovation Plan.

B. Vote to approve the Aspire Academy Innovation Plan (program within Commerce).



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On a motion made by Ms. Monroe Naylor and seconded by Ms. Gresham, a roll-call vote was taken.

Roll Call Vote:

Ms. Valentin - Yes
Ms. Crawford - Yes
Ms. Hurst - Absent
Mr. Gomez, Jr. - Yes
Ms. Gresham - Yes
Ms. Monroe-Naylor (Vice Chair) - Yes
Mayor Sarno (Chair) - Yes

Motion passes to approve the Aspire Academy Innovation Plan (program within Commerce).

- C. Vote to approve the Discovery Polytech Early College Innovation Plan (program within Commerce).

On a motion made by Ms. Gresham and seconded by Ms. Valentin, a roll-call vote was taken.

Roll Call Vote:

Ms. Valentin - Yes
Ms. Crawford - Yes
Ms. Hurst - Absent
Mr. Gomez, Jr. - Yes
Ms. Gresham - Yes
Ms. Monroe-Naylor (Vice Chair) - Yes
Mayor Sarno (Chair) - Yes

Motion passes to approve the Discovery Polytech Early College Innovation Plan (program within Commerce).

- D. Vote to approve the Springfield Honors Academy Innovation Plan (program within Commerce).

On a motion made by Ms. Monroe Naylor and seconded by Ms. Valentin, a roll-call vote was taken.

Roll Call Vote:

Ms. Valentin - Yes
Ms. Crawford - Yes
Ms. Hurst - Absent
Mr. Gomez, Jr. - Yes



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Ms. Gresham - Yes
Ms. Monroe-Naylor (Vice Chair) - Yes
Mayor Sarno (Chair) - Yes

Motion passes to approve the Springfield Honors Academy Innovation Plan (program within Commerce).

- E. Vote to approve the Rise Prep Early College Innovation Plan (program within Commerce).

On a motion made by Ms. Monroe Naylor and seconded by Mr. Gomez, Jr., a roll-call vote was taken.

Roll Call Vote:

Ms. Valentin - Yes
Ms. Crawford - Yes
Ms. Hurst - Absent
Mr. Gomez, Jr. - Yes
Ms. Gresham - Yes
Ms. Monroe-Naylor (Vice Chair) - Yes
Mayor Sarno (Chair) - Yes

Motion passes to approve the Rise Prep Early College Innovation Plan (program within Commerce).

- F. Vote to approve the Chestnut Accelerated Middle School (TAG) Innovation Plan.

On a motion made by Ms. Monroe Naylor and seconded by Ms. Crawford, a roll-call vote was taken.

Roll Call Vote:

Ms. Valentin - Yes
Ms. Crawford - Yes
Ms. Hurst - Absent
Mr. Gomez, Jr. - Yes
Ms. Gresham - Yes
Ms. Monroe-Naylor (Vice Chair) - Yes
Mayor Sarno (Chair) - Yes

Motion passes to approve the Chestnut Accelerated Middle School (TAG) Innovation Plan.

- G. Vote to approve the John J. Duggan Academy Innovation Plan.

On a motion made by Ms. Monroe Naylor and seconded by Ms. Crawford, a roll-call vote



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was taken.

Roll Call Vote:

Ms. Valentin - Yes
Ms. Crawford - Yes
Ms. Hurst - Absent
Mr. Gomez, Jr. - Yes
Ms. Gresham - Yes
Ms. Monroe-Naylor (Vice Chair) - Yes
Mayor Sarno (Chair) - Yes

Motion passes to approve the John J. Duggan Academy Innovation Plan.

H. Vote to approve the Van Sickle Academy Innovation Plan.

On a motion made by Ms. Crawford and seconded by Mr. Gomez, Jr., a roll-call vote was taken.

Roll Call Vote:

Ms. Valentin - Yes
Ms. Crawford - Yes
Ms. Hurst - Absent
Mr. Gomez, Jr. - Yes
Ms. Gresham - Yes
Ms. Monroe-Naylor (Vice Chair) - Yes
Mayor Sarno (Chair) - Yes

Motion passes to approve the Van Sickle Academy Innovation Plan.

On a motion made by Ms. Gresham and seconded by Ms. Monroe Naylor, it was voted to adjourn the Special Meeting.

Roll Call Vote to Adjourn:

Ms. Valentin - Yes
Ms. Crawford - Yes
Ms. Hurst - Absent
Mr. Gomez, Jr. - Yes
Ms. Gresham - Yes
Ms. Monroe Naylor (Vice Chair) - Yes
Mayor Sarno (Chair) - Yes

The Special Meeting adjourned at 6:00 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,

March 30, 2025, School Committee Special Meeting Minutes



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Triny Vargas
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