



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 REGULAR MEETING

Thursday, September 10, 2026

LOCATION

Springfield City Hall
36 Court Street 2 FLR, Room 220, Springfield, MA

I. CALL TO ORDER – REGULAR MEETING – ROLL CALL

The Chair, Mayor Sarno called the Regular Meeting to order at 7:03 PM.

Roll Call Attendance:

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

A. Invocation

The meeting began with a moment of silence.

B. Pledge of Allegiance

The pledge of allegiance was led by the Chair, Mayor Sarno.

II. APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES:

A. Vote to approve the Minutes of the School Committee’s Regular Meeting on August 27, 2026.

The vote was tabled for the next regular meeting as the minutes were not disseminated for review due to the recent cyber incident.

III. VOTING ITEMS:

A. Vote to approve Central High School’s same day field trip request to the Gear Up Massachusetts College Prep at the Revs at Gillette Stadium in Foxborough, MA on Saturday, September 19, 2026.

With no further questions, a motion was made by Ms. Hurst and seconded by Ms. Valentin. Ms.

September 10, 2026, School Committee Regular Meeting Minutes



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Monroe Naylor had to excuse herself from the meeting and did not vote.

Roll Call Vote:

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

Motion passes to approve Central High School's same day field trip request to the Gear Up Massachusetts College Prep at the Revs at Gillette Stadium in Foxborough, MA on Saturday, September 19, 2026.

- B. Vote to approve Putnam Vocational Technical Academy's same day field trip request to the Gear Up Massachusetts College Prep at the Revs at Gillette Stadium in Foxborough, MA on Saturday, September 19, 2026.

With no further questions, a motion was made by Ms. Hurst and seconded by Ms. Valentin. Ms. Monroe Naylor had not yet returned to the meeting and could not vote.

Roll Call Vote:

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

Motion passes to approve Putnam Vocational Technical Academy's same day field trip request to the Gear Up Massachusetts College Prep at the Revs at Gillette Stadium in Foxborough, MA on Saturday, September 19, 2026.

- C. Vote to approve Duggan Academy's same day field trip request to the Gear Up Massachusetts College Prep at the Revs at Gillette Stadium in Foxborough, MA on Saturday, September 19, 2026.

With no further questions, a motion was made by Mr. Gomez and seconded by Ms. Valentin.

Roll Call Vote:

Ms. Valentin – Yes
Ms. Crawford – Yes (Remote)
Ms. Hurst – Yes
Mr. Gomez, Jr. - Yes



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

Motion passes to approve Duggan Academy's same day field trip request to the Gear Up Massachusetts College Prep at the Revs at Gillette Stadium in Foxborough, MA on Saturday, September 19, 2026.

- D. Vote to approve the Exercise of Renewal Option No. 1 to City Contract No. 20260180 Memorandum of Understanding Gateway to College Program at STCC in the amount of \$550,000.00.

With no further questions, a motion was made by Ms. Hurst and seconded by Ms. Valentin. Ms. Monroe Naylor returned to the meeting and could not vote due to a conflict of interest.

Roll Call Vote:

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

Motion passes to approve the Exercise of Renewal Option No. 1 to City Contract No. 20260180 Memorandum of Understanding Gateway to College Program at STCC in the amount of \$550,000.00.

- E. Vote to appoint a School Committee member as the Influence 100 School Committee Representative.

A nomination to appoint Ms. Hurst as the Influence 100 School Committee Representative was made by Ms. Monroe Naylor. With no further nominations or questions, a motion was made by Ms. Monroe Naylor and seconded by Ms. Valentin.

Roll Call Vote:

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

Motion passes to appoint Ms. Hurst as the Influence 100 School Committee Representative.



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IV. PRESENTATIONS:

- A. District Strategic Priority 2: Middle School Transformation. The School Committee received an update on the district's middle school transformation efforts. Administration reported that several middle schools have returned to the district following their previous participation in the Empowerment Zone structure and are now operating as innovation schools. The district is continuing to learn from strategies and programs that were successfully implemented in those schools, particularly those addressing the academic, social, emotional, and developmental needs of adolescents. Executive Director Michael Calvanese introduced the middle school principals who participated in the presentation and noted that the transformation work continues to focus on four primary areas: teaching and learning; student voice and empowerment; career exploration; and student well-being.

Principal Williams reported on the expansion of advanced coursework and academic acceleration at STEM Middle Academy. The school continued to offer Algebra I opportunities to eighth-grade students based on student interest and readiness, with 24 students participating and successfully completing the course during the prior year. The school also implemented an intentional acceleration block within the daily schedule to provide targeted reading and mathematics intervention based on student data. Preliminary data indicated that the school's mathematics and English language arts performance had stabilized after previous declines. Principal Williams also discussed efforts to strengthen the transition from elementary school to middle school and from middle school to high school through the development of habits of scholarship and increased attention to high school readiness.

Principal Sullivan provided an update on Van Sickle Academy, highlighting efforts to strengthen school culture, student voice, family engagement, and academic intervention. The school is establishing student ambassador opportunities through which students will meet regularly with school leadership and participate in decision-making. The school also increased family engagement through events and efforts to bring parents and families into the school community. Principal Sullivan reported that the school has redesigned its intervention process to provide daily, data-driven support, with administrators, counselors, deans, intervention teachers, and classroom teachers collaborating to monitor student progress and adjust intervention groups as needed. The school also revised its instructional vision and is focusing on strengthening teacher capacity, professional development, and instructional practices.

A representative of Duggan Academy reported on the school's comprehensive transformation efforts, including strengthening academic foundations, expanding access to advanced mathematics, and creating pathways connecting middle school exploration to high school, college, and career opportunities. The school expanded Algebra instruction and introduced a sixth-grade RAMP pilot focused on reading and mathematics proficiency to address foundational academic needs during the transition from elementary to middle school. The school also developed a middle school enrichment and career exploration pipeline, with opportunities connected to fields such as criminal justice, allied health, and education. The Academy continues to expand early college opportunities, with students having collectively earned 1,816 college credits through the program.

Principal Robinson discussed efforts at Chestnut Middle School to expand advanced mathematics and strengthen student engagement and academic readiness. The school is increasing access to



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Algebra I, including opportunities for seventh- and eighth-grade students, and introduced Geometry coursework for eighth-grade students. The school is also focusing on student voice, problem-solving, critical thinking, personalized learning, and a sense of belonging. Principal Robinson emphasized the importance of preparing students not only academically but also in developing independence, confidence, and the skills necessary for success in high school and beyond.

Principal Gonzalez provided an update on South End Middle School's continued focus on consistency, academic readiness, student voice, and college and career exploration. The school has expanded opportunities for students to participate in youth participatory action research, allowing students to develop ideas, plan initiatives, gather feedback, and implement changes within the school. The school also established dedicated college and career readiness time during its weekly schedule, providing students with opportunities to explore personal interests, connect those interests to career pathways, and develop their My Career and Academic Plan. South End Middle School continues to expand Algebra I opportunities in eighth grade and Algebra readiness in sixth and seventh grades through acceleration blocks. Principal Gonzalez also emphasized the importance of strong instructional practices, professional learning communities, coaching, and vertical planning to support teachers and maintain academic growth.

The School Committee discussed the importance of expanding middle school transformation beyond academic preparation to include leadership development, conflict resolution, emotional intelligence, mediation, and other skills that prepare students to navigate interpersonal and community challenges. School Committee member, Mr. Gomez, referenced prior experiences with student mediation programs and suggested that students be intentionally identified and developed as leaders during middle school and that their leadership development continue as they transition into high school.

Executive Director Calvanese acknowledged that elements of student leadership, peer mediation, and related programming are already occurring in several schools, including student ambassador and peer mediation initiatives. He stated that the district will continue identifying effective practices across schools and expanding successful programs where appropriate. He also supported the concept of strengthening peer leadership opportunities so that students could potentially facilitate groups, support conflict resolution, and take on greater leadership responsibilities within their schools.

The School Committee expressed appreciation to the Executive Director and middle school principals for the presentation and for the continued work to strengthen academic achievement, student voice, leadership, career exploration, school culture, and high school readiness across the district's middle schools.

V. INFORMATIONAL/DISCUSSION ITEMS:

- A. Discuss the Springfield Public Schools Draft Policy for Interacting with Law Enforcement Officers Engaged in Civil Law Enforcement (Protect Act) per the DESE guidance. The School Committee reviewed draft policies and procedures governing Springfield Public Schools' interactions with civil law enforcement officers pursuant to the Protect Act, signed into law by Governor Healey on August 5. Superintendent Dr. Dinnall explained that the district is working



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under a required timeline and that the proposed policy had previously been reviewed by the subcommittee. Attorney Jeremy St. Laurent provided an overview of the proposed protocols.

Attorney St. Laurent explained that the policy establishes procedures for responding to civil law enforcement activity on school premises, including contacting district legal counsel, notifying appropriate district and school leadership, documenting incidents, addressing requests for student information, notifying parents, guardians, or eligible students as required under FERPA, and communicating with school communities regarding civil law enforcement activity. The policy also addresses maintaining updated emergency contacts and alternative care plans, engaging families and the community, and making the protocols available to students and families through the district website.

The School Committee discussed the application of the protections in settings where school facilities are located within buildings that serve multiple purposes. In response to a question from the Vice Chair, Attorney St. Laurent clarified that the protections apply to school activities and areas governed by the Act but would not generally extend to public areas or activities outside the school campus or school-related activities. The School Committee acknowledged the importance of providing additional clarification to school communities where facilities are shared with other organizations or businesses. Following the discussion, the School Committee thanked Attorney St. Laurent for the clarification.

- B. Discuss the Hand-to-Hand transportation protocol. The School Committee considered a discussion regarding the district's hand-to-hand transportation protocol. The Superintendent requested that the item be tabled so that additional related matters, including questions concerning Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), could first be reviewed at the upcoming subcommittee meeting and presented together as a comprehensive discussion.

Upon the Superintendent's request, the Committee agreed to table the item pending further subcommittee discussion and consideration of the related transportation matters.

- C. Discuss a follow-up report for the First Student Transportation Contract. The School Committee received a presentation from First Student regarding the district's student transportation contract. The presentation was brought forward following an extensive discussion at the subcommittee level to provide the full committee with an opportunity to further review the company's performance, staffing, technology, communication, and operational strategies.

First Student Location Manager Ms. Diane Gincel reported that the company ended the prior school year with an overall reported on-time performance rate of 94.5%, based on approximately 14,811 recorded instances during June. Minibus service was reported at 98.1% on-time performance. First Student acknowledged ongoing operational challenges and described efforts to improve service, including the addition of seven routes, increased staffing, expanded recruiting and training resources, additional office and telephone support, and continued development of its technology platforms.

The School Committee discussed First Student's recruitment, hiring, and training practices. Ms. Gincel reported that the company provides paid CDL permit preparation, state-required training, additional training opportunities, weekend training, and ongoing professional development.



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Drivers receive required annual training as well as instruction related to customer service, conflict resolution, communication, safety, and working with students with special needs. First Student reported that it currently has six state-certified trainers and continues to expand its training capacity.

The School Committee also discussed the FirstView transportation app and its implementation. First Student reported that more than 2,000 users are currently utilizing the application and that it supports multiple languages, including Swahili and Creole. The School Committee raised concerns regarding discrepancies between reported on-time performance and feedback received from families, as well as instances in which the app did not reflect significant transportation delays or route changes. First Student explained that the application is updated based on driver and vehicle assignments but acknowledged that technology limitations or changes made during routes can affect real-time tracking. The district and First Student will continue working toward improved communication and future notification capabilities.

Committee members raised concerns regarding parent communication, including difficulty reaching transportation staff during peak afternoon hours and uncertainty regarding which telephone number families should use for transportation-related concerns. First Student reported that additional dispatch and telephone support has been added, while the district maintains transportation support until the final bus has been cleared. The Committee requested that the district and First Student clearly communicate the appropriate transportation and dispatch telephone numbers and hours of availability to families.

The School Committee discussed procedures for students who are not met by a parent or guardian at their designated stop. First Student explained that drivers notify dispatch and transport students to the district holding center when necessary, where district staff are responsible for contacting the parent or guardian. The School Committee emphasized the importance of clear and timely communication with families throughout this process.

The School Committee also questioned First Student's contingency plans for driver absences, vehicle breakdowns, communication failures, and other emergencies. First Student reported that it maintains a spare-driver ratio and is continuing to increase spare coverage to address unexpected call-outs and service disruptions. The company also described radio communication with drivers, backup route information, and ongoing coordination with the district regarding emergency preparedness. First Student indicated that additional work is needed to establish more detailed joint emergency response procedures with the district.

Regarding local vendor support, First Student reported that a contract has been provided to a local transportation vendor for review as a potential standby resource during service disruptions. Negotiations remain ongoing, including discussion of the terms and costs associated with standby service.

Committee members thanked First Student for the presentation and for addressing the Committee's questions. The School Committee emphasized the importance of reliable transportation, timely communication, accurate technology, appropriate driver training, and clear procedures to ensure that families are informed and students are transported safely.



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- D. Discuss the audit report for First Student Transportation. The School Committee received a report from Internal Auditor Young No regarding the internal audit and follow-up review of the First Student transportation contract. The original audit, conducted during the 2023–2024 school year, evaluated key contractual requirements and the School Department’s oversight and monitoring of the approximately \$30 million transportation contract.

The audit identified several areas requiring stronger controls, including missing performance bonds, insufficient documentation of driver drug testing and EpiPen training, missing fleet and operational reports, inconsistent route numbering that presented a potential emergency response concern, billing errors related to charter trips, the absence of formal written transportation procedures, and fragmented processes for tracking contacts and complaints. Fourteen recommendations were issued as a result of the audit.

The Internal Auditor reported that a follow-up review conducted approximately eight months prior found that most recommendations had been implemented and incorporated into the district’s new transportation contract and monitoring practices. Two recommendations remain in progress. One involved reconciliation of excise tax payments, with 22 buses identified as requiring registration and payment of applicable excise taxes. The other involved fleet compliance, including several buses that had exceeded age or mileage requirements. The Transportation Department indicated that those vehicles would be replaced with electric buses during the upcoming or following school year.

School Committee members questioned the timing and frequency of monitoring a contract of this size and asked what actions had occurred between the original audit and the 2026 follow-up. The Internal Auditor clarified that the identified recommendations had been addressed, and that required documentation was subsequently provided. The January 2026 follow-up correspondence represented the annual reporting cycle and did not indicate that no corrective action had occurred between the original audit and the follow-up review.

The Internal Auditor explained that, due to the size of the Internal Audit staff, contracts are selected for review through an annual risk assessment rather than audited every year. Given the size and significance of the First Student contract, it will remain on the Internal Audit’s radar and will be subject to future review. The School Committee emphasized the importance of continued monitoring to ensure that contractual requirements are consistently met and that the district receives the services for which it is paying.

The School Committee thanked Internal Auditor Young No and CFO Patrick Roach for providing clarification and addressing the School Committee’s questions.

- E. Discuss the annual audit report for Student Activity Funds. Internal Auditor Young No presented the Internal Audit review of Student Activities for the school year ending June 30, 2025. Student activity accounts are administered by the schools for the benefit of students and are subject to annual internal audits, with an independent outside audit required every third year in accordance with DESE requirements. The review assessed financial records, policies and procedures, internal controls, and supporting documentation. Seven accounts with balances exceeding \$25,000 were tested, representing a portion of the approximately \$373,000 held across 179 student activity accounts.



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The audit found that the district's overall policies, accounting framework, account authorization procedures, accounting systems, training, bonding requirements, annual audit requirements, inactive account controls, and procedures related to deficit balances were generally adequate. Student travel procedures were also performed without exception. The primary exceptions identified involved cash receipts, supporting documentation, reconciliations, and purchasing procedures requiring compliance with city processes. The Internal Auditor noted that outside auditors who conduct student activity audits throughout the district have characterized Springfield Public Schools' student activity policies and procedures as among the stronger programs they have reviewed.

During discussion, the School Committee revisited a previously discussed policy concerning booster clubs and the administration of related student accounts, including the designation of treasurers. The Superintendent explained that a draft policy had previously been presented but received concerns from Committee members and therefore required further review. Due to other urgent matters, the policy had not yet returned for consideration; however, the Superintendent indicated that staff would return to the policy after the more immediate matters were addressed. The School Committee acknowledged the audit findings and thanked the Internal Auditor for the report.

VI. REPORTS OF THE STANDING COMMITTEES:

A. Student and Parent Concerns (Ms. Gresham, Chair)

- a. No report.

B. Buildings and Maintenance (Mr. Gomez, Jr., Chair)

- a. No report.

C. Legislative and Contracts (Ms. Crawford, Chair)

- a. No report.

D. Curriculum and Programs (Ms. Hurst, Chair)

- a. Ms. Hurst reported that they have a meeting scheduled for the following week.

E. Budget and Finance (Ms. Monroe-Naylor, Chair)

- a. No report.

F. Career Technical Education (Mr. Gomez, Jr., Chair)

- a. No report.

G. Technology (Ms. Monroe Naylor, Chair)



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- a. Ms. Monroe Naylor reported that the meeting scheduled for next week has been postponed until further notice due to the recent cyber incident.

H. School Safety (Ms. Gresham, Chair)

- a. No report.

I. Diversity/Equity/Inclusion (Ms. Crawford, Chair)

- a. No report.

J. Innovation School (Ms. Valentin, Chair)

- a. No report.

VII. REPORT OF THE SUPERINTENDENT:

- A. Superintendent Dr. Dinnall provided a brief update regarding the district's efforts to welcome students and staff back to school following the recent disruption. The Superintendent reported that all schools were expected to reopen Monday morning, with staff returning Friday for professional development. The Superintendent also stated that the district would review the 2026–27 school year calendar to determine how the four missed instructional days could be addressed without negatively affecting the end of the school year. The Superintendent expressed appreciation to the School Committee, City, staff, partners, and others who provided support throughout the challenging period.

School Committee members commended the Superintendent, district leadership, staff, and City administration for their diligence, professionalism, collaboration, and commitment to ensuring the safe return of students and staff. Members emphasized that the circumstances surrounding the disruption were significant and expressed concern regarding public statements that questioned the district's commitment to educating students or the competency of its educators. Members reiterated that the priority was to ensure that students, teachers, and staff returned safely and were prepared to learn and work together.

The mayor also expressed appreciation to city departments and personnel, including Information Technology, Communications, and other teams that supported the district's response. The mayor emphasized the collaborative effort between the City and Springfield Public Schools and reaffirmed the City's commitment to working alongside the district to address the situation and maintain the education of students as the primary goal.

The Superintendent further highlighted the emergency food-service response during the school closure. Through Chartwells and district operations staff, emergency meal distribution was quickly coordinated to ensure students continued to have access to food while schools remained closed. Meal packages included a lunch that could be reheated at home and a shelf-stable breakfast for the following morning. Meal distribution was scheduled from 11:30 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. at Indian Orchard Elementary School, DeBerry-Swan Elementary School, Brightwood-Lincoln Elementary School, South End Middle School, Forest Park Middle School, and Talmadge



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Elementary School. Identification was required, and meals were distributed while supplies lasted. The district reported distributing nearly 2,000 meals as part of the emergency response.

VIII. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

- A. Ms. Hurst revisited Attorney Keefe's previous suggestion regarding the use of consent agendas to improve the efficiency of School Committee meetings. She noted that similar or routine items, such as multiple school-related events with the same date and purpose, could potentially be consolidated into a consent agenda, allowing additional meeting time for substantive presentations and informational discussions focused on academics and student achievement. Ms. Hurst emphasized that this approach could provide greater opportunity for the public and meeting attendees to hear about the positive work occurring within the district rather than spending extended time on routine votes.
- B. Ms. Crawford revisited the possibility of scheduling a School Committee retreat, noting that the Superintendent had previously expressed enthusiasm about the opportunity. She requested that planning and scheduling for the retreat be revisited in the near future.

IX. NEW BUSINESS

- A. Vice Chair, Ms. Monroe Naylor raised a concern regarding a recent incident following a subcommittee meeting in which a visitor arrived seeking a committee member, and several staff members became uncomfortable and uncertain about the individual's purpose. Although the situation was ultimately determined to be a misunderstanding and did not involve a threat, she requested that security coverage be available at the building through the conclusion of School Committee subcommittee meetings. Ms. Monroe Naylor stated that having designated security personnel present would provide staff with greater reassurance and allow for appropriate assistance in addressing similar situations. The Superintendent agreed to follow up with staff regarding security coverage for subcommittee meetings.

On a motion made by Ms. Hurst and seconded by Ms. Monroe Naylor, it was voted to adjourn the meeting.

Roll Call Vote to Adjourn:

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

The meeting was adjourned at 8:59 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,



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Triny Vargas
Executive Assistant to the School Committee