



CRANSTON CITY COUNCIL CRANSTON SCHOOL COMMITTEE JOINT MEETING

Daniel R. Wall, President, Ward 6
Kristen E. Haroian, Vice President, Ward 2
Emilia Vaziri, City-Wide
Richard D. Campopiano, City-Wide
Christopher E. Buonanno, City-Wide

Bridget R. Graziano, Ward 1
Andy M. Andujar, Ward 3
Frank J. Ritz, Jr., Ward 4
Michael A. Traficante, Ward 5

MINUTES WEDNESDAY, MARCH 4, 2026 at 7:00 P.M.

The Joint meeting of City Council and Cranston School Committee was held on **Wednesday, March 4, 2026 at 7:00 PM. in the Cranston High School East Auditorium, 899 Park Ave., Cranston, RI 02910.** Remote participation was offered.

YouTube Live Stream

The meeting is available on YouTube. Click the link below to observe the proceedings.

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCtE9vwA1B1PQHuftrNPcZjg>.

I. CALL TO ORDER

The Council meeting was called to order by Council President Wall at 7:04 P.M., followed by call to order of the School Committee meeting by Chairman Fusco.

II. ROLL CALL

The roll was called by the City Clerk. Stated as present: Councilwoman Graziano, Councilman Andujar, Councilman Ritz, Councilman Traficante, Councilwoman Vaziri, Councilman Campopiano, and Council President Wall. Council Vice-President Haroian arrived at 7:11 P.M. The School Committee roll was called by Amy Falcone.

III. CITY COUNCIL/CRANSTON SCHOOL COMMITTEE JOINT MEETING

Presentation by Superintendent Jeannine Nota-Masse and Christian Jedson, Chief of Facilities and Capital Projects *(no votes)*

Superintendent Nota-Masse provided opening remarks. The school buildings have been assessed. She is pleading with both bodies to approve a repair/renovation bond to be placed on the 2026 ballot. Some items cannot wait until 2028. In 2017, a facilities report identified

hundreds of millions of dollars in need, documented by professionals. It has been ten years since that report. She is worried about a catastrophic event that would leave an entire building unusable and the need to relocate 200-2,000 students. She is not placing blame, but this is the result of decades of neglect. Under Governor Raimondo, the reimbursement rate was 74%. Garden City Elementary's final cost was over \$60 million. The city's cost was \$15 million. That is not an astronomical cost for school construction. The 74% reimbursement rate is over. It is now 54%. Costs have compounded, increased, and reimbursement is less. In 2024, she came before the City Council and addressed the need for a new middle school. The \$200 million estimated bond would have been reimbursed 74%. At the time, the decision was made to instead do a \$40 million bond for repairs. Some improvements were made, but we can't catch up. The condition of the buildings is sending a message to the students, teachers, and staff about what we value. Arlington Elementary's roof has been repaired several times. She hoped to get through the school year, but with the amount of snow, she does not know if that's possible. We are at the point we need to fix the schools we have. The elevator at Bain was built in the mid 1920's. It cannot be fixed any longer. We cannot get service or parts. This affects any student or staff with ADA needs. She is begging for help so the students and staff can be in buildings that are safe and functional. Mr. Jedson will show pictures and explain the immediate needs identified for a \$31,927,000 million bond.

- ***State of Cranston Public Schools' Buildings and Facilities***

Christian Jedson, Chief of Facilities and Capital Projects stated the district has 16 elementary, 4 middle, 3 high, and 4 support schools totaling 1.8 million square feet. Seven schools are in critical need of roof replacement. He proceeded with the PowerPoint Presentation.

Council President Wall was previously on the School Committee. He understands the \$31 million would be a short-term band aid. Mr. Jedson confirmed. A chunk of money would be put toward the middle schools and high schools because those will not be rebuilt any time soon. If we lose one of these schools, we do not have the capacity anywhere to move up to 2,000 students.

Council President Wall asked the Superintendent if there is enough time to get a bond on the November ballot. Supt. Nota-Masse explained she will need to expedite the process with the legislature and the Department of Education. It is possible. In anticipation of tonight's meeting, RIDE has been put on notice of potential projects for a 2026 election referendum.

Council President Wall asked if the bond needs to go before the School Committee and the City Council and needs the Mayor's signature. Supt. Nota-Masse hopes this can be done simultaneously. The General Assembly is only in session until June. Bond counsel stands ready.

Councilman Ritz is concerned the projects will go over the \$31 million. Mr. Jedson said he obtained budgetary quotes from respected suppliers. RIDE requires them. No new buildings are included; strictly maintenance and repairs. Even if the city had an appetite for new buildings, we are on a short timeline and there's not enough capital reserves.

Councilman Ritz asked if the projects have been prioritized. Mr. Jedson confirmed. Heating systems are number one.

Councilman Ritz asked if the city could use any of its own resources. Mr. Jedson would work with Public Works Director Corrao.

Councilman Campopiano recently took a tour of the schools with Mr. Jedson and School Committee member Crowley. He asked the current cost of school construction. Mr. Jedson answered \$850-\$900 per square foot.

Councilman Traficante noted the projects are broken down into seventeen categories. A \$31 million bond covers the priorities. Mr. Jedson corrected. It covers critical projects. Councilman Traficante added the \$40 million bond two years ago ended up not being sufficient to cover the cost of all the intended projects. Mr. Jedson confirmed. Councilman Traficante asked how accurate the \$31 million figure is. Mr. Jedson obtained all quotes in the last five weeks from reputable companies. Supt. Nota-Masse explained the problem a couple times in the past has been that by time the projects were complete the numbers escalated. The world is volatile. These are best estimates from professional companies. They don't want to overestimate.

Councilman Traficante sits on the School Buildings Committee. Is it necessary to spend \$100,000 to hire a consultant? He would rather see that money spent on projects. Mr. Jedson responded every dime put into fixing the buildings is necessary. The RIDE soft costs are not included. Councilman Traficante repeated his question. Is it necessary to hire a consultant? Mr. Jedson answered it is not a yes/no question. Phase 1 and Phase 2 require an external source. As far as the \$100,000 cost is concerned, they have done an RFQ and are reviewing results. Councilman Traficante pointed out no one has identified where the \$100,000 will come from.

Councilman Traficante recalls there used to be a repair/renovation bond every two years. He does not know why that stopped. It is necessary for maintenance.

Councilman Andujar asked why the School Committee supervises the bonds, not the city. Supt. Nota-Masse explained the city owns the schools, but the school department has the care and control. She also addressed Councilman Traficante's last question. RIDE was not providing reimbursement for repairs for several years; reimbursement was for new construction only.

Councilman Andujar cannot support the \$31 million bond because in September or October he floated the idea of a bigger bond. Cranstonians love their schools. \$31 million will not do much of anything. He would be supportive of the \$265 million bond, even if it is an election year. We are the second largest district in the state. \$31 million is the minimum for what we absolutely need. It may take political courage and fortitude, but the \$265 would make an impact.

Councilwoman Graziano asked if year one is \$31.9 million, what are the numbers for years two, five, and ten. Has a projection been done on how to catch up? Supt. Nota-Masse started a five-year master plan in 2018. The state had bond money. The school department laid out needs and wants. It took a lot of time and people. It needs to be done again. If, as a group, we decide on a bigger bond that will carry us three years, we will need to develop a five-year plan during that time. Councilwoman Graziano commented the \$265 million figure anticipates no other costs over the five years. She is concerned problems will keep being added. She asked if air conditioning is a necessity. Mr. Jedson explained it is included in the modern HVAC. He noted that the \$265 million of projects could not be completed in one year. It would take several years to complete.

Councilwoman Graziano asked about grants through RISE Engineering or other partners. Mr. Jedson answered they will seek as much money as possible. Supt. Nota-Masse added these are rebate programs. The costs must be paid up front. Councilwoman Graziano recommended solar, net zero buildings, and less pavement. She is an environmentalist. She would include a 20% contingency for change orders.

Councilwoman Vaziri asked where students would go if a school needed to be shut down. Supt. Nota-Masse replied it would depend on the school. A small school can be moved. If it were a high school or middle school, there is no place with capacity we can go. There are strict restrictions on where we can go.

Council Vice-President Haroian is alarmed to hear there is no fire suppression in schools with boiler issues. She is in support of the bond, for safety. Supt. Nota-Masse noted the absence of fire suppression and sprinklers. There are alarms. We are not in violation of the fire codes. She wants to make that clear, so parents do not panic.

Councilman Traficante pointed out the city must carry the \$31 million or \$265 million in debt service. There is a maximum the city can incur. He asked if Hope Highlands could go back to serving as an elementary school. Supt. Nota-Masse does not see that happening any time soon without building a new middle school. Predicting enrollment is tricky.

Councilman Andujar asked the average cost per student in the district. Supt. Nota-Masse answered it is just under \$20,000 for regular education.

School Committeewoman Crowley is concerned about the buildings. In her first term, there was a small bond. She wishes it had been larger. \$31 million is the immediate cost to avoid catastrophe. She would like to see a large bond in 2028 to take care of all the other serious issues. That would require more intense planning with RIDE. A small bond is doable. She would like to see the School Committee and the City Council work together on a large bond.

School Committeeman Catone received an email today from a Scout whose sibling was injured and is affected by the lack of an elevator at Park View. These everyday situations are frustrating to hear. In 2024 we needed \$220 million. That was eligible for 74% reimbursement. The city decided on \$40 million. Tonight, we are asking for \$31 million. The School Committee does not get to raise the money. They just get told the amount and how to use it. He would like to see an energy efficiency savings versus cost analysis for projects available for incentives. Mr. Jedson indicated some rebates are case by case. It will not be easy to come up with numbers. He can try to tabulate.

School Committeewoman Medeiros commented this has been an eye opening, depressing presentation. She would like to know the benefit versus the \$3.9 million cost to fix the pool at Park View. Mr. Jedson's personal opinion would be to shut it down. The equipment is ancient. The tiles and grout are falling out. He would not spend that much money on a pool. It does not affect the school operationally.

School Committeewoman Medeiros asked the cost from the flood at Edgewood Highlands. Supt. Nota-Masse is not sure. It was covered by insurance. Ms. Medeiros asked the cost of the immediate move to another location. Supt. Nota-Masse indicated all work was done by custodians and staff.

School Committee Vice-Chairman Melillo read a prepared statement. He thanked Council President Wall for convening the joint meeting. He thanked the Superintendent, Mr. Jedson, and the school administration for their efforts. He believes every school principal is in the audience. We cannot continue to push these projects down the road. The costs will grow. He asked Mr. Jedson to put escalation costs in every item, no matter the bond, so the amount can realistically include completion of every project and not require us to forego projects to finish projects. That has been a problem in the past. Mr. Jedson noted the \$265 million bond figures sent to Finance Director Zidelis included an 11% escalation.

School Committee Chairman Fusco stated a plan needs to be submitted to RIDE to be eligible for reimbursement. We can't just change the use of the funds. We would need to go back to RIDE for a memorandum of agreement. He pointed out that reimbursement does not happen until all projects are completed. In the meantime, the city must absorb the debt service. It's not fair to municipalities when it takes five years to build new schools. The General Assembly once introduced a bill to change this, but it did not pass. A huge bond to cover every school would take ten to fifteen years to complete. We would not see the reimbursement money until then. The city would not be able to cover the debt service. It also requires voter approval. Warwick recently held a special election for an additional \$250 million bond. It was rejected. He agrees with Councilman Traficante's plan to bond every two years for work. Supt. Nota-Masse added once the project is complete, in recent cases, reimbursements were bundled to take advantage of the 74%. The money was given back in state housing payments over the life of the bond, not all at once. It is paid in increments as the bond ages out and debt services goes down.

Council President Wall opened the floor to public comment. There was no public comment from the in-person audience.

Elizabeth Larkin (via zoom), President of the Cranston Teachers' Alliance commented this joint meeting was needed long ago. The Superintendent is a hard-working, proactive leader. She feels the pain. The schools have been neglected for decades causing issues with electricity, heat, leaks, etc. Others would never work under these conditions. We need to fix main issues before we have a dangerous situation. The schools need money now. It can't wait for a bond, especially Arlington. It is an improper environment for workers and students.

Council President Wall closed public comment. He will go around the stage once more for brief final comments.

Councilman Campopiano asked if additions to existing schools are possible. Supt. Nota-Masse stated there are possible expansion areas at some schools, but there are none at others. Some back up to wetlands.

Councilman Traficante thanked the Superintendent. The presentation was revealing. Supt. Nota-Masse neglected to talk about the Building Committee. They act as the conduit for plans.

Councilman Andujar ran some quick numbers. A \$320 million bond over 30 years would be approximately \$8,000 per house, or \$267 per year, \$300 per year with interest. It's a tough pill to swallow, but the voters should be able to decide.

Councilwoman Graziano commented any building on wetlands will lose her vote.

School Committeewoman Crowley, as superintendent of another district, believes the Cranston School District is well managed and run. She hopes communication between bodies continues.

School Committee Vice Chairman stated once the facts were presented, he realized there was a difference between what he thought he knew and what he knows now. He will speak to anyone.

School Committee Chairman Fusco thanked the Council President again. This has been a great step in the right direction. He hopes the cooperation continues.

Council President Wall thanked the School Committee, the Superintendent, Mr. Jedson, and the staff for participating tonight. With no further business, he called for a motion to adjourn the Council meeting.

IV. ADJOURNMENT *(vote may be taken)*

MOTION made by Councilman Ritz, SECONDED by Councilwoman Vaziri to adjourn at 9:13 P.M. All Ayes

The School Committee adjourned immediately following.

Respectfully submitted,

Tracy A. Nelson, City Clerk

Minutes approved as written March 16, 2026