
EAST PROVIDENCE SPECIAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING OPEN SESSION – September 2, 2026

I. Call to Order Open Session

The East Providence School Committee met in open session on Wednesday, September 2, 2026 at 5:00 pm at the East Providence School Department Administration Office. Mr. Luiz called the meeting to order at 5:00 pm. Members present: David Luiz, Chair, Antonio deSimas, Vice Chair, Anthony Ferreira, Clerk, Jessica Beauchaine and Ryan Queenan. Superintendent Perry, Assistant Superintendent Benedetti-Ramzi, Mark Piccerelli, Acting Finance Director, Jessica Arruda, Interim Controller and Consultants Joseph Crowley and Joseph Balducci were also present. The Pledge of Allegiance and a moment of silence were observed.

II. Policy Report

1. Personal Electronic Devices & Cell Phone Policy – 1st read

On August 1, 2026 the Rhode Island General Laws §16-21-43 passed legislation that requires every public school to adopt a policy regarding personal electronic devices and requires the policy to include a prohibition on students having physical access to covered personal electronic devices during the school day. The statute requires the School Committee to establish the policy in conjunction with the Superintendent and in consultation with applicable collective bargaining representatives. The policy must be enforced consistently and systematically while minimizing unnecessary conflict among students, families, educators and staff.

For purposes of this policy, a personal electronic device includes, but is not limited to: Smartphones and cellular telephones; Smartwatches; personal tablets; personal computers, devices or laptops; and other personally owned electronic devices capable of communication through the internet or a wireless network.

Students shall not have physical access to personal electronic devices during the school day/instructional time. To provide a consistent and equitable method of complying with this policy, the District shall utilize a Yondr or comparable secure locking pouch system for student personal electronic devices at schools designated by the Superintendent. The pouch remains the property of the East Providence School District.

Schools shall provide parents and guardians with clear information regarding: The District's personal electronic device policy; locking pouch procedures; emergency communication procedures; approved exceptions; and consequences for violations.

There was much discussion on this unfunded mandate from the Rhode Island Department of Education. The Committee needs to think about this policy. Ms. Beauchaine stated that for this amount of funding (\$74K), the District could have financed a needed position. The statute requires the School Committee to adopt the policy. She would like to see how the Yondr pouches are used and would like a demonstration. Ms. Benedetti-Ramzi will share some videos and has gone out to look at this procedure at Taunton High School. Ms. Beauchaine would like

to bring in a union president and subcommittee person to attend a meeting to discuss this. She would like to have school procedures for the next meeting.

Mr. Luiz inquired about the procedure for the first day of school. Assistant Superintendent Benedetti-Ramzi stated that they will utilize the same procedure that our schools have been using. There are mixed opinions on this policy and she will get data to support it. The pouches are ready to go once this policy is approved. Each school has their own procedure and will be monitored by a Dean or Administrator. There is no cost to the District and was funded through Project Aware.

Superintendent Perry stated that Assistant Superintendent Benedetti-Ramzi has done a great job explaining the policy to the School Committee. The District has the opportunity to comply with the law to use these devices. The School Committee has made important points and concerns about emergency situations. They will continue to work on it and be in compliance with the law. Communication and implementation of this policy will be out soon.

Mr. Ferreira stated that he doesn't support this mandate. There is no date to back up the use of pouches. He suggested looking at different options to research. There may be devices that block cellphones.

Mr. Luiz doesn't agree with the state mandate. Principal Black at the high school is handling the cellphone situation well. There hasn't been any major issues. Mr. Luiz inquired if teachers are allowed to have their phones out in the classroom. Superintendent Perry responded yes.

Mr. Queenan suggested adding to the policy what the procedure is if a student doesn't have a cellphone.

III. Budget Workshop II

Superintendent Perry stated that this workshop is a follow up to the first budget workshop. The first document handed out to Committee members is a communication to Mr. Piccerelli, Finance Director from Ms. Delgado, Director of Finance for the City. The letter is confirmation of payment in full for a \$5M advance. This has been fully repaid.

The letter states that City financial records confirm that the \$5,000,000 advance issued on October 1, 2024 has been fully repaid. All payments made between October 1, 2024 and September 1, 2026 are documented in our reconciliation, which shows a zero balance as of September 1, 2026. This confirmation applies only to this advance and does not affect the status of any other financial obligations between the City and the School Department.

Superintendent Perry stated they asked the City and have confirmation that the school department does not owe any money to the City at this time. Dr. Perry wanted to make sure that they had it in writing. Mr. Piccerelli stated that the payments were subtracted from the appropriation received from the City.

Mr. Ferreira stated that he would like the information and names of who went to the City requesting \$5M. He would like to see where the \$5M is deducted on paper.

Dr. Perry stated they don't have a paper trail. They are trying to make things right now going forward and will do everything they can to provide a full transparent financial report.

Budget Workshop Session 2

Superintendent Perry gave an overview of the preliminary FY2027 budget. He explained that the purpose of this session is to present a detailed overview of projected expenditures and revenues for the FY2027 budget. The goal is to provide transparency and reach a consensus on a realistic budget for presentation to the City Council. The Interim Director of Finance will play a prominent role in this presentation.

Personnel: We have more accurately calculated personnel costs, which constitute approximately 82% of the overall budget. A comprehensive personnel spreadsheet is being finalized to track all associated costs. Key updates include:

- Six positions were eliminated from the FY26 budget.
- Recent retirements have allowed for modest salary line reductions through new hires.
- No further cuts to certified staff can be made for the first nine months of FY27, as these had to be identified by June 1, 2026.
- Personnel projections reflect increases to account for raises.
- Classified staff positions are currently being reviewed based on necessity.

Departmental Budgets: Budget managers have submitted requests for the remaining 18% of the budget. Examples are as follows:

- Schools: Many requests for equipment, furniture and fixtures have been denied.
- Information Technology: Many software contracts are ongoing. A request for \$450,000 for equipment and software is currently under review.
- Special Education: Costs are driven by IEP requirements, including nursing, occupational therapists, physical therapists and out-of-district tuitions.
- Transportation: Transportation costs are rising by 9% due to contract increases.
- Athletics: Athletics will see no reductions if current programs are maintained.
- Maintenance: Only minor cuts are anticipated, as delayed maintenance will increase long-term costs.

Financial Projections: During a meeting with the Rhode Island Auditor General on September 2, 2026, the following fiscal outlooks were reported:

- FY2025: It is projected that the FY2025 audit will produce a balanced budget.
- FY2026: It is projected that the FY2026 audit will produce a deficit of \$1.3M.
- FY2027: It is projected that the FY2027 audit will produce a deficit of \$3.9M.

Conclusion

Rather than presenting a budget based on arbitrary line-item cuts, we have chosen to provide realistic projections for full transparency. Unfortunately, these projections indicate a structural deficit by the end of FY2027. As noted by the Auditor General, many school districts are facing similar challenges. The structural deficit in East Providence is primarily due to the fact that

revenue increases – including state aid, local aid and federal pandemic recovery funds – are insufficient to cover the rising costs of district operations.

The FY2027 budget spreadsheet that was shared with the Committee shows essentially a deficit. The decision the School Committee will have to make is whether or not accepting a budget that shows a projected deficit. Knowing what was known about the state of the budget this time last year, it was possible that the Committee would have seen that a deficit of \$1.3M would have been projected.

Superintendent Perry stated that after the audit, if the district has a deficit, they will speak with the Auditor General. East Providence is in good company with many other districts. They will have five years to have a corrective action plan in place. Cities and towns throughout RI are experiencing the same issues. The projected deficit and being transparent will let everyone know that we need more revenue.

Mr. Ferreira requested to see the entire budget to be approved and needs information to research. Superintendent Perry meets with principals and directors to provide information to the committee. The budget is a process. Any specific questions the committee has will be answered. The way they are presenting the budget hasn't been done in East Providence and he will get this information out to the Committee sooner.

There was much discussion on ways to trim the budget. Ms. Beauchaine stated that the school department needs more money from the state, not the city taxpayers. They should look at the cost of paying subs and possibly revisit and lower the number. Look at paying \$125 per day for all subs. To balance a budget they need to look at staffing, certain bargaining groups, consolidating bus stops and transportation. She requested the number of students going to out-of-district schools.

Mr. Queenan stated that creating the ALP classroom at the administration office and supporting the CRAFT program were cost savings initiatives.

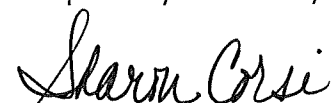
Mr. Piccerelli stated that their objective is to get the budget as low as they can, and implementing accounting procedures will give everyone a better handle on where they are. There will be better communication.

The proposed budget needs to be presented to the City Council on September 15, 2026. Budget Workshop III will be held on September 8th at the regular School Committee meeting.

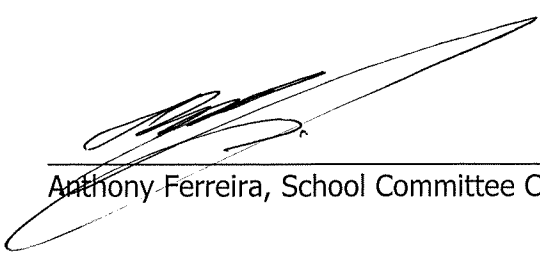
IV. Adjournment

Motion by Ms. Beauchaine, seconded by Mr. Queenan and carried unanimously to adjourn the meeting at 7:50 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,



Sharon Corsi, Executive Assistant



Anthony Ferreira, School Committee Clerk