

**Minutes of the Public Forum  
of the Salem School Committee  
Monday, November 17, 2025  
211 Lafayette St, Salem  
In-Person Meeting**

**Members Present:** Mayor Pangallo, Vice Chair Cruz, Amanda Campbell, AJ Hoffman, Beth Anne Cornell and Veronica Miranda

**Others in Attendance:** Superintendent Stephen Zrike, Deputy Superintendent Carbone and Assistant Superintendent Pauley

**Members Absent:** Mary Manning

**Call of Meeting to Order**

Mayor Pangallo called the meeting to order at 5:00 pm and informed the public that the docket contains the public participation procedure and how to access Spanish as well as Portuguese interpretation.

**Opening Updates**

Superintendent Zrike thanked the Saltonstall School for hosting the public forum and stated that many conversations had taken place with various stakeholders in recent days. Superintendent Zrike and Assistant Superintendent Pauley presented the slides on the elementary reconfiguration.

**Public Forum**

Mayor Pangallo provided guidelines for public comments.

Leah Cross, Bentley Academy Innovation School Parent

Ms. Cross spoke about the benefits of the dual language program at Bentley. Ms. Cross supports moving the dual language program from the Early Childhood Center to the Saltonstall School so that the program will have room for expansion. Ms. Cross said that Bentley is the only elementary building in the district that has not been modernized and this is especially troubling since it serves the highest proportion of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) and high needs students. Ms. Cross said that the dual language program is a vital part of the district's efforts to provide equitable educational opportunities and urged the School Committee members to allow the program to survive and grow.

Melinda Baker, Carlton Innovation School Parent

Ms. Baker stressed the intent and impact of the consolidation process is very different. Ms. Baker said the systematic breakdowns call the entire process into question as many families ask for a pause. Ms. Baker continued that the information was presented to families as a school must close or merge next year and they were not made aware that a vote to do nothing is an

available option. Ms. Baker concluded that in order to rebuild trust in the process, the district needs to slow down, correct course and commit to a process that matches the seriousness of this decision.

**Leila Hauck, Carlton Innovation School Parent**

Ms. Hauck spoke about the negative effects the proposed school reconfiguration would have on her family which includes drop-off and pick-up coordination, and the possible loss of other unique features that Carlton offers students. Ms. Hauck highlighted that the hastiness and short-sightedness of the process may give rise to other problems. Ms. Hauck added that the consolidation is asking a lot from parents and students at the heels of the pandemic. Ms. Hauck asked to slow the process because more information might be forthcoming in January and that a fall in enrollment would be detrimental.

**Meghan Stasio, Collins Middle School and Saltonstall School Parent**

Ms. Stasio mentioned the changes that the Saltonstall School had experienced through the years. Ms. Stasio said that the removal of the middle school grades last year was a very fast decision and the school is still trying to settle into the new K-5 identity. Ms. Stasio continued that families are already dealing with a lot of stress about food, personal safety, finances and it is not thoughtful and dismissive to introduce another major change.

**Julie Damico, Salem Public Schools Parent**

Ms. Damico said that parents' trust in the school system has been damaged because in prior meetings, parents were informed that consultants were being engaged to explore co-locations and 1-5 year reconfiguration timelines but on November 3rd, the consultants presented proposals to close a school next year. Ms. Damico continued that there are so many aspects to consider for which there is no information yet. Ms. Damico asked the School Committee not to close a school first and plan later.

**Sarah Sosnowski, Carlton Innovation School Parent**

Ms. Sosnowski was in strong opposition to the closure of the Carlton Innovation School. Ms. Sosnowski explained the impact of the school on her family and the community.

**Dr. Christina Porter, Collins Middle School and Saltonstall School Parent**

Dr. Porter was in strong support of keeping Saltonstall open. Dr. Porter spoke about the staff culture at Saltonstall and also the equity implications as the pace of these decisions risk leaving behind the families who need the most support to participate. Dr. Porter requested the School Committee to pause and look for solutions.

**James Bixby, Carlton Innovation School Parent**

Mr. Bixby spoke about how his children benefit from the innovation model at Carlton. Mr. Bixby said he has not seen a plan on how the innovation plan would be kept intact.

**Daisy Wisda, Carlton Innovation School Parent**

Ms. Wisda said that a lot of information was not easy for parents to find. Ms. Wisda also said that there is no information about what will help elementary students in the future if there are

cuts year after year. Ms. Wisda shared her children's experience at Carlton. Ms. Wisda requested the School Committee to keep in mind the students for whom change is more of a challenge.

**Erica Giardina, Saltonstall School Parent**

Ms. Giardina said that this decision feels rushed without a fully developed plan. Ms. Giardina highlighted the role of after-school programs.

**Megan Christianson, Saltonstall School Parent**

Ms. Christianson said she was disappointed and embarrassed at the way the reconfiguration process has been conducted as it is causing stress and pain for Salem parents at a vulnerable time. Ms. Christianson requested the School Committee to conduct the reconfiguration process in a way that does not do harm to the community. Ms. Christianson highlighted the commendable outreach for the high school project and the reasonable timeline for the project. Ms. Christianson said that there is still uncertainty and contradictions with the elementary reconfiguration. Ms. Christianson implored the School Committee to pause, reflect and revisit this issue in the future with a reasonable timeline. Ms. Christianson requested that Saltonstall be kept where it is.

**Rita Choudhury, Carlton Innovation School Parent**

Ms. Choudhury explained the choices made by her family to live in Salem and enroll her child in Carlton. Ms. Choudhury spoke about the effects of school closures on students. Ms. Choudhury said a school closure will not solve the budget deficit and added that it is unclear how a school closure at this time will serve the City's long term vision. Ms. Choudhury asked to extend the deadline and work on a long-term plan to balance the budget.

**Maren Juliano, Carlton Innovation School Parent**

Ms. Juliano said that the School Committee needs to support the families with better planning. Ms. Juliano highlighted the traffic concerns when moving Carlton to Saltonstall or Horace Mann. Ms. Juliano spoke about her family's personal experience with Carlton. Ms. Juliano requested the School Committee to reconsider the option to close Carlton.

**Jennifer MacGergor, former Carlton Innovation School Parent**

Ms. MacGregor said that the lack of transparency is disappointing and that it would have been helpful to bring parents and caregivers to the conversation earlier. Ms. MacGregor gave the example of the Henny Penny Nursery School and the parent involvement to prevent closure. Ms. MacGregor spoke about allocation of funds and solutions for schools.

**Carlton Innovation School Parents**

The parent said the program at Carlton works well for their child. The parent continued that closing a school is not going to fix the budget deficit and everyone should be working together to find a solution. More data and time is needed. The parent requested the School Committee not to make a rash decision.

**Jen Iglis, former Carlton Innovation School Parent**

Ms. Inglis touched upon traffic issues and positions that need to be cut with mergers. Ms. Inglis said the process has been handled poorly. Ms. Inglis requested the School Committee to reconsider the rush for a decision.

**Tim Simrell, Saltonstall School Parent**

Mr. Simrell said that many at Saltonstall feel that it has been targeted. Mr. Simrell added that at the last meeting, Saltonstall was portrayed as not being among the top choice for schools but that many students attend Saltonstall. Mr. Simrell highlighted the lack of a full traffic study after the middle school shifted to Collins, the impact of after school programs and the loss of programs such as the Carlton innovation program.

**Jeff Rolke, Carlton Innovation School Parent**

Mr. Rolke said that the process is extremely rushed and that information has not been provided. Mr. Rolke requested a pause before a decision was made so that the community could have more information and explore all other avenues.

**Ted Burnham, Carlton Innovation School and Early Childhood Center Parent**

Mr. Burnham said he is frustrated that there was no community engagement about funding for the schools. Mr. Burnham added that he believes the problem can be solved through collective action.

**Ashley Waterberg, Carlton Innovation School Parent**

Ms. Waterberg said that the information was just presented and it is new information. Ms. Waterberg added that the reconfiguration is a school closure. Ms. Waterberg asked about the long-term vision for the schools. Ms. Waterberg requested the School Committee to pause and listen to the ideas from parents.

**Daniel Krugman, Bentley Academy Innovation School Parent**

Mr. Krugman said all possibilities to keep schools open should be explored. Mr. Krugman added that the programs at Bentley and ECC are vital. Mr. Krugman continued about the need for repairs and expansion at Bentley. Mr. Krugman supported moving Bentley out of the building into another building which would allow the dual language program to grow.

**Greg Niemann, Carlton Innovation School Parent**

Mr. Niemann said that there is research showing the need for smaller schools. Mr. Niemann related the experience of his child at Carlton. Mr. Nieman continued that the cost of closing or relocating a school was not shown. Mr. Niemann strongly encouraged that any efforts to reconfigure schools be part of a cohesive, multi-year plan for the district and not rushed efforts to reduce expenditure in the short-term term. Mr. Niemann urged Mayor Pangallo and City Councillors to be proactive in finding new funding sources. Mr. Niemann asked the School Committee not to close a school first and plan later.

**Marsela Repa, Witchcraft Heights Elementary School and Saltonstall School Parent**

Ms. Repa said that there is no information about safety with the merging of schools which would result in larger student populations. More data and explanation is needed.

**Jessica Eveleth, Saltonstall School Assistant Principal**

Ms. Eveleth mentioned her background of growing up in Salem, attending and then working for Salem Public Schools. Ms. Eveleth spoke about Saltonstall and that Saltonstall needs to stay. Ms. Eveleth also mentioned the demographic differences between the schools. Ms. Eveleth said that the Carlton Innovation plan will continue even if Carlton comes to Saltonstall.

**James Jenner, Early Childhood Center Parent**

Mr. Jenner said that the dual language program is important to his family. Mr. Jenner added that the ECC should get their own building and that the current building should be upgraded. Mr. Jenner concluded that a decision should be made in December.

**Christine Keogh, Saltonstall School Parent**

Ms. Keogh spoke about her children's experience at Saltonstall. Ms. Keogh said that the decision feels rushed and not all aspects have been considered. Ms. Keogh asked how the district plans to facilitate conversations with the students about the reconfiguration. Ms. Keogh said it feels like the decision to close Saltonstall has already been made. Ms. Keogh concluded that she is losing faith in the educational system in Salem.

**Joy Ajayi-Carrier, Saltonstall School Parent**

Ms. Ajayi-Carrier said that urgency is the word that has been used by the School Committee to force parents to fall in line with their poor planning and lack of communication. Ms. Ajayi-Carrier requested the School Committee to urgently revisit the drawing board and develop a more succinct plan, a plan that is more favorable to families and staff.

**Closing**

Mayor Pangallo informed the community about the upcoming public forums.

**Adjournment**

Vice Chair Cruz made a motion to adjourn at 7:37 pm. Member Miranda seconded and it was so VOTED. Motion passed unanimously.

Respectfully submitted by,

***Shirley Dorai***

Executive Assistant to the School Committee & Superintendent



# Elementary Reconfiguration Updates

***November 17, 2025***



# Reconfiguration Scenarios

<p>Scenario 1</p> <p><b>Saltonstall &amp; Horace Mann merge at Horace Mann building</b> <i>Saltonstall building is repurposed rather than closed</i></p>	<p>Scenario 4</p> <p><b>Carlton &amp; Saltonstall schools merge at Saltonstall building</b> <i>Carlton building offline or becomes early childhood center</i></p>
<p>Scenario 2</p> <p><b>Saltonstall &amp; Horace Mann merge at Horace Mann</b> AND <b>Bentley moves into Saltonstall building</b> <i>Bentley/ECC building becomes early childhood center</i></p>	<p>Scenario 5</p> <p><b>Carlton &amp; Horace Mann merge at Horace Mann building</b> <i>Carlton building offline or becomes early childhood center</i></p>



# Reflections

- Goals:
  - **Elevate the learning experience for every student**
  - **Advance our core value of equity**
  - **Ensure long-term fiscal sustainability**
- Scenarios ruled out dispersal of students
- Commitment to engaging the public with data, reasoning, and opportunities for discussion

# Themes in Feedback

- More information about the SPS projected deficit
- What are the alternatives to school mergers?
- Traffic
- Class size and building utilization
- Benefits from larger elementary consolidation
- Supporting students, staff and families through a transition



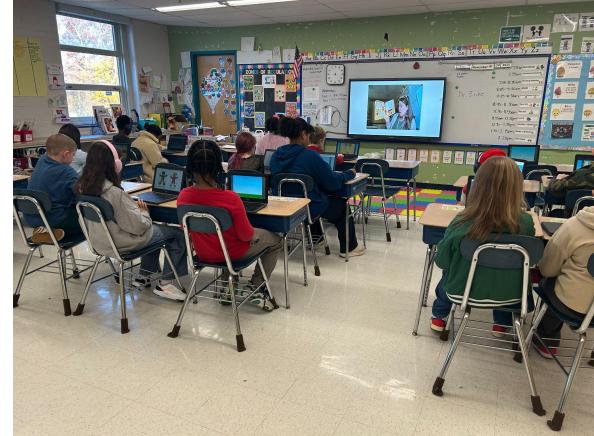
# Traffic Concerns

- Start and end times would need to be staggered between HMLS and SHS.
- Traffic study conducted in Dec. 2024 matches the number of students who are projected to access the site if there is a merger.
- HS project will adjust traffic patterns
- More analysis and consultation is necessary to develop a plan that reduces congestion.



# Class Sizes

- The ‘minimum full’ capacity is smaller than the current assignment practice.
- The ‘maximum full’ capacity reflects the contractual maximum.
- Currently, we are not projecting an increase in elementary class sizes with our merger scenarios.
- We are not suggesting merging/altering substantially separate classrooms.



# Overall Elementary Utilization and Capacity

	Current Enrollment	Empty Seats in Existing Classrooms	Estimated # number of unused classroom spaces across elementary schools	Total number of unused seats at an average of 23 students per classroom
K-5	1,901	218	60	1380

**\*Total # of available elementary seats-  $218 + 1380 = 1598$  available seats**



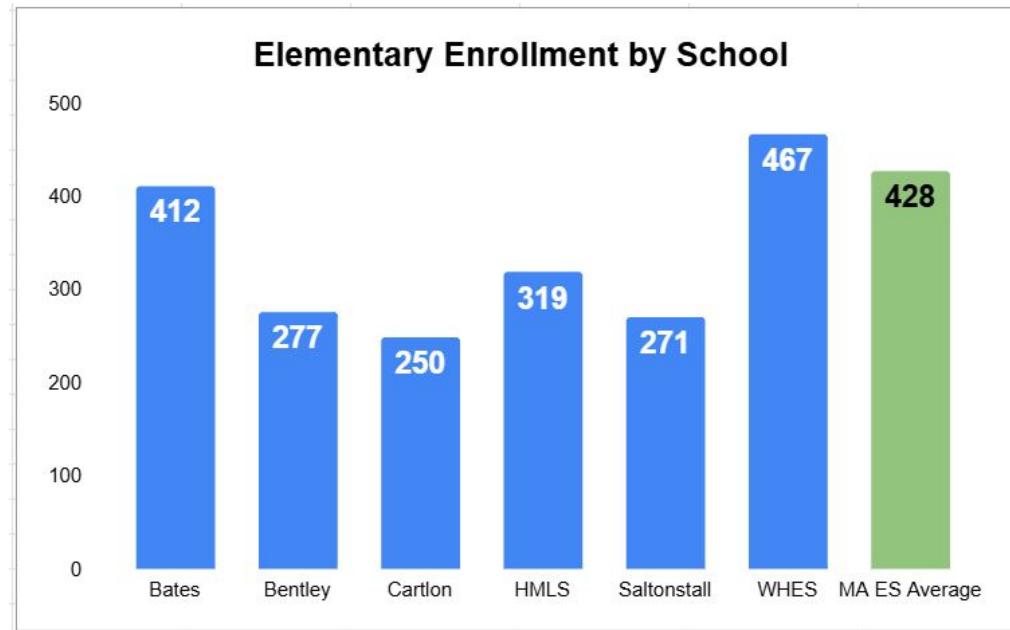
# Benefits of Larger Elementary Schools

- Increased educator collaboration across grade levels
- Ability to strategically assign students
- Service providers and specialists do not need to travel, providing stronger connection to each community
- Resource efficiency allows for investing in more robust programs at each school for students
- Smaller footprint for the central office
- Capital \$s allocated across fewer buildings

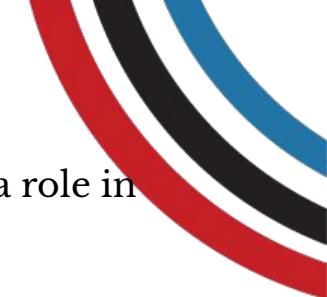


# Comparisons

- The average size of a MA elementary school is 428 students
- Districts with between 3500-4500 students in MA have on average 7.5 schools



# If the School Committee Votes to Merge a School



## *Supporting Families and Students*

- Transition team to oversee merger
- Series of transition events
- Commit to specific resources needed to assist with transition
- No changes to any services for students on IEPs/504 plans affected by mergers
- Commit to maintain unique traditions
- Metrics to monitor outcomes
- Prioritize families from merging school who want to make alternative assignment choices

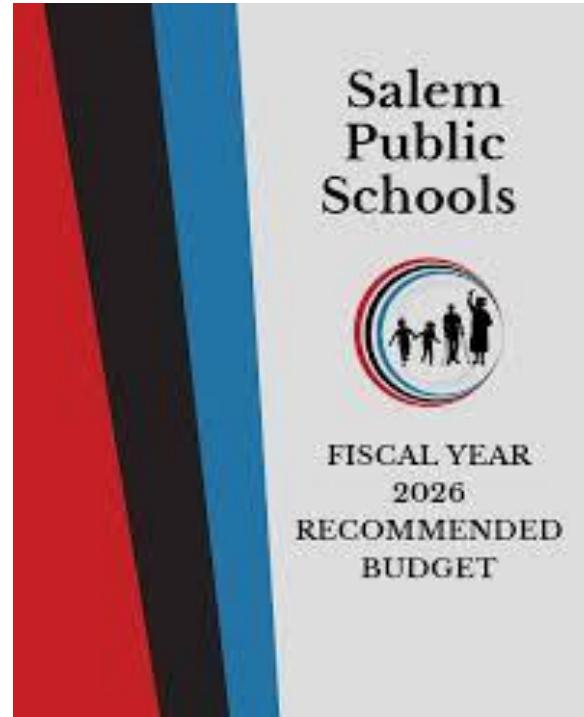
## *Supporting Staff*

- The majority of staff will have a role in the merged building.
- All staff with professional status will continue to have a role in SPS
- We will work to find a role for any staff member in good standing without professional status somewhere in SPS.
- We will engage in 1 to 1 planning conversations with affected staff

*For planning and effective implementation a decision by end of December is highly preferred*



# Budget Context



Elevate Learning • Empower Educators • Center Belonging • Strengthen Our Foundation

# Reminder: FY26

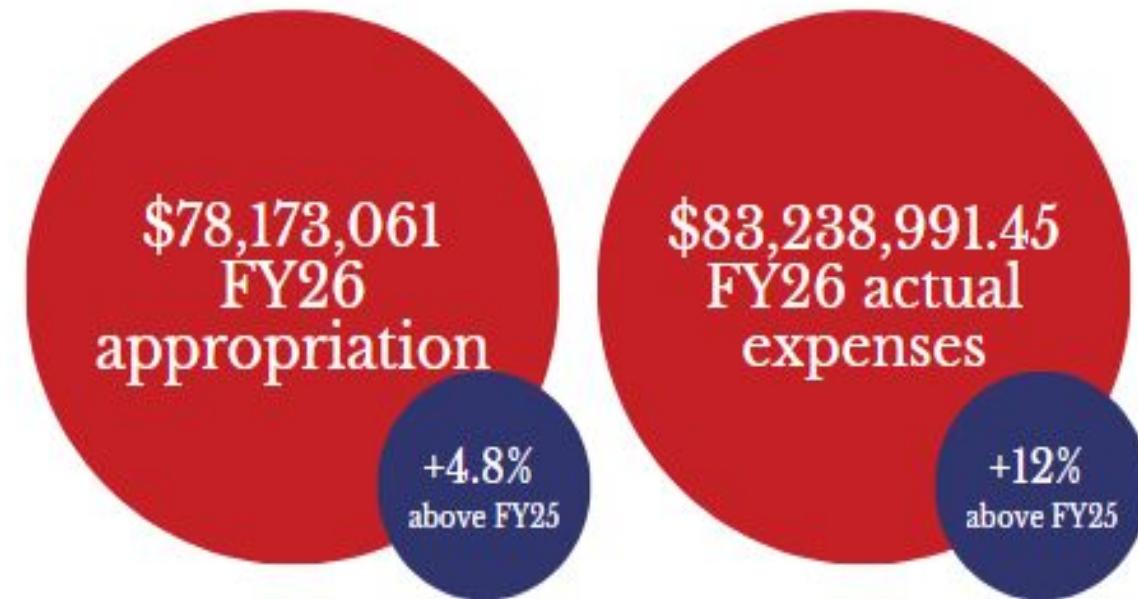
- ❑ 4.8% increase (+\$3,580,445.57)
- ❑ Complicated architecture
  - ❑ Looked for efficiencies
  - ❑ Using recurring revenue to reduce expenses
  - ❑ Position reductions & Non-Personnel reductions
  - ❑ 56.5 positions are being eliminated



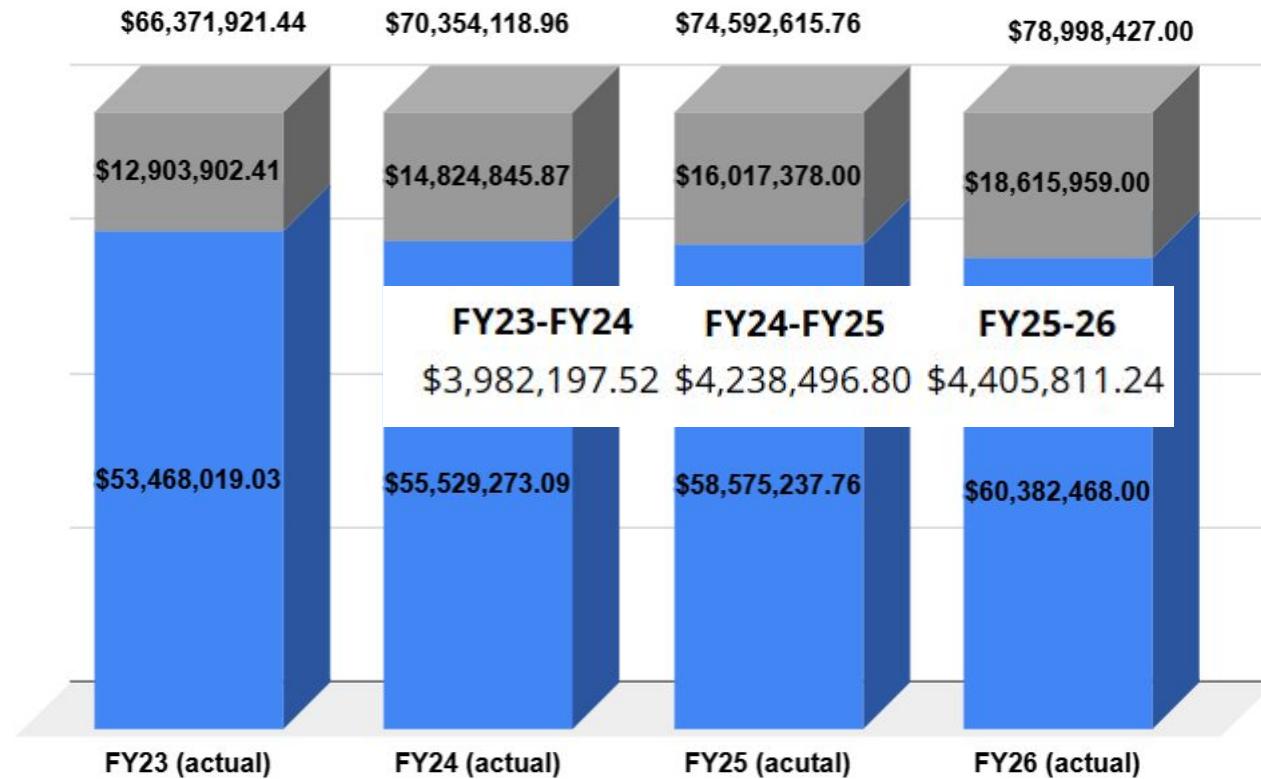
\$78,173,061

# Appropriation vs. Actual Expenses

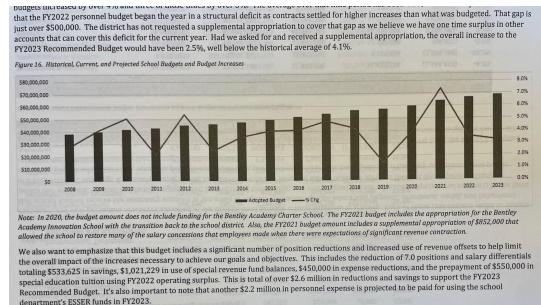
- ❑ Before reductions & offsets, Personnel & Non-Personnel costs will be ~\$4.9M above the appropriation
- ❑ +6% above the appropriation



## Personnel, Non-Personnel & Total, by Fiscal Year



# Budget Context: It's Complicated



**FY25: Balancing the Budget**

**Direct Appropriation**

**\$74,592,616**

This includes

- state aid

Salem Public Schools has a **structural budget gap**, between operating costs (personnel and non-personnel expenses) and our annual direct appropriation from the city & state. This gap is over \$3 million.

Salem Public Schools FY25 Budget Book | 20 27

**THE CODCAST**

## Municipal budgets at the breaking point

by COMMONWEALTH BEACON STAFF 3 days ago

**'Most challenging year': Large number of Mass. districts...**

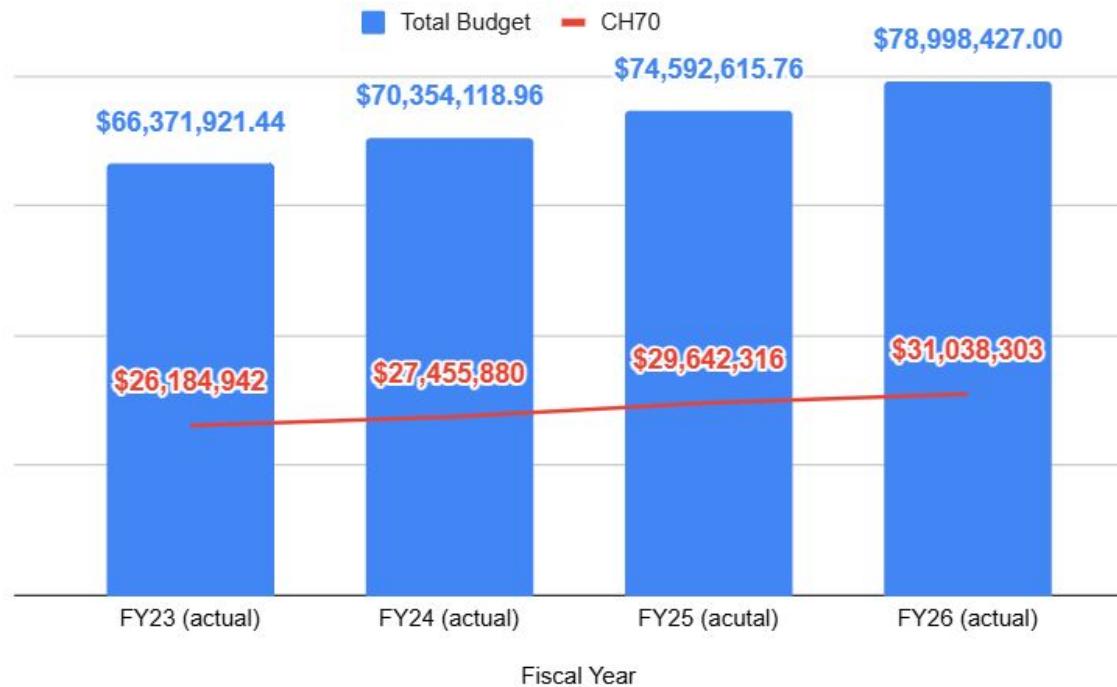
**'Challenging year': Large number of Mass. school districts laying off teachers, cutting programs**

'Most challenging year': Large number of Mass. districts...



# Where does SPS funding come from?

## SPS Budget Appropriation & CH70



# Salem's expected local contribution is among the highest for Gateway Cities

- Maximum local contribution is 82.5%
- For the 26 Gateway cities, target local share ranges from 14.93% (Springfield) to Barnstable & Quincy (82.50%)
- Salem's target local share is 71.46% (185% of the average)
  - 10% decline in target state aid share in the last three years

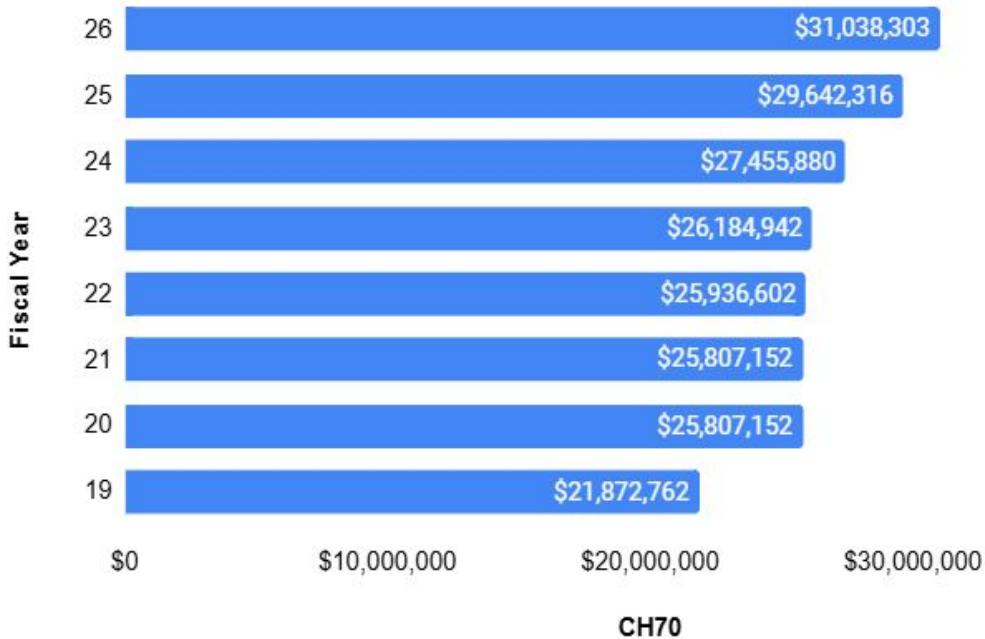
Town	Target Local Share
Springfield	14.93
Lawrence	15.33
Holyoke	18.7
New Bedford	21.35
Fall River	22.05
Chelsea	22.56
Brockton	23.05
Lynn	23.4
Lowell	25.37
Fitchburg	27.27
Everett	28.14
Worcester	29.38
Chicopee	29.53
Taunton	36.86
Pittsfield	37.29
Leominster	40.33
Revere	40.87
Haverhill	44.15
Westfield	46.61
Methuen	46.8
Attleboro	48.91
Malden	53.22
Peabody	67.82
<b>Salem</b>	<b>71.46</b>
Barnstable	82.5
Quincy	82.5



# CH70 & Salem

- 2019: Student Opportunity Act & it was identified that Salem would receive less
- Salem leaders have been actively trying to address the CH70 formula
- CH70 commission is now evaluating the formula

CH70 by Fiscal Year



# What We Know/Assume about next year:

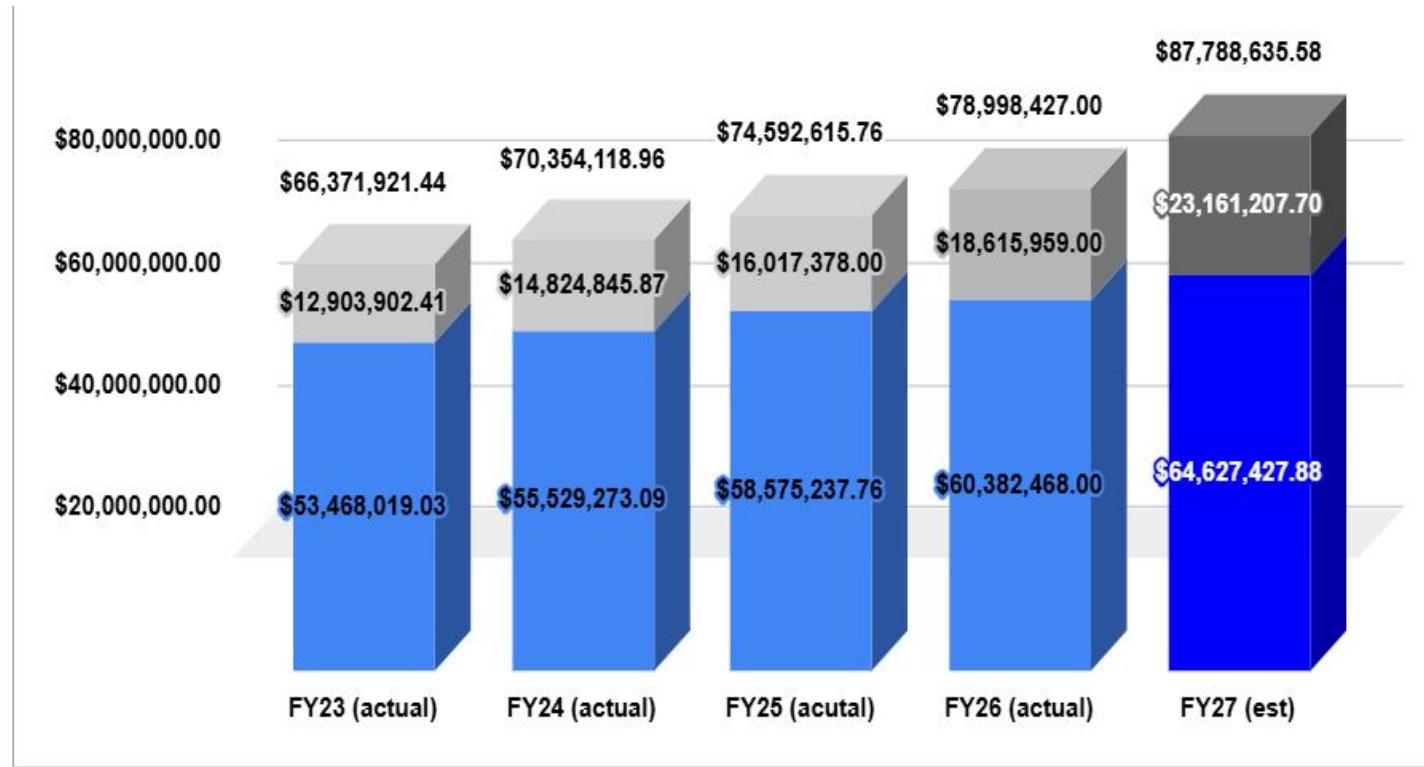
- STU, PSRP, SAA salaries
- 3.5% increases to most non-personnel lines
- Budget increase will be consistent with budget increases in FY25 & FY26

# What we don't yet know:

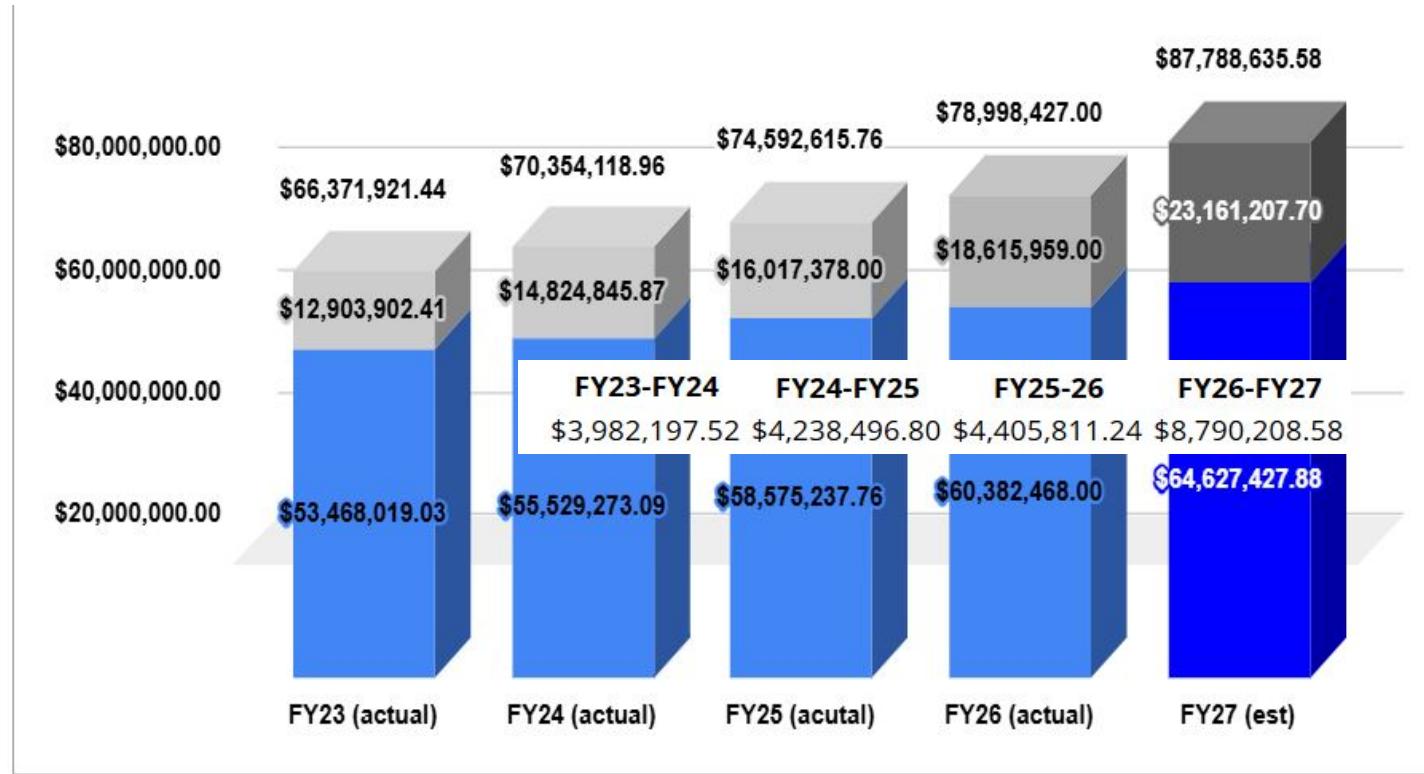
- CH70 for FY27 (January)
- AFSCME salaries (negotiations this year)
- Increases to major cost drivers:
  - Special Education OOD tuition
  - Transportation– Regular Day & Homeless
- What shifts/expansion will be needed for Special Education
- Federal funding changes
- Inflation/cost increases



# Personnel, Non-Personnel & Total Budgets



# Annual Budget Increases



# FY26 and FY27: Actual & Est.

	Personnel	NonPersonnel	Total
FY26 (actual)	\$60,382,468.00	\$18,615,959.00	\$78,998,427.00
FY27 (est)	\$64,627,427.88	\$23,161,207.70	\$87,788,635.58

Assuming a typical or (slightly higher than typical) budget increase, the estimated gap will be ~\$4.5-~\$5 million



+\$8,790,208.58



# What drives our costs?

## Intentional Choices:

- Paying competitive wages to staff (recruitment & retention)
- Average salary increases (step & COLA) in FY26 were significant & overdue:
  - SAA: +5%
  - STU: +10%
  - PSRP: +15%
- Operating costs from maintaining 8 buildings

## External Factors: Rising costs

- Rising utilities costs
- Rising costs for out-of-district placements
- Rising costs for transportation



# What have we done to close budget gaps?

- Annually offset gaps (ESSER, reserves, revenue, prepayment);
- Reduce positions 4 years in a row (56.5 positions in FY26);
- Expand in-house capacity to better meet student needs:
  - 2018: 19 Special Education programs
  - 2025-2026: 31
- Actively seek grant funding: in FY25, 50 FTEs fully/partially funded by grants;
- Participate DESE/ERS learning cohort to look for research based & effective budgeting strategies.



# No great options for closing \$4.5-\$5M gap: Gap in FY26 was \$4.9M, resulting in 56.5 position cuts (including vacancies, retirements, & voluntary departures)

## Options this year:

- Reduce district-level staff (\$235,000)
- Reduce school level admins & non-classroom positions (\$1,136,166)
- Increase class size up to the contract limit (25) (\$884,264)
- Reconfigure High School schedule (\$700,000)
- Increasing caseloads for MLs & Students with Disabilities (~\$175,000)
- Sharing elementary specialists across schools (\$340,000)
- Close PreK classrooms (\$279,480)
- Reducing non-required stipends (\$550,000)
- Reduce non personnel expenses (\$345,248)
- Reduce transportation (~\$375,000)
- Merge schools (\$1,300,000)



# Next steps: the FY27 Budget Process

## What we know

- SPS has had a structural deficit that has necessitated cuts for the last 4 budget cycles
- Costs are rising
- SPS will have another sizable gap in FY27
- There will be budget cuts

## What we are modeling?

- What is the minimum number of cuts that can be made?
- What non-personnel cuts can we make (e.g. non-mandatory transportation)?
- How to make the most of our resources to deliver the highest quality education to all students?



# Final Reflections

- Provide childcare at Horace Mann on **Tuesday, November 25 @ 6:30 pm**
- Working on scheduling a Spanish speaking forum
- Continue to respond to questions via [reconfiguration@salemk12.org](mailto:reconfiguration@salemk12.org) and meet with families, staff and community organizations

