

On September 30, the CPSD superintendent finalists were interviewed by the School Committee. On Monday, October 6, between 5 - 7, the School Committee will conduct the Superintendent vote. **?-4 will be public comment.** Link goes to public comment registration.

[While the swirl around the superintendent search makes for great #myhbo](#), I want to shift to the actual content of the interviews. Each candidate was asked the same twenty questions, and each candidate provided in-depth answers. Occasional follow-up questions were asked of each finalist. I found these interviews to be revealing, both around School Committee members' concerns and conclusions and finalists' ggggv regarding educational best practices. But all three interviews are dense and jargon heavy, making it harder for the public to parse any kind of meaning from the interviews *or* the questions. So TV I'm going to do my best to summarize. (

Please be aware that this is editorial content. Questions and answers have been condensed and summarized. All mistakes and interpretations mine.

[To read the finalist responses on the website](#), toggle the + sign to the right of each question. [If you'd prefer to read this as one document, check out Newsletter: Twenty Questions.](#) Finalist responses are listed in alphabetical order by last name.

Feel free to fact check me or draw your own conclusions via the [complete list of questions](#), the transcripts themselves ([Garcia - 9.30](#), [Murphy - 9.30](#), [Sanchez - 9.30](#)) and the [School Committee Special Meeting 9/30/25](#) video recording. Please note that no question asked should necessarily be attributed to the authorship of any particular School Committee member. Due to open meeting law, the committee could not collaborate as a group on the questions and no particular committee member is aware of who wrote each question. Questions were assigned to each School Committee member by the Mayor's Office.

Thanks,

Anne Coburn

Q1: What is your vision for public education in Cambridge now and in the future? What roles do you see for staff, students, and families in making change?

Dr. Lourenço Garcia would like to transform Cambridge into a beacon of educational equity and excellence within five years by 1) closing opportunity and achievement gaps by investing in early literacy, multilingual education, targeted interventions. 2) Deepening student engagement, through culturally responsive curriculum and authentic student voice in decision making. 3) Strengthening partnerships with families, community organizations, and city agencies to support the whole child. 4) Using artificial intelligence to personalize learning, reduce educator administrative burden, support multilingual communication, and equip students with skills &

critical thinking. (Re AI use, he also plans to safeguard equity, privacy, and human connection in education.)

David Murphy believes that superintendents don't have a monopoly on providing a vision for the organization. He believes that the role of superintendent is to be chief facilitator of what the community wants and what the students need from the school system. He also spoke about relevance and engagement in education – he believes in experiential learning that helps students to make connections between the educational material and the world at large. He also wants to prioritize accountability for all professionals in this system. The foundation of that accountability is lifting up equity in a way that “is not going to be consistent with what’s happening in the outside world.” In his view, public education is our effort as a society to confront and combat those inequities. But to make that a reality, it has to be based on the values and consensus of the community the district serves.

Magaly Sanchez generally gives very concise answers. This is her full reply: “I would say that my vision for public education here, in Cambridge, is centered around students; driven based on decisions around data; culturally and linguistically high-quality learning experiences, as well as equity and access and inclusivity for all students. With the opportunity of educator support, coaching, professional development, as well as clear, authentic stakeholder voice.”

Q2: 22% of CPSD students are on IEPs*. But their caregivers don't feel informed about or involved in the process. How would you help these parents feel more included in their kid's education? We also have a significant number of out of district placements*. How would you review these placements more systematically in the future?

Garcia: He believes that special education should not be considered a separate program but instead should be integrated with the general population via co-teaching, scaffolded instruction, differentiated class instruction, and intervention strategies to “to support those kids who are not making it.” He believes that to “turn around our special education kids,” a collective culture shift towards rigor should begin with the superintendent and school committee members.

Regarding IEP meetings, parents must be invited to the table. When referring students for special education, teachers should evaluate the whole child: all the factors, skills, and know how that the kids bring. Each evaluation should be authentic and in compliance with all laws; parents should have access to records whenever they would like.

“No excuses. As a superintendent of schools, that's the type of culture I want to create for our special education students. We also need to be aware of the MTSS* and other types of strategies to support those, you know, our special education students. That's the reason why they call special education students, because they have skills that probably are a little bit low, or

cognitively low, than other populations. Our job is to really make sure that those skills are properly met. They are learning, they are enjoying learning, and they are basically being integrated with the general population.”

Murphy believes that families, students, and staff all see themselves far more as part of their school community than as part of the district as a whole. Because of that, he feels that the central office should allow for “a certain level of deference” to what happens at the building level. Ed note specific to IEPs: I think that means that he thinks that building level staff should have more say in shaping a student’s IEP than the central administration because those educators have a better knowledge of the student?

According to Murphy, the role of the central administration and school committee is to both empower and set expectations for school communities. That kind of support should create environments where healthy relationships can flourish. He also said the through line between families who feel disenfranchised or are disaffected by the relationship with this organization is a lack of trust. CPSD will build more trust and better relationships with families by having greater follow-through, improved communication, and perhaps more than anything else, listening to what they are asking for.

Sanchez: After hearing that our families don't feel included or part of the IEP decision-making process, **Sanchez** wondered what we're doing now. She would have a data review to understand the full scope of students on IEPs and out-of-district placements. She wants to know what the accountability data is telling us and would also like to know more about our goals for students with IEPs.

She commented that it's important that students on IEPs are always being serviced in the least restrictive environment. She said that she'd first frame the challenge in a culturally and linguistically responsive way, so all families could understand the process. She'd engage with educators, families, and students in the decision making process. Additionally, she'd include a consistent policy review to understand how CPSD serves its students and to confirm if our decisions are, in fact, working.

*[AMC Note: *IEP (Individualized Education Plan). A legal document developed for each public school child in the U.S. who needs special education. It outlines specific strategies and supports to help students with disabilities succeed in both academic and social aspects of school life.*

**Out-of-district placement. An out-of-district placement is a specialized school or program outside a student's local school district. Placement is determined by the student's IEP Team.]*

**MTSS (multi-tiered systems of support). The MTSS model is intended to help all students, not only those with identified disabilities. It involves universal screening, tiered interventions, data-driven decision making, continuous progress monitoring, and a collaborative approach.]*

Q3: Our community complains about lack of communication at every level of CPSD. Folks also want to better understand CPSD central administration decision-making. How will you assess those complaints? And if you were superintendent, how would you incorporate that feedback into your administration?

Garcia: It's important to be transparent and communicate clearly across multiple platforms. We will communicate to our families in all languages within the district, and ensure access to translation. We will share information proactively. Rather than dictate to families, we will explain why decisions were made. We will create a space for parents to provide input into decision-making. We will move away from transactional leadership to one of transformational leadership, building strong relationships first and creating a culture of shared ownership to bring parents to the table. Pull quote: "In moments of challenge, we will be clear, empathetic, and timely, because honesty and openness are what sustain trust. Ultimately, my goal is to ensure that every student, family, and staff member in Cambridge feels they are part of the conversation. And the collective work of advancing educational excellence is maintained, respected, and encouraged."

Murphy: Families and students want a strong education. They also just want something that is pretty fundamental and simple, which is that they want to be informed about what's happening in their children's school. They want to understand what it is that we are teaching, and why is it that we are teaching it to them. What skills is it going to unlock? What opportunities is it going to create? As a district, we have a responsibility to continuously improve in our communication with families (and fyi, he's never claimed to be a perfect communicator). He believes that communication is dynamic – but that the best communication starts by listening. While he hopes that surveys say that CPSD is steadily improving in the area of communication. But "the moment we say that we've reached the mountaintop with regard to communication, I think is the moment we start lowering our standards. And what I would say to a school leader who says, I think I've... I think we've mastered communication in my building, I would say then, you've got to go back to the drawing board and master the art of conversation, because that's really what we should be having with our families, is a dialogue, a reciprocal dialogue that is continuously building stronger trust."

Sanchez: Communication and transparency is key to this role, because that's actually what builds trust across all stakeholders. She sees that as a critical need for all of the team members. She'd like to assess Cambridge Public Schools' communication process. What does that look like? Are we engaging with our families, and our stakeholders in a way that all families feel included, and that they are part of the decision-making process? Once she better understands what's happening now, she'd look at setting clear frameworks and consistent structures of communications, so that families know when these communication systems are gonna come out and when they're gonna happen. She would then build consistent feedback loops or families and educators to see how their input is used. For example, if we're asking for feedback from families, we want to make sure that it's purposeful, that it's very clear, and that we're using that

feedback. She would make outcomes accessible by creating data dashboards to help families understand communication processes that come out, how many communications or pieces of information we actually send out. Finally, she'd ensure that the whole process is done in a culturally and linguistically appropriate way.

Q4. Published in 2019, Cambridge's Building Equity Bridges* project looked at barriers to racial equity in CPSD. Which of those barriers resonates with you today?

[AMC Note: Barriers named include 1) inequitable school and classroom experiences; 2) lack of focus on relationships; 3) youth are not centered; 4) educators of color are not being valued, centered, and supported; 5) whiteness, privilege, and bias; 6) power in decision-making is inequitably distributed; 7) existing structures and practices perpetuate inequities; 8) lack of coherence has disproportionate and inequitable impacts; 9) equity work has lacked commitment, coherence, and accountability.]

Garcia: "I think one of the things that I've seen there is that there is a strong commitment to academic excellence. But also, there is a strong...expectations around making sure that we have the right...the know-how, the expertise, and the skills that are certainly culturally responsive embedded. And that is the optics. And, that's a way we should probably...prepare ourselves, prepare our district, prepare our teachers, prepare the leaders of this great district that you have, you call Cambridge, that has done and built a strong legacy and a strong culture of//equity to really engage in. So, certainly, those are the two things I would say that it's certainly, whatever you do, and basically what emanated from that document, has to do with investing in cultural responsive practice. Always. And it might not be the right word, but I think the spirit of what is being portrayed in that document is that it's basically making sure that the district continues to build on structures, practices, and philosophies that will take us to, to where we see all kids to be served properly, all students to achieve excellence, and all students to be treated with dignity, respect, and, and, and care. And with empathy, I would say. So those are the things that really resonated with me. And those are things that are really ingrained in my philosophical approach, and in my belief systems."

Murphy: His pick: youth are not centered within the CPSD system. He believes that we have an adult-oriented culture. And that's not a good thing for a public school system. According to Murphy, "We are here for one purpose, and one purpose only, and that it is to improve experiences for students so that they can lead better lives. And...the nature of//any public school system at any time, is that we are susceptible to distractions...And right now, we're at a moment in our history in which distractions are occurring in abundance."

To sum up: If we aren't focused on improving students' experiences in this system, we'll get pulled off track. And he thinks it is critical that we stay anchored in our commitment to the well-being of students and to the improvement of their educational experiences.

Sanchez: "I am gonna go with the inequitable school experiences. And the reason I'm going with the inequitable school experiences is, because...I think this is what's really at the core of our opportunity gaps within the district. Anytime that...students have inequitable experiences within the classroom, whether that is around teaching and learning, or access to high-quality curriculum, or access to rigorous, learning opportunities, then that certainly widens the gap. And so because, in having multiple conversations with stakeholders last week when I was here, and that being, obviously, the common thread that we're trying to work towards here as a team, that would be the most significant barrier for me."

Q5. What are some teacher and administration evaluation examples that actually work to improve performance and motivate educators? How will this be consistent with professional standards, curriculum frameworks, and roles and responsibilities? How can that process be rolled out in a reasonable timeframe?

Garcia: "If you're expecting teachers to do great work in the classroom, you need to inspect. Inspection and expectations go together, and the expectation is to ensure that everyone, starting with the superintendent, is visible, keeps the visibility in the buildings. That means showing up in the classrooms, showing up in the hallways, saying hi to kids, and also say hi to our teachers. Our teachers teach a variety of students, students with a variety of skills, knowledge, etc, etc. Evaluation is needed, because that's the only way you can assess the performance of a teacher, whether good planning's taking place, if teachers are really scaffolding and differentiating class instruction so that you can come and see if kids are engaged in the classroom...the way in which instruction, whether it's rigorous, it's not rigorous, whether kids are engaged, you can find that out very quickly. If a child is not being engaged, all you need to do is approach the child and say, what are you learning today? That child will tell you. If the child is unable to tell you, that means that instruction is not affecting the classroom... The goal here is to make sure that the evaluator does it in a constructive way....and that's a way you can move a teacher, because the teacher also is looking for that feedback so that they can improve instruction."

Murphy: "I think it's the superintendent's responsibility to understand what are the needs of that school district at that particular time. The reason we've talked about it in this room is because it is not something that we have been doing as well as we need to do. It's not something that we

as an organization have prioritized. That has been unfair to our educators, but more importantly, frankly, it has been unfair to our students.

When I say that our top priority is educator effectiveness, I am not speaking only about educator evaluation. If all we think about is the technocratic process of making sure that we observe educators on a contractually mandated frequency, and that we apply with all the deadlines, and we have a sort of technically sound evaluation system, we will potentially be able to submit ourselves for an award around compliance, but we're not going to move the needle for any students. I don't think that's what the evaluation instrument is designed for.

The evaluation instrument has to be paired with the type of professional learning that is going to deepen and improve//the capacity of our educators to serve students...We're not just trying to go out and improve pedagogy for the sake of improving it. We are trying to improve our educators' capacity with the programming that we have them immersed in, and ultimately, I think that's going to lead them to be more sufficiently empowered to serve students."

Sanchez: "It's very difficult for one to get great at their craft if they're not really receiving consistent feedback from their leaders via an effective evaluation process that's based on standards...oftentimes what happens is that we get so heavily involved with everything else that's important about being a school leader, and then that consistency [with educator evaluations] throughout the year minimizes. That ends up impacting the trust, the relationships between, the school leaders and the teachers.

And so...I think about school leaders, ensuring that they have a consistent process across the board that they share with all of their teachers. This is something that could happen in the summertime when they're opening up schools. They would be sharing the evaluation tool. They would be sharing the district's strategic plan and objectives, because evaluation s should really be aligned to those goals. And they would be making reasonable goals as teams.

So...it would be...coaching and providing professional development for teachers at the beginning of the year, explaining the evaluation process, explaining how school leaders would be going into classrooms to do these evaluations...and providing that authentic feedback, so that that way our teachers can grow and get better in their craft. Not missing deadlines, very critical. And ensuring that these evaluation processes are focused on the growth of our educators, not an I-gotcha, because that also diminishes trust."

Q6. We eliminated tracking because we thought we could provide differentiated instruction. Now we have a wide range of academic preparedness in one classroom and we don't think we're serving all of our students very well. How would you address that?

Garcia: “I would have to do a root cause analysis and see why this is happening. That's where you start the conversation, by getting your directors in one room, your principals in one room, and have a conversation. Why there is this gap, why this persistent gap exists? And...we need to look at whether the curriculum is being consistently aligned...Consistency alignment of the curriculum means that all the expectations set for elementary, middle, and high school...So, the skills, the foundations are built so that the child is able to use those foundations to transition to the next level.

Once that is done sequentially,...then you can say that that child can certainly move from point A to point B, point B to point C, etc, etc, because those foundational skills are important. Studies have shown time and time again that if a child cannot read by 3rd grade level, then the chances for the child to become illiterate is strong. So, we want to make sure that we invest in our pre-K education, where those foundations are set. And that goes through grade level 3, and we want to make sure that our kids are very strong.

...As they move on, we want to make sure they have all those skills mastered, learned, so that they can continue to build sequentially, those understanding until they get to high school. If that's linear, that process is linear, there's no bumps on the way, which I believe there would be bumps on the way, so, and it's our job as school leaders, principals, directors, to find ways in which we can overcome those bumps...”

Murphy: “This is a challenge in the Cambridge Public Schools...when we fail at this at a systems level, it is a challenge that families and educators, and I think, you know, tragically, students, observe in real time...And so...my answer to, like, well, how do we do this better, is that, well, this is about the actual execution of the work...I bring up the point that every school district has this challenge day in and day out, every class that convenes...But here, we have everything we need to do this well. I think it comes down to being better organized, having a level of accountability that I don't think has always been present, and ultimately being willing to embrace data, because at the end of the day, what data really is, it's just facts...We have to just be willing to look ourselves in the mirror and actually see the difference and see the impact that our work is having. And if it's not having the impact that it needs to for all students,...then we have to do it differently. And I think we have to be willing to change, both in terms of our immediate practices with kids and just systemically as an organization.”

Sanchez: “Differentiation versus tracking, right, is what we're talking about here. So we know that tracking is a significant concern because it actually hits at the heart of equity in terms of access, which is why most districts, including this one, is moving away from tracking, right? And so, I think that, in order to address this, I would focus on really looking at and trying to understand what our Tier 1 instruction looks like within our classrooms, right? So that every student has daily access to rigorous and high-grade level content, which is very, very critical...and I think that one of the areas that we also get really stuck in when it comes to differentiation is that we don't put the proper systems and structures in place so that our

teachers are actually successful...So some of those proper systems and structures have to do with scheduling in the building. When I was a high school principal, we ensured that students during Tier 1...were receiving high-quality instruction that was in a personalized way...And...that students...are always in the classroom when that Tier 1 instruction is happening. So there's no pull-out, there's no services happening at that time, because it's important for the students to be able to access that portion of, of, of the instruction. And then during scheduling, we also did what's called a WIN block, or what I... which is... stands for what I need. Right? And so, during that block, students would have the opportunity to actually ramp up in the areas that they need support.

And this is just one example of how to kind of put the proper systems in place in terms of differentiation. But there's also a lot of other areas that have to do with the instructional framework. What does that look like? Are we evaluating the programs? Are we supporting the teachers? And do the teachers have the right professional development and coaching in order to be able to actually provide the personalized supports that the students are needing?"

[AMC Note: CPSD implemented a well-respected district-wide curriculum (CKLA, Illustrative Math) and WIN blocks within the past three years. Tier 1 refers to core education, accessed by most of the student population.]

Q7. Can you describe your knowledge and experience of school finance? Describe a budget planning process you've used, and as well as your experience with budget management, controls, and reductions.

Garcia: Has dealt with high school level budgets, applied for grants, manages his own, approximately \$7M program budget. As assistant superintendent in Revere, he participates in a collaborative budget creation process. That team looks at enrollment projections, principals' new and existing needs, district priorities for equity and excellence, and strategic planning. He suggests coming into a budget meeting with a clear mind: "Put all the eggs on the table, and see what's working, what's not working. What programs we can cut without compromising the learning from our kids? What program we should keep? We know that the bulk of the budget, basically, is absorbed by salaries, benefits, and you know, special education, you know, transportation, we know that. So, but we want to make sure that we use a...you know, a zero process, you know, budget process, which means that you can clear and you put everything there."

Murphy: Has served as a school committee chair, district chief financial officer as part of his role as assistant superintendent for finance and operations in the Medford Public Schools, and then most recently, as the interim superintendent in Cambridge. Believes that the budget must reflect the values of the community funding it and that it serves. Mentioned that fixed costs will occupy the vast majority of a school district's budget in any year. Suggested that the budgeting process is more about shaping the district with a long term trajectory in mind, one aligned with

the goals and objectives of the school system. He also says that people want immediacy and sometimes, even for a wealthy school district, that's just not available. According to Murphy, keeping the mission in mind is the most equitable way to serve all the kids.

Sanchez: Oversees a \$30 - \$45M program budget. She believes that the funding follows the students, the priorities, and the objectives. That means if you've got a very strong strategic plan based on closing opportunity gaps, everything in the district should be aligned to that funding down to the penny. She suggested that the district should follow a zero-based budgeting strategy, and start fresh every year. Presenting the budget should be very transparent, culturally and linguistically appropriate, and accessible to all.

[AMC Note: I asked Ivy Washington, CPSD's CFO, about zero-based budgeting, because it showed up in two out of three finalists' answers. She said: "Zero-based budgeting is a strategy to help companies make radical changes to their budgets, often as a cost saving measure. It involves starting from scratch (zero) and building the budget entirely anew. For school districts, the vast majority of our budget is built from positions and purchases that are actually set or that we don't have a great deal of control over; multi-year contracts are in place, there are contractual and regulatory requirements, etc....And because zero-based budgeting requires you to start from scratch each year, it is also a much more costly and labor-intensive methodology for budgeting."]

Q8. What role does whole child support (balancing academics, social-emotional-cognitive development, non-academic interests/skills, and life and career preparedness) play in our work as a school district?

Garcia: He would ensure that schools have social-emotional learning, restorative justice practices, and training teachers on recognizing behavioral dysregulation and early warning indicators. He believes that we should go back to the root of the problem by communicating with families.

"We cannot teach academics without having a student that is emotionally stable. So, that's given. Whoever is preaching this to anybody, or if you hear this somewhere, you may say. It's wrong. So, a child can always, you know, a child with an empty stomach cannot learn. A child who's, you know, social-emotional learning is not stable, cannot learn. A child that is deregulated cannot learn...we cannot just focus on one piece of the equation and forget the rest...if we start punishing kids because they're not doing certain things, and we aren't really understanding where they're coming from, it may be your language, it could be parents who probably work 3-4 jobs. We know that. In urban environments, they have a lot of those families. Our ELL population, our special ed population, they know the difficulties they challenge, they face in current times. All that needs to be taken into account."

Murphy: Feels that social-emotional learning is the foundation upon which everything else rests. If a child doesn't have psychological safety in school, they won't be well-positioned to learn – and the more vulnerable the student is, the more important this is. (This is also true for our educators.)

Working through this past year's Fletcher Maynard Academy redesign process was a tipping point for him in wanting the permanent superintendent position. The school team came back and said that they wanted the school's emphasis to be on social-emotional learning. As they piloted the Wayfinder program in both FMA and other schools, he was incredibly inspired by the educators who reported to work early this year to go through that professional development and training.

He also said that there are ways and strategies that superintendents use to rapidly boost test scores in districts with these kinds of achievement discrepancies, and they're not sustainable over the long-term. What he sees happening at FMA is deeper, longer term, healthier work that will capitalize on the already high-quality teaching at the school. He believes that this type of practice should be systematized and improved at each school community across the district.

Sanchez: "The whole child support is necessary for all of our students. Our students come to us ...with diverse needs, and...our role [is] to educate the whole child. And so, in order to be able to do so as a district, we want to be able to identify what those needs are. We want to identify personalized plans in order to support the students, and this is what helps them then access curriculum, access learning, and really engage in the joy of learning. It's very difficult for students to be able to do that, they're coming into school, and they're hungry, or they're worried, or they're scared, like many of our students are today. And so, just reminding students in the fear, from the fear perspective, that schools are a very safe place. And supporting their every need, so that that way they can focus on, on the business of teaching and learning."

[AMC Note: We have a social-emotional learning department as part of CPSD's Office of Student Services, as well as a social worker in each school.]

Q9. In 1986 and 1987, the Concerned Black Staff Report identified that Black and Brown students aren't receiving the same education as their White peers. That was 40 years ago and not enough has changed. How do you propose to address this issue?

Garcia: He believes that the problem stems from systemic racism, and that the structures have not been designed to address the needs of either Black male students or Black students in general, or for BIPOC or immigrant children. He believes that we have to study the system to identify those traces of systemic racism. He likes the district's equity plan, but he wants to ensure that the work is being done authentically and with fidelity. He believes that focus must begin with the superintendent and the school committee members and stretches out towards principals and teachers. He believes that process requires trust, building connections, and sustainable leadership. He also believes in investing in culturally responsive practices and

curriculum that respects the identities, the experiences, and perspectives of Black children and people, rather than one that is centered primarily on the stories of White folk.

Murphy: He appreciates the skepticism and the “what’s gonna be different about this go around” regarding closing opportunity gaps. He doesn’t pretend to have a magic formula, and he doesn’t think this is an easy problem to fix.

“I think the way you close gaps is by being relentless in being insistent that there are high standards across the board for all students, and that educators are supported in their development as educators. And then they are respected as professionals, and then, they are empowered as professionals, to make sure that they are able to...afford students whatever it is that they need, wherever they happen to be, so that we can follow the mantra of meeting students where they are. I think that, as superintendent, the thing that I can do most to help that, is to prioritize the cultivation of systems that insist on that level of standards and insist on that level of accountability...Our data indicates that the investments we are making is having an impact, and it is having a difference. It is not yet closing those gaps. I don't take that as evidence that our investment or our priorities are not working. I take that as evidence that investments and priorities, if not coupled with execution, are going to leave some students behind...that is the change that we need to see in the coming years.”

Sanchez: She would ensure that students have access to rigorous learning opportunities, regardless of where they live, where they come from, no matter what their background. She specifically discussed implementing advanced learning opportunities at New Bedford Public Schools by removing barriers to an International Baccalaureate (IB) program. She mentioned that while access and participation was really important, being ready was even more critically important. So her team put in place foundational opportunities to support all students, so that they can on-ramp to these programs. Additionally, she worked to support kids with tutoring and peer groups, and that supports happened within and during the school day.

“I think that the tale here is that all of our students have the opportunity and should have the opportunity to access rigorous learning opportunities, and it's up to us to make sure that that happens.”

[AMC Note: I am trying to source this document to link the reference. If you have a lead, please feel free to contact me at info@coburnforcambridge.com.]

Q10. In Cambridge, privileged and underrepresented communities exist in silos. How will you address community engagement for *all* stakeholders?

Garcia: “So it's not just, hey, you know, we have this forum today, we invite you to the forum. Come and share. That's not the way it's done. You want to make sure that you invite them, the

invitation, is in their respective languages, and you also make sure that, you know, when you have a forum, you got people who understand their culture, they can also communicate effectively in their own language. They identify with the culture of our families, and they're there for that purpose...you can also create forums for parents, in the afternoon, where you can invite them to have a conversation. You can call it... label coffee hours with the principal, or coffee hours with the superintendent, or maybe a dinner hour with the superintendent. You invite families, you have dinner with them...that's the way you build trust and relationship with members of your community....that's all part of engagement. It's creating a space that basically inspires kids, that inspires, you know, families to come, right? Without any fear, to come and engage in that conversation."

Murphy: "All caregivers, or at least all caregivers that I've ever met, really do want the same thing. And I think that sometimes, there's maybe a responsibility on the part of the school system to make sure that we are being effective in our communication in a way that points that out. Because, at the end of the day, what families want from their school system is for their children to be better prepared for life. And it doesn't matter what your economic status is, or what language you speak, or what you look like, the expectation on the part of families is that we better prepare their children for life...I fully acknowledge that the challenges that are contemplated by your question, I think, are more pronounced in the Cambridge community [than in other communities]. But we should not ever use those circumstances as an excuse as to why we have to operate differently. Again, it's why I go back to the idea that we have a singular mission. As long as we are executing properly, and as long as we are fostering a sense of professionalism, I'm not concerned about the fact that, you know, our folks across the city are sort of coming at it from a different perspective. When they show up at 7.45, 8.15, 8.45, they all want the same thing, and their expectations, I think, are pretty consistent, and I think we should capitalize on that."

Sanchez: She emphasized the importance of school councils, which she's grown significantly in her district (from 22% to 90% in her current role). "I lead from a place of engagement because I believe that it's very, very critical, not to mention that all of the research says that the more that we engage all of our community members, especially our caregivers, that it truly positively impacts student outcomes. And so, how I would do that is, just really welcoming diverse perspectives, learning about those perspectives, and getting to be able to understand them. Engagement really talks about us meeting our caregivers, our families, where they are, and showing them a sense of belonging by building trust, building relationships with them, and helping them understand that they're part of this village and part of this decision-making process. So we can do that through our school councils, which are required based on Massachusetts law...and ensuring that the meetings are posted on websites and following the Open Meetings Act, ensuring that all stakeholders are part of the shared decision making. And so that's pretty much, that's one example.

But again, engagement and authentic engagement really talks to purpose. It talks about why are you looking to engage families, and having that clarity, so that that way families feel like they are

part of, right? And they understand what that purpose is. So if you're looking to inform, then we should be honest and transparent about that, and sharing... we're informing this decision, this is why it was made, right? But if you're looking to share a draft of a policy so that stakeholders can actually get engaged and involved and share feedback, then we share that purpose and that information, and now they have clarity, and then they know how to best engage. Right? But they also will come to the table, understanding what we're seeking from them, and also feeling that they are part of the decision-making process.”

Q11. Tell us about a time when you did the right thing, especially that may have been at the cost of your own interests. Can you share some specific examples of personal courage in your work or your life?

Garcia: “When I was hired as a principal to work in Revere Public Schools, I find a school that, despite the fact that they had good teachers, good leadership in general, but, it sounds to me that the school needed a lot of support. And one thing I noticed right away, when the bell rang, it took kids [time] to move around the hallway. By the time they got to class, it was 30 minutes, 33 minutes of instructional time. I dismantled that structure, I created the block schedule [of 80 minutes of instructional time], pretty much like we have here at the high school. And the goal was to make sure that we got less movement in the hallway, had more kids in the classroom, and instruction could be a little bit more deepened in the classroom. So then I created an advisory period to foster relationships and collaboration and personalization with kids as well. And I also created a structure where teachers could converse with each other, engage in curriculum planning, and deliver, and learn from each other, and do peer observation. And particularly with the block schedule, I thought that I was...people... I thought that was going through a revolution in Revere. There was a very tough time, and I had struggled, because imagine, I had to really make sure I do a better job making sure that I changed the mindset of those teachers. And the first year was in 2012, 2013, that's the year that the high school moved from Level 3 to Level 1. So that was a huge accomplishment, because by that time, teachers – teachers understood that the principal had good intentions, the principal had done his research, and the proof was right there. And it's one of the things that I will never forget.”

Murphy: I've been extremely fortunate to hold the leadership positions that I have, this one included. And while I think I've... I've put my principled belief in the importance of public education and my heartfelt belief in this organization, ahead of my own professional interests or ambitions. I've never really felt as though that was anything so great that I should be talking about in a job interview, I guess. Because I think that's just part of the job. You have to be willing to lose the job of superintendent, if you're going to do it well, because there are decisions that have to be made that are unpopular, and there are decisions you have to make that are going to antagonize powerful interests, and you know, I always appreciate when the powerful interests are willing to attach their names to their attacks, and I think that should be a basic principle of public life.

I will tell you that, I'll just, I... my second day working for the Cambridge Public Schools was, I was asked to go to City Hall, and it was a discussion about the long-term facilities condition assessment. And it was pretty evident that part of that discussion was going to be about potential structural changes that need to be made in the organization to be more sustainable, and to ultimately create an environment that is better suited for students. And the report and the work that's been done around the report is much, much more complicated. So please, you know, don't go read the report and try to figure out what school we're trying to close, because that's not in there, and it's not going to be. But what the report does do, is it sets an expectation that we have to ask ourselves some pretty important and pretty consequential questions about how we as a school system are organized, and whether or not we are organized in a way that best serves the interests of students.

And I've, I think that the decision around the Kennedy Longfellow, which – it was a decision that was, I think, first and foremost, the right decision – so I'll just be very clear, the school committee was right to do that. It was not a decision that I think was easy from the standpoint of what would be the most popular in a given political moment. But that is just sort of one example of how I think the decisions that those of us who sit at this table have to make on a regular basis.”

Sanchez: “You know, in these very public-facing roles, I really feel and believe that we almost do that every day. And so, I would like to ground my response in experiences with, actually closing school communities. A very complex thing to do, right? And, it's not ever an easy decision to make. And in the carbon district that I'm in, we actually have a capital planning process that we're all engaging in, and family and community engagement is a very critical part of that. And anytime that we're making those types of decisions, because it's a very emotional decision that impacts students, it impacts families – no one feels that their school community should be closed, right? And so, when that occurs, we become the villains, and we become the ones that are making the poor decisions, because we're impacting them emotionally. And so I think that anytime that those decisions are made, they can go awry, and what I have learned from it is that doing it with humility, doing it with humanity, ensuring that we're understanding that it is a traumatic experience for our students and families, having multiple forums, with explanation, sharing the data and the why and the purpose – and having opportunity for that social-emotional space, right? Because it's a very emotional thing to do. So at any given time, that can turn really awry, and those decisions have to be based on data, honesty, transparency.”

Q12. Right now, we have a half-dozen open labor agreements with the CEA. How will you deal with multiple bargaining units simultaneously? How will you prioritize teaching and learning while ensuring fair labor conditions?

Garcia: “So, my role as a superintendent is to ensure that I am the bridge between the school committee and the teachers. That's my role. So...when I hear concerns, or the union president brings concerns to me, my job is to take that and...try to resolve that at my own level. If I cannot resolve it, if something that is bigger than that, then I will have to consult with the school committee members. That's my job, is to be that cultural bridger between the teachers and the

union. I have to give them a chance to express themselves and see, really, what this is all about. I have to be curious, to be empathetic to people, to sit down with people, listen about their concerns, what they have. Sometimes they see things I don't see. So give them a space, let them talk to me, and then I'll take my notes. Whatever decision we make, though, about salary and negotiations and stuff like that needs to be fiscally responsible. In other words, I'm not going to agree on something that is going to harm the expectations that we have set for our children. That's... it's not gonna happen. But, at the same time, I always believe in giving people space for them to express themselves and express what they really see that I'm not seeing. Then I'll bring it to the school committee, we'll debate it, we'll discuss it. You know, in our district, we always have conversations with the union, on a weekly basis, on a monthly basis, before the issue gets escalated. How's the temperature in the building? How things are going? It needs to be a collaborative approach, otherwise it will not work. So, that's my approach to any types of things that we do, is by engaging people in conversation, listen to their concerns, and not diffuse the problem, or ask them to walk aside, or to walk away. That's not gonna happen. I am the bridge, and as a result of that, I have to listen to all parties."

Murphy: The first thing I would say that I think is a core tenet of all labor relations, and maybe just all relationships and professional contexts, is, I think we have a responsibility to be forthcoming and to be transparent, as much as we possibly can. I think that part of why I've been able to foster what I think are largely constructive relationships with our bargaining partners since I came to Cambridge, is that I've tried to be as available, accessible, and transparent as I possibly can. That includes the things that I disagree about, or things that are being advocated for that I don't think are going to serve the interests of students.

So to go to one of the parts of your question, how do we make sure that our teaching and learning is not affected by what at times can deteriorate into a less constructive discourse with our bargaining partners? And I have not been here where that's really happened here, but it's certainly the climate in our state, and I've certainly been a part of it in other places. I think the first – the way we do that is to continue to treat our educators with the utmost respect and understand that they're in a professional environment, and their representatives are zealously advocating on their behalf, which is their responsibility and their duty. And I think respecting that, I think, goes a long way in terms of making sure that our classroom experience is as insulated as it possibly can be from any potential acrimony.

That said, I also want to be really clear that it is a two-way street, and our labor leaders have a responsibility to be transparent and to be honest, and to not manipulate actions or messaging that is coming from the school committee or from the administration. I'm grateful that we have the partners that we do. I believe that we do have a healthy discourse. I think it's my responsibility to continue to maintain the health of that discourse, but I also want to be very, very clear tonight that that is not a responsibility that I can fulfill alone. And we will need partners at the bargaining table who share that commitment. That's been my experience in Cambridge. I'm confident that will continue to be the case. But I think I would be being disingenuous with you if I said I thought that was something that I can fully control myself."

Sanchez: “As part of the superintendent's role, fair labor conditions is not only ethically required, but it's also required by law in engaging in these fair practices of negotiations. Now. That is said, and it doesn't mean that it always happens. And so, I would take the time to ensure that I'm building relationships with all of our union partners. I would try to be able to understand what their perspectives are, where they're coming from in terms of their negotiations. You know, the art of negotiation is really engaging in those conversations and understanding those diverse perspectives. But really also, knowing there's always gonna have to be a give and a take. But I think that, when we go into those spaces, we go into those spaces with respect, we go into those spaces with engaging in the why, with data, with, information to back up what we're seeking, hoping that they're also doing the same. And I think that those relationships are grounded on building those relationships and making a strong attempt to build trust and build an understanding of what they're seeking and why they're seeking it.”

Q13. Some parents feel that their child is labeled as having bad behavior; sometimes this may be related to cultural differences. Other parents feel that their child's learning time is being taken away due to another child's disruptive behavior in the classroom. How do you reconcile the needs of a dysregulated child with the needs of their peers? How can you reassure families that we're balancing inclusion and educational progress?

Garcia would start with having a conversation with the parents and setting up a listening tour or a forum to educate all parties. He'd start by engaging with simple questions like “why do you think this?” He believes that sometimes, in education, one doesn't take the time to explain the why, what, and how. He suggested that maybe those parents need more conversation so that they can understand what “special education students are all about...what our English language learners is all about. What skills and know-how and expertise they bring. What is going on with a child that's trying to process in two languages? Okay? So that the child can understand...Just inviting [the parents] to the table. Okay? Have meetings and conversations with them, and hopefully they'll understand. If they don't understand for the first time, do it again....and we need to tell them that all children deserve an equitable education. All children deserve a regular education. All children deserve to be here, because they are taxpayers, they are part of this community.”

Murphy: “I've never met an educator who wants to label a child as a troublemaker. But that's what we want, and that's what we aspire to. And...here and in other districts, disproportionality is a real issue. And I would tell you there's two lanes that we need to make sure that our disproportionality is not perpetuating that experience that you're talking about there. One, we've got to make sure that our systems are in place, that we're closely monitoring our data and making sure that if we see trends of disproportionality, that we are responding in real time and making sure we're supporting our school leaders and our educators and our counselors and all the other staff who are involved in those situations, to make sure that they are fulfilling their responsibility to explore all possible strategies to support every child. That's the systems level. This, as much as any other situation that we will talk about here tonight, comes down to the actual execution of the practitioner, the child, and with the support of the family. And in terms of

what leadership can do, I think we go back to making sure that we are holding ourselves accountable...we have to have people that...maintain the capacity to serve children in the way that they should be served, and that requires a level of vigilance that can be challenging for a school district. Most school districts. But again, we're not most school districts. We have no excuses. We have all the oversight that we could possibly imagine."

He shared an example of CPSD's work:

"In the Equity Academy that Mr. Fernandez and Dr. Jimenez led last year, one of the programs was taking the disproportionality data that we know is there, isolating that data, and looking closely and deeply at what was causing it. And what levers are available...to the educators and to the staff who were having a disproportionate level of referrals of students of color. And that is a hard conversation to have within a school community. It is a hard conversation to have as a professional. I am grateful to Mr. Fernandez and his team for creating the space for those conversations to take place, and I am incredibly grateful to the staff...for taking on that very real challenge and doing something about it. And I think that sets a good example, and we've got to apply that type of work in different contexts in which there is greater accountability. And I think that's sort of the next step where we have to go from there."

Sanchez: "I think that's really grounded, again, in building student-teacher relationships, them getting to really know each other, the teacher understanding and knowing their students, and the needs of their students, right? And then, how I've done this in the past is really thinking about restorative opportunities. You know, restorative oftentimes is one of those words that's kind of thrown [around], but it is a true practice, and when it's done correctly, it does work, right? And so, I'd like to better understand what is the data telling us, and then think about what types of systems and structures do we have in place to be able to support the child's social-emotional needs, right? And if we're going to be talking about restorative practices, or those types of supports, that really talks about the student really learning about who they've harmed in the space. And in this case, it's other students' learning that's being harmed. And so the student hopefully internalizing this information and being able to understand that they're harming other students' learning, and even harming their own learning, will hopefully bring them to a place of building on their social-emotional learning, and taking ownership of this, and then thinking about what the next steps would be in terms of that. So I think I would ground it in restorative opportunities, but truly not just throwing the word around, really having folks that are trained, again, having the systems and the structures in place."

Q14. How will you work with the school committee to identify district priorities while finding the resources to move them forwards? How will you use the budget process to advance student achievement? How will you add new programs or cut ineffective ones?

Garcia: He would hold a listening tour to 1) build trust and to 2) ensure that he's aware of what's currently there in terms of resources and services. He would review available data regarding

MCAS, coursework, and demographics in terms of outcomes and services provided. As part of this process he'd draw on input from building leaders, teachers, and students. After he's had a chance to comprehensively review that data, he'd be in a better position to pinpoint where the district is faltering. At that point, he'd make his recommendations to the school committee. Together, he and the school committee would create a plan for next steps.

Murphy: "I think your question really gets at the heart of what step one for the next superintendent will need to be, which is to develop a new strategic plan that is reflective of the community's goals, values, and priorities, and then identifies, with specificity, where are the areas that we're seeing strength and improvement, what are assets that need to be maintained or potentially built upon, and what are systems or practices that have been in place for however long that need to be retired?"

We do not talk publicly as much about the programs and systems that we are retiring due to ineffectiveness or resource allocation. Sometimes we have a bad habit of saying we are retiring something because we don't have the money, and really, we have the money – we just would like to spend it somewhere else. And I think one of the things that I would say in response to your question, Mayor, is I think we've got to lose that habit. We've just got to be more transparent. When we decide something's not working, we need to just be clear that it's not working, and therefore it's ending, and if there are hurt feelings about it, there's other ways in which we can support in response to that. But the reflective habit of saying, we can't do that because we don't have money – this is the one school system that really just can't do that.

Part of why we're not as institutionally inclined to talk about the things that we are retiring, is that we are a school system, and we are a budget that is made up entirely of people. And when we retire something, there's frequently some type of personnel implication of it. And so it becomes a communications challenge, frankly, because it's not something that we necessarily can be or are inclined to be as transparent about...and so I think it's a challenge of the public nature of the work. But I think that by continuing the dialogue and making sure that we're...going back to what are the goals that we are looking to advance, I think that can instill on the community's part, a level of confidence in at least having a rationale for the investments that we are making."

[AMC Note: In the summer of 2024, the School Committee fired Dr. Victoria Greer and brought on Interim Superintendent David Murphy. Murphy recommended that Greer's strategic plan be extended through the FY25-26 school year.]

Sanchez: "I would say that the school committee and superintendent relationship is very critical, and it's one that's really built on trust. I know that there's that common thread that we all want our students to be successful, and that we want to close that 50% achievement gap, especially around our Black and Brown students. It's really building those strategic plans with all of our stakeholders. It's not just us. Building those strategic plans that are very clear, we have our objectives, we have the money following those plans, and we're being very transparent about it. Everyone knows where the money's going, how we're using the funding, and why. There's a purpose behind it, right?...I think it would be really critical to look at the data, to look at

programs that we currently have in place, and to also take the opportunity to implement a continuous cycle of review, present those cycle of reviews of the programmatic experiences that we have as school committee presentations, so that that way the whole community is understanding...And then we can make informed decisions on how we're going to move forward with these different programs.”

Q15. How do you view and work with subcommittees of the school committee?

Garcia: “I'm a people's person. I am also firm. When I make a decision, I can negotiate the decisions, but I can also be firm with certain decisions that I make. Obviously, I will explain why I make a decision. If there is room for compromise, I will compromise. Basically, if you convince me that that's the way to go, then I'm flexible enough to review the data you presented, and tell me why you think we should go this way. I approach things as [part of] a team. I work by collecting ideas, by working with people together, by collaborating, and once we made a decision, that's the final decision. If a decision's not working, I will flag that. I say, well, you know, guys, you know, what we have...I don't think will support our children and support our families and our teachers. I think that we should go back and explore other options, other opportunities. I'm flexible in the area. We present before the board, and you know, I have great relationship with board members. I'm highly respected in my district, so, I would say that probably that will be the same in this district.”

Murphy: “From my perspective as a former school committee chair, the school committee has the responsibility to set the broad direction of the school system. I do think that that has to be done in tandem with the superintendent, as well as with a variety of other constituencies. But I think the sort of specific structural way in which a school committee organizes itself...is one of those areas that is squarely within the prerogative of the governing body, and I think the administration's responsibility is to be as respectful and responsive to that as possible. If a school committee were to inform a superintendent that we've decided to have 65 subcommittees, and they're going to meet every day, and you and your staff will need to be represented properly, I would probably say I think that's gonna be dysfunctional, and I wouldn't recommend it. I've never had that experience here. I have found this committee to be extremely focused, and consistent with respect to your expectations of myself and expectations of our team, and ultimately expectations of the organization. And so, as long as the subcommittees...continue to be anchored to that singular mission and to the goals that we have collectively set, I wouldn't have any reservations about different...permutations of how the committee would organize itself. Because you are ultimately the lead representatives of the community...I think it's important that the committee be, also be sort of in a listening posture and make sure that you are reflecting the views of the community. But I think we have to function as a team, and to understand that collectively we represent the governance structure and the leadership of the organization.”

Sanchez: “Subcommittees are an extension of the school committee. So, I view them as a critical part of the work. Actually, I view them as where you all, as school committee members, do your work, right? And that part would be very critical to our governance relationship, and one that I would like to take the opportunity to expand on. And what I mean by expanding is we have many policies within the district. So there'll be opportunities to review policies there, ensuring that our policies should really be reviewed, most of them at least once a year, at minimum, and then we would bring them up to the full committee. It's that transparency, that communication, where students and families will be able to understand, here's the work that the subcommittee did at the last subcommittee meeting. This is something that I did when I was on the school board in Rhode Island. Our practice as a school committee, is we worked in the subcommittee, and if there was ever any opportunity that we needed to vote on a policy, we would actually take the opportunity to talk about it at least three times before it was fully voted on, so that that way, families have the opportunity to internalize it, to understand how it may impact their particular student or the overall community. And then by the third reading, the whole school committee would vote on it. So I see the subcommittees as an integral part of our governance and our work.”

Q16. Can you describe a complex problem or crisis when you called on skills and abilities outside of simple intelligence? For example, communication, political savvy, instincts, etc.

Garcia: “So, I strongly believe in the circle, in the circle process, I believe that, it's a way to really, bring parties together. In situations where there were some police, you know, cultural and language differences between high-ranking positions in our district versus parents and...even within the school committee and the central office, we certainly brought two things to make sure that we are on the same page. One was to bring a retired superintendent who came and, certainly capitalized on his strengths as a retired superintendent, and he basically brought us together, ensuring that we understand our roles as a superintendent, a central office, and also the role that the school committee members, have to, has as well.

Because that... those two roles sometimes get very confused, and sometimes, as a result of that confusion, you know, misunderstanding happens, and then you got the two bodies separate, when in fact, you should be working together towards serving kids and families. So, if you are not careful enough, you know, you may have some conflicts there. So, we brought somebody that came, we used the person as a mediator, and we were able to overcome that. The restorative justice practice also was the same thing. You know, you brought somebody that was specializing in restorative justice practice circles to come and get people together around the table, and basically facilitating the conversation and empowering teachers...and then at the end of the day, everyone left with a better understanding of each other's perspective, and the issue was corrected.”

Murphy: “...With respect to an example that I, you know – smartness is definitely not something that I think was...of particular usefulness...I would say the decision that we collectively made at

the Kennedy Longfellow last year. That decision, as has been said in other forums, and I think is accurate, was a long time coming, was a decision that had a profound and significant and lasting impact on the members of that school community.

And it is the type of decision that a superintendent and a school committee should never make unless you have to. And I am grateful to you as individuals, I am grateful to you as a body for supporting that recommendation. And I would say that it is a good example of something that required, not just from myself, but from the members of our team, my team, who helped execute it, and did so with grace, and with dignity, and with a commitment to the students in that school. And it was work that was carried out by the educators in that school. And it was work that was carried out by Principal Gerber. And it was a decision that was grounded in a fundamental belief that we have a responsibility to put all students in better positions to succeed.

And the conditions under which that school was operating, for an extended period of time, were not, under any circumstances, putting those students in the best position available to us as an organization to succeed. And... I think that...the communication skills and political savvy, understanding the teaching and learning implications – I do think all of those – I think they were required of me as the individual who made that recommendation. They were absolutely required of the individuals who helped execute it. But the fact that those skill sets were not and can't be contained within a single individual, is why we were able to make that transition successfully.

And putting aside any attributes of myself or the other leaders who helped execute that decision, what the decision was grounded in, was fundamental equity. Closing the school was not an example of inequity. Allowing the conditions to develop over an extended period of time, such that the decision was as clear as it was – that was an example of inequity. And I think, at the end of the day, it doesn't matter how much intellect you have, it doesn't matter what your credentials are, it doesn't matter all the other things that you may have that are good. This work will not be done effectively unless the leaders have a shared purpose and are grounded in those fundamental values that, more so, I believe, than any other profession, you have to bring to work with you every single day."

[AMC Note: I've left this answer largely intact because it's at the heart of the questions that have preoccupied my attention for years.]

Sanchez: "...I have found that intelligence is not the only expertise that one needs, within a leadership role. And so I'll, I'll talk about – when I first came on board in this current chief position, there was a recommendation to do a reorganization within one of my departments. That reorganization was based on the needs of priorities and budgeting, actually. And...I was very new into the role – you want to talk about an opportunity to be new in a role, right? Doing something that's controversial, where some folks may say, oh, she's just a leader looking for, like, a feather in her cap. It wasn't part of my core. So I did engage in conversations with my executive team and my leader, and I said, well, I want to be able to understand what the why is and why this need is coming about. So I did ask for grace to collect data, to be able to

understand and meet everyone – I hadn't even met everyone. And also to be able to clearly understand why this potential recommendation was being made.

While engaging in the reorganization, I needed to use not only my intelligence, but I needed to use my humility, I needed to use my empathy. I also needed my collaboration, my collegiality, because I had to work with the legal team, the equity team, human capital. I had to work with our social-emotional team, because it was very difficult for the members of my team – they were going to be recommending not to... some of them not to be coming back, right? And so, I think what I learned from that experience is that intelligence certainly can be key, but it's very important to lead with humility, with empathy, and with understanding. Because once I did... I looked at the data, looked at the budget and the priorities, it definitely was a necessity, and I found that it was in agreement, and I followed through with it. Some of the very same people that were impacted by it, because of how I led that, are my very best of friends today. And they... they thanked me because of how I dealt with that very difficult situation. And, I'm... I'm... I'm honored for that, honestly, because it was very difficult.”

**Q17. What are gaps in your experience or preparation for the role of superintendent?
How will you address those gaps?**

Garcia: “One of those gaps is that I work too much. That's one thing that I have to make you aware of, and if you really want your superintendent to be in good health, and, you know, with energy and enthusiasm, you gotta tell the superintendent, you know, you have to certainly work with him so that it does not get burned out.

I take my job with great responsibility...even as a principal, that's what I did. So I overworked myself, because I believe in a cause, and if I do not balance my approach and my leadership in terms of commitment, I may end up burning myself...I'm very committed. I stay at work until I get the job done. I can be somebody that messages very quick, but I can be a perfectionist. I don't fake. I have strong work ethics, and that's my North Star. When I speak about Cambridge, I speak about Cambridge with one voice, and that pride, I'll bring it everywhere. That's what I have done in Revere, that's what I've done in Osaka, Rhode Island, that's what I did in [the] Bronx. So, when I embrace the cause, I embrace it 100%.”

Murphy: “My path toward the superintendency has not necessarily been a conventional one. When I was practicing law, I found myself enjoying the civics education program that I was working with students more than I did the intellectual property litigating that I was doing – or was supposed to be doing during the day – and as a result of that, I...I guess I could say I found myself...I found a profession, but I found myself, I think, more than anything else.

I am, you know, it's been said about me that I don't necessarily bring the traditional teaching and learning experience that some superintendents have. I have found that leaves me much less

susceptible to thinking I know better than the people around me, or the people who are closer to that work...but I think it's a legitimate answer in terms of a gap that I have. Because there's a credibility issue that I have a responsibility to be responsive to. It's a perfectly reasonable question for educators to ask, how exactly did they end up working for a lawyer? Anyone would ask that. Anyone who's ever met a lawyer would ask that. But I think that the experiences that I've amassed over the course of the last 12 - 13 years, serving in various leadership roles as a chair of a school committee, as a deputy superintendent, an assistant superintendent, as a chief operating officer, and chief financial officer for a school district, and outside counsel to school systems as well, has positioned me to understand the superintendency, I think, as well as I could. And so there's a gap, but I...I've tried to capitalize on that gap to make me a better leader, and I think in many cases I have.

...I think I have an extra responsibility to stay connected to students. There is a first-hand knowledge and a first-hand experience that people who do this work have to have. And the only way to do that is interacting directly with students. And...there's a classroom from the Tobin that is nice enough to have offered me a standing invite to do some reading with them, so, hello to the SEI kindergarten classroom at the Tobin. Working with the student leaders at the high school. And you know, I think about, like, what was the best day that I ever spent as superintendent? Easily the best day of the year for me last year was the civics program at the State House. But to spend the day, engaging directly with 8th grade students on projects that they have built themselves, and having conversations with them about why it was they picked those particular projects, and why it was they were advocating for what they were advocating for....I don't hope it doesn't sound cliché, because I mean it, but, like, it was the most fulfilling moment of what has not always been the most enjoyable 15 months in this seat.

And I think that probably that's my own...predisposition to public service and thinking about, sort of, the role that public education plays in our democracy.”

Sanchez: “I think that what's really critical of any leader is to really think about growth and to think about reflection, and that is critical in everything that we do. So one of the things that I will share that everyone knows here is I have not ever been a superintendent, right? But what I can say is that I've prepared my entire life for this position, and my entire professional life. And that very reflection in leadership growth is what has actually prepared me to be the best superintendent in service to students. And so, as...as a leader, when you take the opportunity to reflect, you take the opportunity to grow, you take the opportunity to learn, and to really think about, how can I be a better leader for everyone that I'm in service to?

Yeah, I, I... so, I've had extensive leadership experiences. Usually in pre-K to 12 education, we call it... we have two sides of the house, right? So we have the operational side of the house and the pedagogical side of the house, which is our houses of teaching and learning and operations. And so I have had extensive, extensive leadership experience, over the past 20 plus years. I don't want to age myself, where I've been, pretty much preparing for this role for some time. Director of Student Registration, Assessment, and Assignment, responsible for developing policies around school choice and transportation, responsible for family and community

advancement, responsible for curriculum development and implementation, high school leader. I have sat pretty much in every single possible role, in a very successful way, which I'm very proud of.

That has certainly prepared me for... for this opportunity. And I... and I'd close by saying that what's critical about that is the level of...the reflective leader that I am. And knowing that, I don't just say that I'm a lifelong learner, but I'm a true learner. And that's how I address the complexities of every single role that I've been in. And having had the opportunity to lead a lot of complex roles is... is what I know has prepared me for this opportunity."

Q18. Our district data shows a persistent achievement gap along demographic lines. What do you think is the root cause? Is it a) curriculum, b) teaching competence, c) teaching environment, d) something else? How do you think we can address that gap?

Garcia: "First of all...we go back to the root cause of the problem and see what's really causing this. Is it lack of teacher preparation? Our teachers need a little bit more understanding of where our kids are, who our kids are as individuals, what they are bringing to the table, what skills and awe-house do our kids have?...Are they communicating with parents using two-way communication so that they can properly understand where the child is? Are we using data as a metric to really inform our decision-making? Is chronic absentee a factor? Is behavior a factor? Is the lack of skills? So that is...you know, what we need to do first. Once we have that in place, then it's a conversation. It's to ensure that our teachers also have the skills that they need.

So, all these factors are important. Teachers need to know their children and where they come from, who they are. And as leaders, it's our job to empower them. And I always believe that empowerment comes through making sure that we have space for our teachers to converse, to talk, to learn, peer observation, a space for them to dedicate themselves to prepare, understand the curriculum. We have new teachers that probably need to navigate the complexities of our school system. So you need to create mentoring programs for them, induction programs for them, so that they know the culture of the school, where they can seek help. Open space for teachers to come and dialogue with you. Why not? So these are all part of the process, so it takes a lot of tentacles, really, to, you know, to move around, to make sure the culture is working well, and our kids are being properly recognized, skill-wise, culture-wise, linguistically-wise, so that they can feel part of something."

Murphy: "Amongst what's listed here, nothing is more important than the educator. The educator is the variable over which we have both the most control as an organization, as well as what data has shown for an extended period of time at this point has the greatest potential for impact. So making sure that there's a well-trained educator who's being supported by the district and provided the type of professional learning and resources that we absolutely can provide in Cambridge, that's the variable that we know is going to make the biggest difference. But in terms of my philosophy around root causes, I think what I would say to that is that never losing

sight of what data tells us is the most important variable. I think we have a responsibility to look at each of these situations as comprehensively as we possibly can.

The inequity in this field rarely presents itself as some type of sensational moment, right? We're living in a political context in which sensational moments are happening every day, and they are rooted in some of these systemic problems and challenges that we have as a society. But in a public school system, inequity grows over time. And inequity is represented by the inertia that organizations have, and reluctance to change. And so, when I talk about what I think is a culture that is frequently overly concentrated on the well-being or levels of satisfaction amongst adults, as opposed to the needs of children, that is a variable that will yield inequity.

Because we know students are coming in from different starting points. So if they come in from different starting points, and they are met with a culture that is not responsive to their needs, and is not sufficiently nimble enough to meet their needs, then we should not be surprised when they get to the finish line, those discrepancies still exist. And a public school system's responsibility is to make sure that we take account of every variable. And make sure that we hold ourselves accountable for making sure that every variable is tightened in a way that, at a minimum, we're not going to exacerbate the inequities that children arrive in. And when we are fully functional and fully thriving, we are actively and intentionally eliminating those inequities. And I...like, it is... it's the work. I mean, this is central to the work that we're doing, and I, I'd like to keep doing it."

Sanchez: "That is... that is the \$3 million question, right? With not making haste or thinking that it is funny at all, because it quite frankly isn't. It is not only the problem that we have in Cambridge Public Schools, but it's the problem that we have nationally, right? And so, when I think about what the root cause is, the truth is that any leader that sits in front of you has to be able to tell you that they have to do a root cause analysis, because if they don't, then you should be concerned. And so I'd like to be able to listen, learn, and understand what is happening in Cambridge, because while that may be a national thing, it is also something that is very personalized to whatever is occurring within our classrooms, right? And so I would strongly want to look at our clear vision and our instructional framework.

Are we truly engaging in our students truly engaging in high-quality learning within the classrooms, that are not only meeting the needs of our students, that we know have fallen behind, but also the needs of our students that are advanced learners, right? Do our teachers have the appropriate professional development? Coaching opportunities that they need? Is our scheduling within our schools proper, and what I mean by proper, so that our teachers have professional learning time, times to be able to visit each other's classrooms and learn from one another? There's many skills that they can learn from each other, and the best person to learn from usually is a peer, because that's the level of comfortability, right, of our educators. And then I would...it's really evaluating our programs on a continuous basis, using common walkthrough tools that are aligned to our standards. What does that look like? Our teaching and learning should not be that far different from one Cambridge public school to another Cambridge public school. And if it is, we need to know why, right? Especially if there's one that is highly

performing, and all of our students are highly performing. We would need to figure out why that's happening, right? And so, I think that those assessments and continuous evaluations is what's really going to get us to that root cause analysis."

Q19. We have five upper school programs feeding into the high school. How will you ensure equitable and adequate preparation for high school at each upper school?

Garcia: "Programs reviews could be done at the beginning of the school year, it could be mid-school year, and it could be at the end of the school year. That needs to be done. When you do program reviews, I'm sure that you'll find gaps, you'll find strengths. So you use those...that opportunity to really assess the gaps, where the gaps are, and how that is affecting our children. We need to do what's called the PDSA, which is Plan, Study, Doing, and Act. That's part of the evaluation. It's like you're doing a learning cycle. It's basically the same thing. So that's important, because when you plan, you design. And then when you design your plan, then you do. And basically you act and you study, that's all part of the cycle. So, that will give you some data points in terms of why your program is failing, why your program is not paying dividends. The last thing you have to do, as you do it, you have to do progress monitoring. If you're gonna just divide, you know, design a program and ask people to do and implement, you're not progress monitoring where we stand. By the end of semester one, where we stand, by the end of semester two, then don't do it. You have to measure progress. That means that those who are implementing the program have to come together and really see, is this working? Is this not working? Why not working? What type of barriers? What type of impediments do you have there that's preventing from moving from point A to B, B to C, and so on and so forth? So these are our conversations. The next year, when it comes around, next year, maybe by the end of the first semester, you just adjust the program as needed. And then you proceed. That's the way you do it."

Murphy: "One of the things that we've done in the last year, is to organize our school leaders into principal learning communities with the specific purpose of trying to foster greater consistency of practices across our teams. Our upper school leaders essentially were ahead of us with respect to organizing themselves like that, because they recognize the critical importance of building in that type of consistency."

There's a balancing act that always needs to be struck in school district leadership, because we want schools to function as laboratories of innovation. We want them to be ecosystems unto themselves. We want them to hold themselves to high standards and high levels of accountability. But I think that one of the challenges that the Cambridge Public Schools have faced over a period of time is that our idea around autonomy, I think, proliferated to a degree that was not always in keeping with the best interests of students. We had schools that functioned in a very autonomous fashion, we had educators who functioned in a very autonomous fashion. And there's a tension there because, as I said, the work happens in individual schools, they are more communities unto themselves than they are part of our

broader network, and so you want them to have autonomy, you want them to be empowered. But if you don't set clear levels of expectations around consistency, it is inevitable that you're going to have variability with regard to experience.

And when students ultimately arrive at our flagship school as part of a much broader community, that variability makes the functionality of the learning environment more challenging, and then no students are benefiting, regardless of whether they had a high-quality experience at upper school or not. And so I think that is our best hope for that type of consistency and seeing greater equity, and I commend our school leaders at the upper school level for recognizing that on their own, and essentially forming their own principal learning community before we told them they had to do it.”

[AMC Note: Follow-up question: Could you elaborate on how the controlled choice program, the school lottery program, and the feeder patterns that we have from the elementary school to the middle school, put our middle schools or our upper schools on different footing from where they're starting, even though they're all trying to get their students to the same point before they matriculate at CRLS?]

Murphy: “...There have been conversations in the last year, some of which coming out of the Kennedy-Longfellow decision, some of which coming from the community and people rightfully demanding answers with respect to what are the implications for what is referred to as the innovation agenda, and how is that connected with school choice in Cambridge? And what I would say to that is, I think this is a conversation that's overdue, and I appreciate those urging us to look at these issues. But I think it's really important that we understand that when we go to look at what was dubbed the innovation agenda, or we look at our school choice policy, we are talking about, at a very basic level, how we as a school system function.

You can't separate out our organization of feeder patterns, our triad system in our elementary schools, and the school assignment process that we have. You can't separate that from just how we function and how we operate as a school district. It'd be like saying, like, well, we're going to examine a human body except for the heart and the brain. Like, these are vital components to how we function. And I think, to your question about, like, well, what has it done? What has the impact been? I don't think it's the case that the reorganization that was done a little more than 10 years ago, or the specific school choice policies, are themselves exacerbating inequities across our upper schools. But it creates operational deficiencies that then, in turn, have an impact on the consistency and the quality of educational opportunities. I think the policies that were adopted around school assignment and the organization of elementaries and upper schools have an attenuated effect on how we operate and how well we serve students. But I think there are other variables across that whole formula that are probably more impactful.

But what is most important is that we not lose sight of any of the variables. You can't isolate this variable and say, well, we'll talk about school choice, but we won't talk about triads, or we'll talk about triads, but we won't talk about school choice, or we'll talk about the size of our schools, but we won't talk about the number of our schools. I mean, like, these variables are all

completely interconnected, and if we want to improve the experience for all students across Cambridge, we're gonna have to have a comprehensive conversation about what it is that we're trying to achieve, what it is that we can afford, and what vision does that actually look like?"

Sanchez: "Yeah, again, it really has to do with the instructional framework, what is happening within the buildings, how, are teachers being supported, are school leaders within the teachers' spaces, providing feedback, and providing constructive feedback, right? There's opportunities for accountability, but what we're talking about here is really giving our teachers the opportunity to have that coaching that they may need, so that our students are actually getting, in a personalized way, what they need. It's really looking at our instructional framework, looking at our materials, evaluating our programs. Are these programs really working? And doing it on a consistent basis, in a transparent way, that all of our constituencies, all of our families, and all of our students know that is happening. We have the venue here. We should be providing those presentations in a culturally and linguistically appropriate way so that families are understanding. And making the difficult decisions if the programs are not working."

Q20. We are concerned that we are not doing a good enough job for each kid. We suspect that these outcomes may be income driven. How can we be more effective with our resources so all kids receive the support and opportunities to help them thrive?

Garcia: "It is by making sure that we are visible in the classrooms. There's no other way around it. So, visibility means showing up in the classrooms, collecting data, and providing teachers feedback so that they can improve their practice. That's one. The second thing we need to do is to make sure that our kids are not lacking skills. Our teachers are not lacking professional development skills.

So when you show up in the classroom, you do walkthroughs in the classroom, when you see the gaps in the process, you know that something is not clicking well. Why that teacher standing in deliver for 80 minutes? A teacher who's standing in deliver for 80 minutes, and kids are sitting there and listening to the teacher, that teacher needs to be provided training, because it's not differentiated in class instruction, he's not creating groups in the classroom where kids can be involved, engaged in the process, he's not creating opportunities for kids to engage and relate to one another, engage with the curriculum as well...If the delivery is not meaningful to the child, and is delivered in a way that the child is not understanding it, then you have a problem. That's why visibility in the classroom, constant walkthroughs in the classroom, providing constant feedback to our teachers is so critical in this process, because that way, you help them grow professionally, and you help them get the skills and the know-how necessary to really deliver in a rigorous and meaningful classroom.

That's what we need in our schools. So it's not just asking key teachers to plan, and then you deliver it, you never show up. Our directors are not there, our principals are not there. That's why we call our principals and directors instructional leaders. They need to show up and do the

work, and provide feedback to our teachers, so that we know that they are really teaching the curriculum, they're not certainly doing things that probably – is watered down, and it's not moving the child forward.”

Murphy: “What I see as the heart of this question, Mayor, is that despite this variable that distinguishes us from almost every other school system, in terms of the resources that are available, we are not distinguishing ourselves from every other school system with respect to our performance. And...while there is an enormous amount to be proud of in the Cambridge Public Schools, and the pride belongs to our educators, they belong to our families that are committed to education, they absolutely belong to our students who inspire us on a daily basis.

There are things that don't work as well as they should. We have students who are not having the same level of an experience, and because they don't have the same level of experience, they are not as well positioned for success as they can be. If we want that reality to change, we have to be honest with ourselves about the culture under which we are currently operating. We have to be more focused on children and less focused on adults. If we continue to be satisfied with how our culture manifests itself currently, and if we continue to fail to recognize that every single thing that we do, every action that we take, every decision that we make, is in one way or another contributing to that culture, we will continue to have the same results, and there will be another school committee and another superintendent in another year, asking the same question, having the same conversation.

After that, I think there are practices that we have to change, some of which we have changed, or are in the process of changing, and I credit my predecessors for some of those decisions that have been made. I credit the school committee for some of the difficult decisions that you have made, and the space that you have given our leadership team to operate in the course of the last year, and I could give you a long list of mechanical things that I think need to change. But ultimately, the commitments that we've made to recognize the vital importance of educator effectiveness, and recognize that we have to fundamentally change the relationships we have with caregivers in this community to engender greater trust and bring them into the conversation about what their children need, I think those have to be the two cornerstones that, when coupled with our resources, give us a better chance for success.”

Sanchez: “Yeah, I'd have to say that that really goes back to the budgeting process. It goes back to us setting our district priorities and our objectives in a personalized way, based on what our students and our school community needs. Once we understand the root cause, we're diverting the funds and our high-quality teachers to ensure that our students in those particular situations have nothing but the best. Not leaving behind our students that are advanced learners, right? And so ensuring that our advanced learning opportunities are just as equally robust, so that that way there's access and opportunity for all of our students.

The range of things that I would want to be able to look at is the instruction in the classroom. What is happening with our Tier 1 instruction? It's...we have to be able to start there, right? So once we start thinking about moving a student into another space, we're thinking about what's considered Tier 2 instruction and Tier 3, which end up being a more personalized plan for students. When I hear this type of data, right, that is a Tier 1 problem. And we go in. We identify the root cause, we look at our teaching, our...we bring our union partners along as well, right? Because this is a village, it's all of us together in tandem and rowing in that same direction over there in the river."