

Melrose School Committee Handbook

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9/15/15

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Introduction

Welcome

Thank you for serving on the Melrose School Committee! Your commitment to students in the district is valued and appreciated. In your role as a Committee member, you will perform duties required by the federal and state governments as well as those determined by the body to contribute to the improvement of student outcomes. These duties include, but are not limited to setting goals and defining policy; approving a budget; negotiating collective bargaining agreements, deciding broad issues of curriculum; holding the Superintendent accountable; and advocating for our district schools. Central to your success as a member of this body is your ability to create working relationships with fellow Committee members, the Superintendent, school staff members, municipal leaders and staff, Committee members from other districts in the state, parents, students, and the community at large.

You are expected to share a commitment with other Committee members to perform duties associated with our goals and policies, to engage in learning about public education in general along with the history of the Melrose Public Schools, to abide by Committee norms, and to embody a sincere desire to be part of a high-functioning governing body that takes the responsibilities of public service seriously.

Vision

We engage all students in learning, raising the aspirations of all students by embracing them in a learning environment designed to meet the needs of all learners. We provide a comprehensive curriculum aligned with state and national standards that challenges and prepares all learners from Pre K to 12 and beyond. The curriculum is research-based and consistently integrates best practices to provide a focus that is aligned horizontally and vertically across all grades and addresses the needs of all students. The Melrose Public Schools employs highly qualified teachers and administrators who engage students in a positive and dynamic manner, are student-focused, and work individually and collaboratively to effectively deliver instruction and assessment and advance student performance in all areas of learning. (*excerpt: Melrose Public Schools Strategic Plan 2010-2015*)

Mission (District)

We inspire, engage, support, prepare, and challenge all students to achieve personal and academic excellence, to become life-long learners, and to be responsible, respectful, and successful participants in our global community.

Mission (Committee)

The mission of the Melrose School Committee is to provide sound governance over the Melrose Public Schools, while fairly and openly, representing the citizens of Melrose. We consider educational excellence to be the foundation of our support for the district's vision, mission, goals

and objectives. We perform our duties using our best judgment and abilities in accordance with the governing laws and regulations; consistently prioritizing what is best for our students.

(Melrose School Committee Policy Manual - first vote 5/26/09, second vote 6/9/09)

Overarching Goals

1. The Melrose Public Schools will ensure that all students are prepared for their choice of post-secondary pursuits by providing a rigorous, innovative and supportive learning environment that meets Massachusetts and community standards.
2. **Instructional Practices & Support:**
The Melrose Public Schools will recruit, develop, evaluate, and retain highly-qualified, diverse, and effective staff members to support a professional culture designed to prepare every student for success.
3. **Community Engagement:**
The Melrose Public Schools will engage the community in a vision for our students' achievement that is grounded in the belief that first-rate public education is our community's most valuable asset.
4. **Fiscal Issues:**
The Melrose Public Schools will responsibly, strategically and transparently allocate resources based on their ability to positively impact teaching and learning to realize continuous improvement in student achievement.

Rev: 12-May-2015

Norms and Protocols

How we relate to one another

- School Committee members will participate in open and respectful dialog and will always assume positive and constructive intent from others, and will respect each other's opinions and responsibilities.
- Committee members will share information with each other about the district, as well as information from outside educational opportunities. Committee members commit to a "no surprises" philosophy with the Administration and each other by sharing this information as soon as possible.
- Members will focus debate, discussion, and comments on the issues, not personalities. We will strive to avoid factions. In all actions, the Committee will act as a board in making decisions, and not as individuals. Once a vote is taken, Committee members will move on to the next issue promptly.
- In areas where the Committee has not explicitly determined an action, the Chair will make decisions for the Committee that he/she feels best fulfills our roles and responsibilities as pertain to our legitimate educational interests. If a member does not agree with the actions of the chair, they may bring the matter up to the entire committee for a determination. The committee as a whole can overrule the chair in any matter.

How we communication with the public

- We will communicate with the public in an open, timely and professional manner, always being aware and knowledgeable of legal requirements and constraints.

- We will be ambassadors for the District, spreading news of achievements and challenges in a constructive way. We will use and promote a positive tone to encourage change.
- The School Committee will exhibit professionalism in our dress, behavior, writing and speaking; we will model the high quality standards that we expect across and within the School Department and its staff.
- There will be one official School Committee voice to the press. Any other member, speaking independently, will make it clear that s/he does not represent the School Committee.

How we govern

- We shall exercise leadership in vision, planning, policy, budgeting, evaluation, and advocacy of the district. The School Committee will focus at all times on student achievement and teaching and learning. We will govern with the whole district in mind, not particular stakeholders, because we represent the entire community.
- The Committee will, in all matters, respect the authority of the Superintendent as the educational leader of the district. Committee members do not individually have any authority to provide direction to the Superintendent, or to make requests of him/her.
- All communication with the district will occur through the Superintendent's office. The Committee will respect the chain of command in all District matters. Information from the district will be provided to all members to the extent that it relates to an educational purpose and/or the Committee's legitimate governing responsibilities.
- In our roles as liaisons to district groups, Committee members will mainly act primarily as observers and not participants. Even in these roles, requests for additional information will be sent to the Superintendent. The purpose of serving as a liaison is to understand and provide information as requested by the group, not to direct the actions of the group.
- Information requested must have a legitimate educational interest for the Committee and fall within their roles and responsibilities. Members will make requests for information to the Superintendent directly. The Chair, in concert with the Superintendent, will determine the form of that information and how it is best provided in a timely manner, such that it reflects the committee's roles and responsibilities. Committee members can request additional information through formal public records requests, or by a vote of the full committee.
- The School Committee will work with the Superintendent each year to ensure that the Superintendent and District goals reflect the Committee's vision for the district. All subsequent committee decisions will provide support for those goals.
- Committee members will stay current with educational and legal matters and perform their responsibilities with due diligence.
- The Committee will strive to respect and work collaboratively with other government bodies and all presenters to the committee.
- Committee members will be held accountable to these commitments. We agree to be responsible for reminding each other of our norms and expectations in a helpful and constructive way, in private if possible. If the behavior continues, the matter should be brought to the Chair, and if needed, it will be discussed in a meeting, allowing all members to weigh in on the matter.

How we conduct meetings

- Melrose School Committee meeting agendas will be designed with specific purposes in mind, and, wherever possible, agenda items will have specific actions. Agenda decisions of the chair will be respected, and the rolling agenda will reflect the upcoming meetings to the highest degree possible.
- In meetings, all members will listen respectfully to each other's positions, be respectful of dissent, and be open to new ideas. The Committee will support robust and open discussion of all ideas. When disagreeing with a matter under discussion, members will strive to offer constructive counter proposals and/or options for the committee to consider.
- All members will come to meetings prepared, will be mindful of time and the agenda, will follow agreed upon meeting protocols, and will focus on the topic at hand.
- To the extent that members have questions of the Superintendent or any individual appearing before the Committee on behalf of the School Administration, members will strive to provide any questions and requests they may have in advance of the meeting through the Superintendent.
- Members will be mindful that they are on camera at all times.
- When presenting new proposals, members should try to present multiple versions or give additional time for reflection, in order to increase understanding of the issues being presented.
- Meetings will be carried on legally, professionally, and as transparently as possible with the goal of no surprises. Executive sessions will be held in the same manner and with the confidentiality allowed under state statutes and regulations.

How we can improve

- The Committee will self-reflect on our actions and perform a self-evaluation. The focus of this self-reflection will be on teaching and learning and whether our actions have improved student achievement and educational outcomes. We will continue to evaluate our meeting structure.
- The School Committee will endeavor to gather community evaluative input of our actions to be included in our self-reflection.
- The Committee will make these norms publicly available in order to show our intention and model the behavior we expect across the district.

Authority and Ethics

Law and regulation

Policy
Process

Best Practices: Characteristics of High Performing School Committees

1. Shared leadership: A focus on student learning through a shared clear vision, high expectations, and dynamic leadership among all levels.
2. Continuous improvement: A continuous focus on improving education, with high levels of involved and shared decision-making.
3. Ability to create and sustain initiatives: An understanding of how to organize the people and the school environment to start and sustain an improvement effort.
4. Supportive workplace for staff: A supportive workplace that enables all staff to succeed in their roles.
5. Staff development: Regular school-wide staff development that is focused on studying teaching and learning.
6. Support for school sites through data and information: Using data and information on student needs to make decisions and modify actions at the district and building level.
7. Community involvement: A close connection between the school, parents, and community.

(Walser, Nancy, *Essential School Board Book*, Boston: Harvard Education Press, 2009)

Organization of the Committee

Chairman:

The Chairman will preside at all meetings of the Committee and will perform other duties as directed by law, State Department of Education and Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) regulations, and by the Committee. In carrying out these responsibilities, the Chairman will:

1. Sign the instruments, acts and orders necessary to carry out state requirements and the will of the Committee.
2. Consult with the Superintendent in the planning of the Committee's agendas.
3. Confer with the Superintendent on matters that may occur between Committee meetings.
4. Appoint ad hoc task forces as deemed necessary.
5. Appoint each subcommittee's Chairman and Vice Chairman at the first meeting in January or other time deemed necessary.
6. Call regular and special meetings of the Committee as deemed necessary.
7. Be the public spokesperson for the Committee at all times except as this responsibility is specifically delegated to others.
8. Be responsible for the orderly conduct of Committee meetings.

As presiding officer at all meetings of the Committee, the Chairman will:

1. Call the meeting to order at the appointed time.
2. Announce the business to come before the Committee in its proper order.
3. Enforce the Committee's policies relating to the order of business and the conduct of meetings.

4. Recognize persons who desire to speak, and protect the speaker who has the floor from disturbance or interference.
5. Explain what the effect of a motion would be if it is not clear to every member.
6. Restrict discussion to the question when a motion is before the Committee.
7. Answer all parliamentary inquiries, referring appropriate questions to City Legal Counsel.
8. Put motions to a vote, stating definitely and clearly the vote and result thereof.

The Chairman will have rights consistent with those of other Committee members relative to offering resolutions, discussing motions, and voting.

Vice Chairman:

The Vice Chairman will assume all duties and responsibilities of the Chairman in the Chairman's absence.

Executive Secretary:

The Executive Secretary will have the following duties:

1. Keep or cause to be kept an accurate journal of all Committee meetings.
2. Comply with state law and Committee policy regarding notification of meetings.
3. Render such reports as may be required by the state or the city.

Roles and Responsibilities: Purpose and Process

Goals

The Committee sets direction for education in the district by virtue of setting annual goals. From these goals come the Superintendent's goals that s/he uses to lead and manage the district. The Strategy Overview must align with the goals.

Budget

The Committee is responsible by law for approving an annual district budget. The budget process is a cycle that begins in late fall and continues until approval, when its monitoring then begins. The steps are as follows:

- Mayor projects the next fiscal year's revenues for the city.
- Preliminary school program budgets are sent to the Superintendent.
- School Councils finish their work.
- The Mayor sends individual budget recommendations to City departments.
- The Superintendent presents a draft budget to the Committee.
- The Committee hears presentations, holds discussions, and listens to public comment.
- The Committee holds a public forum and subsequently votes a budget.

- The Committee, as designated to the Superintendent, presents the budget for approval to the Board of Aldermen.
- The budget may adjust if final state revenues change.
- The budget is monitored throughout the year according to Committee policy and protocol.

Policy

Superintendent Evaluation

Evaluating the Superintendent is one of the primary ways that the Committee guides district work. A formative evaluation is conducted in the middle of the school year and is designed to publicly communicate the Committee's opinions as to whether and how the Superintendent is accomplishing approved goals. The summative evaluation is at the end of the school year and reflects the Committee's opinion on performance. The document on which the evaluation is based is the DESE approved rubric, and aligns with evaluation rubrics employed for administrator and teacher evaluations. The Committee determines the elements within each indicator and standard upon which the Superintendent will be evaluated. The Committee also approves the artifacts that will be supplied as supporting evidence of achievement of those elements. The Chair explains the process in the meetings prior to the actual evaluation, and explains Committee members' responsibilities. Committee members are welcomed to meet with the Superintendent before and/or after evaluations to ask questions or provide more detail around standards, indicators, and elements so that the Superintendent can take any corrective actions or continue on the path charted by actions already taken. Evaluation comments and ratings are employed when proposing and approving Superintendent goals for the following year.

Negotiations

Given that the school budget for salaries exceeds 85% of its total, negotiations is one of its most important responsibilities. The Melrose Public Schools negotiates contracts with six collective bargaining units: teachers (represented by the MTA), paraprofessionals (represented by the MTA), secretaries (represented by the MTA), administrators (represented by the Teamsters), transportation drivers (represented by), and crossing guards (represented by). Custodians report through the Melrose Department of Public Works. Food service workers are employed by Chartwells, with whom we contract to manage food service in the schools. Nurses report through the Melrose Health Department.

The role of the Committee, per Mass General Law Chapter 150E is to be the legal representative of management. The Chair selects a representative from the Committee to sit at each negotiating table with appropriate district administrators and counsel. The Superintendent and Committee representative provide negotiation updates to the Committee in Executive Sessions and follow all laws regarding how and when negotiations can be discussed. Votes to approve contracts can be taken in Executive Session but are subsequently re-voted in public session according to the law.

Hiring Responsibilities

The Committee has full responsibility for hiring the Superintendent. Upon recommendation of the Superintendent, the Committee hires the Assistant Superintendent(s), School Business Officer, Administrator of Special Education, School Physician, Supervisor of Attendance, and Civil Rights Officer.

Curriculum

Legislative Advocacy

Committee Relationships

Superintendent

Staff

Subcommittees, Liaisons, and Working Groups

Educational Programs and Personnel

Finance and Facilities

Policy and Planning

Liaison Positions

- Act as listener and translator for Committee
- Attend related events (e.g. HS liaison attends Nat'l Honor Society inductions)
- What are they?
 - Professional Development Working Group, Curriculum Materials Working Group, Technology Committee (Required by MTA Collective Bargaining Agreement)

Meetings

Schedule

Regular meetings are scheduled on the 2nd and 4th Tuesday of each month, unless holidays conflict, Committee members are generally unable to attend (e.g. should a quorum be unavailable in summer months), or should cancellations be necessary (e.g. for weather conditions). Special meetings are generally convened prior to a scheduled regular meeting and are designed to address a single issue, often accommodating guest presenters.

Agendas

The Chair and Superintendent work together to craft agendas that are intended to be purposeful, productive, balanced with respect to subcommittee responsibilities, and informative to the community at large. The Chair maintains a rolling agenda such that all required items are addressed in a timely manner, and the Committee focuses on decisions and presentations related to student achievement. Every meeting has an agenda that:

- Serves as the steering mechanism
- Enables logical organization and preparation
- Informs the Committee and community of items being discussed

- Complies with all state laws and regulations
- Allows the Superintendent an avenue to report appropriate information and/or request Committee guidance (in the form of policy or procedure)

The order of the agenda is as follows:

- Call to order
- Pledge of Allegiance
- Report of the Student Representatives
- Public Comment
- Announcements of the Superintendent
- Consent Agenda
- Subcommittee agendas
- Announcements of the Chair
- Executive Session (as needed)

Executive Sessions

All meetings are open to the public; however the Committee may meet in Executive Session for one or more of the following reasons:

1. To discuss the reputation, character, physical condition or mental health, rather than professional competence, of an individual, or to discuss the discipline or dismissal of, or complaints or charges brought against, a public officer, employee, staff member or individual. The individual to be discussed in such executive session shall be notified in writing by the public body at least 48 hours prior to the proposed executive session; provided, however, that notification may be waived upon written agreement of the parties;
2. To conduct strategy sessions in preparation for negotiations with nonunion personnel or to conduct collective bargaining sessions or contract negotiations with nonunion personnel;
3. To discuss strategy with respect to collective bargaining or litigation if an open meeting may have a detrimental effect on the bargaining or litigating position of the public body and the chair so declares
4. To discuss the deployment of security personnel or devices, or strategies with respect thereto;
5. To investigate charges of criminal misconduct or to consider the filing of criminal complaints;
6. To consider the purchase, exchange, lease or value of real property if the chair declares that an open meeting may have a detrimental effect on the negotiating position of the public body;
7. To comply with, or act under the authority of, any general or special law or federal grant-in-aid requirements;
8. To consider or interview applicants for employment or appointment by a preliminary screening committee if the chair declares that an open meeting will have a detrimental effect in obtaining qualified applicants; provided, however, that this clause shall not

- apply to any meeting, including meetings of a preliminary screening committee, to consider and interview applicants who have passed a prior preliminary screening;
9. To meet or confer with a mediator, as defined in section 23C of chapter 233, with respect to any litigation or decision on any public business within its jurisdiction involving another party, group or entity, provided that:
 - (i) any decision to participate in mediation shall be made in an open session and the parties, issues involved and purpose of the mediation shall be disclosed; and
 - (ii) no action shall be taken by any public body with respect to those issues which are the subject of the mediation without deliberation and approval for such action at an open session.
 10. To discuss trade secrets or confidential competitively-sensitive or other proprietary information provided:
 - a. in the course of activities conducted by a governmental body as an energy supplier under a license granted by the department of public utilities pursuant to G.L. c. 164 § 1F;
 - b. in the course of activities conducted as a municipal aggregator under G.L. c. 164 § 134; or
 - c. in the course of activities conducted by a cooperative consisting of governmental entities organized pursuant to G.L. c. 164 § 136;
 - d. when such governmental body, municipal aggregator or cooperative determines that such disclosure will adversely affect its ability to conduct business in relation to other entities making, selling or distributing electric power and energy.

(Ref: <http://www.mass.gov/ago/government-resources/open-meeting-law/attorney-generals-open-meeting-law-guide.html#Executive-Ten-Purposes>)

How to Prepare

Preparation for meetings is critical to being informed about current issues, reflecting on commentary heard by constituents, asking thoughtful questions, and weighing all sides of an issue to determine how to vote on prospective motions. Documents and packets are posted on Friday mornings prior to Tuesday meetings. The “no surprises” commitment the Committee has avowed in the norms support directing questions one anticipates asking to the Superintendent prior to the meeting itself, in order to share in understanding around an issue.

Procedures: Quorum and Voting

Professional Development

- Massachusetts Association of School Committees – events, publications, and listserv
- MA Board of Elementary and Secondary Education meetings – meetings
- MA DESE - Commissioner’s Update
- MA Legislature
- Rennie Center – seminars and reports
- *School Administrator Magazine*: Monthly column entitled “Board-Savvy Superintendent”

Communication

Superintendent
 Staff
 Students
 Parents, Guardians, and Families

Elected Officials

The Committee considers it a privilege to partner with elected and appointed officials at the city and state level to advance educational opportunity and outcomes for Melrose students. Committee members will engage in open, constructive, and respectful dialogue with elected leaders in the shared interest of improving student outcomes.

External Partners

Committee members will have many opportunities to formally and informally represent the district to outside organizations within the district, at MASC events, with community organizations, and with elected officials. While only the Chair speaks for the Committee, it’s important to speak to the body’s intentions and represent the body in a professional manner. Members are expected to report highlights from liaison events and activities in a timely and useful manner for the benefit of Committee decision-making.

Media

Responding to questions and concerns by constituents

- Members of the community are welcomed to contact Committee members, and it is incumbent on the members to understand the roles and responsibilities of the Committee and the Superintendent such that consideration of comments are directed appropriately.
- Personnel matters, unless specifically related to the performance of the Superintendent, should be directed to the Superintendent, who is not permitted to address complaints about staff, but who can inform the member(s) that the issue will be attended to. (Committee members have no jurisdiction in the management of district staff.)

Being an Effective Member

- It is difficult, sometimes, to run as an individual and find oneself having to work as a member of a committee. The most successful committees are frequently the ones where all members realize that the obligation is not to a small number of constituents, but to the students, and where members realize that they often (by virtue of collaboration with colleagues and district personnel; subcommittee, liaison, and working group inclusion;

professional development; and personal/professional/historical experience) have greater knowledge and perspective than their constituents.

New Member Orientation

A new member will be afforded the Committee's and Superintendent's fullest measure of courtesy and collaboration; and will make every effort to assist the new member to become fully informed about the Committee's functions, policies, procedures, and challenges.

Upon election or appointment, the new member will be afforded the opportunity to participate in the Massachusetts Association of School Committees (MASC) Annual Conference (held in November), subject to space availability. The Administrative Assistant will inform MASC of the new member's election and help ensure that the member receives all benefits accorded a MASC member.

The new member will be sworn in by the Town Clerk in January, along with other newly elected municipal representatives. The required on-line Ethics course must be completed within two weeks, with a receipt printed and returned to the Committee's Executive Secretary.

A new member will meet with the Chair, Administrative Assistant, and Superintendent in order to introduce the member to relevant responsibilities, operational procedure, and district policy.

New members must complete eight hours of orientation within one year of joining the Committee. The most streamlined way to accomplish this training is through MASC, who offer a session that incorporates a review of school finance, open meeting law, public records law, conflict of interest law, special education law, collective bargaining, school leadership standards and evaluations, and the roles and responsibilities of Committee members. The district funds this training.

Documents that will be made available to a new member (in hard copy or as links to online information), and which should be reviewed and understood include:

- District Strategy Overview
- Current Goals and Action Items
- Rolling Agenda
- Policy Manual
- Open Meeting Law
- Conflict of Interest Regulations
- Budget
- Collective Bargaining Agreements and Contracts
- Student and Staff Handbooks
- School Improvement Plans
- Programs of Study

Resources and References

Useful Links

Acronyms