

JOINT SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES

**Concord-Carlisle School Committee
Concord School Committee
July 22, 2025**

Present: Tracey Marano, Chair CCSC
Andrew Herchek, Chair CSC; CCSC
Carrie Rankin, Vice-Chair CSC; CCSC
Lynette Kelleher, CCSC
Sandeep Pisharody, CSC; CCSC
Michael Williams, CSC; CCSC
Ayesha Lawton, CSC METCO Representative on Zoom
Michelle MacDougall, CSC METCO Representative on Zoom

Present from Administration: Dr. Laurie Hunter, Superintendent of School, CPS & CCRSD

Not Present: Brian Waterson, Vice-Chair CCSC
Robert Conry, Asst. Supt. of Finance & Operations, CPS & CCRSD
Shelly Chin, Interim Assistant Superintendent, CPS & CCRSD

I. CALL TO ORDER

Ms. Marano called the Concord Carlisle School Committee to order at 6:00 PM. Mr. Herchek called the Concord School Committee to order at 6:00 PM. Mark Howell, Concord Select Board Chair, introduced himself and called the Concord Select Board to order at 6:00 PM. Roll was taken: Paul Boehm, present; Mary Hartman, present; and Wendy Rovelli, present.

II. OPENING STATEMENTS

Mr. Herchek and Ms. Marano prepared a joint committee statement read by Mr. Herchek which addressed the civil rights complaint that alleged antisemitism within Concord Schools. Both Chairs acknowledged the community's frustration, sadness, and reaffirmed the School Committee's commitment to provide a safe academic experience for all students. They pledged to review current policies, programming, training, and work with the community to combat antisemitism, both inside and outside of the schools.

Ms. Marano added half of the committee members are new which creates an opportunity to address acts of hate from new perspectives but still require community-wide effort since most of a student's day is spent outside of school. She thanked the Select Board, Representative Cataldo, Chief Mulcahy, District Attorneys Ryan and Tobin for participating in the meeting. Ms. Marano reminded attendees most of the committee's work happens behind the scenes, and privacy laws protecting minors limits the information that can be publicly disclosed.

Mr. Howell addressed the community's concerns about antisemitic acts, hateful speech, and acknowledged the Select Board's commitment to being attentive and responsive to the issue. He stated the primary goal for the evening was to hear the community concerns, offer initial reactions, and continue the discussion at a future meeting.

III. SUPERINTENDENT UPDATE AND NEXT STEPS

Dr. Hunter shared a heartfelt apology for the pain caused by recent antisemitic incidents and acknowledged that communication about the incident had been challenging and limited. She affirmed the school's commitment to ensure all students feel safe and included, otherwise effective learning cannot happen. Dr. Hunter stated previous incidents were handled privately due to disciplinary and privacy laws, but the schools need a clear, more collective strategy. In response to the incidents, she contacted organizations the district has partnerships with including the ADL, the Lapin Foundation, the JCRC of Greater Boston, and local rabbis. She emphasized the importance of listening and understanding to better strategize to reach both students and adults. Dr. Hunter viewed the situation as a catalyst for a community-wide conversation and welcomed the opportunity to partner with everyone to find a solution.

IV. DISCUSSION

A. Anti-Semitism

Rep. Simon Cataldo, Massachusetts Special Commission on Combating Antisemitism, shared the commission's findings and recommendations. The report revealed antisemitism is widespread and increasing statewide in schools; prior findings were underreported; there is a lack of centralized tracking; and victims fear retaliation for reporting incidents. As a result, Jewish and Israeli students and families have experienced mental health distress. The commission found anti-bias and DEI programs insufficiently cover antisemitism; educators lack training on identifying and addressing antisemitism; and Holocaust education didn't adhere to the 2021 Genocide Education Law. Rep. Cataldo shared the recommendations including integrating antisemitism into digital literacy education; implementing mandatory anti-bias and antisemitism training for school staff; train mental health personnel to support Jewish students; and ensure transparent reporting policies for hate incidents.

District Attorney Paige Tobin presented an overview of the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) to address the community questions about sharing information. Ms. Tobin explained FERPA and Massachusetts student record regulations, controls how student records are collected, maintained, and distributed. The law requires school districts to protect the privacy and security of educational records and prohibit the disclosure of personally identifiable information without a parent's or eligible student's written consent. Ms. Tobin stressed even if a student or family publicly shares information from a student record, the school district is still legally barred sharing student records.

Concord Police Chief Thomas Mulcahy offered the police department's full support as community leaders. Chief Mulcahy stated the existing protocol for reporting incidents includes notifying the District Attorney's office, the human rights council, the Anti-Defamation League, and the Attorney General's office. Chief Mulcahy reiterated the department's commitment to collaborating with all community leaders.

Middlesex County District Attorney Marian Ryan distinguished between feeling safe and being safe, noting hate incidents comprise both aspects, even if they don't meet the legal definition of a hate crime. In the past four years, 160 hate crime were prosecuted, but many hurtful incidents don't meet the legal standard for prosecution. The D.A.'s office has implemented

an anonymous online reporting form for hate incidents on their website, middlesexda.com. and offers programs that clarify what constitutes a hate crime and how to respond to hateful acts.

The District Attorney's office is proposing legislative amendments to address current loopholes, such as the property ownership requirement for hate crime charges; an amendment to mandate education programs for offenders; and the use of restorative justice to hold offenders accountable. Ms. Ryan concluded by reiterating the strong collaboration among local leaders and law enforcement as a promising path forward.

V. PUBLIC COMMENT

Parashar Patel described the events as shocking and disturbing and suggested a broad conversation about what the entire community, not just schools, can do. He praised the comments on the wider community's role, suggesting children may be hearing these harmful ideas from friends or at home. Mr. Patel asked for clarification on existing procedures for bullying incidents, specifically if the parents of the accused students are contacted.

Ed LeClair believes the entire community including schools, churches, and the Select Board must be willing to be uncomfortable to solve the problem. Mr. LeClair feels discomfort is a necessary part of confronting both overt and subtle prejudice and he noted previous speakers did not use the words antisemitic or Jewish hatred. He requested everyone stop dancing around the issue and state clearly that students are being bullied because they are Jewish. Mr. LeClair expressed hope community members would work together to resolve the issue.

Craig Awmiller advocated for restorative justice as a necessary path forward for the community. Though the process might be uncomfortable for town leaders, he insisted the community has specific questions that deserve specific answers. Mr. Awmiller feels true restorative justice involves not only listening, but also accountability. He expressed skepticism about the sincerity of leadership that only listens within restrictive parameters, and he asked leaders to embrace and commit to the restorative justice process.

Melinda Coolish, mother of a senior and member of the Jewish community, shared her family's experience, which did not involve incidents from the formal complaint, but marked a sense of hopelessness and marginalization. In first grade, a bus driver organized a Christmas-themed activity that made her Jewish children feel excluded. Ms. Coolish explained her children felt they could not speak up for fear of being blamed for disrupting a beloved activity. She stated this pervasive passivity, and inaction creates a breeding ground for more severe incidents of antisemitism by signaling it's acceptable to leave out Jewish kids. Ms. Coolish shared the long-term impact, noting her children consider the percentage of Jewish students before applying to college, to not feel marginalized.

Jodi Sperber, eighth grade parent and member of the Jewish community, agreed on the impact of antisemitism on families. Ms. Sperber proposed three immediate actions: first, to explicitly name and acknowledge antisemitism; second, to provide a time-bound roadmap with specific steps for the next three to six months; and third, to clarify the distinction between antisemitism and political speech. She concluded by stating that this is not a political issue but one of safety, dignity, and belonging for Jewish students.

Mark Girolimetti expressed frustration that despite raising alarms for a year, the community is stuck in a cycle of repeating mistakes. Mr. Girolimetti shared his conversations with Jewish, Black, LGBTQ, and mixed-race families revealed experiences with bullying and exclusion that were identical, causing the same trauma. He stated the words inclusion and equity are meaningless without consequences for acts of hate and insisted the community stop tolerating a culture of hate and silence and take immediate, decisive action.

Deborah Dorfman, 27 Lang Street, an attorney who represents children with disabilities and a member of the Jewish community, expressed her disappointment that antisemitic hate is still prevalent today. She urged town and school leaders to commit to making lasting changes, not just temporary fixes. Ms. Dorfman stressed the need for consistent follow-up and monitoring to ensure all measures are effective and meaningful. She concluded by stating that transparency is crucial for repairing the community's damaged trust.

Wilson Odoman, Concord High School senior, felt the school's initial response to antisemitism was inadequate and he recalled an email and assembly that addressed swastikas drawn in bathrooms, which gave the impression of an isolated incident. Mr. Odoman stated the response failed to acknowledge the deeper issue of widespread and persistent bullying, which included students forming Team Hitler and performing Sieg Heil gestures in the hallway. He asserted these were blatant acts of antisemitism and criticized the administration for its failure to take disciplinary action against known perpetrators. One victim was removed from a classroom as part of a safety plan while the perpetrators remained. Mr. Odoman proposed two key actions: first, immediate and proper application of existing disciplinary actions against the perpetrators; and second, the creation of a working committee of students, faculty, and community members to develop an action plan from the ground up, not top down.

Scott Smigler expressed concern the antisemitism students are experiencing are not isolated incidents but part of a systemic issue affecting all Jewish students. Mr. Smigler mentioned a school assembly where an adult challenged the data on antisemitism, leading to cheers from the student body. He asked school leaders to imagine being a Jewish student in that moment and he questioned why adults did to stop the dissent; are the concerns about staff behavior isolated or indicative of a wider pattern; are school leaders transparent about the depth of the issue; and what actions will be taken.

Brian Farber asked what the general protocol and sanctions for students who commit antisemitic hate? How many students have left the school in the past five years due to bullying? He requested a timeline for the collection of data on Jewish student sentiment and asked how the school would handle anti-Israel content approved by the MCAS. Mr. Farber asked what would happen if the teachers' union opposed mandated antisemitism training.

Jay Abelowitz, Concord resident, felt the response to antisemitism was inadequate. After October 7th, the district was slow to issue a statement of support for Jewish students, despite making prompt statements on other events. He emailed the Superintendent and the DEIB director, but only the Superintendent replied. Mr. Abelowitz criticized the DEIB department and its website that offers a single link to the ADL, despite Jews being the targets of 70% of religious hate crimes. He feels the Massachusetts Teachers Association spreads anti-Semitic,

anti-Israel materials to educators, which seeps into the classroom. Mr. Abelowitz asked how many antisemitic incidents were reported last year, what actions were taken, and what support was provided.

Hope Rubin, Sawmill Road in Concord, a member of the Jewish community, expressed outrage at the news of pervasive antisemitism at the Concord Middle and High Schools. Ms. Rubin feels the lack of response failed students and allowed antisemitism and racism to go unchecked. Ms. Rubin requested four specific changes: first, a clear and unequivocal standalone statement from Dr. Hunter and each school committee member condemning antisemitism by name; second, for the Select Board to work with the Jewish community on a town proclamation against antisemitism; third, a detailed plan for the start of the 2025-2026 school year that clearly states the reporting mechanism and consequences for employees and students who engage in such behavior; and fourth, she asked for immediate reporting of all antisemitic and racist incidents to the police and the community.

Kim Frederick, 166 Main Street, and mother of a CCHS senior and a Concord Middle School seventh grader, both who are Jewish and African American asked her daughter about the recent antisemitism case. She responded by asking if they could address the fact she hears the N-word every day. Ms. Frederick expressed support for more reporting mechanisms, education, and restorative justice, which she believes can create teachable moments.

Michael Amster recalled a painful experience from 25-30 years ago when his 10-year-old son was told that Jews killed Christ, emphasizing that a child that age doesn't come up with such ideas on their own. He argued that education must extend to parents, and these efforts must begin in elementary school, not just high school.

Leela Jacobson, acknowledged communities are struggling with rising antisemitism but felt Concord's response was unacceptable. Ms. Jacobson requested the leadership admit mistakes and move forward with a purposeful course of healing and action. She echoed previous calls for a detailed plan, with clear and immediate consequences for hate, and for the establishment of a robust reporting mechanism. She stressed the need for mandatory, professional training for all faculty and staff to address both explicit and invisible bias.

Pamela Dritt, Concord resident, suggested the community be provided transparent information about what happened, without revealing the identities of the students. Ms. Dritt spoke about the tribal nature of humans and the importance of not conflating criticism of Israel with antisemitism. She shared a lesson from her son's first-grade teacher. Using autumn leaves, she showed the students their initial groupings were not fixed, and they could find ways to be more inclusive, unifying aspects of humanity. Ms. Dritt concluded by suggesting this type of lesson could serve as a core curriculum for both adults and children.

Andrea Fonserata expressed concern over the report documenting recent incidents, many of which occurred in front of other students. Ms. Fonserata wondered, how did these other students respond in the moment? Were students intervening when they witnessed this behavior? Perhaps understanding reactions can help determine how pervasive the issue is and

how students are experiencing the overall school climate, which is crucial for fostering meaningful and lasting cultural change.

VI. JOINT BOARD REFLECTION

Select Board Member Mark Howell acknowledged the community needs to move past being “just fine” and directly confront the problem of hate. Mr. Howell expressed a commitment from the Select Board to address the issue and focus on how to change community expectations for everyone to prevent such incidents from occurring.

Michael Williams thanked the public for providing clear direction and emphasized the need to act quickly and smartly. He was disturbed by the allegations in the complaint filed with the Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights. The incidents and sentiments shared by members of the Jewish community and others have deepened his personal distress. Since the complaint was made public, he has been reminded of the fear, anger, and helplessness one feels when targeted and under threat. He is relieved to stand with his colleagues and other municipal leaders to begin addressing the issue in the schools and community. He extended his hand to all who are hurt or feel threatened. The hateful actions and rhetoric of ableism, antisemitism, homophobia, transphobia, racism, and religious intolerance divide us all, and we cannot let it continue. This complaint and this moment are a gift because the urgency compels us to act. Mr. Williams committed to working with the committee, public leaders, faith leaders, and the community to bring about change.

Paul Boehm, a grandparent and member of the Kerem Shalom synagogue, spoke on behalf of Concord's Jewish community. He acknowledged the large online attendance and expressed his commitment to addressing hate incidents. Mr. Boehm asserted a lack of transparency has harmed the community, and while he appreciated signs of progress, he lamented it took an ADL complaint to shed light on the issue. He advocated for full transparency without breaching privacy, suggesting that anonymity could be maintained in reporting. Mr. Boehm applauded Dr. Hunter's initiative to update the school's incident data dashboard as a crucial step, believing it needs to be expanded town-wide to rebuild trust damaged by the April Swastika incident and the ADL complaint. He emphasized the necessity of improved school policies, procedures, and awareness training and called on the school committee to work collaboratively as a community to improve transparency, timely information flow, and overall communication.

Sandeep Pisharody emphasized there is no place for antisemitism in schools, viewing its condemnation as a moral imperative, not a political act. Mr. Pisharody stressed safety is fundamental to learning, and if Jewish students don't feel safe, they can't fully engage or grow. He supported addressing the specific complaint with care while also aiming to rebuild community confidence, strengthen policies, and restore trust through ongoing dialogue.

Mary Hartman underscored the moral imperative to condemn antisemitism in schools, stating it should not be considered a political act. She emphasized a sense of safety is fundamental to learning, and without it, Jewish students cannot fully engage or grow. Ms. Hartman stated discrimination is a town-wide problem, as children often mirror adult behavior and she urged the community to reflect on their own conduct. She called for the community to be hopeful but not naive, advocating for swift action to resolve issues.

Carrie Rankin emphasized the importance of listening, particularly to community members who have voiced their concerns online. She has had numerous conversations with people across the community and has thoroughly reviewed all public statements, press coverage, letters to the editor, and materials from organizations like the ADL. Describing the process as painful, Ms. Rankin asserted the incidents under investigation should not have occurred and offered a sincere apology to the affected families and students. Expressing a genuine belief that we can do better and that we must do better, she hoped the joint meeting would demonstrate a collective resolve to act and make real change.

Wendy Rovelli condemned all acts of hate and bias in the community. She expressed optimism, that there are many available best practices and resources that the community should leverage. Ms. Rovelli reminded the Select Board of their commitment to providing education and training for both staff and the wider community. She emphasized the need for broader outreach, suggesting that students in private schools and residents who frequent the library may need support. Expressing regret that the conversation was necessary, she concluded by affirming everyone is equally committed to addressing the issue in the most effective way.

Ayesha Lawton expressed her support for the Jewish community, condemning all forms of hate. Drawing from her personal experience as a victim of hate in Concord, she lamented that the community is still having this conversation. Ms. Lawton emphasized the need for 100% transparency and uniformity in how hate incidents are addressed, advocating for a swift, positive response. She called for open lines of communication and a strong working relationship with the Concord Police Department, urging a more aggressive approach, including pressing charges when necessary. She concluded this kind of behavior, which has been ongoing for over 20 years, needs to end.

Lynette Kelleher expressed sadness that the meeting was needed. Ms. Kelleher reaffirmed that Carlisle, its school committee and administrators, stand in support of Concord and are ready to work together. She emphasized the importance of unified training for students from both towns, who attend high school together, to ensure they become good students and citizens.

VII. ADJOURNMENT OF THE SELECT BOARD

Wendy Rovelli moved, and Paul Boehm seconded the motion to adjourn the Concord Select Board at 7:20 PM.

VIII. DISCUSSION

The Story of the Schools was created in response to the community request to hear more about what is going on in the schools. The committee is creating a comprehensive overview of the two school districts to build a bridge and connections with the community. Ms. Rankin explained the goal is to develop a comprehensive document that would inform taxpayers, students, and parents about the districts' schools, including their value, student experiences, and outcomes.

Due to a tragedy at the high school in April, the project was put on hold to prioritize the community's needs. The committee resumed the project and plans to release an updated

document in the fall of 2025 with data from the 2024-2025 school year. A public records request for the draft was recently made, which prompted the working group's chair to share the document with the school committee before releasing it to the public. The chair is now asking the committee for feedback on the draft, with several planned updates including student stories and academic data, adding more student perspectives, including an honest reflection on the districts' challenges, and incorporating new district priorities and goals. The goal is to use this document to effectively connect with the community and showcase the positive work being done in the schools.

The Communication Working Group Chair, Regional Chair, and committee, recalled the 2024 charge to the working group: to enhance communication between administration, school committee, and our community. Following the update from Mrs. Rankin, the Committee discussed other forms of communication to consider including social media, radio, podcast, and in-person listening sessions.

IX. CONSENT AGENDA

- A. Warrants
- B. Removal of Science Department Materials from CCHS
- C. Vote to Accept Donation of Photography
- D. Communications Working Group Minutes July 9, 2025
- E. Joint School Committee Minutes June 10, 2025
- F. Executive Session Minutes June 10, 2025
- G. Joint School Committee Minutes June 18, 2025
- H. Joint School Committee Minutes May 20, 2025 (corrections)

Mr. Herchek moved, and Mr. Pisharody seconded, the motion to approve the Consent Agenda as presented, with the exception of the meeting minutes from June 10, 2025, and the three warrants under discussion. Roll was taken: Herchek, aye; Kelleher, aye; Marano, aye; Pisharody, aye; Rankin, aye; and Williams, aye.

X. ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Williams moved, and Ms. Rankin seconded the motion to adjourn the meeting at 7:46 pm. Roll was taken: Herchek, aye; Kelleher, aye; Marano, aye; Pisharody, aye; Rankin, aye; Williams, aye.

submitted,

Barbara Gilmore

Abbreviations:

CCHS Concord-Carlisle High School

CCRSD Concord-Carlisle Regional School District

CCSC Concord-Carlisle Regional District School Committee

CCTA Concord-Carlisle Teachers' Association

CEF Concord Education Fund

CMS Concord Middle School

CMSBC Concord Middle School Building Committee
COAR Communities Organizing Against Racism
CPC Community Preservation Committee
CPS Concord Public Schools
CSC Concord School Committee
CTA Concord Teachers Association
DEIB Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging
DHCB Department of Housing and Community Development
ESSER Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund
FINCOM Finance Committee
LEAP Learning Executive and Academic Processes
MTSS Multi-Tiered System of Supports
PD Professional Development
SC School Committee
SEPAC Special Education Parent Advisory Council
WRAP Writing, Reading, and Academic Processes
YRBS Youth Risk Behavior Survey