

Minutes of School Committee Meeting: 8/4/25

Strategic Planning and Goal Setting (00:00:00-01:10:00)

a. Goal 1 (Policy Review) progress and continuation discussed

- Policy subcommittee **started** review process for **updated** policies
- MASC recommended **changes** to 137 policies since March 2023, with **new** bulletin expected by **end** of August including competency determination policies
- Committee to **prioritize required** MASC updates before broader maintenance reviews

Recommended monthly/bi-monthly subcommittee meetings reviewing two **sections** at a time

b. Goal 2 (Communications) status reviewed with completed and outstanding items identified

Completed: communications subcommittee created, newsletter template developed, **website** update process established through superintendent

- Outstanding: improving **meeting** minutes **timeliness**, visible time clock for public comment, team building **activities**, community **surveys**, **local** media relationships
- **Need to read** public comment policy at beginning of **each** public comment period

c. Goals 3 (Budget Process) and future year planning discussed

- Goal 3 largely met with clear timeline, **robust workshops**, and **early** budget approval
- Potential new goals: **relationship repair with teachers/staff**, **portrait of a graduate** (support NEASC process rather than **lead**), **ex officio** membership evaluation
- Student outcomes **metrics** and **data** collection needs identified, recommended to wait for NEASC completion before establishing success **metrics** goals

Operating Protocols and Governance Discussion (01:10:00-01:22:00)

a. Accountability mechanisms for operating

protocols

- Chair responsible for conversations with members who violate protocols
- Districts may use censure for significant violations if policy exists

Operating protocols should be adopted by vote and signed by all members including superintendent

b. Annual adoption and review procedures

- Vote on protocols annually at first fall meeting after summer review
- Legal counsel training over summer recommended as best practice

c. Building project committee structure clarification

- School building advisory committee should be created by superintendent, not as school committee subcommittee

Advisory committees have different structure than subcommittees and different open meeting law requirements

- Committee previously voted to make facility subcommittee the roof project subcommittee with annual membership revoting

Break and Transition (01:22:00-01:36:00)

a. Committee discussed logistics for continuing with training activities

Refreshments available including fruit, muffins and coffee

- Alicia Benjamin explained training component not subject to open meeting law requirements
 - committee could adjourn formal meeting or continue with remaining business if brief
 - Trainings are generic and involve no deliberations about committee business

b. Committee confirmed completion of formal agenda items and prepared to transition to training

- No other agenda items remaining on formal meeting agenda

- John Robidoux returning at 10 o'clock for another commitment
- Brief break taken to set up materials for training portion

Ethics and Conflict of Interest Training (01:36:00-02:06:00)

- Committee received conflict of interest training under Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 268A covering prohibitions on using public resources for personal/political purposes, taking official action affecting personal financial interests or immediate family members, and participating in employment decisions for immediate family
- Training addressed gift restrictions (cannot accept items worth \$50+ for official duties), confidentiality requirements for executive sessions and personnel records, and distinction between actual conflicts (requiring written disclosure and recusal) versus appearance of conflicts (optional disclosure, continued participation allowed)
- Members advised to contact state ethics commission for guidance before acting on potential conflicts; violations can result in fines up to \$10,000 with enforcement ranging from educational letters to criminal prosecution

Open Meeting Law Training (02:06:00-02:44:00)

- Conflict of interest and Open Meeting Law scope requirements

● Members advised to provide complete facts when seeking ethics commission opinions; hidden facts could result in different guidance and potential \$10,000 fines per violation

- › Open Meeting Law applies to all deliberations through any medium including email, texting, and social media on public business within committee jurisdiction
- A quorum constitutes a majority of members; two-member subcommittees cannot have private conversations about policies they will discuss
- Serial communications through multiple individual conversations that collectively involve a quorum violate open meeting law
- b. Meeting posting and public comment procedures
 - All meetings must be posted at least 48 hours in advance excluding weekends and holidays, with specific location details and agendas required

Emergency agenda additions permitted only for items chair could not reasonably have known

about within 48 hours

- Public comment not required unless committee policy mandates it; should limit overall time periods and individual speaker time to typically three minutes
 - Chairs cannot control disrespectful speech unless actual threats are made

c. Executive session and documentation requirements

- Executive sessions require convening in open session first, roll call votes with each member's vote recorded, and chair announcements of purpose
- Two sets of minutes required when executive sessions occur; open session minutes always disclosable, executive session minutes subject to periodic review
- Committee members strongly advised against texting or emailing during meetings as communications are visible to public and subject to records requests

Open Meeting Law Training Continued and Public Records Law Overview
(02:44:00-02:51:00)

a. Open Meeting Law Electronic Communications Scenarios:

Texting during meetings about voting plans or consulting outside groups violates open meeting law by creating private deliberations

- All texting during meetings should be avoided as public cannot distinguish personal from official communications
- Emergency communications about superintendent employment matters require proper 48-hour meeting posting; job searches are not emergencies requiring immediate action

b. Public Records Law Requirements:

- Committee members must never respond directly to public records requests-only designated records access officer handles these
 - All government documents, emails, texts, photos, and videos by district employees/committee members are presumed public unless specific exemptions apply
- Records access officer has 10 business days to respond and must explain any exemption denials

c. Electronic Communications Best Practices:

- All written communications may become public records-only write what you would not mind being disclosed
 - Never use school committee email for personal business; no expectation of privacy in

district accounts

- Personal email accounts used for committee business subject to public records searches use only official channels
- All deliberations must occur in properly posted public meetings, not through electronic communications

Public Records Law Overview (02:51:00-02:58:00)

a. Personal communications handling and public records request procedures

- Committee members should forward personal emails about school business to official accounts and respond from there to avoid creating records trails in personal accounts
- Public records requests must be directed to the records access officer, not handled directly by committee members

Records access officers must search and review all relevant communications for comprehensive requests between members

b. Communications subject to disclosure and best practices

- Communications germane to committee deliberations during posted meetings are releasable; purely personal comments are not
- Any written communication during meetings (electronic or notes) creates public records issues
 - Phone calls preferable to written communications as they leave no records trail
 - Personal communications like coordinating child pickup are not subject to disclosure

c. Committee roles and spokesperson protocols

Key responsibilities include hiring/evaluating superintendent, adopting curriculum, establishing policies, setting goals, and collective bargaining

- Only designated spokesperson can speak for the committee and must represent committee position even if it differs from their personal vote

School Committee Governance and Communications (02:58:00-03:38:00)

a. Committee completed training on member roles, responsibilities, and authority limitations

- Members have no individual authority and can only act through votes at properly posted meetings
- Concerns must be directed through superintendent, not directly to principals or administrators
- Individual members cannot direct business manager or administrators to change procedures without

committee approval

b. Training covered communications protocols and ethics requirements

- Chair **serves as** official spokesperson **and must** communicate committee's voted position even if it differs from personal view
- **Individual** members can express personal opinions but must **clarify** they don't speak for the committee
- Members cannot use position for special treatment of their children **or** to intimidate administrators
 - Violations of these principles constitute state **ethics law** violations

c. **Committee reviewed** unfair labor practice restrictions **and** proper union communications

- Members cannot **bypass** union leadership to communicate directly with **employees** about contract matters
 - Communications from committee members **viewed as** official regardless of disclaimers
 - **Must avoid statements** that could chill employees' union rights

d. A motion was made by [Name] and **seconded** by [Name] to adjourn the meeting.

The motion passed 4-0, with votes in favor: Al Williams, Kate Schmeckpeper, Jennifer Schaeffner, Henry Gwazda. The meeting adjourned at _____.