

JOINT SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES

**Concord-Carlisle School Committee
Concord School Committee
August 20, 2025**

Present: Tracey Marano, Chair CCSC
Brian Waterson, Vice-Chair CCSC
Andrew Herchek, Chair CSC; CCSC on Zoom
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

Present from Administration: Dr. Laurie Hunter, Superintendent of School, CPS & CCRSD
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. Ms. Rankin called the Concord School Committee to order at 6:00 PM.

II. PRESENTATION OF BEEDE CENTER MAISEY O'DONNELL DIVING CENTER

In honor of their daughter Maisey, Betsy and Christoph O'Donnell are raising funds to build a dry-land dive training facility at the Beede Center. The facility is intended to be a welcoming environment for all students, regardless of skill level, and to foster the kind of inclusive and encouraging atmosphere that Maisey embodied. Equipment, such as a trampoline with a harness, and a dry board with a landing pit, are crucial for teaching advanced diving skills safely. As of August 14, 2025, the O'Donnell family has raised over \$400,000 for the project, with a goal of reaching \$750,000 to \$1 million to cover construction and future maintenance costs. The project received full support from the school committee.

III. PUBLIC COMMENT

Ellen Quackenbush 206 Prairie Street, Concord, expressed concern over the educational and cultural environment at the high school. She criticized the handling of the recent anti-Semitic incidents, including the use of hateful team names, and disagreed with the DEI director's characterization of these acts as microaggressions. She urged the committee to create a culture of equity and safety for students and requested a timeline of when incidents were reported and what actions were taken. She questioned why the full school committee and public were not informed until a civil rights complaint was filed by the Anti-Defamation League.

Craig Awmiller 27 Lane Street, Concord, cited a press release about a man sentenced for threatening the Jewish community and statistics showing an increase in anti-Semitic incidents in Massachusetts. He criticized the failure not to act on swastikas and questioned if the current leaders lack the skills to handle these situations.

Joe Palumbo, Blackhorse Place, Concord, feels the school district has been in crisis and gave examples including the METCO families who felt their concerns were not being addressed; the

Adunzi family complaints regarding repeated racist attacks on their son; and the recent resignations of METCO PTG representatives. Mr. Palumbo is concerned about the district's response to antisemitic and other hate attacks, including in the school bathrooms which were not reported to the community for over 20 days. He feels these events demonstrate a failure of leadership in terms of response, transparency, communication, and accountability.

Rihanna Susan Tobin, 70 B Harrell Street, Concord asked if the Concord Carlyle curriculum includes an anti-hate curriculum. Does the anti-hate include other cultures and the people from other minorities? As a Concord citizen, she has not been privileged with information about what's going on and asked how she can participate.

Robin Goldstein, a retired teacher, mother, and Jewish woman, shared since October 7th, she worries about antisemitism and her children's safety. Ms. Goldstein approved of the district's antisemitism plan and stressed the importance of distinguishing between legitimate criticism of Israel and antisemitism, and anti-Zionism which is a form of antisemitism that denies Jews the right to self-determination in their ancestral homeland. Ms. Goldstein concluded by urging the committee to adopt the plan to ensure that Jewish students feel safe, included, and valued.

Court Booth, 134 Wright Road, Concord stated there was a need for change to rebuild trust concerning anti-bias efforts. Mr. Booth compared the current situation with the past, noting a simple and direct reporting system to two accessible principals was effective. Despite having administrators and a DEI director, people choose to report incidents of harm and hate to public safety or the press instead of school officials. He feels a lack of trust in the system and fear of negative consequences are barriers to reporting and urged examining leadership practices to foster a culture of trust, so students and teachers feel safe to report incidents.

Ares Apolous, Concord student and member of Concord Coalition for Palestine, voiced concern about the Special Commission on Combating Antisemitism. Mr. Apolous differentiated between being Jewish and being an Israeli, stating his concern is with support for a military committing war crimes and genocide and an ethno-state attempting to erase Palestinians. He dismissed the evidence used by the commission, alleging it comes from the Trump administration or the Anti-Defamation League, which he criticized for defending Elon Musk. He feels adopting the IHRA definition of antisemitism will silence students trying to speak out.

IV. SUPERINTENDENT UPDATE

Dr. Hunter highlighted several events kicking off the start of the school year including orientation for 18 new teachers and the staff welcome, the first district-wide event in the Ellen Garrison Building at Concord Middle School. A major focus for the upcoming year will be improving literacy instruction for students in kindergarten through fifth grade to address equity and close achievement gaps. The district secured a \$360,000 grant to fund this initiative, which covers the cost of materials, professional development, and coaching.

V. CHAIRS UPDATE

Ms. Marano attended the Concord Chairs Breakfast where the town clerk announced a new series of governance workshops from October to May designed to provide training for committee chairs and members. The Finance Committee held meetings over the summer to discuss budget preparation and moved up the timeline for submitting budget information. M.A.S.C. representative, Alicia Malin, will share a presentation at next Wednesday's workshop which will focus on practices and protocols, including procedures and meeting minutes.

Mr. Herchek acknowledged the need for better communication, stating implementing new communication strategies is a major goal for the school committee this year. He emphasized the importance of communication not only with parents and students but also with the wider community, including non-parents.

VI. CONSENT AGENDA

A. Minutes July 22, 2025

B. Minutes June 10, 2025

C. Warrants

1. CPS A/P

1012 8/14/25 \$175,421.75

1011 8/14/25 \$721,896.86

1007 7/31/25 \$227,683.75

1134 6/19/25 \$508,996.05

1144 6/30/25 \$217,582.47

1145 6/30/25 \$54,334.16

2. CCRSD A/P

1039 8/14/25 \$426,316.03

1034 8/12/25 \$1,200.00

1033 8/5/25 \$50,826.82

1026 7/31/25 \$675,133.57

3. CPS Payroll

Pay date 8/14/25 \$155,619.48

Pay date 8/14/25 \$665.34

Pay date 8/14/25 \$273,244.47

Pay date 7/31/25 \$799.72

Pay date 7/31/25 \$157,418.82

Pay date 7/31/25 \$282,787.33

4. CCRSD Payroll

Pay date 8/14/25 \$519,305.98

Pay date 8/14/25 \$61,432.65

Pay date 8/14/25 \$142,374.64

Pay date 8/14/25 \$37,889.03

Pay date 7/31/25 \$180.00

Pay date 7/31/25 \$506,654.87

Pay date 7/31/25 \$60,415.23

Pay date 7/31/25 \$135,945.61

Pay date 7/31/25 \$36,356.58

Pay date 7/31/25 \$1,547.57

Pay date 7/31/25 \$176.21

Pay date 7/31/25 \$167.80

D. Approve Student Handbook Addition

E. Approve CCHS Earth Science Trip

Mr. Williams requested postponing approval of the July 22, 2025 meeting minutes to amend Ms. Rankin's comments on alternative communication methods to improve community communication. Ms. Rankin requested to table the vote, stating she needed to rewatch the meeting video to verify the discussion's content.

Mr. Williams requested the student handbook be pulled from the consent agenda because the new middle school is referred to as Concord Middle School rather than its full name, The Ellen Garrison Building at Concord Middle School. After a brief discussion, the majority agreed to approve the handbook as presented, with the addition of the new language about religious waivers on page 13, based on a recent Supreme Court decision; and using the full name of the middle school, The Ellen Garrison Building at Concord Middle School.

Mr. Pisharody moved, and Mr. Waterson seconded the motion to approve the Consent Agenda as presented, after removing the July 22nd meeting minutes and the Student Handbook. Roll was taken: Herchek, aye; Kelleher, aye; Marano, aye; Pisharody, aye; Rankin, aye; Waterson, aye; and Williams, aye.

Mr. Williams moved, and Mr. Pisharody seconded the motion to approve the July 22nd meeting minutes with the additional addendum. Roll was taken: Herchek, aye; Kelleher, aye; Marano, aye; Pisharody, aye; Rankin, aye; Waterson, aye; and Williams, aye.

Mr. Waterson moved, and Mr. Herchek seconded the motion to approve the Student Handbook Addition as presented tonight with the new updates. Roll was taken: Herchek, aye; Kelleher, aye; Marano, aye; Pisharody, aye; Rankin, aye; Waterson, aye; and Williams, aye.

VII. CORRESPONDENCE

No Correspondence has been received since last meeting.

VIII. DISCUSSION

A. Anti-Semitism Action Plan

Dr. Hunter presented an Anti-Semitism Action Plan developed with input from staff, students, and the community. The plan includes staff professional development with training to prevent and address anti-Semitism; training and behavior management tools for staff; and teaching best practices on how to respond to anti-Semitism. In the classroom, anti-Semitism will be taught in grades K-5 with lessons on using language that is not hurtful; older students will receive more progressive anti-Semitic lessons; the Playbook Initiative will dedicate its first bystander scenario to anti-Semitism; and ninth-grade students will participate in anti-bias training that includes a discussion on anti-Semitism. The district is also reviewing the Holocaust curriculum to ensure it is effective and comprehensive.

To foster an inclusive school culture, the school district is introducing measures to support its Jewish community including culture surveys allowing families to voluntarily indicate their religion, valuable data on Jewish families to create a baseline; prioritizing student voices by supporting the formation of a CCHS Jewish Student Union; and the district will celebrate Jewish Heritage Month to honor Jewish culture and contributions to the community. Funding for anti-Semitism initiatives will be secured by a recent award for a \$35,000 Hate Prevention Grant from the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. To ensure accountability, a new district-wide anti-Semitism coalition will be created with stakeholders, including faith leaders, and is expected to meet three times a year to set goals, review progress, and make necessary adjustments.

B. Story of the Schools

Ms. Rankin noted the Story of the Schools working group is working on a draft for the September 10th meeting. The project is an important step to celebrate the many great things

happening in the school district and is in response to community members who expressed a desire for more information about the schools, beyond what they see in the news.

C. Amenities Building

The School Committee discussed the recent failure of the amenities building ballot question, which was defeated by 386 votes. Ms. Marano reported that 722 mail-in ballots were submitted with an information packet that contained a critical error, misstating the cost per household as \$2,710 per year instead of the correct amount of \$271 over 10 years. Ms. Marano will draft a letter to the Concord Select Board requesting an accounting of the error and will pursue a new application for Community Preservation Act funding. The high school currently rents portable toilets for Memorial Field, but this presents an equity issue due to accessibility concerns, leaving the district vulnerable to litigation.

D. Superintendent Goals 2025-2026

Dr. Hunter reviewed her Superintendent Goals for the upcoming school year. Student Learning Goals include ensuring an equitable, evidence-based curriculum that allows for the achievement of all students. Professional Practice Goals include ensuring all learners have equal access to high-quality instruction; ensuring special education programming promotes effective instruction for all learners; and prioritizing formal programs focused on student and staff well-being. District Improvement Goals include addressing anti-racist and equity practices and to create an environment that is inclusive, equitable, and fosters a sense of belonging for all students, staff, and families, including support for the LGBTQ community. Other goals include a plan to combat anti-Semitism; implement a transparent and fiscally responsive budget process; identify and execute on capital needs and projects; and enhance communication with stakeholders outside of the parent community. The district is considering contracting with a public relations firm to share positive stories and engage with the community through various platforms, including social media.

E. School Committee Goals

Ms. Marano and Mr. Herchek presented a draft of the school committee goals with four categories: Budget, Policy, Superintendent Evaluation, and Communication and Collaboration. The Budget Goal is to replicate the successful and collaborative budget process from the prior year, which avoided the need for a tax override. The Policy Goal focuses on updating policies, specifically major topics like AI and cell phone use. For the Superintendent Evaluation, the committee will provide continuous, ongoing feedback throughout the year, instead of one end-of-year evaluation. The Communication and Collaboration Goal seek to improve outreach, share information, and working closely with other town committees. Committee members were asked to provide feedback on the draft by Monday, August 26th.

F. Liaison Assignments

Ms. Marano reviewed the current community liaison roles and requested volunteers for open positions. School liaison assignments include Adult and Community Education, Lynette Kelleher; Carlisle Select Board, Brian Waterson; Concord Select Board, Tracy Marano, primary; and Andrew Herchek, secondary; Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging Commission, Michael Williams; Concord Financial Audit Advisory, Sandeep Pisharody; CMS Building Committee, Sandeep Pisharody; Maintenance Bargaining, Sandeep Pisharody; and Administrative Assistant Bargaining, Brian Waterson. Liaison positions to be filled include the PEG Media and Governmental Access Committee, Sustainability Committee, Warrants Signers, Campus Completion Committee, and the Communications Working Group. The final liaison assignments will be voted on at the next meeting.

Ms. Marano noted that the liaison reports will now be written reports, and any questions would be addressed during the public meeting. A template will be provided for the summary of any highlights that directly intersect with the school.

G. AI Policy and Protocols Draft First Reading

Dr. Hunter presented the first reading of Policy IHNDG, which establishes a framework for the use of AI. A separate guidance document outlines the specific dos and don'ts for students. AI offers students creative new ways to access information, communicate, improve task efficiency, and create artistic and conceptual work. The draft policy uses existing rules to hold students accountable for plagiarism, focusing on ensuring that AI supports, rather than replaces, critical thinking. AI tools will be used differently across grade levels; older students may use generative AI, while younger students will interact with adaptive learning software. The goal is to maximize the benefits of AI for students, including using it to help close achievement gaps.

The district plans to incorporate the ethical use of generative AI into the K-12 curriculum. The administration will create developmentally appropriate guidelines for both teachers and students; the guidelines will cover proper citation of AI content and AI literacy; the guidelines will be revisited and updated annually; and the AI guidelines will be included in the student handbook.

IX. ACTION ITEMS

A. Student Activity Funds

Mr. Conry presented the committee the financial status of the student activity funds for the Concord Public Schools and the Concord-Carlisle High School districts. The CPS student activity fund consists of one account for the middle school and is used for student-run activities such as the robotics and cooking clubs.

Mr. Pisharody moved, and Mr. Williams seconded the motion to authorize the use of the Concord Middle School Student activity account for Fiscal Year 2026. Roll was taken: Herchek, aye; Marano, aye; Pisharody, aye; and Williams, aye.

Mr. Conry reviewed the student activity funds for the Concord-Carlisle High School and requested authorization to use existing CCHS student activity accounts to cleanup any deficits by transferring funds from an Interest Income student activity account for the fiscal year 2026. He proposed creating a Student Experience Fund to support student activities not covered by club funds or the school budget; creating a Trip Scholarship Fund to provide financial aid for students on expensive international trips; and approval to cover the current deficit created from AP fees to ensure students are not penalized with higher fees for past shortfalls.

Mr. Waterson moved, and Mr. Williams seconded the motion to authorize the use of the Concord-Carlisle High School student activity accounts as listed on the following pages for Fiscal Year 2026, and to approve the transfers recommended by Administration on those pages; and authorize the administration to pay FY26 student activity audit fees for CCHS from the Interest Income student activity account. Roll was taken: Herchek, aye; Kelleher, aye; Marano, aye; Pisharody, aye; Rankin, aye; Waterson, aye; and Williams, aye.

Ms. Marano adjourned the Concord Carlisle Regional School District meeting at 9:27 p.m. The Concord Public School stayed in session to discuss and vote on CPS-specific matters

B. Bus Surplus

Mr. Conry presented two motions for the school bus fleet. The first, Bus Surplus, is for approval of four non-drivable buses to be traded in for a value of approximately \$42,000. The second, CPS Bus Lease, is an approval request for four new buses under a five-year lease. The funds for this lease is already allocated in the district's operating budget.

Mr. Pisharody moved, and Mr. Williams seconded the motion to declare the vehicles listed as surplus, and to be dispositioned in whatever manner the district administration determines to be the most advantageous for the district. Roll was taken: Herchek, aye; Marano, aye; Pisharody, aye; and Williams, aye.

Mr. Williams moved, and Mr. Pisharody seconded the motion to approve the lessee resolution, as presented in tonight's School Committee packet, and to authorize the Assistant Superintendent of Finance and Administration and District Treasurer to sign and execute any documents required to secure this financing. Roll was taken: Herchek, aye; Marano, aye; Pisharody, aye; and Williams, aye.

X. ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Williams moved, and Mr. Pisharody seconded the motion to adjourn the meeting at 9:35 pm. Roll was taken: Herchek, aye; Marano, aye; Pisharody, aye; and Williams, aye.

Respectfully submitted,

Barbara Gilmore

Approved: October 8, 2025

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