

JOINT SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES

**Concord-Carlisle School Committee
Concord School Committee
April 1, 2026**

Present: Tracey Marano, Chair CCSC
Brian Waterson, Vice-Chair CCSC
Andrew Herchek, Chair CSC via Zoom
Carrie Rankin, Vice-Chair CSC; CCSC
Sandeep Pisharody, CSC; CCSC via Zoom
Michael Williams, CSC; CCSC
Lynette Kelleher, CCSC
Ayesha Lawton, CCRSD METCO via Zoom

Not Present: Michelle MacDougall, CPS METCO

Present from Administration: Dr. Laurie Hunter, Superintendent of Schools
Robert Conry, Assistant Superintendent
Shelly Chin, Assistant Superintendent

I. CALL TO ORDER

Ms. Marano called the Concord Carlisle School Committee to order at 4:00 PM. Ms. Rankin called the Concord School Committee to order at 4:00 PM. Roll was taken: Herchek, present; Kelleher, present; Marano, present; Pisharody, present; Rankin, present; Waterson, present; and Williams, present.

II. EXECUTIVE SESSION

Mr. Waterson moved and Ms. Rankin seconded the motion that the Concord School Committee and Concord-Carlisle Regional School Committee enter Executive Session under Purpose 3 of the Open Meeting Law: To conduct strategy sessions with respect to collective bargaining with the bus drivers and return to Open Session.

Roll was taken: Herchek, aye; Kelleher, aye; Marano, aye; Pisharody, aye; Rankin, aye; Waterson, aye; and Williams, aye.

III. RECOGNITION – UNIFIED BOWLING

Coach Josh Reed and CCHS student mentors from the Unified Sports program shared insights on the program's growth and impact, highlighting its inaugural bowling season alongside the established track and basketball programs. Over five seasons, participation increased from 17 to 51 students, fostering a culture of social inclusion. Student mentors shared their deep personal connections formed through the program, noting the experience shifts the focus of athletics from intense competition to friendship and mutual support. Upcoming unified sport events include a track meet at Emerson and the Westford New Friends multi-school event.

IV. SUPERINTENDENT AND CHAIRS UPDATE

Dr. Hunter shared several updates, noting that the Concord Audit Advisory Committee reported clean audits for FY24 and FY25; the district is expanding METCO enrollment to include entry points in grades six and nine; and to advance sustainability, the district partnered with Highland Bus to secure five electric buses and the necessary charging infrastructure. Educational initiatives

included collaborative visioning on equity, Universal Design for Learning, and a recent Holocaust survivor presentation that connected eighth graders with high school affinity groups. To prioritize safety ahead of prom and graduation, the district, supported by the Concord Behavioral Health Collective, will host a substance abuse prevention program for juniors, seniors, and their parents.

Ms. Marano stated the district continues to strengthen its community ties through monthly PTG presidents' meetings, which serve as a collaborative forum for discussing school directories, fundraising strategies, and student wellness policies such as cell phone usage.

Ms. Lawton shared that the CCHS METCO enrollment currently stands at 31 students. Recent discussions with METCO parents emphasized the importance of actively increasing these numbers, while also highlighting student-focused initiatives, such as the upcoming junior and senior prom organized by the METCO Board of Directors for May.

V. CCHS STUDENT UPDATE

Maddie Clancy, Mark Johnson, and Evelyn Mudge shared an update on recent CCHS achievements and extracurricular activities. Highlights included the Performing Arts Department winning gold at the MICCA competition; and METCO student ambassadors attending a Youth Leadership Conference at MIT focused on networking and financial literacy. Additionally, the Interact Club packaged 10,000 Meals of Hope, the Student Senate held its annual blood drive, and students volunteered at the St. Patrick's Day run. Looking ahead, seniors are beginning their fourth-quarter internships while the student body prepares for the upcoming Student Senate and School Committee elections in May.

The CCHS students shared their perspectives on the proposed cell phone policy, expressing they do not believe usage is excessive and are generally opposed to new restrictions. They suggested teachers simply enforce the existing phone caddy system, noting some staff check for compliance each morning. Overall, students prefer maintaining the current practice of placing phones in caddies upon entering the classroom.

VI. PUBLIC COMMENT

Adrienne Principe, 78 Nashoba Road, Concord, advocated for a restrictive smartphone policy, citing the harm technology inflicts on mental health and academic performance. Drawing on recent legal precedents, Ms. Principe characterized personal smartphones and school-issued one-to-one technology as addictive tools that facilitate social alienation and collect sensitive student data. She challenged the district to prioritize human interaction. She feels while students must sign digital compliance agreements, there is a lack of research justifying intensive screen use in classrooms. Ms. Principe concluded by urging for an away-for-the-day policy to protect students and the addictive nature of these platforms.

Christine Spin, of 49 Partridge Lane, Concord, expressed concern about the pervasive use of educational technology and personal devices. Ms. Spin feels providing devices without parental consent or content barriers undermines family values and household rules. She highlighted how digital-first education removes sensory and tactile learning experiences, noting a decline in handwriting and creative skills among middle schoolers. Ms. Spin concluded by urging to prioritize research-based evidence, advocating for reduced screen time to allow children to learn more deeply through human interaction and physical engagement.

Emily Lines, 63 Bruce Road, Concord, expressed support for the expansion of METCO enrollment before advocating for a bell-to-bell cell phone policy. Citing the 2024 Youth Risk Behavior Survey, she noted students spend a median of 2.7 hours daily on non-school device use, a habit linked to rising rates of anxiety, depression, and social isolation. She stated while community surveys are useful for determining rollout logistics, scientific evidence provides a clear mandate for action to protect student mental health. Ms. Lines urged the committee to implement a consistent off and away policy.

VII. CONSENT AGENDA

- A. Warrants
- B. December 17, 2025, Joint Minutes
- C. January 21, 2026, Joint Minutes
- D. February 4, 2026, Joint Minutes
- E. Accept CPS Annual Distribution from Trustees of Town Donations and Manual Training Trust Fund
- F. CCHS Travel 2026-2027
 - 2027 Presidential Traverse White Mountains, NH
 - Italy Trip for Latin Students
 - Exchange San Sebastian, Spain
 - French Exchange
 - Culture and Geology of Patagonia South America

Mr. Williams requested Consent Agenda Item D, February 4, 2026, Meeting Minutes, be removed from the Consent Agenda. Mr. Waterson moved and Mr. Herchek seconded the motion to approve the Consent Agenda, with Agenda Item D removed. Roll was taken: Herchek, aye for both; Kelleher, aye for region; Marano, aye for both; Pisharody, aye for both; Rankin, aye for both; Waterson, aye for region; and Williams, aye for both.

VIII. CORRESPONDENCE

Ms. Marano reported the district was copied on a few emails and nothing required further action.

IX. DISCUSSION

- A. COLA Adjustment and Hiring Incentives for Transportation

Mr. Conry addressed the transportation staffing challenges and proposed a two-pronged recruitment and retention plan for the Concord and Concord-Carlisle school districts. The plan includes a 2% cost-of-living adjustment to base pay; a \$2,500 hiring incentive for already-licensed drivers, payable after one year of service; and a \$1,000 referral bonus. With an estimated annual fiscal impact of \$18,000 for Concord Public Schools and \$12,000 for the Regional District, these costs are essential for securing reliable transportation and ensuring the district remains competitive with neighboring towns and private vendors.

Mr. Waterson moved and Mr. Williams seconded the motion to approve the Concord and Concord-Carlisle Regional School Committees vote to authorize district administration to implement this driver recruitment incentive plan and agree to amend the bus driver's union contract to implement the increased pay rates as outlined in the Assistant Superintendent's memo.

Roll was taken: Herchek, aye for both; Kelleher, aye for region; Marano, aye for both; Pisharody, aye for both; Rankin, aye for both ; Waterson, aye for region; and Williams, aye for both.

B. CCRSD Certified E and D

Mr. Conry reported that the Massachusetts Department of Revenue's Division of Local Services has certified the Excess and Deficiency (E&D) fund at \$1,772,572 as of June 30, 2025. This amount represents 4.38% of the FY26 budget, which is below the 5.0% statutory cap. Mr. Conry noted that while the district has benefited from interest income and one-time revenues, the current budget is tighter and more predictable; consequently, \$300,000 of the E&D fund has already been allocated to offset operating costs.

C. CCRSD FY27 Budget

Mr. Waterson moved and Mr. Williams seconded the motion to approve the Concord-Carlisle Regional School District Proposed FY27 Budget in the amount presented above, and the resultant assessments allocated to the Town of Concord and Town of Carlisle per the regional agreement formula.

Roll was taken: Herchek, aye; Kelleher, aye; Marano, aye; Pisharody, aye; Rankin, aye; Waterson, aye; and Williams, aye.

D. Cell Phone Survey

The committee held a brief discussion on the draft cell phone survey designed to gather community input. The survey will be directed to students in grades 8-12, parents of K-12 students, and the Concord and Carlisle communities. The survey will require names and emails to prevent multiple entries. The committee discussed four policy options including the current Caddy System, an Enhanced Caddy System, Away and Out of Sight, and two versions of Bell-to-Bell. The discussion concluded with an acknowledgment the final policy decision remains the responsibility to act in the best interest of student well-being during school hours.

E. First Reading Policies

The committee held the First Reading of Policy ECAB, Access to Buildings and Grounds; KI, Visitors to schools; and EFBA, School Nutrition. The first Policy ECAB is a new addition on building and grounds access aimed at enhancing safety and security; the second Policy KI, governs school visitors; and the third Policy EFBA, a new School Nutrition policy focused on meal modifications to accommodate students with disabilities, ensuring the district remains aligned with state and federal regulations.

F. Bias and Hate Incident Working Group

Mr. Pisharody shared an update on the Bias and Hate Incident Working Group, noting that a recent focus group prioritized the inclusion of anonymous reporting to encourage student participation and build trust. The working group plans to consult with administrators to learn from existing district reporting systems before presenting a final recommendation to the Select Board in mid-May. Mr. Williams proposed renaming the agenda item to Bias Assessment starting in June. The Committee agreed to keep the current title through May and revisit the potential name change and long-term focus once the working group concludes its current charge.

G. CASE Collaborative Proposed Capital Plan Revision

Dr. Hunter shared the proposed CASE Collaborative capital reserve plan, which outlines a long-term vision for significant investments, including land acquisition for standalone special education settings, the eventual electrification of the transportation fleet, and ongoing vehicle replacements. Dr. Hunter clarified the plan is not a direct financial request but ensures the Collaborative can continue planning for future infrastructure and instructional needs.

Mr. Waterson moved and Ms. Rankin seconded the motion to approve the formal revision to the CASE Collaborative Capital plan as presented. Roll was taken: Herchek, aye for both; Kelleher, aye for region; Marano, aye for both; Pisharody, aye for both; Rankin, aye for both ; Waterson, aye for region; and Williams, aye for both.

H. Amenities Building update

Mr. Waterson reported the Carlisle Select Board voted to support its funding portion of the Amenities Building through CPA funds. To build momentum, a podcast will be released in mid-April to educate the Carlisle community on the warrant article; this will also be shared with the Concord community. Design documents have been submitted to the Department of Public Works for a final engineering review. Mr. Conry indicated the district anticipates going out to bid this summer, with site preparation beginning shortly thereafter and construction extending into late 2026. While project costs remain within projected ranges, the district secured a safety net through capital stabilization funds and a 10% bid contingency to account for potential market escalation.

X. SCHOOL CHOICE HEARING

Ms. Marano opened the School Choice Hearing at 6 PM. Roll was taken: Herchek, present; Kelleher, present; Marano, present; Pisharody, present; Rankin, present; Waterson, present; and Williams, present.

A. School Choice Memo

Dr. Hunter recommended that the Concord and Concord-Carlisle School Committees vote against participating in the 2026-2027 Interdistrict School Choice program. This recommendation is based on the districts' current building capacities and the lack of an equitable transportation system for non-resident students.

B. Vote on School Choice for the 2026-2027 School Year

Mr. Waterson moved and Mr. Herchek seconded the motion the Concord and Concord-Carlisle School Committees vote to not participate in School Choice for the school year 2026-2027.

Roll was taken: Herchek, aye for both; Kelleher, aye for region; Marano, aye for both; Pisharody, aye for both; Rankin, aye for both ; Waterson, aye for region; and Williams, abstain.

Ms. Marano closed the School Choice Hearing at 6:03 PM.

Roll was taken: Herchek, aye; Kelleher, aye; Marano, aye; Pisharody, aye; Rankin, aye; Waterson, aye; and Williams, aye.

XI. EXECUTIVE SESSION

Mr. Waterson moved and Mr. Williams seconded the motion that the Concord School Committee and Concord-Carlisle School Committee enter into Executive Session under Purpose 3 of the Open Meeting Law: To conduct strategy sessions with respect to litigation and not return to Open Session. The motion passed by roll call at 6:45 PM: Herchek, aye; Kelleher, aye; Marano, aye; Pisharody, aye; Rankin, aye; Waterson, aye; and Williams, aye.

Respectfully submitted,
Barbara Gilmore

Approved: May 6, 2026

Abbreviations:

CCHS Concord-Carlisle High School
CCRSD Concord-Carlisle Regional School District
CCSC Concord-Carlisle Regional District School Committee
CCTA Concord-Carlisle Teachers' Association
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