

JOINT SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES

**Concord-Carlisle School Committee
Concord School Committee
September 9, 2026**

Present: Brian Waterson, Chair CCSC
Tracey Marano, CSC; Vice Chair CCSC
Sandeep Pisharody, Chair CSC; CCSC
Lynette Kelleher, CCSC
Drew Maglioni, CSC; CCSC
Michael Williams, CSC; CCSC
Michelle MacDougall, CPS METCO
Ayesha Lawton, CCSC METCO

Not Present: Andrew Herchek, Vice Chair CSC; CCSC

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

I. CALL TO ORDER

Mr. Waterson called the Concord-Carlisle School Committee meeting to order at 6:00 PM. Mr. Pisharody called the Concord School Committee meeting to order at 6:00 PM.

II. RECOGNITIONS - OPENING DAY CLIPS

Dr. Hunter shared highlights from the teachers' opening day welcome assembly. Laz, a recent graduate currently attending Merrimack College, read an original poem about his experience as a Muslim student. Dr. Hunter also shared the positive impact of the student panel, featuring 5th graders through high school seniors, who spoke about specific teachers who made a difference in their lives by offering academic support and ensuring they felt seen and heard.

III. CCHS STUDENT UPDATE

Mark Johnson shared opening-week highlights at CCHS including the freshman dance featuring student DJs, annual senior traditions such as the senior breakfast, car painting, and preparation for Senior Sunrise. The Student Senate held a club fair and planned a 9th-grade Flex block club introduction, the BSU drew about 30 students to its first meeting, and plans were announced for affinity groups to partner on school improvements. Students are looking forward to picture day, class elections, the 50-year alumni reunion, pickleball and badminton tournaments, a Kicks for Cancer t-shirt fundraiser, and an all-grade homecoming at the Armory. Mark shared his experience in the Rivers and Revolutions program and praised its hands-on outdoor learning at local landmarks such as Walden Pond, Northridge, and Egg Rock.

IV. SUPERINTENDENT, CHAIRS AND METCO UPDATE

Dr. Hunter reported a smooth start to the school year across busing, lunch, scheduling, and student onboarding; the scheduling of initial meetings for the Antisemitism Coalition and Sustainability Committee; progress on the district's five-year math and social studies curriculum review; and the selection of two core instructional strategies, Carrying the Cognitive Load and Collaboration, to be implemented district wide.

Mr. Waterson reported on a recent FINCOM meeting and preliminary budget data request, noting that Carlisle's budget process is beginning later but will not affect the overall timeline, and reminded committee members serving as liaisons to submit the standard reporting template.

Mr. Pisharody reported on the opening day assembly, a meeting with PTG leadership, strong turnout at the Bias and Hate Committee workshop, the first SEPAC community coffee, and receipt of a new proposal for the CMS solar installation for review.

Ms. Lawton reported that the start of the school year at CCHS ran smoothly, with most students actively participating in a club or sport. She shared that METCO is organizing a meeting with out-of-town representatives to establish direct lines of communication.

Ms. MacDougall reported a very positive start to the school year across all METCO bus stops, highlighting great excitement among both new and returning students. There are new METCO students enrolled across multiple grade levels. Additionally, representatives have begun planning the biennial METCO board election process, which allows METCO families to elect their representatives for fixed terms.

V. PUBLIC COMMENT

Gail Hire, 54 Nancy Road, referenced public comments made by parent Emily Lines two weeks prior regarding the Intentional Tech Coalition, a group formed to help parents address screen addiction and manage school-issued laptops and technology. Ms. Hire commended Ms. Lines for her initiative and urged the district to join over half of U.S. states in implementing a strict, bell-to-bell cell phone ban to improve student focus and limit exposure to harmful content.

Emily Lines, 63 Bruce Road, spoke in support of Gail Hire's proposal to ban cell phones in schools. She urged the Technology Committee to focus on safety and efficacy by ensuring EdTech and AI tools support learning without harming mental health or focus, establishing transparent policies with strong oversight, and giving parents and independent experts a genuine role in governance. Ms. Lines cited examples from other districts, including grade-by-grade screen limits, blocks or restrictions on generative AI, and designated tech-free days. She noted the American Psychological Association report, Children and Adolescent Learning with Educational Technology, and its warning that gamified features and frequent app clicks reflect screen engagement and not actual learning. Ms. Lines urged the district, working alongside the Intentional Tech Coalition, to systematically measure EdTech and AI usage, commit to student-centered learning outcomes, maintain transparency, and involve parents directly.

Nick Fullard commented on the use of educational technology inside and outside the classroom and is concerned that software is deployed without clear communication to parents. Citing platforms like Bloocket, XtraMath, Lexia Core 5, and Zearn, he shared examples of students being distracted by video game rewards, discovering inappropriate content on e-book platforms, and hacking devices to bypass restrictions. Mr. Fullard asked the committee to consider how parents can receive upfront information and opt-out options regarding digital tools, what criteria and independent evidence justify adopting specific applications, and how screen-based learning is balanced against traditional instruction.

VI. CONSENT AGENDA

- a. Warrants
- b. June 3, 2026 Joint Meeting Minutes
- c. June 16, 2026 Joint Meeting Minutes
- d. June 23, 2026 Joint Meeting Minutes
- e. July 9, 2026 Climate & Culture Working Group Minutes
- f. July 10, 2026 Joint Meeting Minutes

Ms. Marano moved and Mr. Williams seconded the motion to approve the Consent Agenda minus Item B, the June 3rd minutes. The motion was unanimously approved.

After a brief discussion, Ms. Marano moved and Mr. Williams seconded the motion to approve the June 3, 2026, as amended. The motion was unanimously approved.

VII. CORRESPONDENCE

There was no correspondence since the last meeting.

VIII. DISCUSSION

A. Climate and Culture Working Group

The Climate and Culture Working Group reviewed feedback on the proposed framework from the prior meeting and will finalize the document ahead of formal review and adoption by the school committee. The group has been interviewing potential professional facilitators to lead upcoming discussions on climate, culture, and belonging. Following a final interview, the working group will evaluate the candidates and present a recommendation to the committee. Funding for external facilitators is allocated in a dedicated budget line item for professional development expenses.

B. District Technology Update

Dr. Hunter reported that the district is launching two parallel monthly committees in October to establish a systemic vision for technology. The first, the Instructional Technology Committee, led by Ms. Chin and composed of cross-district educators, administrators, building tech specialists, and librarians, will build upon a June 2026 survey completed by more than 150 educators. The second, the District Community Technology Committee, will serve as a multi-stakeholder feedback group comprising administrators, community members, two School Committee members, and high school students. Following post-COVID expansion, technology usage is being carefully vetted, categorized across instructional, organizational, and assessment functions, and streamlined. The district emphasizes a balanced approach to screen time: while high-stakes state testing such as MCAS, SAT, and ACT requires digital literacy and embedded tool mastery, core academic programs such as the K-5 English Learner literacy curriculum remain entirely paper-based.

A brief discussion was held regarding School Committee responsibilities, highlighting that beyond gathering community feedback, the committee retains direct oversight of high-level policy and budget decisions. Upcoming policy items include evaluating a bell-to-bell cell phone ban, establishing software procurement rigor, and continually updating the district's AI policy as technology evolves. School Committee members will submit their interest in the two

community committee seats prior to the October 7th meeting, and initial findings from both technology groups will be reported back to the board regularly.

C. Superintendent Goals

The committee discussed the Superintendent Goals and focused on closing the achievement gap, implementing UDL, and standardizing evaluation metrics across the district. Members adjusted the 2026–2027 district goals to reflect key focus areas and indicators without altering the underlying core language. To address persistent achievement gaps in math proficiency, such as the gap between overall 8th-grade proficiency (66%) and that of students with disabilities (22%) and low-income students (48%), Dr. Hunter stated that improvements must begin with Tier 1 core instruction through UDL, common practices, and differentiation, rather than relying solely on Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions.

Ms. Marano moved and Ms. Kelleher seconded the motion to approve the Superintendent Goals for 2026-2027 as presented. The motion passed unanimously.

D. School Committee Goals

The committee discussed the proposed 2026–2027 School Committee Goals across several key areas. Under Fiscal Stewardship and Contract Negotiations, members added language acknowledging upcoming collective bargaining across five distinct units, reaffirming the standard practice of maintaining four core goals while establishing ratified labor agreements as a primary objective. Regarding Climate and Culture, the committee agreed to receive periodic updates from the Director of DEIB without imposing unnecessary presentation burdens. During the discussion on Baseline Data and Metrics, members evaluated adding explicit requirements for subgroup baseline data, such as disaggregated achievement, belonging, and equity metrics. Given the complexity of K–12 data relative to higher-education or corporate dashboards, the committee elected not to include specific metric language in the goal text, delegating ground-level data frameworks and trends to the Climate and Culture Working Group instead. For Policy and Oversight, members agreed without edits to re-establish the Policy Subcommittee, revisit non-discrimination and harassment policies, and review updated technology policies. The committee adjusted the Superintendent Evaluation goal-establishment deadline from November to October 2026, establishing a mid-year check-in for January and a final evaluation for April 2027 so the sitting committee completes the evaluation process prior to member transitions.

Ms. Marano moved and Ms. Kelleher seconded the motion to approve the School Committee Goals as discussed. The motion passed unanimously.

E. Second Reading Policies

Dr. Hunter presented the second reading of the Protect Act Policy that updates and adopts the standardized format provided by the MASC. There were no substantive changes to the policy language itself, only structural and visual reformatting.

Ms. Marano moved and Mr. Williams seconded the motion to approve the Protect Act Policy as presented. The motion passed unanimously.

F. FY28 Budget Development Timeline

Mr. Conry presented the FY28 budget timeline for CPS and CCRSD. Key milestones begin in mid-November with the administration completing initial budget development, followed by a joint School Committee meeting on December 2nd to review the draft Capital Plan. Members may attend the Finance Committee Capital Planning Forums on December 8th and 10th as observers, leading into the presentation of the Superintendent's Recommended Operating and Capital Budgets on December 16th. In January, a quorum-posted Joint Capital Planning Forum is scheduled for January 11th, followed by a public budget hearing on January 13th to receive community feedback. Carlisle Finance Committee budget presentations are anticipated in late January following their September 22nd Select Board meeting. Finally, the School Committee is targeted to formally vote on and adopt the FY28 budgets during its February 3rd meeting.

G. Bond Anticipation Note for CCHS Access Road

Mr. Conry presented a Bond Anticipation Note (BAN) renewal for the CCHS regional access road constructed three years ago, noting that issuing a BAN rather than a long-term bond avoids significant issuance costs. The district secured a competitive interest rate of 3.75% from UniBank for Savings, reflecting the regional district's underlying credit rating.

Ms. Marano moved and Mr. Williams seconded the motion that the Concord-Carlisle Regional School Committee vote to approve the sale of the \$697,173.00, 3.75% general obligation bond anticipation notes, the notes of the district dated October 2nd, 2026, and payable October 1st, 2027, to Unibank for savings at par and accrued interest if any. The motion passed unanimously.

IX. ADJOURNMENT CCSC

Mr. Waterson adjourned the CCSC meeting at 7:55 PM.

X. DISCUSSION

A. Community Preservation Grant Re: Bruce Freeman Rail Trail

Landscape architect Josh Burgel presented design and development updates for the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail Connector ahead of the September 18 CPC grant deadline. The project will establish a safe, fully ADA-compliant, non-motorized pathway linking the CMS campus to the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail. Designed as an 8-foot-wide corridor with a 5-foot paved pervious asphalt trail and 1.5-foot gravel shoulders, the pathway accommodates emergency and ATV access. To navigate the 28-foot vertical drop between the upper school sidewalk and the lower fields, the trail utilizes a serpentine layout that maintains gentle slopes while preserving existing mature trees. Environmental mitigation features porous asphalt for stormwater management and a commitment to replace all removed tree caliper inches, with construction impacting only two surveyed trees.

The total estimated project cost is \$600,000, supported by \$110,000 in committed initial design funds and a pending CPC grant request for \$490,000 to \$500,000, resulting in zero direct impact on the school district budget. Long-term maintenance will be managed by existing school staff. Following the joint town-school CPC application submission on September 18, 2026, the project will undergo CPC review during the winter and proceed to a May 2027 Town Meeting vote. Upon funding availability on July 1, 2027, the project will move into competitive bidding and construction in the summer and fall of 2027, with target completion prior to winter asphalt plant shutdowns.

B. Alcott Playground

Alcott Elementary School Principal Naomi Krakow presented initial design concepts and plans for replacing the school's aging play structure ahead of the September 18th CPC grant submission deadline. Driven by maintenance concerns, safety closures, and input from a student committee, the school evaluated two ADA-compliant design options: a natural wood-timber Earthscape design estimated at \$600,000 to \$700,000 and a traditional high-structure Sky Tower design estimated at \$600,000 featuring a fully enclosed center tower. Both options prioritize full accessibility via rubberized pathways and are structured for a phased rollout, beginning with the core play structure in Phase 1, followed by future seating, shade, and field enhancement phases. To fund the project, the district is requesting \$500,000 from the Concord CPC, leveraging a secured \$25,000 state earmark obtained through Representative Carmine Gentile. The Alcott PTG has established a fundraising subcommittee to bridge the remaining financial gap prior to finalizing CAD schematics for the September 18th application.

XI. ADJOURNMENT CSC

Ms. Marano moved and Mr. Pisharody seconded the motion to adjourn the CSC meeting.

The CSC meeting was adjourned at 8:40 PM.

Respectfully submitted,
Barbara Gilmore

Approved: October 7, 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
CPC Community Preservation Committee
CPS Concord Public Schools
CSC Concord School Committee
DEIB Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging
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