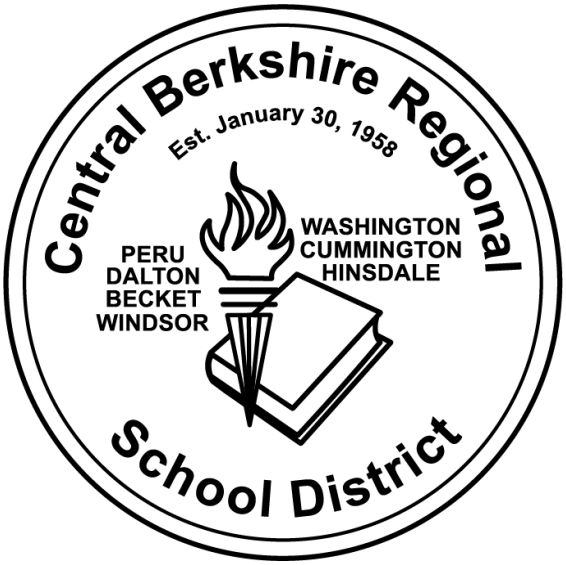
School Committee Handbook



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INTRODUCTION & MISSION STATEMENT

Purpose of the Handbook

This handbook serves as an operational guide for members of the Central Berkshire Regional School District (CBRSD) School Committee. It outlines the responsibilities, procedures, and legal frameworks governing regional school committee operations in Massachusetts.

District Mission, Vision, and Core Values

- **Mission Statement:** The Central Berkshire Regional School District will provide a high quality educational experience for all learners that leads to academic achievement and forms a foundation for success in 21st Century society.

- **Vision:** Central Berkshire Regional School District will provide an inclusive education that supports the academic and social and emotional knowledge and skills to be successful community members in a pluralistic society.

- **Core Values:**
    - We value resiliency and persistence in problem solving
    - We value courageous and compassionate collaboration
    - We value curiosity and investment in learning
    - We value ethical and community-minded leadership
    - We value innovation and future-ready citizenship

2023-2028 District Strategic Plan

SCHOOL COMMITTEE ORGANIZATION & OPERATIONAL PROTOCOLS

Legal Authority & Statutory Role

The CBRSD School Committee derives its authority from Massachusetts General Laws (M.G.L. c. 71), state regulations, and the CBRSD Regional Agreement. The Committee acts as a legislative and policy-making body responsible for:

- Establishing educational goals and policies for the district.
- Employing, supporting, and evaluating the Superintendent of Schools (M.G.L. c. 71, § 59).
- Reviewing and approving the annual operating and capital budgets for member towns.

Meeting Schedules & Location

- **Regular Meetings:** Held on Thursdays at 7:00 PM posted on the calendar.

All regular meetings of the School Committee shall be held at the place established by the Committee with notice as provided in Section 9. Regular meetings of the School Committee shall begin at 7:00 p.m. In January, February and March two regular meetings per month shall be held on the second and fourth Thursdays. In the months of May through October one regular meeting per month shall be held on the fourth Thursday of the month. In April, November and December one regular meeting per month shall be held on the second Thursday of the month.

- **Location:** Rotating between all schools in the district.
- **Timing:** Standard protocol dictates that extending past 10:00 PM require a specific vote of the Committee to proceed(Policy BEAA).

Open Meeting Law Compliance

All meetings of the School Committee and its subcommittees adhere strictly to the Massachusetts Open Meeting Law (M.G.L. c. 30A, §§ 18-25).

- **Meeting Notices:** Agendas must be posted at least 48 business hours prior to the meeting time.
- **Executive Session (Policy BEC):** Executive sessions are conducted only for statutory purposes permitted under M.G.L. c. 30A, § 21.

Parliamentary Procedure & Conduct

- Meetings follow *Robert's Rules of Order* unless superseded by local policy or committee bylaws.
- Members practice recusal when personal or financial conflicts of interest arise, in accordance with state ethics laws.

Roles and Responsibilities

Entity / Position	Primary Governance Responsibilities
School Committee (As a Whole)	Policy development, budget approval, Superintendent evaluation, and regional agreement compliance.
Committee Chair	Presides over meetings, develops agendas in consultation with the Superintendent and Vice Chair, configures subcommittees, and serves as official spokesperson.
Committee Vice-Chair	Assumes duties of the Chair in their absence and assists in governance functions.
Superintendent of Schools	Serves as Chief Executive Officer, manages day-to-day district operations, hires and manages staff, and implements Committee policies. Serves as the secretary of the School Committee.
Secretary	Keeps a permanent record book, in which all its votes, orders and proceedings shall be recorded. Sends out notices of all regular and special meetings of the Committee. Keeps the minutes of all meetings and shall be the custodian of the Regional Seal, all records, and Treasurer's bond. Prepares such reports as may be required by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.
Clerk	The clerk will keep or cause to be kept an accurate journal of all Committee meetings; will comply with state law and Committee policy regarding notification of meetings; and will render such reports as may be required by the state or the town.

Entity / Position	Primary Governance Responsibilities
Treasurer	Receive all monies paid to the Regional School Committee in accordance with Massachusetts General Laws. Keep financial records and accounts in accordance with state regulations. Act as paymaster, as directed by the School Committee. Prepare and submit bills to member towns. Post a bond with the Secretary of the Committee. Be responsible to the Committee.
Individual Committee Members	Participate in deliberations, vote on official business, serve on assigned subcommittees, and uphold ethical standards. Liaise between the town governments, community members, and the School District. (Note: Individual members hold no legal authority outside official meetings).

School Committee Professional Development

- The School Committee is committed to the principles of continuous improvement and modeling life-long learning. All members are encouraged to utilize the services and resources provided by the Massachusetts Association of School Committees (MASC), the National School Board Association (NSBA), and the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE). Opportunities for professional development include:
    - MASC Annual Conference in November
    - Miscellaneous MASC workshops and classes
    - NSBA Advocacy Institute programs
    - NSBA Annual Conference
- Members will be reimbursed for reasonable costs incurred attending conferences and workshops according to. Click here for the form.

School Committee Partnerships

The School Committee collectively and as individual members will work collegially and collaboratively with the Superintendent, district staff and community members, member town boards and committees and others. We will be respectful, trustworthy and transparent in all of our communication and partnerships.

Representative Opportunities

- Individual members of the school committee may have the opportunity to represent the committee and the district at various functions, including the following:
    - MASC Day on the Hill
    - Wahconah Regional High School graduation
    - Member town meetings
    - School council meetings
    - Liaison opportunities to each school
    - Massachusetts or Federal Legislature
    - Other town/school functions that you would not otherwise attend
- Unless specifically designated by a vote of the committee, individual members may not speak on behalf of the committee.

Being an Effective School Committee Member

As a committee member, there are eight key areas of commitment as developed by the NSBA and published in “Key Work of School Boards”:

- **Vision:** Establishing a clear vision of student achievement as the top priority of the school board, staff, and community
- **Standards:** Setting clear standards for student performance
- **Assessment:** Establishing an assessment process that measures success at regular intervals
- **Accountability:** Establishing a strong accountability process
- **Alignment:** Aligning resources to focus on students meeting the standards
- **Climate:** Creating a positive climate for student success
- **Collaborative Relationships:** Building collaborative relationships with political and business leaders, with a focus on developing a consensus for student success as a top community priority
- **Continuous Improvement:** Committing to continuous improvement for student achievement

School committees have certain legal, fiduciary and collegial responsibilities. Certain skills and characteristics are required to be present in effective school committees and committee members:

- **Be prepared for the meeting.** Do your homework, review the agenda in advance, and come prepared to the meeting with questions
- **Focus on the students.** Every decision that is made and every action that is taken must serve the best interest of the students
- **Respect your fellow members.** State your opinions, agreements, and disagreements respectfully
- **Represent the community.** Your responsibility is to present the community as a whole
- **Monitor, do not manage.** Your job is to oversee the strategic direction of the entire district, not to manage its operations.

SUBCOMMITTEES & ADVISORY BODIES

Subcommittees are established by the School Committee to review targeted area operations and present recommendations to the full body. All subcommittee meetings are subject to Open Meeting Law rules. It is general practice for subcommittee meetings not to extend beyond two hours without a vote of the subcommittee to continue. The subcommittees and their duties and responsibilities shall be voted on at the annual reorganization meeting of the full School Committee.

Curriculum Subcommittee

- Review student performance data on standardized tests
- Review and make recommendations to curriculum based upon the curriculum council
- Review and make recommendations on significant changes to extracurricular programs
- Review and make recommendations on school improvement plans and student handbooks
- Annually review the district Technology Plan to ensure that technology and infrastructure support educational program and curriculum needs and administrative and financial needs; make recommendations to the School Committee for improvements or upgrades to satisfy such needs

Finance Subcommittee

- Recommend annual operating and capital budgets and monitor budget performance, including revenues, expenditures, and budget transfers throughout the fiscal year.
- Review projected revenues, including state and federal funding, grants, revolving accounts, fees, and other significant revenue sources.
- Review the annual independent financial audit, internal controls, financial policies, and management recommendations, and recommend appropriate actions to the School Committee.
- Review and make recommendations regarding long-term financial planning, including multi-year budget projections, capital needs, debt obligations, and significant financial commitments.
- Work with town officials and town finance departments semiannually during the budget process.
- Review and recommend action on capital, facilities, maintenance, major equipment, and technology projects, including their financial and long-term operating implications.
- Review the financial impact of proposed staffing and other operational changes that would affect the adopted budget and make recommendations to the School Committee.

Personnel Subcommittee

- Make recommendations for the makeup of collective bargaining teams to represent the School Committee in negotiations with unions, individual contract negotiations, and non-represented personnel. Teams will be dissolved upon ratification of the contract.
- Review and make recommendations to the full committee on contract negotiations, including strategies and goals.
- Recommend compensation for superintendent and other non-represented personnel
- Review and make recommendations pertaining to contracts for non-represented personnel
- Design, organize, and implement annual evaluation of superintendent
- Make recommendations on hiring of legal counsel, and review matters involving legal counsel that are within the purview of the School Committee.

Policy Subcommittee

- Recommend new policies and revisions to policies, bylaws, and the regional agreement
- Address issues involving transportation services
- Design, organize and implement the annual self-evaluation of the School Committee
- Annually review mission/vision statements
- Annually review District Strategic Plan
- Review and update, as necessary, Acceptable Use Policy

Safety & Wellness Subcommittee

- Meet with Wellness Advisory Committee Quarterly
- Review Quarterly Bullying Data
- Review Health & Wellness Impact and Trends Bi-Yearly
- Review Wayfinder Data Bi-Yearly
- Emergency Review (after drills take place) Annually
- Review Cyber Security Data (keeping students safe) Annually

Ad hoc & Advisory Committees

- **Wahconah Building Project:**

  Review the construction of the new high school and provide feedback as a member representing the interests of the towns and the greater CBRSD community

ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES OF A SCHOOL COMMITTEE

Policy Development & Administration

Policy Adoption Process

The Committee follows a structured process for policy formulation and adoption:

1. **First Reading:** Presentation of proposed policy at a regular meeting for initial discussion.
2. **Review & Revision:** Refinement by the Policy Subcommittee based on member and administrative feedback.
3. **Second Reading & Adoption:** Formal vote by the full Committee at a subsequent meeting.

Administration in Policy Absence (Policy CHD)

In emergency situations where immediate administrative action is required and no specific policy exists, the Superintendent is authorized to act and must report the circumstances and action taken to the Committee promptly.

Superintendent Support & Evaluation

Annual Evaluation Cycle (Policy CBI / MASC Guidelines)

The Committee evaluates the Superintendent annually using the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) rubric and MASC recommendations.

- **Goal Setting (Fall):** Joint establishment of professional practice, student learning, and district improvement goals.
- **Mid-Cycle Progress Report (Winter):** Review of preliminary progress toward goals.
- **End-of-Cycle Summative Evaluation (Spring/Summer):** Individual ratings compiled into a composite public evaluation document.

School Committee Self Evaluation

In order to be a more effective and efficient organization, the School Committee will annually perform a self-evaluation using the MASC self-evaluation tool and consider the progress made on annual goals. The evaluation will determine what is being done optimally and what needs improvement, which are reviewed and presented by the policy subcommittee.

- **Self-Evaluation Tool:** Linked Here
- **Self-Evaluation Review & Reporting:** The policy subcommittee reviews the results of this self-evaluation, compiles that information into a comprehensive report which is then

presented to the full Committee.

Negotiations

Superintendent's Contract

The superintendent is hired by the School Committee, who is responsible for negotiating and approving an employment contract between the school department and the Superintendent. Under the open meeting law, such negotiations and preparations for negotiations are permitted to take place in executive session, provided that the final vote of approval by the School Committee is done in open session.

Generally, the Superintendent will initiate contract renewal negotiations in writing to the chairperson of the committee. Upon receipt of such notification, the chairperson will work with the Superintendent to determine a suitable timeline for both parties, and will schedule an executive session for the School Committee to discuss strategy with respect to the impending negotiations. All members of the Committee will participate in negotiations, however the chairperson and vice-chairperson should be considered to be the primary negotiators. Members shall discuss negotiation norms and procedures prior to actual negotiations to ensure that all members are aware of expectations. As with all executive sessions, members should respect the confidential nature of the negotiations.

Collective Bargaining

Employees of the Central Berkshire Regional School District are represented by several different labor unions:

- Central Berkshire Education Association
    - Teachers
    - Paraprofessionals
    - Administrative Assistants
- AFSCME Local 204, Council 93, AFSCME (AFL-CIO) (Custodians)
- AFSCME Local 204, Council 93, AFSCME (AFL-CIO) (Food Services)

Negotiations are an opportunity for management and labor to meet formally at the start of a contract cycle to discuss any work concerns. Concluding negotiations fairly and swiftly is always preferable for both management and labor. The role of the school committee under MGL Chapter 150E is to be the legal representative of management. Union negotiations are arguably one of the most important roles of the school committee.

The chairperson should select representative agents, as recommended by the Personnel Subcommittee, who are responsible for understanding the School Committee's parameters and for keeping the full Committee informed of developments, when appropriate. There should never be any surprises between the agents and the full Committee. Historically, union negotiations are led by the Superintendent with School Committee members and other district administrators serving on the negotiating team.

Upon receipt of notification from each labor union, the chairperson will place an executive session on the agenda of a regular School Committee meeting to discuss parameters and strategy with respect to the impending negotiations. The negotiating team will then meet with

representatives from the labor union to negotiate the contract. Though the timeline is not defined by law, the School Committee generally will vote to approve the final contract following successful ratification from the union's membership.

The remainder of district employees have individual contracts or are employed at will.

Hiring

The School Committee is responsible for hiring the following personnel:

- Superintendent
- School Business Administrator
- Director of Student Services
- District Legal Counsel

It should be noted that with the exception of the Superintendent, the Committee does not have the authority to decide whether or not to renew the contracts of these individuals – once they are hired, they are considered district employees who report to the Superintendent. The School Committee does approve their salaries as recommended by the Finance Subcommittee.

Financial Governance & Budgetary Oversight

Fiscal Management Goals

As the steward of local, state, and federal funds allocated for use in public education, the Committee will use these funds wisely in pursuit of the district's goals.

The quantity and quality of the district's educational programs are dependent on the effective, efficient management of allocated funds. Achievement of the district's purposes can best be achieved through excellent fiscal management.

It is imperative that the educational program be held of paramount importance. Decisions made due to resource limitations must center on the educational goals of the district.

This prioritization will be incorporated into all aspects of district management and Committee decision making.

Regarding the district's fiscal management, it is the Committee's intent:

1. To allocate public funds equitably and responsibly in support of the district's educational goals and priorities.
2. To engage in thorough advance planning, with appropriate staff and community involvement, in developing and reviewing annual budgets.
3. To advocate for adequate levels of funding to provide a high-quality education for all students.
4. To support sound and effective practices for budget development, financial management, and expenditure oversight.
5. To maintain appropriate financial oversight and accountability, including review of financial policies, internal controls, audits, and compliance with applicable federal, state, and local laws, regulations, appropriations, and School Committee policies.
6. To engage in responsible long-term financial planning, including consideration of multi-year budget projections, capital needs, debt obligations, and other significant financial commitments.
7. To provide timely, accurate, and appropriate financial information to the School Committee and the community.

Budget Control & Line-Item Transfers

While the Superintendent and Business Manager direct everyday operations, line-item transfers across appropriation accounts require review and approval by the School Committee in accordance with policy guidelines.

Annual Budget Development

The budget development process follows Section IX of the CBRSD Regional Agreement and applicable M.G.L. provisions. The timeline includes:

September:

The Superintendent develops the budget calendar and presents it to the School Committee for review and approval.

The Finance Subcommittee develops budget guidelines and instructions and presents them to the School Committee for review and approval.

January:

The Budget Book, including the Superintendent's Initial Budget, is compiled, and distributed at the Superintendent's Initial Budget presentation to the School Committee

The Superintendent's Initial Budget is presented to the School Committee.

January & February:

The Finance Subcommittee deliberates the Superintendent's Initial Budget.

The administration modifies and adjusts the budget to reflect these deliberations.

February

The Superintendent submits the Tentative Operating and Capital Budgets to the Finance Subcommittee. The Finance Subcommittee deliberates and votes to recommend School Committee adoption.

The School Committee deliberates and adopts the Tentative Operating and Capital Budgets. School Committee adoption must be no later than March 1 and no less than 75 days before the first Annual Town Meeting (CBRSD Agreement Section IX paragraph B). A majority vote of the School Committee is required for the Tentative Operating and Capital Budget adoption.

March

The Finance Subcommittee deliberates concerns raised during Tentative Operating Budget adoption

The Superintendent submits the Final Operating and Capital Budgets to the Finance Subcommittee. The Finance Subcommittee deliberates the submittal and votes to recommend School Committee adoption.

School Committee conducts the Public Hearing

The School Committee reviews and adopts the Final Operating and Capital Budgets. School Committee adoption must be no later than March 31 and no less than 45 days before the first Annual Town Meeting. (CBRSD Agreement Section IX, paragraph C)

May & June

Member towns approve the budget

COMMUNICATION

Public Comment Protocols

A designated period for public comment is provided at regular meetings. Speakers must adhere to public participation guidelines regarding time limits and decorum. Members of the School Committee can participate in the public comment period of Subcommittee meetings that they are not assigned to, but they may not participate in discussion or deliberation unless called upon by the Chair. (Policy BEDH)

Media & External Communications

The Committee Chair (or designee) serves as the official spokesperson for the School Committee regarding policy positions and Committee decisions. Individual members speaking publicly must clarify that they speak as individual citizens rather than on behalf of the entire body. If a School Committee member is contacted by the media, it is courtesy to inform the Chair and the Superintendent.

Electronic Communications

School Committee members shall use digital resources in a responsible, efficient, ethical, and legal manner in accordance with the mission of the district. Members are responsible for modeling responsible digital citizenship, and thus all use must comply with the policies and procedures of the Central Berkshire Regional School District.

All members must agree to and sign an appropriate digital use form prior to being granted access to district digital resources. Members are required to use their district-issued accounts, not personal accounts, for all communication when conducting School Committee business. Member communication is a matter of public record. This extends to member use of social media and personal electronic communications when conducting district business.

Any online activities that would not be considered appropriate in the classroom should not be conducted online. High standards of appropriate online communication and conduct must be maintained. One-to-one interactions with students must be avoided.

How to Respond to Constituent Complaints

The school committee's policy with regard to the handling of complaints from the public is clearly defined in policy KE. While members of the community, including parents and students

have the right to contact elected officials as unambiguously stated in both the state and federal constitutions, school committee members often lack the authority to resolve problems brought to their attention.

Parents may raise concerns about the schools to members of the committee. These concerns may relate to individual school department personnel who are under the authority of the superintendent or the principal.

Committee members are strongly encouraged to refer parents to the appropriate administrative authority, starting with the staff member closest to the concern. For example, if a parent contacts a committee member with a concern about a teacher, the member should encourage the parent to discuss the situation with the teacher. If they already have, the member should refer them to the principal. If they have already spoken with the principal, the member should refer them to the Superintendent. In any event, the member should notify the Superintendent of the nature of the complaint.

NEW MEMBER ORIENTATION

Upon election to the committee, attend and participate in the new member orientation meeting to understand your roles and responsibilities as well as how the group functions within the district.

Each new member shall be given or provided access to the following materials:

- A copy of the School Committee policy manual including Norms and Protocols
- A copy of the Open Meeting Law, as required by law, including review of training materials and review of OML determinations for the body from the last five years.
- A copy of the Ethics/Conflict of Interest Regulations
- A copy of the district's budget
- Collective bargaining agreements and contracts
- Student and staff handbooks
- Regional Agreement

The Chair and/or Superintendent shall also clarify policy:

- Arranging visits to schools or administrative offices
- Requesting information regarding school district operations
- Responding to community requests/complaints concerning staff or programs
- Handling confidential information
- Budget Development Process

Each new member will be required to:

- Attend a “Charting the Course” session by MASC
    - Receive Open Meeting Law training
- Complete State Ethics training and renew such training biannually

Link the presentation

USEFUL RESOURCES

Massachusetts Association of School Committees (MASC)

District Glossary of Terms

State Ethics Commission

Relevant MA General Law

- CH 15 - Department of Elementary and Secondary Education
- CH 15D - Department of Early Education and Care
- CH 30A - Open Meeting Law
- CH 41 - Officers and Employees of Cities, Towns, and Districts
- CH 60 - Scholarship Funds
- CH 70 - School funds and State Aid for Public Schools
- CH 70B - School Building Authority
- CH 71 - Public Schools
- CH 71A - English Language Education in Public Schools
- CH 71B - Children with Special Needs
- CH 74- Vocational Education
- CH 150E - Labor Relations Public Employees