

# Leicester School Committee



# MEMBER HANDBOOK

Adopted: 2/10/2015

*The Leicester School Committee Member Handbook was adopted by the Leicester School Committee on February 10, 2015. Members of the School Committee are: Scott Francis, Chair; Tyler Keenan, Vice Chair; Deborah LaBombard, Secretary; Paul McCarthy, and Grover Adams. The school committee would like to thank the Framingham School Committee, whose member handbook served as a template for this handbook.*

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## **Introduction**

Thank you for serving on the Leicester School Committee! Your commitment to serve the children of Leicester is one of the most important responsibilities you can undertake.

In your role as a school committee member, you will work with the other members of the committee on a myriad of complex issues including setting goals and policy, deciding the budget, negotiating contracts, managing the superintendent, and advocating at the local, state, and federal levels for our students. You are now a leader whose words and decisions will have a lasting effect on our Leicester community. Central to your success as a member of the committee is your ability to create and maintain effective working relationships with your fellow committee members, superintendent, other administrators and school staff, municipal leaders and staff, parents, students, and the community at large.

It is expected that you will share a commitment with the other committee members to provide an exceptional educational experience for all students, a willingness to become well-versed in public education and the Leicester schools, and a sincere desire to be a part of a high-functioning governing body that takes the responsibilities of public service seriously.

You are expected to work with the other committee members as part of a unified team despite any differences in experience, education, political affiliation, or background. We welcome your commitment and contributions.

## **Mission**

Challenging students to develop skills, knowledge, and character to become contributing citizens

## **Vision**

Recognized by the community as its greatest asset, the Leicester Schools engage every child in rigorous and student-centered learning in a safe and technology-rich environment.

## School Committee Operating Protocols

- 1) Members will attend all meetings prepared not simply to vote on agenda items, but to discuss and offer input on items of interest. Preparation includes reading all materials in advance, preparing specific questions to pose, and letting the superintendent know of any background you may be asking for at the meeting.
- 2) If a member is unable to attend a regularly scheduled meeting of the full committee, he or she will notify the chairperson of the school committee. If a member is unable to attend a sub-committee meeting, he or she will notify either the superintendent or the other member of the sub-committee.
- 3) When determining the agenda for regularly scheduled meetings of the school committee:
  - The chair and superintendent shall meet immediately after reorganization to develop an outline of agenda topics by meeting.
  - Each month, committee members shall suggest additional agenda items to add to the next month's meeting agenda.
  - The superintendent shall draft the agenda based upon additional district needs, the input provided at the last meeting, and any other items suggested by the chair.
  - Ideally, the chairperson and superintendent will meet to finalize the agenda. Alternatively, the chairperson shall approve the drafted agenda at least one week prior to the scheduled meeting,
  - The superintendent will be responsible for compiling supporting materials for agenda items and posting the agenda in accordance with the open meeting law
- 4) "No surprises rule:" In accordance with the Open Meeting Law, members will refrain from bringing up topics that are not on the agenda or to ask for information on items that may require research (unless the member provides some advance notice to the superintendent of the need for this information). Members should ask for items to be placed on the agenda rather than unexpectedly bringing them during meetings.
- 5) Members will check district email at least once every other day and respond to queries (for such things as availability for meetings) in a timely manner.
- 6) Members will not speak on behalf of the school committee to outside parties, unless they are reporting on actions taken by the school committee or have been specifically authorized by the school committee to do so.
- 7) Individual school committee members should recognize that authority rests only with the majority of the school committee, and not with individual members.
- 8) The school committee will meet at least once per quarter (in August, November, February, and May) in a workshop format to evaluate its adherence to these protocols, as well as to discuss any other topics that may be conducive to a workshop setting.
- 9) Members will be cognizant of the time constraints of the tasks they take on and will complete such tasks within the timeline determined by the committee.

## **New Member Orientation**

A new member is to be afforded the committee's and staff's fullest measures of courtesy and cooperation. Committee and staff shall make every effort to assist the new member to become fully informed about the school committee's functions, policies, and procedures.

Upon election or appointment (where permitted by law), the new member must be sworn in by the Town Clerk. The Town Clerk will provide information on the online ethics course which must be completed within two weeks. Upon completion, a receipt must be presented to the Town Clerk and a copy sent to the District office.

New members will meet with the superintendent and school committee chairperson after taking office for the primary purpose of introducing the new member to his or her responsibilities, the committee's method of operating, and to the district's policies and issues.

Each new member is required to complete at least eight hours of orientation training within one year of joining the committee, which shall include a review of school finance, the open meeting law, public records law, conflict of interest law, and other pertinent information. The Massachusetts Association of School Committees offers a course entitled "Charting the Course," which will fulfill this requirement. Alternatively, new members can fulfill the requirement at the annual joint MASC/MASS conference each year.

Upon taking office, each new member will be given access to:

- The school committee policy manual (<http://lpspolicies.wikispaces.com/home>)
- This handbook
- The open meeting law
- Conflict of interest regulations
- The district's annual budget
- Collective bargaining agreements
- The superintendent's contract
- Other relevant materials at the discretion of the chairperson or superintendent

The superintendent will also clarify policies related to:

- 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

At each new member's first official meeting, the chairperson will assign a more senior member to serve as the new member's mentor. During the first year, a mentor will answer questions about the member's new role. Mentors will also check in with their mentees from time to time to ensure that all members are finding fulfillment in their role.

## Organization of the Committee

### Chairperson

The chair of the school committee has the same powers as any other member of the committee to vote upon all measures coming before it, to offer resolutions, and to discuss questions. Contrary to Roberts' Rules of Order, under which the school committee normally operates, the chairperson will not be required to relinquish the gavel should he/she wish to express an opinion. The chairperson will perform those duties that are consistent with his or her office and those required by law, state regulations, and this committee. In carrying out these responsibilities, the chair will:

- Sign the instruments, acts, and orders necessary to carry out state requirements at the will of the committee;
- Develop school committee agendas with the superintendent;
- Confer with the superintendent on crucial matters that may occur between committee meetings;
- Appoint subcommittees established by the committee;
- Call special/emergency meetings of the committee, as necessary;
- Be the public spokesperson for the committee, except when the chair specifically delegates this responsibility to others; and
- Be responsible for the orderly conduct of all committee meetings.

As presiding officer at all meetings of the committee, the chair will:

- Call the meeting to order at the appointed time;
- Announce the business to come before the committee in its proper order;
- Enforce the committee's policies relating to the order of business, public participation at meetings, and the conduct of meetings;
- Explain the impact of a motion if it is unclear to members;
- Restrict discussion to the question when a motion is before the committee;
- Answer parliamentary inquiries; and
- Put motions to a vote, stating clearly the vote and result.

### Vice Chairperson

The vice chair of the school committee will act in the absence of the chairperson as the presiding officer of the committee and will perform other duties as may be delegated or assigned to him/her.

### Secretary

The secretary will keep an accurate journal of all school 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. Unless clearly indicated otherwise, it shall be assumed that the secretary will delegate such responsibilities to the superintendent's executive secretary. Additionally, the secretary shall serve as presiding officer of the school committee in the event that both the chairperson and vice chairperson are absent, provided a quorum is present.

## Professional Development

The school committee is committed to the principles of continuous improvement and ongoing education. 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 Hyannis during 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, provided that they follow the same process established for other district employees to obtain reimbursement and that funds have been budgeted for such purposes. Any event where the cost per member is expected to be greater than \$1000 must be approved by the school committee. In the event that a member is unable to attend an event that has already been paid for, the member will be responsible for those costs, provided that an alternate arrangement cannot be made.

## 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
- Leicester High School graduation
- 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 except to offer congratulations or thanks to an individual or organization.

## Being an Effective 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.

## Budget

The town budget cycle begins with a joint meeting between the school committee, board of selectmen, and finance advisory board to discuss budget priorities, parameters, and goals. The school committee then provides the superintendent with preliminary budget direction, centrally focused on the district's strategic plan.

The superintendent works with the building principals to develop a draft budget based on the needs of the schools. Principals must justify all budget requests.

In January, budget workshops are held to educate the committee and the community on district needs and to get input regarding a preliminary budget proposal. At this point, the budget is not finalized and members may contribute comments and suggestions.

In February, the school committee will vote on the preliminary budget to be presented to the finance advisory board. At this point, the superintendent and members of the school committee will present the proposed budget to both the board of selectmen as well as the finance advisory board, before holding a public hearing on the budget at its March meeting. After the March meeting, the budget proposal is official and will be voted on at the annual town meeting in May.



## **Superintendent Evaluation**

One of the most important responsibilities of the school committee is to evaluate the superintendent, which, by law, is a very public process. The school committee uses the BESE approved evaluation tool and process for superintendent evaluation.

The evaluation process begins in August, when the school committee meets in a workshop setting to discuss the superintendent's goals for the year. The superintendent will generally present a set of proposed goals, which the committee can discuss and modify. The goals that are ultimately voted upon at the September meeting should be mutually agreeable to both the school committee and the superintendent.

Throughout the year, the superintendent will maintain portfolio of evidence, which may be electronic, toward the accomplishment of his/her goals. Other forms of evidence include but are not limited to:

- Reports and research prepared by the superintendent for committee review
- Involvement in the collective bargaining process
- Fulfillment of professional duties
- Relationship with municipal officials
- Interaction with the public

Committee members are cautioned against using hearsay and gossip as evidence of performance.

In January of each year, the superintendent will present a mid-year summary of his/her progress towards his/her goals. Each committee member will then prepare a mid-year evaluation report, and submit said report to the chairperson (or designee) who shall compile the individual reports into a summative report. This summative report, along with each individual report, shall be forwarded to the superintendent and will provide guidance in areas that the superintendent should improve. Members should also bear in mind that under the public records law, all evaluation reports are public documents.

In May of each year, the superintendent will give a final presentation on the status of his/her goals. Using this data, as well as data from the superintendent's portfolio and other evidence as listed above, members will complete final evaluation reports and submit them to the chairperson. The chairperson, or a designee, will compile all reports into a final summative evaluation, which will be signed by the chairperson and placed in the superintendent's personnel file. The final summative evaluation will be voted on by the school committee at its June meeting, and in no event will be later than the annual town election held in June. At this time, the committee will also publicly discuss the results of the evaluation and the rationale behind the results.

## **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 Leicester School Department are represented by four different labor unions:

- Educational Association of Leicester (Teachers)
- Government Employees' Union Local 2 (Custodians)
- Government Employees' Union Local 4 (Food Services)
- Massachusetts Nurses' Association (Nurses)

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.

At most, two committee members should be on the negotiating team to avoid having a quorum. The chairperson should select representative agents 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.

By law, the Leicester Town Administrator and/or his/her designee, and each school committee member is allowed a vote on all district contracts.

The remainder of district employees either have individual contracts or are governed by the terms of employment for non-union, hourly employees are articulated in policy GBD-A – Policy for Wages, Benefits, and Terms of Employment for Non-Union, Hourly Employees.

## School Committee 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 considering the progress made on annual goals and present the results at its regularly scheduled meeting in June. In addition, the school committee will be evaluated by the superintendent. The evaluation will determine what is being done optimally and what needs improvement.

## Hiring Responsibilities

The school committee is responsible for appointing the following personnel:

- Superintendent
- School Business Administrator
- Administrator of Special Education
- School Nurses
- 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.

## Subcommittees and Liaisons

The school committee does not have any standing committees, but rather operates on a “committee of the whole” structure. Each month, the school committee meets in a workshop setting to discuss district finances, pending district policies, and other topics of interest. These meetings are posted and open to the public but are generally not televised or filmed. The chairperson, in conjunction with the superintendent, will set the agenda of these meetings as he/she would any other regularly scheduled business meeting.

Ad-hoc committees may be formed from time to time to perform certain tasks, study a particular issue, or make a specific recommendation. Examples of such committees include search committees for any of the positions over which the school committee has hiring authority, committees to work on a specific goal of the school committee, and committees formed for the purposes of collective bargaining.

In addition to serving on ad-hoc subcommittees, members will also serve as liaisons to schools and outside groups. The following liaisons are appointed by the chairperson at the committee’s reorganization meeting each year:

**Legislative Liaison:** The school committee’s legislative liaison stays abreast of all legislation which may have an impact, whether positive or negative, on the school district. The liaison advocates on behalf of the committee (when appropriate) to Leicester’s legislative delegation, and testifies on behalf of the committee in support or opposition to legislation before various House, Senate, and Joint legislative committees. Prior to January of every odd-numbered year, the liaison assists with the drafting of bills that would benefit the school district to be filed by

Leicester's legislative delegation. When possible, the liaison represents the district at the annual MASC Day on the Hill.

**MASC Delegate:** The MASC delegate is the school committee's elected representative at MASC's annual business meeting. As the legislative liaison is likely the member with the most knowledge of state-wide educational issues, strong consideration should be given to electing the legislative liaison as the committee's MASC delegate.

**Wellness Committee Liaison:** The Wellness Committee Liaison reports to the committee the activities of the district wellness team and provides recommendations to the committee on policies that improve student wellness across the district.

**Facilities Capital Committee Liaison:** The Facilities Capital Committee Liaison attends meetings of the facilities capital committee, reports on the activities of the committee to the school committee, and provides recommendations to the committee with regard to district facilities.

**Parks and Recreation Committee Liaison:** This liaison attends meetings of the Leicester Parks and Recreation Committee and reports to the committee on any actions that may have an impact on the school department.

**School Liaisons (one committee member per school):** School liaisons are expected to be the school principal's point of contact on the school committee. Additionally, members are expected to attend the various events held at each school on a regular basis, making sure to give appropriate notice to the school principals. Recognizing that school committee members may not serve on school councils, members may periodically attend public school council meetings as members of the public.

**Selectmen/Finance Advisory Liaison:** A member of the committee who is not a liaison to a school shall serve as liaison to the Leicester Board of Selectmen and Finance Advisory Board. The liaison should periodically review agendas for the two boards and attend any meetings that may have implications for the school department. The liaison should also notify members of both boards of their position as liaison, to give the boards a point of contact on the school committee.

## **School Committee Meetings**

### Schedule of Meetings

Regular meetings are usually scheduled for the second Tuesday of every month from September through June. Meetings normally commence at 6:30pm. If the second Tuesday falls during a vacation week, the meeting will be scheduled by mutual agreement of the committee. School committee meetings will not take place at the same time as a town meeting, and will not take place on the day of an election.

Executive sessions will generally take place following regularly scheduled meetings, though they may take place prior to the meeting if necessary. Workshop meetings will take place once per month, on a schedule that is mutually agreeable to the committee.

## Agenda Format

Every school committee meeting has an agenda that:

- Serves as the steering mechanism for each meeting
- Enables logical organization and preparation for each meeting
- Informs committee members of the items and issues to be discussed
- Provides guidelines necessary for the conduct of the meeting in an efficient, well-organized, and effective manner
- Is kept on file, as per law, and can be cited as the record of what transpired
- Serves as the basis for the preparation of the minutes
- Allows the superintendent to assure that items and matters to be reported and acted upon will be brought to the committee's attention

The following is an outline of the agenda:

- Call to Order
- Showcase
- Public Comment Period
- Approval of minutes
- Report of the School Committee chairperson
- Superintendent's Report
- Other reports from committees/liaisons
- Readings of policies
- Finance Items
- Business Items
- Items for future agendas
- Executive session (if necessary)
- Adjournment

The school committee chair and superintendent work together to develop the agenda for each school committee meeting. The number of items on the agenda needs to be considered as it may adversely affect the length of the meeting. Ideally, school committee agendas are designed so that the meeting is dedicated to focused, informed discussion on student achievement, progress towards the educational goals, and priorities of our district. Meeting agendas, along with the necessary supporting documents and materials, are generally distributed to school committee members via district e-mail by the Thursday prior to the meeting.

## Reorganization Meeting

At the first meeting following the town's annual election, the meeting will be called to order by the superintendent. The first item on the agenda will be to elect from its membership a chair, vice chair, and secretary, all of whom will hold their respective offices for a term of one year or until a successor is elected. Once officers are elected, the newly-elected chairperson will take control of the meeting.

## Executive Sessions

All meetings of the school committee are open to the public and media. However, the committee has the right to convene in a closed executive session for one of the ten purposes delineated by law. These ten purposes are:

- 1.) The reputation, character, physical condition or mental health, rather than the professional competence, of a single individual, or the discipline or dismissal, including the hearing of charges against, a member of the committee, a school department employee or student, or other individual. The individual has certain rights enumerated in the law including requiring the committee to hold an open session should the individual so request.
- 2.) Strategy with respect to non-union negotiations or to conduct collective bargaining sessions with non-union personnel.
- 3.) Strategy with respect to collective bargaining or litigation, if an open meeting might have a detrimental effect on the committee's bargaining position. Collective bargaining negotiations may also be conducted in executive session if a quorum of the committee is present.
- 4.) The deployment of security personnel or devices.
- 5.) Allegations of criminal misconduct or to discuss the filing of criminal complaints.
- 6.) Transactions of real estate, if an open meeting might be detrimental to the negotiating position of the committee or another party.
- 7.) To comply with the provisions of any general or specific law of federal grant-in-aid requirements.
- 8.) To consider and interview applicants for employment by a preliminary screening committee (The only position that the school committee would be involved in that might qualify would be for the position of superintendent). This exemption only applies if it can be determined that an open meeting will have a detrimental effect in obtaining qualified applicants. This shall not apply to applicants who have passed a prior preliminary screening.
- 9.) To meet or confer with a mediator with respect to any litigation or public business.
- 10.) To discuss trade secrets or confidential comparatively-sensitive or other proprietary information conducted by a governmental body as an energy supplier.

When meeting in executive session, the committee should follow these procedures:

- The committee will first convene in an open session for which due notice has been given
- The chairperson (or presiding member) will state the purpose of the executive session by stating all subjects that may be revealed without compromising the purpose for which the executive session was called
- A majority of the members must vote to enter the executive session, with the vote taken by roll call and recorded in the official minutes
- The chairperson or presiding member will state before entering the executive session whether the committee will reconvene in open session following the executive session

As executive session minutes need only include any votes that are taken and the purpose for which the session was called, the committee will not withhold minutes from the public unless a vote is taken during the session which could defeat the purpose of the executive session. In the event of such an occurrence, the committee will periodically review withheld minutes and will release them at such time as the committee sees fit to release them.

## **Open Meeting Law**

The following section briefly overviews the Massachusetts Open Meeting Law, however school committee members are encouraged to read the law in its entirety for a more complete understanding.

School committee meetings are subject to the Massachusetts Open Meeting Law, M.G.L. c. 30A, §19 and must be open to the public. The statute defines a meeting as “a deliberation by a public body with respect to any matter within the body’s jurisdiction.”

A deliberation is an oral or written communication through any medium, between or among a quorum of members of a public body. A quorum is a simple majority of the members. Whether or not communication constitutes a meeting subject to the law depends on four factors:

- The communication must be between members of a public body
- The communication must constitute a deliberation
- The communication involves a matter with the body’s jurisdiction
- The communication does not fall within an exception listed in the law (see below)

There are five exceptions to the definition of a meeting under the Open Meeting Law:

- Members of a public body may conduct an on-site inspection of a project or program; however, they cannot deliberate at such gatherings
- Members of a public body may attend a conference, training program, or event; however, they cannot deliberate at such gatherings
- Members of a public body may attend a meeting of another public body provided that they communicate only by open participation; however, they may not deliberate at such gatherings
- Members of quasi-judicial boards or commissions held solely to make decisions in an adjudicatory proceedings are not subject to the open meeting law
- Town meetings are not subject to the open meeting law

The school committee, as a public body, must provide notice to the public at least 48 hours in advance, except in emergencies, but excluding Saturdays, Sundays, and legal holidays. The agenda for the meeting is sent to the Town Clerk, who posts it on the web and in the town hall where it is conspicuously visible to the public at all hours. Meeting agendas and minutes are also posted on the school committee’s web page.

## **Procedures – Quorum and Voting**

A quorum of the Leicester School Committee is three members.

The committee operates under Roberts’ Rules of Order, unless otherwise specified. The chairperson shall serve as committee parliamentarian, and shall decide all questions of parliamentary procedure. In general, on any agenda item, the procedure is as follows:

- Chairperson (or presiding officer) states the question at hand
- A motion is made relative to the question, and a second is made
- Chairperson allows for discussion of the question and the motion made

- Members can make amendments to the original motion, provided that there is a sufficient second
- Votes are taken by voice vote, in general, but any member may ask that a vote be taken by roll call. Such request will be honored unless there is objection from any member of the committee, in which case the chairperson will call for a voice vote to decide whether a roll call vote will be allowed on the main motion. For a voice vote, any member can request that their vote be recorded by name in the official meeting minutes
- A majority vote of those present and voting is required for the passage of a motion. In the event of a tied vote, the motion is considered defeated

For a roll call vote, the chairman will direct the school committee secretary to call the role in alphabetical order. It is assumed that unless otherwise stated, the secretary will delegate this responsibility to the superintendent's executive secretary.

## **Communication**

As an elected official representing the public schools of Leicester, each member of the school committee commits to actively seeking input from a variety of stakeholders, to listening carefully to all viewpoints, and to maintaining a broad understanding of the important issues confronting the schools and the town at large. We uphold the value of clear, timely, and honest communication with relevant constituencies. We are eager to hear communal voices and, in turn, we resolve to communicate publicly our decisions, actions, and rationales. Our goal is to maintain an open, two-way system of communication with the community while following the protocols outlined in earlier sections of this handbook. We also commit to ongoing assessment of our communication systems and to continuous improvement.

### Communication with District Personnel

Members should always remain cognizant that they possess no authority outside of the authority of the full school committee when communicating with district staff. The committee does, however, value the input of district personnel, and members are encouraged to regularly communicate with district personnel to gather input on the committee's decisions and actions. Additionally, staff members will not suffer any negative repercussions from communicating with members of the school committee.

Any feedback received from district personnel that relates to district operations should be relayed to the appropriate administrative authority, usually the person's immediate supervisor. When this is unclear, the concerns should be communicated to the superintendent. Unless otherwise indicated by the superintendent, members should not discuss specific concerns of staff members during a school committee meeting.

### Communication with Students

The primary objective of the school committee is to establish policies that ensure the academic achievement of all students. The school committee benefits from hearing the opinion of students on issues affecting their education and the overall social, intellectual, and extracurricular climate of the schools. Students may address the school committee by speaking at the beginning of our



public meetings, or by asking the school committee student representatives to speak on their behalf. We value the input of our students.

### Communication with Municipal Leaders

Leicester has a rich tradition of service by elected and appointed committees, boards, officials, administrators, and their staff. The school committee is eager to work together with community leaders in the service of public education. We affirm the importance of maintaining a productive, collegial, and efficient working relationship with all municipal leaders in the pursuit of excellence in our schools. We may not always agree on our respective priorities, but the school committee commits to collaboration, to explaining carefully our decisions, and to resolving disagreements in a harmonious and respectful manner

### Communication with Parents, Guardians, Families, and Community

Members are encouraged to maintain a healthy dialogue with members of the community to keep people up to date on the committee's actions. The committee recognizes that individual members each have access to distinct networks of constituents, and members should frequently utilize these networks as communication opportunities. Communication mediums such as social media, e-mail newsletters, and blogs are all effective means of communicating with constituents. Members should be sure to clarify that certain methods of communication, especially social media (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc) are done on behalf of the member only and are not necessarily representative of the full school committee.

We will ensure that our decisions and actions are performed in a public and transparent manner – with the sole exception of the topics that legally permit and require school committee to adjourn to executive session. These exceptions aside, the public will always be informed of committee decisions and the rationale.

## **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.

If the complaint is about the superintendent, the member should discuss the situation with the superintendent prior to making any commitments to the complainant. If necessary, the member can discuss the situation with the chairperson, however these situations can generally be handled through dialogue with the superintendent.

The superintendent will generally keep the committee member abreast of any developments that may arise through dealing with the complaint, to the extent permitted by law.

## **Useful Resources**

Leicester Public Schools website: <http://www.leicester.k12.ma.us>

Leicester Public Schools policy manual: <http://lpspolicies.wikispaces.com/home>

Town of Leicester website: <http://www.leicesterma.org>

Mass. Department of Elementary and Secondary Education: <http://www.doe.mass.edu>

Harvard Graduate School of Education: <http://www.gse.harvard.edu>

Massachusetts Association of School Committees: <http://www.masc.org>

Open Meeting Law: <http://www.mass.gov/ago/government-resources/open-meeting-law>

Mass. Ethics Commission: <http://www.mass.gov/ethics>

Mass. General Laws: <http://www.masslegislature.gov/Laws/GeneralLaws>

Mass. Legislature: <http://www.masslegislature.gov>

Mass. Budget and Policy Center: <http://www.massbudget.org>

DESE District Analysis, Review & Assistance Tools (DART):  
<http://www.doe.mass.edu/apa/dart>

Mass. School Building Authority: <http://www.massschoolbuildings.org>

National School Boards Association: <http://www.nsba.org>

## **Acronyms**

AYP – Adequate Yearly Progress

BESE – Board of Elementary and Secondary Education

CPI – Composite Performance Index

DESE – Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

ELL – English Language Learners

FTE – Full Time Equivalent

FY – Fiscal Year (July 1 – June 30)

IEP – Individualized Education Program

IDEA – Individuals with Disabilities Education Act

LPS – Leicester Public Schools

MASC – Massachusetts Association of School Committees

MCAS – Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System

MOU – Memorandum of Understanding

MOA – Memorandum of Agreement

MSBA – Massachusetts School Building Authority

NCLB – No Child Left Behind

NEASC – New England Association of Schools and Colleges

NESDEC – New England School Development Council

NSBA – National School Boards Association

PARCC – Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers

RFP – Request for Proposal

RTTT – Race to the Top

SEPAC – Special Education Parent Advisory Council

SOI – Statement of Interest

STEM – Science, Technology, Engineering & Mathematics

SWCEC – Southern Worcester County Educational Collaborative