

Brookline School Committee Roles and Norms

Draft for discussion at SC workshop, 22 October 2024

Role of the School Committee. As a governance board, the School Committee sets goals for the Public Schools of Brookline, provides resources for meeting the goals, and monitors progress toward the goals. For these purposes, we maintain open and active relationships with residents, families, and Town officials. We advocate for our students and place their interests above all others in making our decisions. Our core responsibilities include hiring and evaluating the Superintendent, working with the Superintendent and senior staff to develop a budget, writing policy, and conducting collective bargaining. Management and personnel issues are the responsibility of the Superintendent, while the School Committee's role is systemic and strategic. We are mainly responsible for the "What," not the "How."

Conduct of meetings. At School Committee meetings, we strive to act in a way that could serve as a model for our students. All members can express opinions, concerns, and ideas freely, and can change their minds without embarrassment. Even in times of disagreement, we treat staff, members of the public, and each other with dignity and respect. Each of us is mindful of the amount of air time taken up relative to other members. We speak as advocates for all of our students, and not as representatives of constituencies. We vote our convictions, but we uphold and support the decisions of the Committee once they are made. We maintain the confidentiality of executive sessions.

Public comment. We welcome public comment in both written and spoken form, and attend carefully to every message we receive. At the same time, we acknowledge that School Committee meetings are not public meetings, but meetings held in public. The Chair will strive to incorporate public comment in a way that balances the need to listen to the community with the need to conduct the Committee's business efficiently.

Communication with the Superintendent. The School Committee and the Superintendent recognize the importance of proactive communication, so that there will be no surprises. Committee members will refer important questions or concerns received from members of the community to the Superintendent, who alone has the authority to investigate. The Superintendent will provide all members with the information needed to respond to an issue.

Communication with staff. We recognize that staff are not responsible for addressing the priorities of individual School Committee members. In general, requests for information, reports, and data should be channeled through the Superintendent or through subcommittee chairs, and all members of the Committee should have access to the information. In considering whether to make any such request, we will be respectful of staff members' time, energy, and professionalism.

Role of the Chair and Vice Chair. The Chair and Vice Chair establish workflows by determining whether an issue is best handled by the full School Committee, by a subcommittee, by the Chair, or by the Superintendent. In setting the agenda for School Committee meetings, they try to ensure that important issues are discussed at a strategic level, not an operational one, and that members understand what (if anything) is to be decided. The Chair and Vice Chair act as the conduit for information between other Committee members and the Superintendent on many issues, and they lead the annual Superintendent evaluation process.