

JOINT SCHOOL COMMITTEE

Concord – Carlisle School Committee  
Concord School Committee  
Ripley Building  
May 1, 2017

- Present: Wallace Johnston, Chair, CSC; CCSC  
Heather Bout, Vice Chair; CSC; CCSC  
William Fink, Chair, CCSC  
Dan Conti, Vice Chair, CSC; CCSC  
Johanna Boynton, CSC; CCSC  
Robert Grom, CSC; CCSC  
Mary Storrs, CCSC
- Present from Administration: John Flaherty, Deputy Superintendent of Finance & Operations, CPS & CCRSD
- Absent from Administration: Diana Rigby, Superintendent of Schools, CPS & CCRSD

**I. CALL TO ORDER**

The session was called to order by Mr. Fink, for CCSC, and by Mr. Johnston, for CSC at 6:32 PM. Mr. Johnston noted that the meeting was being recorded. Ms. Kathleen Snook questioned the order of business regarding seating of the Committee, per the School Committee Policy.

A motion was made by Mr. Grom, seconded by Ms. Bout, to suspend the policy of having the first item of business in the first meeting after Town Meeting include the seating of the Concord School Committee and move it to a later point in the meeting. The SC discussed moving this to a later point in the meeting and questioned the reasoning for it. Mr. Johnson stated that due to some contentious business, he felt it was appropriate for him to deal with it since he had been the Chair throughout the discussions. He noted that he was trying to do right by the new Chair. Ms. Bout stated that if it would create upset by changing the order of business, that she was fine with keeping it in the original order. Mr. Grom voted in favor of suspending the policy. Ms. Bout, Ms. Boynton and Mr. Johnston voted against suspending the policy. Mr. Conti abstained from the vote. The motion did not pass.

**II. CONCORD PUBLIC SCHOOL MEETING**

**A. ORGANIZATION OF THE COMMITTEE**

1. Seating of the Concord School Committee Members – CSC. A motion was made by Mr. Johnston, seconded by Ms. Boynton, to seat the Concord School Committee members by name. A motion was made by Mr. Boynton, seconded by Mr. Johnston, to recognize Johanna Boynton, Wallace Johnston, Heather Bout, Daniel Conti and Robert Grom as members of the Concord School Committee. The motions were unanimously approved.

2. Election of Officers of the Concord School Committee – CSC. A motion was made by Mr. Johnston, seconded by Mr. Grom, to elect Heather Bout Chair of the Concord School Committee. Ms. Boynton noted all of the hard work Ms. Bout has done as Vice Chair and Mr. Johnston seconded Ms. Boynton’s comments. Mr. Conti stated that he was looking forward to Ms. Bout as Chair and thanked Mr. Johnston for all of his work as Chair. Ms. Bout thanked Mr. Johnston for all of his help and guidance. The motion was unanimously approved.

A motion was made by Mr. Johnston, seconded by Mr. Conti, to elect Johanna Boynton Vice Chair of the Concord School Committee. Mr. Johnston and Ms. Bout stated that they appreciated Ms. Boynton stepping into the role. The motion was unanimously approved.

3. Appointment of School Committee Recording Secretary – CSC. A motion was made by Ms. Boynton, seconded by Mr. Conti, to appoint Erin Higgins as School Committee Recording Secretary. The motion was unanimously approved.

**II. PUBLIC COMMENTS**

1. Rosa Hollowell, 19 Sudbury Road, Concord, MA. Ms. Hollowell thanked the SC for gathering the data regarding the religious holidays. She shared a handout with the SC that included a framework to simplify the analysis of the secular impact on the school district of holding school on the major religious holidays. She reviewed the handout with the SC. Ms. Hollowell noted that the Calendar Advisory Committee gathered a small fraction of the data in April 2015 including the pilot year data from the middle school only. She noted that they didn't rely on that data for their recommendation nor include the data in their report to the SC.

2. Susan Deysher, 1861 Main St, Concord, MA. Ms. Deysher stated that many of the arguments around the religious holidays were based around the fact as if they weren't already present. She noted that having the religious holidays off has been a long-standing practice in Concord. She encouraged the SC, regardless of the way the vote goes, to look closely and carefully at the policies regarding protection for students taking off for religious reasons. She noted that this was an opportunity to dig deeply into the dialogue and understand the needs of the community.

3. Kathleen Snook, 471 Old Road to 9-Acre Corner, Concord, MA. Ms. Snook congratulated the SC on Town Meeting. She noted that she had planned to read the letter she had written to the SC regarding a welcoming Concord, but that she felt she needed to speak from where her heart is. She stated that she has spent 50-70 plus hours in the past months on the calendar issue. She noted that she was proud of the work the Calendar Committee did. She stated that she has remained engaged in the calendar issue due to her personal reasons and beliefs. Ms. Snook noted an email sent by a citizen in December of 2015 stating that Jewish families were being marginalized by the calendar change, and asked if the members of the SC had anything in their lives that made them different. Ms. Snook stated that she would never assume what it's like to walk in anyone else's shoes and she would never desire anyone to walk in hers over this time. She noted that her Jewish, Christian, Pathways and Agnostic friends helped her through this time and that it was, and continues to be, the love and support of all of the community members of various races, creeds and cultures that has her sitting there tonight. She stated that this was the real reason for continuing the effort – her respect for all of these individuals. She stated that they should have a calendar free of religious holidays. She stated that she hopes that any comments she has ever made were not disrespectful to any group, and that this was not her intention.

4. Kristin Johnson, 61 Lang St, Concord, MA. Ms. Johnson read a letter that she wrote to the SC. The letter noted that the student and teacher absenteeism data did not justify school closure on religious holidays. She noted in the letter that the teachers also support keeping schools open on religious holidays. She stated that what she finds most interesting about the continued debate comes from those seeking to preserve preference of 1 or 2 religions above all others. She noted that Ruthy Bennett petitioned Concord to hold a referendum on upholding the civil rights of all people in the community. She noted the idea of radical inclusion in which the school would have a calendar that contains closures for all holy days and what the difficulty implementing this would be. She stated that it might be a good idea for the teachers to be aware of all of the holy days for all religions. She urged the SC to approve a religious neutral calendar and draft a policy to allow days off for students for religious holidays as well as accommodations for schoolwork.

5. Ruthy Bennett, 114 Deer Grass Ln, Concord, MA. Ms. Bennett stated that it is clear from the absenteeism data that there is a higher than normal absenteeism rate on the 3 religious holidays. She stated that the District has a hard time filling absent teacher and staff positions on regular days, noting that it is even harder on these 3 days. She questioned why the SC would create days that they know students and staff will not show up in regular numbers. She stated that this is the SC's chance to lower the rates of absenteeism and to also support the school community. She urged the SC to not create a split calendar and also questioned the option of holding school on December 24<sup>th</sup>. Ms. Bennett stated that Concord Recreation supports working parents.

### **III. REPORTS & ISSUES FOR DISCUSSION**

A. 2017-18 School Calendar. Mr. Fink noted that they have had a tremendous amount of time to research and understand the calendar topic. He asked for thoughts from the SC members prior to voting.

A motion was made by Ms. Storrs, for CCSC, seconded by Ms. Boynton, to revote the 2017-2018 Calendar approved on January 24, 2017 and adjusted as follows: removing September 21<sup>st</sup> and March 30<sup>th</sup> as holidays and moving the professional day from January 22<sup>nd</sup> to January 16<sup>th</sup>, with the last day of school being June 12<sup>th</sup>. Mr. Grom stated that his decision is based on the rate of absenteeism and what's best for the students. He stated that they would eliminate the inferior educational experience on the religious holidays by keeping the schools closed.

Mr. Johnston stated that absenteeism is a problem on many days throughout the year and that they can do something positive regarding that issue on the 2 days in question. He noted that they haven't created uniformity for the students who are out on these days and that he doesn't feel comfortable having these days be regular school days. He noted that they polled the students and then disregarded what they said. He stated that if absenteeism increases on other religious holidays, then they might have to look at those dates as well.

Mr. Conti stated that Mr. Johnston captured his perspective and that he still stands by his statement from January 24<sup>th</sup>, which was based on the secular value of cultural proficiency. He noted that he seconded Mr. Johnston and Mr. Grom's comments.

Ms. Bout stated that everyone shares a similar goal of what's best for the students and community by being most inclusive. She noted that the question is how do they get there. She also stated that everyone agrees that a task force be created to address cultural fluency and inclusiveness and noted that they need to do this regardless of the way the vote goes. She noted that she has reviewed all the data and that the absences on those days are above the norm, but are not high enough to justify school closure. She also noted the teachers' and students' opinions, noting that the polls were done to get a read. She stated that she feels they are being more inclusive by not just picking 2 religions. She noted Ms. Bennett's questioning of December 24<sup>th</sup> as a school day and stated that there would likely be such high absenteeism on this date, that it does justify closing school. Ms. Bout acknowledged the fact that voting this way would be a change from her original vote, but noted that since there was new information, she feels she needs to vote the other way.

Ms. Boynton reviewed what had previously happened regarding the calendar – from the original vote, to receiving legal opinion and the distribution of the legal opinion. She noted that the lawyer stated that it was unconstitutional to put religious holidays into a school calendar for religious reasons. She stated that the 2 years of absenteeism data do not support or justify closing school on those particular holy days. She noted all of the community members who came forward with stories about their families and religious observances and also the request from the teachers to not include the holidays on the calendar. She stated that by including holidays of some religions, and not others, they risk alienating or disrespecting others. She strongly recommended revoting the calendar with no preference given towards any religion.

Ms. Storrs stated that inclusivity is about all religions and cultures, and by putting in certain religious holidays; they are making others feel excluded. She noted that this is the 7<sup>th</sup> meeting they have discussed this and the more they discuss this, the more divisive it gets. She stated that, regardless of the vote, their work is not over and that they need to figure out how to implement with the administration.

Ms. Bout noted that she doesn't have data on December 24<sup>th</sup>. Mr. Johnston stated that, regarding his comment on polling students, he was pointing out why would they have asked them if they were going to dismiss what they said. He also noted that if he knew all of their comments prior to the vote at the January 24<sup>th</sup> meeting would have been the only thing taken into account in the legal opinion, he would have certainly talked about other points including absenteeism rates.

Ms. McCausland noted that substitutes are the 1<sup>st</sup> pool used when an absence occurs, support staff are the 2<sup>nd</sup> pool and doubling up classes are the 3<sup>rd</sup> pool. She noted that they have not had to double up on classes. Mr. Fink questioned the threshold used for teacher absences and Ms. McCausland stated that she spoke with the school with the highest teacher absenteeism rate (39.5%) on Good Friday and was told that there was not a negative impact on education. She noted that the use of the current classroom aides and other support staff makes a teacher's absence appear more seamless to the students. Mr. Johnston questioned how 39.5% teacher absenteeism doesn't affect education. Ms. McCausland stated that it's always better for the teachers to be in front of the students, noting that education would be impacted if it were for several days in a row.

Ms. Snook questioned if anyone on the SC had analyzed the data into a ranked data set. Mr. Fink stated that they were all working off of the same information. Ms. Storrs stated that she had analyzed the data provided by the Administration and shared the analysis with the committee at a recent meeting. Ms. Boynton stated that she had ranked the data for teacher absenteeism.

Mr. Fink stated that if you take Good Friday out of the picture, because it had a high absence rate due to the fact that it was also the Friday before April vacation, there are many other days that are near the top of the absenteeism list. He stated that in order to respect all of the holidays, you would not pick out 1 or 2 of them. He noted that the teachers as well as the Calendar Advisory Committee do not support having the religious holidays on the calendar. He stated that he still stands by his original position of not including the religious holidays in the calendar.

Ms. Boynton, Mr. Fink, Ms. Bout and Ms. Storrs were in favor of the motion. Mr. Johnston, Mr. Grom and Mr. Conti were opposed to the motion. The motion carried. Ms. Storrs stated that they need to proactively communicate the change in the calendar.

A motion was made by Ms. Boynton, for CSC, seconded by Mr. Johnston, to revote the 2017-18 calendar voted on January 24, 2017, with removal of September 21<sup>st</sup> and March 30<sup>th</sup> as days off, making the last day of school June 12<sup>th</sup>. Mr. Johnston stated that they now have a potential split calendar issue and they have not fully made accommodations for students taking the days off. An amendment to the motion was made by Mr. Johnston, seconded by Mr. Grom, to hear from administration no later than the September 12, 2017 SC meeting with a report in detail on accommodations for students taking off for religious holidays. The amendment was unanimously approved.

Mr. Johnston stated that he was troubled at where they were and feels a split calendar is very challenging. He noted that they have a lot of work to do on this entire topic.

Ms. Boynton and Ms. Bout were in favor of the motion. Mr. Conti, Mr. Grom and Mr. Johnston were opposed to the motion. The motion failed.

Ms. Bout apologized to the Concord community that CPS and CCHS would have 2 different calendars.

Public Comment: Miriam Zarchan, 389 Lindsay Pond Rd, Concord, MA. Ms. Zarchan stated that this is a very rational and high-minded discussion and also very emotional. She noted that the SC did a good job at articulating why they voted. She encouraged the SC to be thoughtful in how they present themselves to the public. She stated how alarming the articles in the Concord Journal were regarding the calendar.

Mr. Conti noted that although Yom Kippur does not fall within the school week in 2017, it is still being observed, and teachers need to be aware in terms of any schoolwork given over the weekend. Ms. Boynton noted that this would occur for all holidays. Ms. Bout stated that this topic should be added to the agenda for the next meeting. The SC discussed how to disseminate the calendar.

Susan Deysher questioned if a list of religious holidays could be added to the calendar. Mr. Fink stated that the attorney's advice was not to include a list of the religious holidays on the calendar. Ms. Johnson noted that the listing of the days is not supposed to be listed on the calendar, but could be a stand-alone document used to inform the District.

Public Comment: David Allen, Eastbridge Rd, Concord, MA. Mr. Allen stated that there were 2 religious holidays included in the CPS calendar and noted that the law does not allow this. Mr. Fink stated that the reasoning has to be for secular reasons, not religious. Mr. Allen stated that the SC referred to them as religious holidays and the law does not allow this.

B. CCHS Campus Advisory Committee. Mr. Grom shared his second draft of the Campus Advisory Committee. The SC discussed additions and edits to the Committee charge, membership and responsibilities. Ms. Storrs noted that they should be open to all possibilities for the landfill, not just for athletic usage. Mr. Flaherty stated that it is critical that the Facilities Manager be included as a Committee member. They discussed having subcommittees focusing on specific aspects of the campus. They agreed upon having 13 committee members identified before the summer and that the advisory committee would identify high interest/priority areas by April of 2018.

Public Comment: Diane Proctor stated that it would be possible to have many community experts come in to talk to the committee, but not to necessarily hold a seat on the committee.

C. Town Meeting 2017 Debrief. The SC stated that Town Meeting went very well and everyone did a great job.

#### **IV. ACTION ITEMS**

A. Revote the 2017-18 School Calendar. Vote occurred previously in the meeting.

B. Vote to approve the 2017-2018 School Committee Meetings. A motion was made by Ms. Boynton, for CCSC, seconded by Ms. Storrs, to approve the 2017-2018 School Committee Meeting dates as posted. A motion was made by Mr. Johnston, seconded by Ms. Boynton, for CSC, to approve the 2017-2018 School Committee Meeting dates as posted. The SC discussed conflicts with some of the posted dates and agreed to change the August 22<sup>nd</sup> meeting to August 29<sup>th</sup> from 5:00-9:00. Ms. Storrs questioned voting on meeting dates and then voting to change them. The SC discussed this practice and agreed that it may not be necessary to vote changes to the meeting schedule in an open meeting. The motions were unanimously approved as amended with the change to the August meeting date.

Mr. Fink stated that the SC was invited to attend the award ceremony for the Class Act award on May 4<sup>th</sup>, at CCHS from 7:00-8:00PM.

#### **V. ADJOURNMENT FOR THE CONCORD-CARLISLE SCHOOL COMMITTEE**

A motion was made by Ms. Storrs, seconded by Ms. Boynton, to adjourn the CCSC meeting.

*Ms. Storrs left the meeting.*

B. Superintendent's Report. Mr. Flaherty, on behalf of Ms. Rigby, reported that Justin Cameron has been appointed the new CMS Principal beginning July 1, 2017. He stated that the Rose Retirement Ceremony will take place on Wednesday, May 17<sup>th</sup> at 4:00 PM at Willard and will include a number of retirees, including: Anne McCormack, Nurse, Alcott; Anne Egan, SPED Teacher, Alcott; Jaime Malzman, SPED Teacher, CMS; Mitchell Stern, Math Teacher, CMS; Mary Gallagher, Grade 3 Teacher, Thoreau; Pat Fernandes, Principal, Willard; Susan Chafe, ELA Curriculum Specialist, Willard; and Janice Shear, Grade 3 Teacher, Willard. Mr. Flaherty stated that students and teachers have been working hard on the MCAS.

The motion was unanimously approved.

#### **XI. ADJOURNMENT FOR THE CONCORD SCHOOL COMMITTEE**

A motion was made by Ms. Boynton, for CSC, seconded by Mr. Johnston, to adjourn the meeting. The motion was unanimously approved and the meeting adjourned at 9:43 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Erin E. Higgins

Approved: 5/31/17

Abbreviations:

ACLU	American Civil Liberties Union
CASE	Cooperative Association for Special Education
CSC	Concord School Committee
CCSC	Concord-Carlisle Regional District School Committee
CPA	Community Preservation Act
CPC	Community Preservation Committee
CPS	Concord Public Schools
CCRSD	Concord-Carlisle Regional School District
CCHS	Concord-Carlisle High School
CHPS	The Collaborative for High Performance Schools
CSEC	Comprehensive Sustainable Energy Committee
CPW	Concord Public Works

CTA	Concord Teachers Association
DESE	Department of Elementary & Secondary Education
ELA	English Language Arts
FAAC	Financial Audit Advisory Committee
FINCOM	Finance Committee
MASC	Massachusetts Association of School Committees
MIAA	Massachusetts Interscholastic Athletic Association
NEASC	New England Association of Schools and Colleges
OPEB	Other Post-Employment Benefits
RTI	Response to Intervention
SEPAC	Special Education Advisory Council
SOI	Statement of Interest
YRBS	Youth Risk Behavior Survey