

The School Committees Report: FY25 Operating Budget Updates; 2024-25 School Calendar Adopted; Literacy

FY 25 Operating Budgets

The School Committees and Administration are advancing operating budget recommendations that are designed to be fiscally responsible while supporting teachers, staff, and students with the necessary resources for the Districts' teaching and learning mission. Both budgets are level service and reflect the goals and priorities identified in the Five-Year Strategic Plan for each district. The School Committees approved operating budget recommendations that are three percent higher than the current fiscal year. Specifically, the recommended Concord Public Schools operating budget increase is 3.26% higher than the current year and is consistent with the Concord Finance Committee budget guideline. The recommended operating budget for the Regional School District is 3.08% higher than the current year but will impact the two towns differently based on the percentage of enrollment from each community.

School Committee members expressed their concerns that Inflation remains a significant challenge as costs for items such as educational materials, out of district special education tuitions, and transportation are rising at higher rates than before the pandemic. Despite their desire to maintain minimal increases for future operating budgets, it was noted that it will be a difficult, if not impossible, challenge. Other similar districts in the area are seeking operating budget increases of up to five or six percent for the next fiscal year due to inflation and the current economic conditions. Examples include Bedford, which is seeking a six percent increase and Belmont which is seeking a seven and seven-eighth percentage increase in operating budgets.

Early Literacy and Embedded English

School Committee members heard from the Principals of CPS elementary schools, teachers, and literacy specialists, as well as the CCHS Co-Principals regarding CPS Early Literacy and CCHS Embedded English at their most recent business meeting.

CPS Early Literacy experts discussed the Science of Reading which is an evidenced based approach to direct reading curriculum and instruction. According to the National Center on Improving Literacy (NCIL), the Science of Reading is collection research that allows educators the best approach to help students learn to read. It is based on five key components identified and defined by the NCIL including:

- **Phonemic Awareness**, The ability to identify and play with individual sounds in spoken words.
- **Phonics** - Reading instruction on understanding how letters and groups of letters link to sounds to form letter- sound relationships and spelling patterns.
- **Fluency** - The ability to read words, phrases, sentences, and stories correctly, with enough speed, and expression.
- **Vocabulary** - Knowing what words mean and how to say and use them correctly.
- **Comprehension** - The ability to understand what you are reading.

CPS educators utilize a variety of screening tools to measure and monitor the literacy skills of students as well as books and materials designed to provide students with individualized instruction at their level. Examples of these include STAR Early Literacy, Foundations, and Lexia. CPS educators noted the Science of Reading is continually improving as more research is conducted.

Co-Principals Brian Miller and Katie Stahl presented the Embedded English approach that started in the fall at CCHS. Honors and Regular English are taught simultaneously in the same classroom as teachers utilize a differentiated approach to meet the individual needs of each student. They stressed that there are lofty expectations and significant support for each student. In previous years there were approximately 11

sections of Honors and three to four sections of Regular English. With the change, there is an average of 2.8 Regular English students in each Honors class. Miller and Stahl shared the benefits of implementing Embedded English which include smaller class sizes, more opportunities for students to learn from each other, more individualized support for students on IEP's and 504's, and greater access to course selection for students in the humanities and other departments. As part of implementing this approach, teachers are being supported with the appropriate professional development.

There are links to the comprehensive presentations for the Early Literacy and Embedded English on the Districts' website in the agenda for February 27th meeting; <https://www.concordps.org/school-committee/school-committee-meetings/>.

2024-25 School Calendar Approved

The School Committees voted to approve the school calendar for the 2024-25 school year. The academic year will begin on August 26th for teachers with two professional development days and the first day of classes for students will be Wednesday, August 28th. The 180th day of school would be Friday, June 13th of 2025 and if five emergency days are utilized, the last day of classes would be June 23rd with the holiday of Juneteenth being recognized.

Upcoming School Committee Meetings:

March 12, 6pm Joint School Committee Meeting, METCO Headquarters, 11 Roxbury Street, Boston

March 26, 6pm Joint School Committee Meeting, Ripley Conference Room 4

Zoom links are available on the District website, www.concordps.org.

Sign up for School Committee News Individuals who are interested in knowing more about the role of the School Committees as well as receiving the latest updates on school budgets and informational events are encouraged to enroll in the "School Committee News" Subscriber List. These updates will include timely information such as meeting dates and agendas, minutes, event announcements, and the School Committee Report. Individuals can sign up at www.concordps.org/school_committee_subscriber_list. Individuals interested in the Concord Middle School Building Committee (a Town of Concord Committee) can find updates and all relevant materials at <https://www.concordps.org/cms-building-project/cms-building-committee-updates/>

The School Committees Contact Information

Concord School Committee Alexa Anderson (Chair of CSC), Court Booth, Tracey Marano (Chair, Regional School Committee), Cynthia Rainey, and Carrie Rankin (Vice-Chair of CSC)

Concord-Carlisle Regional School Committee is comprised of the five Concord School Committee members as well as two Carlisle representatives, Carrie Patel, and Sharon Whitt (Vice-Chair, Regional School Committee)

METCO Representatives Domingos DaRosa, and Ayesha Lawton

Individuals can link to the School Committees' emails on the Districts' home page at www.concordps.org. Or, you can email the Concord Public School Committee at concordschoolcommittee@concordps.org and the Concord-Carlisle Regional School Committee at concordcarliseschoolcommittee@concordps.org. Interested individuals are encouraged to sign up for the School Committees subscriber's list which is also on the District's web page.