

FAQ

What is the time commitment of a School Committee member?

The School Committee (SC) meeting calendar is created and published prior to the start of the new school year. There are typically two SC regular business meetings a month. Meetings start at 6PM. Additionally, there is a goals workshop in June, and a budget workshop in January. Whenever possible, training workshops to review SC roles and responsibilities and to prepare for writing the Superintendent's evaluation, are scheduled to take place an hour prior to a regular meeting. If there is a need for an additional business meeting, it must be voted on in open session and approved by a majority of the committee.

School Committee members also are assigned to at least one Subcommittee and may be assigned to an advisory committee or as a liaison to a committee such as SEPAC. A list of Subcommittees, Advisories and Liaisons and their responsibilities can be found on pages 14-15 of the School Committee manual. Subcommittees typically meet once a month. Meeting schedules are determined by the committee once it is seated for the school year.

Additionally, it is expected that members attend their Town Meeting which is the first Monday in May. It is also "good practice" for members to attend the High School Graduation in June.

It is expected that SC members attend all meetings and refer to the calendar when scheduling personal business. If something comes up that prohibits attendance at a SC meeting, the member must notify the Chair as soon as possible. Meetings cannot be held without a quorum, 5 of 8 members.

Can School Committee members put items on the agenda?

The SC Chair and the Superintendent create a master planning schedule for the committee at the start of each school year. This calendar is continuously updated at the end of each School Committee meeting to reflect emerging topics and rescheduled items. An example of this calendar can be found in the Appendix of this manual. At each SC meeting, there is an agenda item, "Items for Future Agendas." This is an opportunity for members to suggest future agenda items. Scheduling of such items is at the discretion of the Chair and the Superintendent.

Can School Committee members request information from the Superintendent?

All requests for information from the Superintendent must be made through the SC Chair. The Chair may give permission for a member to contact the Superintendent, and that member must cc the Chair on all communication.

What can the School Committee do and what is it prohibited from doing?

School Committee Member Authority and Duties can be found on pages 2-3 of the School Committee Manual. School committee Powers and Duties are on pages 5-8 of the Manual.

With regard to prohibitions, MASC advises members to refer to *Charting the Course, Roles and Responsibilities* for a long list of examples and detailed information on this topic.

What does and does not constitute deliberation outside of the School Committee?

According to the OML, the definition of a deliberation is: "Oral, written or electronic communications on public business between or among a quorum of a public body." It includes not just issues that are being discussed by the committee at the moment, but any issues which fall within the purview of the committee. For example, if someone wanted to change school start time and talked to a quorum of others about it, then came to the committee with a full-blown plan that already had the support of the majority, that would constitute a violation of the law.

When is it appropriate to respond to a constituent and when is it appropriate to defer to the Chair? Please refer to *Charting the Course, Roles and Responsibilities*, page 12, IV, for detailed information on this topic.

Suggested items from FAQ from *Charting the Course*:

In order to be an effective School Committee member, what are some of the more important resource documents each member of the committee should have?

Every member of the committee should have access to an updated School Committee policy manual, the budget, collective bargaining agreements, administrators' contracts, district goals and objectives, the strategic plan, and student and staff handbooks.

What is the best way to clearly articulate the School Committee's official position regarding matters they have voted on?

The committee should have a written communication policy that outlines the procedures for communicating with the public, media, parents, staff, and students. Many committees delegate this responsibility to the Chair of the committee. It is important that official positions be clear and consistent to avoid confusion or misunderstandings.

Why is it necessary to contact the Superintendent and/or principal when a committee member wants to visit a particular school?

No matter how well intended, unannounced visits may be perceived by the staff as an attempt to meddle in school business. Once elected or appointed, School Committee members are viewed as elected officials who may be visiting for official reasons. Alerting administrators in advance sends a clear message that the purpose for the visit is to demonstrate support and interest. Advance notification also avoids visits from taking place when activities that cannot be interrupted, such as student testing, are taking place.

Involving parents and the public has become more and more critical in order to reinforce credibility in our schools. While schools have benefited from more involvement, there are some matters that must be left in the hands of the staff or committee. How can a School Committee explain that to the public?

Openly, honestly, and respectfully. Most people do not object to playing by the rules if they

know what the rules are. School Committees should always be prepared to explain why a particular matter is outside of the public domain. References to the law, regulations, policies, or collective bargaining agreements usually clarify issues. There are always those who will not accept the information provided, but in those instances the committee will be assured they have handled the matter appropriately.

Who hires the attorney who represents the committee?

The School Committee does. This is usually done in consultation with the superintendent since he/she will very often be interacting with the attorney on behalf of the committee. Contact points for legal counsel will be determined by the school committee chair and the superintendent.