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COMMUNITY RELATIONS
(1000 SERIES)

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Goal

It is the goal of the Belmont School Committee to create and maintain open channels of communication and good relations among the schools, parents, community organizations, businesses and the community at large. In furtherance of this goal the schools shall establish and maintain:

- A continuous, two way process of communication and cooperative effort with the community to encourage an active interest in the schools,
- Procedures that will encourage the community to place a high priority on education and make funds available for an education system that supports learning for all children,
- Programs that increase mutual understanding of educational and community needs and establish partnerships to enhance learning opportunities and cooperation in the work of improving the schools.

Responsibilities of the School Committee

As elected officials, members of the School Committee recognize their responsibility to listen to comments and suggestions from the residents of Belmont, as well as members of the school community who reside elsewhere. School committee members will refer compliments, suggestions and constructive criticism about operational matters directly to the Superintendent.

No individual School Committee member may speak for, or in the name of, the full School Committee, unless specifically authorized to do so by the full Committee.

References:

MGL 71: 37 Powers and Duties of School Committees

Policy 8006: School Committee Governance and Operations: Officers, Chairperson

Coverage of School Committee Meetings

Representatives of all newspapers and other media are welcome to attend all open meetings of the School Committee. Meeting announcements and agendas will be publicly posted in advance of each meeting. Summaries of the meeting may be furnished to local newspapers.

Audio or video taping of open meetings of the School Committee is permitted, subject to the restrictions delineated in the Massachusetts Open Meeting Law. Any such taping shall not interfere with the normal functioning of the meeting.

References:

MGL 30A: 18-25: Open Meeting Law

66: 5A, 10: Public Records

Public Statements Concerning School Policy

The explicit prior approval of the Superintendent is required before any employee, acting in his/her capacity as a representative of the Belmont Public Schools, may make public statements involving school policy either through a press release or other media. This policy does not circumscribe any employee's individual right to free speech and expression. An employee speaking on issues concerning the Belmont Public Schools should clearly state whether he/she is speaking officially or as an individual citizen.

The Superintendent will designate those responsible for coordinating the release of information at each of the schools.

References:

Connick v. Meyers, Supreme Court of the United States, 1983

Alinovi v. School Committee of Worcester. United States Court of Appeals.

1985

Cooperation with Local Media

The School Committee welcomes the active participation of newspapers, magazines, radio, television and other media in providing the public with pertinent information concerning the schools.

Media releases by the schools are encouraged as a means of informing the public of programs, activities and accomplishments. The Superintendent, or designee, will coordinate the release of information concerning the school system and the School Committee. The principal of each school, or designee, will coordinate the release of information relating to each school and provide copies to the Superintendent.

News and information identifying personnel or students shall be released to the press only with the approval of the principal and in accordance with state and federal laws regarding confidentiality and student privacy.

References:

20 USC: 1232 g & h: Protection of Pupil Rights

School Committee Meetings

School Committee meetings are conducted for the purpose of carrying on the business of the schools. All meetings, including subcommittee meetings, are open to the public, unless they are duly convened executive sessions.

The public has the right and is encouraged to attend meetings of the School Committee. The Committee shall make time available for public participation at meetings in accordance with guidelines established by the committee. A copy of these guidelines is available at the Superintendent's office, on the Belmont Public Schools' website and at each School Committee meeting.

The School Committee will not address complaints regarding school personnel except in the manner provided for elsewhere in these policies.

Employees have the right to attend School Committee meetings in the same manner as all other citizens.

References:

MGL 30A 18-25: Open Meeting Law

Policies: 8012: School Committee Meetings: Public Participation

1018: Citizen Suggestions and Complaints

1019: Complaints Concerning School Personnel

Procedures: 1006P: Public Participation at School Committee Meetings

Belmont School Committee Public Participation at School Committee Meetings

The School Committee believes that one of its paramount responsibilities is to listen to the citizens it represents and keep itself informed of their opinions and viewpoints.

The public is encouraged to attend meetings of the School Committee. The Committee makes time available for public participation at meetings in accordance with the following general guidelines:

Meetings of the School Committee shall include an agenda item titled "Citizens' Concerns". This section of the meeting provides the opportunity to the public to comment or raise questions regarding school related issues which are not covered elsewhere on the meeting agenda. Complaints and suggestions concerning curriculum, personnel and administrative issues will not be addressed unless the individual raising the issue has followed the appropriate policies and procedures (see Contact Guidelines). Concerns raised will generally be referred to a subsequent meeting agenda for discussion and response if appropriate.

Individuals wishing to speak to items on the meeting's agenda are requested to wait until each item is introduced and members of the School Committee and Administration have had an opportunity to speak to the issues. Those wishing to participate in the discussion are then encouraged to ask questions or provide further information or ideas that will be helpful to the Committee. Participants should:

- Identify themselves;
- Direct all comments/questions to the School Committee Chairperson;
- Keep comments to three minutes or less and be courteous and discreet in their remarks;
- Address themselves only to the issues which are the subject of the discussion.

The School Committee Chairperson will direct the discussion in the following manner:

- Recognize participants;
- Respond directly to public inquiries, referring to the members of the School Committee or Administration for clarification or response when appropriate;
- Limit the time for the presentation. If there are numerous requests to address the committee on the same subject, the chairperson may select representatives to speak on the issues.

Agendas for each School Committee meeting are posted in the offices of the Superintendent of Schools and the Town Clerk, and in the Police Station. Electronic

copies of the agenda and supporting materials are sent to PTA/O presidents and observers, to student representatives, the BEA president and various school related organizations. Copies of any exhibits or materials distributed to the School Committee at a meeting will be available on the BPS web site and at the office of the Superintendent.

Copies of the agenda and these Guidelines for Public Participation are available at the Superintendent's office, on the Belmont Public Schools' website and at each School Committee meeting.

References:

Policies: 1018: Citizen Suggestions and Complaints

1019: Complaints Concerning School Personnel

8012: School Committee Powers and Duties

Formation and Operation of School Councils

The principal of each school shall establish and serve as co-chair of a school council. All duties and activities of the school councils shall conform to the statutory provisions and limitations of the General Laws of Massachusetts. School Council meetings are governed by the Open Meeting Law.

References:

MGL 71: 59C, School Councils

MGL 30A 18-25: Open Meeting Law

Parent-Teacher Associations and Organizations

The Belmont Public Schools recognize the formation of parent–teacher groups in our schools and support their role in:

- promoting the welfare of children and youth in home, school and community;
- creating a partnership between the home and the school, so that parents and teachers may cooperate in the education of the children; and
- developing cooperative efforts which promote educational excellence, social development, and extracurricular opportunities.

Citizens' Advisory Committees

Advisory committees may be appointed by the School Committee or the Superintendent on specific topics.

Upon appointment, each advisory committee shall be charged in writing as to:

- The topic to be addressed;
- the scope of service intended;
- the resources which will be provided; and
- the expected completion date

Upon completing its assignment, each committee shall be given a new charge or shall be dissolved. The School Committee or the Superintendent, as appropriate, shall have the authority to dissolve any advisory committees they have appointed and reserve the right to exercise this authority at any time during the life of any committee.

The School Committee and the Superintendent shall be responsible for informing the public of all major conclusions and recommendations made by such committees.

Advisory committees appointed by the School Committee are subject to the Open Meeting Law.

References:

MGL 30A; 18-25: Open Meeting Law

Visits to the Schools

The School Committee encourages parents, professional educators and others who have legitimate interests to visit the schools. All visitors must report immediately to the Principal's office upon entering the school and identify themselves and the purpose of their visit.

Professional educators and citizens who are from other communities and who wish to observe the schools in operation are welcome. Arrangements for such visits must be made in advance with the Superintendent and Principal.

Guests, visitors of students or students registered at other schools are not allowed in the schools without permission from the Principal.

Visitors shall not enter classrooms without the prior consent of the Principal.

All visitors to the schools must conduct themselves so as not to interfere with the daily operation of the school program.

Volunteers in Schools

The Belmont Public Schools encourage parents and other community members to volunteer in the schools. Volunteers must report to the Principal's office upon entering the schools. In accordance with Massachusetts law, the Belmont Public Schools will obtain criminal offender records information (CORI) of all volunteers and other individuals who may have direct and unmonitored contact with children. All such volunteers must sign a request form authorizing receipt by the district of all available CORI data from the Criminal History Systems Board.

All volunteers are considered "members of the school community" for purposes of the Belmont Public Schools harassment policy.

References:

MGL 71: 38R: Criminal Records: Check of Application

Cross Reference:

Policy:0005: Criminal Offender Registry Information

Policy 0002: Harassment

Public Performances by Students

Teachers are encouraged to provide students with opportunities for public performances when:

- Performances fit both the goals of the schools and the needs of the students,
- Students are not exploited for the benefit of any individual or group,
- No student is excluded because of race, color, religion, gender, age, sexual orientation, national origin or disability.

Students as members of recognized school groups or organizations may perform where admission fees are charged only if the proceeds are used for charitable, educational, or civic purposes. Payment for performances may be accepted by the schools but not by individual students. The supervision of the students and liability protection for the participants will be responsibilities of the school district.

Approval of all public performances will be given by the principal involved when the above criteria have been met.

References:

MGL 71: 47 Athletic Programs; School Organizations; Regulations

MGL 71: 51 Exhibition of School Work at Expositions

Contests, Prizes and Awards Sponsored by Outside Organizations

Contests or other activities involving participation by students or staff that are sponsored by organizations not connected with the schools, shall not be announced, promoted or permitted within the schools unless approved by the Superintendent. The Superintendent shall approve only such contests or other activities as will be of educational value to the participating students.

Trophies, prizes or awards received by students from person or organizations not connected with the schools will be recognized by the Belmont Public Schools only if the Superintendent determines that they are consistent with the goals, policies and programs of the District.

The Superintendent will develop guidelines as necessary to implement this policy.

References:

MGL 71 : 47: Athletic Programs; school organizations

Awards, Gifts, Grants and Donations to Schools

The Belmont School Committee, on behalf of the schools may accept awards, gifts, grants and donations for educational purposes. Only those gifts that are deemed consistent with the goals, policies, programs and the best interests of the district will be accepted.

All gifts which are accepted on behalf of the district shall be in the name of the district and become the property of the district. Where installation is required, the gift shall be installed under the supervision of district personnel. Once such gifts become the property of the school district, repair and/or replacement of such equipment or other property, if appropriate, will become the responsibility of the district.

References:

MGL 71: 37A: Acceptance of Grant

Recognition of Service

The School Committee may recognize, through the presentation of resolutions and plaques, members of the staff, the community or the school committee who have rendered outstanding service to the Belmont Public Schools.

Gifts to School Personnel

No school employee may accept any commission, gift or gratuity of substantial value, as defined by the Massachusetts Ethics Commission, from individuals or companies, including equipment or materials required in the operation of the schools.

Students and their parents are discouraged from the routine presentation of gifts to district employees. The School Committee welcomes the writing of letters to staff members expressing gratitude or appreciation.

References:

MGL 268A: Public officials and employees conflict of interest law

930 CMR 5.00 et seq: Regulations of the Massachusetts Ethics Commission

Massachusetts Ethics Commission Advisory 04-02, May 12, 2004

Citizen Suggestions and Complaints

The School Committee welcomes constructive criticism intended to improve the effectiveness of the schools. Complaints and suggestions regarding committee actions and policy matters should be directed to the School Committee. Complaints and suggestions should be directed according to the BPS Contact Guidelines, attached. The School Committee reserves the right to defer and redirect complaints that have not been fully reviewed to the appropriate administrative level.

Anonymous communications shall be disregarded.

References:

Procedures 1017P – Contact Guidelines

Policy 1018 and procedure 1018P – Complaints Concerning School Personnel

Policy 1019 and procedure 1019P – Complaints Concerning Instructional Materials

Complaints Concerning School Personnel

Complaints concerning school personnel not resolved at the building level shall be in writing, signed, and directed to the Superintendent. Oral complaints may be recorded by a designated official for submission to the Superintendent. All such complaints will be reviewed fully and fairly. Anonymous complaints shall be disregarded.

The Superintendent will develop procedures that assure prompt and fair attention to complaints concerning school personnel.

Whenever a complaint is made directly to the School Committee as a whole or to an individual Committee member, it will be referred to the Superintendent for review and resolution unless the Superintendent is the subject of the complaint, in which case the School Committee, or its designee will be responsible for review and resolution.

References:

MGL 71: 44 Prohibition on restriction of teachers' political rights

MGL 30A: 18-35: Open Meeting Law

Procedure 1018P: Complaints concerning personnel

BPS Collective bargaining agreements

Complaints Concerning Instructional Materials

Complaints concerning instructional materials not resolved through utilization of the BPS Contact Guidelines shall be in writing, signed, and directed to the Superintendent. Oral complaints may be recorded by a designated official for submission to the Superintendent. All such complaints will be reviewed fully and fairly. Anonymous complaints shall be disregarded.

The Superintendent will develop procedures that assure prompt and fair attention to complaints concerning instructional materials.

In accordance with this policy, no questioned materials shall be removed from the school pending a final decision.

References:

Procedure 1019P Complaints concerning instructional materials

Community Use of School Facilities

The School Committee encourages the use of school facilities by responsible local community organizations. The Superintendent shall establish procedures for community use, rental regulations, and regulations regarding the use of athletic facilities.

Reference:

MGL 71: 71 Use of School Property; Purposes

Policy 7004: Use and rental of School Department Property

Research within Schools

Any request to conduct any research, surveys or questionnaires, or obtain information from students or staff during school time must be submitted in writing to the Superintendent. The Superintendent will disallow any request that, in his judgment, does not serve the best interests of students.

References:

MGL 71: 59 Superintendent of Schools; duties

Business on School Property

No private business shall be transacted on school property unless authorized by the Superintendent and so reported to the principal directly involved. Belmont Public Schools do not allow the subscription or collection of money on school premises, or allow any article to be exhibited thereon for the purpose of sale or solicitation of business.

Advertising

The name of the Belmont Public Schools may not be used as advertising by any individual or company.

Materials distributed via the schools to students by non school connected organizations must not contain advertising which is beneficial to any particular group or business.

Cooperation with Public Agencies

The Belmont Public Schools wish to cooperate as fully as possible with other public community agencies that deal with students. The Superintendent shall seek to develop positive working relationships with such agencies, including but not limited to participating in resource sharing, information exchange or investigative committees.

References:

MGL 71: 59D School Community Partnerships

Emergency Response

The Belmont Public Schools will have plans in place to respond quickly and appropriately to crisis situations within the schools. Examples of a crisis could include, but are not limited to, criminal acts, disease epidemics, physical injury or death, presence of intruders on school premises, or natural disaster.

The Superintendent shall ensure that proper procedures are in place for all schools. This includes appropriate training, establishment of emergency response teams, consultation and cooperation with community agencies, and publication of emergency procedures.

The Belmont Public Schools shall have, and annually update, a crisis response manual. Following any crisis incident, the administration shall review the effectiveness of the response and if necessary make changes and notify the School Committee.

References:

Section 363 of chapter 159, of the Acts of 2000 – Multihazard evacuation plans

Section of chapter of the Acts of 2012 – Medical emergency response plans

Belmont Public School Emergency Response Manual, available at the office of the Superintendent and the Principal of each school.

Cooperation with Police Department

The Belmont Public Schools shall cooperate with law enforcement agencies in matters involving the welfare of students or the safety of community members in school facilities.

The Superintendent will develop a Memorandum of Understanding with the Belmont Police Department which will be periodically reviewed and updated as necessary. The Memorandum shall be available to the public at the office of the Superintendent and on the Belmont Public School website.

References: Belmont Public School Emergency Response Manual, available at the office of the Superintendent and the Principal of each school.

Coordination with the Recreation Commission

The School Committee, in conjunction with the Belmont Recreation Commission shall oversee the operation of athletic facilities owned by the School Department or the Town of Belmont.

The Director of Athletics and Student Activities at Belmont High School shall schedule the use of Harris Field. The Director of Athletics and Student Activities and the Belmont Recreation Department shall jointly schedule the use of all other athletic facilities. Priority shall be given to Belmont Public School programs.

References:

Policy 7005 Use of Lighted Athletic Field

Coordination with the Health Department

The Belmont Public Schools shall cooperate with the Belmont Board of Health and the Belmont Health Department to promote and support student health.

The Superintendent shall insure that all state mandated health screenings are administered in the Belmont Public Schools. The Principals shall promptly report to the school nurse and the Superintendent the presence of any communicable or contagious diseases in the schools. The Superintendent shall notify the Board of Health of any such diseases. School nurses will insure compliance with all state laws and regulations with regard to such communicable and contagious diseases. Nurses shall refer parents who cannot afford medical or dental care to appropriate public health resources.

References:

MGL 71: 55: Contagious Diseases

55A: Procedure for handling sick children

Policy 5005: Student Health and Wellness

Partnerships with Community Organizations

The School Committee and the Superintendent shall seek to develop positive relationships with community organizations that promote and support public education. The School Committee may authorize district affiliation with specific organizations when appropriate.

References:

MGL 71: 37A: Grants; acceptance and disbursement

MGL 71: 59D: School-Community partnerships

Membership in Associations

The Belmont Public Schools shall maintain memberships in recognized associations that provide:

- in-service education benefits to staff and School Committee members,
- relevant information through newspapers, advisory services, periodicals, etc.,
- such other beneficial purposes as the Superintendent and the School Committee shall determine.

The Superintendent is authorized to purchase memberships in such associations and to pay the costs of staff or School Committee participation in activities of such associations.

Coordination with Other Schools

The School Committee will cooperate with other schools, including private and religious, and universities in matters of mutual benefit where not expressly prohibited by law.

The Superintendent may explore areas of mutual benefit with the administrative officers of such schools and to recommend desirable courses of action when appropriate.