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SCHOOL COMMITTEE GOVERNANCE AND OPERATIONS
(8000 SERIES)

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School Committee Governance and Operation

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Purpose

The Belmont School Committee is elected by the community to provide leadership and community member oversight of the Belmont Public Schools.

Members of the School Committee

Composition

The Belmont School Committee, pursuant to the By-laws of the Town of Belmont, is composed of six (6) members nominated and elected at large by the voters of Belmont for overlapping terms of three (3) years. In addition, the chair of the Student Advisory Committee elected annually at Belmont High School, is an ex-officio, non-voting member of the School Committee pursuant to M G L c. 71 section 38M.

Eligibility

Any registered voter in the Town of Belmont is eligible to hold the office of School Committee member.

Election and Term School Committee members are elected on a non-partisan ballot for staggered terms of three (3) years, with two (2) members elected each year.

Compensation

Members of the School Committee are not compensated for their services. Members may be reimbursed from school funds for expenses pre-approved by the Superintendent incurred on behalf of or while engaged in official business of the School Committee.

Resignation

A School Committee member may resign by delivering his/her written resignation to the Town Clerk with copies to the Chairperson of the School Committee and the Superintendent. Such resignation is effective upon receipt unless some other date, not to exceed 60 days from the date of submission, is specified. A School Committee member who moves from Belmont, resigns, becomes incapacitated or otherwise becomes disqualified during his/her term is deemed to have vacated the office.

Vacancies

A vacancy on the School Committee is filled by the remaining members of the School Committee and the Belmont Board of Selectmen in accordance with the provisions of MGL 41:11.

Legal References: Belmont town by-law

MGL: 71: 38M, 52

41:1, 11

School Committee Powers and Duties

The Belmont School Committee has all the powers and duties conferred upon it by state law including, but not limited to:

1. Developing, in concert with the community, students and staff, a common vision for the Belmont Public Schools focused on learning and achievement responsive to the needs of all students;
2. Adopting, evaluating and updating policies consistent with the law and the Belmont Public Schools' vision and goals;
3. Maintaining accountability for student learning by adopting the Belmont Public Schools curriculum and monitoring student progress;
4. Ensuring a safe and appropriate educational environment for all students;
5. Providing leadership on educational issues and advocating on behalf of all students and public education;
6. Hiring and supporting the Superintendent so that the vision, goals and policies of the Belmont Public Schools can be implemented;
7. Conducting regular and timely evaluations of the Superintendent based on the Superintendent's job description, the goals and objectives set for the evaluation period and any applicable performance standards established by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education;
8. Adopting a fiscally responsible budget based on the Belmont Public Schools' vision and goals, and regularly monitoring the fiscal health of the Belmont Public Schools;
9. Establishing a framework for the Belmont Public Schools' collective bargaining process and adopting responsible agreements;
10. Convening as a judicial and appeals body and serving as the final decision-maker in accordance with law, School Committee policies and negotiated agreements;
11. Retaining counsel for the School Committee for collective bargaining and for general legal matters;

12. Ensuring opportunities for the diverse range of views in the community to inform School Committee deliberations; and

13. Periodically evaluating its own effectiveness.

The School Committee has no authority to exercise any administrative control over the schools or school personnel.

Legal References:

MGL 71;37, 37E, 37F, 38, 59

Internal Reference: Administration: Superintendent

Individual School Committee Member Authority and Responsibilities

Authority

Individual School Committee members have authority only when acting as the Belmont School Committee when legally in session. Any statement or action by an individual member does not bind the School Committee except when such statement or action is a result of specific instructions of the School Committee. All policy decisions and other matters, as required by law, will be settled by an official vote of the School Committee. Individual School Committee members have no authority to exercise any administrative control over the schools or school personnel.

Responsibilities

School Committee members should:

1. Understand the mission and vision of the Belmont Public Schools;
2. Have a working knowledge of the goals, objectives, and programs of the Belmont Public Schools and the policies and procedures of the Belmont Public Schools;
3. Act impartially for the good of the students by holding the education of students above any partisan principal, group interest, or personal interest;
4. Accept the will of the majority vote in all cases, and abide by and carry out all School Committee decisions once they are made;
5. Refer questions and complaints to the proper school authorities;
6. Become familiar with the General Laws and Regulations of the Commonwealth relating to education;
7. Take collective responsibility for building unity and creating a positive organizational culture;
8. Comply with the orientation requirements of MGL 71:36A; and participate in professional development and commit the time and energy necessary to be an informed and effective leader;
9. Recognize and respect differences of perspective and style on the School Committee and among staff, students, parents, and the community;

10. Communicate a common vision;
11. Operate openly, with trust and integrity;
12. Act in a dignified and professional manner, treating everyone with civility and respect;
13. Govern within School Committee-adopted policies and procedures;

Internal Reference: Community Relations: Complaint Procedure (1018)

Conflict of Interest

As elected public officials School Committee members are classified as "Municipal Employees" for purposes of Massachusetts General Laws, Chapter 268A, the State's Conflict of Interest Law, and are bound by the provisions of that statute.

Legal Reference:
MGL; 268A

Internal Communications

School Committee members shall not use any method of communication to a quorum of members to discuss matters that require public discussion at an open meeting. Any message that can be considered an invitation to reply in any medium, and would amount to deliberation on business that must occur only at official meetings is prohibited. A quorum may be arrived at sequentially without the knowledge and intent of the original author.

School Committee members may use electronic messaging between and among members only for housekeeping purposes such as requesting or communicating agenda items, meeting times or dates or to distribute materials, correspondence, or reports so that members can prepare individually for upcoming meetings. Email sent or received by School Committee members on district related issues is subject to the public records law, is a public record, and is discoverable, subject to the exemptions of the Massachusetts Public Records law. Confidentiality should not be assumed, and therefore confidential and sensitive material should not be communicated via email.

Any email sent by School Committee members to or from the Belmont Public Schools server is subject to the district's record retention policy.

Legal Reference: MGL 30A: 18-25

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4: 7, clause 26

MA Attorney General's Open Meeting Law Guide, March 2011

www.mass.gov/Cago/docs/Government/OML_Guide_032411.pdf

Officers

The officers of the School Committee are a Chairperson and a Secretary.

Election

The Chairperson and Secretary are elected by the School Committee by majority vote at the organizational meeting (see definition in section 8007). If the School Committee fails to elect a Chairperson and/or Secretary at the organizational meeting, the members filling these positions pro tempore shall exercise all duties of their respective offices from one meeting to the next until new officers are duly elected.

Tenure

The officers of the School Committee each hold office until the next organizational meeting unless a shorter period is specified by the terms of his/her election or he/she resigns or otherwise becomes disqualified.

Chairperson

The Chairperson of the School Committee has the same powers as any other member of the School Committee to vote upon all measures coming before it, to offer resolutions and to discuss questions. He/she will perform those duties that are consistent with his/her office and those required by law, state regulations, and this School Committee. In carrying out these responsibilities, the Chairperson will:

1. Sign the instruments, acts, and orders necessary to carry out state requirements and the will of the School Committee;
2. Consult with the Superintendent in the planning of the School Committee's agendas;
3. Confer with the Superintendent on issues that may occur between School Committee meetings;
4. Appoint subcommittees, subject to School Committee approval;
5. Call special meetings of the School Committee as necessary;
6. Be a public spokesperson for the School Committee at all times except as this responsibility is specifically delegated to others; and
7. Be responsible for the orderly conduct of all School Committee meetings.

Secretary

The Secretary will:

1. Keep or cause to be kept a permanent record book in which all votes, orders, and proceedings are recorded;
2. Comply with state law and School Committee policy regarding notification of meetings;
3. Render such reports as may be required by the state or the town.
4. In the absence of the Chairperson, assume the duties of the Chairperson.
A Secretary Pro Tempore shall be elected by a majority of members present.

Resignation

Any officer may resign from office by delivering a written resignation to the Chairperson, the Secretary or to a meeting of the members of the School Committee. Such resignation is effective upon receipt and acceptance shall not be necessary to make it effective.

Vacancies

If the office of Chairperson or Secretary becomes vacant, the members of the School Committee shall elect a successor by vote of a majority of all of the members of the School Committee. Each such successor holds office for the unexpired term or until he/she resigns or otherwise becomes disqualified.

Legal references:

MGL 71:36

66:5A

Meetings

The School Committee will transact all business at official meetings. These may be either regular or special meetings, defined as follows:

Regular Meetings

The usual official meetings, held during the school year according to a schedule determined by the Superintendent and the Chairperson and provided to all School Committee members prior to the commencement of the year. All regular meetings of the School Committee (typically held on Tuesdays at 7:30 pm) are open to the public and the media.

Special Meeting

An official meeting called between scheduled regular meetings to consider specific topics.

Emergency Meeting

A meeting held in response to a situation which requires prompt action to prevent imminent disruption or harm to the system. An emergency meeting may be held without complying with the notice provisions for regular meetings. Notice shall be posted as far in advance as is practicable. All other requirements for regular meetings will be observed.

Adjourned Meeting

A meeting deferred or suspended by majority vote of the School Committee to a later time and place which shall be specified in an order of adjournment. Notice of such adjournment shall be posted within 24 hours after the time of adjournment and 48 hours in advance of the date to which the meeting is deferred.

Organizational Meeting

The first meeting of the School Committee following the annual town election. The most senior member of the School Committee present shall preside as Chairperson Pro Tempore, and the next most senior member shall serve as Secretary Pro Tempore. At this meeting officers are elected and policies are adopted.

Public Hearings

A meeting of the School Committee to obtain public testimony or comment. A public hearing may occur as part of a regular or special meeting, or it may be the sole purpose of a special meeting, with no other matters addressed. If a public hearing

is held pursuant to state law, all statutory requirements for notice and conduct of the hearing shall be met.

Executive Session

A meeting of the School Committee closed to the public conducted only to discuss confidential matters as specified by law. An executive session may be held at any time during any meeting in accordance with law. The School Committee shall state in open session the matters to be discussed in executive session and whether it will return to open session. In the executive session, the School Committee may consider only those matters covered in its statement.

Legal References:

MGL: 71, 38N, 37, 23A, B & C

Notice

Notice of all School Committee meetings, including meetings of subcommittees, shall be posted in the offices of the Superintendent and the Town Clerk at least forty eight (48) hours prior to the meeting, unless otherwise provided by law, and shall conform to statutory requirements for posting of notice.

Each notice of meeting shall specify that reasonable accommodations for people with disabilities are available upon request. An individual requesting disability-related accommodation or modification in order to participate at the meeting should contact the Superintendent's office within a reasonable time in advance of the meeting, describing the accommodation needed and providing contact information. Last minute requests will be honored to the extent practicable.

Legal Reference:
MGL 37:23B

Quorum

A majority of the School Committee constitutes a quorum for the transaction of business. Unless otherwise provided by law or this policy, action by the School Committee requires a majority vote of all members present and voting.

Agenda/Meeting Materials

The Superintendent, conferring with the Chairperson of the School Committee, will arrange the order of agenda items so that the School Committee can accomplish its business as expeditiously as possible. The particular order may vary from meeting to meeting in keeping with the business at hand.

The School Committee will follow the order of business established by the agenda to the extent practicable. The order of business may be rearranged for the convenience of visitors, individuals appearing before the School Committee, or to expedite School Committee business.

Any School Committee member or a member of the Belmont Public School Community who wishes to have a topic scheduled on the agenda should submit a request to the Superintendent or the Chairperson of the Committee. A staff member who wishes to have a topic scheduled on the agenda should submit the request through the Superintendent. The inclusion and scheduling of such items will be at the discretion of the Chairperson of the School Committee, in consultation with the Superintendent. The agenda will also provide time for members of the Belmont Public School Community to speak briefly before the School Committee.

The agenda, together with supporting materials, will be distributed to School Committee members on the Friday prior to a regularly scheduled meeting.

Agendas will be posted on the Belmont Public Schools' web site.

Internal Reference: Community Relations: Public Participation (1006)

Conduct of Meetings

School Committee meetings are conducted in accordance with the rules of parliamentary procedure as set forth in Robert's Rules of Order, as periodically revised, and the School Committee's own policies. In the event of a conflict, the School Committee's internal policies and procedures control. The School Committee, by unanimous consent, may suspend the rules in appropriate circumstances.

At all meetings of the School Committee, the presiding officer will:

1. Call the meeting to order at the appointed time;
2. Insure that agenda items are taken up in an orderly manner;
3. Recognize persons who desire to speak, and insure that the speaker who has the floor may speak, free from disturbance or interference;
4. Respond directly to public inquiries, referring to a member of the School Committee or Administration for clarification or response when appropriate;
5. Explain what the effect of a motion would be if this is not clear to members;
6. Restrict discussion to the question when a motion is before the School Committee;
7. Answer all parliamentary inquiries; and
8. Put motions to a vote, stating definitely and clearly the vote and result thereof.

Public Participation

All meetings of the School Committee, including subcommittee meetings, are open to the public, unless they are duly convened executive sessions.

Meetings must be held in accessible locations. With reasonable advance notice, appropriate disability-related accommodation will be provided for individuals requesting such accommodation from the Superintendent's office.

The School Committee shall make time available for public participation at meetings in accordance with guidelines established by the School 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 in the Community Relations section of these policies.

Employees have the right to attend School Committee meetings in the same manner as all other member of the Belmont Public School community.

Legal Reference:

MGL C 37 §§23 A & B

Internal Reference: Community Relations, Public Participation (1006)

Community Relations, Complaint procedure (1018)

Policy Development and Adoption

The School Committee is solely responsible for developing or changing the policies of the Belmont Public Schools to reflect the district's vision and goals and to provide guidelines for School Committee action and administrative decisions. These policies shall comply with all applicable state and federal laws and regulations.

Adoption and Amendment

The Superintendent or designee shall present drafts or suggestions for new policy and policy revisions when changes in law occur or when specific needs arise. All drafts must be distributed to School Committee members in writing and placed on the agenda for a regular meeting for first reading and discussion. Comments from the Superintendent and reports of any advisory committee established to review or comment on the proposal shall be considered.

Prior to adoption, policies shall normally be given two readings by the School Committee. At its second reading, the policy may be adopted by a majority vote of all members of the School Committee. The School Committee may waive the second reading or may require additional readings.

Policies will be effective on the date determined by the School Committee, which will be set to ensure that those affected have sufficient time to become familiar with them prior to implementation.

Review and Evaluation

The School Committee will conduct periodic reviews of its policies to keep them up to date. The Superintendent shall inform the School Committee of any policies that are out of date or appear to need revision for other reasons.

Dissemination

A copy of the Belmont Public Schools policy manual will be provided to each School Committee member and will be available in the Superintendent's office and the main office in each school building. All copies of the manual remain the property of the Belmont School Committee and are subject to recall at any time.

The Superintendent, or designee, is responsible for preserving and making accessible the policies adopted by the School Committee and any procedures developed to implement them.

Suspension

The operation of any provision of Belmont Public School policy not established by law or contract may be temporarily suspended, for a specified purpose and for a specified time, by a majority vote of School Committee members present at any official meeting. Any action to suspend policy must be reviewed at the next regularly scheduled meeting.

The Superintendent may suspend all or part of any policy or administrative procedure when it conflicts with state or federal law or regulations. The Superintendent will report the suspension to the School Committee. Suspension shall be valid until the policy or procedure is rescinded, amended or reaffirmed.

Legal Reference: MGL c. 71:37, 37H

Internal reference: Administration: Other Administrators, School Committee Review of Regulations