

Concord School District  
**Annual School Board Retreat**  
**January 11, 2020**

**School Board members:** Jennifer Patterson, Gina Cannon, Tom Croteau, Barb Higgins, Jim Richards, Chuck Crush, David Parker, Liza Poinier, Danielle Smith

**District administrators:** Frank Bass, Donna Palley, Jack Dunn, Matt Cashman

**Guest:** Barrett Christina, Esq., *Executive Director* NHSBA

Agenda

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| A. Introduction and welcome          | Jennifer Patterson |
| B. School Board training information | Barrett Christina  |
| C. Committee explanations            | Jennifer Patterson |

A. Ms. Patterson opened with an informal welcome and overview of the day. The Board began by discussing topics on which it was hoped the NH School Boards Association would offer guidance during the retreat. One key area was RSA 91-A Access to Governmental Records and Meetings, and how this law regulates what information from the Board can and cannot be shared with the public. Since so much of the Board's last year was focused on the different kinds of meetings, and guidelines that go along with each, it was a good place to begin, as review for current Board members and training for new Board members.

Items such as how much public notice must be given for public and non-public meetings were discussed. Board members discussed what differentiates a non-public meeting from what is often called a "non-meeting." The bonding process was discussed, and the "ins-and-outs" of public notices related to those meetings. The Board discussed whether inviting Superintendent Bass into a meeting would make it a public meeting. The general rule is that both public and non-public sessions must have at least 24 hours' prior public notice while non-meetings (negotiating sessions; meeting with legal counsel) did not require public notice.

Ms. Patterson introduced Barrett Christina, Executive Director of the NH School Board Association for a morning of training.

B. Attorney Christina reviewed the *NHSBA School Board Roles and Responsibilities – November 2019* packet provided to those in attendance. While the Board did not complete all 34 pages of the handout, healthy conversation centered on the key roles and responsibilities of a school board, and how Concord's School Board functions a bit differently, as it is autonomous from the City Council.

Policymaking was the first Board responsibility discussed. It was pointed out that there is no legal difference between the term "policy" and "rule." Attorney Christina walked the

Board through setting and establishing Board policies as well as legal requirements pertaining to Board policies.

The discussion moved to the efficient running of meetings and committee work versus full Board work. There was significant discussion on the potential ineffectiveness of re-hashing detailed committee meeting minutes at a full Board meeting, compared with the need for all Board members to be educated and knowledgeable about what has taken place in committee meetings.

Board members discussed the challenges of helping the community better understand the Board's role. Sometimes community members assume that being on the Board is a full-time job; they do not understand that Board members essentially volunteer their time. Discussion on how to educate the community followed. It was reiterated that policymaking and budget approval were primary Board functions. In other communities, the school board itself participates more heavily in negotiations. Due to this Board's autonomous nature and the fact that all members vote on actual negotiated contracts and funds, CSD Board members cannot sit at the negotiations table.

The other main function of the Board is to hire and supervise the Superintendent. There was discussion on how to best execute this process as the Board prepares to hire a new permanent Superintendent. A focus on trauma and a background with crisis arose as professional characteristics needed for this community at this time. A brief discussion ensued around the supervision of superintendents by the Board, and the importance of good communication practices between the Superintendent and the Board. This segued into a discussion about how much the full Board should know about employee personnel matters when compared to the Executive Committee, and what the timing and degree of specificity of these communications can or should be.

If Board members knew too much about a given situation from one side or another, they could not function in an unbiased way should there be a personnel hearing. This balance between knowledge of a situation and remaining neutral was seen to be a fine line from a legal perspective.

Board members discussed the challenges of communicating with the public when questions arise about personnel matters. It was noted that there is not always a timeline for sharing information and oftentimes the process for legally sharing information does not allow it to be shared as quickly as members of the public expect or would like.

The Board discussed the challenge of listening to public comment without responding, which can create an aura of apathy when in fact Board members are obligated to remain impartial about potential personnel matters due to the Board's role as an appellate body. Returning emails and phone calls, while critically important, can be similarly challenging when there is no substantive information that a Board member can share.

Dr. Bass noted that timely communication and responsiveness are key areas for him as a Superintendent. Over 180 responses were received from teachers on the draft policy Employee-Student Relations survey, and he noted that the safety in which they could respond seemed to be cathartic for them.

The Board discussed other ways it could foster strong communication with the public. Ideas included setting up public forums in which to address public concerns as more of a back-and-forth discussion than is workable in a monthly Board meeting. Table set up during meetings was also discussed, including whether school administrators and Board members should sit separately, and what was the right balance between the Superintendent and Board roles.

Attorney Christina concluded the morning by encouraging Board members to take advantage of NHSBA resources, and offered to answer questions at any time.

The Board and staff members broke for a lunch break.

C. After lunch, Ms. Patterson led a review of each committee and the appointment of vice-chairs for each committee. A vision Ms. Patterson has for each Board member includes the opportunity to chair meetings and to develop specific areas of expertise, working in conjunction with Central Office staff in each area.

Following an overview of each committee by its chairperson, Board members discussed the work of each committee, highlighted success from the past year and discussed focus areas for the coming year.

**Capital Facilities Committee** – this committee would like to see the District develop long- and short-term maintenance goals in a revised facilities plan. This committee will also be at the forefront of the middle school facility development and will examine ways to influence the political conversation to reinforce the need for state building aid. Jim Richards is chair, Liza Poinier is vice-chair.

**City and Community Relations Committee** – this committee will look at the District website to improve navigation, and review work in social media and television. Board members discussed how to improve ready access to Board meetings on the website. The Committee would like to host a legislative breakfast this year and consider how to advocate for building aid. Liza Poinier is chair, David Parker is vice-chair.

**Communications & Policy Committee** – this committee will continue its work to update, review and revise current policies and to stay up-to-date on newly-introduced legislation that will influence policies. This committee would like information on interpreting contract language, as grievances may come to this committee. Jennifer Patterson is chair, Gina Cannon is vice-chair.

**Finance Committee** – this committee manages the reserve and trust funds and must be well aware of costs related to running the District: tax rate and creating options (80% is attributable to personnel costs). The committee is interested in making good choices, prioritizing, gaining state building aid, and the need to consider bonding to support a middle school project and to support older facilities (more roofing projects). Tom Croteau is chair, Barb Higgins is vice-chair.

**Instructional Committee** – This committee enjoys the curriculum and instruction-connected conversations as it examines 21<sup>st</sup> century learning: hands-on, project-based learning. This committee would like to consider the middle school grade range decision

(grades 5-8 or 6-8). For the coming year, the committee will focus on computer science and social studies, personalized learning, the social-emotional learning (SEL), behavior task force and career pathways. The committee will consider ways to create opportunities for Board members to visit classrooms during the coming year. Barb Higgins is chair, Danielle Smith is vice-chair.

**Negotiations Committee** – this committee has just completed a fairly challenging year with several new CBAs completed. The committee will continue to consider long-term liabilities in negotiations. The committee is interested in gaining and maintaining a competitive edge as new employees are recruited. Four contracts will need to be negotiated by June 30, 2021. Chuck Crush is chair, Jennifer Patterson is vice-chair.

**Executive Committee** – this committee meets monthly to create the agenda for the monthly meetings, and also considers significant issues as they arise in the District. This committee has some interest in being present at community events and connecting with other organizations in the community. Jennifer Patterson is President, Jim Richards is Vice President, and Barb Higgins is Secretary.

There was a final brief conversation about social media and the role of Board members thereon. A Board page was discussed as well as individual Board member pages. Mr. Croteau suggested the Board ask Mr. Christina to return to provide further training, as this was invaluable.

The retreat adjourned at 1:45 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Barb Higgins, *Secretary*