

Melrose School Committee Goal #4 The types and frequency of communications and information requests from the Melrose School Committee should be more clearly delineated.

First step is to look at the roles that are already defined.

Second step will be to evaluate any potential changes to these policies to make the roles clearer.

Third step will be to determine whether there are additional definitions that need to be set out in policy in order to make them clear.

This will all be coordinated with the Communication Plan being worked on by the Superintendent's Communications Plan Working Group.

Below is a summary of our existing policies as they relate to communications:

**Communication with the Public -**

**1101** Therefore, the Committee declares its intent:

1. To keep local citizens regularly and thoroughly informed through all available channels of communication on the policies, programs, problems, and planning of the School District, and to carry out this policy through its own efforts, those of the superintendent, and such information officers as may be appointed.
2. To solicit the studied counsel of the people through advisory committees selected from the community and appointed to consider problems that vitally affect the future of our children.
3. To invite the advice and counsel of the people of the community at all times and especially at all meetings of the Committee, except Executive Sessions.

**1106** It is the desire of the Committee that the citizens of the city be fully informed of their policies and actions regarding official matters, with the exception that deliberations on actions involving the discussion of employees, and considered to involve matters of a personal or private nature, shall not be considered public information.

It is the responsibility of the Superintendent to employ such means as may be at his/her disposal to inform citizens of the activities of the schools. It is his/her responsibility to remain sensitive to the interests and aspirations of the community and s/he may initiate efforts to assess these interests from time to time.

The Committee, through the Superintendent, will seek to keep the public informed as to the needs and activities of the schools.

1. Cooperation by the schools with the various news media is encouraged.
2. Special publications by the public schools may be issued for information of parents and the public from time to time.
3. Other school personnel shall be encouraged to meet with organizations and groups in the community to explain the school program and to seek community views and opinions.

**1502 and 6603** The composition of task forces and other advisory committees will be broadly representative and take into consideration the specific tasks assigned to the Committee. Members of the professional staff may be appointed to the Committee as members or consultants.

4. Appointments to such committees will be made by the Committee; appointment of staff members to such committees will be made by the Committee upon recommendation of the Superintendent of Schools.
5. Each Advisory Committee will be clearly instructed as to:
  - a. The length of time each member is being asked to serve.
  - b. The assignment the Committee wishes the Advisory Committee to fulfill and the extent and limitations of its responsibilities.
  - c. The resources the Committee will provide.
  - d. The approximate dates on which the Committee wishes to receive major reports.
  - e. The responsibilities of the release of information to the press.
6. The School Committee possesses certain legal powers and prerogatives that cannot be delegated or surrendered to others. All recommendations of an Advisory Committee must be submitted to the School

Committee. The School Committee will have the sole power to dissolve any of its Advisory Committees and will reserve the right to exercise this power at any time during the life of any committee.

7. The School Committee Chair shall furnish a list of names and addresses of members of any such Advisory Committee to the School Committee members and the Superintendent.

As required by state or federal law, the meetings of Advisory Committees will follow all applicable Open Meeting Laws.

**1503.01** No resident of the city will be denied the right to bring complaints to the Committee. Complaints will be referred back through the proper administrative channels for solutions before investigation or action by the Committee. Exceptions will only be made when the complaints concern Committee actions or Committee operations.

The Committee believes that complaints are best handled and resolved as close to their origin as possible and that the professional staff should be given every opportunity to consider the issues and attempt to resolve the problem prior to involvement of the Committee. The proper channeling of complaints regarding instruction, discipline or learning materials will be as follows:

1. Teacher
2. School Building Administrators
3. Superintendent
4. School Committee

If a complaint, which was presented to the Committee and referred back through the proper channels, is adjusted before it comes back to the Committee, a report of the disposition of the matter will be made to the Committee and then placed in the official files.

Matters referred to the Superintendent and/or Committee must be in writing and should be specific in terms of action desired.

The Committee expects the professional staff to receive complaints courteously and to make a proper reply to a complainant.

**1503-02** Complaints about school personnel will be investigated fully and fairly. Prior to any complaint being investigated, the complainant must submit his/her complaint in writing to the appropriate responsible individual. Anonymous complaints will be disregarded.

Whenever a complaint is made directly to the Committee as a whole or to a Committee Member as an individual, it will be referred to the Superintendent for study and possible solution.

The Superintendent will develop, for approval by the Committee, procedures that assure prompt and fair attention to complaints against school personnel. The procedures will require that an employee who is the object of a complaint be informed in a timely manner and be afforded the opportunity to present the facts as he/she sees them.

If it appears necessary, the employee involved may request a formal hearing by the Committee. Statutory restrictions on executive sessions will be observed.

**1505** The Committee endorses the concept that community participation in the affairs of the schools is essential if the School Department and the community are to maintain mutual confidence and respect and work together to improve the quality of education for students. It will exert every effort to identify the desires of the community and to be responsive, through its actions, to those desires.

All citizens will be encouraged to express ideas, concerns, and judgments about the schools to the school administration, staff, any appointed advisory boards and the Committee.

Residents who are specially qualified because of interest, training, experience, or personal characteristics will be encouraged to assume an active role in school affairs. From time to time, these people may be invited by the Committee to act as advisors, either individually or in groups.

The Committee and the staff will give substantial weight to the advice they receive from individuals and community groups interested in the schools, particularly from those individuals and groups they have invited to advise them regarding specific problems, but will use their best judgment in arriving at decisions.

The Committee reaffirms the right of its citizenry to make recommendations to the Committee regarding

improving the city schools.

All communications received by the Melrose School Committee are documents of public record, whether they are received electronically or in hard copy. If communications are received by the Melrose Public Schools for the Melrose School Committee, they will be forwarded to the entire committee at the earliest convenient time (e.g. an email might be forwarded later that day, while a mailed letter might be copied and sent in a regular packet delivery, or provided in hard copy at a meeting).

If any communication is deemed to indicate an immediate threat to students or property, the communication will be forwarded to the Superintendent and through him/her to the Melrose Police Department.

Anonymous communication, whether received electronically or in hard copy, will also be distributed in this manner. While the committee does not encourage anonymous communication, they do recognize that some contributors are unable or unwilling to include their identity since it is not possible for the Melrose School Committee to shield the name of the contributor from the public record. It is incumbent upon committee members to take into account the inherent difficulties of verification and accountability in anonymous communications and to judge the content accordingly. In no case will an anonymous communication be read at a public meeting or placed in an employee's personnel record.

**1107** The Melrose School Committee is made up of public servants, and its meetings and records will be a matter of public information except as such meetings and records pertain to individual personnel and other classified matter.

The Committee supports the right of the people of the District to know about the programs and services of their schools and will make every effort to disseminate information. All requests for information will be acted on fairly, completely, and expeditiously.

The official minutes of the Committee meetings, its written policies and regulations, and its financial records will be open for inspection by any citizen desiring to examine them. No records pertaining to individual students or staff members will be released for inspection by the public or any other unauthorized persons, by the Superintendent or any other persons responsible for the custody of confidential files. The exception to this will be information about an individual employee (or student), which has been authorized in writing for release by the employee (or student, or student's parent) or by court order.

Each building administrator is authorized to use all means available to keep parents and others in the particular school's community informed about the school's program and activities.

The Superintendent and the Principals will develop a plan that sets out the procedural details of School-Parent and School-Community communications. This plan will include elements about the use and protection of phone numbers, emails and other identifying information. This plan will be reviewed by the School Committee on an annual basis. The details of the plan will then be communicated to the parents at the beginning of each school year.

**6501** "Except in an emergency, a notice of each Committee meeting shall be filed with the Clerk of the municipality in which the Committee acts, and the notice or a copy thereof shall, at least 48 hours, including Saturdays but not Sundays and legal holidays, prior to such meeting, be publicly posted in the office of such Clerk or on the principal official bulletin board of such municipality... For the purposes of this section, "emergency" shall mean a situation where immediate, undelayed action is deemed by the Committee to be imperative."

**6503** All meetings of the Committee shall be open meetings unless the Committee votes to go into Executive Session. No Executive Session shall be held until the committee has first convened in open session. The Committee shall go back into open session prior to adjournment.

Except in an emergency, a notice of each meeting shall be filed at least 48 hours in advance with the Town Clerk.

Executive Session:

In accordance with State law, an Executive Session of the Committee, at which time the public and press shall be excluded, shall be held only for the purpose of discussing, deliberating, or voting on those matters which by general or specific statute, or federal grant-in-aid requirements, cannot be made public, and those matters which

if made public might adversely affect the financial interest of the system or town or the reputation of any person. The Committee shall maintain records of the action taken at such meetings, but the records shall remain secret so long as their publication would defeat the lawful purposes of the Executive Session, but no longer. **All votes taken shall be recorded roll call votes**, and will become part of the executive session minutes. Minutes of all executive sessions shall be maintained separately, and made available pursuant to existing state or federal statutes.

**6510** In compliance with State law the Committee shall maintain accurate records setting forth the action taken at each meeting, and a summary of all matters voted shall be made public with reasonable promptness. Votes taken in Executive Session may remain confidential so long as their publication would defeat the lawful purposes of the Executive Session.

The Superintendent shall provide each member of the Committee an advance notice of each meeting including an agenda and related materials. This notice shall be given at least forty-eight (48) hours in advance.

The Superintendent shall keep on file in the administrative building all reports, papers, and documents relating to the business of the Committee or belonging to the Committee.

**6511** Notice of all special meetings shall be given to the members of the Committee and City Clerk at least forty-eight hours prior to the time stated for the meeting to convene. Said notice shall indicate the purpose of such special meeting.

The agenda for the Special Meeting shall be concerned exclusively with the topic or topics expressly voted by the Committee at the time the meeting was scheduled. No other matter may be brought before the Committee. In an emergency, a meeting may be called which does not provide forty-eight hours notification.

#### **Communication with Parents -**

**1103** Notices include those sent on paper, through email, or posted on the MelroseSchools.com web site. Distribution of notices by non-school organizations or on non-school matters shall be permitted only under the following conditions:

Such notices may be distributed only with the Superintendent's authorization, or that of his/her designee.

Such notices shall relate to activities for school children or to information, which is deemed relevant for the families of school children.

All notices must state the relationship between the Melrose Public School system and the non-school organization.

By virtue of its distribution through the schools, there may seem to be an implied endorsement by the Melrose Public School System of the organization, ideas, or activities in the notice. In cases where the Melrose Public Schools are not endorsing the organization, ideas or activities, that must be stated explicitly on the notice.

Under no circumstances will notices of a religious or political nature, or about religious or political topics, be sent through the schools.

**1104** Students, parents, and staff will be informed early in each school year of the procedures that will be used to notify them in case of emergency closing.

**1503.03** Criticism of a book or other materials used in the schools may be expected from time to time. In such instances the school will follow the Administrative Procedures set out in Procedures for Reconsideration of Curriculum and/or Instructional Materials or Procedures for Reconsideration of Library/Resource Center Materials. Any substantial changes to these procedures will be presented to the Melrose School Committee.

**1504** Parents are encouraged to visit the schools. The Committee requests that the parent contact the classroom teacher to arrange the day and time of visits so as to avoid any conflicts with the school schedule.

#### **Communication with the Press**

**1105** Every effort will be made to assist the press and other communications media to obtain complete and adequate coverage of the programs, schools, cost, curriculum, changes, concerns and special events.

All representatives of the media will be given equal access to information about the schools. General releases of interest to the entire community will be made available to all of the media simultaneously. There will be no exclusive releases except as media representatives request information on particular programs plans or problems. In order that School Department publicity is given wide coverage and is coordinated into a common effort and purpose, the following procedures will be followed in giving official information to the news media:

1. The Committee Chair will be the official spokesperson for The Committee, except as this duty is delegated to the Superintendent.
2. News releases that are of a City-Wide or sensitive nature or pertain to established Committee policy are the responsibility of the Superintendent.
3. News releases that are of concern to only one school, or to an organization of one school, are the responsibility of the Principal of that particular school. All statements made to the press by other staff members of the particular school must be cleared with the Principal.

While it is impossible to know how news releases will be treated by the press, every possible effort should be made to obtain coverage of school activities which will create and maintain a dignified and professionally responsible image for the Melrose Public Schools.

Of increasing importance when dealing with critical incidents, particularly those within a school facility or at school related events, is the role which the media can play. The STARS program will address the issue of the role of the media and seek to establish formal relationships with the media (print and electronic) to develop protocols which will allow for mutual cooperation and benefit when incidents or the threat of incidents occur.

### **Communication with Outside Organizations**

**1405** Therefore, it shall be the desire of the Committee to establish positive working relationships with all other public and private organizations which contribute to the education process and to the general welfare of the citizens of the community.

**1406** It shall be the policy of the Committee to cooperate to the fullest possible extent with other school systems, and with other local, state, and regional agencies and organizations in the solution of educational problems of common concern. This cooperation shall extend to such areas as research, exchange of information and data, coordination of curriculum, coordination of school calendars and activities, and construction of facilities which may be efficiently utilized on a cooperative basis, such as television facilities, special facilities for performing arts, and any other facility where it may be advantageous to serve a broader area than this system with a single facility.

Promoting this policy, the Superintendent shall include in his/her recommendations to the committee, an evaluation of the desirability and feasibility of cooperation with other agencies in endeavors which could benefit the system.

### **Communication within the School Committee**

**6404** When a school emergency occurs that calls for notification of Committee members, the Superintendent or his/her designee will contact the Chair, or in his/her absence, the Vice Chair.

**6506.01** The Chairperson of the Committee or a Subcommittee may include any item on his/her meeting agenda that the presiding Chairperson deems appropriate.

Any other member of the School Committee, Melrose resident or other person having business before the Committee or Subcommittee, may request that an item be included on the agenda. If a request is accompanied by the explicit endorsement of two (2) or more School Committee members, or it is endorsed by the Superintendent and one (1) School Committee member, then that agenda item will be honored by the presiding Chairperson and included on the agenda, although any such item may be deferred for one (1) regularly scheduled meeting, if necessary, for scheduling concerns. Deferrals for longer than one (1) regularly scheduled meeting will require an approved motion of the Committee or Subcommittee.

The presiding Chairperson will decide whether to include a requested item on the agenda, to decline to do so, or to defer the requested item to a later meeting. The presiding Chairperson should give due consideration to all requests. Explanation will be made as to why a request is denied or deferred. Copies of requests and

explanations about their disposition shall be maintained as part of the public records of the Committee.

Members of the Committee shall be notified when requests are denied or deferred.

Requests must be specific, and in writing, and delivered in person or through other reliable means (email or fax, for example) to the presiding Chairperson or the Superintendent's office at least four (4) full business days before the meeting to be considered for inclusion at that meeting. For example, if the Committee is meeting on Tuesday evening, a request must be received by the presiding Chairperson or the Superintendent's office before the opening of business at the Superintendent's office on the preceding Thursday, assuming a normal workweek. Requestors should not assume receipt without confirmation. The Superintendent shall forward all such requests to the presiding Chairperson. The presiding Chairperson may waive the four (4) day requirement if s/he considers a matter to be urgent.

Acceptance of an agenda item does not necessarily provide the requesting party with an opportunity to speak at a School Committee meeting.

**6601** The Student Advisory Committee shall meet with the Committee at least once every other month, during the months school is in session. It shall be a non-voting member body of the Committee and shall be subject to all Committee rules and regulations and shall serve without compensation.

**6602** Sub-committees may act for the full Committee only on specific instructions or within specific limits. In all matters, the sub-committee will report its findings to the full Committee. No sub-committee action shall become final until ratified by the full Committee.