



OFFICIAL MINUTES OF THE IN PERSON BOSTON SCHOOL COMMITTEE RETREAT

November 20, 2024

The Boston School Committee held a retreat on November 20, 2024 at 6 p.m. at the Bruce C. Bolling Municipal Building, 2300 Washington Street, Room 2-12, Roxbury, Massachusetts. For more information about any of the items listed below, visit bostonpublicschools.org/schoolcommittee, email lpavex@bostonpublicschools.org, or call the Boston School Committee Office at (617) 635-9014.

ATTENDANCE

School Committee Members Present: Chairperson Jeri Robinson; Vice Chairperson Michael D. O'Neill; Stephen Alkins; Brandon Cardet-Hernandez; Student Representative Omer Ismail, Chantal Lima Barbosa; Rafaela Polanco Garcia; and Quoc Tran.

Boston Public Schools Staff Present: Superintendent Mary Skipper; the Mayor's Senior Advisor for Youth and Schools Rebecca Grainger; Assistant Superintendent for Data Strategy and Implementation Monica Hogan; Senior Deputy Superintendent of Academics Linda Chen; Deputy Superintendent of Operations Sam Depina; Deputy Superintendent of Equity, Community and Family Advancement Dr. Ana Tavares; and Chief of Communications Chris McKinnon.

DOCUMENTS PRESENTED

[Agenda](#)

[Eight Characteristics of Effective School Boards](#)

[Role of School Boards](#)

CALL TO ORDER

Chairperson Jeri Robinson welcomed participants to the retreat, highlighting collaboration, effective governance, and aligning priorities. She noted the session builds on the October 28 retreat to strengthen the committee's work for student success. Ms. Robinson welcomed back Dr. Amanda Aiken to facilitate and introduced Dr. Rebecca Grainger, the Mayor's Senior Advisor for Youth and Schools.

Dr. Alkins arrived after the discussion had started.

SUMMARY OF DISCUSSION

Dr. Grainger emphasized that we all share the common goal of providing quality education and fostering transformational change. To achieve this, she stressed the importance of collaboration. She called for alignment and clarity in defining our shared objectives moving forward, involving the School Committee, the Mayor's Office, and the district.

Dr. Aiken emphasized the importance of harnessing the group's collective strength to tackle the considerable challenges ahead. She highlighted the importance of working together to support children's success, not just survival. She encouraged the group to focus on district priorities from a governance perspective. She also asked members to share how they were feeling by answering, "How are you entering today?" with one word.

The School Committee members proceed to discuss attendance. The key takeaways from the last retreat were:

1. There was agreement that clear attendance expectations keep everyone on the same page and prepared.
2. Members are overall diligent about notifying the chair and executive secretary in advance of any planned absences.
3. It's important to create a space where everyone feels heard and like they truly belong.
4. Regular attendance shows commitment to the group's success and helps maintain momentum.
 - a. How can we reaffirm our commitment to regular attendance?
5. Absences impact the team's cohesion and progress, especially with a small group.
 - a. Committee members must catch up (review materials and meeting recordings) and stay engaged after missing a meeting. Are there other needed supports?

Drafting Our Attendance Expectations

- What is a reasonable limit for absences?
Reference from our last conversation: Chronic absenteeism is when a student misses 10% or more of the school days in a year.
- What steps can we take to maintain engagement for members who are absent?
- What else should we be thinking about?

Dr. Aiken asked members to pair up and discuss attendance expectations for adults, referencing the district's definition of chronic absenteeism for students which is 10% or more.

The first group, consisting of Dr. Alkins, Mr. Tran, and Ms. Lima Barbosa shared their ideas:

- Don't miss more than 20% of meetings due to sickness, travel, work-related business, or childcare
- Engagement: Meet with district staff, one-on-one meeting with other members, review materials
- Reintroduce task forces - reduce meetings to ten and increase the number of task forces

The second group, Mr. Brandon Cardet-Hernandez and Ms. Polanco Garcia, shared their ideas:

- Allow for hybrid meetings for the members
- Create a yearly theme calendar for planning
- Distinguish between meetings vs. town halls – adopt a structured approach with focused meetings around specific themes and town halls for open dialogue and public comment

The third group, Ms. Robinson, Mr. O’Neill, and Mr. Ismail, shared their ideas:

- The School Committee should be a priority for all members, with no more than 10-20% absenteeism. Students are allowed up to 10% absence, and we should apply the same standard.
- Members need to affirm the expectations
- How to maintain engagement: make sure to watch the missed meetings
- Communicate with district staff and liaison, ask questions ahead of time and communicate with other members
- MASC (Massachusetts Association of School Committees) training- use them as a resources
- Be proactive if you miss a meeting

Dr. Aiken summarized the discussion on the number, structure, and cadence of meetings, stressing clear expectations. She highlighted the importance of accessible meetings, including hybrid options, and the need for commitment and engagement. She also mentioned that the district team would draft a plan and present it for review.

The members discussed the need for an in-person quorum for hybrid meetings, as confirmed by MASC. The Superintendent suggested having five members commit to in-person attendance and rotating. Mr. O’Neill recommended providing the full calendar early, reducing the number of meetings, and exploring the legality of hybrid meetings.

Dr. Aiken outlined the next steps, including determining the legality of hybrid meetings, agreeing on the annual meeting count, and developing a flexible calendar. She also mentioned that the district would present a draft of attendance expectations along with a proposed meeting schedule and reductions.

Understanding the Key Expectations for School Committee Members to Maximize Impact

Your Role in Improving Student Achievement: By their nature, boards do not create learning; rather they work through others by creating conditions that promote learning. - The Role of School Boards in Improving Student Achievement

Below are governance levers that can help drive improvements in student achievement.

1. Setting the Vision
2. Establishing Goals
3. Developing Policy
4. Allocating Resources
5. Assuring Accountability

Dr. Aiken asked the members to take five minutes to reflect and discuss with their colleagues the following questions:

1. How can you leverage governance to improve student achievement?
2. What is our role in supporting the district's academic improvement efforts?
3. How should we evaluate ourselves in terms of leveraging effective governance?

Mr. Cardet-Hernandez emphasized aligning goals with the budget and focusing on fewer, in-depth goals. Dr. Alkins highlighted defining achievement beyond academics, engaging with the community, and ensuring Committee priorities are community-driven. Ms. Polanco Garcia added that working with Task Forces would help build stronger community relationships.

Ms. Lima Barbosa emphasized educating the community, empowering parents, and suggested 'Coffee with a Member' or town hall meetings to increase engagement. She also called for a more structured evaluation process for members. Ms. Polanco Garcia highlighted the importance of visiting schools to understand students' realities, particularly immigrants and students of color, and stressed that the community's evaluation is key. Mr. Tran recommended listening to community members' input.

Mr. O'Neill stressed visiting schools to assess impact and suggested setting goals and policies for the Superintendent, focusing on outcomes. For self-evaluation, he proposed measuring progress by the change in outcomes. Ms. Robinson highlighted key terms: attendance, preparation, participation, growth, and accountability. Mr. Cardet-Hernandez emphasized that self-evaluation is about meeting goals, with student achievement as the key outcome.

Dr. Aiken continued the discussion by focusing on priorities, asking what we expect to evaluate and what our key priorities should be.

Priority 1: Accelerating Academic Performance

Priority 2: Ensuring Access for All Students

Priority 3: Consistency in High-Quality Learning Opportunities

For Priority 1: Accelerating Academic Performance, the key focus areas include:

- High-Quality Academic Experiences
- Equitable literacy
- High-Quality Instructional Materials

The district measures Priority 1 through Student Outcomes and Implementation Metrics, including:

- State Assessment
 - MCAS Achievement (annual; Sept/Oct)
 - MCAS Growth (annual; Sept/Oct)
 - ACCESS for ELLs (annual; Sept/Oct)
- Graduation rate (annual; March/April)
- HQIM use (annual)

Dr. Aiken asked the members to reflect on the prompts in groups:

1. Identify which governance lever(s) (Setting the Vision, Establishing Goals, Developing Policy, Allocating Resources, Assuring Accountability) you should focus on for this priority.
2. Consider your role in guiding, overseeing, and making decisions to support these suggested priorities from a governance perspective.
3. What types of outcomes are you considering within these priority areas?

The members discussed priority 1 and goals. The first group, including Ms. Polanco Garcia, Ms. Robinson, and Mr. Tran, emphasized the Committee's role in ensuring accountability, resource allocation, and policy implementation. They suggested quarterly reviews to assess student progress.

The second group of Ms. Lima Barbosa and Mr. O'Neill suggested using "improve academic outcomes" instead of "accelerating." They emphasized accountability, resource allocation, and goal-setting. They also recommended moving beyond MCAS, focusing on student engagement and existing outcomes, especially for ELLs.

The third group, including Dr. Alkins, Mr. Cardet-Hernandez, and Mr. Ismail, highlighted the importance of vision setting, high-quality academic experiences, and aligning goals with the budget. They emphasized focusing on outcomes, equitable literacy, and the Committee's role in ensuring progress. They suggested regularly revisiting policies and evaluating progress toward goals. The superintendent emphasized reviewing outdated policies and ensuring the School Committee understands teacher contracts, as some decisions, like HQIM material adoption, are tied to them.

Priority 2: Ensuring Access for All Students, the key focus areas include:

- Native language, dual-language, and bilingual education
- Inclusive education: Multilingual learners, students with disabilities, multilingual learners with disabilities
- Focus on historically marginalized populations: Socioeconomic status, race/ethnicity, geography

The district measures Priority 2 through Student Outcome and Implementation Metrics

- Enrollment in dual-language and bilingual programs (annual; November)
- Enrollment for SWD in LRE (annual; November)
- Dropout rate (annual; March/April)
- Chronic absenteeism (quarterly)

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2. Consider your role in guiding, overseeing, and making decisions to support these suggested priorities from a governance perspective.
3. What types of outcomes are you considering within these priority areas?

The first group, consisting of Ms. Robinson and Dr. Alkins, discussed the need for increased resources and attention for certain student groups, which are becoming the majority. They stressed creating policies on teacher qualifications and resource allocation to close achievement gaps.

The second group, consisting of Mr. Cardet-Hernandez, Mr. Tran, and Ms. Lima Barbosa, stressed the need to address the needs of students, such as those with disabilities, multilingual learners, and Black students. They emphasized creating a clear vision and using data to drive policy and resource allocation. Ms. Lima Barbosa noted the challenge of voting on policies without enough time to review them and called for a more intentional policy process. The group also highlighted the lack of policies on Native language, dual-language education, and inclusive education.

Mr. O'Neill, Ms. Polanco Garcia, and Mr. Ismail stressed the need for bilingual education with native language support to improve outcomes, as English immersion alone isn't enough. They highlighted the unequal distribution of resources across schools and called for policy accountability and better resource allocation.

The superintendent emphasized that policies can unintentionally impact certain student groups and highlighted the need to consider all students' needs. She recommended starting with policies under priority two, reviewing existing ones, and building or adjusting them based on what's already in place.

Priority 3: Consistency in High-Quality Learning Opportunities

- Implementation of the Long-term facilities plan (LTFP)
- Access for every student to a High-Quality Student Experience
 - Rigorous and culturally affirming learning experiences
 - Wellness and enrichment
 - Supportive network of caring adults
 - Physical spaces that support learning

The Student Outcome and Implementation Metrics for this priority: There is extensive data already incorporated into the long-term facilities plan. The focus now is on identifying measurable outcomes related to consistency in student access and exploring diverse methods of gathering and analyzing additional data.

Dr. Aiken asked the members to reflect on the prompts in groups:

1. Identify which governance lever(s) (Setting the Vision, Establishing Goals, Developing Policy, Allocating Resources, Assuring Accountability) you should focus on for this priority.
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3. What types of outcomes are you considering within these priority areas?

The first group, Mr. Cardet-Hernandez and Ms. Polanco Garcia, emphasized defining "High-Quality Student Experience" clearly, especially regarding physical spaces, and having a vision before setting goals and policies. Ms. Polanco Garcia highlighted the need for the LTFP to address schools in urgent need of repairs, like Blackstone, to provide students with better, more comfortable facilities.

Ms. Robinson, Ms. Lima Barbosa, and Mr. Ismail highlighted the need to understand newcomers' experiences and hear from school communities like Josiah Quincy and Boston Arts Academy. They expressed interest in the 2025 plan and emphasized the importance of clear policy direction.

The last group, including Mr. O'Neill, Mr. Tran, and Dr. Alkins, discussed the challenge of clarifying certain concepts and definitions. They emphasized the need for the committee to align with the LTFP and ensure vision and policies are aligned. Regarding outcomes, they examined the impact of high-quality spaces on student success, comparing results in well-equipped buildings to those without, and debated whether to prioritize programs or facilities.

The superintendent explained that HQSE criteria were based on surveys from students and families. Projections through 2030 will align HQ seats with building closures, and capacity assessments will be made, noting that some schools can't accommodate 900 students due to growing multilingual and special education needs. New schools enhance the student experience, though outcomes may not rise immediately. The superintendent also stressed the need to understand the capital budget and maintenance costs, with increased funding now available.

Dr. Aiken emphasized the importance of making revisions and incorporating both policy and data across all priorities. She thanked the members for their valuable contributions to the discussion and recommended forming subcommittees. She outlined the next steps, stating that the district team will:

- Draft overview document of the norms discussed at this retreat.
- Draft the new attendance expectations.
- Draft member expectations.
- Collaborate with the committee to advance work around the priorities.

Dr. Aikins reviewed what had been discussed about Committee norms:

1. Reduce the number of School Committee meetings (bylaws require 10 meetings annually).
2. Aim for shorter, more focused meetings with a 3-hour maximum.
3. Committee members' comments will be focused and concise.
4. Committee will review materials, share thoughts and questions, and come to meetings prepared.
5. Establish 1:1 pre-meeting check-ins between members and the chair.
6. The committee will reimagine public comment.
7. The committee will align policy discussions with budget considerations to improve decision-making.
8. The committee will engage in professional development and learning.

Revisiting the Conversation: District Norms

1. The district team will establish an annual calendar that outlines reports, presentations, and key events.
 - a. Specific presentation topics will be scheduled one-month in advance.
2. The district team will share meeting materials by Friday, which will give committee members sufficient time to review them before the Wednesday meeting.
3. The district team will time their presentations. The presentations will be focused and aligned to our priorities.
4. The district team will ensure the superintendent's report is more concise.

GENERAL PUBLIC COMMENT

- Deidre Manning, parent, testified regarding various issues in BPS, including transportation and exam schools admissions.
- John Mudd, advocate, testified on the importance of oversight hearings, subcommittees, and town halls to ensure follow-through on suggestions.
- Edith Bazile, advocate, testified regarding accountability and urged a shift towards an anti-racist approach and data-driven strategies.

ADJOURN

Ms. Robinson thanked Dr. Aiken for facilitating the discussion, as well as Superintendent Skipper, her team, Dr. Grainger, and the School Committee members for their dedication to students and families. She also expressed appreciation to everyone for the productive conversation, emphasizing the importance of staying focused on both current and future goals.

Approved - At approximately 9.55 p.m. the Committee unanimously approved a motion by roll call to adjourn to the meeting.

Attest:



Lena Parvex
Executive Secretary