



# LEXINGTON SUPERINTENDENT-SCHOOL COMMITTEE NORMS & BELIEFS: A WORKING AGREEMENT Approved August 28, 2018

## OUR GUIDING PRINCIPLES

1. **[The Purpose of A Lexington Education]** – Our state constitution calls upon municipalities to spread the “opportunities and advantages of education” for the purpose of diffusing the qualities of wisdom, knowledge and virtue amongst the people.

Our constitution further elaborates:

- For Virtue and Wisdom: ‘principles of humanity and general benevolence, public and private charity, industry and frugality, honesty and punctuality in their dealings; sincerity, and good humor’.
- For Knowledge: ‘literature and the sciences’, ‘agriculture, arts, sciences, commerce, trades, manufactures, and a natural history of the country’.

Accordingly, the purpose of education in the Lexington Public Schools is to provide a well-rounded education for all students, one that promotes civic engagement, respect for all, rich academic and cultural experiences, critical thinking skills, habits and dispositions for learning, and the social and emotional development of every child. We will create conditions such that their learning will be motivated by intellectual curiosity and supported by courage and resiliency. We will strive to nurture our students to grow into healthy, confident, empathetic, knowledgeable and engaged global citizens, who adapt to change with equanimity and skill.

2. **[Diversity, Equity, Inclusion]** – We believe in Lexington’s strength as a diverse community, and our obligation to learn from one another. We embrace individuals of all backgrounds and abilities, and we strive to create a welcoming environment for all students, one that values diversity, equity, and inclusion. We will make decisions that are equitable (and not necessarily equal) and in the best interests of students.

## OUR GOVERNANCE PHILOSOPHY

3. **[We Set the Tone]** – We believe that the relationship between the superintendent and the school committee sets the tone for the Lexington Public Schools. How we engage and interact with one another serves as a model for the respectful behaviors and interactions we expect of all students, staff, and school community members. We will debate issues, not one another, and always assume positive intent.
4. **[We Are One Lexington]** – We believe that the Lexington Public Schools add to the growth and vibrance of the Town. Our first priority is to our students, and we recognize that their sustained success requires significant community investment. We value open collaboration with other Town officials, working together in the best interests of our students. We know that our students win when we are “One Lexington.”



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5. **[Purposeful Meetings and the Critical Role of the Chair]** – A School Committee meeting is a meeting held in public, not a meeting for the public. One of the key practices of high-functioning superintendent-school committee teams is to structure purposeful meetings that are run effectively by the School Committee chairperson. A School Committee meeting will be considered “purposeful” if the following conditions are met:
  1. The superintendent makes every effort to distribute the agenda and all materials to school committee members 72 hours in advance, with no last minute changes. (\*Note: the legal requirement for distribution under the Open Meeting Law is 48 hours, and exceptions will be made for critical items not reasonably anticipated in advance).
  2. Public input is succinct, not repetitive, and individuals are allotted a maximum of 3 minutes.
  3. We do not exceed the allotted time on agenda items.
  4. School Committee members listen carefully, but do not engage in commentary after public input is given.
  5. As appropriate, community issues requiring more thoughtful attention are moved to either a subcommittee, Committee of the Whole, or a hearing at a later date and time.
  6. The meeting starts and ends on time, lasting no longer than three hours.
  7. The agenda includes only one feature presentation, providing an opportunity for careful consideration and thoughtful deliberation.
  8. The Chairperson and the Superintendent engage in a post-meeting debrief, taking time to reflect on the degree to which the School Committee meeting was purposeful.
  
6. **[Thoughtful Decision-Making]** – We believe that it is our responsibility to thoughtfully and carefully weigh the major decisions before us, and we actively seek different viewpoints and perspectives. We will make every effort to consider a wide range of options, avoid confirmation bias, reality-test our assumptions, be prepared to be wrong, and not let short-term emotions influence our decisions.<sup>1</sup> Once a difficult decision is made, we agree to publicly support it despite our differences.
  
7. **[Goal Setting and Monitoring]** – We agree that goal setting and monitoring is a key practice of high-functioning Superintendent-School Committee teams, and we recognize the value in gaining consensus on the most important work to be done in the school system. New ideas and competing interests inevitably arise, but we believe in careful and thoughtful attention and commitment to our collective goals, in order to ensure that the students and staff in our schools continue to thrive.
  
8. **[Self-Evaluation]** – We believe that thoughtful reflection is important to our individual and collective development. We, as elected officials representing the Lexington Public Schools, understand the importance of meeting our goals and holding ourselves and one another accountable to our agreed upon norms and beliefs. We see value in - and commit to - periodic review of our performance.

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<sup>1</sup> Heath, Chip, and Dan Heath. *The Four Villains of Decision Making*. Random House, Canada, 2013.



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## OUR COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES

9. **[No Surprises for the Superintendent and School Committee]** – We agree to communicate clearly and effectively so there are no surprises. When the Superintendent is dealing with matters that may be of particular public interest, she will make every effort to share the information with the School Committee in a timely way. When concerns are brought to the attention of individual School Committee members by employees or members of the community, school committee members will bring them to the attention of the Superintendent.
  
10. **[Going Solo's A No-No]** – We agree that the authority of the School Committee rests with a quorum and not with an individual acting as an agent of the School Committee. When important information is in the hands of individual School Committee members, they agree to share it with the Chairperson and their colleagues.
  
11. **[Community Engagement and Public Input]** – We believe that healthy organizations promote active community engagement, and we recognize the importance of public input. We want to hear the opinions and views of others, even when those opinions may differ from our own. During School Committee meetings when contentious issues arise requiring more public discourse, we agree to utilize subcommittees, Committee of the Whole meetings, or public hearings (rather than regular meetings of the School Committee) to give the public a voice in important matters affecting our students.