

POLICY / COMMUNITY AFFAIRS SUBCOMMITTEE MEETING

MARCH 1, 2010

Oliver Administration Building

Present

Subcommittee: Diana Campbell, Chair, Denise Arsenault and John Bento

School Committee and Administration: Marjorie McBride, Melinda Thies, Mario Andrade, Mary Almeida, Andrew Henneous, Don Rebello and Guy Murgo

Guests: Emily Spence and Anne Kellerman

Diana Campbell called the meeting to order at 6:34 PM.

Pledge of Allegiance

All present were invited to join in the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag.

Approval of Minutes

MOTION: Denise Arsenault motioned to approve the minutes to the February 1, 2010 meeting; John Bento seconded. The motion to approve passed by a vote of 3 to 0.

Tobacco, Alcohol and Other Drug Policy for Students (JFCH)

Mr. David Silvia had written a letter to the Committee to request some changes to the policy, prompted by an incident involving a Mt. Hope student. Because of his physical limitations, a conference call was made to Mr. Silva. Diana Campbell introduced everyone present. In his letter Mr. Silvia suggested the following changes:

„Í i§Determination if a student is under the influence of a drug or alcohol.

„Í Immediate action by a qualified medical designated person or Paramedics to evaluate the condition of the student and the seriousness of the intoxication.

„Í Immediately notify the parent or legal guardian in all cases.

„Í If found under the influence transport to an emergency room for further evaluation.

„Í Provide assistance in drug/ alcohol counseling prior to lengthy suspensions and loss of school privileges.í”

Mr. Silvia stated the determination of i§under the influencei” should be made by a paramedic or other medical person, or if there is obvious evidence such as a liquor bottle in a pocket or a controlled substance on the person. Also, sometimes the behavior is the result of an emotional situation the student has to deal with and suspending the student to stay home for ten days does not help identify the problem; it would be better to find out if there is a problem. Diana explained the policy requires immediate notification of the parents or

guardian as well as mandatory counseling for the first offence. We will review how the policy is implemented; she commented that if a student makes a mistake, it is still a mistake and there has to be some type of consequence. She will ask Don Rebello, Guy Murgo and Melinda Thies to review the policy.

MOTION: Denise Arsenault motioned to ask Administration to review the policy with the input from Mr. Silvia and report back to this Subcommittee at the next meeting. John Bento seconded; the motion passed by a vote of 3 to 0.

Diana thanked Mr. Silvia for his interest and concern and told him the next meeting will be April 5. Mr. Silvia was thankful for the opportunity to speak; kids need to understand consequences and if issues do not get addressed in school, they can become much larger in the future; he asked to be informed of the changes that are made to the policy. The phone connection was terminated at 6:55 PM.

Don Rebello is amenable to review the policy, which, as it stands, is rather substantial. Andrew Henneous suggested changing the consequences for the first offense to suspension of up to ten days; we cannot hold school administrators to criminal law standards and he strongly advised against tying their hands, they should be allowed to make the determination; Andrew will also work on the policy review.

Marjorie McBride agreed with "up to" ten days and feels it needs to

be made clear that we offer counseling but we cannot provide counseling for parents; in the case of a conflict between the nurse's determination and the administrator's determination, call 911. Melinda said administrators are responsible for maintaining the safety of everyone in the community and need the latitude to make that determination. Denise Arsenault suggested clarification of the nurse's and administrator's role by adding "Final authority lies with the administrator." She is in total agreement with the compassion piece. Andrew will work with Melinda on this as well.

John Bento asked Don about the weight of the nurse's judgment. Don believes the final decision should be made by the administrator because they have more interaction with the students and can better discern behavior that is not typical to a particular student.

Prohibition Against Harassment, Bullying and Dating Violence (JGF)

Andrew was asked to attend the meeting to clarify some questions about the designation of an incident as sexual harassment, and more specifically, is the school district required to classify an offense as sexual harassment. Andrew said it is not; he strongly suggested we retain the reference; the law is focused on the victim's interpretation of the act; it should be understood that this term is not thrown around lightly. Sexual harassment is a red flag and administrators know this.

Ten times out of ten the deciding vote is with the victim and former Commissioner McWalters definitively supported that position. The

way our policy is written gives latitude; we should not limit the ability to use the term. Melinda added that RI law clearly delineates the difference; our policy could be further defined as in the Mt. Hope Handbook.

Andrew referred to the Handbook Section 3 under "Sexual Harassment" saying the terminology should be kept as is. Diana asked about the criminal record of the accused. Andrew explained it is on a case by case basis; it could result in a 504 claim or a human commission type of claim. Marj asked if we are adequately educating students about sexual harassment and its implications. Melinda said as mandated by the Lindsay Ann Burke Act, it is included in the 7-12 curriculum. Andrew said many school districts nation-wide have adopted disclaimers that let students know about things like "sexting", what it is, conviction could qualify you as a sexual predator, and the obligated to report these incidents to the police. Denise felt it should be reinforced that it is in the realm of possibility this offense is punishable by law and perhaps parents should sign off on this. Melinda said this is in the forefront in orientation and in the long run may result in fewer referrals. Andrew suggested stating this very clearly in the handbook and including it as a sign-off item for parents.

Diana said a high school infraction does not put someone on the sexual predator list; Andrew agreed, but depending on the severity of the incident. Marj believes we can make impressions that are

effective and non-punitive. John asked if someone is found guilty, whether criminally or not, how devastating is it on his/her future; if they enter the military, the question can be asked of them. Andrew responded it is a delicate balance. Don said more and more colleges and universities are requiring disciplinary records on students.

Andrew left the meeting at 7:26 PM.

Chemical Health Policy

Diana said the Substance Abuse Prevention Task Force proposed a policy for inclusion in the Handbook as well as an umbrella School Committee policy. Guy explained Maria Ursini had asked the high school for input on a general statement and Guy proposed the first paragraph.

Marj - There is no way to enforce this unless it happens at a school function; we get into trouble if we punish a student who is later found not guilty by the law; it is frustrating to know that a captain of a team can misbehave at a party over the weekend and be honored for athletics, and there is nothing we can do about it; we should consult Andrew.

Denise ¶ This does not accomplish what research tells us is important to keep kids drug and alcohol free; there is no use to threatening kids; this warrants study by a task force made up of

parents, students, teachers and administrators; there is no fair way to punish a captain without punishing a whole team; peer programs create protective factors for kids; she suggests consequences such as community service or reparation; when you discipline a kid with isolation you open them to depression; we need to think in terms of what keeps kids healthy, what makes them better; protective measures are better.

Melinda - It only becomes monitored when there is evidence of a violation; we want to protect the kids; the piece we are lacking is the compassion with the community; we have to build understanding and a culture then move the punitive piece; she encourages working with the Task Force but we must work on the educational piece first; this is an improvement over the past; all these pieces need to be put together; how can we reach the students, we see students who do not abide by this; we must try to prevent a tragedy; intervention needs to occur early on, probably 5th, 6th and 7th grades, perhaps requiring high school students to provide services to their younger peers; this is a very complex issue; keeping our kids safe is important, as is growing a culture.

Diana ¶V Regarding our policy on academic eligibility, a senior commented he was glad because it made him study harder, but a sophomore said it was bad; do we want to include another way to catch these kids; would like to merge the TOAD and Chemical Health policies and weigh in with Andrew on the outside school and school

hours piece and seek input from the SIT team; we need to make sure we can enforce the policy, are compassionate and keep kids safe.

Don ¶ This is different from the academic eligibility policy because of academic remediation; the help comes in with the counseling piece; the mission statement is fine; using peers as role models is very effective; he believes through his experience in Massachusetts that if you do not put into place some kind of policy that provides incentives you will have more violations; we are powerless if we do not have a policy allowing us to take action.

Guy ¶ It should be preventative and more incentive oriented and include a balance of consequences and supportive measures; a lot of the education piece lies in health education, we offer a lot of intervention, there are after school activities and a number of clubs to join; preventative measures work well; once kids are involved then it takes treatment measures and consequences; without consequences and intervention, young people will not change their behaviors; the earlier they can face that, the better it will be; the peer helpers program at the high school helps students who are substance free to validate themselves with their peers and resist pressure.

Discussion will continue.

Transportation Policies

Diana asked if we can charge students for parking; Don and Guy said probably, because it is a privilege and the high school is looking to offer the limited vacant spaces to juniors who are in good standing. Marj asked if they check for parking stickers; yes, they do. Denise asked about checking for seatbelt use; no, they do not.

Don and Guy left the meeting at 8:03 PM.

School Bus Safety Program (EEAC-R)

At a previous meeting, Bill O'Dell expressed he would like us to require someone of authority to look at the busses to assure contract compliance in regards to age, video cameras and current inspection stickers, at the beginning of the school year and then randomly throughout the year. Melinda obtained a new asset list; there are still some busses not in compliance and we continue to receive a discount. Denise felt that if Bill wants an inspection we should have George inspect the buses a week before school starts; it should be kept short. Marj agrees with an inspection because the bus company has proven not to be reliable.

Diana would also like the principals to go to the site of an accident. Melinda said principals often do this to reassure students and quell rumors. Marj would like all parents notified when an accident happens. This in fact does happen.

MOTION: Denise Arsenault motioned to update the policy to include

a check-off by an administrator or his/her designee whether a bus is in compliance; and if a bus accident happens, the principal or an administrator go to the site and follow up with a ConnectEd message to inform parents what happened. John Bento seconded. The motion passed by a vote of 3 to 0.

Student Automobile Use (JHFD)

Diana said it is not enforceable but we should encourage students to use seatbelts or lose parking privileges if caught not using them. Denise felt it would be very difficult for the two teachers in the lot to check for everything and she suggested trying it out before making it a policy; this would create a backup at a busy time. Diana suggested maybe stating in the policy we expect all students to obey the law. Policies JFCC-R and EEAC-R need to coincide.

MOTION: Denise Arsenault motioned to ask administration to review all the transportation policies reviewed tonight and others and report back to this subcommittee with recommendations for changes. John Bento seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

Attendance Policies

Denise Arsenault said a letter was sent to a parent that was insulting and threatening and she asked that this be addressed with the

principal. Melinda confirmed that it already has; both she and the principal contacted the family.

Denise asked about the practice of charging for pre-K; Melinda responded we charge a minimal amount; this is our right and does not violate policy because we are not obligated to provide pre-K instruction. Diana asked Denise to provide the reference letters of the policies so the clerk can include them in the School Committee packets. Denise would rather provide the letters and have the Committee look them up in their books. Diana will take this under advisement.

Denise also would like the tardiness and loss of credit policies clarified to include the school of reference.

Policy Review List

Chemical Health Policy: Discussion continued to April meeting

Superintendent's Continuous Improvement Plan: John Bento to work with SC Chair to set up special workshop

HIV/ Sexuality: Mario Andrade to review for compliance with RIDE updates on sexual orientation

Attendance Policies: Reviewed by Denise ;V no changes to policies

Sexual Harassment: No changes to policy

TAOD Policy: Discussion continued to April meeting

Evaluation Instrument Review: To be reviewed at April meeting

Additions:

Transportation Policies: Administration to review them and report back to the Subcommittee

BEP ¶ Denise would like to incorporate the BEP in the policy manual.

Diana suggested a reference be made to it because we do not include the Strategic Plan or School Committee Goals; Denise suggested creating another binder for these documents; Melinda suggested links like our webpage; Denise liked the idea of a hard copy in public places.

ACTION: Diana asked Melinda to think about this and report back to the Subcommittee.

Next Meeting

April 5, 2010; 6:30 PM

Adjournment

MOTION: At 8:40 PM John Bento motioned to adjourn; Denise Arsenault seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

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