

POLICY / COMMUNITY AFFAIRS SUBCOMMITTEE MEETING

Monday, May 6, 2013

Oliver Administration Building

Present

Subcommittee: William O'Dell, Chair, Diana Campbell and Lynn Wainwright

School Committee, Administration & Guests: Melinda Thies, Mario Andrade and John Saviano (6:37 p.m.)

Meeting called to order by William O. at 6:34 p.m.

Approval of Minutes

MOTION: Diana C. motioned to approve the minutes of the April 1, 2013 meeting; Lynn W. seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

Dating Violence Policy (JGF) Discussion

William O. called for a review of the item of concern brought forward at the previous School Committee Meeting in reference to a penalty given for failure to report a known case of dating violence. Diana C. gave two scenarios to illustrate that issue. A friend confides in another friend and requests that it be kept confidential vs. someone who does not know the student, witnesses a dating violence situation, yet doesn't report it. Diana C. commented when this issue was initially discussed in the Policy subcommittee meeting there was

a suggestion to change "obligated to report" to "may report" in the hope that it would give principals an option to discern between the two scenarios presented above. After further discussion, all agreed that "have a responsibility to report" would address the concern brought forward, but also still stress the importance of reporting an incident of dating violence.

MOTION: Diana C. made a motion to bring the Dating Violence Policy (JGF) as amended to the School Committee for a second reading; seconded by Lynn W. The motion passed unanimously.

Tobacco, Alcohol & Other Drug Policy (JFCH) Discussion

William O. called for a review of those items of concern brought forward at the previous school committee meeting. Lynn W. stated the first issue of concern was why ALL offenses do not require a certified letter to go out to the student's home. Currently, this is only stated in the policy under the third offense. During the School Committee Meeting, Andrew H. had advised against using a certified letter in any circumstance because statistically certified letters do not get picked up by the recipient. Melinda T. stated, however, that with a 1st Class Prepaid letter, the intended recipient could say they never received it. She believes a return receipt letter is important as it protects the District, especially in cases where there is a hearing and a student could be suspended up to 180 days, with proof a letter was sent and received. William O. stated that a Return Receipt Restricted Delivery letter requires the intended recipient's signature. Someone

else cannot sign for it. This would be more costly. William O. stated that the post office actually attempts to deliver Return Receipt Restricted Delivery letters three times. After three weeks, the letter is sent back unclaimed. Diana C. feels that the Return Receipt Restricted Delivery shows an attempt was made to deliver, but then there is still the issue that the parents could claim they never received the notice. Melinda T. commented that in most cases the District does hear back from a parent. William O. suggested that the policy be amended to say "A First Class Prepaid letter and a Certified Mail Return Receipt Requested Restricted Delivery letter will be mailed".

The second area of concern brought forward at the previous school committee meeting was why social suspension was not included in some situations. Melinda T had contacted the high school concerning this and was informed it was an oversight and should be included consistently throughout the policy where necessary. Melinda T. stated she had already begun making changes to the policy to include the high school's recommendation of "10 days suspension; up to 10 weeks social suspension".

MOTION: Diana C. made a motion to adjust Tobacco, Alcohol and Drug Policy as described; seconded by Lynn W. The motion passed unanimously.

MOTION: Diana C. made a motion to bring the Tobacco, Alcohol and

Drug Policy (JFCH) as amended today to the School Committee for a second reading; seconded by Lynn W. The motion passed unanimously.

Entrance Age Policy (JEB)

Melinda T. stated that the policy as written contained the following error: "§A child below the age of six found to be lacking in readiness for first grade may be placed in kindergarten at the direction of the superintendent." She stated the policy should read "§at or above". The entrance age for 1st grade is currently 6.

MOTION: Diana C. made a motion to accept the Superintendent's amendment to the Entrance Age Policy (JEB) and move to a 1st Reading at the next School Committee Meeting; seconded by Lynn W. The motion passed unanimously.

School Committee Powers and Duties (BBA)

Diana C. believes the School Committee Powers and Duties Policy needs to be reviewed as compliance to items contained within has started to erode. The current school committee contains nine members all of whom are passionate in what they do. However, in some cases this has caused an overstepping of boundaries and micromanaging. Diana C. feels the entire school committee should review this document. She, however, does not feel any adjustments need to be made to the policy. Lynn W. commented that as a new member she sees the prudence of all school committee members

reviewing this policy. Melinda T. stated she wouldn't disagree as she has heard from employees who were put in an uncomfortable position by school committee members. As a governing body, certain decisions are made through the superintendent or other appropriate school entities.

Melinda T. commented that the "Issues to Consider" document is a good one as it explains issues that can arise. To the earlier point, #5, which states, "Committee Members generally interact with the Superintendent and not with individual employees of the District." Other items contained within the document if violated could undermine the credibility of the District. Melinda T. stated the purpose of an executive session is to work through any sensitive items prior to an open session. If a sensitive subject is discussed in an open session, the public's perception is at stake.

Lynn W. attended the National Committee and Workshop Meeting. She stated the rules for a school committee are very clear stressing everything should be done through the Superintendent.

Diana C. asked if the School Committee Powers and Duties Policy (BBA) should be brought back to the School Committee for affirmation. William O. asked if anything is being violated at this time.

Diana C. responded "no". William O. believes that being the case it would not be necessary for the School Committee to affirm. Melinda T. suggested using School Committee Powers and Duties Policy

(BBA) as a reference for the duties and responsibilities of the School Committee and the Superintendent working together.

Board-Staff Communications (BG)

William O. commented that he saw no need for change within this policy. Diana C. stated the policy speaks of individual member authority. Melinda T. stated that during a recent meeting to discuss contract renewals, a school committee member admitted they made contact with a staff member which is a clear violation of this policy. Melinda T. asked the Policy Subcommittee who would be responsible for monitoring school committee behavior. John S. responded that it would not be the responsibility of the Superintendent as the School Committee hires the superintendent. He believes there should be "policing", but within the School Committee. William O. stated it is up to the voter to sanction a school committee member and would not be the responsibility of the School Committee. John S. commented that four years is a long time to wait before taking action against a school committee member as voters might not remember or even be aware of the situation. He suggested seeing what position the National School Board Association (NSBA) takes. John S. stated there should be a model set forth within the policy of effective school board actions. He would like the subcommittee to consider "Eight Characteristics of Effective School Boards at a Glance" which is used nationally.

Diana C. suggested the following be added to the Board-Staff Communications Policy (BG): "Should a school committee member

be seen as violating policy, it is the responsibility of the Chairman of the School Committee to remind member of the policy.” She also suggested that since the Chairman of the Policy Subcommittee is most familiar with policies, that position could also have responsibility for coming alongside a school committee member if there is a violation. John S. suggested appointing a three member panel. William O. responded that in situations like these, it would be important to move forward incrementally. William O. asked Melinda T. to speak with Andrew H. on appropriate wording for person(s) responsible for enforcing policy.

Melinda T. stated that in the past, Andrew H. has offered a “School Committee 101” to new members, but that lately this has gotten lax with erosion of checks and balances.

William O. suggested tabling Board-Staff Communications (BG) to the next meeting when Melinda T. will have input on suggested language from Andrew H.

School Committee Member Authority (BBAA)

William O. brought forward a concern related to the Executive Board Meetings and why they aren’t posted. He stated that his purpose for bringing this up is not to single any group of people out, but more to clarify the legality of these meetings. Diana C. commented that she was under the impression these meetings were not going to take place anymore. William O. stated that the original format of the

Executive Board Meetings was that the Chairman, Vice-Chairman, Treasurer and Secretary would go over the agenda and prepare for the next meeting working through anything that could become an issue at the meeting. Melinda T. responded that this format generally goes on now. Diana C. commented that in the past, the Executive Board Meetings were just with the Superintendent and the Chairman. She feels it is not necessary for the other officers to be in attendance. William O. stated the purpose of having several people in attendance was so both towns were represented.

William O. asked whether the format of these meetings would require them to be posted. Melinda T. responded by asking, "Is it a meeting?"; "Would this be a subcommittee?" "Should it be posted?"; "Is it a meeting with the Chairman to review the agenda?"

Melinda T. added that you can limit public interaction at any meeting. John S. stated that if you have more than four members at a meeting, it would then be considered a full board meeting. Melinda T. commented that the Executive Board Meetings are just a functioning piece to conduct research prior to a meeting regarding the agenda so that we present well.

Melinda T. asked if she should talk to Andrew H. William O. responded, "No, it is up to the Chairman." William O. will report on this discussion at the next School Committee Business Meeting with the suggestion that it be discussed during a workshop.

Diana C. commented that she feels School Committee Member Authority (BBAA) is woefully out of date and needs to be reviewed completely. She highlighted #3 which states "The superintendent and/or his staff are not to honor a request made by individual School Committee members if such a request entails preparing a document which is not already in existing" - Typographical error. Lynn W. questioned #2 which states, "Requests made by individual School Committee members requiring photocopying of materials must be submitted to the full school committee for determination"

Melinda T. asked about the status of the School Committee's goals and effectiveness of the School Committee. Diana C. had requested that the School Committee Evaluation be placed on a future School Committee Meeting agenda. Melinda T. responded that she believes this would be a good piece to work on during the summer workshops.

Diana C suggested tabling discussion until other related policies are reviewed.

MOTION: Diana C. made a motion to move discussion of School Committee Member Authority Policy (BBAA) to next meeting; seconded by Lynn W. The motion passed unanimously.

Policy Review List

William O. commented that he is happy the list is short and concise.

Future Agenda Items

„X School Committee Officer's Duties (BCB)

„X Subcommittees of the School Committee (BCE-R)

„X Board Staff Communications Policy (BG)

„X School Committee Member Authority (BBAA)

„X Health and Wellness Policy (JHCG)

Adjournment

MOTION: At 7:55 pm Diana C. motioned to adjourn; Lynn W. seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

/kd