

POLICY / COMMUNITY AFFAIRS SUBCOMMITTEE MEETING

Monday, November 4, 2013

Oliver Administration Building

Present

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

School Committee, Administration & Guests: Karen Lynch, Marjorie McBride, John Saviano, Melinda L. Thies, Superintendent; and Mario Andrade, Asst. Superintendent;

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

Approval of Minutes

MOTION: Diana C. motioned to approve the minutes of the September 30, 2013 meeting; Lynn W. seconded.

DISCUSSION: Lynn W. would like the minutes amended to include a discussion she had with Don R. during the SIT Team portion of the agenda which had not been included in the minutes. The amended addition should read, "Lynn W. asked how many kids were in danger of failing. Don R. responded statistically at the end of last year, 20% were in danger of failing one class."

Bill O. also requested an item amendment on Page 5 under the New

Policy Development – Administrative Procedure Discussion heading where it states “...with a directive from the Chair for the high school administration to submit policy language” and should read, “...with a directive from the Chair for the Superintendent to submit policy language”.

The motion passed unanimously.

Bill O. stated for the record that he would be shuffling the agenda around to begin with the Academic Eligibility Policy discussion.

Bill O. stated that the first draft of the Academic Eligibility Policy has been received from administration for the Subcommittee’s review and asked for comments.

Marj M. stated that she does not approve of a two failure criteria before being prohibited from participating in an extra-curricular activity. She commented that she could perhaps compromise with one failure as long as there were three days a week of intervention support. Marj M. believes that two failures puts the policy right back to the Rhode Island Interscholastic League and doesn’t believe the District should be catering to that. Marj M. commented that she doesn’t believe the current policy as written is being followed, and feels that students are participating in extra-curricular activities even when failing.

Melinda T. stated that data has been kept on the less restrictive policy that aligned with the RILL. This year the policy in effect stipulated no extra-curricular participation with a failure. She added that despite this, no matter what the policy, there are still a large number of failures citing the 20% quoted by Don R. at the last meeting. Melinda T. commented that if done properly, and monitored closely, a student failing two courses must enter into the intervention program for up to three days a week. In order for a student to return to the extra-curricular activity, a student must attend the intervention program.

Lynn W. asked why students are failing. She asked if it is because students are in classes they shouldn't be, are not engaged, spending too much time texting or listening to music, not studying, not completing projects or completing their homework. Lynn W. expressed concern as to why a more proactive approach is not being taken to prevent students from failing rather than waiting until they fail and then intervening. Lynn W. stated that she understands that Bristol has one of the most restrictive failure policies in the state. She then read excerpts from a couple neighboring towns Academic Eligibility policies where a student could not participate in an extra-curricular activity if they were failing one class, and reported that those school system's failure rates were low. Lynn W. stated she is concerned that there isn't a focus on the bigger problem and believes standards must be set higher to help the students be the best they can be.

Diana C. cited that kids transitioning from middle school to high school have a difficult time as they are moving from an approach where the teacher is helping a student every step of the way to working more on their own with a homework volume that increases substantially. Diana C. stated that since the District started Academic Eligibility, NECAP and SAT scores are going up and graduation rates are increasing. She added that students are continuing to excel in extra-curricular activities as evidenced by the numerous accolades that are distributed each year. Diana C. commented that students are not underachieving. There is currently an 83% graduation rate. Diana C. stated she believes the policy as written is too burdensome to implement. She commented that there has been pushback from teachers citing an example of having to approach a student to ask them to “remove their hood” or having to ask a student, “Did you show up for the after school activity?” Diana C. said as a compromise, she could live with two failures as long as only one of them is a core class. Lynn W. commented that only 48% of students went on to four year colleges. Diana C. responded that amount is actually better than prior to Academic Eligibility. Melinda T. responded that she couldn’t speak to the correlation between better achievement statistics and Academic Eligibility, but does believe the strong focus on SAT Prep which is embedded within the curriculum has caused the increased numbers of students going on to four year colleges. Melinda T. agreed that the intervention piece could very likely be burdensome. She called it the “prep school model” where a

student doesn't participate in an extra-curricular activity until the academic piece is complete. She commented that she wasn't comfortable with the way it was before. Melinda T. said now there is a dedicated way of tracking and monitoring students ensuring connections are made with the coach and advisor of the extra-curricular program on a weekly basis. Melinda T. said once a determination is made on the success of this model, it could be expanded outside of extra-curricular students.

Bill O. stated that two different discussions are taking place; one is the global failure issue and the other is the specific failure as it relates to students participating in extra-curricular activities. He commented that tonight's purpose is to address students who participate in extra-curricular activities. Bill O. said he believes there is a conceptual divide. The Administration was told there is huge opposition to the "two fail" allowance, yet the policy presented for our review still includes two fails. He then asked the Subcommittee if they are on board with two fails.

Mario A. made a clarification. He sees the policy as presented indicating after one fail you are still eligible, but after two fails you are ineligible until you complete the intervention program and participate in the support system. Mario A. commented that the idea of the two fail is that you are still part of the team and still have a mentor through your coach. He added that with two fails you aren't participating in the performance or game, but you don't lose your

“team status” or the adult mentor that goes along with that. Melinda T. commented that the policy clearly states a student cannot participate in an extra-curricular event with two fails, but instead must participate in the intervention program for three days. After that, if a student joins the team and sits with them, they still have a “carrot” to draw the student to the activity to maintain mentorship with the adult.

Marj M. asked what the carrot would be for the student who does not choose to participate in extra-curricular activities. She said a small group of students are being given a carrot, but the rest of the students have none. She is concerned where their motivation would come from. Melinda T. responded the extended day program could provide that.

Melinda T. stated that those students that are engaged in school do better. Through this policy, students are being gathered in as something is drawing them to extra-curricular activities. She added that if we did not gather them in, we would essentially be casting them out with no more access to adult mentorship. Melinda T. stated that she agrees that the failure rate is too much. She feels that for now we are bringing some students back into the fold, but then can expand the model.

Karen L. stated the support system needs to be in place before anything changes. She believes this is the piece that is going to

motivate the kids to get passing grades in their classes.

Bill O. asked if the Subcommittee believes the proposed policy as written actually represents a one fail policy? Marj M. responded that after hearing Mario A. she is now on the fence. She said if it comes before the School Committee she will not vote for it until everyone is hired and every piece of the support system is in place. Marj M. stated it is too early for her to consider until she is assured that there are no loopholes. Bill O. commented that this policy is a month away from First Reading and at least three months away from a vote.

John S. stated during a recent SIT meeting statistics were discussed which show that students who participate in extra-curricular activities are those who graduate. John S. believes it is important that these kids continue to get an opportunity to participate. He said that if Melinda T. and Mario A. are willing to back a true support system, then he believes the School Committee should support the policy. Mario A. added that during the SIT meeting John S. referenced, a majority of the conversation concerned mentoring. He feels that a support system needs to be in place to make sure accountability is established.

Marj M. commented that a system like this was set in place once before, but that it morphed into something that doesn't exist anymore, and would not want to see that happen here. She would like to see everything in place such as who is being hired, number of

hours and who the mentors will be. Marj M. would also like to see the mentor program looked into for best practices. Diana C. asked if there are advisories in place. Melinda T. responded there are a variety of peer mentoring programs including students, peer mentors and adults. She added there is a YES program as students move to 8th and 9th grade. Melinda T. stated there are a series of supports in place, but that the District does still struggle in these areas.

Diana C. stated that she is willing to entertain this, but would need to see something in place beforehand.

Bill O. presented several detail items he would like to see changed on the proposed policy as follows:

1st bullet – remove specific dates

4th bullet – This bullet states that a student is required to attend the homework program for three days. If they miss one day, they are “ineligible for participation for remainder of the week”. Bill O. is concerned there is a loophole in the instance of a student not attending the homework program on a Friday. He believes “remainder of week”

should instead state “next two days”. Melinda T. commented the days support is available needs to be clearly defined.

5th bullet – “students repeated” seems ambiguous and needs to

be quantified.

Melinda T. mentioned the new piece to the policy of Social Expectation which puts emphasis on cooperation and participation in class.

Marj M. commented that asking the coaches and activity advisors to monitor attendance and requirements would add a large chunk of time to someone who isn't paid much. Melinda T. responded that whoever is proctoring the activity has that responsibility. Marj M. stated she would like to see whoever is proctoring notify coaches.

Bill O. believes administration should clean up the policy some more, present evidences of a concrete system in place and present a plan of action to support this. At that point, the Subcommittee will look at the policy again to approve. He would like this item placed on the agenda for next month.

Diana C. believes this policy can work citing that when people come up with their own roles, they will implement them because they have ownership of it and a sense of what needs to be done.

Lynn W. does not support two failures and would rather have the SIT team come up with ways to stop failing grades. She would like a more global discussion in the future.

SIT Policy

Bill O. stated that the proposed draft of the SIT Policy came back exactly how the Subcommittee requested it. He would like to add a sentence at the end of the document to indicate “A copy of the policy will be distributed to all present and future SIT Chairs.” Diana C. responded this is not something that is included on any of the other School Committee policies, but is understood. She does not feel it is the job of the School Committee to mandate distribution. Marj M. believes that it is the job of the School Committee. Bill O. responded that he wants to ensure that SIT Team Chairs are without excuse and have received a copy of the policy. Marj M. stated that when the policy is approved in full committee, the Superintendent should be directed to ensure every SIT team member has a copy. The Subcommittee asked the secretary to assign a policy number and to prepare for First Reading to be presented at the next full business meeting of the School Committee.

Health & Wellness Policy

Bill O. reviewed the main objection from the School Committee of the proposed draft as related to mention of curriculum within the policy. The Chair charged the Subcommittee to remove references to curriculum. Lynn W. asked the Subcommittee if they read the law concerning Health & Wellness policies which states a Wellness Subcommittee is chartered with recommending curriculum in the

policy. Diana C. responded that this does not mandate that curriculum be mentioned in the policy. Lynn W. expressed that when the Health and Wellness Policy was revised in 2009, the whole curriculum piece was included.

The following changes were suggested:

Removal of bullets on page 8 after the main bullet point which ends with the word “by:”

Lynn W. feels the public needs to see this and it needs to be communicated to parents. Marj M. commented that attorneys have taken the School Committee to task for listing items in a policy that are not enforceable. Lynn W. responded this piece had already been in the policy without being “taken to task”.

Bill O. commented that if the policy gets sent back to the School Committee without their recommended changes it will not pass the second reading.

Lynn W. expressed a concern on whether the School Committee is serious about health and wellness and asked to be corrected if she is wrong. Diana C. responded that Bristol Warren has one of the best Wellness Subcommittees in the State of Rhode Island and have been told they are light years ahead of others. Diana C. stated the District has won trophies for staff wellness adding that this was done before

it was a state policy. Diana C. stated the District also educates through the COZ program. Melinda T. stated the District has done what it is able to do. Obese children are more due to family issues and beyond the scope of the school district. Lynn W. replied that she believes the District is doing a good job, but feels a better job could be done. Lynn W. stated her hope is there will be consistency throughout all the schools. Lynn W. asked about the Wellness section on the new District website. Melinda T. responded that the nurses will be uploading to that area.

Marj M. requested that a clean copy of the policy be presented to the School Committee for the second reading.

Page 7, 1st bullet under “Student Physical Activity” – change “at the discretion of the administration” to read “at the sole discretion of the building administrator”.

Lynn W. stated this change will help ensure that lunchroom attendants do not over-enforce this.

Health and Wellness “Committee” should be changed to “Sub-Committee” throughout document.

Page 5 – should read, “The items are sold by students

Page 4 & 5 curriculum piece removal – On the bottom of page 4 last

paragraph only leave first sentence and remove the rest related to curriculum through top of page 5 to include “Education materials shall be free of brands and illustrations of unhealthy foods.”

Lynn W. stated that RIDE recommends those items be in the policy. She asked the Subcommittee if they read the 2010 Healthy Hunger Act document which described how the Health & Wellness Policy language should read. Lynn W. commented that RIDE would like to see the Health and Wellness Policies consistent with other districts. Marj M. responded that the School Committee cannot tell the health teacher how to educate. She added this is the responsibility of administration. Melinda T. commented that the PE and health teachers take their job very seriously and work from within their own framework where these items are included in the curriculum.

Page 4 – under Parent Nutrition Education - section which states, “Nutrition education will be provided...” should be changed to “Nutrition education may be provided...”

Page 9 – at the top, 3rd bullet should read, “Physical Education should be sequential throughout the academic year.

Page 9 – at the top, 4th bullet should be removed

Page 9 – under Staff Wellness – in bullets beginning with “Improve” change to “Improved”; in bullet which states, “Build the commitment

of staff to promote...” change to “Build a committed staff to promote...”

Bill O. stated due to the amount of editing, he would like to place the Health and Wellness Policy on the next agenda where the Subcommittee will review a clean copy with the changes discussed today included before sending on to the full committee for a second reading.

MOTION: Diana C. made a motion to review final changes of the Health & Wellness Policy at the next Subcommittee meeting at which time it will be moved forward for a second reading to the full committee; seconded by Bill O. The motion passed with a 2-1 vote; Lynn W. dissenting.

School Admissions Policy Discussion

Melinda T. stated that recently some irregularities have been noticed when processing school admissions. She added with the concern about enrollment numbers, it is important to tighten up the policy to ensure no one is able to circumvent. Marj M. brought up the issue of homeless people. Melinda T. responded that the Vento Act protects the homeless. She commented that the additions to the policy are to protect against fraudulent activity in an effort to protect tax payers to ensure no one is gaining an education without proper proof of residency. Melinda T. stated that the current policy School Admissions (JEC), items 1-5, will be replaced with the proposed draft

language. Two proofs of residency will now be required. A mortgage statement (if applicable) has been added as well as a notarized letter accompanying the lease, real estate tax bill or mortgage statement. Lynn W. asked if these items are difficult to get from landlords. John S. responded this is something that is the norm for requirements. Melinda T indicated specific utility bills are also included as a requirement. She commented that if a person could not produce the primary and secondary proof of residency they would have to complete the affidavit of residency requirements which must be notarized by a person outside of the District. Melinda T. reiterated that if a person is found in violation of fraudulently reporting residency, the person will be prosecuted.

Lynn W. requested that the semi-colon in the first paragraph be changed to a colon.

MOTION: Diana C. made a motion that current policy JEC Proof of Residency Requirements be moved forward to a First Reading with new proposed language replacing the old as well as the above mentioned edit; seconded by Bill O. The motion passed unanimously.

Policy Review List

Bill O. asked the Subcommittee to review the Policy Review List and to alert him of any changes or additions.

Future Agenda Items

- **Academic Eligibility**
- **Health and Wellness Policy**
- **School Admissions Policy (JEC)**
- **Subcommittees of the School Committee Feedback Discussion**
- **Policy Review List**

Next meeting will be held on December 2, 2013.

Adjournment

MOTION: At 8:24 pm Diana C. motioned to adjourn; Lynn W. seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

/kd