



POLICY/COMMUNICATIONS COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES

January 16, 2024

Virtual Meeting - 4:00 p.m.

Committee Members: Randall Peach, Chair

Ellen DePinto, Beth Fiore (Carolyn Podgorski attended in place of Ms. Fiore), Jennifer Wolf

Administrative Staff: Dr. Jonathan Hart, Superintendent of Schools

Jason Bohm, SBA/Board Secretary

Minutes

The Committee began the meeting by welcoming a new member, and for the benefit of that member discussing briefly the purpose of the Committee including its work in reviewing and updating policies, discussing proposed legislation, the role of Strauss Esmay in providing updates, and the differences between Board policies and administrative regulations, among other aspects.

1. Communications Planning Update.

The Committee discussed how the Board had approved the shared services agreement with the public relations consultant. Dr. Hart has scheduled a first meeting with the consultant to discuss planning and our communications objectives, with a goal to launch our communications plan in September. Dr. Hart will provide another update after that meeting.

There was discussion about how to better advertise board meetings, apart from the Board Briefs and the newspaper notices, and Dr. Hart indicated that this would be part of his discussion with the consultant.

The Committee also discussed possibly having a newsletter or targeted mailings as a communication method. One member emphasized that we should strive to integrate the consultant's proposals into a plan, so that we do not merely have proposals without action, and to regularly update stakeholders about the goals achieved.

2. Alert 231 (con't)

- a. Policy 5111 - Eligibility of Resident/Nonresident Students
- b. Regulation 5111 - Eligibility of Resident/Nonresident Students
- c. Policy 5116 - Education of Homeless Children and Youths
- d. Regulation 5116 - Education of Homeless Children and Youths

The Committee discussed proposed revisions to Policy 5111 and 5116 and the corresponding Regulations, all of which have to do with nonresident students and homeless students.

Policy and Regulation 5111 have been updated pursuant to new statutes governing the enrollment of students who do not reside in the district, typically because their family is in the process of moving. Dr. Hart gave the example of parents who were moving into our district but not closing on their new home until October, yet wanted their child to enroll in our district in September. (Or, the reverse situation where a family was

moving out of district near the end of the school year but wanted the child to finish the school year in the district.) The district faces this situation about one-to-five times a year.

In the past our district offered a reasonable grace period for this situation and did not require tuition payment from the family. Now, however, the statute requires some tuition payment from students who are not residents, which tuition would be decided by the board (and per Dr. Hart there are formulas) and then approved by the County Superintendent.

Further, the revised Policy and Regulation require a specific time frame when the student can be admitted to our schools even if no longer a resident. After some discussion over various time frames, Committee members felt that it would be better to make the ending of the first and last marking periods (typically 8 or 9 weeks) the time frame, rather than a calendar date. Dr. Hart also noted that families in this situation are typically required to provide proof of the move, such a signed purchase agreement or building permit.

Policy and Regulation 5116 relate to the education of homeless children who may be domiciled in our district, but who have been displaced from a permanent home because of economic or other circumstances. The Policy and Regulation capture legal changes which now put students displaced by nature disasters and terrorism into the category of homeless, which means that our district can now receive funding for educating such students from the state or district of permanent residence.

Lastly, as to the proposed Policies and Regulations, one member voiced opposition to the replacement of his/her pronouns with the “their” pronoun, which the member felt was unnecessary and divisive. Dr. Hart noted that changes had been made by him to make the pronoun changes grammatically correct and the language less “clunky.”

3. School Calendar 2024-2025 Draft

In reviewing the proposed calendar for next year, Dr. Hart pointed out that the RTEA contract requires 181 days for students and 186 for teachers. The law requires 180 student contact days. This calendar only includes one snow day and one virtual day, and thus only a total of two days for inclement weather; if we end up needing more than that, we would have to include an additional school day, possibly during spring break, or at the end of the year (which here would require students to return on a Monday for the last day) - none of which are great options.

There was a discussion about possible solutions. Dr. Hart proposed speaking to teachers to determine if they would agree to return in late August for t professional development days, which would allow school to start for students the day after Labor Day (September 3) instead of September 5. After speaking with the teachers, Dr. Hart will update the Committee and the Board.

One member commented that we should try to align our calendar with Hunterdon Central’s calendar as much as possible, for parents with children in both our district and the high school. Dr. Hart said he would discuss our calendar with Central’s superintendent.

4. Advocacy

a. Teacher retention & pensions (no update)

Dr. Hart noted that per legislation there is now a fee “holiday” to obtain a teacher’s certificate.

In addition, there has been a waiver of the requirement that teacher candidates take the teacher licensure exam, which consists of basic reading, writing and math skills. The core competencies teacher’s exam is still required.

There is no update yet as to proposed legislation for “grandfathering” teacher pensions in order to attract candidates who left teaching previously.

b. Communications coordination with Hunterdon Central

Hunterdon Central is working on their communications plan as well, and so there might be an opportunity to coordinate our own plan with Central. Former Board Member Jodi Betterman is on a committee that is looking at Central’s communications plan, and she has graciously offered to keep Dr. Hart updated on their work.

5. Policy 5111 and 5116 will appear on the next agenda.
6. The Committee’s next meeting was scheduled for February 21, 2024 at 4:00 p.m.