



# POLICY/COMMUNICATIONS COMMITTEE MEETING

## MINUTES

May 7, 2024

Virtual Meeting - 4:00 p.m.

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Committee Members: Randall Peach, Chair  
Ellen DePinto, Beth Fiore, Carolyn Podgorski (substituting for Jennifer Wolf)

Administrative Staff: Dr. Jonathan Hart, Superintendent of Schools  
Jason Bohm, SBA/Board Secretary

Guest: Phil Nicastro & Pete Salerno, Strauss Esmay (item #1)

### Minutes

#### 1. Q&A with Strauss Esmay

Our meeting began with a question and answer session with Phil Nicastro and Pete Salerno from Strauss Esmay, the firm that advises the district on policies. They gave us background about how they track new legislation and changes in the administrative code, and then write policies for school districts that are impacted by the changes.

On the subject of pronouns, Mr. Nicastro stated that for the last two years the State has been making an effort to eliminate gendered pronouns in statutes and regulations. He specifically mentioned that the regulations for Managing for Equity in Education (N.J.A.C. 6A:7) are intended to eliminate gendered pronouns.

In response to questioning, Mr. Nicastro noted that he did not think districts were prevented from having gendered pronouns in their policies, or that they would face any legal exposure if they did not eliminate gendered pronouns per the Code. At the same time, he recommended that, to be on the safe side, districts should fully align themselves with any changes to the Code.

- #### 2. Alert 232 (con't) - Managing Equity in Education
- a. Policy 1530 - Equal Employment Opportunities
  - b. Policy 2260 - Equity in School and Classroom Practices

We next discussed the two policies that were held over from the last meeting. The first was Policy 1530, Equal Employment Opportunities. There was a discussion about the portion of the policy which states that the district can use hiring practices which correct or prevent imbalances based on race or other protected categories.

The second policy held over was Policy 2260, Equity in School and Classroom Practices. Here there was a discussion about provisions which use the term "all sexes" in place of "both genders." Strauss Esmay mentioned that the State's use of "all sexes" in place of all "both genders" was intentional, as the word "gender" is not a protected category under the Law Against Discrimination, which instead uses the categories "sex" and "gender expression or identity." Strauss Esmay also mentioned that, while they recommended that we align our policies closely with the Code, they did not think there would be any legal exposure if the board changed this to read "both sexes" instead of "all sexes."

Ultimately no consensus was reached by the committee on these issues, and it was instead agreed that the two policies would be brought to the full board for a discussion.

3. Alert 232 (con't)
  - a. Policy 5570 - Sportsmanship (revised)
  - b. Policy 5841 - Secret Societies (revised)
  - c. Policy 5842 - Equal Access of Student Organizations (revised)
  - d. Policy 7610 - Vandalism (revised)
  - e. Regulation 7610 - Vandalism (revised)
  - f. Policy 9323 - Notification of Juvenile Offender Case Disposition (revised)

We next discussed this group of policies, all of which have been revised to remove the list of protected categories, and replacing it with the expanded list as defined in N.J.A.C. 6A:7-1.1(a).

Policy Guide 5570 – Sportsmanship – has also been updated to align with the rules and by-laws of the New Jersey State Interscholastic Athletic Association, including provisions for determining unsportsmanlike conduct.

Policy 5841 addresses secret societies, which are student organizations that are not open to all students. Such societies are prohibited by statute, and therefore it is recommended that we have a policy.

Policy 5842 - Equal Access of Student Organizations - has been revised to address the degree of participation that staff can have with student organizations, under a recent U.S. Supreme Court decision.

Policy and Regulation 7610 – Vandalism - have been updated per statute, including requiring students committing acts of graffiti to pay restitution and perform community service, including removal of the graffiti. It also makes the parents of any minor damaging school property liable for damages.

Policy 9323 - Notification of Juvenile Offender Case Disposition - has been updated to align with statutes which govern how schools may gain access to juvenile justice proceedings when necessary.

4. Abolish [Policy 5755](#)

It was noted that Policies 1523 and 2260 (once passed) will address all of the requirements outlined in Policy 5755, eliminating the need for Policy 5755.

5. RMS Main Office Communications Plan

Next, the committee discussed the main office renovation, which will take place this summer and continue into the fall. There will be communications from Dr. Hart about the project and additionally Mr. Charleston will send out a more detailed letter, including the day-to-day impact on students. Mr. Bohm mentioned that there will be no major impact on students, as the construction will be sealed off and most of the heavy construction work will take place in the summer.

6. Advocacy: Preschool Special Education and QSAC revisions

The committee discussed the discrepancy in funding for special ed students in our pre-school program. Specifically, the district is prohibited from using the state's preschool funding on special ed students, forcing us to instead use our own budget. The district is thus advocating for state officials to address this discrepancy.

The committee also again discussed what will likely be revisions to the QSAC process, and it was noted that the Hunterdon County superintendents are working with the State on the issue.

7. Agenda items: Policies 5570, 5841, 5842, 7610, 9323
8. Next Meeting: June 18, at 4:00 p.m.