



POLICY/COMMUNICATIONS COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES

December 20, 2022

Virtual Meeting - 4:00 p.m.

Committee Members: Jodi Bettermann, Chair
Beth Fiore, Jennifer Wolf, Eric Zwerling

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

Agenda

1. Opt-out vs. Opt-In Discussion Follow-up (Policy 5250 – Excusal from Class or Program)
 - a. Dr. Hart reached out to superintendents from other districts who are using an opt-in approach to the new health curriculum to learn more about how this is working in practice.
 - b. The Committee discussed several aspects of opt-in versus opt-out practices including field trips and the limited scope of the current opt-out policy. All BOE members had weighed in with the Committee Chair, and opinions were 6 members in support of the current opt-out policy and 2 in support of changing to an opt-in approach. (One BOE seat is vacant at this time.)
 - c. Dr. Hart explained our current practice in the district is if a parent sends in a note requesting their child be excluded from sex education instruction, then we honor that request even if it doesn't meet the exact criteria spelled out in the current policy (i.e. a signed statement to a the principal, as email is accepted). Generally, a follow up phone call is made as well to ensure understanding between the parents and the school.
 - d. The Committee requested that Dr. Hart place Policy 5250 on the policy tracking sheet so that when there is a substantial update to the policy from Strauss Esmay that some minor clarifications can be included. Policy 5250 will not be updated at this time.
 - e. Dr. Hart explained that a letter to parents regarding the health curriculum content and lesson timing will be sent out after spring break. He will track numbers of opt-outs this year, and the Committee can revisit the opt-out policy if needed after that data is received.
2. Policy 5511 - Student Dress and Grooming
 - a. The updated policy presented to the Committee had been reviewed by the district's Leadership Team twice. Administrators felt strongly that the policy continue to include a detailed list of dress code requirements/exclusions because they could utilize that list when they need to enforce the dress code policy with students.
 - b. There was discussion of how the dress code policy changes with changing fashion trends. Committee members requested the bullet items regarding straps on all tops and regarding no undergarments being visible be reviewed again by the middle school administration. The feeling was that this could disproportionately affect girls. Current clothing fashion sometimes has girls bra straps visible even though it is otherwise modest and having straps on a top does not make is any more modest than those without straps was the feeling of some Committee members.
3. Proposed New Policy 0169.02 - Board Member Use of Social Networks
 - a. A model policy was reviewed by the Committee. Committee members discussed the need for this policy versus the Board code of ethics. The Committee felt that at this time the code of ethics addresses issues that could be encountered by a Board Member's use of social media and does not require a separate policy.

4. Proposed New Policy 2560.01 - Therapy Dog
 - a. This policy needs to be in place prior to beginning the therapy dog program at RMS this spring. The therapy dog will be phased in slowly to allow the dog to acclimate to the school, and meetings with students will be individual at the beginning of the program.
 - b. The proposed policy was developed based on a model Strauss Esmay policy with input from the insurance company and Board attorney.
 - c. Comments from Committee members included requests for some clarifying language on terms used and required information from the therapy dog's handler, allowance for incidental costs associated with having a therapy dog, adding an option to crate the dog if needed, and including student behavior expectations. The proposed policy will be shared with a therapy dog handler to provide user perspective and ensure realistic expectations.
 - d. After the December Policy Committee meeting, additional research by Dr. Hart indicated that further discussion with the Policy Committee is needed.

5. Relevant Board Goals – Dr. Hart connected the following Board Goals 2 and 4 to the work of the Policy Committee as they relate to advocacy and communication.
 - a. *Goal 2. Engage in activities that advocate for our community's needs.*
 - b. *Goal 4. To continue to improve communications and expand community engagement with all stakeholders. Our efforts will continue our focus on transparency, broadening our efforts beyond our locality, highlighting and celebrating district accomplishments with an emphasis on our sustainability/greening initiatives and developing collaborations with our local governmental entities.*
 - c. The Committee discussed measuring progress and sample activities related to accomplishing these goals. A suggestion was made to add an agenda item each month related to advocacy to ensure we are focusing on it. Some examples of recent activities related to the goals are the agreement with the township allowing all four schools to have police officers, the health curriculum Parent Information Night, and the addition of a policy tracking sheet which shows we are reviewing additional policies even though policy revision may not be required.
 - d. Comment was made that Goal #4 pertains to the Green Committee as well, but since that committee only meets quarterly that the Policy/Communications Committee can cover that under communications and advocacy. An example is the proposed celebration of the bioswale at TBS on Earth Day in April 2023.

6. Press Releases Tentative Topics (Based on Communications Plan):
 - a. December (due November 15): Food Service or Food Pantry (Mr. Egbert) and Strategic Goals (Dr. Hart)
 - b. January (due December 15): District Technology (Mr. Belske) and Kindergarten Registration (Ms. Harris), Partnership with Police (Mrs. Hample) ...and others
 - c. February (due January 16) Budget: Budget Time of Year (Finance Chair) and Kindergarten Registration Reminder (Ms. Harris)
 - d. Dr. Hart noted that we had several press releases in addition to those listed above that were recently submitted, so we might be a little backlogged with having the information in the Readington News.
 - i. December 2022 edition of the Readington News included RMS Girls Volleyball Conference Championship and RMS Civics Class articles.
 - ii. January 2023 edition of the Readington News included Partnership with Police, Kindergarten Registration, and Teacher Inquiry articles.

7. Agenda items: None

8. Next Meeting: Tuesday, January 24, at 4:00 p.m.