



POLICY/COMMUNICATIONS COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES

February 21, 2024

Virtual Meeting - 4:00 p.m.

Committee Members: Randall Peach, Chair
Ellen DePinto, Beth Fiore, Jennifer Wolf

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

Minutes

1. Communications Planning

a. Dr. Hart gave an update to the committee on the district's communications planning. He provided members with a copy of the agenda covering his meeting with the communications consultant, Lori Perlow, which included the board goal of improving communications and expanding community engagement. Dr. Hart's meeting with Ms. Perlow also included discussion of how to better advertise board meetings, conduct targeted mailing, and improve district communications.

b. The committee discussed two options presented by the consultant for data gathering. One option would be to launch a formal SCOPE (School Communications Performance Evaluation) survey that is used by many school districts, which would give us extensive qualitative data about our communications and also compare us to national norms. The committee was provided with a sample report that we would receive if we chose this option. However, the SCOPE proposal would have a cost of \$2,000 to \$3,000, and using it would also require additional lead time that may affect our timeline.

The other option would be for Ms. Perlow to create a Google form for the survey, which she would customize for our district, compile the data herself and then give us a report of specific recommendations. She indicated that this work would be included within her consulting fee.

Committee members reached a consensus that we should choose the second option, and have Ms. Perlow gather the survey data. While this would not include all the extensive data we would get from the SCOPE survey, it would be less costly, and more customizable to our district. Members also felt that we could always switch to using the SCOPE survey in future years.

c. The committee also approved the timeline for communications planning, which will include a launch of the communications survey in March, conducting focus groups in April and early May, and receiving a report in May or June that would identify communication goals and initiatives. The plan is to have Ms. Perlow come to the board retreat in August to do communications training, and then launch the communications plan in September.

Ms. Perlow made other recommendations to Dr. Hart during their meeting. She suggested that the district become a member of the National School Public Relations Association. She recommended that we begin using the Smore platform for our newsletters, which is more mobile-friendly. Ms. Perlow also suggested having a student council representative come to board meetings. Committee members suggested possibly incorporating the student involvement into the civics curriculum.

2. School Calendar Drafts

a. The committee discussed next year's calendar, for 2024-2025. As was brought up at the last committee meeting, there is a need for an additional snow contingency day for this calendar. (Currently, the calendar has only two days for inclement weather.) Since our last committee meeting, Dr. Hart spoke to the teachers to determine if they would agree to return in late August for two professional development days, allowing students to return on September 3. However, teachers raised the concern that, with August only several months away, many staff members have already made plans for the summer.

Therefore, Dr. Hart's recommendation was to bring teachers back on September 3 and 4, with students returning on the 5th; then, we would make Martin Luther King, Jr. Day an additional snow give-back day, if we end up needing it. The benefit to using MLK Day is that, unlike President's Day, MLK Day is not a holiday for 12-month staff members, who have to report that day anyway.

If more snow give-back days are needed after MLK Day, President's Day would be used next, followed by the Friday of spring break. Dr. Hart will add the order of contingency days to the notes on the calendar so that parents are aware of them.

b. The committee then discussed the proposed 2025-2026 calendar. This calendar would have teachers coming back on August 27 and 28, 2025, for their professional development days, with students returning September 2. Thus, MLK Day would be a holiday again on this calendar, and the snow contingency days would be on March 16 and May 26, followed by the virtual day, and if necessary, the end of the school year.

Dr. Hart proposed approving the 2025-2026 calendar day now (at the board's March meeting), along with the 2024-2025 calendar, so that teachers know well in advance that they are coming back in August of 2025. Dr. Hart noted that the August return will require a "side-bar" negotiation with the union.

3. School Calendar 2023-24

The committee then discussed how to make up the one additional snow contingency day needed for this year, given that we had emergency closings on December 18, January 16, and February 13, with only two snow makeup dates already built in. One option is to add a day onto the school year, making the last day June 21 instead of June 20. Other options would be to use the Friday of spring break, or to bring students in for a half day on March 15, which is now a professional development day.

After discussion, the committee reached a consensus that, while there was no ideal option, the "least bad" one would be to add a day onto the school year, making school end on June 21. It was noted that the eighth-grade graduation ceremony would still take place on June 20; Dr. Hart stated that in the past when students had to return after the graduation ceremony, the school offered a breakfast to the eighth-graders along with yearbook signings.

4. Review of Policy 8505 – Wellness

The committee next reviewed revised Policy 8505, which sets forth wellness goals and action items, including for nutrition promotion, education, and physical activity. It was noted that Jason Bohm is our district's Wellness Policy Coordinator who is responsible for ensuring that the district complies with the requirements of the policy. Dr. Hart had added some language to the policy (in blue) based on feedback from the Green Committee. Ms. Fiore asked for the opportunity to bring the policy back to the Green Committee to make sure every item has been included. It was agreed that no action would be taken now on the policy, but that Dr. Hart would bring the policy back to the committee at its next meeting.

5. Alert 232

a. Policy 2423 - Bilingual Education

The committee next discussed updates to this Policy, related to English as a Second Language (ESL), which is part of the district's comprehensive equity plan. The revisions are due to updates to the Administrative Code. The revisions include changes to the definitions, the identification of children needing ESL, and how programs are organized. Dr. Hart noted that Mr. Tumolo and Ms. Beagle had reviewed the policies and that they are both comfortable with them. The district has already begun implementing some of the changes, as we had revised our ESL Policy less than a year ago. Dr. Hart also noted that our district is also well ahead of the curve on the new ESL requirements for preschoolers, as we have already hired a preschool family engagement specialist who has both ESL and Special Ed certificates.

b. Policy 2431.4 - Prevention and Treatment of Sports-Related Concussions and Head Injuries

The last policy discussed was one related to sports-related head injuries. Dr. Hart noted that Ms. Beagle had reviewed this policy, along with our school nurses and with the guidelines from our school physician. The changes are due to a new statute, as well as a model policy that the DOE created for prevention and treatment of these types of injuries. This new policy would therefore align more closely with the model policy, which was based on CDC recommendations.

6. Advocacy: There were no new items on Advocacy.

7. Agenda items: School calendar approvals, and Policies 2423 and 2341.4.

8. The committee scheduled its next meeting for March 26, 2024 at 4:00 p.m.