



POLICY/COMMUNICATIONS COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES

December 2, 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. Star-Ledger to Cease Publication

Our committee opened the meeting by discussing the fact that various newspapers are ceasing print publication, including the Star-Ledger, the Trenton Times and the Hunterdon Democrat. Two of the three newspapers that our district uses to publicize notices are now ending print publication, which will impact our ability to comply with notice requirements. At the suggestion of Dr. Hart, committee members agreed that our district should follow the lead of other districts and groups which are advocating for the Legislature to take action, such as amending the law to allow for electronic publication of notices.

Our options for advocacy include having the board pass a formal Resolution requesting legislation to address the issue, or simply having Dr. Hart write a letter to our representatives in the Legislature. Of the two options, Dr. Hart believes that a formal Resolution by the board would have the most impact. One member suggested that our advocacy should include encouraging the continuation of printed notices to the extent possible, particularly for more elderly members of the community, and allowing local newspapers to serve as candidates for print publications even if their readership “count” levels are too low to qualify under existing law.

2. Strauss Policy Table of Contents

Next, the members discussed using our Policy Table of Contents as a starting point for the policy review process that is being planned by the committee. The TOC identifies the policy, the date it was last updated, and whether the policy is mandated (marked by an “M”). (The protocols for policy review were also discussed, as indicated below.)

3. Committee Handbook for New BOE Member Orientation

The committee then discussed having a committee handbook for new board member orientation, and Dr. Hart presented the draft of a committee handbook he developed. Dr. Hart did not present this handbook at the recent new board member orientation (which had occurred that morning), because he first wanted committee members to review the draft and give input before finalizing it.

The handbook would include information about how each committee operates; how often the committee meets; its expertise and responsibilities; the representation on each committee; and the responsibilities of the committee chair, among other information. Committee members agreed that the handbook would

be a helpful document to have, and that it should be used in the future for onboarding new board members. Dr. Hart stated that he would bring the draft of the handbook to the other committees for their input.

4. Onboarding Survey Results

Next, the committee reviewed the results of the recent survey which board members were asked to fill out, about their experiences with the onboarding process when they were new members. According to the survey results, board members' first-year experiences were relatively positive, and responses indicated that the written onboarding materials given to them had been helpful. One of the suggestions was to have training on Robert's Rules of Order, and Dr. Hart indicated that a training session on RRO was tentatively scheduled for March. Based on the survey results, Dr. Hart also suggested having an additional new member orientation in January, along with a mid-year "check-in" with new members around June. In addition, Dr. Hart suggested bringing back a mentoring program for new members.

5. Protocol for Policy Review

After reviewing our Policy Table of Contents, the committee talked further about the protocol it should follow for the planned review of district policies. Dr. Hart brought up the prospect of the board establishing a governance committee at the upcoming re-organization meeting, and that, if such a committee were established, it could be responsible for reviewing policies and identifying ones that should be revised. However, committee members felt that, even if the board did decide to establish a governance committee, the responsibility for reviewing policies and identifying ones to be revised should remain with our policy committee.

We then discussed the specific protocols for the review of policies. After hearing suggestions from Dr. Hart, a general consensus was reached on the following protocol: each committee member would be assigned (utilizing the Table of Contents) a set of policies to look at (e.g., 5 to 10 per member) with each member to then decide which policies to recommend for review or revisions at the next committee meeting. Dr. Hart suggested creating a rubric for the review of policies, such as how recent the policy was updated, the philosophy behind the policy, and how other districts address the policy.

Dr. Hart suggested that this review process not begin until after the re-org meeting when the policy committee membership has been set, as this will allow him time to draft the suggested protocols and rubric for the review of policies.

6. Wellness Policy – 8505

Next, the committee discussed updates to the wellness policy. After reviewing the policy with the Green Committee over the past several meetings and reviewing requirements for the Sustainable Jersey for Schools application, the policy is being updated to better reflect how the school district encourages health foods and physical activity. The updates include statements such as promoting inquiry involving nutrition and food, supporting a recess period at the middle school (now in the schedule), encouraging field trips that promote physical activity, harvesting garden food for the cafeteria, promoting other outdoor lessons, and supporting physical activity in aftercare through the YMCA. These revisions position the district to possibly achieve additional points in the Sustainable Jersey application. Dr. Hart mentioned that that application is under way now, and is due in June. In response to a committee member's question, Dr. Hart noted that our Green Coordinator does not have to be a district employee and in the past was a person the district hired at an hourly rate, who had a background in 'green' initiatives or sustainability.

7. School Calendar Revision 2024-2025

Dr. Hart then presented the revised school calendar for this year, which is on the agenda for the upcoming (tonight's) board meeting. Due to schools being closed on November 11 because of the power outages, that day will be made up on January 20, 2025. After the board approves the revision, an official notice will be sent out to families reminding them of the change.

Given those recent power outages, Dr. Hart noted that the purchase of generators has been added to the referendum. Dr. Hart also noted that JCP&L has upgraded our district from a Level 2 priority to a Level 1, so that we are now on the same priority level for restoring power as hospitals.

8. Cell Phone Policy – update.

Next, Dr. Hart gave us an update on the cell phone policy. He reported that Mr. Charleston has begun researching the issues and engaging stakeholders, including talking to children and parents, and should be able to report back to the committee by late winter or early spring.

9. Agenda items: The wellness policy and school calendar revision are on the agenda for the board meeting.

10. The next meeting was scheduled for January 23, 2025 at 4:00 p.m.