



POLICY/COMMUNICATIONS COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES

March 26, 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. Survey. The committee discussed the proposed survey that is the first step of the district's communications planning. Dr. Hart had updated the survey prepared by our consultant, to incorporate the feedback from committee members. The survey was scheduled to go out on the Monday after Spring Break, with a week left open for responses. The survey starts with demographics, and then asks specific questions about the person's preferred methods of communications, his or her satisfaction with the communications to date, and the accuracy and clarity of the district's communications.

In addition to parents and employees, the survey is directed to community members, whom the district will target through Facebook, as well as public libraries and community boards. Dr. Hart noted that the survey was anonymous; we do not ask for names and we do not collect email addresses.

- b. Focus Group Schedule. Next, the committee discussed the focus groups, which will be the second step of the communications planning process. Board members will pick a focus group to attend, and parents will also be given an option to attend focus groups virtually or in person. The district will also advertise this opportunity to community members. Dr. Hart noted that the focus groups will be run by an outside facilitator, not by a district administrator, to ensure honest feedback.

Dr. Hart noted that the board should have a report on this for its June meeting, or at the very latest by July so that we can put the communications plan in place for the following year.

In response to a question about whether board members can post about this on social media, Dr. Hart stated that the protocol is for board members to wait until the district first posts items on social media, before posting themselves.

2. Local Realtor Meeting.

The district is hosting a breakfast for local realtors, on April 23, from 9:00 to 10:30 a.m., at the board of education offices. The idea for this was the result of the first Early Childhood Advisory Council meeting, which was a meeting among preschool parents, administrators, teachers and preschool coaches. The administration learned from that meeting that local realtors thought the preschool program was a big draw to the community and were using it as a sales pitch for purchasing homes here. Dr. Hart therefore

felt that the district should give more details to realtors about the district, and the preschool program. Dr. Hart plans to do a short presentation on our academic achievement, low class sizes, and the preschool program, along with the district's green initiatives.

3. Alert 232 (con't) - Managing Equity in Education.

Next, the committee discussed the ongoing changes to its equity-in-education policies as part of Alert 232 from our policy consultant, Strauss Esmay. Dr. Hart explained that the state's Administrative Code has been revised, and that we have a number of policies that must be revised as a result, so that our practices comply with federal and state law, including the New Jersey Law Against Discrimination. The district must also ensure that its Comprehensive Equity Plan is in compliance with these changes.

- a. Policy 1140 - Educational Equity Policies/Affirmative Action. The committee first reviewed the revised Policy 1140, which is the Education Equity Policies/Affirmative Action policy. One revision to this policy, which we are making to other policies, is to take out the long list of protected classes (race, gender, etc.) and replace it with the phrase "the protected categories listed" in the Code, to avoid listing every category.

One member inquired whether the professional development of staff would include instruction on culturally responsive teaching of the type advocated by the author Gloria Ladson-Billings. Dr. Hart responded that Critical Race Theory was not part of our professional training agenda, but culturally responsive teaching was an example of the type of training that could be and has been provided.

- b. Policy 1523 - Comprehensive Equity Plan. The committee then discussed the district's C.E.P., which must be submitted to the State every three years. This policy gives us information and guidance about what we need to place in the C.E.P., including with respect to professional development and classroom practices. (The last C.E.P. was submitted last Spring, and so the next one is due two years from now.)
- c. Policy 1530 - Equal Employment Opportunities; and
- d. Regulation 1530 - Equal Employment Opportunity Complaint Procedure

Next, we discussed Policy 1530, along with its corresponding Regulation. This policy ensures that we comply with state and federal law for non-discrimination and equal employment opportunity, as well as equitable hiring practices, accommodations for disabilities, etc. The corresponding Regulation also has a complaint mechanism, which provides for the handling of complaints about the denial of equal employment opportunity.

There was a discussion about some of the provisions. One member noted that the policy seemed to suggest in the fourth sentence that race or another protected category could be used as a basis for hiring, if it "corrected" an imbalance in the protected classes, while prohibiting using race and other protected traits for other employment actions. Another member pointed out that the same provision substituted the word "correct" for "prevent," and worried that the word "correct" implied that the district has already committed some violation. Another member noted that if the language was mandated by the Commissioner, the committee had little choice but to include the exact language.

The committee discussed various options, including removing that sentence. Ultimately it was decided that this policy would not appear on the agenda, as Dr. Hart will conduct research with Strauss Esmay, and return information to the committee.

- e. Policy 1550 - Equal Employment/Anti-Discrimination Practices. We next discussed Policy 1550, which similarly addresses equal employment opportunity and non-discrimination in the district.

- f. Regulation 2200 - Curriculum Content. The committee also discussed Regulation 2200, which provides that the district's curriculum should eliminate any discrimination based on the protected categories, as well as eliminate any possible bias.
- g. Policy 2260 - Equity in School and Classroom Practices. Next, we discussed Policy 2260, which requires the district to provide students "equitable" access to classroom practices, deleting the word "equal." This policy, among other things, requires the district to achieve, within each school, a minority representation that approximates the district's overall minority representation. The policy also requires our curriculum to address the elimination of discrimination by narrowing the "achievement" and "opportunity gaps."

In addition, this policy would ensure that the Amistad and Holocaust curriculums are included in our instruction. The policy has various other provisions related to so-called equity in the classroom.

One member remarked that this policy deleted the phrase "both genders" and substituted it with "all sexes" and questioned whether our policy now was that there were more than two sexes, and if so whether this was being taught in our science classes. (Another portion of the policy eliminated the phrase "male and female students" and replaced with "gender identity.") Dr Hart responded that the only class where students might be taught about, for example, transgender persons, would be in health class, and not necessarily in science. It was also noted again that these revisions are the result of Administrative Code changes made by the Commissioner which are then imposed on districts.

A member also questioned the pronoun changes (substituting "they" for "him/her") in all our policies, and whether this was just in the policies or whether the district was also making this change in our curricula and in our classrooms. Dr. Hart responded that the changes in pronouns were not being made to the curricula; at the same time, it was the district's practice to honor any specific request from a student about pronoun use.

It was decided that this policy, like 1530, will not appear on the agenda until Dr. Hart conducts research with Strauss Esmay and returns information to the committee.

- h. Regulation 2260. We also discussed the corresponding Regulation, which contains a complaint procedure in the event there is an alleged violation of Policy 2260.
 - i. Policy 2411 - Guidance Counseling. The committee then discussed the policy on offering guidance counselling to students. Dr. Hart has updated this policy to note that the instruction can come not just from certified guidance counsellors but from teachers certified in other areas.
 - j. Policy 3211 - Code of Ethics. This Policy incorporates the Code of Ethics published by the National Education Association. It has been updated, one, to reflect the protected categories of non-discrimination (see above) and, two, to replace the pronoun "his or her" with "their."
 - k. Policy 5750 - Equitable Educational Opportunity. Lastly, this Policy, as with the others, has been revised to use the phrase "protected categories" in place of listing all of the protected categories. It also replaces the word "equality" with "equity."
- 4. Advocacy. It was noted that the QSAC Code changes are not available yet, but the administration is keeping an eye open for them.
 - 5. Agenda items: Policies 1140, 1523, 1550,, 2411, 3211, 5750

6. The committee scheduled its next meeting for May 7 at 4:00 p.m.