



POLICY/COMMUNICATIONS COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES

July 29, 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. Strauss Esmay Alert 233

We began our meeting with the proposed revisions to policies and regulations as set forth in the Strauss Esmay Alert 233.

a. Bylaw 0141 - Board Member Number and Term

The first revision discussed was to Bylaw 0141, which addresses the number and term of board members, as well as the term of board members filling a board vacancy. These revisions are straightforward and merely 'cleaned up' the prior language of the Bylaw. It was noted that a separate Bylaw (0143) addresses the process to be used by the board when filling a vacancy and is not affected by the revisions to this Bylaw 0141.

b. Policy 2200 - Curriculum Content

We next discussed revisions to Policy 2200, which addresses curriculum content. These revisions make the language of our curriculum content standards consistent with the New Jersey Student Language standards. The revised Policy also deletes the references to high school graduation requirements, which are not relevant for our K-8 district.

c. Regulation 5200 – Attendance

The committee then discussed Regulation 5200, having to do with student attendance. Legislation was recently enacted in New Jersey to permit students from grades six through twelve one additional State-excused absence each school year, in order to attend a civic event. Parents of students seeking an excused absence for attendance at civic events must submit a signed written notice at least five school days prior to the event, along with any required documentation specified by the district. The Commissioner of Education will provide further guidance to districts regarding absences for civic events.

One change which Dr. Hart suggested to the proposed regulation, which the committee agreed with after discussion, was to *not* make it mandatory for parents to provide a written explanation for students returning from a one-day absence, but rather to make this optional at the discretion of administrators.

- d. Policy 8467 - Firearms and Weapons
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Next, committee members discussed changes to our Firearms and Weapons Policy and Regulation. It was noted that these revisions track recent changes to the Code and statute. Dr. Hart mentioned that these revisions address the procedures to be followed when a firearm or weapon is found on a student or on school grounds.

One member raised a question concerning the language of the Policy, which is so broad that it would theoretically prohibit an off-duty police officer, including perhaps one of our school resource officers, from possessing a concealed weapon at a school event pursuant a concealed-carry permit. The committee discussed this scenario but reached the consensus that the Policy should be interpreted to prohibit only the “unlawful” possession of firearms in the school, and thus would not apply to off-duty officers who hold a concealed-carry permit.

The accompanying Regulation provides additional detail on the handling of any firearms school employees come into contact with, until the firearms can be secured by law enforcement.

- f. Policy 9181 - Volunteer Athletic Coaches and Co-Curricular Activity Advisors/Assistants

The committee then discussed revisions to Policy 9181, having to do with volunteer athletic coaches and co-curricular activity advisors. The Policy states that such volunteers must work under the supervision of a licensed or certified school employee.

One change to this Policy is that volunteers now have to be screened for tuberculosis in accordance with N.J. Department of Health requirements. The administration has discussed this provision with our school nurses, and they feel that it is an appropriate requirement to implement.

An optional requirement would be to mandate that such volunteers have a criminal history background check. Dr. Hart recommended that the board make this a requirement, and committee members agreed. Committee members also believed it was appropriate to require the volunteer to sign a hold-harmless waiver of claims against the district, including for workers’ compensation claims if such a waiver is permissible (Dr. Hart to review this issue with board counsel).

It was also noted that there might be an issue of who is a “volunteer coach” subject to this Policy; for example, if it would include a parent merely helping out on occasion. It was agreed by the committee that administrators would use their discretion in applying the Policy.

2. Abolish Policies from Alert 233

- a. Bylaw 0164.6 - Remote Public Board Meetings During a Declared Emergency

Next, we agreed that the board can abolish Bylaw 0164.6, which had permitted remote board meetings during Covid, now that the emergency Covid regulations have expired.

3. Advocacy: QSAC Public Comment Period

Moving on to advocacy, Dr. Hart advised that there is a public comment period for the State’s proposed revisions to QSAC. Dr. Hart noted that the revisions at issue for this public comment period are themselves not substantial, and likely do not merit comment. Dr. Hart emphasized that the N.J. Superintendents Association has been working on behalf of all districts on other, more substantial changes to QSAC that Dr. Hart believes are necessary for a fairer QSAC process.

4. NJSBA vs. Strauss Esmay

The committee next had a follow-up discussion about possibly switching to the N.J. School Boards Association for our policy consulting, instead of using Strauss Esmay. However, based on feedback from another superintendent whose district uses NJSBA for its policies, Dr. Hart does not believe that using NJSBA rather than Strauss Esmay for our policies would be the right move for our board. It was noted that the pricing is comparable: the NJSBA charges \$4800 for this service, and Strauss Esmay charges \$4900. Dr. Hart pointed out that Strauss Esmay also provides an annual professional development, as well as providing a digest with updates on recent case law. Dr. Hart advised the committee that he can further research the issue but that he does not recommend switching from Strauss Esmay at this time.

5. Agenda items: Bylaw 0141, Policies 2200, 8467, 9181

6. Next Meeting: The next meeting was set for September 18, 2024 at 4:00 p.m.