



POLICY/COMMUNICATIONS COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES

September 18, 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. Print News Options: Chronicle and Readington Township Newsletter

The committee first discussed the new Chronicle newspaper, covering news in Readington Township, Raritan Township, and Flemington Borough. The Chronicle will be a monthly publication which comes out the first of every month. If our district has any advertisements or news we wish to include, they must be provided to the Chronicle by the 15th of the month prior to publication. Dr. Hart noted that we were already able to place items into the October edition, including an ad for a job fair, and press releases.

In addition, Dr. Hart noted that the Readington Township committee is moving ahead with plans for its own newsletter, to be published quarterly. So, our district will now have at least two local news outlets for its communications.

a. Smore Statistics

Next, Dr. Hart shared a report on the Smore platform, which we now use for district communications. The report shows how Smore gives us valuable data on the readership of our newsletter, including the views per month as well as how long each person spends viewing the content, which we can utilize to target our communications.

2. NJSBA and Strauss Policy Protocols – update

As part of our ongoing discussion about potentially using NJSBA for our policies instead of Strauss Esmay, Dr. Hart reported on an additional conversation he had with the NJSBA Policy Director. In response to a question from a committee member, Dr. Hart inquired into why NJSBA policies do not mirror the language that Strauss uses, one example being the use of so-called “inclusive” pronouns. NJSBA responded that it is in the process of including “inclusive” pronouns. Dr. Hart also noted that NJSBA policies tend not to mirror the Code as much as Strauss does; rather, NJSBA allows the Code or statute to speak for itself, without copying all the language. Further, NJSBA often combines several policies into one, whereas Strauss tends to write individual policies for each Code provision.

3. Strauss Esmay Alert 233

- a. Policy 3160 – Physical Examination
- b. Regulation 3160 – Physical Examination
- c. Policy 4160 – Physical Examination

d. Regulation 4160 – Physical Examination

Next, we discussed two sets of policies and regulations related to the physical examination of district employees. Part of the reason for these revisions are the updates to the tuberculosis (TB) testing requirements from the New Jersey Department of Health (NJDOH). Strauss is recommending that our policy simply state that the board will follow the current NJDOH guidance for TB testing, so that we do not have to revise the policy every time the NJDOH updates its guidance.

The second part of the revisions has to do with the extent of pre-employment examinations and testing that our district requires during the hiring process. The proposed revisions would give us the option of making offers of employment conditioned on comprehensive fitness-for-duty exams that would include psychological assessments as well as drug testing (including for cannabis use). However, the board attorney advised of the potential downsides of doing such testing.

Dr. Hart added that requiring comprehensive drug testing or psychological assessments as conditions of employment would place the district at a competitive disadvantage in hiring, because many districts do not require such testing. He emphasized that the district would still retain the ability to perform more comprehensive fitness-for-duty exams and testing at a later time, if a specific concern about the employee arose during his or her employment.

The committee had a discussion about this issue, with some members agreeing that comprehensive pre-employment testing might place the district at a disadvantage in hiring. However, one member felt that there should be some psychological assessment of candidates, before they are permitted to be around young children where there is the potential for harm. The policy on the agenda tonight would provide that, besides a physical exam, no additional pre-employment evaluation be conducted.

e. Policy 5337 – Service Animals

The committee then reviewed our policy on service animals, which Strauss has revised to make it consistent with New Jersey statute as well as federal law requirements.

f. Policy 5350 – Student Suicide Prevention

We next discussed proposed changes to our policy on student suicide prevention, based on revisions to state statute. This includes requirements to train staff members about preventing suicide and looking for warning signs, as well as reporting requirements and the district's response protocols.

The committee had a rather lively discussion over the revised policy, with the result being that the policy will be tabled until our next meeting. One member objected to the apparent lack of a requirement that parents be consulted and allowed to participate in the district's initial assessment of a student who has attempted suicide or exhibited warning signs. Another member noted that the policy seemed to require that the district refer a parent to the Division of Child Protection if the parent disagreed with the school's specific assessment or recommendation. Dr. Hart pointed out that the language of the policy may be required by Code or statute, and offered to clarify which language is mandatory at our next meeting.

g. Policy 8420 – Emergency and Crisis Situations

Policy 8420 has been updated to include the requirement that school safety and security plans address the unique needs of students with disabilities during fire drills, school security drills, and emergency situations. One member raised the issue of whether this policy included bus emergencies and evacuations, and whether bus drivers were aware they had to address the needs of students with disabilities during emergencies. Mr. Bohm advised that bus drivers and aides do in fact receive training if they have students with special needs on their buses, and how to handle emergency situations.

4. Communications Consultant Agreement
 - a. Implementation of the communications plan
 - b. Referendum communications

Lastly, we discussed our ongoing arrangement with the district's communications consultant. Dr. Hart noted that our consultant is now working with us on two items. The first is the general implementation of our communications plan. The second is planning for the upcoming referendum, and Dr. Hart noted that the consultant will be working on getting out information about the referendum, including through public forum sessions, lawn signs and newspaper articles.

5. Agenda items: policy 3160, 4160, 5337, 8420.
6. Next Meeting: October 29, 2024 at 4:00 p.m.