

The Regional School District 13 Board of Education Policy Committee met in Regular Session on Wednesday, February 16, 2022 at 6:00 PM in the library at Coginchaug Regional High School.

Committee members present: Mrs. Booth, Mrs. Dahlheimer, Mr. Mennone, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Roraback and Mr. Stone

Committee members absent: None

Board members present: Ms. Betty (by phone)

Administration present: Dr. Schuch, Superintendent of Schools (by phone) and Mr. Pietrasko, Director of Infrastructure and Security Technology (by phone)

Mr. Moore called the meeting to order at 6:00 PM.

Pledge of Allegiance

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

Public Comment

None.

Approval of Agenda

Mr. Mennone made a motion, seconded by Mrs. Dahlheimer, to approve the agenda, as presented.

In favor of approving the agenda, as presented: Mrs. Booth, Mrs. Dahlheimer, Mr. Mennone, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Roraback and Mr. Stone. Motion passed unanimously.

Approval of Minutes - October 20, 2021

Mrs. Booth made a motion, seconded by Mr. Roraback, to approve the minutes of October 20, 2021, as presented.

In favor of approving the minutes of October 20, 2021, as presented: Mrs. Booth, Mr. Moore and Mr. Roraback. Motion passed, with all other abstaining.

Overview of policy development, amendment, and regulation adoption

Mr. Moore explained that the board has policy 9311 which governs the adoption of policies which indicates that a policy has to be presented twice. Exceptions to that have been made at times. Mrs. Petrella mentioned that amendments do not necessarily have to come from the superintendent. Mr. Moore felt that policies normally come from two sources, Shipman and Goodwin or CAFE, and most are based on legislative requirements.

The Policy Committee normally adopts policies as they are written, but sometimes they will be amended to meet the district's needs. Shipman and Goodwin amended all of the district policies related to COVID in 2020. There are also regulations which are drafted by Shipman and Goodwin as well. All of the information is online as well.

Mr. Mennone asked how often the policies are reviewed and Mr. Moore noted that there are no requirements on how often that is done. If there is a change in state law, Shipman and Goodwin or CABA will provide an update on policies. Mr. Roraback added that this committee historically only met a few times a year.

Mr. Moore explained that the district has also developed some policies, with no legal background.

Remote access of public, public comment and incorporating comments into minutes - policy review

A. 9327 Electronic Participation at Board Meetings

Mr. Moore explained that meetings were held via Zoom when COVID hit and that was not addressed by a policy. During that time, they also included emails and correspondence in the minutes but that is no longer happening. Mr. Moore believes that those are letters to the board and the board receives them and they don't necessarily need to be in the minutes. Mrs. Booth stated that that should be unless the writer specifically asks for it to be included in the minutes. Mrs. Dahlheimer agreed, but also felt that they should be specifically board business. It was agreed that it should always be at the discretion of the chair to include any comments.

Mr. Moore would take the wording off the bottom of the agendas and they do not want to create a venue for people to make nasty comments. Mrs. Dahlheimer added that people can always request something to be added to the minutes and if the chair decides to, they will be.

Mrs. Petrella asked if the paragraph can be reworded to encourage people to send their comments directly to the chair and board members. Mrs. Booth felt they could remove the part about including comments in the minutes.

Mr. Roraback felt that it should be made clear that Mrs. Petrella is answering on behalf of all of the board members and the individual members do not specifically answer. Mrs. Booth felt that Mrs. Petrella could put that as part of her response. Mrs. Dahlheimer would not want to discourage anyone from communicating. Mr. Mennone wanted to encourage people to actually come to meetings.

B. 1120 Public Participation at Board of Education Meetings

People have asked to connect via Zoom similar to town meetings and Mr. Pietrasko explained that meetings are only live-streamed based on the equipment that is available. If the board wants to enhance that, specifically moving to a hybrid meeting, they would have to bring in audiovisual specialists. A specialist did come on-site yesterday and will provide a quote to do that. He did comment that the meeting space is not conducive to the audio necessary for a hybrid meeting. The ceilings will cause issues as will the fact that it is a wide-open space. He recommended a Zoom room set-up like what the Town of Durham has. That would require one to two people to run the system during meetings.

Mrs. Dahlheimer felt that the Zoom room would cost about \$14,000 to do it like the town does. Each board and commission chair runs the meetings, either fully remote from home or from the town hall that has high ceilings and terrible acoustics. She would like to have a Zoom consultant come to a board meeting. Mr. Pietrasko was not saying it was not possible, but that it will be a challenge.

Mrs. Dahlheimer added that 14 districts are currently offering some sort of hybrid model for their meetings. The district has one of the larger aging populations and no one knows when the situation will require that type of access again. She would like to add it into next year's budget if it is not possible this year to somehow allow for some sort of public comment this year. Mrs. Dahlheimer felt that what happened during the public hearing was not acceptable. She found out that people were trying to ask questions and YouTube was on delay, so they weren't sure who was talking or if they were calling in at the right time. Mr. Mennone felt that people should be able to ask questions and Mrs. Booth noted that they can't ask questions of the board. Mr. Mennone understood that they wouldn't necessarily get an answer during meetings. He added that one of the board members could certainly moderate the comments via a laptop. Mrs. Dahlheimer noted that she has not noticed anyone using Zoom to cause any type of havoc.

Mr. Moore asked Mr. Pietrasko to reach out to the Zoom people and he will do that next week. He should also have the quote from the AV vendor that was on-site. He did caution that the availability of technology is a current challenge. Dr. Schuch felt that what Mr. Pietrasko was trying to say is if the board does it and offers it people, they want to do it well. One of the things to consider is most meetings are held in the library, but sometimes they are held in the auditorium. He wasn't sure the library is the best place for meetings and suggested coming up with a long-term solution for a better meeting room with a state-of-the-art system. Dr. Schuch felt that no one knows quite how to handle a hybrid meeting. He added that sometimes technology can slow down the flow if there is a back and forth.

Mrs. Dahlheimer felt that the district gives a lot of weight to taxpayers' votes and need to let them explain their thoughts and ask questions. Mrs. Petrella felt that they should look into the possibility of opening up the meeting to people not present. Committee meetings are in flux and may be part of regular board meetings. She felt that the most important thing is for the public to hear what the board is saying, along with their input. She asked if committee meetings could be recorded and put on YouTube. People could watch the YouTube video and then email questions after. Mrs. Dahlheimer would just like the board to move forward and look for ways to make this happen.

Mrs. Booth asked for the information about the other schools that do this and Mrs. Dahlheimer will send that information to the whole board. Mr. Stone would like to at least have the ability for people to call in with public comment. Mr. Pietrasko noted that there would still be a delay as YouTube can be anywhere from two seconds to a minute-and-a-half behind.

Dr. Schuch also suggested having a sign-up list for people who would like to address the board. Mrs. Dahlheimer explained that Greenwich has a public comment speaker form that has to be filled out prior to noon on the day of the hybrid meeting. Mr. Mennone added that it is done like that in Meriden as well. Mrs. Booth felt that they should also look at whether or not they need two public comment sessions in a meeting. Mrs. Dahlheimer felt it could be problematic to pull the public comment at the end. Dr. Schuch explained that he is accustomed to having only one public comment, but it is not limited to any specific subject. Speakers are normally called on in the order that they signed up. It will also help get names and spellings correct for the minutes. Mrs. Dahlheimer thought that they could ask someone for their name, but they are not legally required to give it.

Mr. Moore added that they normally don't have very many public comments at a board meeting and making it complicated may confuse some people. Mr. Mennone felt that this would make everything transparent and there would be no way for anyone to hide. Mr. Roraback added that property owners in town are also allowed to participate, even if they live elsewhere.

Mr. Pietrasko asked what direction they would want to go in and Mrs. Dahlheimer stated she would be open to anything, but Zoom is what she knows from Durham's meetings. Mr. Mennone stated that they use Teams in Meriden and it's a great platform. Mrs. Petrella asked that Mr. Pietrasko look into all options. She added that, as chair, she would not want to be the one to handle the incoming public comments. Mrs. Dahlheimer and Mr. Mennone stated that they would be happy to do it.

Mr. Pietrasko felt that it may take some time, but he will try to do it as fast as possible. He added that he will be on vacation next week and will not be at the board meeting.

Mrs. Petrella reported that she is signing up for CABA's virtual workshop on March 8th, titled "Let's Keep It Civil: How to Lead Public Meetings in Contentious Times." She will also make some comments at the next meeting about public comment. She encouraged board members to speak up when something is out of order. Mr. Moore added that the chair can also correct public comment and move on. Mrs. Petrella also knows of other boards where they have had to shut down a meeting temporarily due to contention.

Public Comment

None.

Adjournment

Mrs. Dahlheimer made a motion, seconded by many, to adjourn the meeting.

In favor of adjourning the meeting: Mrs. Booth, Mrs. Dahlheimer, Mr. Mennone, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, Mr. Roraback and Mr. Stone. Motion passed unanimously.

The meeting was adjourned at 6:48 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Debi Waz

Debi Waz
Alwaz First