

The Regional School District 13 Board of Education Policy Committee met in Special Session on Tuesday, August 30, 2022 at 4:00 PM in the library at Coginchaug Regional High School.

Committee members present: Mrs. Dahlheimer, Mr. Mennone and Mr. Moore

Committee members absent: Mr. Roraback and Mr. Stone

Board members present: Mrs. Petrella and Mrs. Roy

Administration present: Dr. Schuch, Superintendent of Schools, Mrs. Stone, Principal of Coginchaug Regional High School and Mrs. Gonzalez, Principal of Strong Middle School

Mr. Mennone called the meeting to order at 4:00 PM.

Pledge of Allegiance

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

Public Comment

None.

Approval of Agenda

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

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

Approval of Minutes - May 11, 2022

Mr. Moore made a motion, seconded by Mrs. Dahlheimer, to approve the minutes of May 11, 2022, as presented.

In favor of approving the minutes of May 11, 2022, as presented: Mrs. Dahlheimer, Mr. Mennone and Mr. Moore. Motion passed unanimously.

Personal Technology Use

Dr. Schuch explained that the leadership team had a discussion this summer about some of the challenges with personal technology use. The administrators feel that the existing policy gives them the authority to do what they have done to start the year.

Mrs. Gonzalez stated that students are to put their cell phones in their lockers and leave them there during the day. The phone can be retrieved after the school day or if a teacher has an educational purpose for using the phones. It has worked well for the first two days of school. She has received only one parent state that they were not going to abide by this policy and Mrs. Gonzalez explained that they cannot exempt themselves from the rule. The Guidance office also reported that no child came in upset on the first day of school. There is one student who requires their phone for medical reasons which is fine. The teachers have reported that it has been nice and the kids are interacting.

Mrs. Stone stated that this conversation started during summer school when Mr. Ford explained that there was a first or second grader whose mother was calling them during school. After conversations with the leadership team, Mrs. Stone decided that phones need to be off and away during instructional times, unless directed by the teacher. She has not heard any complaints yet. Mrs. Stone does want the students to learn how to use the technology appropriately and not put restrictions on or discipline them over it. Both Mrs. Gonzalez and Mrs. Stone have told the staff that they will support them as long as they support the policy.

Mrs. Gonzalez added that she gave every staff member the code to get on the PA system in case of an emergency and put the school into lockdown. Adults do have their cell phones. She has also told the staff that it is better to put the school into lockdown and be wrong than to not do it.

Dr. Schuch summarized that, under the current policy, the principals have the authority to do what they've done, but he added that the leadership team talked about this and the two biggest points are that the district does supply Chromebooks and there are a number of middle schools who are doing exactly what Strong is doing. He reiterated that the strategy does depend on the adults enforcing it.

Mrs. Stone explained that parents were notified at new student orientation and it is in the handbook. All of the kids will be notified at class meetings on Thursday and Friday. Mrs. Stone felt it was important that everyone re-engage and build community. She emphasized that parents can't just save their kids every day. Mrs. Gonzalez had thought about allowing cell phones at lunch, but in the past it became very difficult to give the phones back. They also don't talk to each other and Airdrop inappropriate things. Dr. Schuch emphasized that no one is preventing a child from calling their parent, but they are trying to make it less impulsive. They can also get messages to children from their parents. Dr. Schuch also noted that this is one step to combat bullying, but added that they can't control what kids do out of school.

Mrs. Dahlheimer was concerned that the policy says that phones can be used during lunch and study halls and parents may go to the policy for that. Mrs. Petrella and Dr. Schuch both emphasized that it also says at the discretion of the building principals.

There was then some discussion about students using the combination locks on lockers. Dr. Schuch added that the trend is moving away from lockers.

Mrs. Petrella emphasized that it is important that the parents are notified of any regulations and that the teachers continue to enforce it. It was generally agreed that it wouldn't hurt to have the same type of regulations at Memorial as well.

Mr. Moore felt that the language needs to be updated on the last page of the regulations.

COVID-19 Temporary Policies and Regulations

Dr. Schuch stated that the if Policy committee wants to kill that policy, he would have no problem with it. Mr. Moore didn't see any reason to change the policy at this time.

Mrs. Petrella explained that the protocols for COVID were constantly changing which prompted this policy, but that doesn't seem to be happening now. She felt that the protocols are pretty consistent now and low key. She felt that they could put the policy on hold at this point. Mr. Moore reviewed that there

was a whole book of policies relating to COVID and this policy was created to avoid having to go back and fix everything every time.

Mrs. Dahlheimer felt that there was so much uncertainty at the time and this policy was appropriate at the time. Most boards are pulling back their policies now to allow the boards to be more involved with the Department of Public Health. She recommended that this policy be pulled and the board meet as necessary if things need to be changed. Mrs. Petrella agreed as long as the policy can be reinstated if things change.

Mr. Mennone asked if they wanted to suspend the policy or remove it and Mrs. Dahlheimer would like to remove it. Mr. Mennone asked Dr. Schuch how that would affect him and he felt that the COVID policies were temporary and there may be some mechanics to go through. Dr. Schuch felt that there will always be situations when it will be difficult for the board to meet in time and he would still be empowered to make a judgment call.

Dr. Schuch added that the CDC has also put out new guidance and the district has gone back to where it was pre-pandemic, asking people to stay home if they are sick, take precautions and not requiring anyone to mask. People will be supported if they want to wear a mask. The state has done the same thing. If a child presents with symptoms, they will be sent to the nurse and if they have a fever, they will be sent home. There are no rules as to how long they have to stay home.

Mrs. Petrella asked what the policy is now and Dr. Schuch explained that there really isn't one because there is no enforcement. The state has guidelines, but everyone can choose to follow or not follow them. The district is not enforcing those guidelines. Mrs. Petrella asked for something written and Dr. Schuch stated that it is not a policy, simply a health guideline. They are trying to avoid entering the school year by creating an atmosphere of fear about the policy and/or guidelines.

Mr. Moore's concern with removing the policy is that they would need to look at all of the concurrent policies regarding COVID. Dr. Schuch will check with Mrs. Neubig. He summarized that the Policy committee would like to eliminate the big COVID policy and they will go back to find any concurrent policies. The State has backed away from using the term COVID and now refers to respiratory illnesses. Mr. Moore added that a new Omicron vaccination is also coming out.

Mrs. Roy asked if it would be better to continue to allow the Superintendent to implement guidelines. Dr. Schuch stated that everyone is happy not to have to enforce this. Mrs. Dahlheimer also mentioned how hard it is to connect with someone when you can't see their face.

Mrs. Dahlheimer would like to send this to the full board to pull back on this policy.

Public Comment

None.

Adjournment

Mr. Mennone made a motion, seconded by Mr. Moore, to adjourn the meeting.

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

The meeting was adjourned at 4:53 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Debi Waz

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