

The Regional School District 13 Board of Education Policy Committee met in Regular Session on Wednesday, March 15, 2023 at 4:00 PM in the library at Cuginchaug Regional High School.

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

Committee members absent: None

Board members present: Ms. Betty and Mrs. Petrella

Administration present: Dr. Schuch, Superintendent of Schools

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

Pledge of Allegiance

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

Approval of Agenda

Mr. Moore made a motion, seconded by Dr. Darcy, to amend the agenda to move Public Comment after Approval of the Agenda and Approval of the Minutes.

In favor of moving Public Comment after Approval of the Agenda and Approval of the Minutes: Mrs. Dahlheimer, Dr. Darcy, Mr. Mennone, Mr. Moore and Mr. Roraback. Motion passed.

Mrs. Dahlheimer made a motion, seconded by Mr. Roraback, to approve the agenda, as amended.

In favor of approving the agenda, as amended: Mrs. Dahlheimer, Dr. Darcy, Mr. Mennone, Mr. Moore and Mr. Roraback. Motion passed.

Approval of Minutes - February 13, 2023

Mrs. Dahlheimer made a motion, seconded by Mr. Roraback, to approve the minutes of February 13, 2023 as presented.

In favor of approving the minutes of February 13, 2023, as presented: Mrs. Dahlheimer, Dr. Darcy, Mr. Mennone, Mr. Moore and Mr. Roraback. Motion passed.

Public Comment

Karen Buckley, from Durham, has been involved in various groups linked to the district and helped to fundraise well over \$100,000 over the last 20 years. There were a few people present at the meeting who are members of various groups who support the learners and their activities, with the goal of establishing a policy to help facilitate continued fundraising and support.

They encouraged the committee to split the policy, with a way to register community service collection efforts without an overly cumbersome approval process. They also suggested that it be split for fundraising, one to have a registration process for organizations who have their own tax ID numbers and also an approval process for students, employees and organizations without that in place. Ms. Buckley also felt that not all fundraising has a pure educational purpose and they suggested the language say “benefit the learner,” but not be limited to education. She gave several examples. They also do not

believe that written authorization from a parent is necessary for each fundraiser and strongly believe that will create an unnecessary hurdle and likely bring the majority of fundraising to a halt. Ms. Buckley does not feel she should have to sign a form to be able to sell items on behalf of her child.

They support language that would permit door-to-door fundraising under certain restrictions rather than a blanket prohibition. They also strongly believe that crowd-funding should be a permitted activity as it is a necessary option in the post-pandemic world and permits people from outside the district to offer their support. The policy in its current form would discourage continued fundraising activity and make the process even harder.

Jennifer Sass added that she has been raising funds for the district for 13 years and is the current president of the Strong PTO and vice-president of the Coginchaug Football Club. She noted that it has been difficult to keep within the parameters of the policy. The proposed policy further limits the type of fundraisers that are possible. At one time, PTOs and other clubs fell under the school tax ID number, however that changed more than 10 years ago. When that changed, there was no clear distinction between clubs and organizations with their own tax ID number and clubs within the school. The draft policy still does not distinguish that. Ms. Sass believes that organizations with their own tax ID number should not fall under the policy as they are their own entities. She suggested that language be added to the policy to separate those clubs and organizations.

Molly Clark, president of the Coginchaug Football Club, is new to the fundraising policy and finds it very confusing as to what the district's goals are. She understands that the district needs to mitigate risk and be aware of fundraisers, but it seems very cumbersome to meet all the requirements and find profitable fundraisers. Looking at the proposed policy, a few items stood out to her including the amount of time required for a fundraiser to be approved, no crowd funding or door-to-door collections. One to two months seems like a very long lead time since most fundraisers are done during the school year. This timing would also lead to fundraising overlaps. Ms. Clark wondered why the district does not allow crowd funding or door-to-door fundraising as they are two of the easiest fundraisers. She noted that the Golf team raised over \$4,000 for their trip to Florida and wondered why the district would want to discourage that. Many people may not be comfortable with door-to-door, but that is a personal decision that should be made by a family not the district. She felt that it is a great way to engage the community with what's happening in the schools.

Oanh Stephan, from Durham, noted that she has been involved in various groups over the last 20 years, serving as PTO president for Brewster, Korn, Memorial and Strong. She is currently the co-chair of POPs. She too felt that the most meaningful item is the clear differentiation between school-sponsored activities and those run by parent-sponsored or non-school-related organizations. Over 10 years ago, the district requested the parent organizations disconnect both legally and financially and they were quick to comply. It soon became apparent that a centralized database was needed to keep track of the fundraising activities to allow for coordination. In about 2015, the process of approval of fundraisers was initiated by Susan Vaccaro, the superintendent at the time, to ensure coordination and success for everyone. Dr. Stephan believes that many of the issues are a result of unclear language and the root cause of the difficulties. It has really been landmine for fundraising over the past 20 years.

Dr. Stephan made some suggestions to the current policy and provided a copy to the committee members. She asked the committee to consider clear language differentiating between school-sponsored and parent and other non-district organizations. She proposed that non-school-associated organizations can register

fund-raisers so the district can coordinate efforts. They suggested other language changes and noted that they would be happy to work with the committee to develop a clear and workable policy.

Karen Buckley explained that their goal was to try to frame the policy using what Shipman provided. There is a distinction between a class at the high school running an activity from the Coginchaug Football Club or the PTOs that have a 501(c)3 and have to file taxes and have their books audited. She gave an example that if students can't do crowd-funding, the district would lose the ability for a Boy Scout to do a project for the school as they do fundraising on behalf of the district.

Dr. Darcy did not feel that online fundraising and crowd-funding are interchangeable. Ms. Buckley noted that there are limited mechanisms that kids can use. Dr. Darcy felt that they need to be specific. Ms. Buckley felt that that is the way fundraising is moving as people are very comfortable with it.

Mr. Moore stated that that was done on purpose about four years ago because nobody really knew enough about online fundraising and they didn't want anyone doing projects without any control. Ms. Buckley felt that there were ways to control it without prohibiting it. Mrs. Dahlheimer felt that the language could be changed to have the district accept the project as a gift, with no ties to the fundraising.

Dr. Darcy commented that Shipman are the experts on this in Connecticut and Ms. Buckley added that not all policies work for every circumstance and they should be kept as much the same as possible but fit within the district. Mr. Roraback felt that most attorneys tend to be very cautious, without considering the specific community. He would not want to thwart any volunteers and recognized that the district runs and thrives off of volunteers. He would be for any way of simplifying it while staying within the law. Mr. Roraback has also found that the attorneys have been known to tweak their opinions.

Mrs. Dahlheimer agreed that Shipman is cautious, but they do have precedent. She read an opinion about crowd-funding and how it can be misinterpreted. Mrs. Dahlheimer added that while they might want to allow for this, they would have to go back to Shipman. Mr. Roraback added that some crowd-funding activities are headline grabbers.

Dr. Schuch reiterated that they certainly don't want to make life harder, but he felt that there are more problems in the regulation than in the policy. He didn't feel that the policy really speaks to any groups that support the learners unless and until they want the learners to be hands-on. It notes that the board would not be responsible. The only part of the policy that he believes may be a point of reconsideration is the door-to-door solicitation. He felt that the word "solicitation" is the problem and that doesn't prohibit someone from knocking on the door of someone they know. He interprets it to be knocking on the door of strangers. Dr. Schuch felt that that was for liability of the district in terms of abductions and other things. Mr. Mennone agreed about the district's liability of kids going door-to-door. Dr. Schuch does not believe that Community Round-Up violates the policy. Ms. Buckley felt that that was why they suggested adding supervision to the policy and the Community Round-Up worked because there were always adults with the children. Dr. Schuch believes that the advertisement that was done before the actual event was the solicitation part, but realizes that may be a gray line.

Mr. Moore had a concern that if there were a car accident while the kids were collecting for Community Round-Up, a lawyer will somehow make the district responsible. Ms. Buckley noted that the reality is that would probably happen whether there is a policy or not. Another parent felt that it really wasn't clear to students and they have definitely knocked on people's doors. Dr. Schuch wondered if Community

Round-Up even falls under this policy because they are not raising funds for a school activity and maybe the regulation needs to be changed. Oanh Stephan felt that the policy has been interpreted in different ways, especially what applies to parent-sponsored organizations. Again, she encouraged that the board separates that out.

Dr. Darcy asked what the board's interest is in protecting the brand of the district. She wondered how the district would handle it if an organization with their own tax ID number wanted to do a car wash at Hooter's. Mrs. Petrella felt that this discussion is great, but this is public comment and the committee should move on. Mrs. Dahlheimer also mentioned that they need to think about equity and if all clubs have the same opportunities. She also asked if there was a cap on how many fundraisers can be held per year.

Dr. Schuch felt that the regulation puts the approval with the principal which is where he thought it should be. He did not believe there were a ton of fundraisers. Mrs. Dahlheimer quoted from the current policy and noted that it was three fundraisers per year and Shipman did not touch it.

Mr. Moore stated that he likes the first paragraph that Dr. Stephan proposed separating the groups and asked Dr. Schuch what he feels about crowd-sourcing and door-to-door. Dr. Schuch felt that those are important and Mrs. Dahlheimer added that Shipman needs to review all of it. Different reasons for crowd-sourcing were discussed. Mr. Moore asked Dr. Schuch to review this with Shipman.

Policy Review

- A. Policy 1324 - Soliciting Funds from and by Students**
- B. Policy 1325 - Fundraising Activities**
- C. 5000 Series Shipment Model Policy on Fundraising**

See discussions above.

D. Policy 5135 - Student Wellness

Mr. Moore reviewed that an issue came up at the board meeting about whether or not food should be allowed at celebrations and other events in the schools. He mentioned that policy 5140 talks about allergies and restricts what foods can be brought in. Mrs. Dahlheimer explained that that policy began in 2020 and asked if that is what brought about the change in the elementary schools. Dr. Schuch talked to the principals and they felt that it was COVID that eliminated it and most just hasn't come back. Ms. Betty felt that it clearly sends a mixed message to the kids in K-5 that their teachers can bring in food for curriculum purposes but they are prohibited to bring in food for celebrations. The principals like the way it is now with celebrations because of allergies and they stated that parents are a little nervous that this conversation is even happening. They added that they want to discourage food at celebrations because of childhood obesity and also felt that there are inequities due to parent involvement. The principals do see the food that is necessary for curriculum as very different.

Mrs. Dahlheimer understood that it is easier, the principals like it and that there can be inequities but the way that it worked at Lyman was that every parent was encouraged to get into the classrooms. Some classrooms did monthly celebrations or made sure that another parent helped out. She felt that they need to make a choice for what is better for the kids and not what is easier. She also mentioned the food that is

served at the schools, including Pop-Tarts, Rice Krispies Treats, cookies, etc., and felt that the discussion should not be about obesity.

Dr. Schuch added that the principals agree with that and they will have a discussion with Mrs. Neubig and Mr. Basil. Mrs. Dahlheimer added that parents in the district actively want their children exposed to foods because they have educated their children.

Mrs. Petrella felt that this is a perfect opportunity to teach about nutrition and life skills because food is usually attached to celebrations and events. She liked the idea of a monthly birthday celebration. Dr. Schuch felt that none of this really requires a policy change and the principals had stated that if the board wanted to move this in a different direction, they will do that. Dr. Schuch would like the board to hear from the principals directly. Mrs. Dahlheimer felt that was important, but she would also want to survey the parents.

Mr. Roraback added that he always clearly identified what was in anything that he ever sent into school. He is not a fan of food in the classroom from a logistical point of view, but would like it happen in the cafeteria. All school systems are having issues with pests and rodents. His district is very strict about it. Mrs. Petrella added that she used a lot of food in her science classes.

Dr. Schuch felt that the discretion is at the principal level right now and they are open to other options. Mrs. Dahlheimer reiterated that the kids are getting a mixed message when the teachers can have food and Dr. Darcy felt that you cannot apply the same rules to adults that you do to children. If adults decide to eat horribly, that is on them. Dr. Darcy did feel that everyone should be allowed a beverage in the classroom, but certainly teachers shouldn't be eating a cupcake in front of the kids in the classroom. Dr. Schuch agreed with Dr. Darcy and felt that kids understand that adults have certain privileges though it could send a mixed message.

Dr. Schuch will invite the principals to the next Policy Committee meeting in April. Mrs. Dahlheimer noted that there is a problem with equity between Lyman, Brewster and Memorial and things never make sense between the schools. Dr. Schuch felt that all five principals should attend. He added that the three elementary principals are on the same page, though specific celebrations may vary. Mr. Moore felt that they would want to encourage food as part of the teaching aspect. Mr. Mennone felt that the more kids are exposed to, the more they are apt to try things. Mr. Roraback added that trying food from different cultures is a great way to introduce a new culture.

Public Comment

None.

Adjournment

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

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

The meeting was adjourned at 5:25 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Debi Waz

Debi Waz
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