

The Regional School District 13 Board of Education Policy Committee met in Regular Session on Wednesday, April 19, 2023 at 4:00 PM in the library at Coginchaug Regional High School.

Committee members present: Mrs. Dahlheimer, Dr. Darcy (by phone initially), Mr. Mennone, Mr. Moore and Mr. Roraback

Committee members absent: None

Board members present: Ms. Betty (by phone) and Mrs. Petrella

Administration present: Dr. Schuch, Superintendent of Schools, Mrs. Neubig, Director of Finance, Mrs. Keane, Director of Student Services and Special Education, Mrs. Stone, Principal of Coginchaug Regional High School, Mrs. Gonzalez, Principal of Strong School, Mrs. Durkin, Principal of Memorial School, Mr. Ford, Principal of John Lyman School, and Mrs. Murray, Principal of Brewster School

Mr. Moore called the meeting to order at 4:04 PM.

Pledge of Allegiance

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

Public Comment

None.

Approval of Agenda

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

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

Policy Review

- A. Policy 5135 - Student Wellness**
- B. Policy 5140 - Food Allergies, GSD and Diabetes**

Dr. Schuch explained that he conveyed the issues to the principals around celebrations and cultural experiences in the classroom. Mr. Roraback felt that while each school has their own perspective, they may want to all be on the same page.

Mrs. Stone felt that this is a non-issue at the high school as the kids can take care of themselves. They understand their allergies and their friends' allergies and don't usually carry food. When everything got shut down during COVID, it really cut down on the anxiety in the classroom about celebrations when she was at Memorial. Allergies were a huge thing then and if there was a food list, it had to be checked by the nurse. Kids with allergies needed a special snack. Mrs. Stone felt that it was much easier when food celebrations went away and also put everyone on an even playing field. She also felt it took a lot of parents' time. Mrs. Stone added that cultural activities in the classroom continued and the difference was that all of the classes had the same activities.

Mrs. Keane felt that notices go home when these things are part of the curriculum and parents are aware. If items are being made at home, the district can't control cross contamination.

Mrs. Murray felt it was particularly challenging on the big celebration days because everyone brings in food. The nurse then has to check every item and that is very challenging. She added that teachers talk about equity in the classrooms a lot.

Mrs. Dahlheimer asked if parents send in trinkets for the kids to give out and Mrs. Murray felt that that doesn't happen a lot. She believes that parents know they can do that, but they choose not to. Families come in and read or donate a book to the room. Mrs. Murray doesn't get complaints from learners about how their birthdays are celebrated. Mrs. Dahlheimer asked if they have done a survey of parents and she is concerned that parents may be afraid because of COVID and think they can't do those things.

Mr. Ford stated that he has received very little feedback, one way or the other. He felt that if someone felt strongly, they would have received feedback. Mrs. Stone added that feedback typically comes from the PTOs. Mrs. Dahlheimer felt that a lot of parents feel that it is a board policy and it is truly more of a building policy. She was concerned that there needs to be more communication about it.

Dr. Schuch noted that the policy gives discretion to the building principals, but there is language that highly encourages limitation of food-based celebrations. He felt that what Mrs. Murray described happening at Brewster a number of years ago is probably in violation of the current Wellness policy. Mrs. Dahlheimer wondered how the kids at Strong know what to do if they are not taught at the elementary level. Everything that comes in for PTO dances goes directly to the tables and nothing gets checked.

Mrs. Murray explained that it is being taught because they still have snack and still have lunch. Mrs. Dahlheimer felt that they were taking the parents out of the equation. Mrs. Murray explained that there are some rooms that are allergy-free and parents do have to understand the restrictions. Mrs. Dahlheimer felt that community members perceive that it was more of a convenience to take it away during COVID and not bringing it back.

Mrs. Keane agreed that the timing did lay out that way, but they were moving in the direction of having less food and food celebrations in the classroom. She felt that part of the confusion is that they are talking about two separate policies. The Student Wellness policy contains a lot of nutritional guidelines because they are required for financial reasons. The Food Allergies policy is more of a nursing/medical concern. Per the Wellness policy, the district can't offer certain foods or sell them during the day, but people can bring them to an event at night. Mrs. Keane added that she would like to see food being brought in, but also supervises the nurses who tell her that there are 83 students in the district with specific food allergies, 29 students with other allergies and five students currently being tested. Some of the allergies are anaphylactic by just coming in contact with food residue. Mrs. Keane felt that if a policy can save one child's life, it is a necessary policy.

Mr. Moore suggested that they may need a third policy which prohibits food from individual student celebrations. Mrs. Dahlheimer felt that kids are exposed to things every day outside of school. Mr. Roraback felt that society is very conscientious of food allergies, but he is more concerned of the time used in the classroom and the equity piece. He added that kids don't learn if they don't feel safe and there

is a sizeable percentage of kids in the district with allergies who also need to feel safe. Mr. Roraback added that he absolutely does not like 24 kids' hands digging into food.

Mrs. Dahlheimer asked if they know what other districts do and Dr. Schuch felt that the policies are fine, but the administration will deviate from current practice if the board desires them to. The policies came from Shipman and are rooted in federal and state regulations. He added that he doesn't feel that the principals are 100 percent against food-based celebrations, but would prefer to control it. They would like direction from the board.

Mrs. Dahlheimer felt that John Lyman School always handled these issues incredibly well and she felt that they need to be open-minded to do this well. She suggested celebrating combined birthdays and didn't want to see schools become different from home life. Mrs. Keane agreed that communication is very important so that everyone has the same message of what to expect. Dr. Schuch reiterated that the current policy gives the discretion at the building level and they may want to encourage parents to take these issues to the building principal.

Ms. Betty felt that no policy has changed since COVID became a thing. They always brought in food that was specific to the particular classroom and there was never an issue with that. Her daughter was taught at home and in the classroom to not share food. Mr. Moore added that his grandson had a peanut allergy and lent his Chromebook to someone who had peanut butter on their hands. He ended up in the nurse's office. He felt that food celebrations should be controlled by the classroom. Mr. Moore didn't feel that people were in a big rush to have parties again, but this issue needs to be separate from the two current policies.

Mrs. Petrella felt that COVID is waning and people are getting back to whatever normal is. She didn't have an opinion either way, but does like to have food at board meetings. She asked if there was a way to compromise by having birthdays once a month and publishing a list of acceptable food items. Ms. Betty agreed that an approved list would be great. She has heard from a lot of families who want to bring this back. Mrs. Dahlheimer knows of a parent who has had four or five kids go through the district, with two of them having very severe allergies, and she is a proponent of making sure that everyone understands allergies and how to make them safe. Mrs. Dahlheimer just wants to make sure that the district is preparing kids to understand.

Mrs. Petrella added that the accepted food list will vary from year to year. Mrs. Dahlheimer would like to know what other districts are doing. Mr. Roraback wondered how much of a burden it is on the parents and Mr. Mennone wants to do whatever is best for the kids, but the kids also need to know what they can eat and not eat. He does, however, realize that if something does happen, it will be the district on the hook.

Mr. Ford agreed that the reason for the shift was due to COVID, but food allergies are an important consideration. The families are very proactive with their own children about what is safe and what is not, but there are always risks. He added that kids do like to celebrate with their peers, but wouldn't want to see kids not be able to have cupcakes because some kids have food allergies. Mrs. Dahlheimer felt that it's very difficult to get the younger children to understand that while there is always food in a celebration outside of school, they can't do that in school.

Mrs. Petrella suggested having a joint celebration of birthdays across a whole grade one day per month. Mrs. Murray's concern with a monthly celebration is that it still brings out the equity lens because families will be required to provide cupcakes for a celebration and there will be families that can't do that. Mrs. Dahlheimer felt that that always happened with room moms. Mrs. Petrella stated that she always spent her own money to be sure that there was enough and Mrs. Dahlheimer felt that the PTO would help with that.

Mrs. Petrella explained that she did not agree with having nothing, but would like to see a compromise that is controlled as best as possible. Mrs. Dahlheimer suggested incorporating a celebration into SEL time. Dr. Schuch suggested that the elementary principals reach out to the PTOs and ask for feedback from parents and teachers as well. He would not recommend any radical shift before the end of the school year.

Dr. Darcy felt that they need to be very clear why people are making the decisions that they make. There are many reasons why parents may not be able to provide cupcakes. Dr. Darcy is flummoxed at the amount of conversation about this topic when the board has yet to even talk about racialized hatred incidents. She trusts the building principals to make the decisions on what is best for their buildings and their kids. She felt that the board has so little time together and they affect so little change that this is not what they should be spending their time on. Dr. Darcy noted that they have low reading scores, low math scores, racialized incidents, LGBTQ kids who are being bullied and they are spending all of this time talking about this. She felt that the list of why not to do it is so much longer than why to do it.

Mr. Roraback asked when this cultural change took place because they always celebrated birthdays in the past, but that was done without food. They did explore different cultures through food which he felt is still a valuable thing to do.

Mr. Moore agreed that too much time is being spent on this subject. Ms. Betty felt that this was the only policy on the agenda for today, but Mr. Moore explained that there were others as well. Ms. Betty understood the racial issues, but felt that this is important as well. Dr. Darcy wanted to know exactly how many people have spoken about this issue.

Mr. Moore summarized that they need a separate policy on food celebrations in the elementary schools. There are options to consider, including no food celebrations or limited food celebrations with food that is on an approved list. He believed that principals should still be able to decide. They should see what other districts do and approach the PTOs and bring it back to the committee.

Dr. Schuch was a little concerned about creating a new policy because the Shipman policies are tied back to funding. Mrs. Dahlheimer felt that parents have a really hard time understanding the district's policies and the more they can differentiate where things are, the more they can understand and will be less likely to go after the board and the administration.

Mr. Moore asked if everyone was comfortable preparing a new policy on the use of food for celebrations, talking to the PTOs, looking at other districts and preparing a list of acceptable foods. It was agreed to move forward with that and prepare something for the fall. Mr. Roraback cautioned that an approved list of foods will be very difficult. Mrs. Keane added that the nurses are against any type of food celebrations as there is too much risk.

- C. **Policy 1324 - Soliciting Funds from and by Students**
- D. **Policy 1325 - Fund-raising Activities**
- E. **5000 Series Shipman Model Policy on Fund-raising**

Mr. Moore explained that Dr. Schuch has received a model policy from Shipman that doesn't include all the parental sign-offs. He felt that it covers many of the issues that have been raised.

Dr. Schuch stated that Shipman felt that the policy applies only to the learners doing the fund-raising themselves. If one of the groups wants to have the adults do some fund-raising, the policy does not apply. Most of the regulations are designed to protect the learners and the district is protected as well. Dr. Schuch has also spoken with the groups concerned and they agree. Their only concern was a different board, superintendent or principals could come in and interpret it differently. Shipman noted that they could add a sentence to the regulations that says something to the effect of "this regulation only applies to any fund-raising activities that involve students."

The attorneys also felt that a PTO is a separate entity which is better. Mrs. Dahlheimer felt that money from fund-raisers does flow through to the schools and she wanted to be sure that the board understands that fine line of what programs are receiving that funding. Dr. Schuch felt that this policy would not apply to that situation and there is another policy that speaks to donations. He felt that it was up to the individual organizations to decide what they donate their money to. Mrs. Dahlheimer felt that the money is still coming into the school through these organizations, but the board has no role in how it is spent. Dr. Schuch reviewed it is within the purview of the board to accept or not accept donations. He related a story of a donation offered to his prior district.

Mrs. Dahlheimer noted that there had been a cap on how many fund-raisers could be done and asked if that was still adhered to. Mrs. Neubig explained that there is still a cap that is done by a tiered system at the principal's discretion. Mrs. Neubig stated that they are all supposed to be decided at the beginning of the school year, but that has not been enforced. Mrs. Neubig added that if students or the district's name is being used for fund-raising, they have to be notified. One recent fund-raiser that was proposed, not including students, was deemed illegal because it would benefit an educational institution. They do have an accountability form in place to report how the funds are spent.

Mr. Mennone asked how money has to be spent if a PTO is doing a fund-raiser and Mrs. Neubig explained that there has to be a reason for a fund-raiser, which could be as general as future student activities. Mr. Mennone would not want an organization to purchase ukeleles when a sports team has 17-year-old jerseys. Dr. Schuch felt that PTOs very often do fund-raisers that do involve the children. The attorneys recommended that the district not stray into that space because they will then own liability. Mrs. Dahlheimer would be concerned about liability if a PTO decides to donate money only to certain programs. Dr. Schuch added that there may be issues with students raising funds in one year and not having them spent for years afterward.

Mr. Mennone added that Benchwarmers do not use kids for fund-raising. Mrs. Dahlheimer stated that some clubs have less parent involvement and feel like it's not worth it to do fund-raising. They feel like the amount of fund-raisers that they are all doing is keeping clubs from starting up at a low level. She would like to make sure that clubs that are just starting have access to fund-raising as well. Dr. Darcy felt that another option could be one major fund-raiser per year per grade, with each child having their own account for the funds. Mrs. Dahlheimer felt that would be very unfair to kids from lower incomes. Mr.

Moore stated that that is what's done for senior trips and band trips, but the board has provisions in the budget to pay for kids who can't afford things. Mr. Mennone suggested that money from a fund-raiser that is not spent could be put into that account. Mrs. Neubig explained that any money not spent stays in the account for the next year, except for money left in the Senior Class fund goes into the Alumni fund which is used to pay for students with financial need.

Dr. Schuch reported that the attorneys felt that Community Round-Up was not a fund-raiser, but is a charitable endeavor and this policy would not apply to that. However, selling something like candy bars by knocking on random doors is prohibited. The attorneys added that this is not the way that most fund-raising is done anyway.

Dr. Schuch stated that the attorneys also said this policy and regulations do not apply to crowd-funding done by outside groups, but it does speak to district students or employees. Shipman also stated that the policy could okay or not okay that activity. They also noted that this is not a prohibition on digital fund-raising, so it doesn't mean that email blasts or things like that can't be used. Mrs. Dahlheimer mentioned that crowd-funding takes money off the top of funds raised.

Dr. Schuch felt that the use of crowd-funding could be argued in either direction. Mrs. Dahlheimer summarized that only outside organizations can use crowd-funding. She felt that some arts and technology areas do not have established organizations to fund-raise for them. Dr. Schuch was neutral on crowd-funding and felt that that would be the board's decision. Mrs. Dahlheimer asked that the board look at those other areas through a different lens when they are looking at the budget.

Dr. Schuch summarized that the policy is fine as recommended and he has spoken to the parents as well. If the board wants to reverse on the crowd-funding in general, Shipman has already provided language that would develop a process to do that.

F. Begin review of 3000 Series Policies (time permitting)

It was agreed to hold off this review until next meeting.

Public Comment

None.

Adjournment

Mrs. Dahlheimer made a motion, seconded by Mr. Roraback, 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
Alwaz First