

The Regional School District 13 Board of Education Policy Committee met in Regular Session on Wednesday, October 18, 2023 at 4:00 PM in the library at Coginchaug Regional High School.

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

Committee members absent: Dr. Darcy

Board members present: Mrs. Caramanello (by phone) 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.

Public Comment

Karen Buckley felt there was some confusion on the new fund-raising policy and wanted to get a better understanding of what the words say vs. the implementation. They felt it would be helpful for the Policy Committee to work with the volunteers who actually do the work to be sure it doesn't negatively impact or discourage groups to walk away from the work necessary to benefit the learners and fill in the gaps of what the budget does not fund. They would encourage training and education for district employees so that interpretation is consistent across the board. She commented that they do not believe many of the activities that are considered school-sponsored are actually that. The parent groups take on their own liability insurance and pay for use of the facilities which makes them specifically separate from the school. They provide services and funding for things that the district chooses not to do or has no interest in participating in. They view school-sponsored events as things like the Community Round-Up. A number of years ago, the district told PTAs, football clubs, etc. that they had to get their own EIN numbers and, in some cases, become 503(c)3s because they were not a school-sponsored activity. Ms. Buckley felt that the district should be consistent in its policy of school-sponsored activities and not pick and choose. The definition ties into the interpretation of the implementation of the policy. They were told that school-sponsored activities have to get approved by the district, especially if they involve children. Under this policy, that would require parent signatures for students to participate. She gave an example of the Durham Fair and all the booths that the kids work in. The policy would require every student to get a signed form for each booth they work at. Ms. Buckley added that most of those events are classified as school-sponsored, yet the district does not take the liability for those activities. They also do not believe that the crowd-funding policy should limit parent activities even though the language states only students and employees. They were told that parents could not use pictures of their own children. They do not believe that the policy should be different according to where the money is deposited. They were originally told that if the money flowed through RSD13 funds, they could be fined and a different rule would need to be followed. They are not looking to hinder or put barriers in the way of any group who is fund-raising as they provide a service that the district does not or cannot provide. Instead, they are trying to make everyone aware that the policy, as written, is unworkable and will deter volunteers from stepping up. It is also being implemented in an inconsistent way across the district. Ms. Buckley hopes that the committee will revisit these issues and stands ready to assist in any way. They also urge that the administration provides education to employees within the district and even the organizations they work with.

Dr. Stephan collaborated with Ms. Buckley in the preparation of what she just presented.

Mr. Moore stated that the policy is very narrow and he felt that the real issue is with the regulation. Ms. Buckley felt that the definition of school-sponsored needs to be looked at as well.

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, Mr. Mennone, Mr. Moore and Mr. Roraback.

Approval of Minutes - August 9, 2023

Mr. Mennone made a motion, seconded by Mr. Roraback, to approve the minutes of August 9, 2023, as presented.

In favor of approving the minutes of August 9, 2023, as presented: Mrs. Dahlheimer, Mr. Mennone, Mr. Moore and Mr. Roraback. Motion passed.

Review Fund-raising Activities 5325 and Social Media 4118.51/4218.51 policies

Mr. Moore felt that it seems like the issue is related to the principals' interpretation and Dr. Schuch noted that this is a recently-adopted policy that is new to everybody. He felt that some training still needs to be done in its implementation. He added that a lot of the issues primarily reside at the high school level, with a little at the middle school level and almost none at the elementary level. There were some crowd-funding activities that were permitted in the past (golf and volleyball teams) prior to the policy and regulation being published. The football club got caught in the cross hairs of this. The district does not want to inhibit any fund-raising and the spirit of the policy is 100 percent at what the learners are actively doing. He felt that the interpretation may be in what constitutes active participation by learners, especially in crowd-funding. He felt that the board didn't want the children to be actively involved in crowd-funding and he admitted that he wasn't sure how the policy speaks to parents actually using pictures of their children. He wanted to be sure that this committee has accurately captured what the board wants to have happen. He agreed that independent nonprofits should not have to get approval from the administration, but the question is where the children intersect in those spaces. Their point about the Durham Fair is a good point and he agreed that they need to take a look at the policy. Dr. Schuch felt that the spirit of the Shipman policy is that no child would be compelled to volunteer for a fund-raising activity without permission of the school and their parents. They are not currently requiring people to fill out permission forms to work at the Durham Fair booths. Dr. Schuch felt that the board has been very clear that they do not want employees crowd-funding, but they would like to know how the board feels about the whole thing and then enforce it consistently.

Mr. Moore felt that there should be a guidance document for anyone trying to interpret it. He felt that the intention of the policy was not to limit booster clubs from collecting money and if this is a barrier, they need to figure out how to make it less onerous and still protect the kids.

Mrs. Dahlheimer stated that while crowd-funding is not allowed, volunteerism in the district is at an all-time low and allowing that type of fund-raising will exacerbate the problem. Students are taught to volunteer their time as a way to build community spirit and get to know their fellow students better.

Group fund-raising helps build a bond and allowing crowd-funding would just exacerbate the decline in volunteering. One of the four pillars of the National Honor Society is voluntarily contributing to the school and community. They also noted that the Durham Fair relies heavily on volunteers and has done so for the past 100 years. She felt that they will no longer have volunteerism if they only encourage people to donate money.

Mr. Moore asked what Mrs. Dahlheimer would suggest in relation to the policy and she stated that she doesn't know why they are back talking about crowd-funding again and that the policy can be enforced as it is written. The district does not allow students and employees to crowd-fund and students should not be tied to a club or organization on crowd-funding which goes all over the world. She felt it was glorified panhandling. She did, however, feel it would be okay for kids to email about their fund-raising events as long as it doesn't go to a corporation that gathers emails.

Dr. Schuch felt that the suggestion is that that puts barriers on the outside groups trying to raise money and will actually provide less money to flow back into the schools. Mr. Mennone added that the kids would already have authorization if it is a school-sponsored activity and could email about that. Ms. Buckley added that the regulations require the form, even it is school-sponsored. Mr. Moore proposed exempting certain activities from that, like the Durham Fair. Ms. Buckley felt it comes back to the definition of school-sponsored. Mr. Moore volunteered to work with Dr. Schuch to straighten this out.

Dr. Schuch explained that this is Shipman's model policy and the only optional part is the crowd-funding because some districts allow it and some don't. Mr. Mennone asked if Shipman had recommended that they not do the crowd-funding and Dr. Schuch felt that they would either allow it all or not allow any of it. Dr. Schuch reviewed that the precipitating incident was a student athlete who sent an email out directly soliciting funds with their picture attached.

Dr. Schuch acknowledged that no one doesn't want fund-raising and Mrs. Dahlheimer felt that the intent on the crowd-funding was exactly what was sent out and interpreted by the administration. Mr. Moore agreed that that was clear, but wasn't sure it was clear whether students can send out emails or not. Dr. Schuch reviewed that the elementary school PTAs do not involve the kids at all, so the policy doesn't really apply at that level. He felt that the question is to what extent does the district have jurisdiction over the name, image and likeness of student athletes or club members when they are being pictured in their team uniform. Mrs. Dahlheimer suggested they ask Shipman for language in regard to that. Dr. Schuch felt they would have had no jurisdiction if there were no images and Ms. Buckley added that that is not what was said. Mrs. Dahlheimer explained that this is no longer public comment and that is not how their meetings work.

Mr. Moore also suggested that a guidance document be drafted for each principal. Dr. Schuch added that the NCAA has given up on this as well. Dr. Schuch clarified that the sentiment of the Policy Committee is that they don't like the idea of crowd-funding with kids in the center but adults can do that through their nonprofit. Mr. Moore mentioned that the POPS craft fair is in December and kids normally work at. He asked if that is still okay and Mrs. Dahlheimer didn't see why they wouldn't want to have permission slips for kids doing that. She did not feel that would be too much of a burden and should be manageable. Dr. Schuch will follow up with Shipman.

Dr. Schuch explained that the Social Media policies were included because they also mention the crowd-sharing and that's important because employees are sometimes involved in the fundraisers as well.

Review of remaining 4000 Series (personnel) policies

Mr. Moore asked if there were any questions on the proposed Shipman policy on the Code of Ethics and Professional Responsibilities for Personnel. Hearing no questions, they will recommend that to the full board. The other policy is Increasing Educator Diversity and includes the Board of Education would be required to develop a written plan for minority educator recruitment. Mr. Moore wasn't sure that this wouldn't be an administrative function, rather than a board function. Mr. Mennone added that the board would not be participating in job fairs or hiring. Dr. Schuch explained that this came from state statute, but he wasn't sure that it required it to be a responsibility of the board. Mr. Moore suggested adding administrators to the language and Dr. Schuch proposed adding the word district instead. Mr. Moore agreed to bring that policy to the full board with the proposed change. Mr. Mennone felt they might want to check with Shipman before changing the wording and Dr. Schuch will do that.

Review of 9000 series (bylaws of the board) policies

Mr. Moore felt that a lot of the 9000 series policies are repetitive and it's often hard to find consistency. They are now organized by type, including policies and regulations, roles and ethics, information, committees, structure and participation and other. Dr. Schuch added that he went through all of these policies and they are all over the place. He also suggested that the committee try to get through one or more groups at each meeting as there are so many. Dr. Schuch added that he usually provides recommendations, but here he has given more observations because the bylaws of the board belong to the board. Mrs. Petrella hoped to break it up into smaller groups and Mrs. Dahlheimer added that she may want to have a board retreat to brainstorm on some of the bylaws.

Mr. Moore began with a proposed Shipman policy, Formation, Adoption, Amendment or Deletion of Bylaws, and he explained that he didn't feel it was something they should adopt as policy 9312 already covers it in much more detail. Policy 9312 describes how bylaws are adopted as well as administration, regulation and policy, so 9313, 9132 and 9311 are redundant. Mrs. Dahlheimer asked what was changed in 9312 in June, 2023 and Dr. Schuch explained that it was just renumbered from the 1000 series. Dr. Schuch and Mr. Moore recommended using the Shipment policy for suspension of policies and bylaws which is more specific. Dr. Schuch explained that 9314 requires a two-thirds vote and the Shipman policy is more generic and complete. Mrs. Dahlheimer would like to know why it would be a two-thirds vote for bylaws and a majority vote for others. Dr. Schuch felt that Shipman gives more weight to bylaws than policies.

Mr. Moore will send out the recommendations from Dr. Schuch and staff to prepare for the next Policy Committee meeting.

Dr. Schuch added that there is a current policy 9311 called Policy Formation that does not recognize a board Policy Committee as even being part of the process. It states that all policies go directly to the full board. Mrs. Dahlheimer also mentioned that Mr. Mennone is a co-chair of this committee and should have had a copy of everything from the beginning.

Public Comment

Oanh Stephan reiterated that it is really important to define what is school-sponsored vs. not. Dr. Stephan noted that POPS has a specific fund-raising policy and thought that might be a good idea for the booster clubs. It clearly specifies that no student is required in any way to participate. She added that the majority of POPS activities require the kids to sign up on a form which parents have full access to. If the craft fair is to become school-sponsored, POPS should not have to pay school use fees or have to have insurance.

Adjournment

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

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

The meeting was adjourned at 5:00 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Debi Waz

Debi Waz
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