



FAIRFIELD PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Policy Committee Meeting Minutes
Monday, October 16, 2023
5:00 PM
501 Kings Highway East
Superintendent's Conference Room

In Attendance:

Ms. Jennifer Maxon Kennelly, Ms. Jennifer Jacobsen, Ms. Carol Guernsey, Dr. Zakia Parrish, Dr. James Zavodjancik (left at 6:30pm), Mr. Robert Mancusi (left at 6:40pm), Ms. Kristen Hardiman

Call to Order: Ms. Jennifer Maxon Kennelly called the meeting to order at 5:00pm.

Approval of September 18, 2023 Policy Committee meeting minutes: Approved with changes by a 3 - 0 vote.

Policy:

5111 – Admission

Dr. Zavodjancik explained language in the first paragraph reflects the new language as stated in the law. Dr. Zavodjancik stated he also included language in the policy about withdrawals. Dr. Zavodjancik explained he does not have the regulations yet since they are still being worked on by the state. Dr. Zavodjancik further explained legislation does require an assessment to be given for those students coming in for school year 2025-2026. Ms. Jacobsen stated she would like the district to use September 1st as the date for the 2025-2026 school year with no assessment option. Dr. Zavodjancik read language from the legislation which states that the district should provide an assessment option for parents who choose to send their child to kindergarten. Ms. Maxon Kennelly stated she is interested in having a very robust assessment because she believes there is a reason for having the September 1st deadline. Ms. Jacobsen asked Dr. Zavodjancik why we must wait for the state to provide guidance. Ms. Jacobsen stated she would like the District to develop our assessment. Dr. Zavodjancik advised waiting for the state so that we can see what the state thinks is developmentally required in the assessment.

Ms. Maxon Kennelly suggested adding this item to the Future Items list to be discussed in the Spring. Ms. Guernsey stated she would like to work on this policy now since many parents are looking for guidance and need to reference this policy.

The committee agreed to discuss this policy again along with the regulations at the next Policy Committee meeting scheduled for October 30th.

5144.4 – Physical Exercise & Discipline of Students

Dr. Zavodjancik stated both CAGE and Shipman developed new language for this policy which recently passed. The name of this policy has changed to “Recess and Play-Based Learning”. The committee agreed to add “and Discipline” to the title of the policy.

Regarding the section called “Loss of Recess as Disciplinary Consequence”, Ms. Jacobsen asked Dr. Zavodjancik what is currently happening if a student poses a danger. Dr. Zavodjancik stated it is currently a school-by-school decision on how to handle the situation. Ms. Maxon Kennelly asked Dr. Zavodjancik if there is data on those situations are handled. Dr. Zavodjancik stated that consequences should be documented in Infinite Campus so there is data that can be used for reporting. Ms. Guernsey stated she does not support withholding exercise as a form of discipline.

Ms. Maxon Kennelly questioned the twenty-minute time period elementary students had for exercise as stated in the first paragraph. Ms. Maxon Kennelly stated there had been a strenuous effort to increase the exercise time; however, she received significant pushback from staff because they felt an increase would not give them enough time to implement the curriculum. Ms. Maxon Kennelly asked Dr. Zavodjancik if the twenty minutes could be increased to thirty minutes. Dr. Zavodjancik explained that currently it is twenty minutes with another ten minutes at another time of the day. Ms. Maxon Kennelly requested that the ten minutes be formalized in the policy.

The committee approved this policy with the recommended changes by a 3-0 vote. This policy will be presented to the Board for a “first read” at the October 24th BOE meeting.

6163.33 – Therapy Dogs

Mr. Mancusi explained the definition of a service animal is in this policy to clarify the difference between a service animal and therapy dog. Mr. Mancusi also explained the policy includes the responsibilities of the therapy dog “handler”. Mr. Mancusi stated there is a “Request for Access for Therapy Dog” form which must be completed and approved by the Principal and Superintendent. Mr. Mancusi stated several parents have emailed a member of the Board in support of therapy dogs in some school programs.

Ms. Guernsey stated she does not support this policy as she feels it puts the district at risk. Ms. Guernsey also stated she is concerned about allowing animals with dander into the schools when there are students who have allergies, asthma, or a fear of dogs. Ms. Guernsey stated she might support therapy dogs if the dogs remained outside of the school.

Ms. Jacobsen asked Mr. Mancusi if he was aware of any issues with students with allergies when the dogs have been in the school. Mr. Mancusi stated he was not aware of any issues. Mr. Mancusi emphasized that currently parents are notified when the dog will be in the school.

Ms. Jacobsen recommended adding language to this policy to include therapy dogs are allowed in the school for specialized programs or special circumstances. Ms. Maxon Kennelly agreed the intent to utilize therapy dogs is for the District’s specialized programs or for special circumstances. Mr. Mancusi stated he will make formatting changes and add the recommended language to present a revised policy at the next Policy committee meeting on October 30th.

5141.5 – Suicide Prevention

Mr. Mancusi stated changes to this policy are in response to revised legislation. Ms. Jacobsen questioned the language on Page 20 about training for teachers, school staff and students. Ms. Jacobsen asked Mr. Mancusi how often the training is provided. Mr. Mancusi stated currently the training is annually. Ms. Jacobsen asked Mr. Mancusi if students are trained yearly. Mr. Mancusi stated he will get clarification on the training of students for the next policy meeting.

6111 – Student Calendar

Ms. Maxon Kennelly stated she would like to focus on editing the policy now since the regulations are flawed. Ms. Jacobsen stated she is interested in having a definitive school calendar with a concrete start and end date. Ms. Jacobsen provided a handout to the committee containing a chart of federal, state, local, school, and bank holidays. Ms. Jacobsen stated if the District holds school on any of the state holidays, the District is required to have a program scheduled pertaining to that holiday.

Ms. Jacobsen stated again that she is interested in having a set beginning and end date to the school calendar. Ms. Guernsey asked Ms. Jacobsen how specific she wants to be. Ms. Jacobsen stated she would accept language such as “beginning the last week of August and ending with by the third week in June.”

Ms. Jacobsen also recommended adding language to the regulations such as “no graduations will be held on Fridays”. Ms. Jacobsen stated she would like to eliminate “the unwritten rules” we are practicing by either getting rid of them or making them part of the regulations.

Ms. Jacobsen stated she will provide revised language to this policy for the next policy meeting.

Open Discussion/Public Comment: There was no open discussion or public comment.

Adjournment: Ms. Maxon Kennelly adjourned the meeting at 7:08pm