



**Minutes  
Policy Committee  
Avon Board of Education  
34 Simsbury, Avon, Connecticut 06001  
Via Zoom  
Monday, June 8, 2020 - 6:00 p.m.**

**Attendance**

**Members Present:** Laura Young, Chair; David Cavanaugh; Jason Indomenico; Lisa Seminara

**Member(s) Absent:** None

**Administration Present:** Dr. Bridget Heston Carnemolla, Superintendent of Schools; Donna Nestler-Rusack, Assistant Superintendent; Roberto Medic, Director of Human Resources

**Others Present:** Deb Chute, Board Chair; Shirley Moy, Recording Secretary

I. Call to Order

*The meeting was called to order by Laura Young, Policy Committee Chair, at 6:02 pm.*

II. Approval of March 10, 2020 Minutes

*Jason Indomenico moved, Lisa Seminara seconded, to approve the minutes of the March 10, 2020 Policy Committee meeting.*

*The motion passed 4-0-0.*

III. Communication from Public

Policy Committee Chair, Laura Young, stated that in light of recent national events, it is imperative that communities and school districts work together to address Racism and in particular, inequality in education, which must never be tolerated.

With this in mind, generally speaking, as outlined by the Connecticut Association of Boards of Education, the primary function of a Board of Education Policy Committee is to fulfill a legislative role, by adopting policies that help guide the operations of a school system.

In doing so, Policy Committees meet throughout the year to review, update, remove and or add new policy, mostly in response to legislative action and/or to support newly identified board priorities, as part of an ongoing process. Suggestions for policy evaluation may also originate from board members, administration, and/or from the community.

The Policy Committee has and will continue to review and enact policies that reflect thoughtful consideration and best practices through an equity lens, in the Avon Public Schools. Dr. Carnemolla, Dr. Rusack and Mr. Medic can speak in greater detail, to the ways in which this happens.

Directions were also given should anyone attending the meeting wish to submit a comment to the Policy Committee.

IV. Old Business – Items for Continued Review and Discussion

a. Policy 6146 Graduation Requirements

Assistant Superintendent, Donna Nestler-Rusack reviewed the changes made to Policy 6146 regarding the graduation requirements stating that changes made included deleting the guidelines that are no longer relevant and to reflect the new requirements. Dr. Rusack also explained the revised course credits of 25 needed to graduate. Mr. Renkawitz, AHS Principal explained to the members of the Policy Committee how the increased credits compared to current policy and highlighted the new requirements of 1.0 for Health and Safety Education and 0.5 credit for Mastery Based Learning. There was also an additional change of 0.5 credit in Humanities and an additional 1.5 in STEM requirements. Mr. Renkawitz added that possible Mastery Based Learning options include a college experience course level that is not used for another graduation requirement, internship, work experience, service learning or independent study. Avon's Director of Guidance, Todd Dyer stated that Avon is well poised to meet the new Connecticut State graduation requirements and was excited about the flexibility offered to students that is now included. Mr. Dyer indicated that the manner in which the high school can interpret the Mastery Based Learning credit would provide students a range of options that will fit their personal interests and needs.

***David Cavanaugh moved to bring Policy 6146 Graduation Requirements as revised to the full Board as a first read. Lisa Seminar seconded the motion.  
The motion passed 4-0-0.***

b. Equity in Policies

Dr. Carnemolla stated that given the national conversations happening about equity, race, social justice reform, the Board wanted to have the opportunity to have this discussion in the confines of the Policy Committee meeting because the Policies are the backbone of the school district and setting policies is the main function of the Board of Education. Dr. Carnemolla went on to review the policies that have been revised through an equity lens. As the work in revising the District's Strategic Plan and Blueprint for Excellence has centered around equity and how the District provides for all students' needs from a social/emotional and educational standpoint, while not publicized, much of the work has been done. The Superintendent realized that although the work was being done concerning equity, non-discrimination and reviewing our data for equitable treatment of our students and opportunities there may not have been as much conversation as there could have been which she hoped to have tonight.

The Superintendent reviewed the Strategic Plan known as the Blueprint for Excellence which the administration and staff work towards implementing in relation to goals and beliefs and includes providing safe climate from a physical, social/emotional and educational standpoint. Meeting the individual and collective needs of students is also within the plan and woven in the District's policies. Policy 0300 refers to the goals and mission of the District and sets the tone for the rest of the policies. The policy states that all planning will be done with those goals in mind and is in line with the Strategic Plan. Policy 6121 was also recently revised and speaks of nondiscrimination in the educational program due to changes in law and to keep in line with the Civil Rights Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act. This affirms our policies of equal opportunity of all educational and co-curricular programs for all and prohibits discrimination of race, religion, color, national origins, sex, sexual orientation, marital status, age, disability, genetic information, veteran status or gender identity or expression. The policy was updated on November 2019 for both the student and staff

policies. This closely related to the policy on instructional materials. The Superintendent reviewed the revision of the sexual harassment policy for students that protects gender identity and expression and the bullying prevention policy. Policies that had any reference to harassment, discrimination, or bullying were also reviewed by the Policy Committee.

Mr. Medic, Director of Human Resources spoke of the recruitment and retention relating to integrating of the District staff. Mr. Medic reviewed the work done on personnel policies related to sexual harassment and nondiscrimination. The major changes were to ensure that the protected classifications as outlined by the federal and state governments are appropriately listed in the policies and the procedures related to handling claims of discrimination and harassment are in line with updated legislation. Mr. Medic also explained Policy 2111 which is an equal opportunity policy that provides guidance to ensure that the District's workforce is a diverse population and we do not discriminate on the basis of any of the protected classifications. Policy 4111.1 and 4111.3 speak on equal opportunity and minority recruitment and ensure all candidates have access to the same material as well as ensuring we provide the same consideration to candidates of all protected classifications. Mr. Medic stated that the goals of the Strategic Plan in diversifying our workforce is important for our students to help provide opportunities for students to interact with individuals in all walks of life. Partnering with Teach Connecticut, which is a network that broadcasts open position through various mediums to multi-states and also recruits at nationally black colleges/universities, and Troops to Teachers Program has helped extend the District's reach with hiring. Mr. Medic has also attended minority recruitment meetings at CREC and works with other districts to ensure greater diversity in our workforce and school districts. There is also a homegrown effort to help non-certified staff obtain their certification. Additional work needs to be done on other policies to ensure consistency in language in regards to protected classifications.

Dr. Carnemolla clarified the difference between policies and regulations/procedures/practices to support the policies. The work of the Policy Committee and Board of Education is to continually revise policies to ensure that they are inclusive.

Dr. Rusack shared how the policies and focus areas of the Blueprint for Excellence are imbedded in the everyday work. This ensure to help meet the academic and social/emotional needs of all the students. One area to help achieve this is by providing staff with ongoing professional development in the areas of equity and cultural proficiency. Staff from CREC and SERC as well as District staff have provided training. Some examples of training and teaching have included story telling as an empathy building tool, implicit bias, work on culturally responsible engagement, culturally responsive teaching and practices, restorative practices, culturally relevant literature, identifying culturally relevant literature, topics of race and culture and how to have the conversations about them, and ways to productively address hurtful bias in the elementary grades. Building Equity in Policies and Practices to Empower All Learners was read by staff at the middle school and discussed throughout the year. Creating inclusive, accepting environments has been a focus districtwide. Included in the Blueprint for Excellence is work around the social/emotional learning with the EXCEL model. The 2<sup>nd</sup> STEP program is being implemented at PGS and RBS and will roll up to TBS next year. TBS has a CARES program for students who demonstrate caring, acceptance, respect, empathy and safety. Dr. Rusack spoke of the various activities the schools held to share different cultures. Welcoming walkthroughs were also held at the schools to assess how welcoming the schools are and how to improve. Students also participated in Tutoring

in the City and heard from various speakers. Open Choice also held various events for students, families and staff.

The Superintendent stated tonight offered the opportunity for conversation and focus on how the District is living out its policies and Strategic Plan. Dr. Carnemolla took a moment to acknowledge her appreciation of the Board of Education for diversifying and hiring her as the first woman superintendent in Avon. And though the District has administrators and staff of various classifications, the Superintendent emphasized that the work is not yet done and still needs to integrate our staff as much as possible because there is value in our students being able to learn from and interact with all kinds of individuals and whom they may identify with. Dr. Carnemolla also shared the work she is doing with the Connecticut Center for School Change and as a member of the Superintendent's Network in Connecticut which is based on a person's commitment to working in the best interest of students in teaching, learning and equity. Dr. Carnemolla shared her commitment to this work due to her belief that all the work must not only come from the bottom up but the top down to meet the needs of everyone they serve.

#### V. Communication from Public

Olivia Piper, AHS alumni, 129 Stagecoach Rd Avon, CT wrote as a prior graduate of the school system and a current Avon resident and an educator, I want to know what the school system is doing specifically to make sure that all of its students, but particularly its students of color have equitable and easy access to mental health services within their school? Are you taking steps to hire more mental healthcare professionals like social workers and school counselors to meet this need? Also, I would like to know what specific anti-racism content is being implemented into the curriculum for students and into professional development for staff? I suggest you look into the organization 'Teaching Tolerance' in order to institute anti-racism programming and lesson plans into the curriculum - they have lesson plans available for teachers to teach directly to students and they offer professional development courses for educators and staff.

Dr. Carnemolla explained that in normal times the District has been proactive in informing the various support staff and their roles in each building so students know who to access. Support information is also available online on the District resources website. While there are students of color who live in Avon and students of color who come from Hartford, the Superintendent stressed that what is done in Avon is done for all students. Additional pieces of outreach are also done for the Open Choice students to ensure there is more of a connection to the families and community.

Nancy D'Incecco, 101 Pine Hill Road Avon CT 06001 commented that true change and equity in systemic racism will not come about until we have a more diverse teaching/administrative/BOE staff. Ms. D'Incecco suggested working with RE CENTER, an organization that she believes will bring about change and provide training to the staff and administrators. Ms. D'Incecco was also expressed concern of possible hostile environments students may encounter when accused of wrongdoing in front of peers or by being tormented to the point of wanting to kill themselves. Ms. D'Incecco asked for more access to support or mental health such as NAMI to support all people. Specifically, they have a program that is geared towards teaching elementary school aged children. Diversity and mental health go hand in hand.

Ellen Mcneill, AHS alumni, 2013 graduate, 30 Charing Cross Avon CT emailed that these are not new policies, how will you be implementing them from paper to real life to ensure that black & POC communities are supported and protected? Great that we are diversifying gender in the school system, but B H began talking about herself, her journey and relating herself to the Black struggle. We are all learning and growing and holding each other accountable so I want to point out that being an ally means removing yourself from the narrative not shifting it to yourself to talk about your own path. It is tough and uncomfortable to hear, but systemic racism is a vast and serious issue in Avon in so many ways that deserves full and long-term attention!

Committee Chair Laura Young acknowledged the comments received and stated that due to the time comments would not be read but added to the minutes. Dr. Carnemolla also added that if there were questions or comments that needed to be addressed further to please feel free to contact her.

- VI. Future Items for Review
  - a. Staff/Student Relationships
  - b. School Volunteers & Parent Involvement

- VII. Adjournment

*David Cavanaugh moved, Jason Indomenico seconded, to adjourn the meeting.  
The meeting adjourned by unanimous consent at 6:58 pm.*

Minutes prepared by Shirley Moy, Recording Secretary

Minutes respectfully submitted by Laura Young, Policy Committee Chair  
*Laura Young, June 13, 2020*

Minutes respectfully received by Jeffrey S. Fleischman, Board Secretary  
*Jeffrey S. Fleischman, June 13, 2020*

*Minutes are approved at the next Policy meeting, and any corrections to the minutes, if needed, will be made at that time.*