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BARRE UNIFIED UNION SCHOOL DISTRICT POLICY COMMITTEE MEETING

Spaulding High School Library and Via Video Conference – Google Meet
March 20, 2023 – 6:00 p.m.

MINUTES

COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:

Chris Parker, Chair (BT)
Emily Reynolds, Vice Chair (BT)
Michael Boutin (BC)
Thomas Kelly (BC Community Member)
Jon Valsangiacomo – (BT Community Member)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS ABSENT:

OTHER BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT:

Giuliano Cecchinelli
Nancy Leclerc
Terry Reil

ADMINISTRATORS AND STAFF PRESENT:

Chris Hennessey, Superintendent
Luke Aither, SHS Co-Principal
Pierre Laflamme, BCEMS Principal
Ted Mills, BTMES Assistant Principal

GUESTS:

Andy McMichael

1. Call To Order

The Superintendent, Mr. Hennessey, called the Monday, March 20, 2023 BUUSD Policy Committee meeting to order at 6:00 p.m., which was held at the Spaulding High School Library and via video conference.

2. Organize

2.1 Elect Chair

Mr. Hennessey requested nominations for the position of Policy Committee Chair

Mr. Boutin nominated Ms. Parker for the position of Policy Committee Chair. Ms. Reynolds seconded the motion.

There were no additional nominations.

On a motion by Mr. Boutin, seconded by Ms. Reynolds, the Committee unanimously voted to elect Ms. Parker as Chair of the BUUSD Policy Committee.

Ms. Parker facilitated the remainder of the meeting.

2.2 Elect Vice Chair

Ms. Parker nominated Ms. Reynolds for the position of Policy Committee Vice Chair. Mr. Boutin seconded the motion.

There were no additional nominations.

Mr. Boutin moved to close nominations. The motion was not seconded.

On a motion by Ms. Parker, seconded by Mr. Boutin, the Committee unanimously voted to elect Ms. Reynolds as Vice Chair of the BUUSD Policy Committee.

3. Additions and/or Deletions to the Agenda

None.

4. Public Comment

None.

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5. Approval of Minutes

5.1 Approval of Minutes – February 20, 2023 BUUSD Policy Committee Meeting

On a motion by Mr. Boutin, seconded by Mr. Kelly, the Committee unanimously voted to approve the Minutes of the February 20, 2023 BUUSD Policy Committee meeting.

6. New Business

6.1 Review of BUUSD Policy Manual Index

A copy of the BUUSD Policy Manual Index (dated 03/20/23) was distributed.

Ms. Parker provided an overview of the document and how it is utilized. Mr. Aither queried regarding updates he has made that are not reflected in the copy distributed with the packet. Mr. Hennessey will research this matter. Mr. Aither advised that he believes most procedures are in place for SHS. Mr. Boutin queried regarding policy changes made by VSBA and whether or not the District is obligated to make the same changes. Ms. Parker advised that VSBA legally vets all changes it makes to policies and that when the District makes its own substantive changes, the District needs to have those changes legally vetted. Mr. Hennessey advised regarding the previous Board's directive to utilize VSBA policies as much as possible, but does make some changes, or creates local policies when necessary. There have been times when it was discovered that a policy amended or written at the local level did not agree with statute. It was noted that the BUUSD policies are considered to be in very good shape. Mr. Aither advised regarding legally required policies that must be adopted as written by VSBA, legally required policies, 'Recommended' policies, and policies 'To Be Considered'.

6.2 VSBA Policy Notes

A document titled 'VSBA Policy Notes – BUUSD Policy Committee' was distributed.

Ms. Parker advised that the notes included in this evening's packet pertain mainly to policy B20 (Agenda item 7.1)

7. Old Business

7.1 Personnel Recruitment, Selection, Appointment, and Background Check Policy (B20) – Recommended

A copy of the policy was distributed.

Ms. Parker advised regarding some of the continuing discussion surrounding this policy. Mr. Valsangiacomo advised regarding the three registries; the criminal Sex Offender Registry, and the two confidential registries; the Vulnerable, Neglect, and Exploitation Registry, and the DCF Child Protection Registry. The two confidential registries are not the result of a criminal conviction, and individuals can petition to be removed from these registries. Statute requires that individuals on the Sex Offender Registry be barred from employment by the District. Ms. Parker advised that her interpretation of the legal opinion is that the policy should be written in accordance with statute, and that the two confidential registries be left out, giving latitude regarding whether or not an individual on one of those registries would be hired. It was reiterated that the two additional registries are not the result of a criminal conviction. After lengthy discussion, the Committee was divided regarding whether or not to ban from employment, all individuals from any of the three registries, or to ban only those on the Sex Offender Registry, but allow latitude for hiring of individuals on the other two registries.

Brief discussion was held regarding removal of the words 'and contractors' from the policy. Mr. Aither believes the words were redundant, and therefore removed. It was clarified that the Committee makes recommendations to the Board (regarding policy adoption), but only the Board has authority to adopt policies.

The 'Optional' section (relating to training in the onboarding process) has also been a matter of disagreement within the Committee.

Mr. Boutin made a motion to push the policy forward, removing the words 'bias, and anti-racism' from the 'optional' section.

The motion was not seconded. Brief discussion was held regarding the process/procedure for making policy draft changes during Committee meetings. Mrs. Poulin advised that the protocol has been for the Committee to, by majority/consensus, agree to make changes to draft policies, but have never made motions for the numerous changes being proposed to policy drafts. As many changes are often made to drafts, it hasn't been practical to make motions for every amendment. The protocol has been to agree on how to word the drafts, then have motions to present First Readings to the Board. Mr. Boutin and Mr. Kelly feel strongly that the words 'bias and anti-racism' be removed from the policy. Mr. Aither advised that the current bias and anti-racism training modules are very short (approximately 15 minutes). Mr. Aither offered to share the training video with the Committee. It was noted that non-discrimination training is required by statute, bias and anti-racism training is not. The Committee agreed that they cannot reach consensus on this matter.

Additional discussion was held regarding registries; Ms. Parker polled Committee Members regarding whether or not to ban from employment, all individuals from any of the three registries (or to ban only those on the Sex Offender Registry, allowing the Superintendent latitude for hiring of individuals on the other two registries). The majority of the Committee supports banning only those on the Sex Offender Registry. Mr. Kelly feels strongly that any individual who is on any of the 3 registries, should be banned from employment.

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Additional discussion was held regarding the ‘optional’ section and whether or not to include the verbiage ‘bias, and anti-racism’ in the ‘optional’ section. The majority of the Committee supports leaving ‘bias and anti-racism’ in the draft policy. Mr. Boutin prefers to remove the words ‘bias and anti-racism’. Mr. Kelly would prefer to eliminate, in its entirety, the ‘optional’ section of the policy.

Mr. Boutin advised regarding his concern over the Recruitment Section (#1), that refers to recruitment of educators within historically excluded groups, and the section under the Selection Section (#1), that mandates that the cost of background checks be borne by prospective employees. Mr. Boutin believes the cost of background checks could be prohibitive for individuals within historically excluded groups. Brief discussion was held, including; past practice, under COVID (the District opted to waive the fee for some categories of employees, the budgetary impact of waiving fees. Mr. Aither believes the sections labeled Recruitment, Selection, and Appointment are more procedural and should be removed from the policy and put into a procedure document. Brief discussion was held regarding policy and procedures, and that procedures should be separate from policy. Mrs. Poulin advised that VSBA has clearly stated that they keep policy and procedure separate and that whatever is included in the model policy is considered by them to be policy, not procedure. VSBA codifies procedures differently. Mr. Aither noted that legal counsel indicated that the Recruitment section seemed more like procedure than policy. The options are to move forward include; removing the Recruitment, Selection, and Appointment sections (and putting them into a Procedure document), or keeping them in the policy. Ms. Parker suggested that the policy come back to Committee with removal of the three named sections, and policy amendments as previously discussed. It was noted that the Board does not approve procedures. Ms. Parker suggested that both the policy and procedure be presented to the Board when the policy is submitted for a First Reading. Mrs. Leclerc noted that in the past, legal counsel recommended that all procedures be reviewed by the Board to assure that they match the policy and meet legal requirements. In response to a query, it was noted that a column labeled procedures has been added to the Policy Index to assist with tracking which procedures are completed. Mr. Aither believes the Board should be aware of procedures, but not approve them. Mrs. Leclerc reiterated that legal counsel stated it was just as important to review procedures, as it is to review policies. The Committee agreed to remove the Recruitment, Selection, and Appointment sections and have those sections put into a procedure.

On a motion by Mr. Valsangiacomo, seconded by Ms. Reynolds, the Committee voted 3 to 2 to recommend that Policy B20, as amended, be presented to the Board for a First Reading. Ms. Parker, Ms. Reynolds, and Mr. Valsangiacomo voted for the motion. Mr. Boltin and Mr. Kelly voted against the motion.

8. Other Business

None.

9. Future Agenda Items

It was noted that the District is currently waiting for VSBA to make amendments to many policies (listed in the Parking Lot). VSBA is busy with legislative matters and most likely won't have updates until June.

It was noted that for agenda preparation (selection of policies to discuss), it is important to identify policies where the BUUSD approval date is earlier than the last VSBA review date.

- D40 – Teaching and Instructional Materials for Sensitive Issues (possible new local policy, taking verbiage from D32) (Parking Lot Item A)

10. Next Meeting Date

The next meeting is Wednesday, April 19, 2023 at 6:00 p.m. at the Spaulding High School Library and via video conference.

11. Adjournment

On a motion by Mr. Boutin, seconded by Mr. Kelly, the Committee unanimously agreed to adjourn at 7:14 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Andrea Poulin