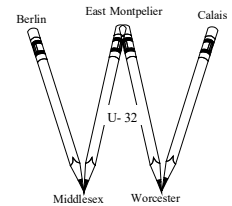


Washington Central Unified Union School District

WCUUSD exists to nurture and inspire in all students the passion, creativity and power to contribute to their local and global communities.

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Meagan Roy, Ed.D.
Superintendent



WCUUSD Policy Committee Minutes

2.22.24

4:45-6:45 PM

Via Video Conference

Present: Chris McVeigh, Amelia Contrada, Amy Molina, Natasha Eckart, Superintendent Roy, Gillian Fuqua, Jen Miller-Arsenault

1. **Call to Order:** Chris McVeigh called the meeting to order at 4:50 p.m.
2. **Approve Minutes of 1.10.24:** Amelia Contrada moved to approve the minutes of January 10, 2024. This motion carried unanimously.
3. **Policy for Discussion**
 - 3.1. **School Choice:** Superintendent Roy had included in the packet a merged policy based on discussions in the past meetings, leaning on model policies from districts that are more similar to ours. The other version of the policy (Chris McVeigh had drafted) indicates that we do not do school choice but there is a mechanism for the school board to consider exceptions, based on guidance within the policy. Chris McVeigh stated that he does not think a school choice option could be offered equitably if transportation were required; we would be “overpromising.” Chris McVeigh stated that without transportation, some families would be able to take advantage; others would not. Natasha Eckart reiterated her opinion that offering school choice would not be equitable; she noted that an email the board received today cemented that belief for her. She stated that there is a great deal of information out there, about why school choice is not what is best for students. Superintendent Roy stated that we want to send the message that every single school in our district is great. With school choice, we are almost sending a message that some schools are better/ more desirable than others. Gillian Fuqua wondered if there could be a mechanism, e.g., to accommodate for geographic location. Could we provide some clarity within the policy around these types of exceptions? Could we incorporate language in the policy so that the family does not have to re-apply every year, barring any changes? Write a letter to the school board and they decide on a case-by-case basis. Superintendent Roy stated that over the past couple years we have made the procedures more specific (e.g. created a form); the mechanism could still be the same - you make a request to the board - but the board has more

specific procedures. She stated that she feels requiring families to make the request every year is safer. Chris McVeigh asked whether we should consider specifics around geographic considerations. Superintendent Roy suggested that the board would want to give itself flexibility. Gillian Fuqua stated that Doty School is in some cases closer than the nearest Calais bus stops. She does not think it is necessary to name specifics because the circumstances are unique. Natasha Eckart spoke about the possibility that families move to one town intending to send their children to a neighboring town school. Chris McVeigh stated that we need some guidelines in place so that it is a fair system. Superintendent Roy suggested that an updated procedure could help; this is public information but it is not displayed as prominently as a policy would be. Chris McVeigh asked whether the bullets that we have created could be manipulated. Some discussion around “extenuating circumstances” being gray as opposed to black and white. Amelia Contrada would like information about cost implications. Superintendent Roy spoke about ADM, Ed funding, and costs. She spoke about special education costs; we are never allowed to make decisions related to school choice in this context, based on special education status. Vermont law does not allow Special Ed funding to follow the student. Superintendent Roy explained that we have a voluntary 1:1 exchange agreement with Montpelier (this is an MOU that we work out every year.) Amelia Contrada wondered if it would be possible to consider a 1:1 exchange between the schools and think creatively about addressing the equity barrier (e.g. carpooling etc). Superintendent Roy stated that the board has a mechanism now to consider expectations without a policy in place. In addition, we could consider tightening the procedure for more clarity. Chris McVeigh asked whether there has been consistency or inconsistency. Superintendent Roy stated that she sees consistent generosity - there is an ethos that “if someone wants it, we generally say “yes.” Chris McVeigh wondered if we have more clear guideposts, would we have more consistent responses to requests? Amelia Contrada suggested that she likes the idea of having more specific procedures, and she suggested that, for example, if a student has a mental health counselor, then they could provide input and affect the decision of the board. Superintendent Roy stated that she does not think “risk of transition” should be a factor as a whole - for example, she spoke about neurodiversity in students and the work that schools do to meet and collaborate around transition planning to set students up for success. Amelia Contrada spoke about instances of development, trauma, peer issues, etc. as considerations. Natasha Eckart reiterated that she does not feel that we should have a school choice policy. Chris McVeigh suggested that we bring this information and discussion bullet points to the WCUUSD board and get the sense of the board. Superintendent Roy stated that we could put this on the agenda as a discussion item but not provide a draft policy yet. She will include the current procedures in a memo to the board to facilitate the discussion. Natasha Eckart stated that we have been existing without a policy, we have a procedure, we have discussed how to tighten the procedure; she does not think that we should bring this to the board as a whole. Chris McVeigh stated that he believes we should bring this to the board as per our charge; explain what the recommendation is from the committee. Superintendent Roy stated that the following two policies (Education Philosophy Teaching and Learning about Controversial Issues) were recommended by the Great Schools

Partnership. The VSBA does not have a model policy for these; the first draft policies that are provided are models from the Great Schools Partnership. Chris McVeigh asked whether any things in these policies would affect the way we currently do business. Superintendent Roy stated that from a birds eye view, the Education Philosophy model policy is consistent with how we do business. She suggested that some of the specific language in the policy might be edited to align with the language that we currently have in our mission statement, core values, equity statement, humanity and justice, etc. Jen Miller-Arsenault noted some worry about specific citations within the Teaching and Learning About Controversial Issues. Chris McVeigh agreed that we do not need that specific language within the policy. Natasha Eckart stated that within the Education Philosophy, there are many details around academics but not as much about the other two pillars. She stated that as many/ the more times that we can put language regarding equity, humanity, and justice into our documents, the better. She would like to see some language in the policy around what teachers are permitted to do, in addition to the language regarding what students are permitted to do. She suggested adding some EQS language to the policy. She wondered whether we want to use the term "controversial" in the policy or some other term that is not "activating." Amy Molina suggested that department heads and teacher leaders at U-32 look at the "Controversial Issues" policy. She asked about the "Educational Philosophy" policy - where are we in the development of our vision and mission statement/ strategic planning? Should we hold off on this policy until this work? Suggestion for HJC to look at it. Amelia wondered about adding quantifiable language related to EQS that references empirical data and science so that when there is controversy, we have it built into the policy. Gillian Fuqua suggested that Superintendent Roy's idea of combining the two policies makes sense. She wondered about the verbiage "controversial," "difficult," etc. - she stated that this reflects that we have to change the way we change history so that it aligns with current understanding. Informed understanding of the reality of current events. Chris McVeigh stated the difficulty with current understanding versus what has been stated/ believed. This is where the debate will come in. Amelia suggested the word that comes to mind re: "controversial" is "progressive." Terms that are more euphemistic and name it in a more positive light. Some committee members expressed that it makes sense to combine the two policies together. Natasha Eckart stated that she would prefer to keep the policies separate. She likes the idea of having a stand-alone Education Philosophy policy that is more of an umbrella to others, not combined with the "Controversial Issues" policy. Jen Miller-Arsenault suggested terms: "multi-faceted," "complex." Student curriculum group and Families of Color Affinity Group - both of these groups might be able to provide some input into policy language. Chris McVeigh suggested creating a version of the policy combined, and two separate policies, for consideration. Superintendent Roy stated that most of our policies start with a purpose statement: "this we believe" and "here is the mechanics" - she stated that many of the things in the "Controversial Issues" policy are belief statements. She stated that the most important thing is that the content is in the policy (or two separate policies.) Chris McVeigh suggested that the

committee could consider the edited formats at the next meeting; he suggested we need another round of consideration before taking it to other stakeholders. Jen Miller-Arsenault suggested that as an administrator, she would want to be cross-checking the Equity Policy regularly, as they work hand-in-hand. Superintendent Roy stated that clarity and ease of use are important in a policy. Amelia Contrada wondered about the term “multi-faceted” and the language in the policy around that - she appreciates that language. She wondered about speaking directly about the idea of dialectics - having multiple views, having a dialogue with the intention of finding a middle ground. Dialectical thinking - the ability to view issues from multiple perspectives and to arrive at a reasonable middle ground. Dichotomy - “either/ or” versus considering the complexity/ nuances. Chris McVeigh asked whether Amelia Contrada would propose some language for the policy around these ideas. She suggested it as an “add-in” to the section around critical thinking. Gillian Fuqua stated that she agrees that we do not need the information about teaching - that is good practice, and it is more of a supervision/ evaluation issue and something that we would want to see with any content. She suggested that we want to teach students how to hold opposing views and discuss them respectfully whether it is a discussion about math strategies or whether it is a more multi-faceted/ complex conversation. Natasha Eckart asked, do we necessarily have to put into words that there should be some middle ground? There might never be a middle ground. People should be able to look at things from different perspectives but they might not arrive at a middle ground. Superintendent Roy will attempt two versions: one that combines the two and one that keeps them separate and reflects the discussion from tonight. Natasha Eckart asked do we want to wait until after the next Policy Meeting to bring in other stakeholders, or do we want to invite them to the next Policy Meeting. Natasha and Jen will talk about it when creating the agenda for the next HJC meeting (which is March 12). Chris McVeigh stated that it is helpful to get input as early in the policy as possible. Superintendent Roy will work on drafts for the HJC meeting on March 12, for them to consider before the Policy Committee meets on March 20.

4. Education Philosophy

5. Teaching and Learning About Controversial Issues

6. Policies for Review

6.1. **D4 Title I Comparability:** Jen Miller-Arsenault stated that we comply with the policy; we have procedures that have been reviewed as recent as November 2023. We are required annually to submit our Comparability report, and we do; this has been completed this year by November 15, 2023. Chris McVeigh suggested some edits to the policy, changing language related to schools and districts, as we have changed our verbiage after Act 46 consolidation. Jen Miller-Arsenault stated that there would be no change operationally if the language were to change. The committee agreed to leave the language as is and bring it to the next board meeting for adoption.

7. Future Agenda Items

7.1. Next Meeting: March 20, 2024 (the board will have reorganized at that time!)

8. Adjourn: Natasha Eckart moved to adjourn at 6:27 p.m. Seconded by Amelia Contrada, this motion carried unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,

Lisa Grace, Committee Recording Secretary