

ROCHESTER BOARD OF EDUCATION
Policy Committee Meeting
June 14, 2012

Attending: Commissioner Cruz (Chair); Commissioner Powell. Commissioner Campos absent. Parent Representative: Victoria Robertson absent. District staff: Charles Johnson, General Counsel; Maria Mello-Dupre, Director of Transportation; Vicky Ramos, Director of Student Placement; Jerome Underwood, Senior Director of Operations. Board staff: Debra Flanagan.

Commissioner Cruz convened the meeting at 5:37PM.

I. Review and Approve Minutes of May 17, 2012 Policy Committee Meeting

Motion by Commissioner Powell to approve the minutes of the May 17th Policy Committee meeting. **Adopted 2-0.**

II. Proposed Hiring and Recruiting Policy

Chuck Johnson recalled that the Diversity Committee presented recommendations to enhance the diversity of the RCSD workforce and the Policy Committee has discussed providing incentives for employees to reside in the District. He stated that a number of versions of this policy proposal have been introduced to the Policy Committee in previous meetings, but the current version has been reviewed and approved by the Superintendent and the Chief of HCI.

Mr. Johnson discussed the highlights of the current policy proposal:

- Hiring preference given to graduates of urban public high schools, and to candidates with at least two years of experience in an urban school district or urban non-profit youth agency. “Urban” is defined as a city with a population of at least 110K, which would include all of the major cities in New York.
- Housing incentives would be offered to a specified number of employees each year to purchase a home for the first time in the City. The District would participate in the City’s Employer-Sponsored Housing Initiative, which offers up to \$3,000 to first-time homebuyers in the City to use toward a down payment or closing costs.

Commissioner Powell inquired whether the policy can include housing incentives for employees purchasing a home for the first time in the City. She expressed concern about excluding employees who may have purchased a home outside the City, and are now considering moving into the District.

Commissioner Cruz asked whether a provision could be added to the proposed policy to allow consideration in special circumstances or on a case by case basis.

Commissioner Powell emphasized that the benefit should be extended to any employee who is not currently a City resident, as long as the property will be used for their primary residence and

not to be leased to generate additional income. Mr. Johnson replied that the City's program places a lien on the property for five years to ensure that the employee resides in the home for at least that period of time. In addition, he noted that the program requires employees to contribute \$1,500 of their own income toward the down payment or closing costs.

Commissioner Cruz questioned whether an overall limit should be placed on this employee benefit to manage costs. Mr. Johnson stated that the Superintendent would allocate funds each year for this program in the budget, based on the District's fiscal condition.

Motion by Commissioner Powell to approve proposed Hiring and Recruiting Policy (9240) to advance to the full Board as an Information Item. **Adopted 2-0.**

III. Discuss Transportation Options

Jerome Underwood recounted the current status of exploring transportation options, noting that crime data has been examined and legal research conducted regarding establishing child safety zones. He reported that the State's response to questions regarding providing Transportation Aid in high-crime areas was not favorable. Mr. Underwood stated that a major concern has been large annual expenditures (\$27M) for transportation in the District, significantly affected by many buses crossing zone boundaries.

Vicky Ramos described efforts undertaken by the Office of Student Placement to try to keep students in schools within their zone, particularly through discussing these issues with parents when applications are submitted for voluntary transfers. She stated that staff in the Placement Office have also discussed these issues when parents apply for kindergarten for their child and an older sibling is attending school in a different zone. Ms. Ramos described some resistance from parents in moving their older sibling to the zone in which the family now resides. She expressed concern about communicating clearly and carefully with parents prior to making any changes to the existing transportation structure.

Ms. Ramos also expressed concern about whether schools have the capacity to absorb all of the students in their zone, if the zone boundaries were to be reinforced. She requested support from the Board in clearly communicating policies to enable staff in the Placement Office to be more proactive in enforcing zone boundaries.

Commissioner Powell pointed out that cross-zone activity goes both ways and capacity issues would be rectified by addressing these issues throughout all of the zones. She noted that schools must also be closed at the same time to realize operational efficiencies, and the distribution of staff will also be affected by reinforcing zone boundaries and closing schools. Ms. Ramos replied that staffing allocations have improved recently because of better projections of student enrollment at the school level.

Commissioner Powell requested information from Ms. Ramos as to potential changes needed in Board policy or Superintendent regulations to support the Office of Student Placement. Ms. Ramos replied that the policy and regulations are clear and do not need to be changed, but improvements in communicating the policy to parents are needed. She discussed the current

problems with cross-zone busing and students placed in schools outside of the zone in which they reside as arising over time with actual practice not adhering to the policy. Ms. Ramos stated that the impact on students and parents may be mitigated to some extent by grandfathering in some groups of students, which would require modifications to existing policy.

Action Item: Debra Flanagan will collaborate with Vicky Ramos and her team in the Office of Student Placement to examine the impact of phasing in zone boundaries over time and any revisions needed to Board policy to accommodate this process.

Mr. Underwood concurred that these issues have developed over time, and requiring students to attend school in their zone would be too much of a shock to the entire system at this point. He suggested exploring opportunities for transfers and phasing in the reinforced zone boundaries over the next several years. Mr. Underwood stated that he will examine the number of buses crossing zone boundaries in September 2012 as a baseline and monitor this over time to determine the impact of changes on the system.

Commissioner Cruz expressed optimism that the system will correct itself over the next few years if the District communicates clearly with parents and offers guidance regarding staying within the zone.

Commissioner Powell commented that there will be too few students being transported across zones to justify at some point. She stated that the District then has to be prepared to enforce the zone boundaries and inform parents of the cost, noting that this is removing funds from supporting classrooms and teachers.

Commissioner Cruz recalled that the purpose of realizing a cost savings initially was to be able to expand transportation services, especially to students having to walk through high-crime areas. Mr. Underwood responded that with a greater impact in reinforcing zone boundaries, consideration may be given to changing existing policy to provide transportation within 1 or $\frac{3}{4}$ miles of school.

Commissioner Powell suggested that the “experts” recommend stronger language in the regulation. She also pointed out that the initial expectation of the Board in determining the current zone boundaries and in developing the Parent Preference/Managed Choice policy (5153) was that a $\frac{3}{4}$ -mile radius would be used. She stated that this change was not made in the computer program with the change in policy, so the $\frac{3}{4}$ -mile radius was never actually used.

Commissioner Powell also emphasized the need to make any necessary changes in policy by September 2012 so that they can be reflected in the Placement books issued in November.

Commissioner Powell reported that the New York State School Boards Association (NYSSBA) reviews resolutions annually to place items on the legislative agenda. She suggested submitting a resolution regarding current Education law excluding large city school districts from being able to designate child safety zones, noting that the deadline for submission is August 1st.

Action Item: Debra Flanagan will prepare a resolution for submission to NYSSBA regarding large city school districts' exclusion from the law allowing additional transportation to be provided in child safety zones. This resolution will be due prior to the July 19th Policy Committee meeting.

IV. Review and Discuss Proposed Amendment to Responsible Bidder Policy (6725)

Mr. Johnson noted that the Diversity Committee also recommended an amendment to the Responsible Bidders' Policy (6725) to provide greater assurance that a contractor with the District has not been engaging in discriminatory practices. He stated that a provision was added to the policy to allow the District's Purchasing Officer to consider the demographic characteristics of a bidder's full-time workforce in determining whether they are considered responsible. He stated that another provision was added to require bidders to provide this information, and to conduct a hearing to disqualify a bidder from doing business with the District.

Motion by Commissioner Powell to approve proposed revision to Responsible Bidder policy (6725) and advance to the Board as an Information Item. **Adopted 2-0.**

V. Review Next Set of Priorities for Updating Policy Manual

Debra Flanagan reported that the next set of priorities is to establish Superintendent regulations to implement recently approved Special Education policies, and to evaluate the need for additional policies to enhance fiscal oversight (e.g. use of P-Cards, Meal and Travel Reimbursement, etc.).

Commissioner Cruz referred the evaluation of potential policies to improve fiscal oversight to the Finance Committee.

Ms. Flanagan stated that the next priority for updating the Policy Manual is the policies that contain a scheduled review date (e.g. "policy to be reviewed annually"). She noted that the Board needs to consider the importance of reviewing these policies on a regular basis, and to determine the extent to which regular review is a priority at this point.

Commissioner Powell suggested gathering information as to the extent to which scheduled policy reviews are due to mandates.

Action Item: Ms. Flanagan will gather information regarding mandates for review of specific policies.

Motion by Commissioner Powell to adjourn. **Adopted 2-0.**

Meeting adjourned at 5:27PM.