

ROCHESTER BOARD OF EDUCATION
Policy Committee Meeting
May 17, 2012

Attending: Commissioner Cruz (Chair); Commissioner Powell. Commissioner Campos absent.
Parent Representative: Victoria Robertson absent. District staff: Charles Johnson, General
Counsel. Board staff: Debra Flanagan.

Commissioner Cruz convened the meeting at 5:30PM.

I. Review and Approve Minutes of March 13, 2012 Policy Committee Meeting

Motion by Commissioner Powell to approve the minutes of the March 13th Policy Committee meeting. **Adopted 2-0.**

II. Discuss Policy Changes related to the *Dignity for All Students Act*

Chuck Johnson explained that former Governor David Patterson signed the *Dignity for All Students Act* in 2010 to discourage bullying in schools. He stated that the law requires some changes to the existing Code of Conduct (5300) and Policy Against Harassment of Students and Employees (1510). Mr. Johnson highlighted the required changes to these policies:

- Staff training in recognizing, preventing, and managing bullying/harassment
- Adding weight as a protected class, along with race, color, creed, national origin, religion, sex, gender identity and expression, sexual orientation or disability.
- Designating one staff member in each school building to monitor and address bullying/harassment, and to coordinate staff training
- Report incidents of harassment to SED by BEDS day
- Include cyber-bullying (i.e. through email, instant message, texting, blogs, chat rooms, etc.) in the list of prohibited behaviors in the Code of Conduct
- Students will be able to file a report of alleged harassment under the District Policy Against Harassment of Students and Employees (1510)

Commissioner Cruz inquired about the impact of the law on popular or cultural trends, giving an example of someone who found wearing sagging pants offensive. Mr. Johnson replied that bullying is contextual and based on perception because behavior that is acceptable to one person may be considered harassment/bullying by another. He noted that this is the reason that staff training will be important in raising awareness and sensitivity.

Commissioner Powell pointed out the difficulty for students to report instances of bullying when they already feel victimized. She asked why weight is not included in the first paragraph of the District Policy Against Harassment of Students and Employees, but only in section 1510.01 regarding harassment of students. Mr. Johnson explained that the introduction to policy 1510 reflects NYS Human Rights law, whereas section 1510.01 pertains more specifically to the *Dignity for All Students Act*.

Commissioner Cruz questioned whether the two policies could be combined, since both address the same types of issues. Mr. Johnson responded that the District Policy Against Harassment of Students and Employees is intended to address employee misconduct, whereas the Code of Conduct primarily pertains to the behavior of students in school buildings.

Commissioner Powell commented that the Code of Conduct is already lengthy.

Commissioner Cruz asked about the impact on the timeframe if the two policies were to be combined as a condition of approval. Mr. Johnson stated that the process for adopting the amendments to these policies has to be expedited because the Dignity for All Students Act goes into effect on July 1st. He offered to examine aspects of the two policies that could be combined in time for the annual review of the Code of Conduct in October.

Motion by Commissioner Powell to approve amendments to the Code of Conduct and to the District Policy Against Harassment of Students and Employees. **Adopted 2-0.**

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

Meeting adjourned at 5:53PM.

Next Policy Committee Meeting: June 14th at 5:30PM