

**Board of Education
Policy Committee Meeting
October 21, 2010
5:30PM**

MINUTES

Attendance: Commissioner Cruz (Chair); Commissioner Campos. Commissioner Powell absent due to attending New York State School Boards Association meeting in New York City. Parent Representative: Vicki Robertson. District Staff: Chuck Johnson, Gladys Pedraza Burgos, and Dorothy Evans-Flaherty. Board Staff: Debra Flanagan

Commissioner Cruz convened the meeting at 5:32 p.m.

I. Review and Approval of Minutes from September 16, 2010 Policy Committee Meeting

Motion by Commissioner Campos to approve the minutes of the September 16, 2010 Policy Committee Meeting. **Adopted 2-0, with concurrence of parent representative.**

II. Report regarding update of Parent Involvement policy (1900)

Gladys Pedraza Burgos provided an overview of the proposed revision to the Parent Involvement policy (1900), stating that this is based on new language regarding parent engagement at the national level, such as Congressional bills related to school reform and through the National PTA. She also noted that the existing policy is lacking accountability, which will be addressed through annual evaluation and reporting of parent engagement efforts.

Dorothy Evans-Flaherty pointed out that the revised policy incorporates national standards for parent involvement, and assessments will be aligned with these standards to evaluate the efficacy of parent engagement efforts on an annual basis. She reported that evaluations will be conducted at the district and school level.

Chuck Johnson noted that the proposed policy eliminates specific areas of collaboration between parents and the District that are legally problematic, such as collective bargaining negotiations and employee discipline. He stated that the district-wide Parent Advisory Council would be responsible for reporting directly to the Board regarding issues related to parent engagement.

Ms. Pedraza Burgos described a number of plans to obtain input from parents regarding the proposed policy and in forming corresponding regulations. Specifically, meetings will be held with the district-wide Parent Advisory Council, Bilingual Council, School-Based Planning Teams, Flower City Parent Network, local ministers, and school PTA/PTOs. In addition, the proposed policy will be posted on the RCSD website and a robocall sent to all households in the District to notify parents of the posting on the website.

Ms. Evans-Flaherty asked the Parent Representative to the Policy Committee, Vicki Robertson, if she would be willing to sponsor a meeting with parents at School No. 12. Ms. Robertson immediately agreed.

Ms. Pedraza Burgos also discussed the importance of regulations to implement the Parent Involvement policy (1900), as the lack of regulations has created a great deal of confusion and discord regarding parent organizations and representation.

Commissioner Cruz recommended that the Board of Education conduct a town forum with community groups and organizations to obtain additional input regarding parent involvement in the District.

Action Item: Board staff will work to schedule and coordinate a town forum to obtain input regarding parent involvement in the District.

Commissioner Campos inquired as to when the district-wide Parent Advisory Council will have an opportunity to view the proposed revision to the Parent Involvement policy. Ms. Evans-Flaherty replied that it will be presented in the November 8th meeting of the Parent Advisory Council.

Ms. Evans-Flaherty described research conducted into effective parent engagement programs in other school districts, notably Boston and Charlotte-Mecklenberg, NC. Commissioner Cruz advised further examination into districts with a high percentage of ELL students, which has a major impact on the way in which parent involvement is approached. Commissioner Campos suggested looking into approaches used in the Austin, TX district.

Parent representative Vicki Robertson requested that an executive summary be provided to parents to highlight the changes being proposed in the policy, as well as the rationale for making the changes. She emphasized the importance of making this information comprehensible to the lay person.

Commissioner Campos noted that she is planning to attend the December 13th meeting of the Parent Advisory Council, and this would be an opportunity to discuss the proposed policy.

Action Item: Commissioner Campos will present and discuss the proposed Parent Involvement policy (1900) and District parent engagement efforts in the December 13th meeting of the district-wide Parent Advisory Council.

Speakers from the Community Education Task Force:

One of the members of the Community Education Task Force expressed concern that parents have been left out of the Parent Involvement policy. She explained that the District removed some members of the Parent Advisory Council without notice and the Council is now comprised of individuals appointed by District staff. She emphasized that parents cannot have a voice if there is no opportunity to vote for their representatives.

Commissioner Cruz replied that the Policy Committee is just beginning to review the Parent Involvement policy and many meetings are planned at which she can provide input. He stated

that the goal is to bring parent engagement to a new level in the District because this is critical in enabling the District to excel.

III. Review of Code of Conduct

Mr. Johnson noted that New York State law requires school districts to review their Code of Conduct annually, but the Board does not have to re-approve the Code unless changes have been proposed. He stated that significant changes are anticipated in the future to incorporate the requirements of the recently enacted “Dignity for All Students Act”, and recommended that any additional suggestions for revision be addressed at that time.

Commissioner Cruz stated that while the Code of Conduct seems to be quite comprehensive, it does not indicate the process by which a violation by an employee is to be handled. Mr. Johnson responded that the Code is primarily focused on students rather than staff.

Commissioner Cruz expressed concern that the Code establishes an elaborate process for notification and warnings, suspension and student discipline, but is silent regarding discipline of employees. He contended that the Code should be applicable equally to students and staff. Mr. Johnson stated that he could propose provisions to address Code violations by staff.

Action Item: Mr. Johnson will present a proposed revision to the Code of Conduct which addresses staff violations; the proposed revision will be presented in the November 9th Policy Committee meeting.

IV. Report regarding development of a new Professional Services Contracting policy

Noting that District practices for contracting for professional services were cited in the NYS Comptroller’s Audit Report, Mr. Johnson stated that work is underway to develop a policy regarding these types of contracts. He emphasized the importance of creating a balance between competitive bidding to facilitate contracting with a wider range of vendors, and flexibility in contracting for professional services when there is an urgent need and/or a specific area of expertise is required. Mr. Johnson reported that the District generally engages in over 300 professional services contracts per year. Requiring competitive bidding for all of these contracts would be prohibitive in terms of responding to District needs in a timely fashion and the staff time required to issue Requests for Proposals and evaluate responses to decide on the contract award.

To achieve a balance between competitive bidding and flexibility to meet District needs, Mr. Johnson stated that the proposed policy would stipulate that all professional services contracts will be competitively bid with certain exceptions: 1) if the contract is less than \$25K; 2) exceptions may be authorized by designated staff for contracts exceeding \$25K; and 3) additional review of exceptions by the Finance Committee for contracts over \$100K. The Board of Education will still approve all contracts in excess of \$25K, including those for professional services.

Commissioner Campos noted that the NYS Comptroller's Audit Report also cited professional services contracts for lacking clarity and specificity regarding the deliverables to be provided to the District. She asked whether the proposed policy would address these issues.

Mr. Johnson replied that the main focus of the proposed policy is on the vendor selection process.

V. Discussion of Board Approval of Small Contracts due to Aggregate Expenses exceeding \$25K threshold over the course of the fiscal year

In response to the request of the Policy Committee in the September 16, 2010 meeting, Mr. Johnson presented data regarding the number and dollar amount of contracts for which Board approval had to be obtained because the aggregate expenses over the year exceeded the \$25K threshold. He explained that approximately half of the small contracts (300) eventually were submitted to the Board for approval and approximately 19% (56) of these exceeded the threshold by less than \$25K.

Mr. Johnson encouraged the Committee to consider either eliminating the \$25K threshold for aggregate expenses over one year, or establishing an amount by which the threshold would have to be exceeded before requiring Board approval. He stated that the Superintendent does not want to change this regulation without input from the Board.

Commissioner Cruz requested that Mr. Johnson present 2-3 options for the Policy Committee to consider with information as to the number of contracts and dollars involved.

Action Item: Mr. Johnson will develop 2-3 options regarding the aggregate rule to present to the Policy Committee in the November 9, 2010 meeting.

VI. Report regarding possible policy related to Student & Family Support Centers

Ms. Pedraza Burgos noted that former Superintendent Rivera requested that a policy be developed to provide guidance and consistency in services offered through Student & Family Support Centers. A policy proposal was presented in December 2008 to the Policy Committee, but organizational changes and other issues have arisen since that time.

Marjorie Lefler stated that the District has acknowledged the importance of social, emotional, and psychological health in affecting students' ability to learn. She reported that many students enter the District with significant difficulties in these areas, which cannot be addressed by the school system alone. Ms. Lefler explained that Student & Family Support Centers were established in the 1990s to house community agencies to provide a range of services to meet these types of needs. Currently, Student & Family Support Centers are housed on 13 campuses and a new federal grant will enable the District to expand to another 3 schools. Ms. Lefler noted that the Association of Student Assistance Professionals recommends establishing a Board policy as best practice to provide guidelines regarding the relationship between the District and community organizations. She also stated that such a policy would be in accordance with the New York State Education Department's P-16 Plan to address barriers to learning.

Parent Representative Vicki Robertson asked about the types of services offered through the Student & Family Support Centers. Ms. Lefler replied that the Centers offer a spectrum of services from crisis intervention, assistance with basic needs (housing and food), counseling, preventive services (e.g. conflict resolution, diversity training, and leadership development), as well as targeted interventions to address specific issues (e.g. teen pregnancy, substance abuse, mental health).

Commissioner Cruz asked whether the intent in creating a Board policy is to formalize relationships with community organizations. Ms. Lefler confirmed this statement, asserting that guidance is needed regarding confidentiality and exchange of information, notification of parents, and decision-making authority. She stated that a Board policy would also establish standards to ensure consistency in services regardless of the school that the student attends.

VII. Legal Mandates for Financial Accounting & Reporting

Mr. Johnson explained that a concern has been raised regarding the District's compliance with legal mandates to provide monthly financial reports to the Board. He stated that the pertinent regulation relates to union-free school districts, which creates ambiguity in terms of the extent to which these requirements apply to RCSD.

From a financial perspective, year-end transactions and reconciliation are processed during July and August. Mr. Johnson stated that reports generated at this time would not provide an accurate reflection of the current status of the District's financial condition. He noted that a year-end report and these monthly reports are provided to the Board in September. He stated that that the District has not been cited for providing year-end, July, and August reports in September.

Commissioner Cruz stated that he did not see a need to change the policy.

Motion by Commissioner Campos to retain the current Financial Resolutions & Reporting policy (6630) as amended on September 23, 2010 (Resolution No. 2010-11: 280). **Adopted 2-0, with concurrence of parent representative.**

Motion by Commissioner Campos to adjourn. **Adopted 2-0, with concurrence of parent representative.**

Meeting adjourned at 6:26PM.

Next Policy Committee Meeting: November 9th at 5:30PM