

**Board of Education
Policy Committee Meeting
September 16, 2010
Immediately Following Finance Committee Meeting**

MINUTES

Attendance: Commissioner Cruz (Chair); Commissioner Powell. Commissioner Campos absent due to illness. Parent Representative: Vicki Robertson (arrived at 6:57PM). District Staff: Chuck Johnson. Bethany Centrone, Gladys Pedraza Burgos, Dorothy Evans-Flaherty. Board Staff: Debra Flanagan

Commissioner Cruz convened the meeting at 6:32 p.m.

I. Review and Approval of Minutes from August 19, 2010 Policy Committee Meeting

Motion by Commissioner Powell to approve the minutes of the August 19, 2010 Policy Committee Meeting. **Adopted 2-0.**

II. Update regarding Legally Mandated Policies related to Safety

Chuck Johnson introduced a new attorney with the Law Department, Bethany Centrone, who is working with Board policies. Bethany Centrone explained several legal requirements to be incorporated into Board policy:

- providing an option for students to transfer schools if their school has been designated as “persistently dangerous” or if the student has been the victim of a violent offense at their school;
- establishing a process for fingerprinting employees and contractors; and
- directing development of a plan to address natural disasters, national security and other types of emergencies.

She noted that the current policies (Safety Program – 8100 and Safe Schools – 8135) have not been updated since 1998, when the Policy Manual was first adopted.

For the sake of clarity, Ms. Centrone explained that the two primary safety concerns (environmental conditions and student safety) would be addressed in separate policies. She noted that the environmental safety concerns are proposed to be incorporated into the Safety Program (8100) policy, and student safety concerns are to be incorporated into the Safe Schools (8135) policy. In terms of the requirement to offer students the option to transfer schools due to safety issues, Ms. Centrone proposed including this provision in the existing Parent Preference – Managed Choice (5153) policy. She reported that a regulation is being developed to establish guidelines for student transfer under these circumstances; the regulation would include guidelines for parent notification and selection of a new school for the student.

Commissioner Powell expressed concern regarding attaching provisions for transfer of students due to safety concerns in the Parent Preference – Managed Choice (5153) policy. She explained that the Parent Preference – Managed Choice policy includes all students in the District, but the designation of “persistently dangerous” is only given to high schools. In practice, students are transferred back to their original school as soon as its “persistently dangerous” designation has been removed and students and parents have no input into this decision. Commissioner Powell objected to this practice, noting that it contradicts Board policy and places program integrity above the needs and concerns of students and parents. Ms. Centrone offered to incorporate the student transfer provisions in the Safe Schools (8135) policy.

Commissioner Powell cautioned against developing regulations which offer students the option to transfer out of their school, but then require that they return as soon as the “persistently dangerous” designation has been removed. Chuck Johnson noted that the District has the legal authority to allow a student to stay in the school to which they have transferred.

Motion by Commissioner Powell to approve proposed revision to Safety Program (8100) policy. **Adopted 2-0, with concurrence of parent representative.**

Motion by Commissioner Powell to approve proposed revision to Safe Schools (8135) policy with inclusion of provisions for student transfer when their school is designated “persistently dangerous” or the student has been the victim of a violent offense in school. **Adopted 2-0, with concurrence of parent representative.**

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

Mr. Johnson stated that the Superintendent is considering revising a regulation (Contract Authorization – 6745-R) which currently requires the Board to approve any contract for which expenses exceed \$25K during the fiscal year. He pointed out that as soon as the \$25K threshold has been exceeded by any amount, the Board has to review and approve the contract. Mr. Johnson reported that this has caused delays in the contract process. He stated that the Superintendent is considering creating a dollar threshold above \$25K that would have to be exceeded before requiring Board approval, or eliminating the regulation entirely. He noted that the Board is currently provided a quarterly report regarding all contracts below \$25K for their review. Mr. Johnson indicated that the Superintendent wanted to present these considerations to the Board to allow opportunity for input.

Commissioner Cruz inquired as to the number of small contracts currently submitted to the Board for approval under these circumstances. Mr. Johnson replied that he would have to obtain this information. Commissioner Cruz pointed out that this information is necessary in establishing a new threshold to ensure that the issue is addressed.

Action Item: Mr. Johnson will provide information to the Policy Committee regarding the number and percentage of contracts submitted for Board approval due to exceeding \$25K in expenses during the year by less than \$10K.

Commissioner Powell noted that the District was cited in the NYS Comptroller's Audit for professional services and consulting contracting practices. She expressed concern that relaxing this regulation for these contracts would exacerbate these issues.

Commissioner Cruz suggested reserving discussion of concerns regarding professional services contracts until proposed revisions to the Purchasing (6700) policy are addressed later in the meeting.

IV. Review of Revised Regulation regarding Use of District Cell Phones

Mr. Johnson provided an overview of the revisions to the regulation regarding use of District cell phones, noting that use of cell phones would be monitored by each department head instead of by the Information Management & Technology division. The revised regulation would provide criteria in terms of the positions requiring a District cell phone or air card, and a report would be generated of usage anomalies for review by each department head. Each department head will be required to investigate and initiate disciplinary action, if needed.

Commissioner Powell inquired about the specific triggers for generating a report of potential misuse of cell phones.

Action Item: Mr. Johnson will provide information to the Policy Committee regarding the specific indicators used to generate a report of potential misuse of cell phones and air cards.

Parent Representative Vicki Robertson pointed out the importance of ensuring that the indicators are sufficiently specific to prevent supervisors from spending time reviewing unnecessary information.

V. Review of Additional Proposed Revisions to Purchasing (6700) Policy

Mr. Johnson explained that additional revisions were suggested to the Purchasing (6700) policy proposal to acknowledge the Board's commitment to prohibit discrimination and promote contracting with M/WBE firms. He noted that these revisions could be incorporated as an amendment to the proposal already presented to the Board.

Commissioner Powell questioned whether this policy proposal addresses the concerns cited in the NYS Comptroller's Report. Mr. Johnson replied that the Comptroller had cited District practices regarding professional services contracts specifically. He indicated that the current Purchasing (6700) policy proposal could be withdrawn to allow time to address these concerns in that policy, or a separate policy could be developed specifically regarding professional services contracts.

Commissioner Cruz expressed concern that the Board had indicated in their response to the NYS Comptroller's Audit that these issues would be considered in reviewing and updating the Purchasing (6700) policy.

Commissioner Powell suggested advancing the current Purchasing (6700) policy proposal and consider amending the policy in the future to address the Comptroller's concerns. She emphasized the importance of changing the dollar thresholds in the policy to facilitate conduct of business.

Motion by Commissioner Powell to approve proposed Purchasing (6700) policy with the suggested revisions regarding M/WBE firms. **Adopted 2-0, with concurrence of parent representative.**

Mr. Johnson reported that a task force is currently examining the process for professional services contracting and will be issuing recommendations.

Given the significance of the NYS Comptroller's Audit and recommendations regarding professional services contracts, the members of the Policy Committee directed Mr. Johnson to develop a separate policy to address these issues.

Action Item: Mr. Johnson will develop a policy specifically regarding professional services contracts which addresses concerns cited in the NYS Comptroller's Audit.

VI. Report from Finance Committee regarding Financial Accountability (6000) policy proposal

Commissioner Powell reported that the Finance Committee reviewed and approved suggestions from Administration for revising the proposed Financial Accountability (6000) policy. She explained that the suggested revisions clarified the language and removed redundancy by referencing other policies.

Motion by Commissioner Powell to approve Financial Accountability (6000) policy proposal with suggested revisions. **Adopted 2-0, with concurrence of parent representative.**

VII. Review of Current Parent Involvement (1900) policy

Commissioner Cruz noted that parent involvement has been discussed for a long time in the District and the Youth & Family Services Division is examining changes needed to the policy.

Gladys Pedraza Burgos, Chief of the Youth & Family Services Division, reported that the Parent Involvement (1900) policy has not been updated since 2002. While a policy review was initiated in 2008, changes in leadership in the Office of Parent Engagement kept the process from moving forward. Ms. Pedraza Burgos discussed the substantive changes that are needed to this policy: revisions to comply with NCLB and NYS mandates and a comprehensive approach to parent participation in the District. She stated that input regarding the policy will be solicited from the new Parent Advisory Council and the Bilingual Council next week. Ms. Pedraza Burgos emphasized the importance of the Parent Involvement (1900) policy in providing clear definitions of different levels of engagement and in holding the District accountable to students and parents.

Dorothy Evans-Flaherty, Director of the Office of Parent Engagement, reported several rigorous studies which clearly indicate the impact of parent involvement on student achievement. She emphasized the importance of parents having opportunities to be engaged in meaningful ways. More specifically, Ms. Evans-Flaherty discussed establishing two-way communication between schools and family members and actively involving parents in their student's academic progress (linking parent involvement to learning outcomes).

Commissioner Powell commented that there have been problems with implementing aspects of the current Parent Involvement (1900) policy, particularly in seeking parent feedback regarding their satisfaction with the staff and school and in consulting parents prior to collective bargaining negotiations. She underscored the importance of following through on policies rather than continuing to make empty promises.

Ms. Pedraza Burgos stated that the Youth & Family Services Division is piloting a survey of parents to assess school climate and satisfaction. She reported that the survey will be expanded to include all parents in January.

Commissioner Cruz inquired as to the timeframe for updating the Parent Involvement (1900) policy. Ms. Pedraza Burgos replied that a draft will be ready to present to the Policy Committee in their October meeting.

Commissioner Powell noted that the bylaws for district-wide parent organizations have been prepared by the Board and by parents themselves in the past, and both of these efforts failed. She suggested that the Superintendent create the rules/bylaws and then obtain parents' input to ensure a more productive focus for the parent organization. Parent Representative Vicki Robertson pointed out that parents are much less likely to participate if they do not know the nature or extent of their commitment because of a lack of guidelines or expectations at the outset.

Commissioner Cruz asked about establishing a process for parents to appeal or present a grievance to a higher level of authority, suggesting that this be incorporated into the revised Parent Involvement policy and that the steps be clearly defined.

Commissioner Cruz stated that a public hearing will be held when the Board is considering the new Parent Involvement policy to ensure that parents have an opportunity to comment.

Action Item: Ms. Pedraza Burgos will prepare a draft for a new Parent Involvement (1900) policy to present to the Policy Committee in its October 21st meeting.

Commissioner Cruz stated that he would appreciate a presentation regarding the new Parent Engagement website and the communication thread with the Flower City Parents Network.

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

Meeting adjourned at 7:56PM.

Next Policy Committee Meeting: October 21st at 5:30PM