

Rochester Board of Education
Policy Committee
Public Hearing Code of Conduct
May 12, 2008
6 p.m.

Chairman Thomas Brennan called the hearing to order at 6:03 p.m. Commissioners Elliott and Powell were in attendance. He explained that the purpose of the meeting was for the Committee to gather comments, thoughts and suggestions on the Code of Conduct during its revision for 2008-09. He invited those in attendance to address the Committee from the podium and provide their names/addresses for the record.

Nicholas Hirsch
The Highlands
Rochester, NY

Mr. Hirsch, a substitute teacher in the District, said that teachers who make discipline referrals are sometimes banned from buildings, which is against the Whistleblower Policy and retaliation procedures; discipline referrals are not taken seriously; the Code of Conduct is not being enforced; people not following it and the Project SAVE legislation should be held accountable; the Code needs to be properly distributed. He has reported this situation of people not following the Legislation to Albany, but officials there say they do not have enough investigators; social ills are not the District's responsibility; he is trying to teach algebra to students who cannot add 12 and 12; it is pointless to let people sit in class and not learn anything and waste everybody's tax money. Mr. Hirsch also said there should be dedicated Code of Conduct training for new teachers and administrators.

Diane Watkins
Address

Ms. Watkins, a teacher at Wilson Foundation and parent of a student at Wilson Foundation, illustrated her point with a classroom lesson regarding the Qin Dynasty, which last for only 15 years in China because it had too many rules. She said the Code should reflect community morals and values regarding vulgarity, disrespect, sexual misconduct, etc., but that she is tired of arguing with students about hats and headphones. Students need to learn to love each other. Just and positive results are needed. The District is good at putting its foot on peoples' throats and at zero tolerance, but humans know the difference between right and wrong.

Glenny Williams
Address

Mr. Williams said accountability is needed at the start. Where is the safety plan? There should be a program description and measurable objectives for the Department of Security Operations. The District has talked about suspensions for the last 20 years and has to do better. The Code is outdated and reflects old information from 1985. The District should evaluate what is already being done before amending the policy. If the Superintendent is proposing new policies, he or others should go to parents/the community and explain them. Mr. Williams specifically referenced the Superintendent's Discipline Code. Parents and the community have valuable input on what has not worked in the past and what may not work well in Rochester. He also said at least the general rhetoric regarding building level emergency plans should be available, as well as the assessments of these plans. The Board didn't do anything to make this evening a professional and valid hearing. The changes should be made and then subject to review by citizens. Dr. Urbanski raises the issue of safety whenever it is time to

negotiate so that teachers can have ‘combat’ pay. He should not be allowed to play games when it comes to kids. A teacher’s aide at Wilson dragged a student down the hall by the hair. The situation was then covered up by administration because it was a personnel issue. The same was true when a teacher called a student names. The District needs a discipline system that looks fair to all. Discipline cannot be done on an arbitrary basis. Also, there are five times as many disruptive incidents as there are suspensions, and the number of suspensions in the District is higher than all of the surrounding area combined. Continuing with current practices will continue to produce failure; there is not evidence that the classroom environment is being addressed.

David Boyer
46 Sycamore 14620

Mr. Boyer is a teaching artist and visits schools all over the state as a cartoonist. He works with students on illustration, drawing and cartooning. Some RCSD visits go very well, others not so well. He does not see a lot of tie-in regarding parents in the Code. In Japan, teachers are allowed to visit students’ homes to ensure they have a place to do homework and necessary supplies. He sees problems in the classroom that come from outside the building, including abrasive behaviors, gang designs on hats, gang sign language being used. The Code should be put where all students can see it – on posters at eye level. He was a ward of the state growing up in the Bronx so he knows what students have to contend with.

Reverend Marilyn Cunningham
Address

Rev. Cunningham is on the School Based Planning Team at School 5 and a grandparent. She applauded the speaker who said children need to learn to love each other. At the elementary level, it is evident when teachers have love in the classroom. She suggested that sixth-graders may not belong in elementary schools because so much is going on in their lives; they bring bad behaviors to the schools and there are no sentries at elementary schools. There are teachers with love, but there are also teachers who are afraid. There are serious issues at the elementary schools at Grade 6. Sentries should be added. It can take four or five teachers to hold one student down so that others don’t get hurt. When there is fear on campus it interrupts the day.

Scott Wilson
88 Kingston Street

The District should think about coordinating policies with the Department of Social Services and others across the City serving the same population. The City and County need to cooperate. He provided copies of a newspaper article regarding landlord/tenant relations.

Sandra Lake
15 Laurelton

Ms. Lake said her neighborhood group has been meeting with Director of Security James Sheppard and has seen vast improvements, including less litter. She sees many parents who are good people walking their little ones to Webster Avenue school in all kinds of weather. Situations in classrooms are not the fault of parents or teachers, it can be the synergy of the group and reflects what children are going through. She hopes everyone will accept Mr. Sheppard as a leader as he makes his way through the buildings with safety audits. Ms. Lake also thanked the Board for its support of neighborhood issues.

Lenzie Blake
245 Furlong St.

Mr. Blake told the Committee he is a product of the City School District and has lived his entire life in the northeast. He is the founder of Slater’s Raiders for Peace. His organization employs 20 young people and will mentor them for a year. Regarding the Code, he said students have to know there is a level of expectation, similar to that in a household, and that there will be reprisals if the expectations are not met. Mr. Blake’s

concern is parents; what is broken is the process of parenting. Parents have abdicated their role and thrust it onto teachers, who spend more time managing the classroom than teaching.

Paul Miner

139 Belknap, Concorde, Mass.

Mr. Miner said he was speaking for himself on behalf of Charlie Richardson. He said there is a problem with youth and the City School District. He works with a number of non-profits, and they are all about measurable results. If you are going to initiate programs, you need to know whether it is working or not. Children are raising children. There is a need for preventative programs. He recommended a book by the Children's Defense fund, "America's Cradle to Prison Pathway." An important element of it is how to deal with discipline in schools; when students are suspended they are on their way to prison. It costs \$55K per year to keep someone in prison.

Tom Morse

Address

Mr. Morse spoke of the Values Policy initiated several years ago that arose from discussions with parents, teachers and administrators. The Code of Conduct should be measured against that Values Policy (4311), which has not been amended or rescinded to his knowledge.

Commissioner Powell asked whether Mr. Morse was willing to work on a committee to re-examine 4311, and he was unsure of whether he could commit because of professional obligations.

Commissioner Powell also commented that the hearing was held in the spring this year in order to better engage parents in order to make meaningful changes in the Code. She would like to see an emphasis going forward about in-school v. out-of-school suspensions, short-term v. long-term, etc. She would also like to see the Code of Discipline being discussed at the administrative level.

Chairman Brennan urged all in attendance to feel free to contact Board members, attend meeting, and make their voices heard and views known. Involvement is not limited to this meeting. He thanked everyone for attending. Responding to questions from the audience, he said the Committee will discuss the provided input at its meeting May 20. Urge all to feel free contact Board members, come to meetings, make voices heard and views known, involvement not limited to this hearing. Proscribed format. Thanks everyone.

Hearing adjourned at 7:20 p.m.