

BOE Policy Committee Minutes
Wednesday, January 12, 2022, 9:00 AM – 10:30 AM
Municipal Building, Council Chambers
3 Primrose St, Newtown, CT
06470

CALL TO ORDER Meeting was called to order at 9:00 am

IN ATTENDANCE Dan Cruson, Deborra Zukowski, Janet Kuzma, Dr. Lorrie Rodrigue, Suzanne D’Eramo, Wesley Johnson (virtual), Sarah Connell (virtual), 9 Public

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Jen Padilla, 32 Glen Road, stated that the work the Board did in passing the DEI Resolution was a move in the right direction. This work is not about politics, it is about students and their needs. DEI is critical to success and changing the words in the Academic Freedom policy would be a mistake.

Trey Hazard, 10 Arthurs Court, graduated in 2020 is in favor of the Academic Freedom policy as it reads. The policy aligns with the resolution that the BOE passed in July 2020. The words in the policy are not politically loaded words and in fact, they bring people together, all backgrounds, and all ethnicities.

Nicole Maddox, 14 Nighthawk Lane, pointed out that there should be no reason to change the language in the Academic Freedom policy, unless it is a legal issue. It is time for the BOE to be bold and to stop making excuses.

Jessica Velasco, 103 Brushy Hill Road, asked the committee to remember the kids that came to the December 21st Board of Education meeting while reviewing the Academic Freedom policy. The students recounted their experiences with racism in the schools and how teachers, principals and past Boards have failed them. She asked if this Board will be the one that make a change and accept diversity, equity and inclusion.

Sabeena Ali, 8 Quail Hollow Lane, stated that when she moved to Newtown, she was convinced by many people that Newtown School District and the community at large were welcoming, open and inclusive. She continued by stating that her oldest child is blind and while accommodation were provided for, the social atmosphere was less than ideal with teachers, support staff and students. Currently, her youngest daughter is now a senior at NHS and has been bullied since first grade. In the past 3-4 years there has been a shift and teachers, staff and students have been more accepting of her. The change started when NPS starting incorporating diversity, equity and inclusion concepts. She implores the committee to keep pushing the needle toward diversity, equity and inclusion.

APPROVE MINUTES Dan Cruson made a motion to approve the minutes of November 24, 2021. Deborra Zukowski seconded. Vote: Aye - 1 (Cruson), Abstain – 2 (Zukowski, Kuzma)

OLD BUSINESS

Discussion and possible action:

Item	Reports
<p>Policy 4118.239/4218.239 – Required Covid-19 Vaccinations</p> <p>D. Cruson said that there was no feedback from the BOE regarding this policy. He gave an overview to the new members of the committee by stating that this policy was edited to be short and clear. The BOE only approves policies and not regulations. The Regulation in this policy will be maintained by L. Rodrigue and the Policy Committee.</p> <p>D. Zukowski asked the committee if regulations have to be attached to policies. L. Rodrigue answered that they do because the policy guides the regulation by the context.</p> <p>D. Zukowski asked the committee to refer to page R4118.239(c), under Vaccination Verification and Testing for Covered workers. She asked if the data of vaccinated workers would be reported to the BOE and if the BOE is responsible for authenticating it. L. Rodrigue answered that the “Board” in this case is referring to the designees of the Board (HR and the Superintendent).</p> <p>D. Zukowski asked if the committee would un strike the definition of the Board. D. Cruson and L. Rodrigue answered that Shipman and Goodwin advised removing it from the policy.</p> <p>J. Kuzma asked who will be in charge of verifying the vaccination status of the volunteers.</p> <p>L. Rodrigue said that it will be handled at a building level (Administration).</p> <p>J. Kuzma asked if the BOE will be providing Covid tests for volunteers. L. Rodrigue said not at this time because they are not employees. The BOE only has tests for employees at this time.</p> <p>This policy will go back to the BOE for second read and possible approval.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• S. Connell will send this policy back to K. June for BOE 2nd read and possible approval.
<p>Policy 4118.21 – Academic Freedom</p> <p>D. Cruson acknowledged that there is a lot of input regarding this policy. He pointed out that one change was made after the last BOE meeting. The edit was by BOE member, D. Ramsey and the change</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• S. Connell will invite W. Johnson and S. D’Eramo to the next policy meeting.• S. Connell will send original packet of sample policies from CABE to committee members.

is the word perspective changed to perspectives in the last paragraph.

L. Rodrigue stated that she agrees with this policy whole heartedly. After speaking with members of the staff, union presidents, and members of the community, the same question “What exactly is Academic Freedom?” has been asked. There needs to be clarity around the fact that this policy is about students as well and their freedom to learn. L. Rodrigue agreed that she agrees with what W. Johnson added to this policy.

W. Johnson stated that his aim to be succinct and as clear as possible to ensure that students felt they could express themselves as well. It was also his aim to reflect the newly approved Resolution.

D. Zukowski stated that she was not aware what “Academic Freedom” was. As a literal reader, D. Zukowski read the 2nd paragraph as what the staff can’t do then the next paragraph outlines what they must do. She wondered what staff was free to do. After researching Academic Freedom, it was clear that K-12 Public does not have as much Academic Freedom as higher learning because of laws and policies in place. D. Zukowski is recommending that the committee adds the Academic Freedom policy adopted by Connecticut State Board of Education as an Appendix so the public can see what Academic Freedom really means.

D. Cruson said he is weary of the idea of adding the policy as an appendix because the committee does not have control of that policy. Legal advises that we do not add anything to the policy that we do not have control of.

L. Rodrigue reminded the committee that the Connecticut State Board of Education policy is noted in the legal reference and feels that it is enough.

J. Kuzma agrees with D. Zukowski that the document that D. Zukowski sent makes more sense and provides more clarity. J. Kuzma asked if there was a way to add more language from the State Dept. of Education policy to the CABA policy.

W. Johnson said he would be fine adding paragraph 4(from CT State Dept of Ed) to the proposed policy

- S. Connell will reach out to CABA and ask if the Appendix is part of the policy or regulation.
- S. Connell will make the approved edits for the committee to review at the next meeting.

to provide more clarity. L. Rodrigue agreed and asked, "Do we want to add more language or reference to it in some way?"

W. Johnson thinks that it is important for this document to reflect the language from the state, but also to incorporate the language of the BOE Resolution. W. Johnson reminded the committee that he likes to be succinct but not without substance.

D. Zukowski asked W. Johnson what "without partisan" means.

W. Johnson said, simply put, "without favor".

D. Zukowski recommended adding paragraph 4 to the CAFE policy and then the committee can revisit this policy again at the next meeting.

J. Kuzma asked D. Cruson if the committee could see the original packet with the sample policies.

S. Connell will send the committee the sample policies that the committee reviewed.

D. Cruson sent a proposed change to the committee ahead of the meeting. The committee agreed that they would add paragraph 4(CT State Board of Ed.) to replace the second paragraph instead.

W. Johnson reminded the committee that it is important to not using language that would work against from the conversation of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion. W. Johnson and L. Rodrigue agree that taking the language from the CT State Board of Ed policy is the better route to take. J. Kuzma also agrees.

S. Connell will make the approved edit (adding paragraph 4) and bring back to the committee to review.

W. Johnson added that he is worried about the language and how it does not promote and encourage but rather "how do we limit". He is concerned about the tone of the conversation the committee is having. It is important to keep any language that promotes Diversity, Equity and Inclusion.

D. Cruson and L. Rodrigue answered W. Johnson that we will be keeping the language that promotes Diversity, Equity and Inclusion.

D. Zukowski asked to put “influence” after “without”partisan. W. Johnson did not have a problem but the committee agreed to keep as is.	
D. Cruson asked for this policy to come back for review.	

NEW BUSINESS

Discussion and possible action:

Item	Reports
<p>Policy 4111.1/4211.1 - Equal Employment Opportunity/ Plan for Minority Recruitment and Selection</p> <p>This policy was reviewed by the committee in May 2020. It has been in the 4000 series queue waiting to go to the BOE for approval.</p> <p>The committee would like to review again, with W. Johnson’s input, before sending it to the Board.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This policy will be discussed at the next policy meeting. • S. Connell will invite W. Johnson and S. D’Eramo to this policy meeting.
<p>Policy 4000 – Concepts and Roles in Personnel</p> <p>This policy was reviewed by the committee in May 2020. It has been in the 4000 series queue waiting to go to the BOE for approval.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This policy will be discussed at the next policy meeting. • S. Connell will invite S. D’Eramo to the next policy meeting.
<p>Policy 4100 – Certified Personnel</p> <p>This policy was reviewed by the committee in May 2020. It has been in the 4000 series queue waiting to go to the BOE for approval.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This policy will be discussed at the next policy meeting. • S. Connell will invite S. D’Eramo to the next policy meeting.
<p>Review Policy Meeting Dates for 2022</p> <p>D. Cruson asked S. Connell to create the calendar for the 2022 meeting dates and send to the Town Clerk.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • S. Connell will create the calendar for meeting dates for 2022 and send to the committee and Town Clerk.

UPDATE FROM THE SUPERINTENDENT

Dr. Rodrigue does not have any updates but is very happy that the committee was able to discuss the Academic Freedom policy.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Nicole Maddox, 14 Nighthawk Lane, agreed that the language discussed in the meeting takes care of the issue with K-12 educators to ensure that they adhere to the structure that is put in place, etc. She agreed with Mr. Johnson’s concerns about the tone of the conversation changing from Diversity, Equity and Inclusion and language that encourages the conversation is important and strengthens this policy.

A motion was made by D. Cruson to move Policy 4118.239/4218.239 – Required Covid-19 Vaccinations forward to the BOE for approval. D. Zukowski seconded. Motion was unanimously approved.

A motion was made by D. Cruson to postpone discussion on Policy 4118.21 – Academic Freedom, Policy 4111.1/4211.1 - Equal Employment Opportunity/ Plan for Minority Recruitment and Selection, Policy 4000 – Concepts and Roles in Personnel, and Policy 4100 – Certified Personnel until the next policy meeting.

D. Zukowski seconded. Motion was unanimously approved.

ADJOURNMENT

Dan Cruson made a motion to adjourn the meeting. D. Zukowski seconded. Motion was unanimously approved. Meeting was adjourned at 10:30 a.m.

FREE TO LEARN

A Policy on Academic Freedom and Public Education

Adopted by Connecticut State Board of Education

Academic freedom is the freedom to teach and to learn. In defending the freedom to teach and to learn, we affirm the democratic process itself. American public education is the source of much that is essential to our democratic heritage. No other single institution has so significantly sustained our national diversity, nor helped voice our shared hopes for an open and tolerant society. Academic freedom is among the strengths of American public education. Attempts to deny the freedom to teach and to learn are, therefore, incompatible with the goals of excellence and equity in the life of our public schools.

With freedom comes responsibility. With rights come obligations. Accordingly, academic freedom in our public schools is subject to certain limitations. Therefore, the STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION affirms that:

Academic freedom in our public schools is properly defined within the context of law and the constraints of mutual respect among individuals. Public schools represent a public trust. They exist to prepare our children to become partners in a society of self-governing citizens. Therefore, access to ideas and opportunities to consider the broad range of questions and experiences which constitute the proper preparation for a life of responsible citizenship must not be defined by the interests of any single viewpoint. Teachers, school administrators, librarians, and school media specialists must be free to select instructional research materials appropriate to the maturity level of their students. This freedom is itself subject to the reasonable restrictions mandated by law to school officials and administrators.

At the same time, local school officials must demonstrate substantial or legitimate public interest in order to justify censorship or other proposed restrictions upon teaching and learning. Similarly, local boards of education cannot establish criteria for the selection of library books based solely on the personal, social or political beliefs of school board members. While students must be free to voice their opinions in the context of a free inquiry after truth and respect for their fellow students and school personnel, student expression which threatens to interfere substantially with the school's function is not warranted by academic freedom. Students must be mindful that their rights are neither absolute nor unlimited. Part of responsible citizenship is coming to accept the consequences of the freedoms to which one is entitled by law and tradition. Similarly, parents have the right to affect their own children's education, but this right must be balanced against the right other parent's children have to a suitable range of educational experiences. Throughout, the tenets of academic freedom seek to encourage a spirit of reasoned community participation in the life and practices of our public schools.

Since teaching and learning are among the missions of our public schools, the STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION affirms the distinction between teaching and indoctrination. Schools should teach students how to think, not what to think. To study an idea is not necessarily to endorse an idea. Public school classrooms are forums for inquiry, not arenas for the promulgation of particular viewpoints. While communities have the right to exercise supervision over their own public school practices and programs, their participation in the educational life of their schools should respect the constitutional and intellectual rights guaranteed school personnel and students by American law and tradition.

Accordingly, the STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION, in order to encourage improved educational practices, recommends that local school boards adopt policies and procedures to receive, review, and take action upon requests that question public school practices and programs. Community members should be encouraged, and made aware of their rights to voice their opinions about school practices and programs in an appropriate administrative forum. The STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION further recommends that local school boards take steps to encourage informed community participation in the shared work of sustaining and improving our public schools.

Finally, the STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION affirms that community members and school personnel should acknowledge together that the purpose of public education is the pursuit of knowledge and the preparation of our children for responsible citizenship in a society that respects differences and shared freedom.