

Board of Education, Ellington CT
Policy and Curriculum Committee Combined Meeting Minutes

A combined Policy Committee and Curriculum Committee of the Ellington Board of Education met on Tuesday, September 15, 2020 at 5:00 p.m. in the Ellington High School Library, 37 Maple Street, Ellington, Connecticut.

Attendees: Dr. Scott Nicol, Superintendent of Schools, Mr. Brian Hendrickson, Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction, Mr. John Collins, Director of Technology, Mr. Tim McCluskey, Athletic Director, Dr. Sue Nash-Ditzel, Crystal Lake School Principal, Ms. Sara Varga, Lead Teacher/Math Interventionist, Mr. Gary Blanchette, Board Member, Ms. Miriam Underwood, Board Member, Ms. Marcia Kupferschmid, Board Member, Dr. Mike Young, Board Member

Committee Members: Ms. Liz Nord, Ms. Jen Dzen, Ms. Kris Picard-Wambolt

Community: PTO President Julie Burns-McAvoy

Call to Order: The meeting was called to order at 5:05 p.m. by Ms. Picard-Wambolt.

Agenda Items:

1. Citizens and Staff Forum

No one addressed the committee.

2. Administrative Regulations for Policies 4118.11, 4118.112, and 5145.5

Dr. Nicol presented the committee with the newly developed Administrative Regulations for the recently revised and adopted Policy 4118.11 – Nondiscrimination, Policy 4118.112 – Sexual Discrimination / Harassment, and Policy 5145.5 – Sexual Discrimination and Sexual Harassment. Administrative regulations do not need to be formally voted on and adopted by the Policy Committee, nor the full Board. These were presented for an informal review and discussion. The committee members voiced several concerns regarding vague language, including to whom should a complaint be directed if the alleged perpetrator is the Title IX coordinator. These will be clarified and addressed by Dr. Nicol in an email to the committee.

3. Discussion of Random Drug Testing of Students Involved in Extracurricular Activities

A concern was brought to Ms. Picard-Wambolt regarding the alleged use of performance enhancing drugs in high school sports. As we currently have no policies specifically addressing this topic and the CIAC defers to the districts to address, it was determined a discussion was warranted. Dr. Nicol presented the committee with background information and an incredibly comprehensive sample policy. Mr. McCluskey addressed the committee. He assured the committee he, personally, has no concerns in this regard. He discussed the training process of the student athletes. He shared with the committee that the drug policies currently in place are reviewed and discussed with all student athletes. Mr. McCluskey answered all committee members' questions and addressed all of their concerns. The committee determined the sample policy provided was very extreme and is not needed by our district at this time. No action is recommended.

The Policy Committee portion of the meeting concluded at 5:35 p.m. at which time Ms. Picard-Wambolt transitioned the meeting to Dr. Young, Curriculum Committee Chair.

Curriculum Committee Meeting Minutes

Attendees: Dr. Scott Nicol, Superintendent of Schools, Mr. Brian Hendrickson, Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction, Mr. John Collins, Director of Technology, Mr. Tim McCluskey, Athletic Director, Dr. Sue Nash-Ditzel, Crystal Lake School Principal, Ms. Sara Varga, Lead Teacher/Math Interventionist, Mr. Gary Blanchette, Board Member, Ms. Miriam Underwood, Board Member, Ms. Marcia Kupferschmid, Board Member, Dr. Mike Young, Board Member

Committee Members: Ms. Liz Nord, Ms. Jen Dzen, Ms. Kris Picard-Wambolt

Community: PTO President Julie Burns-McAvoy

Call to Order: The meeting was called to order at 5:35 p.m. by Dr. Young (Chair).

AGENDA

1. Citizen and Staff Forum

None.

2. Seeds of Civility / Presidential Election 2020 and the School District's Role

Dr. Nicol brought to the group his interest in providing a safe and trusting atmosphere for debating controversial issues and in so doing, learning how to conduct civil discourse on highly charged topics, including the upcoming 2020 election. He reported that he expects his faculty who bring these discussions into their classes should be observed to be non-biased and balanced in their presentations and their students' work. He reported that our teachers are currently doing well at preserving a healthy environment for discussing polarizing topics. He wants to highlight and reinforce existing things that are already standard practices with regard to the role and responsibilities of the public school community in handling controversial issues.

Mr Hendrickson added the existence of webcams and the Polycam systems and associated transparency of classroom activities heightens the need for faculty to have support and guidance on how to deal with increasingly visible classrooms. He suggested there is interest in being proactive in addressing this topic.

It seems important for teachers to model positive mechanisms for students to find their participatory democracy voices and constrain in-class interactions to positive behaviors when students want to take actions related to spirited debate.

Dr. Nicol reported that Susan Nash-Ditzel will lead the administrative process to proceed on refreshing district recommendations on this topic and perhaps work through fictional case study examples.

Dr. Young inquired about any role that recorded distance learning classes might play in the review of discussions of controversial issues. It is possible such recordings might enter into any investigation but it is not the intent for recordings to be used in any way to supervise or review teacher performance.

3. Discussion on Implementation of New 2020-2021 Distance Learning Expectations

Dr. Young made a brief statement about the need to address the quality of Distance Learning in the spirit of a learning community exploring best teaching practices in the relatively uncharted waters of hybrid learning environments, without guidance from a solid educational research literature or standards for normal educational practice of distance learning, particularly at the early elementary grades.

PTO president Julie Burns-McAvoy spoke to represent parent input on how distance learning has been with fall school reopening. She reported that parents find advanced schedules helpful to organize their days. She says parents have observed that children are becoming more fluent with the technology but of course are still limited by typing fluency. She reported an example of how, using SeeSaw to interact with the teacher to get clarification is an example of Silver parents and students learning to be more interactive. Getting materials and topics in advance can enable families to plan and schedule the day with multiple users of Internet devices in a shared home environment. She noted how setting up a ten-minute warnings to scheduled events for students (like on a smart phone) may prove helpful. She reported that teachers holding virtual office hours for parents has proven helpful. She noted that Google Meet online performance continues to have issues of multiple origins. Guidance on technology issues and solutions were requested. She noted that some parents may not be fluent at resolving technical issues and some District-provided Chromebooks are aging and were not refreshed as planned this fall due to backorder delays globally.

Mr. Collins reported that dual monitors may help teachers be more interactive with students in certain cases by providing opportunity for teachers to manage and interact more with Silver (fully remote) students.

Ms. Burns-McAvoy raised the issue of the number of Silver students per class, particularly in kindergarten and how that may limit the attention teachers can provide to each remote learning child. Access to the Silver teachers, even not finding them in the directory, was also brought to the committee as an issue. The balance between direct teacher instruction and student independent work was raised. There is also need to acknowledge the balance parents are challenged with regarding their own jobs and their role as an educator in the distance learning environment and a continuing need to find ways to be engaged in support of their child's learning.

In summary there is a general feeling that progress is being made while critical challenges remain.

Sara Varga reported about what is expected of teachers. Teachers are concerned with screen time and balance of activities, such as math manipulatives, with time in contact with the teachers synchronously. She cautioned there is always a need for more teacher talk at the start of the school year, with orientation and expectation-setting that can tip the balance toward more teacher time during the initial days of school.

The committee agreed it is important to see continuous improvement in a dynamic process of learning to provide distance learning as effectively as possible.

Jen Dzen noted that students are missing time to collaborate with groups where they can interact, raise questions in smaller groups, and be active learner and explore advanced content.

Dr. Nicol noted that parents are experiencing an unprecedented amount of transparency of the classroom and curriculum. This may well represent new and valuable feedback on our work as a committee and as a school district.

Mr. Hendrickson noted that certainly more personalized learning at a distance is possible and there are mechanisms coming, with Infinite Campus and others to support continued refinement of the Silver distance learning environment.

Liz Nord inquired if assessments have identified any specific gaps from the extended school closure. Mr. Hendrickson responded that it may be too early prior to the end of the first marking period to confidently detail any such gaps. Certainly, it is a high priority to monitor where each child is in relationship to standards, particularly at the elementary level.

4. Review K-6 Science Curriculum Work

Tory Schilling joined the meeting virtually to support Sara Varga's presentation of slides concerning K-6 Science Curriculum Teacher Professional Development from July into fall 2020. This work enabled teachers to review NGSS standards and adoption of high quality units and adapting these units for the Ellington framework. The work provided progress on our district Curriculum grid, moving several more units into the "green" teachable lessons category. Each grade level now has at least 3 teachable units that can now be adjusted for hybrid learning environments.

5. Update on Infinite Campus Implementation & Timeline

Mr. Collins reported that Infinite Campus has officially launched for the district. Work continues on pace, with spring orientation meetings conducted at a distance. There were challenges introduced to implementing new system to some groups, such as nurses seeking to address new strategies related to COVID-19. The system supported building and scheduling the hybrid model. The parent portal is available and more content will be built out going forward. Tableau and data visualizations are on schedule for the coming year.

6. Discuss October agenda item/s for Curriculum Committee

Hear from administration regarding the Seeds of Civility with regard to Presidential election.
Discuss data assessment concerning potential gaps caused by extended school closure.
Receive and update on middle school math model.

Adjournment:

A motion was made to adjourn the meeting.

VOTE: Unanimous. The motion passed.

1st. K. Picard-Wambolt

2nd J. Dzen

The meeting was adjourned at 7:14 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by:

Kris Picard-Wambolt, Policy Committee Chair & Dr. Michael Young, Curriculum Committee Chair