

The Regional School District 13 Board of Education Policy Committee met in Special Session on Wednesday, August 25, 2021 at 6:00 PM in the library at Coginchaug Regional High School.

Committee members present: Mrs. Booth, Mr. Hicks, Mr. Moore, Mr. Roraback, Dr. Taylor, and Mr. Yamartino

Committee members absent: Mrs. Caramanello

Board members present: Dr. Friedrich

Administration present: Dr. Schuch, Superintendent of Schools, Mrs. Neubig, Director of Finance, Mrs. Keane, Director of Student Services and Special Education and Mr. Brough, Human Resources Specialist

Mr. Hicks called the meeting to order at 6:00 PM.

Pledge of Allegiance

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

Public Comment

None.

Approval of Agenda

Mrs. Booth made a motion, seconded by Dr. Taylor, to approve the agenda, as presented.

In favor of approving the agenda, as presented: Mrs. Booth, Mr. Hicks, Mr. Moore, Mr. Roraback, Dr. Taylor, and Mr. Yamartino. Motion passed unanimously.

Approval of Minutes - April 21, 2021

Mrs. Booth made a motion, seconded by Dr. Taylor, to approve the minutes of April 21, 2021, as presented.

In favor of approving the minutes of April 21, 2021, as presented: Mrs. Booth, Mr. Hicks, Mr. Moore, Mr. Roraback, Dr. Taylor, and Mr. Yamartino. Motion passed unanimously.

Policy considerations concerning COVID-19 and the reopening of schools

Dr. Schuch stated that he has had conversations with colleagues across the state and he recommended having a single policy that basically reinforces that the board will uphold and implement any state mandates. He reviewed the policy and stated that most of what is in the document is straight out of the state mandates. Most of it is very similar to how the district ended the year last spring. Dr. Schuch highlighted the key differences, including that there is a vaccine mandate for employees as of last week. Guidance from the state just came out last week that included a situational instructional mask flexibility for teachers which is a district-level decision. Dr. Schuch also recommended that the visitor policy during the day would be essential visitors only, but he does not feel there is a significant risk of after-hours use by school-related or non-school-related groups though they may discourage large numbers of people. Dr. Schuch's team also believes that field trips should be allowed in outdoor settings. Another change has to

do with communication about individual positive cases and they are recommending not sending out any letters but instead updating the website daily.

Dr. Schuch also explained that there is a new contact tracing guideline that applies to masked individuals in classroom settings and invokes a three-foot rule in lieu of a six-foot rule. He also reviewed that there is no remote option this year.

Dr. Schuch hopes to record a video that hits all these highlights by Monday. Mrs. Booth thought that they should make it clear that even if children are not vaccinated, but were exposed and had a mask on while they were more than three feet away from someone, they do not have to quarantine if they are asymptomatic. Mrs. Keane explained that that applies to in the classroom only and other areas need six-foot spacing, such as on the bus. Mrs. Booth asked how the busing will be handled and Mrs. Keane explained that seats will be assigned at the elementary level and seats will probably have to be shared.

Dr. Schuch wondered if people really need specifics about contact tracing, but noted that parents will hear from them if their child has been exposed. Dr. Taylor asked if there was any point when kids would not be within three feet in the classroom. He noted that the guidance doesn't specify any length of time. Mrs. Keane noted that the length of time for three feet in the classroom with masks is all day. Dr. Taylor felt that kids do not stay more than three feet apart all day long. Dr. Schuch felt that this was the state's way of keeping more kids in the classroom and mentioned that this does not apply to adults or kids outside of the classroom. Mrs. Keane added that any child who is symptomatic will need to quarantine under any circumstances and any kids exposed who were less than three feet away would also need to quarantine, symptomatic or not. Dr. Schuch explained that the older children who have been vaccinated do not need to quarantine if they are asymptomatic.

Dr. Taylor asked if an entire class would need to quarantine if one student is positive and Dr. Schuch felt that that may be the case for the very youngest learners but the state does not want districts to have as many students out of school as they were last year. He also noted that classrooms and even entire schools went out last year due to staff infections, but a high percentage of the staff have been vaccinated now.

Dr. Taylor felt that a lot of time would be lost if an entire class is quarantined with no remote learning and felt that they should be more specific about the three-foot spacing. Dr. Schuch explained that the state has not prohibited the district from doing virtual instruction but do not require it. The district has decided to not offer the Cohort C option that was available last year, but there is no plan to fit all ages of kids. Dr. Schuch felt that, if an entire class is out, the teacher is able and the technology is there, they will probably connect virtually. They do feel that remote learning was less effective for the very young kids and hope to be able to support learning at home in other ways.

Dr. Friedrich asked if the teachers understand what the expectations are and Dr. Schuch noted that they have not even reported back to work yet, but they will be made aware. Dr. Friedrich asked if the teachers will be made aware that they will be required to teach from home if they are not sick. Mrs. Booth noted that teachers are required to be vaccinated and will be able to still report to work and teach from there. Dr. Schuch felt that the administration and teachers will look at each situation and see what makes the most sense.

Dr. Schuch explained that the union has approached the district with an MOU, but no district in the state has signed one at this point because of all the unknowns.

Mrs. Booth asked what will happen if a quarantine becomes necessary and Dr. Schuch emphasized that they will immediately address the issue and support the children while they are at home. Mrs. Booth asked if the kids will still need to take their Chromebooks home every day and Dr. Schuch stated that that is what they've talked about, but they are not sure about K and 1. Dr. Schuch is confident that the teachers will handle the situations.

Mr. Moore stated that they do need to have a policy on how the board will respond and he has looked at the temporary policies from last year. They basically state that the board adopts the guidelines as well as any other associated mandates for the 2021-2022 school year. The board authorizes the superintendent to modify the guidelines as necessary between board meetings.

Mrs. Booth was concerned about the superintendent modifying the guidelines and Dr. Schuch explained that that is only in there so that they don't need to call special board meetings. Mrs. Booth explained that she has a very strong opinion about masking and would have a problem not being involved in that decision. Dr. Schuch explained that he would not unilaterally make a decision about masks.

Mr. Moore made a motion, seconded by Mr. Yamartino, to adopt the policy concerning temporary policies and regulations related to COVID-19 pandemic.

Mr. Yamartino suggested that the board consider the following language instead of the proposed last paragraph: "Therefore, the RSD13 Board of Education authorizes the superintendent to implement guidelines and procedures that comply with state mandates and/or guidance from the district health director, Connecticut State Department of Health, CDC and Connecticut State Department of Education." He intentionally excluded the CIAC. Dr. Friedrich agreed with Mr. Yamartino's proposed language.

Mr. Yamartino asked to make an amendment to the motion, striking the second paragraph and replacing it with "Therefore, the RSD13 Board of Education authorizes the superintendent to implement guidelines and procedures that comply with state mandates and/or guidance from the district health director, Connecticut State Department of Health, CDC and Connecticut State Department of Education." Mr. Moore accepted the amendment.

In favor of adopting the policy concerning temporary policies and regulations related to COVID-19 pandemic, as amended: Mrs. Booth, Mr. Hicks, Mr. Moore, Mr. Roraback, Dr. Taylor, and Mr. Yamartino. Motion passed unanimously.

Mr. Hicks later clarified that this vote is only to bring this policy forward to the full board.

Dr. Taylor did not think that the science supports the part of the guideline that states that anyone who has previously had COVID-19 should be considered vaccinated. Mrs. Keane noted that that language is directly from the state. Dr. Taylor explained that immunity from a primary infection is only around 40 percent and not nearly as effective as a vaccination. Mrs. Keane explained that that does not need to be included in the guideline.

Dr. Taylor also noted that the language for unvaccinated individuals in athletics states that they need to be masked during all activities and that is not the case for music. He wondered if vaccinated students do not need to be masked. Dr. Taylor felt that all sports and all music, if indoors, should require masks. Dr.

Schuch felt that all indoor activities should be masked, but outdoor sports do not require that nor do musicians playing outside. Dr. Taylor would just like to see continuity.

Dr. Schuch asked if anyone had strong feelings one way or another about the flexibility for teachers. He felt that the teachers were split on this and other superintendents are as well. The district's administrative team tends to support it and allow teachers to make the decision. Dr. Schuch felt that the science supports a fully-vaccinated individual who is well-distanced from the rest of the class does not need to be masked which would make it better for learning. On the flip side, will children feel it is unfair that teachers can take off their masks from time to time if they can't. Dr. Schuch felt that he could argue for either side, but they do need to tell teachers something when they come back.

Mr. Roraback felt that younger kids benefit greatly from facial expressions. Dr. Schuch stated that the state gave the example of kids watching the teacher's mouth while learning literacy and mentioned that kids toward the back of the classroom may not be able to hear well if the teacher is masked at the front. This would only apply to vaccinated staff in the front of the classroom and limited to the classroom. It would also be completely at the teachers' discretion.

Mr. Yamartino agreed with giving the teachers the flexibility and added that children with developmental disabilities would benefit greatly from seeing the teacher's face. Mrs. Keane agreed. Mr. Yamartino felt that the real question would be how to address the students and parents about why they need to wear masks when the teachers don't. Dr. Schuch stated that those are exactly the kind of things they'd like to include in the FAQ video. Mr. Roraback and Dr. Taylor were both in support of the flexibility. Dr. Schuch felt that another problem would be to help the younger children understand that they can't just run up to the teacher like they normally would.

Dr. Schuch also how everyone felt about building use during non-school hours. Dr. Taylor asked if those groups would have to adhere to the policies and procedures of the school and Dr. Schuch noted that they would. Dr. Taylor asked if that would also pertain to town meetings as that has not been the case in the past. He felt that that should be the general policy. Dr. Schuch agreed but felt that enforceability would be the issue without the district having a physical presence.

Mr. Moore also mentioned that basketball leagues will be asking for use of the gym and Dr. Schuch explained that groups like that were allowed in the summer. Mr. Yamartino felt that even the basketball leagues would have to comply with wearing masks.

Advertising policy review

Mrs. Neubig explained that the language was sent out for a first read. She explained that they were approached seven years ago about having a policy for this. Mr. Moore, Dr. Schuch, Mr. Petronio and Mrs. Neubig met with the Benchwarmers and came up with the proposed language. They researched many districts' policies and came up with what they think fits for the district. Advertising would include banners on the athletic fields, but could also be something in a playbill as well.

Mrs. Neubig sent the first draft to the attorney who gave some suggestions. It is basically generic and does state that the district can partner with other organizations. The policy also states what can and cannot be advertised. It gives the board and the superintendent a lot of oversight and discretion. It also calls for one sign maker to provide uniformity and the organizations will be responsible for putting them

up and taking them down. A price will be set at the beginning of every year and the revenue will be reported to the Board of Education at the end of every fiscal year. Of course, the policy can always be revoked.

Mrs. Neubig explained that there are also procedures included with this policy, including a proposed contract. She would like to start this with fall sports this year.

Mrs. Booth asked if there has been any discussion on pricing and Mrs. Neubig explained that that would be procedural after the policy was approved. She felt that they would enter into an agreement with an organization and that group will handle all the advertising. Dr. Schuch felt that their approval would be simply to make sure it is not inappropriate. Mrs. Booth asked if this would include signage in the gym and Mrs. Neubig explained that it does say athletic facilities which would include the gym, however they have the right to not allow it in the gym should they decide that.

Mr. Roraback felt that this is a genuine attempt at community outreach and noted that people sometimes feel that they can't participate with the district. He felt that this could be tastefully done.

Dr. Friedrich asked how the money from advertising would be handled and Mrs. Neubig explained that the district would retain the right to allocate a portion of the funds to an organization. If the district partners with an organization, they would receive the checks but the district would monitor how the revenues are used. Dr. Taylor would not support advertising signs on district property and them having full control of the allocation of the revenues. He would support the district allocating the funds as appropriate.

Mr. Roraback would not want to see the district's human resources having to administer this. If there are volunteers willing to help, the district should embrace that in a big way. Mrs. Booth has no trouble with volunteers helping, but would not want them to be able to use the money as they see fit. She believes the money should go to the district. Mr. Roraback felt that it would cost the district more to have employees do it vs. volunteers doing it.

Ms. Geraci felt that this could be an audit question regarding the transfer of funds and maybe the auditors could look at this. Mrs. Neubig explained that they haven't done anything about this because of the absence of a policy, the money would need to go to the general fund. She agreed that it would be more administrative work for the district to have the money come directly to the district. Mr. Yamartino asked for clarification as to how it would affect Title XIX to be sure the funds are distributed equally.

Mrs. Neubig noted that there are a lot of sports' fund raisers anyway that has the money go directly to the organization providing it and the district has no control over how that money is spent. Dr. Taylor felt that that's different than an organization prioritizing for other organizations within the district. He felt that that should be the district's decision and felt there needs to be a lot more discussion on this. Dr. Friedrich felt that whatever is set up needs to pass audit.

Mr. Roraback reminded everyone that they have had discussions about not having the money to buy new scoreboards, etc. and that this type of policy could allow for community groups to help with things like that. That would be one more place where the district can put their money toward education.

Mr. Hicks suggested that Mrs. Neubig get some clarification on the points that have been talked about.

Public comment guidelines

Dr. Friedrich reviewed that Ms. Geraci had suggested that something be added to the agendas for the meetings and he has rephrased it as follows: "Public comment is limited to three minutes per speaker. As specified by Board Policy 1120, the chair of the board may, at his/her discretion, restrict, extend, or curtail comments at any time. All comments must refer to the educational program of RSD13 and conform in manner and content to the district's core ethical values. Comments at the beginning of the meeting are limited to items on the meeting agenda." Dr. Friedrich also added, "It is board practice not to respond to comments during the meeting."

Mr. Hicks asked if he was suggesting this as a change in policy and Dr. Friedrich stated that he was not and would just like to have it added to the agendas. Mr. Hicks felt that this could be brought directly to the board, but he is concerned as this is part of the policy. Ms. Geraci felt that it was just putting an excerpt from the policy on the agenda so that people understand when they come to meetings.

Public Comment

Henry Bugai, president of the Benchwarmers, explained that he has been pushing for the advertising policy for the last seven years. He noted that they have given everything back to the district and take no overhead. Scholarships and championship jackets are given out. The Benchwarmers have never said no to any sport in the district. They give \$15,000 to \$20,000 a year back to the district, for a total of \$1.8 million since their inception. Mr. Bugai felt if they were going to go out and sell signage, they should keep the money or they won't want to do it.

Adjournment

Mr. Yamartino made a motion, seconded by Dr. Taylor, to adjourn the meeting.

In favor of adjourning the meeting: Mrs. Booth, Mr. Hicks, Mr. Moore, Mr. Roraback, Dr. Taylor, and Mr. Yamartino. Motion passed unanimously.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:05 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Debi Waz

Debi Waz
Alwaz First