



CONSOLIDATED SCHOOL DISTRICT OF NEW BRITAIN

New Britain Board of Education Policy Committee Meeting

June 15, 2020 – 5:30 PM | Virtual Meeting

Call to Order and Opening

Mr. Nicholas Mercier, Policy Committee Chair, called the meeting to order at 6:00 PM.

Board Members Present

Mr. Merrill Gay, Ms. Diane Leja*, Mr. Nicholas Mercier*, Ms. Annie Parker, Ms. Diana Reyes*, Ms. Gayle Sanders-Connolly, Dr. Violet Jiménez Sims*

**Committee members*

CSDNB Staff Present

Mr. Antoine Billy, Mr. Matthew Cannata, Mr. Michael Foran, Ms. Maryellen Manning, Ms. Kristin Salerni, Dr. Nicole Sanders, Ms. Nancy Sarra, Mr. Mark Spalding, Ms. Donnah Swaby

Old Business

Review Policy 6141.32 – Access to Internet

This policy was initially reviewed at the Policy Committee Meeting on April 20, 2020. At that time the Policy Committee did not recommend any revisions to the Board Policy Statement itself, but did recommend review of the Administrative Procedure in order to ensure that it is up to date. Mr. Matthew Cannata, Manager of Safety and Communications, has brought forward recommended changes to the social media section (D. Guidelines for Social Media and Cyber Bullying) of the Administrative Procedure. This proposed revision of the Administrative Procedure will be forwarded to the Superintendent's Cabinet for review.

Ms. Leja motioned that the Board reaffirm/approve Policy 6141.32 – Access to Internet at the next regular meeting, seconded by Ms. Reyes. Motion carried unanimously.

Review Policy 4118.51 – Use of Social Media

This policy was initially reviewed at the Policy Committee Meeting on April 20, 2020. At that time the Policy Committee recommended that this policy be referred to the Superintendent's Cabinet for review in order to ensure that it is up to date. Mr. Cannata has brought forward multiple recommended revisions to the policy which were modeled after policies from CAFE and Granby Public Schools.

Dr. Jiménez Sims motioned that the Board approve updated Policy 4118.51 – Use of Social Media at the next regular meeting, seconded by Ms. Reyes. Motion carried unanimously.

New Britain Board of Education

Merrill Gay – President | Nicholas Mercier – Vice President | Violet Jiménez Sims – Secretary

Monica Dawkins | Anthony Kane | Diane Leja | Annie S. Parker | Diana Reyes | Nancy Rodriguez | Gayle Sanders-Connolly

Review and Approve Minutes from the Policy Committee Meeting on May 18, 2020

There were no recommended changes to the minutes from the Policy Committee Meeting on May 18, 2020.

Dr. Jiménez Sims motioned to approve the minutes from the Policy Committee Meeting on May 18, 2020 as submitted, seconded by Ms. Leja. Motion carried unanimously.

Discuss School Uniforms / Review Policy 5132.10 – School Attire

This topic has been raised by community members who are concerned about families being unable to provide their children with uniforms in light of the many challenges they are facing due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Committee member suggestions/recommendations for the Board Policy Statement:

- Ms. Reyes expressed concern with Section III of the board policy which references disciplinary consequences for the child/children out of uniform.

Committee member suggestions/recommendations for the Administrative Procedure:

- Ms. Leja noted that we need to be more specific in our prohibition of masks in Section II of the Administrative Procedure and eliminate any gender-specific language in Section III.
- Dr. Jiménez Sims recommended review of the prohibition of scarves and head coverings in Section II of the Administrative Procedure citing cultural purposes.

Superintendent Sarra stated that she believes that it would be a good starting point to survey students and families to see how they feel about potential changes to this policy. Ms. Leja questioned if we have leeway in our policy for students who have sensory issues relative to their clothing. Mr. Spalding, Director of Pupil Services, answered that a PPT or 504 decision for a student would take precedence over a board policy. Dr. Jiménez Sims agreed that family input is important and suggested giving families a choice over whether or not to wear a uniform. Dr. Sims also emphasized the importance of having administrators look at the purpose behind keeping the guidelines of the policy and recommended going out into the community and attending meetings as a way to engage disenfranchised families. Mr. Mercier stressed the importance of getting family and community input before moving forward with making any changes to our current policy.

The Policy Committee made the following recommendations with regard to this item:

- Refer the Administrative Procedure of Policy 5132.10 – School Attire to the Superintendent’s Cabinet for review of specific guidelines and bring forward any recommendations
- Add discussion of the temporary suspension of Policy 5132.10 – School Attire to the Board’s agenda for the regular meeting in July
- Plan to discuss topic with the larger community in the fall when students return to school

Review Policy 5145.11 – School Resource Officer

Committee members were provided with copies of current Board Policy 5145.11 – School Resource Officer, the Administrative Procedure regarding School Resource Officers dated July 14, 2014 (Protocols for Police School Resource Officers Access to and Intervention with Students at NBHS), and the MOA between New Britain Public Schools and the New Britain Police Department dated December 8, 2017 for review.

Superintendent Sarra explained that when the Memorandum of Agreement between New Britain Public Schools and the New Britain Police Department was designed in 2017 the intention was that police officers would be there to offer support as opposed to serving a punitive or disciplinary role.

Ms. Diane Leja expressed concern over the tone that we are setting by having police officers present in our school buildings specifically with regard to how children of color may react to their presence.

Mr. Antoine Billy, Associate Principal of New Britain High School, agreed that he understands how some students at New Britain High School may view School Resource Officers in a negative manner. He stated that while School Resource Officers do work hard to try to build relationships with the students, he would like to see increased communication between administrators and SROs to ensure that interventions are dictated by the administration and not others. Mr. Billy believes that the administration puts kids first by making sure that students are kept safe, making sure that they are kept out of the judicial system, and ensuring that the relationships between community members and SROs are pleasant.

Mr. Mercier pointed out that the district is supposed to be meeting with the New Britain Police Department on a quarterly basis to review arrest information per the MOA. He expressed concern with discretion the administration may have regarding whether to allow access to students during school hours as referenced in the Administrative Procedure Section "Situations Where the Police Request Access to Student without a Warrant." Mr. Mercier believes that unless it is a serious emergency situation, we should make sure parents are notified prior to allowing police access to our students per our attorney's suggestion at the end of this section of the Administrative Procedure. He also questioned if having armed police was the best way to go about building relationships with the students. Mr. Mercier would like information included in the MOA detailing what sort of training police officers have received regarding educational issues, our intervention policies, implicit bias, and de-escalation. In addition, he recommended having students complete an anonymous survey about they feel about SROs in order to get critical student input.

Dr. Jiménez Sims expressed concern that the Board has not been receiving reports as outlined in the MOA and board policy. She believes this is problematic because this data hasn't been tracked and we don't know the effects it may have had on children. Dr. Sims emphasized the importance of looking at research regarding SROs in urban districts and the school-to-prison pipeline. She contrasted witnessing the arrest of a student at New Britain High School for marijuana possession while a student in a suburban district received a referral to counseling services through a school-based substance abuse program and no police involvement for the same offense. Dr. Sims stated that we need to be mindful that every child of every background does not experience the same level of grace and support when making adolescent mistakes.

Ms. Donnah Swaby, Coordinator of Special Education and Pupil Services, K-Age 21 and Districtwide, stressed the importance of looking at disaggregated arrest data and surveying the students to get a sense of how children of color feel about the police presence in the high school. She expressed concern with the trainings that New Britain police receive specifically with regard to excessive force and de-escalation strategies. Ms. Swaby questioned whether the third police officer at NBHS would be needed in the fall if the schools reopened with smaller classroom sizes and no lunch waves in the cafeteria. She strongly disagrees with the language in the Administrative Procedure that states that if police do not have a warrant they may talk to students without parent permission. Ms. Swaby believes that if we are to continue to have police presence in our schools we need to make sure that we are receiving monthly and quarterly reports from the New Britain Police Department in order to review the data. In addition, she stated that it is important to open up communication between our community of students and police officers to help repair and heal what is broken.

Mr. Billy stressed that building administration at New Britain High School does make sure that a parent is contacted when a police officer comes into the building with an arrest warrant for their child. If parents are unable to be reached or cannot come in, administrators will sit with the student (in loco parentis).

Mr. Mercier believes a strong overhaul of the reviewed documents needs to be completed if we are going to continue to have SROs in the school district.

The Policy Committee made the following recommendations with regard to this item:

- Superintendent Sarra will direct appropriate staff members including Mr. Billy, Ms. Swaby, and Dr. Sanders, to begin reviewing Board Policy 5145.11 – School Resource Officer, the Administrative Procedure regarding School Resource Officers and the MOA between New Britain Public Schools and the New Britain Police Department and bring forward any recommendations.
- Student feedback will be solicited in the fall.
- District attorneys should be consulted regarding what our legal obligation is with regard to situations involving arrest

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warrants.

Discuss Title IX Changes

Mr. Mark Spalding (Director of Pupil Services), Ms. Maryellen Manning (Director of Personnel and Talent Development), and Dr. Nicole Sanders (Assistant Chief Talent Officer) recently attended a webinar regarding the new Title IX regulations that go into effect on August 14, 2020. Mr. Spalding shared slides from the presentation with committee members highlighting some of the changes regarding the definition of sexual harassment, standards of district liability, creation of new roles, and the grievance process for sexual harassment investigations. Mr. Spalding will continue to meet with Ms. Manning and Superintendent Sarra and will bring forward any recommended revisions to the district's Title IX policies and procedures prior to the start of the next academic year.

Closing and Adjournment

Ms. Reyes motioned to adjourn at 7:18 PM, seconded by Ms. Leja. Motion carried unanimously.