

POLICY SUBCOMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES

January 29, 2018

4:30 p.m.

Morton Middle School Community Room

1135 North Main Street

Fall River, MA 02720

A roll call at 4:30 p.m. showed:

Mr. Costa: Present

Mr. Khoury: Present

Mr. Hetzler: Present

Also present were Superintendent Malone, Julia Carlson, Brian Mikolazyk and Ken Pacheco

A salute to the flag followed the roll call. Mr. Costa read the Open Meeting Law.

1. **Discussion and Vote to Refer:** Student Registration/Assignment

MOTION: Mr. Hetzler-Mr. Khoury: To refer the Parent and Community Engagement proposed policy to the full School Committee.

Discussion:

Superintendent Malone stated that they have been working for a good part of year on refining and enhancing the student registration process. The goal of today's meeting was to get the Subcommittee's feedback as they continue to refine this and before they bring it to the full School Committee for a first read. They would like to bring this to the full School Committee for a first read at the next meeting. Their taskforce has put in a lot of time and effort to figure out how they can be more customer service oriented. They want to have a clear, upfront presence of information so that everyone can understand the process and how it works so that the School Department is not scrambling in August to get 10,000 kids assigned. As they're balancing class sizes and reducing transportation costs, they're considering using flexible assignment zones to meet the needs of class size.

Ms. Carlson stated that she will be going through five brief key ideas to share where they are and where they are moving toward. The first one is the old model. Fall River has generally always been a neighborhood district but those lines have been skewed over the years. A lot of it is based on parent preference. One of the key things that she noticed when she was assigned to this taskforce was that in the old brochures there were a lot of references to "choice" and how parents choose their child's school which is contradictory to how their actual neighborhood district was set up. One of the first things they did was streamline the process. The second key area is the new model. This is the direction where they are looking to go. This is to really specify that Fall River is a neighborhood school district, meaning if a student lives in a certain neighborhood, the school in that area is the school they will be assigned to. One of the things that they instituted this past summer was they had parents fill out a form that Brian Mikolazyk put on the webpage. If parents wanted to request a school outside of their neighborhood school, they went through a time period where the leadership team looked at three different criteria: siblings, hardship, and preference. Based on seat availability, they granted those requests but this came without transportation. Before, if parents got a choice, the district did

transport; however, this time, the parents were notified that, if they chose a school outside of their neighborhood, the School Department would not provide transportation.

Mr. Costa stated that it was his understanding that, if a child was assigned to a particular school under a special permit and it was approved, it was under the conditions that transportation would not be provided.

Mr. Pacheco stated that he thinks that parents initially agreed to that but then attendance problems started to happen and, when the attendance officers did their house visits, they found out that there was no transportation available at home so the request would come in as a hardship for transportation. Mr. Costa stated that there have been multiple conversations about when parents put in for a hardship. It is well understood that it is the parent's responsibility to get their child to school. If attendance becomes an issue, someone should have been looking to make a better arrangement that accommodated that student better such as sending them back to a school that they could get to. Mr. Pacheco stated that the problem with that is, once a student is in a new school, that student's slot gets taken up by another student. So in order to get that student back to their neighborhood school, it becomes a double displacement to make room. Mr. Costa asked how many of the home visits resulted in a CRA (Child Requiring Assistance). Mr. Pacheco stated that he didn't know. The visits that they have done in the last three or four months have been that kind of case but those weren't students that were moved this year.

Mr. Costa stated that there were court proceedings they could take for a student's failure to attend school. He's wondering how many of these attendance issues were attached to a student with a special permit. He feels that it's the responsibility of the parent, if they make that special request, to get their child to school. If they agree to that but don't follow through, it shouldn't fall on the District to provide transportation. Superintendent Malone said that, going forward, he will hold people accountable to the way things should be. Mr. Costa asked how the new proposal addresses the issue that they're speaking of now. Ms. Carlson stated that she has received several requests for transfers this year and she has not approved a single one. She thinks that parents were in the habit of selecting a school they wanted to send their child to and, if the Parent Information Center denied their request, they would ask someone else. That person would approve the request then the parent would turn around and file for a hardship so that they could get transportation. Now they have situations where students are in different neighborhood schools. That's one of the reasons they are looking at sibling preference. One of the big changes that they were making this year is that no transportation will be provided for those who are not in their neighborhood school. If a student is chronically absent in a non-neighborhood school, they do have the option of returning that student to their neighborhood school but there is no policy that states that they can do that at this point. Mr. Costa said that that brings them back to square one because it's considered a double bump. Bringing a student back to their neighborhood school may require them to bump another student from that spot. He doesn't want to see multiple schools where kids keep getting bounced back to neighborhood schools. Transportation should have never been provided and parents should have been held accountable with a court action. He knows there was a situation where a special permit was requested for a child and it was made clear that transportation would not be provided. He knows that has always been practice but he's not sure if there's a policy. He thinks that they may have to craft one. Superintendent Malone stated that, once the document that is being proposed is approved by the School Committee, it does become policy even though it's procedural stuff.

Mr. Costa stated that he understood providing transportation to students if they have capacity on the bus and they're not making any special arrangements like door-to-door transportation; however, if a parent is asking the School Department to make special arrangements to pick up their student, that's an issue. Mr. Hetzler asked if they needed to add that language in the policy or if they needed to create a separate policy.

Ms. Carlson said that she included some of that language in the document. One of the components that they started this summer was, when parents put in for a transfer to an out-of-neighborhood school, it all got tracked in one system so they were able to see when they filled out the request, when it was submitted, and it's all kept in one place so they were able to verify the information. For kindergarten, because they don't have an equitable number of classrooms in all their schools, they only start assigning students to neighborhood schools in first grade. For example, a child may be in kindergarten at Spencer Borden because there is plenty of space, but that may not be their neighborhood school. When they get to first grade, they will be transferred to their neighborhood school. Superintendent Malone stated that, because of the way that they are structured, if the child is assigned to a kindergarten seat at Fonseca but they don't live in the area of Fonseca, they most likely will not be going to Fonseca for the first grade. Mr. Costa said that he does not agree with bouncing kids from school to school. Superintendent Malone stated that that was why they wanted to assign by the neighborhood school at the very beginning so that kids have that longevity. Mr. Costa said that he understood why they do it in Pre-K because those slots are different. Ms. Carlson stated that kindergarten is not compulsory in the state of Massachusetts right now so that's why some schools may have two kindergarten classes but four sections of first grade or vice versa. Superintendent Malone added that, if a parent requests a transfer for their child in the second grade and the School Department approves it, they will not allow another transfer for the subsequent grades for this student. Mr. Costa asked if they had the number for how many schools don't have a significant number of kindergarten classrooms. Mr. Mikolazyk provided the Committee with a handout.

Ms. Carlson stated that, because this is going to take a while to get streamlined, it may take a couple of years to get kids in their neighborhood schools. She pointed out in the handout where is showed that Spencer Borden has four kindergarten classes and three first grade classes. So they know that 25 of those kindergarten students will not be going to Spencer Borden for first grade. Superintendent Malone said that unless they add a class there. Ms. Carlson said that the reason for this is because Spencer Borden holds one of their largest population of special education subseparate classrooms so it's based on the number of classrooms they can house within a building. She pointed out that Fonseca is a three-unit kindergarten class but it jumps up to five units for first grade. They're trying to streamline it so that they have the same number of kindergarten classes and the same number of first grade classes to keep kids in their neighborhood schools. They're just starting that process so it's going to take a little time to do that. Superintendent Malone said that if there are 125 kids that live in the Fonseca district and only 100 of them go to school there, those 25 kids who start somewhere else for kindergarten will stay where they started.

Mr. Khoury agreed that it was better to start the kids out at a school that they're going to stay at. Mr. Costa asked what the School Department does if the parents want their child to come back to a school for first grade that they weren't at in kindergarten but it's their neighborhood school. Ms. Carlson stated that this was why they have been discussing flexible boundaries because that situation has happened. They had over 300 students that they had to move out of Fonseca this year to place at a different school and many of those families did not want their children going to a different school mainly because they lived close by. On the last page of the document, they gave a definition as to what flexible boundaries are. In the past, when they have wanted to change the boundaries to lines of where kids will go to school, it can be dramatic. They have an overabundance of students but no way of putting those students in a particular school. On the reverse, they have a number of schools where half the number of students are not from that neighborhood. One of the options they have is flexible boundaries that they can look at the lines and pinpoint where every child in their district lives and they can have flexible boundaries. So, if one school gets filled up, hopefully less than one mile to the other school, that boundary can go to another school.

Mr. Costa asked, if they have a situation where a child is in School A for kindergarten but in first grade there's no room for the child so they have to go back to another school and there's no room there, if that becomes the School Department's burden for transportation. Mr. Pacheco clarified that it's the School Department's burden for transportation once they move a student out of their neighborhood school the first time. Mr. Costa stated that not if they're on a special permit. Mr. Pacheco confirmed that that was correct but stated that, for instance, Fonseca had 400 students that were not in their neighborhood school. They were already getting transportation. If they come back to their neighborhood school, the School Department doesn't need to transport, but if they stay at Fonseca, the School Department will transport until they get to middle school. If a student is at Spencer Borden and legitimately belongs at Spencer Borden but Spencer Borden is full then that student is going to be transported at the School Department's dime to the next school. They will stay in that next school unless the parents choose to go back to Spencer Borden if there's an opening. Most of the time that doesn't happen because parents don't want to give up the transportation for the sake of their child going to a school closer to home. The two extremes are that Spencer Borden has 104 seats available and, if they were to assign all the students who belonged in the neighborhood, only 49 of the 104 seats would be used. So there would be 55 open seats. The contrast to that is Fonseca, which they have 78 Grade K seats available. If they reassign the neighborhood, there would be 172 kids that should be there which gives them a short fall of 94 seats.

Mr. Pacheco pointed out the Fonseca zone on the map which showed that it was enormous. Halfway down the map, that area is all transported by bus. Spencer Borden has the issue when they do not have enough students in their own district so there's a little overflow from Fonseca. Silvia's district is also enormous. The problem is that most of the new growth is going to happen in the area of Silvia. There's a potential of 100 houses being built within the next year in the Silvia area and they don't have any space in Silvia for one more student. Mr. Costa asked how many students they were transporting to Silvia for special programming. Mr. Pacheco said that there were quite a few. Mr. Costa suggested that they take a look strategically over the next couple of years whether it's a benefit to continue to have those programs at Silvia or if they should be held somewhere else. Mr. Pacheco said that the programs are at Silvia, Spencer Borden, and Henry Lord. Mr. Costa said that, when they first put the programs in, it may have worked logistically at the time but, if they see in the next couple of years that special programming is taking up seats for neighborhood students, then they have to decide if that special program needs to be put in a school that can house it. Mr. Pacheco agreed. He added that some of the easier fixes is to straighten out some of the zones. They do a lot of cutting in and cutting out and that was to accommodate the fact that Spencer Borden's zone has a lot of areas without population whereas in Fonseca's zone everything is densely populated. The same thing when they get over to Greene. Greene is mostly neighborhood. However, there is still transportation provided for Greene. The worst transportation piece is Henry Lord because of the fact that it's boundary is on the state line. They have students 3.5 miles away going to Henry Lord. With the flexible zone piece, they need to bring Tansey a little further north. They need to bring Spencer Borden a little further north and a little further south in order to pick up some of the focus from Fonseca. He needs to figure out what they need to do with Doran. They're providing some students with transportation to Doran already so, to pick up an area that is currently Fonseca, bringing them to Doran wouldn't be a major expense to transport them. The problem is that they can't walk because of the highway. They can't get from one side to the other side without coming all the way down and walking along the battleship to get to Doran. Mr. Costa asked if they'll know where the students are transported from in regard to special programming. Mr. Pacheco said that they would and that the new software is going to identify where the students are for special populations throughout the city so they're going to be able to see those concentrations and flip them around. Even though they are going to require transportation, they may be able to move them to a school more local.

Superintendent Malone stated that for the flexible boundaries, it's not so much moving it street by street; it's knowing that they can flex within the area based on year to year how many kids live in a certain zone. In the system it may show Fonseca as the neighborhood school but also School B would show up in the flexible zone and they could potentially assign based on class size. Mr. Khoury asked what the numbers were at Fonseca. Ms. Carlson said that in kindergarten they have 172 kids, in first grade they have 187, in second grade they have 177, in third grade they have 193, in fourth grade they have 198 and in fifth grade they have 161. Mr. Khoury noticed that the boundary was very big. He asked, because Doran is K-8, if that impacted the boundaries at Fonseca and if the boundaries changed when it became a K-8 school. Mr. Costa said that he didn't recall if they touched the boundaries when they transitioned. Mr. Pacheco said that he wasn't sure but he knows that they are a two-unit school so they have two Grade 6 classes, two Grade 7s, and two Grade 8s. So those could be another six classes available to elementary if it wasn't K-8. Superintendent Malone said that it was same issue with Lord. Mr. Khoury said that it seemed like those programs would impact the boundaries for the elementary schools. Ms. Carlson stated that it showed that they have 172 kindergarten students in the district but right now there are only 78 that actually attend that school, which means there are 94 students that they had to move to different schools in first grade. They would have to move out 57 students in first grade and 47 in second grade. It shows on the handout how many students had to move out of that school. Superintendent Malone said that they are built for 130 kids in each grade at that school.

Mr. Khoury acknowledged that the School Department is trying to work the numbers where it becomes more efficient district wide to get these kids in the proper setting. Superintendent Malone stated that, long term, as they think about reducing class size, maybe Henry Lord could become a K-5 school so they can add back one classroom and they could fit the two classrooms of middle school kids into the other three middle schools. There's a huge need because most of the kids are living in the Fonseca zone and they don't have enough space. Mr. Khoury said that that must impact Greene to some degree. Superintendent Malone said that it impacted Greene, Doran, Fonseca, and Henry Lord. Mr. Costa stated that he would not support changing Henry Lord because there have been too many transitions including being closed. He thinks it needs to have some consistency to see if it could grab some traction. He understands the need for additional seats but he'd hate to see them change the model again. Superintendent Malone stated that they're going to need more seats at some point and they're going to have options. They've looked at every single option in the city to try to get them to 22-23 K-3 class size. They need more classroom spaces. They're going to free up a couple of rooms at Henry Lord when they move the two storage rooms out.

Ms. Carlson stated that they are also looking at having a director of the Parent and Community Engagement Center so that they could have a one-stop shop for all parents when they come in to the school system. They're looking for someone who understands the process and aligns with the process. In the packet, she included a sample of what that looks like. They've done a lot of talks about operation this summer to streamline the system. They've worked with the parent engagement workers to get an idea of what their day looks like. They did make some changes to the summer hours so that every family could have a registration process that they could go through. On the back end, they're refining how they register kids from start to finish. But it's a very tedious and exhausting process that really comes down to sticking to neighborhood schools and making sure that everyone is on that same page so when a parent says that they've heard bad things about one school and would prefer their child go to another school, they can inform parents that they assign students based on where they live.

Mr. Hetzler asked, in regard to transportation for a student whose address changes in the middle of the year, if that student would be placed in their neighborhood school for the following year. Ms. Carlson said that, what

was agreed upon in their meeting was that the parents would have the option of going to their new neighborhood school. If they chose to stay in the school their child has been at, the parent would have to provide transportation. Mr. Hetzler asked, for students who were being moved, if they would be given proper notice. Ms. Carlson said that they would not change any student who is registered in a school from first grade on. They will remain in that school. The only students they will be looking at changing is any first graders and incoming sixth graders. All of their first graders will be placed in their neighborhood school. If they want a school other than that, they'll have to go through PACE who will look at siblings, hardship, and preference. In the packet, they have the timeline of when they'll have that filled out and how they'll review that. Mr. Hetzler asked if the students who will be changing schools next year will be notified according to the timeline so they'll have the ability to put in a request. Ms. Carlson stated that that was why they were bringing this before the School Committee now so that they can get this up on the webpage so that they will know if they want their child to attend a school that is not their neighborhood school, they can put this request in. June 5 is the cut-off date. It's a tedious task to go through all the information, verify it, and talk to families. Last year, they did this as a committee but this will be something that the director of PACE will handle going forward.

Superintendent Malone stated that they were going to have some retirements in the next year and they're trying to figure out how they're going to do the whole Parent and Community Engagement process. Mr. Khoury thinks that this is a well vetted idea. The targets and demographics are always changing. He thinks that this is a good and fair process. In looking at attendance citywide, he knows that it's an issue. He praised the Letourneau School for having the walking school bus in order to make sure that kids get to school. He thinks it would be great if other elementary schools could have a walking school bus. Mr. Pacheco stated that Fonseca also has one.

Mr. Costa asked, for all special permits that have been approved to date, if those students will not be changed year to year. Ms. Carlson said that this was correct. Mr. Costa asked if the School Department receives any new requests if those individuals will have to follow this proposed policy. Ms. Carlson said that that is what they did last summer. If a student gets a special permit, the School Department did not provide transportation. Mr. Costa asked where the funding was coming from for the proposed PACE job description. Superintendent Malone said that he was going to build that into the budget this year. It's a full-time position and a community engagement position. He has a retirement on another senior-level position that is less than that but he's looking at all the roles of the community engagement specialists in this role. So it's parent engagement, student assignment, and community engagement. They're looking for someone who could be a second language speaker with experience in community engagement and an understanding in the technology to make sure that all the assignments happen. Mr. Costa asked if this will be on top of the budget they have now. Superintendent Malone said that he would be zero basing the budget. Their net school spending figures have gone up substantially so there will be growth in the budget when they do the zero-based budget. They've done cost containments and program improvements. This will be a program improvement. If they don't end up with this, they'll have to come up with Plan B.

Mr. Costa stated that there was a lot of work needed in the parent center. One of the things he hears most often about them is that it's not user friendly. He's heard from someone about their experience with PIC and was embarrassed when he found out some of the comments that were made. Ms. Carlson said that Superintendent Malone has sent her and a team to look at best practices in high performing districts. She and Mr. Pacheco are on a committee that rewrote the procedure starting with as soon as a family walks in. Mr. Costa asked when this was put together. Ms. Carlson said that it has not been laid out yet. Mr. Costa stated that the person that

he heard from was a new family looking to enroll their child in kindergarten and they felt brushed off. The mother was told that the parent center didn't have the information she was looking for. He believed someone should have taken down her name and phone number in order to find out the information and let her know that someone would get back to her once they had the information. The parent should not be told that they have to check with the principal for the information. Proper customer service shows that Fall River is welcoming new students into their district and not giving them the run around and having parents contact schools about their practice. He suggested that someone do a cold call to the Parent Information Center as a potential parent of a new student so that they can get a sampling of whether or not these types of scenarios are occurring. Ms. Carlson stated that they have done that. Mr. Khoury asked if there was an evaluating procedure for that. Mr. Costa said that he didn't believe so. Superintendent Malone said that they are working on it.

All were in favor	None were opposed	Motion passed
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MOTION: Mr. Khoury-Mr. Hetzler: To refer the job description of the Director of the Parent and Community Engagement Center to the full School Committee.

No discussion

All were in favor	None were opposed	Motion passed
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2. **Discussion and Vote to Refer:** Public Comment

MOTION: Mr. Hetzler-Mr. Khoury: To refer Public Comment to the full School Committee.

Discussion:

Superintendent Malone stated that he included three documents in this packet. The first document is the School Committee policy from 2010 on Public Comment. There was past practice where the public could only speak on items that were on the agenda. That was practice but it was never policy. The new charter has changed to say that it does not have to be items on the agenda. He's been working for the past couple of months prior to the new year with former School Committee member Dr. Edward Costar on this policy. The second document is something that they worked on that he feels accomplished both the original policy and ensures that the new charter language is included so that public comment would include anything that is educationally related and doesn't have to be on the agenda and is done in a controlled manner.

Mr. Costa agrees that the public input policy needed to be revamped. His understanding is, although the charter has been accepted, there is language in the charter that any implementation has to be put in place by June. So they have time before adoption is made. Mr. Khoury remembers Dr. Costar's last meeting before he stepped off the board and he was answering questions regarding this topic. He thinks that they are all working to adapt to the new charter. He respects Dr. Costar's experience in writing policy since he's been doing this for many years. Mr. Costa said that he has lived through meetings where public comment wasn't done properly. There were people who formed attacks on the board, Superintendent, and the administration. Part of the feedback they got from DESE was that it put the Committee in a bad spot to catch them off guard on topics that they weren't prepared to address. There is certain information that should not be shared in a public forum with a public body in that manner so they adopted a practice that public comment needed to be an item on the agenda. If there were items that the public wanted to discuss that weren't on the agenda, they would have someone from administration meet with that individual to assist that person.

Mr. Hetzler asked if they thought that #4 ("Improper conduct and remarks will not be allowed. Defamatory or abusive remarks are always out of order. If a speaker persists in improper conduct or remarks, the Chairperson may terminate that individual's privilege of address.") addressed that. Mr. Costa said that he thinks that #4

and #5 (“Speakers may offer objective criticisms or concerns regarding school operations or programs, but in public session the Committee will not hear personal complaints of school personnel, nor against any member of the school community. Administrative channels are the proper means for disposition of legitimate complaints involving staff members.”) does. He hopes that, going forward, the board will alert the chair if they are not comfortable with the remarks being made and assist the chair in making the right decision. It was never the intent of the Committee at any point to stifle or push back public comment. They were following the guidance of a DESE advisor who was there to assist them with running a more efficient meeting where the focus was on policy, budgets, school performance, and not someone who wanted to take a poke at the administration on something that wasn’t vetted. He wants people to have the opportunity to express themselves. He just doesn’t want it to turn into a sideshow of personal attacks. It detracts from the work they set out to do that evening.

All were in favor None were opposed Motion passed

MOTION: Mr. Hetzler-Mr. Khoury: To adjourn.

No discussion

All were in favor None were opposed Motion passed (5:29 p.m.)

Respectfully submitted,



Administrative Assistant

Documents Referred to:

- Proposed Parent and Community Engagement Center (PACE) Policy
- Proposed job description for the Director of the Parent and Community Engagement Center
- Public Participation at School Committee Meetings (BEDH) Policy (CURRENT)
- Public Participation at School Committee Meetings (BEDH) Policy (PROPOSED)
- City Charter: Public Comment Rules or Policy

ADA Coordinator: Gary P. Howayeck, Esq.- 508.324.2650

Please note: A videotape/DVD of this meeting is on file in the School Committee Office and is available for review by contacting the Administrative Assistant for the School Committee Services