

School Committee Policy Review Subcommittee
Monday, January 11, 2021
5:00 PM – 6:30 PM
Remote via Zoom

Policy Review Subcommittee members present: David Pearlman (Chair), Dimitry Anselme, Andreas Liu, and Jennifer Monopoli.

School Staff present: Mary Ellen Normen, Casey Ngo-Miller, and Robin Coyne.

Mr. Pearlman called the meeting to order at 5:00 PM.

1) Approval of Minutes

On a motion of Dr. Liu and seconded by Mr. Anselme, the Policy Review Subcommittee voted unanimously (by roll call) to approve the minutes of the December 14, 2020 Policy Review Subcommittee meeting.

2) Update on Attendance Procedures

Ms. Ngo-Miller provided an update on Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) guidance for taking and reporting attendance in hybrid and remote learning models. According to the DESE preexisting attendance policy, a student must be at school, at a school related activity, or receiving academic instruction for at least half the school day to be counted as present. Students who are not physically present at school but who are receiving academic instruction from the district for at least half the school day should be counted as present. Examples of academic instruction include tutoring, online learning, or distance learning. Ms. Ngo-Miller reported that student absenteeism has been higher during the pandemic, particularly at the middle school and high school levels, for a variety of reasons.

It was noted that some parents had raised concerns about Student Attendance practices during the pandemic. Some families have elected to keep their children home while waiting to switch from in-person/hybrid learning models to remote learning models. These students are marked absent on in-person days. Ms. Ngo-Miller commented that the Coordinator of the Office of Registration and Enrollment would be able to provide information regarding how many students have missed ten or more days and how this has been addressed at the school level. The Subcommittee discussed why it isn't feasible to allow students to switch models at any time, e.g., planning/scheduling issues, different teams of providers, and administrative workload. Ms. Ngo-Miller commented that principals would welcome a review of the Student Attendance Policy.

3) Discussion of Student Grouping, Inclusion and Placement Practices

The Subcommittee discussed the Student Grouping, Inclusion and Placement Practices Policy. Members noted feedback from a member of the public who solicited feedback from educators and administrators from two schools. Members suggested consideration of whether the language addressing inclusion should be modified. Ms. Ngo-Miller reviewed some of the many considerations that factor into placement decisions.

The Subcommittee discussed the statements below, and the degree to which they align with current practice.

In order to create effective learning environments and maintain valued diversity within each classroom, efforts will be made to place students with some peers who share similar profiles so that teachers can more effectively address the strengths and needs of all students.

Mastery will be determined by various and multiple PSB assessments and by school personnel. These opportunities are intended to provide students with curricular challenge in a setting appropriate to the student's social and emotional development, and will include the possibility of elementary student enrollment in BHS courses, as well as high school student participation at local colleges or universities.

Members suggested soliciting additional input from administrators/educators on the following: 1) current practice, including how decisions are made in the schools; and 2) best practices in the field. At that point, the Subcommittee can assess whether the Policy should be altered. Ms. Normen suggested checking whether Massachusetts Education Reform impacted the School Committee's role relative to this and other policies.

4) Discussion of Student Rights and Responsibilities Policy

The Subcommittee discussed the Student Rights and Responsibilities Policy. The Policy should align with current practice and other PSB Policies (e.g., the Yearbook Policy and the proposed Student Activity Policy). Ms. Normen suggested checking that the language complies with Massachusetts Education Reform, and asking Brookline High School Administrators/Educators for input. The Subcommittee discussed ways in which students can provide input on curriculum, and discussed how this can benefit student engagement and learning. Members suggested that this Policy be reviewed through an equity lens.

5) Discussion of Special Services Policy

The Subcommittee discussed the Special Services Policy. Ms. Normen commented that most, if not all of the items in the Policy are already governed by regulations, requirements, and case law. Ms. Ngo-Miller will review the policy to determine which sections can be eliminated. Members recommended maintaining policy language requiring regular reports on litigation. Current language is as follows: *5. Quarterly, Town Counsel shall forward to the School Committee a list of litigation in process for informational purposes.* Ms. Ngo-Miller will get feedback from Counsel regarding the appropriate level of reporting. She suggested biannual reports to the School Committee. Ms. Normen suggested that reporting could also be incorporated into the Quarterly Financial Reports.

Ms. Normen will send members a draft policy that addresses annual review of one-third of the Policy Manual each year.

Ms. Ngo-Miller provided an overview of current practice around In-School Observations.

6) Discussion of Policy Drafts under Consideration by the School Committee

Mr. Anselme reported that he is reviewing Concord and Cambridge norms regarding communication between School Committee members and staff. He intends to revise the proposed Brookline School Committee Roles and Norms document prior to the January 21, 2021 School Committee meeting. The Subcommittee discussed whether it is necessary to include language regarding response to emails. Comments included the following: support maintaining flexibility; requiring the Chair to respond to all emails on behalf of the School Committee would require a great deal of Chair time and effort; look at how other communities handle this issue; practice could vary depending on the volume of emails pertaining to one issue; perhaps the Chair and Vice Chair could respond to issues that generate a lot of emails.

7) New Business

Ms. Normen reported that the proposed Student Activities Policy is ready for review. She suggested that the Policy Review and Finance Subcommittees schedule a joint meeting to discuss the proposed Policy.

Ms. Normen reported that she will be asking the Finance Subcommittee to discuss proposed changes to Public Schools of Brookline Fiscal Policies.

Ms. Ngo-Miller will ask Principals if there are any policy issues they would like addressed.

The meeting adjourned at 6:30 PM.