

Salem School Committee
Meeting Minutes
Monday, November 20, 2017

A Committee of the Whole (COW) meeting of the Salem School Committee was held on Monday, November 20, 2017 at 4:16 p.m. in the School Committee Chambers at Collins Middle School, 29 Highland Avenue, Salem, MA.

Members Present: Mr. Patrick Schultz, Dr. Brendan Walsh, Ms. Mary Manning, Ms. Kristine Wilson, and Ms. Deborah Amaral

Members Absent: Mayor Kimberley Driscoll, Mr. James Fleming

Others Present: Margarita Ruiz, Superintendent, Kate Carbone, Assistant Superintendent for Teaching and Learning, Margaret Marotta, Assistant Superintendent for Pupil Personnel Services, Kristin Shaver, Business Manager, Jill Conrad, Chief of Systems Strategy, Kelley Rice, Chief of Communications, Sayonara Reyes, Manager of the Parent Information Center (PIC)

Call to Order

Dr. Walsh called the Committee of the Whole (COW) Meeting of the Salem School Committee to order at 4:16 p.m.

Review of the Revised Policy #5103 Controlled Choice Student Assignment

Superintendent Ruiz began with an introduction of the policy. They have been through a journey in developing this policy since July of this year. Ms. Ruiz introduced the changes on the policy. From the discussions of the policy, the Subcommittee decided to keep the concept of choice as part of the policy as well as the concept of the 5% objectives of achieving balanced enrollments across all schools. Those continue to be big tenets on this new policy. The new iteration of the policy does the following:

- This policy much more clearly outlines the Controlled Choice Student Assignment process in much more detail than the other.
- It introduces the concept of assigning individual enrollment targets relative to each school in terms of achieving that 5% balance enrollment. It looks at the enrollment of each particular school and analyzes how close they are to meeting that 5% and gives the Superintendent the ability to set specific number targets for both low and non-low income categories based on each individual school.
- Removes language from the previous policy stating that open seats would be given to those on waiting lists, regardless of their income category. Waiting lists would still be maintained, but spaces would only be assigned based on the designated income category.

Superintendent Ruiz continued that one of the big tenets of this new policy is placing strong emphasis on the outreach that is needed in order to make sure that populations around the city, especially those that are more marginalized and do not have access to information. It answers the questions what are we doing as a district to ensure that we are reaching out to those families so that they understand the choices they have in order to make a good choice for themselves. The Assignment policy is rooted in this concept of choice. Superintendent Ruiz continued that she believes that the biggest change to the policy is really the concept of individual school enrollment targets - how to systematically help their schools get closer to that 5% threshold. It is all based on the current enrollment of the school. Superintendent Ruiz informed the members

that they prepared an example of what things would look like in terms of actual numbers in their schools and asked Ms. Conrad to walk the committee through the different sections of the policy, which provided further details. Ms. Conrad passed out a handout to the School Committee members and read the Introduction out loud, the first page of the packet being a summary of the highlights that they talked about.

School Enrollment Targets

Ms. Conrad continued that one of the key features of this policy, which is different from the other policy, is the individual school enrollment target. The previous policy set the enrollment target for each school in the same proportion as the district-wide average for each school, regardless of where that individual school was relative to its demographics. With this, they have the opportunity to differentiate those targets by school depending on which school may need to enroll more low income or more non-low income – students in order to become more balanced. They can see that as an opportunity to push the needle a little further in either direction. Ms. Conrad directed members to an example they included in the packet. She referred them to the updated copy of the language inside the packet.

Ms. Conrad continued that the first page graph shows the current percentages of low income or non-low income, as measured by the percentage economically disadvantaged students, which is published by the state. This is from the most recently published which is the language in the policy. Ms. Conrad continued by reading out loud the average percentages for the district on the graph before them. They would apply a ‘*One Size Fits All*’ for all schools proportion if they were using the current policy. With the new policy, they would take a look at where each school is relative to this district average and set targets and put more emphasis on the category that need to increase or be decreased.

As an example, Ms. Conrad used the Saltonstall School averages as compared to the district – the *Non-Economically Disadvantaged* category red bar is far higher than the *District-Wide* average and the *Economically Disadvantaged* category blue bar is lower than the *District-Wide* average. They would want to set the target for Saltonstall in a way that weighs the opposite. One way of doing it would be to just flip the proportions – 66% of the available spaces could go to *Economically Disadvantage* students. With this scenario, more seats would be available for students who were economically disadvantaged than those who were non-economically disadvantaged. What is proposed is the general concept that they would look at the data every year and set targets that move the needle for every school. Members continued reviewing the percentage comparisons of the percentages of the economically disadvantaged students and district-wide average. It looks at whether the schools are imbalanced according to the objective as written in the policy, which is to be within 5% of the economically disadvantaged. There are two schools that meet the objective as written in the policy.

Two Different Scenarios for Setting Enrollment Targets

Ms. Conrad walked members through two different scenarios on setting enrollment targets. One scenario is a little more aggressive in setting those targets than the other. By aggressive (just for example purposes) the proportions are simply switched with a little bit of rounding involved. Ms. Conrad gave an example of the Bates School’s targets for the economically and non-economically disadvantaged percentages, which reverses their current proportions. This is just an example of targets that could be set being more aggressive in one direction or another. Ms. Conrad further clarified the process. Members sought further clarification, had questions, and shared feedback. In response to some of the concerns, Ms. Conrad suggested that another way of being moderate is to assign at same proportions as the district level. Ms. Conrad explained that the point of this is to show that it is something where they can use the

information they have to set targets that will help them achieve the overall policy objective but be almost customized for each school based on factors that are important to consider. Members continued discussion and shared feedback on the topic.

Removal of the Choice Procedure Language

Ms. Conrad read the last paragraph on the copy of the current policy 5103 out loud for the members, the paragraph that starts with '*Choice Procedures.*' Essentially, under the current policy, students get on a waiting list when they do not get their first choice. With this language, open seats that are available at the end of the process can be released to those on a waiting list, regardless of income category. That is something that has been allowed by this policy but they are proposing to remove this clause from in the future so that enrollment targets can be maintained with integrity. The updated track changes language in the newly edited policy in the packet.

Ms. Conrad continued by directing the members to page 10 of the packet at hand where they would see the track changes shown in red. The only time they would allow that situation of assigning a student out of category (meaning *low* and *non-low income*) would be if there truly were no spaces available anywhere in the district, in that category, when they come in to register.

There may be a case where the student can come in at some point during the year and there is no space available anywhere in the district, regardless what the student's choices are, in their category, because of the way they did enrollment targets that year, etc. In that case, they would need a practical solution in the moment to get the student to a school – this language would allow them to assign the student to the closest school where there is space available but it would require the Superintendent to document every instance when that happens, so that these situations can be tracked. They can be tracking and reporting on that and using that information to inform the setting of enrollment targets for the future. This would also help the district think more deeply about the enrollment targets together with how they create the supply of available seats in the district.

Discussion on Transportation

Ms. Amaral asked how that would affect bussing; would students get bussing if they were forced to attend another school that is not in their neighborhood. Ms. Conrad responded that it is the same transportation policy that applies to all students. Members agreed that they would have to provide transportation for the students. Ms. Shaver added that students could get the transportation they needed if they lived far enough away, according to the transportation policy. Members shared further insight and feedback on when transportation is and is not provided. Superintendent Ruiz stated that they transport students all over the district whether there is choice or not. It is a matter of distance from the school and home. Members continued to share further insight and feedback.

Discussion on Tracking Additional Factors

Ms. Conrad continued that part of the research in creating this policy involved much discussion and speaking with Consultant Michael Alves who worked with many districts doing Control Choice. Many districts are moving towards what they call this multifactor tracking of Socio-Economic status, rather than just using the one standard measure of socioeconomic status, collecting and identifying additional indicators that help identify, within the category of low income, a set of students who experience high levels of risk factors. An easy one to track that they have data on are '*homeless*' students for example.

Discussion on Section #3 of the New Policy (page 4 of the handout)

Ms. Conrad explained that section 3 of the new policy would mean that they would start to collect additional information and maybe begin to track what that would look like over time. In addition to just looking at the low income measure, they would seek other indicators that would help them to think about how they are enrolling and distributing their highest need students. Ms. Amaral asked if the homeless population tend to change throughout the year or is it pretty constant that they all start in September. Ms. Conrad responded that it does not – they come in all throughout the year.

Discussion on Section #4 Concept of Transparency

Ms. Conrad explained that section 4 places more emphasis on outreach communication, clarifying the process in a very easy transparent accessible way, if at all possible. They tried to get the word out last year, more than before. They can try to continue working to improve it. One of the things they are planning this year is to propose a 2nd Kindergarten event instead of one. The 2nd event would be Spanish speaking with English translation, similar to what they did with the City Wide conversation, maybe held at the Saltonstall School or someplace near the point neighborhood to reach out to families in a more targeted way they have not seen as represented in other Kindergarten nights. Ms. Carbone asked if there was also discussion on not only to hold separate events but also to actively reach out to families. Mr. Schultz added that it was to also actively recruit economically disadvantaged students to Witchcraft and the Saltonstall – to conduct outreach to them informing them that *'this is the policy, this is what they want to achieve, this is a wonderful school, but it lacks the diversity of other schools and they want them to seriously consider sending their child there.'* Ms. Manning asked when the first batch would open. Ms. Conrad responded that it would be the morning after the Kindergarten Information night, which falls on the 2nd week of January. Members had questions, shared feedback, and discussed the topic further. Ms. Conrad said that another strategy would be to have more family engagement facilitators (*staff members*) out in the schools to have better understanding of how the Controlled Choice Student Assignment policy works, so that they can be ambassadors and help navigate the process. Members further discussed concerns, insight, and feedback.

Further Discussion on Updated Policy Language

Ms. Conrad continued that the only other thing that is different from the last time they reviewed this policy is that couple of weeks ago, they talked about a 3-year time frame for this policy and they now have pulled that back to just 2 years and included an additional paragraph that is focusing on really making sure that they are bringing this concept out into the community to talk about student assignment and what should the future of student assignment be so that they can evaluate and determine, in 2 years, whether this is something they want to continue investigating and developing or going in a different direction. Ms. Amaral asked Ms. Conrad if they plan on simplifying this student assignment draft policy before it is posted to the general public. Superintendent Ruiz responded that there are certainly language sections that can be simplified. Members discussed cohabitation of choice and balance.

Setting of the Target Language (page 3 of the handout, #2)

Members carefully read the setting of the target language. Dr. Walsh commented that it is all well and good but ignores the sibling factor. The sibling factor skews the numbers. Ms. Manning suggested they ensure to truly holding the 2 to 1 (such as in the Saltonstall for example) in the few seats that are left over after the siblings are brought in. Mr. Schultz and Ms. Manning agreed that is all they can do. Members further discussed the topic and the Saltonstall School. They wondered of the imbalance at the Saltonstall, being in one of the best neighborhoods in town. It has been there since it opened. Ms. Amaral commented that one

reason might be because all ELL classes have been removed. There were 3 or 4 ELL classes before. Members shared feedback on the topic. Mr. Schultz stated they have a couple of outliers on both sides of the spectrum that they need to be aggressive with. Members discussed the possible feedback they might receive from others. Superintendent Ruiz said they are proposing this policy. She believes it is a good step in the right direction, and there might be others that may not be pleased with the result of the implementation of the policy.

Student Registration Procedures and Requirements (page 6 of the handout)

Ms. Amaral referred to the *Student Registration Procedures and Requirements* on page 6 of the handout where it says, *“In order to qualify for assignment to a school all parents/guardians must complete all student registration forms including submitting required documentation. The following documents are required to enroll a child in the Salem Public Schools”* which is different from registering. That could be a barrier for some families. The list of requirements is just to get a spot. It may not allow parents or guardians to gather everything prior to the start of the school. Ms. Manning that parents might not have all of their child’s immunizations by January. Ms. Conrad said that as long as they receive them before the start of school is okay. Ms. Amaral said that they want to make it as easy as possible for families with fewer resources. Ms. Conrad sought clarification. Members agreed that they were referring to the timing of when the requirements need to be received; it is the timing of when to expect families to provide everything on the list. Members agreed to add a sentence clarifying when all documentation is required before the start of school. Ms. Manning suggested added wording such as the following, *“In order to begin school, you will also need to provide immunization records.”* Mr. Schultz said it is just another sentence. Dr. Walsh stated that it is not part of the selection or enrollment process. School Committee members agreed that they wanted the language to be updated to allow families who may not have the immunizations to be processed for assignment, so long as they submit the documents by the time the child starts school. Ms. Conrad asked Ms. Reyes if applications are processed when they come in, despite not having obtained everything on the list of requirements. Ms. Reyes responded that applications are processed despite not having everything that is required; they do begin processing applications. Families are asked to submit the remaining documentation before the start of school. Ms. Reyes stated that the other issue is that physicals are sometimes held in the summer time. Families are asked to submit recent physicals and then submit those that are done later.

Mr. Schultz asked Ms. Amaral, for clarification, that applicants should not be required to have their immunizations, or more than their immunizations, for the Choice process to begin and for them to put in their choices/make their selections. Ms. Amaral responded that she is saying that they should try to make the application process as easy as possible for families to apply. Mr. Schultz agreed. Ms. Conrad said that what she takes from this is to make sure to clarify language that if families do not happen to have the immunization records, it is not an inhibitor to participate in Batch 1. Dr. Walsh suggested that the fewer words the better. Why have it as part of the Assignment policy? That is a part of the Admission to the schools, which comes later. It doesn’t have to be part of the Assignment policy at all. Ms. Amaral agreed. Ms. Conrad responded that the only reason they did put it in is to try to have all the sections of this policy to have everything in one document that can be referred to. Dr. Walsh said it has nothing to do with the assignment. Ms. Amaral believes it can get overwhelming. Superintendent Ruiz suggested developing an implementation guide that would help families understand the policy. Ms. Amaral said that even if they put the word *‘implementation’*, they have to be careful not to put things in that might inhibit others. For example, proof of residency – hopefully others understand that it is about residing in Salem and not citizenship.

a piece of mail and not citizenship. Mr. Schultz agreed that language be clear enough for everyone. Mr. Schultz suggested they could put the word ‘*not citizenship*’ in parenthesis next to ‘*residency*.’ Ms. Manning suggested that for proof of residency, for example, they could specifically request an electric bill and utility or any other bill. Ms. Conrad suggested the deletion of the sentence altogether or delete section 5 altogether. Members agreed they should clarify proof of residency and put a sentence in that says, “*Immunization records will be required for the child to start school in September.*” Members also discussed the option of the Central Office notifying the families of the need for immunizations once the student has been assigned.

Ms. Amaral had a question pertaining to page 11, the very last page of the handout. Ms. Conrad said that this is saying that over the next two years, they have the responsibility to not just implement this policy but also continue this conversation about the future of controlled choice student assignment. She thought there were many questions that were raised and the decision related to the timing with other things that were going on to keep this more confined. Ms. Manning said they have next year and September to discuss this with them/others. Ms. Amaral said that the reason why no attention was paid to this is due to lack of a show of interest; there have been no complaints for a long time. Members shared feedback, insight, and discussed the topic further.

Conclusion

Ms. Conrad sought clarification/clarity from the members on the final changes in the language for this policy. Members decided to change the policy duration back to 3 years. They have Kindergarten night on January 9, 2018, have two more regular School Committee meetings left, and they need three readings and voted in to be finalized. Members (Dr. Walsh and Ms. Manning) agreed that it could be brought up in tonight’s regular meeting at 7pm and voted on the last two meetings. Ms. Conrad stated that this is not in the Agenda for this evening’s regular School Committee meeting. Dr. Walsh said it is okay. Ms. Manning said that it would come out of the committee. Dr. Walsh said that someone could make a motion to accept the policy, as written, for First reading – knowing that there are going to be changes. He will make the announcement at the regular School Committee meeting this evening. Ms. Conrad offered to make the edit changes now and provide them to the members this evening. Members agreed that the changes are not immediately needed at this time as it would be a First Reading with the understanding that there are going to be changes from now until the next reading.

Adjournment

There being no further business to come before the Committee of the Whole (COW) School Committee this evening. Dr. Walsh entertained the motion to adjourn. Ms. Amaral seconded the motion. The meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully submitted by:

Angelica Alayon, Secretary
Salem School Committee

Meeting Materials

COW Notice 11/20/17
Policy #5103 Controlled Choice Student Assignment
Handout