

**Salem Public Schools
Salem School Committee
POLICY SUBCOMMITTEE
Meeting Minutes
September 14, 2021**

On September 14, 2021 the Policy Subcommittee held its regular meeting using the Zoom on-line meeting platform.

In Attendance: Ms. Ana Nuncio, Ms. Mary Manning, and Mr. Manny Cruz

Members Absent: Mr. James Fleming

Others in Attendance: Mr. Adam Colantuoni and Dr. Stephen Zrike (entered at 8:26am)

Call of Meeting to Order

Ms. Nuncio called the meeting to order at 8:01 am.

Approval of Minutes

Ms. Nuncio notes there are no minutes to approve at this meeting. And no vote needed at this time.

Ms. Nuncio mentions there are only two agenda items and two outstanding items under “Other matters for consideration” are still outstanding.

Other matters for consideration

Ms. Nuncio notes she has not received a response for policies that would require no changes and if they need to go through three readings by the entire school committee as proposed by Ms. Manning at a previous meeting. Ms. Nuncio wants to be sure there is no state law violation if it's decided to do this but would need an official declaration that this can be done.

Mr. Cruz identifies that while there are still no changes to the policies they would need to be reviewed in the particular order for the record to show that the policy has been reviewed within the year as scheduled. He provides an example of a policy that doesn't require a change within ten years, and should still be reviewed. He mentions that it seems inefficient but important for future committees to have on record that policies were reviewed in the typical manner of three readings is routine for governing boards such as school committees.

Ms. Nuncio suggests that he identifies the current three-reading process as the way to continue to avoid someone bearing an issue for clarity. Mr. Cruz confirms that he thinks it's best practice to remain current for future audits by DESE and/or for public attendees. He provides a reminder that when the policy subcommittee members first took on the policy reviews, there wasn't consistency or routine. He thinks it's important from a government perspective to have records that policies are reviewed. He also identifies that anytime during the three readings, someone may view the policy differently so he believes that it could be the purpose of the multiple reviews even if they don't require change.

Ms. Manning mentions that she doesn't care of the final outcome, she proposed the idea as a thought of streamlining the process. She mentions prior to Mr. Cruz joining the committee, things were out of line but it wasn't for a lack of review. The problem surfaced in the transition of secretaries, and the lack of

documenting by a secretary. The changes or record of when they were reviewed resulted in a big gap in the changes in the manual. There was an enormous amount of work done that wasn't accounted for and the committee wasn't aware of it until they went back to review it the next time around. It wasn't that it was completely out of line based on the schedule, it was more that the work didn't take place. Mr. Cruz responds that there was an issue with context as he recalls that turnover was a part of the issue and that the chairs turned over as well. Ms. Manning identifies that both prior chairs to Policy Subcommittee were relentless to keep the movement forward, there may have been a lack of transition between them but the real mess was the recording of it all.

Ms. Nuncio is wondering whether there is any way to see from one school committee meeting to the next the latest changes to a policy as they progress through the readings until the final vote is made and the final policy update has been created and posted. Mr. Cruz thinks the best way is using a Google Drive with the policies listed as a way of seeing the changes versus using a paper document with notes. Mr. Cruz notes that the policies live on Google Drive but this transition to editing virtually would require the access to the policies electronically versus waiting for the packet to be delivered prior to review. Ms. Manning asks if the document shared with the policies would only allow the committee members to view it and not make edits and Mr. Cruz clarifies that there are different levels of access and the committee members could receive access to make edits and changes. He just wants the clarification of whether or not the chair of the subcommittee would be able to make changes on the policies between meetings and outside of meeting time. Ms. Manning states that she would be uncomfortable with the ability to edit the policies and if Ms. Nuncio sees areas of wanting changes she would bring the changes to the school committee assistant and the assistant would make the change. Ms. Nuncio is requesting that the process become a routine. She identifies that she's received packets with policies to review that are not the most current version and don't reflect the changes made by the committee so ensuring that the latest version is available is important.

Mr. Cruz thanks Ms. Manning for raising the point of view only access but agrees that having access to view the policies through the document would be helpful. Ms. Manning confirms her stance on the view versus edit access of the policy documents. She worries that with edit access changes could be made without being noted and could end up out of control if not properly documented. Mr. Cruz raises using "Suggest Mode" in the document which would record changes being noted without actually making official changes, but he believes that law hasn't caught up with the times of virtuality and isn't sure that comments would constitute having a meeting and making the changes as a committee. The cleanest way is to have view access.

Ms. Nuncio mentions she is wrapping up minutes from the meeting of August 18, 2021 and will be sending along the draft of those minutes for consideration. In today's agenda there is no mention of the minutes of August 10, 2021 and August 18, 2021 but they will be available ahead of the next meeting.

Ms. Nuncio mentions they will await Dr. Zrike's arrival to continue the discussion of firearms and requests if there are other items for consideration while they wait. Mr. Cruz returns to the conversation of the Google Docs and mentions they received the Zoom Links from the school committee assistant and that they are now asking that they have access to the policy document with track changes so that the committee knows what's been changed. He raises a request to Ms. Weiss (school committee secretary) if they can start receiving that ahead of meetings. Ms. Manning informs Mr. Cruz that she is not present and Ms. Nuncio confirms the meeting is recording and that she is taking notes. Mr. Cruz would want some additional clarification if the link to that Google Doc with track changes would need to be included and available to the public and isn't sure what the Open Meeting Law would require to conduct this request.

Ms. Nuncio suggests clarification if the subcommittee requests the Google Doc for the subcommittee members if that also needs to be available as materials to the public for the open meeting. Ms. Manning suggests that before requesting Ms. Weiss provide this material, the committee should run it by Colby Brunt. Ms. Nuncio agrees. Discussion of ways to make the process easier on Ms. Weiss occurs with a suggestion to numbering the pages for easy reference. Concern of late additions to the packet is proposed which could result in difficulty to pinpoint the exact process. Ms. Manning and Ms. Nuncio discuss the importance of one person keeping the organization and maintaining a consistent approach. Ms. Nuncio suggests talking with Ms. Weiss to find the best approach, and identifies that technology has taken us to a whole new place.

Ms. Manning requests a reminder of what section of policies the committee is reviewing and if there was intent to review policies at this meeting. Ms. Nuncio states that they finished the final section of policies and that the only review of policy was Policy 6201 regarding schedules and affirms the committee is in a good place. The question raised last night was about Policy 3205: discarding materials from the past. Ms. Manning identifies that if the discarded materials are in good shape, there should be something done with them but if not, the items are being discarded at the principals' discretion. If the curriculum coordinator tells the committee that the materials are outdated and not used, they should be disposed of. Mr. Cruz requests Ms. Manning to speak to the other piece of that, regarding that the subcommittee review certain pieces of literature to be removed. Ms. Manning doesn't believe that was part of the district's request. She does mention material goods such as furniture, and believes if there is a certain amount to be discarded that is reviewed by the committee. Mr. Cruz asks if she means that if the amount to be discarded exceeds a certain dollar value it's to be reviewed by the committee. Ms. Manning believes so. Discussion occurs between Ms. Manning and Mr. Colantuoni regarding the role of a principal and discarding items without presenting them to the school committee. A suggestion is made that if the items cannot be bought back, credited, donated and is simply trash - it should be thrown away.

Dr. Zrike enters the meeting. (8:26am)

Discussion of the issue of firearms in school

Ms. Nuncio invites Dr. Zrike to share information collected to continue discussion of the issue of firearms in school as discussed with Mr. Burns. Dr. Zrike shares that Mr. Burns discussed the concerns with the members of his team and the leaders of JROTC and they were looking into a basement location where everything could be stored and locked up that's off the beaten path. The JROTC is not interested in the police station location option as it's a bit of an ordeal to transport everything and the students to the police station. Mr. Burns suggested exploring locations in the building far removed from everything. The discussion continues, the practices have not resumed and will not until Dr. Zrike is informed of a new location and he sees the space. He mentions he doesn't want to bypass the principal, so Mr. Burns is working on the matter with his team directly. He knows the dialogue is ongoing. If the space is not suitable and they can't land on a place it will not happen.

Ms. Manning suggests that it sounds like the JROTC program can run by choosing which pieces of the program they can and want to do. Dr. Zrike confirms that they can choose to do specific aspects of the program, he identifies that by talking to Mr. Sumner, the numbers for JROTC are way up and they are pleased that students are still coming out whether there is marksmanship or not. Dr. Zrike thinks the gentlemen have done a great job getting the program back up and running. Mr. Cruz believes the program has always been popular among students and he was pleased to see that a lot of EL students were participating in the program. It's something that students recognize and are interested in and it's good to see that the numbers have remained steady. He also identifies that it makes sense that there is hesitancy to use the police station location given the difficulty of getting around the city due to traffic.

Ms. Nuncio states that it appears that the topic of marksmanship currently doesn't seem to be an issue. She mentions the point raised is that time has changed and the practice of marksmanship in schools needs to be examined. Ms. Nuncio identifies that the topic should be raised in the future and could result in the creation of a policy identifying that marksmanship does not occur on school grounds due to the policy surrounding firearms in schools. Ms. Manning disagrees that there currently isn't an issue. She believes it's an issue until it's settled and there is no resolution at this time. Ms. Nuncio clarifies that the issue isn't an issue at this moment but will arise again and a drafted policy should be created for future purposes. She suggests developing a policy around it and for now proceed on two tracks, recognizing the principal and superintendent can resolve this at the programmatic level at the high school and that the committee still needs a policy down the line to discuss with the school committee.

Ms. Manning wants to clarify that the location of the program is still unsettled and wants to clarify that Ms. Nuncio is stating the issue currently is surrounding the confirmation of a policy regarding firearms in schools. Mr. Cruz believes at this point the committee and district are covered with the state law and policy surrounding firearms in schools and notes that the issue is being covered by the superintendent and principal and they're handling the situation as Dr. Zrike confirms the program will not run until a solution is formed.

Ms. Manning notes the location of the program as the current topic and questions if the committee tackles the state law surrounding no firearms in the building. Mr. Cruz identifies that the superintendent and principal are using discretion to make decisions and nothing within the policy currently states marksmanship is not to be conducted in schools. Dr. Zrike mentions he isn't crazy about the idea of the program, the most alarming situation is the students walking around with the equipment. Dr. Zrike would feel more comfortable if the whole program was contained to one space, whether it's after school or during school, the idea of moving the equipment isn't appealing. He is trying to find the best approach to find a solution that would make it a viable program for the students and reaffirms that the program won't run until he feels more comfortable and he will continue to make communication consistent about the solution found.

Ms. Nuncio requests clarification that Dr. Zrike is more concerned about the transportation of the equipment versus the actual program. Dr. Zrike states the biggest issue is the transport which flagged concern. People who don't know what it is, will raise concern. Mr. Cruz identifies that a student seeing the equipment without knowing what it is would of course raise concern. He mentioned the need to discuss this issue based on the consistent active shooter drills and how students would react to seeing the equipment outside of context. Dr. Zrike mentions that the need for protocol and process is there and that the conversations will continue to be had until a resolution is reached. He mentions the JROTC and Mr. Burns know where Dr. Zrike stands and they will get back to him when they have a proposed solution.

Ms. Manning asks a question of getting an idea of the numbers of JROTC enrollment and how many of the participants entered the military following the program. She references military personnel entering the field "right out of high school," and expresses she doesn't think it's a great thing to enter the military right out of high school. Ms. Nuncio agrees the data is very important to review. She mentions that young people need other options to make their decision when it comes to joining the military. She notes a conversation with a mom of two students in the JROTC program, noting the term "fodder," within the conversation. Ms. Nuncio identifies having a policy that marksmanship be removed from the program. Ms. Manning notes there is no policy needed but rather the need to push the state law surrounding firearms. Mr. Cruz identifies the superintendent as doing what's best surrounding the program and

making the decisions necessary based on variables. Ms. Manning suggests he isn't because there are still guns in the program. Mr. Cruz brings up the MOU to include the JROTC program knowing this is an element of the program and the superintendent is now working on making a change to this element of the program. Ms. Manning responds that state law doesn't mention location. Mr. Cruz requests sensitivity of the terms being used in the discussion. He shares that the use of the term "fodder" is offensive to those on the frontline of the military. He states the conversation has gone astray and discussion regarding the term continues and Ms. Manning returns back to the request to obtain data.

Ms. Nuncio asks if there are any other topics to discuss. Dr. Zrike wants to mention homeschool parents who want to retain their seats in Salem. It was discussed last year for parents who chose to homeschool their children and he wasn't sure how the committee wanted to move forward on the topic this year. Ms. Manning discusses the transition of school this year to being fully in person unless a child has strict medical reasoning to have remote instruction. Her question is why would we extend the savings of seats if you choose to homeschool another year when the district hasn't extended another year to stay remote. She notes that holding a seat in this situation leaves her uncertain of how to move forward. Ms. Nuncio affirms the point Ms. Manning is making and notes the privilege holding a seat could have for a family with this request. She raises the point of declining enrollment in SPS and how it correlates to the issue of not having affordable housing in Salem. She references the amount of homeschool families and recognizes it will not make-up for the numbers showing a decline in enrollment even if the district were to save the seats of those making the requests. Ms. Manning raises the question: will saving or not saving a seat help the enrollment issue? Mr. Cruz suggests he would like to see the nature of the requests for the folks asking their seat be saved. Is it related to concern of the virus? Do they themselves have a medical condition? He thinks there could be a more narrow window given there is no virtual option. Mention of vaccination availability to re-enroll is proposed. Seeing more data would be helpful.

Mr. Cruz builds on Ms. Nuncio's point of declining enrollment, in addition to the housing crisis - there are other options families have sought with the Charter School, Essex Tech, and the traditionally white flight which is a reality that happened as the MCAS scores started to decline. Ms. Manning states we've had homeschooling in Salem for years and they were never asked why they wanted to homeschool - they were just approved to do so. There is no history of requesting "why," and she would be weary of requesting the "why," now. Mr. Cruz states he's just interested in gaining more context surrounding the request.

Dr. Zrike shares there are a number of families who are homeschooling only because of safety reasons in their mind and mention as soon as there is a vaccination or for next school year they'll return to school. They don't have health care reasons to remain remote so they've applied for homeschooling. Many of the families are perennial homeschool families, they've been homeschooling for a long time. But there is a "this year group" where they aren't yet comfortable returning to school. Mr. Cruz asks Dr. Zrike if those folks fall in the category that are waiting for FDA approval for vaccinations for children under 12. Dr. Zrike confirms. Mr. Cruz says he's more comfortable saving the seats and that it's not out of line for policies that have been adjusted thus far, this late into the pandemic. He thinks it's a window that is contingent upon the vaccine approval, and once that happens we'll welcome them back into the system. Ms. Manning says if they can get as much of a commitment as possible to send their child back once a vaccine is approved, then we can save the seat for that time but she would not go beyond this school year. There needs to be a set limit on this.

Mr. Cruz and Ms. Nuncio agreed. Ms. Nuncio asks Dr. Zrike for confirmation that it's a small number of folks with this request and Dr. Zrike shares it's no more than a dozen. Mr. Cruz asks if Dr. Zrike thinks the final homeschool number will exceed the 60 families that homeschooled last year and if those families

would increase the number of those requesting a saved seat. Dr. Zrike states he would check with Ms. Carbone and says perhaps there could be about five more families who were still expected to apply for homeschooling. Mr. Cruz thinks the contingency of vaccination availability to return to SPS is fine to save the seat for these homeschool families under that regard. The subcommittee questions if Dr. Zrike is able to do this on his own or if he requires the school committee to vote on this matter. Dr. Zrike shares that he can prepare a draft with this language to present to the school committee and can propose something similar to last year regarding a deadline to submit for homeschooling. He identifies holding a seat won't necessarily be a problem currently due to availability of enrollment in the district but to formalize a process is important.

Ms. Nuncio asks if there are other topics to cover before adjourning. No responses. Ms. Nuncio made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 9:06 am. Mr. Cruz seconded. A roll call vote was made.

Mr. Cruz Yes

Ms. Nuncio Yes

Motion carries 2-0

The Subcommittee notes that the meeting has been adjourned but asks if the next meeting should be scheduled. Ms. Manning asks if we should be waiting until the new member begins their term in January to review policies. Ms. Nuncio states it's a good point but she's not sure and she's happy to start the process in the 1000s in the meantime. Mr. Cruz proposes a possibility of moving at a slower pace and meeting monthly to take on more, having one meeting per month. It's noted the policies of the 1000s are community relations.

The subcommittee makes a decision to meet again on Thursday, October 14th from 8:00am-10:00am. Discussion of who to include in the next meetings are had. Ms. Manning asks the final question regarding subcommittee member participation in meetings. Dr. Zrike states that other committee members in attendance are not able to participate solely because they are school committee members. Mr. Cruz and Ms. Nuncio confirm that if an additional committee member speaks at a subcommittee meeting it then becomes a quorum and it changes the process and posting of the meeting.

Ms. Nuncio reminds the group that motions to adjourn have been made and a motion and roll call vote has been made. The meeting ends.

Respectfully submitted by,

Jensen Frost

Executive Administrative Assistant to Assistant Superintendent

Approved October 14, 2021