

T&G POLICY COMMITTEE

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 6, 2017

MINUTES

1. Call to Order at 7:04pm by Jackie Wilson

PRESENT: Jim Salsgiver, Herb Ogden, Melanie Virgilio, Jessica Watson, Richard Dale, Jackie Wilson

2. Public Comment - none

3. Committee Organization

a. Dick Dale nominated as Chair of the Committee

RESULT:	APPROVED [UNANIMOUS]
MOVER:	Herb Ogden
SECONDER:	Melanie Virgilio

4. Policy Work

Mr. Dale started by discussing how the Policy Committee should approach its work, what the Committee should set as goals and what the Committee should plan on producing to present its work to the T&G Board.

The Committee noted that there are Policies that might be viewed to be of greater interest and to be more controversial - for the Board and the residents of our Towns.

- For instance, several Policies on the Agenda for this meeting - In-District School Choice Policies and Transportation - are likely to fall into the category of being of greater interest and more controversial. The Committee should plan on presenting more information on these Policies. For instance, for these Policies, the Committee will likely want to provide some details on our deliberations, and how the Committee reached conclusions to recommend specific Policy for the Board's consideration. The Committee may also want to recommend community engagement - to communicate our planned approach and generate input from the community.
- Mandatory Policies, and the majority of Local Policies, are likely to be of less interest and less controversial - therefore requiring less Board level discussion and community input. With these Policies, it is likely sufficient for the Committee to develop its recommendations and simply present those to the Board for approval.

Ms. Virgilio noted that the VSBA has a good format for its presentation of proposed Resolutions - that might be useful for presenting the higher profile Policies. They introduce the proposed Resolutions with several Whereas clauses that lay out goals and issues that have been addressed in developing the recommended language. The Committee agreed that this may be a good approach, and this format will be shared with all those at the meeting for consideration.

Mr. Dale asked Ms. Wilson if she would be comfortable producing this sort of format. Ms. Wilson is not fully aware of the format and will review it. She noted that she expects that she will be charged with the responsibility of drafting the proposed Policy language for the Committee to review. The Committee agreed that it would make sense for Ms. Wilson to produce the proposed Policy language for the Committee to consider and ultimately approve for presentation to the full Board; but that it would make sense for Ms. Wilson to work with Mr. Dale to develop the explanatory introduction (reflecting the Committee's deliberations and decisions).

a. Discussion - In-District School Choice Policies

Ms. Wilson had provided examples of Policies put in place by Otter Valley and Mt. Mansfield - as a base for discussions.

Ms. Virgilio asked the question "What is the goal of this Policy?" That launched a key discussion on whether the Policy is intended to provide families with choice for in-district schools for grades K-8, or just for grades 7-8. The Committee discussed this question for some time without reaching a clear conclusion. Ms. Wilson indicated that it was her understanding that this Policy was just intended to cover grades 7-8, and she saw a number of logistical problems with trying to implement a full K-8 choice - at least in the near term. Ms. Watson indicated that she believes that a number of residents are expecting that in-district choice would cover all of K-8. This understanding of intent is based on community discussions during the Act 46 and Merger Study process. Mr.

Ogden reviewed the Merger Study Report language on the question on in-district choice and noted that the final version of the report only addressed 7-8 in-district choice.

Mr. Dale suggested that the Committee move forward on the question of how the Policy might read, leaving the question of which grades it would impact for further / later discussion.

The Committee then discussed key elements of the sample Policies, and what we believe our Policy should address. The Committee agreed that the Policy should be clear in its intent to best serve students and families, but should also specify some of the limitations to approving student placements in schools, like: space availability; and the goals of balanced class sizes and optimal learning environments. The Committee agreed that providing equity is important - and that the Policy Committee may need to work with the Equity Committee on elements of this policy. It was also noted that it is important to consider the impact on the district budget of any decisions that are made. It was also noted that this policy necessarily ties in to the Transportation Policy, as transportation is a key element of making choices feasible for families. In both of the sample policies the Committee reviewed, it was noted that transportation necessarily has limits, with the Mt. Mansfield policy noting that families wishing to exercise school choice to an area not covered by a particular school's transportation area would be responsible for providing their own transportation.

The Committee discussed how decisions would be made when more students /parents choose a school than the school is deemed to be able to accommodate. In the sample policies, there were two primary criteria - (1) Home-base and (2) Siblings / Families - that factored into prioritizing requests, before a lottery system was used to allocate available spaces. The Committee agreed that the first priority should go to students with a Home-base that has historically been served by a particular school. The second priority should be for siblings to have the opportunity (although not necessarily the obligation) to attend the same school. If there are still more students applying than there is space, the Committee felt that the Mt. Mansfield approach of using a lottery to assign students to waiting lists was a good approach.

The Committee discussed in detail what Home-base should mean for grades 7-8 students living in Danby, Mt. Tabor and Sunderland. As these Towns have no school in their old-districts that accommodate grades 7-8, they would need to have a different school be considered their Home-base. The Committee discussed the possibility of assigning all students in specific Towns to specific schools, but decided a better approach for students and families would be to allow those families to choose their Home-base amongst the 3 schools providing grade 7-8 education. The Committee discussed whether one family should have the ability to designate a different Home-bases for different children within the family - and concluded this would be a good idea. Mr. Dale pointed out a complication - in that MTR is made up of several Towns, and with the new district replacing MTR, we need to be careful in assuming a Town-to-School connection. The Committee agreed that it is important to make the Policy language as clear and unambiguous as possible - and that it would therefore be useful to define the Home-base for each of our Towns, while outlining the right of Danby, Mt. Tabor and Sunderland families to choose their grade 7-8 Home-base.

Mr. Ogden also noted that we should be quite clear in specifying that this Policy relates to only choice amongst our public schools. He noted that the language in the sample Policies was open enough to allow people to believe that choice could extend beyond the schools operating within our district.

Ms. Wilson took extensive notes during this discussion, and will intend to draft Policy language to reflect all the points agreed by the Committee to be incorporated into our draft Policy language.

b. Discussion - Transportation

The Committee agreed that the Policy should cover transportation for grades K-12, but that it makes sense to have somewhat different approaches for K-8 transportation and 9-12 transportation.

The Committee discussed the overall goals of the Policy. It was agreed that a perfect goal would be to provide transportation necessary to serve all of our students, but that the Policy needs to recognize that the district must provide transportation in a manner that is reasonable, efficient and fiscally responsible.

For 9-12 transportation, the Committee discussed the possibility of taking a hub-and-spoke approach. As an example - it was noted that MTR currently provides 9-12 transportation to BBA, as well as to "Manchester", which allows a school like LTS to provide the last leg of transportation for their students. The Committee discussed the fact that Manchester does not provide 9-12 transportation currently, but that the larger district might be able to fill in what could be considered some gaps in that transportation with bus routes already coming to BBA from

elsewhere. It was noted that UD23 and Dorset have already been working together for routes to BBA - with a UD23 bus providing a pick-up spot in East Dorset for Dorset students, while a Dorset bus provides pick-ups on the Dorset side of Town.

The Committee also discussed vouchers or payment to families that are not served by transportation currently. It was noted that these payments can be a more economical approach than adding bus transportation that will only attract a low level of ridership. Sunderland has used this approach for BBA students (as Arlington provides transportation). MTR has also used this approach to compensate parents not served by district bus transportation. It was also noted that offering payments to families where district bus transportation is not available can be a financial burden or drive a decision to operate a little-used route. The example of Dorset transportation to BBA was noted, where ridership was very low - leading to elimination of the bus for several years. The bus route was brought back when parents requested, but an offer to pay where transportation was not provided would lead to about 100 families qualifying for payments. The specific situation of Manchester and BBA was raised, as many Manchester residents are close enough so as to not really need transportation (when sidewalks, etc. exist to accommodate walking to school). The Committee discussed the possibility of setting a proximity/distance from a student's home to the school at which transportation would not be provided. The Committee also discussed current transportation policy language that could be interpreted as obligating the district to provide transportation or a payment for students attending school far from our local area (e.g. - boarding schools). It was agreed that any such language should be worded to cover only students with a daily commute to and from school.

The Committee also discussed the need to address students living in locations that are not reasonably accessible with bus transportation. Ms. Watson noted locations in Danby where roads will simply not safely accommodate school buses. Mr. Ogden noted several homes in Mt. Tabor only accessible from South Wallingford. It was agreed that language should be incorporated into the Policy along the lines of point 6. In the Danby Transportation Procedures, that would note the issue of rural roads, and give families a way to raise concerns where transportation is not provided. It was also noted that the Policy should make clear that it will be up to the Superintendent to make decisions on what transportation accommodations are to be considered reasonable, equitable and efficient to provide.

The Committee also briefly discussed transportation for non-resident students and for Pre-K. The Committee generally agreed that these issues were outside of the scope of what needs to be addressed in Policy at this time. However, it would be useful to address these issues in the future.

The Committee generally agreed that the MTR transportation policy would be a good base to work from for our proposed Policy language, with the additions of points like that on daily commutes and potentially additional language on difficult to access locations.

c. Discussion - Enrollment of Non-Resident Students

Ms. Wilson noted that legal counsel has made clear that it is important that our Policy make it clear that we are not intending to accept 'parentally-placed' (parental paid) students. The rationale is that: (1) there is no certainty of being paid tuition for these students (as tuition is not coming from another school district) - we have had cases of non-payment in our districts; and (2) when 504 or special education services are required, we have no real legal capacity to demand payment for these services - so that our district/taxpayers could be obligated to cover those costs for non-resident students. It was noted that it is important to be clear, and existing policy language is clear, that we will not discriminate on the basis for the need for special services - but that parental payment for tuition and services should be an acceptable basis for deciding to not accept students.

Ms. Virgilio also noted the difference in tone of the two different approaches taken by our different Policies. One approach is to signal a willingness to accept non-resident students, but with exceptions (the 'friendly' approach) vs. signaling an unwillingness to accept non-resident student, but with exceptions (the 'less friendly' approach). While noting that the ultimate outcome is very much the same, she suggested that the friendly approach be taken with our new Policy.

The Committee also discussed the point included in several of the policies that approval of a non-resident student is only for one year. The Committee agreed that it would be good to include this language, as it is important in terms of being able to apply our annual assessment of capacity of our schools for students.

The Committee also discussed language that specifies 'Enrollment Criteria for Categories of Non-Resident Students'. This language specifies as categories for more likely acceptance: Foreign exchange students, Non-

resident students who reside in districts that do not maintain elementary or middle schools and Special programs. The Committee notes that it would be important for the Superintendent to take care with Foreign exchange students that we do not run the risks pointed out by legal counsel (above), but that this Enrollment Criteria is useful.

The Committee agreed that the Manchester policy language would be a good base for our new Policy - with (1) a change to the 'friendly' approach; (2) a change in Enrollment Criteria 1. - from 'Principal' to 'Superintendent', and (3) on the one-year approval language - to note that students/parents may reapply each year.

d. Discussion - Kindergarten Entrance

Mr. Ogden noted that the primary difference between these policies, that seems to need to be addressed, is on whether to provide for exceptions, or not. Ms. Wilson noted that including an exceptions provision makes this very difficult for Principals - as it can be seen by parents as if the Principal is judging their child negatively. Mr. Ogden suggested that the exception language might be amended to add language that makes it clear that the recommendation of the Principal is largely based on an assessment of 'what is in the best interests of the child'. Ms. Wilson felt that change could be helpful, but still felt it important that she get the input of the Principals on how the Policy should read with respect to exceptions, and whether even the amended language might create real problems in implementation. She will get that input and then inform the Committee.

5. Future Agenda Items

Mr. Dale asked the Superintendent about what she sees as key future work for the Committee. Ms. Wilson noted that most of the policies that are needed for T&G are existing at each of our districts, and are generally the same across all of our districts. Therefore, she feels that the Committee can address those policies in batches, with the goal of taking those policies directly to the Board once vetted and agreed.

The Committee agreed to meet next on 10/3/17 at 5:30 pm, before the 6:30 T&G Board meeting. The goal would be to review draft language for the 4 Policies discussed at this meeting - to be prepared by Ms. Wilson. It was agreed that Ms. Wilson is welcome to attend, but if she is not able - the Committee should still move forward with the planned meeting. The goal of that meeting would be to agree on draft Policies to be presented for a first read to the full T&G Board on 10/17/17. It was also agreed that Mr. Dale will provide the T&G Board with an update on the Policy Committee's work at the 9/19/17 Board meeting - and that it would be useful to provide the Board with enough information so that we could get Board members' reactions and thoughts to the Committee's approach and decisions with respect to the Policies discussed at this meeting.

6. Next Meeting Dates - October 3, 2017 - 5:30pm - Dorset School

7. Adjournment at 10:08pm

Respectfully Submitted,
Jim Salsgiver