

DRAFT MINUTES

SAU 39 POLICY COMMITTEE MEETING

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 6, 2021

MONT VERNON VILLAGE SCHOOL LIBRARY

PRESENT: SCSD Board Members: Steve Coughlan (Minute Taker), John Glover; **ASD Board Members:** Beth Kuzsma (Chair), Josh Conklin; **MVSD Board Members:** Sarah Lawrence, Jessica Hinkley; **Administrative Assistant** Abby Wallace; **Assistant Superintendent:** Christine Landwehrle.

Chair Beth Kuzsma – Call to order at 3:06 PM.

Approval of Minutes: Sarah L. moved to approve the 8/3/21 minutes, Jessica H. seconded, unanimous.

Policy BBBA, Board Member Qualifications: After discussion at the last SAU meeting, the sense of the SAU board was that no board members should be allowed to be substitute teachers. Substitute teaching was added to the list of positions not allowed. Discussion about adding coaches to the list as well. While coaches were mentioned at the SAU meeting, there were no concerns raised, so the new draft will not include it. Motion to recommend amended policy to the SAU by Josh C., seconded by Sarah L., unanimous.

Policy BCB, School Board Member Conflict of Interest: After discussion at the last SAU meeting, and two straw polls to clarify the wishes of the board, language was added to (a) prevent sales of goods or services to the district by board members, and (b) clarify and extend anti-nepotism constraints to be more gender-neutral and include prohibitions on hiring step-relatives, as well as changing the hiring entity from the Board to the District or SAU. Motion to recommend amended policy to the SAU by Sarah L., seconded by Jessica H., unanimous.

Policy BEDH, Public Participation at Board Meetings: This was retained by the Policy Committee to make sure that the current draft matches the best practices reviewed at a recent NHSBA training. The language was reviewed, and it is consistent with the recent training best practices. Motion to recommend BEDH without further amendment to the SAU by Sarah L., seconded by John G., unanimous.

Policies BIB (School Board Member Development Opportunities) and BIBA (School Board Conferences, Conventions and Workshops): These were left tabled at an earlier meeting and never acted on. They were incorrectly marked as “Rescind” in the Trello board. July 12, 2021 minutes show that BIBA was recommended to be rescinded, and BIB was going to be further edited. The major concern was over maintenance of a calendar (who and how). Sarah L. recommended referring to the NHSBA Calendar of training opportunities, since that is the primary source of training, which was supported. The second paragraph regarding funds shall be budgeted annually and the public shall be kept informed about ongoing training is not necessary, and can be deleted. Motion to recommend the amended BIB to the SAU Board for review, made by Steve C., seconded by Jessica H., unanimous.

Policy EBB, School Safety: John G. had dissented on this earlier because it omits discussion of infectious diseases, which he feels is an important component of School Safety. It was sent back from the SAU because the original draft included a reference to non-existent policy EBCB. The draft has been amended to modify the references the underlying RSA 189:64 or other required plans. Spelling concerns

were debated (recordkeeping vs record-keeping, buses vs busses). Debate about including health-related safety (pathogens, infectious diseases) vs leaving them in separate policies, followed by consensus to retain separation. Motion to recommend the amended policy (including 1-s buses) to the SAU Board made by Josh C., seconded by Sarah L., unanimous.

Policy BHC, Board-Staff Communications: Concerns from multiple board members about staff being constrained by potentially labelling some discussions unethical, placing them in a possible jeopardy of disciplinary action. Discussion focused on what conversations are “harmless” and what conversations might compromise the quasi-judicial duties of board members, and how to phrase the policy to allow some topics and discourage others. The focus is on this being a board policy, and board members need to know what topics are acceptable, and others aren’t, and stop problematic conversations before they compromise the board member’s ability to act impartially if the issue comes before the board. Wording of the final paragraph amended to clarify that it’s a board member’s duty to remind staff members that they have no power as individuals; to stop conversations that venture into unethical areas; and that continuing those conversations is potentially unethical behavior on the part of the board member, and could also be considered unethical behavior by staff members. The committee considered the chain-of-command concept, which is not explicitly defined in any one policy, but is pieced together from many policies. Consequences for violating the implied chain of command in this policy were discussed, and the committee agreed that if a staff member violates this policy, which is to say they communicated to the board or any board committee, not through the superintendent, that’s the chain of command piece that we’re referring to, then they’re guilty of violating a policy. This policy doesn’t have any special punishment or discipline process associated with it, aside from the general discipline process that exists for any violation of any policy, which always starts with a stern talking to, and is progressive, so it’s not jeopardizing an individual’s employment in any way for a first or inadvertent violation. Motion to recommend the amended policy to the SAU Board for consideration by the Districts and SAU made by Sarah L., seconded by Josh C., unanimous.

Policy BGF, Suspension of Policies: This came back to the Policy committee with questions about the varying majorities required for different circumstances of suspension (simple majority or 2/3, of quorum present or all members), and if there is a legal basis for these thresholds. After discussion, the committee concluded that this policy is optional, the language is imprecise, the practice has always been simple majority of those present is sufficient, and any higher bar for suspension can be circumvented by rescinding (simple majority). The recommendation of the Policy Committee is to rescind the existing policies in Amherst and Mont Vernon (it doesn’t exist in Souhegan), withdraw the updated policy from consideration, and not adopt it. Motion to recommend rescinding in ASD and MVSD made by Sarah L., seconded by Jessica H., unanimous.

Policies GBEA (Staff Ethics) and GBEB (Staff Conduct): Questions asked include How do these policies protect the district from employment liabilities; how will consistency and fairness be maintained if the district interprets the New Hampshire Department of Education Code of Conduct; where is a framework for reporting, investigating, and appealing; how will protected classes be ensured fairness; do these align with union contracts that exist in other districts; and a request for legal review for Souhegan. The concerns were reviewed, the policies were found to be consistent and compatible with other policies around protected classes, disciplinary procedures, and administrative practices. In particular, G policies proposed in Souhegan automatically go through PPC review for consistency and staff input. Responses

to the concerns expressed have been placed on the Trello card, and the committee continues its recommendation to SAU board with no changes.

GBEBD, Employee Use of Social Media: Sarah L. analyzed the proposed policy from Laura T. in a comprehensive document (GBEBD-REVIEW_2021), including the NHSBA model and the language of the underlying RSAs. A version currently exists in Souhegan, but not Amherst and Mont Vernon. Sarah thinks that Laura's language is better than the model. She makes some minor suggestions for improvement. Sarah does call out the list of staff dos and don'ts as a major difference from the model, and wonders if that list should be included or not, since they are included in the underlying RSAs and Ed Rule 510, and it might be more efficient and future-proof to not include a list that may change. Discussion about difference between personal and official school-sponsored technologies/accounts, and if official accounts are used then this should have little or no impact on HS interactions. Because technologies change rapidly, there was general agreement that listing specific platforms or technologies was less desirable than just referring to the "approved school platforms". Concern raised about item 5 in the proposed draft: *"Not require or request a student to disclose or to provide access to a personal social media account or the social media account's contents;"* does not fully quote the full RSA (189:70), which changes the meaning. Preferred language uses the whole RSA *"[Not] Require or request a student [or prospective student] to disclose or to provide access to a personal social media **account through the student's or prospective student's user name, password, or other means of authentication that provides access.**"* The general agreement was that this is a big change, that a thoughtful process that includes more administrative input and legal review is the safest approach. Steve C. noted that once the SAU Policy Committee agrees on the best common language for all districts, then the Souhegan PPC reviews all G policies before they go to the board, so there is a layer of teacher input that gets applied before the policy is adopted in Souhegan. Sarah L. will make recommended edits to the current draft. Beth K. and John G. had another issue with section 3 of the draft (*[Staff shall] Not fraternize with students except on matters that pertain to school-related issues.*) In our small towns, there are non-school related activities where students and staff members are likely to share interests and participation, which would be forbidden. Sarah commented on GBEBB (Student-Staff Interactions) because these two policies interact, and both need to be considered in unison. Currently a new draft GBEBB from Laura is being worked on as a Souhegan-only policy, currently at PPC. Christine pointed out that the current NH Code of Conduct covers social media use, and it is a strong incentive for certified staff, who can lose their certification for violating the Code, or for knowing about a violation and failing to report it. The focus on the committee turned to "what problem is this trying to solve", as the problem definition then drives the language in to potentially very different directions. Sarah feels that the NHSBA Model GBEBB (Employee-Student Relations) with a version of the proposed GBEBD covers the issues well. She has not seen Laura's proposed GBEBB draft. In response to the question about the problem to be solved, John stated what he thought the major problems were: (1) the relatively recent issues Concord NH schools faced around inappropriate staff-student interactions, and how to prevent some of the mechanisms used there from being considered acceptable; (2) a desire to put some boundaries around the "24/7" expectations for staff responsiveness to student messages; (3) a desire to add auditable communications between individual students and staff; and (4) make the expectations and rules apply to all employees and volunteers. Christine expressed her concern as the current trainer for SAU personnel on the Code of Conduct, that a policy that is overly detailed and specific (and therefore lengthy) can be complicated to explain and overwhelming for employees to internalize, and supported staying close to the current model language, which is simpler to train and support staff on.

Josh C. summarized that this discussion had been lengthy, and not yet reached a conclusion. The topic is large and important, and requires more thought, and it doesn't feel ready to bring to the SAU yet. Beth K. recommended waiting for PPC to finish review of the Souhegan GBEBB and then review this with that interconnected language closer to being settled. Christine L. asked if the administration should review and comment on the draft, and Sarah L. thought it would be appropriate. Christine discussed the potential (at the HS level) to use a current auditable platform, Powerschool Messenger, in such a way that parents could opt in to receiving copies of texts, and provide either their or the students' mobile number as the preferred communication channel. Time ran out, and the consensus was to pick up this discussion at the next meeting.

Next Meeting: Beth K. stated that there may be action items for the committee after the next SAU Board meeting (the next week) where the rest of the policies will be read and discussed. She asked the sense of the meeting around scheduling a meeting now, or waiting to see what happens at the SAU meeting. There was no appetite for scheduling a meeting for the week of 10/18 due to calendar uncertainties. Beth will schedule the next meeting when necessary. John G. summarized the actions on GBEBB: Sarah L. will make edits; we will wait to see what comes from PPC for GBEBB language; we will not yet send it out for legal review until the two policies are felt to be ready.

A presentation was made to Steve C. in recognition of his upcoming retirement from the board, and his service to the Policy committee.

Motion to adjourn the meeting made by Sarah L., seconded by Josh C., passed unanimously. **Meeting adjourned by Chair Kuzsma at 6:10 PM.**