

Minutes

Policy Committee Meeting
Waterford Board of Education
15 Rope Ferry Road
May 26, 2011

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Present: Mr. Blevins, Mr. Egan, Mrs. McCarty, Ms. McLaughlin, Mr. Taglianetti

Absent: None

Staff: Mr. Bonillo, History Teacher, Waterford High School; Mr. Foster, French Teacher, Waterford High School; Mrs. Lynch, Assistant Principal, Clark Lane Middle School; Mr. Macrino, Principal, Waterford High School; Mr. Powers, Assistant Superintendent

Guests: None

Mr. Blevins established a quorum and called the meeting to order at 5:02 p.m.

Motion: That the Policy Committee approves the minutes from meetings held on April 28, 2011.
McCarty, McLaughlin: Unanimous

The meeting began by discussing the final draft of the Community Use of Schools policy that will be forwarded to the Board of Education for approval. There was some clarification to the current language and its interpretation. The committee agreed this policy is ready to go before the BOE in June.

Mr. Powers began discussion on the Social Networking proposed policy by distributing various articles on use of social networking in the schools. Mr. Bonillo, Mr. Foster, Mrs. Lynch and Mr. Macrino were all asked to be present for the discussion so the committee can get the pros and cons of social networking use in the schools from the perspective of teachers and administrators.

Mr. Bonillo does see the benefits of social media and thinks it is a great way to reach students since so many of them use it. Mr. Bonillo believes the draft policy sets clear guidelines for social networking use.

Mr. Foster teaches world language. He uses social media, particularly Facebook, as a way to expose his students to language without them even realizing that it is happening. For example, he may post a French song that he likes and some students may click and listen. Because the district has no policy covering social networking, he has had to create his own "policy" for interaction between himself and his students.

Both Mrs. Lynch and Mr. Macrino agreed that it would be a disservice to students to ignore the capacity of social networking sites. While they themselves do not have accounts, they realize that it is a way to connect with students. Mrs. Lynch stressed the need to educate both staff and students on social networking.

Mr. Taglianetti asked for an estimate of how many staff members actually use a social networking site, such as Facebook, to connect with their students. Mr. Macrino said he would estimate maybe 10% at most. Mrs. Lynch said she would expect the middle school to be much less than that, if any at all. Mr. Powers also added that this was mostly a middle and high school issue, being that social networking sites are generally not used by students at the elementary level.

Mr. Bonillo spoke about the draft policy and regulations which refer to the use of “groups” on sites such as Facebook. This would be a more regulated use of Facebook, which would require prior approval from administration, and the settings are much more limited. Mr. Bonillo also emphasized that teachers would really need to be the regulators of what is going on in their group and need to be educated on the benefits of using the group. Mrs. McCarty added that in the case of foreign language teachers, the onus would really be on them to monitor themselves. Even if a third party observer, such as a member of the IT department, was added to the group for regulation purposes, they would most likely not know the language to accurately monitor what was being said.

Mr. Blevins was concerned that the policy might infringe upon staff members’ first amendment rights. Mr. Bonillo and Mr. Foster both thought that was not the case. Under the teacher’s code of conduct, teachers are generally held to a higher standard and this would be the case even if they wrote something personal on a social networking site that did not involve interaction with students.

Mr. Powers reiterated that the policy should broadly cover the subject and provide relevant longevity to the topic. Conversely, the regulations should provide more detail and be reviewed from time to time by the policy committee. At the next meeting, the committee will focus on the draft regulations as they are currently written. All the staff members in attendance are invited back to continue the discussion.

Motion: That the Policy Committee adjourn its meeting at 5:57 p.m.
McCarty, McLaughlin: Unanimous

Respectfully submitted,
Mrs. Kathleen McCarty
Recording Secretary