

Educational Policy Committee

Special Agenda NOTES

October 17, 2023

7:00 - 8:15 pm

The Forum, Mt. Blue Campus

COMMUNITY | CULTURE | CURRICULUM

Working together to provide high-quality educational opportunities for all

Members: Gwen Doak, Amanda Caruso, Kyle Fletcher, Alexander Creznic, Will Jones, Debbie Smith

Other Board Members Present: Dee Robinson, Jeffrey Barnum, Greg Kimber, Gloria McGraw, Carol Coles

Staff: Monique Poulin, Christian Elkington

Other Staff Present: Joel Smith, James Black, Gerri Chesney, Merrily Welch, Bruce Mochamer, Ericka Conlogue, Anna Peterson

1. Call Meeting to Order - Chair Doak
 - a. The meeting was called to order at 7:03.

2. Expectations for Committee Meetings - Chair Doak
 - a. The purpose of this meeting is to hear from staff and the superintendent on tonight's subject and to review the draft policy.
 - b. Public comment is heard at full board meetings not at committee meetings.

3. State & Federal Guidelines - Elkington
 - a. Documents our attorney says sets the expectations for Guidelines/Policy
 - i. Review of provision of the MHRA dealing with education discrimination ([Title 5, §4602: Unlawful educational discrimination](#))
 1. Review
 - a. Superintendent Elkington reviewed pertinent points of the Human Rights Act (specifically section 1, C).
 2. Questions
 - a. None
 - ii. The 2016 MHRC memo (https://www.maine.gov/mhrc/sites/maine.gov/mhrc/files/inline-files/20160113_g.pdf)
 1. Review

Educational Policy Committee

- a. Superintendent Elkington reviewed pertinent points of the memo dated January 13, 2016, which is the latest guidance from the state. No changes have been made since 2016. We have used “consistently identifies as” when we create plans in RSU #9. It is not enough to ask students to exclusively use a specific facility. Students must be permitted to use facilities corresponding with their gender identity. With regards to name changes the Maine Human Rights Commission says: “In the event that the student and their parent/legal guardian do not agree with regard to the student’s sexual orientation, gender orientation, gender identity, or gender expression, the educational institution should, whenever possible, abide by the wishes of the student with regard to their gender identity and expression while at school.” Families do have FERPA rights regarding their children and we would comply with those requests for any and all written information. In school, we deal with educational law, federal law and state law.
 - b. The guidelines we have followed for the last six+years have been brought forth because our guide should not be through guidelines, but through policy.
 - c. As shared in this document Maine interprets broadly the meaning of equity.
2. Questions
 - a. What are the age parameters? Our practice has been in grades 6-12 working with any student to inform their parents but not force them. The broad look is that this applies to all students in all grades and ages.
 - b. Has there been a case for those under 6th grade when they ask that their parents not be told due to fear? Not that we are aware of, but we do involve DHHS as necessary for any student who self-reports a credible case for being in fear of someone at their home.
- iii. The OCR guidance ([Protecting the Rights of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and Intersex \(LGBTQI+\) People | HHS.gov](#))
 1. Review
 - a. Superintendent Elkington reviewed pertinent points of the Office of Civil Rights guidance.
 2. Questions
 - a. None
4. RSU 9 Process & Procedures [Presentation](#) - RSU 9 Staff
 - a. Review

Educational Policy Committee

- i. The presentation review by the team of school staff and administrators included the what, why and how of the topic. It was shared that this is also in alignment with our strategic plan.
- b. Questions
 - i. When do we get the parents/guardians involved?
 - 1. K-5
 - a. At these grade levels it is not a frequent occurrence. We are able to counsel and work with students to involve their families.
 - 2. 6-12
 - a. Although every case is different, name changes can cover all sorts of circumstances. We have a protocol that is consistently followed, and parent permission is part of that process. If students are hesitant, school counselors ask further questions and continue to counsel students. Students can also pursue informal changes which do not involve official adjustments in day-to-day school records. Official records can only be changed with parent consent. The plans that are developed can be flexible and are definitely individualized. If the family is contacted and the parents are not in agreement, the guidance has been to follow the request of the student. Our process attempts to maximize student safety and inclusion. We take a team approach (multiple staff members) to supporting all students, in all circumstances.
 - ii. Is there an age of accountability?
 - 1. The approach would be the same for all students. The language used in the counsel may be different based on the age-appropriateness.
 - 2. The younger the student, the more time spent on explanations and definitions of the words they are asking about to check for understanding. "When you said that, what did you mean?" Students will often want the conversation opener to happen with staff to their family.
 - iii. Does it change for 18 year olds?
 - 1. At that age, all records become theirs and they have the right to limit what is shared with their parents.
 - iv. Appreciation was shared with the staff for how they support students and families. It was noted that our procedures have been in place for years to support students based on past experiences in line with these guidelines. It was also noted that what our staff shared demonstrates that keeping students safe at school and at home along with balancing communication with both students and families are both priorities.

Educational Policy Committee

5. Guidelines switching to Policy [ACAAA Transgender and Gender Expansive Students](#) - Elkington
 - a. Review of adjustments to Guidelines to make it policy
 - b. Questions
 - i. How do you feel about having this as a guideline or policy?
 1. Staff shared that no matter if it is a guideline or policy, it won't impact what we do with students. However, a policy would more clearly support the work.
 - c. Comments
 - i. There is data that shows an increase in bullying for LGBTQ students. It is important to ensure as safe an environment in our schools as possible.
 - ii. We are following the law even if we have different feelings about it.
 - iii. Several board members shared support for a policy (instead of guidelines) to better support our staff members.
6. Other information needed? - Elkington
 - a. Superintendent Elkington suggested the following adjustments:
 - i. C-second line-add back "consistently asserts"
 - ii. Change to school counselor and social worker instead of guidance counselor.
 - iii. Page 5-Add section 8 back in if 6 does not cover this. Superintendent Elkington will do a bit more research on this. It was suggested to keep section 8 out. School counselors would be working with students on this type of circumstances within the plan.
7. Possible next steps? - Chair Doak
 - a. Superintendent will bring this back to the next Ed Policy mtg.
8. Next Mtg. Nov. 7, 2023
9. Adjourned at 8:24
10. Future Agenda Items -
 - Volunteer Hour expectations for school boards
 - Building Use Discussion
 - Has had many changes over the last ten years
 - Do you want staff to be like nonprofits around custodial cleanup and costs?
 - [KF](#): Community Use of School Facilities
 - [KF-R1](#): Community Use of School Facilities - Regulations
 - Phonics, Mystery Science, & Math Book implementation/transition
 - Curriculum Rotation Plan
 - Elementary World Language

Educational Policy Committee

- Grant Updates:
 - Transitions & Goals
 - Community Schools
 - ESEA
 - ESSER
 - Special Ed.
 - BARR
 - Other?