

*Natick Public Schools*  
*SCHOOL COMMITTEE*  
***POLICY SUBCOMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES***  
*December 23, 2022*

The School Committee's Policy Subcommittee held a meeting on Friday, December 23rd, 2022 at 11:30 p.m. Dr. McKenzie called the meeting to order at 11:40 p.m.

Roll Call: Dr. Donna McKenzie, Catherine Brunell

Others present: Dr. Anna Nolin, Tim Luff

**Public Speak**

Dr. McKenzie asked if anyone wished to come forward for Public Speak. No one came forward.

**Physical Restraint Policy - JKAA**

Mr. Luff explained the changes are based on the recommendation of the Massachusetts Association of School Committees policies. The change would make the use of pronouns gender neutral and add a phrase to emphasize that corporal punishment is not permissible.

Ms. Brunell asked how this policy was flagged as needing updated and Mr. Luff explained that he noticed the changes to the state policy example when the procedures stemming from the policy needed to be updated. Ms. Brunell suggested the committee consider how we update policies on an ongoing basis at a future meeting.

Ms. Brunell asked about the procedures around a timeout room to which the policy refers. Mr. Luff explained that it must be the least restrictive, the use of one must already be in a behavior plan that has been communicated with the parents and staff and if at all possible, an inclusionary timeout and other de-escalation efforts are made before anything else.

Ms. Brunel recommended approval to the changes for policy JKAA as recommended by the administration. Dr. Mackenzie seconded the motion. It was approved by a vote of 2-0-0 with two members in attendance.

**Flag Policy**

Ms. Collins entered the meeting virtually at 11:50 a.m.

Dr. Nolin and Mr. Luff explained that the district is considering a flag policy because of the Supreme Court case around the Boston City Hall Flay display.

They acknowledged that the draft provided in the agenda, a compilation of several different policies from different states, is imperfect and noted that several constituents had contacted the

Committee and Administration with suggestions and questions about the policy. Most of those were about how one defines a political basis.

The question before us is: How do we fly our flags in public spaces?

Dr. McKenzie inquired how Framingham is able to fly the progress flag. Dr. Nolin stated that the City of Framingham has a policy that allows them to do it. She said that there has been a lot of traffic this year about what is being hung in our classrooms with criticism that the classroom is being used as a bully pulpit. Her recommendation is to keep the classroom as neutral as possible.

Mr. Luff added that while other towns and cities may be doing it a different way, those policies may work until they are challenged; this was the case at Boston City Hall.

Ms. Brunell suggested that we take our time with this policy to see what develops in the next six months at the state level.

Dr. Nolin said that taking this slow leaves the principals dictating on an individual basis what is allowed in a classroom. It creates a lot of work for the central office staff who then field the complaints. We saw this, for example, with the Black Lives Matter flag.

Ms. Brunell shared how important it was for our students to know visually that they are in a safe space and recounted how impressed she was when she first saw the Safe Space stickers at the High School. She wondered if there was another way to approach this policy and read an example from Hudson, Vermont: "The School Board will only consider flag requests from HUUSD students, school groups, or staff when there is sufficient reason to believe that such messaging via the flag will promote student well-being."

The benefit with this policy is that it would provide a process other than the administration making individual decisions. Mr. Luff was hesitant to recommend anything that would put the committee in direct line with a potential first amendment case.

Dr. McKenzie suggested that Dr. Nolin gather more information for the committee about how Framingham is approaching the situation, that Ms. Brunell look into the pro's and con's of having a policy like this at all and that she would look into the language of other policies like this.

A member of the public, Ms. Katie Joyce was acknowledged. Ms. Joyce encouraged the committee to consider that if teachers have had a progress flag up and those come down, that sends a message to the students. She understands the need to simplify policy and encouraged the committee to ensure that inclusion would trump other values.

Mr. Luff suggested that the committee think about if we are better off waiting on this policy or any, or if we are better off doing what we have in front of us and making adjustments as needed in the future.

## **School Calendar/Homework and Homework Policy Update**

Ms. Brunell gave a quick overview of the documents that were attached to the agenda: a timeline of the committee's work, the current recommendation of the Administration, research done on other districts in Massachusetts and a list of holidays as determined by national organizations. She asked the other members to add their notes to the document so that we have a full understanding of what was shared at each of the meetings.

Dr. Nolin shared that on Eid al Fitr of 2022, Monday May 2nd we had 150 students absent, 41 of whom denoted the holiday as the reason. We do not have accurate counts for families that celebrate Diwali from 2021 or 2022 because we learned that culturally, many of the families that celebrate the day would not elect to take a day off.

Dr. Nolin read a comment from Dr. Ferguson, Natick's SEL and Equity Director, to the committee. In it, he said that when a district makes the decision to include the world's religions in the school calendar, the district is making a belonging statement. That will signal to the community and future community members what Natick believes in and supports. You attract the diversity your district seeks by signals like this.

Dr. McKenzie thanked Dr. Nolin for including that from Dr. Ferguson and she remembered that the committee had been advised by a few of the religious leaders that a survey would be divisive. She also stated her opinion that we cannot just simply adopt the Westborough statement because the rationale of a day being "a low day of attendance" is not our motivation.

Dr. Nolin recommended that we offer EID and Diwali as category 1 holidays, meaning that the district would be closed on those days.

Dr. McKenzie added that in an ideal world, she thinks, we would have no religious holidays off in a public school, but she doesn't believe that we can do that in this community; that could be seen as favoring White Christian holidays. She said that she would like to let the decision be up to parents but she doesn't think this is the moment to do that.

Ms. Brunell asked if we could talk for a moment about what we were hoping to achieve and by when. It was discussed that there are two upcoming meetings of the full School Committee, January 9th and 23rd meeting. We will have a report or recommendation to School Committee at the January 9th meeting as a simple reference on the agenda so that the committee as a whole can discuss the recommendation on the 23rd.

Dr. Nolin shared that more data coming from the town about demographics in Natick.

Dr. McKenzie said that Ms. McDonough had shared the Hopkinton survey with our committee

The committee discussed whether or not we could submit questions about religious holidays to the survey that is going out to families about start times. Ms. Brunell has asked that these two decisions are made in tandem as they will impact families and the need for childcare in a similar way.

Dr. Nolin suggested that like all of the listening sessions that we've had, we will find that the opinions run the gamut.

The committee set a goal to meet in the first week of January in order to have documents ready for the full committee by January 9th.

Ms. Brunell motioned that we add no more than 5 questions to the Start Time survey if allowable by the Start Time Committee. Seconded by Dr. McKenzie. The vote passed 3-0-0.

At approximately 12:56 Ms. Brunell moved to adjourn. Dr. McKenzie seconded. It was unanimously approved by a vote of the three members present, 3-0-0.

Respectfully Submitted,

Catherine Brunell