

BOARD OF EDUCATION OF THE CITY OF PLAINFIELD  
IN UNION COUNTY, NEW JERSEY

MINUTES of a **POLICY COMMITTEE** Meeting of the Board of  
Education Held on Tuesday, February 1, 2011

A **POLICY COMMITTEE** Meeting of the Board of Education of the City of Plainfield was held this day in the Plainfield High School, conference room. Notice had been provided to Board members and to the Courier-News, Star Ledger, Public Library, City Clerk, Plainfield Police Department, and posted in all Plainfield Public Schools and the District's website. The meeting was called to order at 6:33 p.m. by Mrs. Lisa Logan-Leach, Board President, and the following action took place:

**I. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

**II. WELCOME**

WELCOME to a Policy Committee Meeting of the Board of Education of the City of Plainfield. Members hope you will find the meeting interesting and informative. We thank you for taking the time to attend. Please be advised that this and all meetings of the Board are open to the media and public, consistent with the OPEN PUBLIC MEETINGS ACT (Ch. 231 Laws of 1975), and that advance notice required therein has been provided to the Courier News and Star Ledger on Thursday, January 13, 2011, for advertisement on Saturday, January 29, 2011.

**III. ROLL CALL**

PRESENT

Mrs. Lisa C. Logan-Leach, President  
Mr. Rasheed Abdul-Haqq, Vice President @ 6:40 pm  
Mrs. Wilma G. Campbell, @. 6:45 p.m.  
Mrs. Brenda L. Gilbert  
Mrs. Renata Hernandez @ 6:35 p.m.

ALSO PRESENT

Mrs. Anna Belin-Pyles, Interim Superintendent  
Mrs. Roslyn Mathis  
Mr. Robert Pickett, Esq.  
Mr. Charles Craig, Esq.

Ms. Patricia I. Barksdale	absent
Mr. Agurs Linward Cathcart, Jr.	absent
Mrs. Keisha Edwards	absent
Ms. Katherine Peterson	absent

Mrs. Logan-Leach stated that the Policy Committee Meeting did not require that they have five members present so they were going to go ahead with the members they have and turned the meeting over to Mrs. Gilbert, Policy Chair.

Mrs. Gilbert wanted to get a point of clarification from Mr. Pickett to deviate from the agenda briefly, to which he replied yes she could, regarding conversation that took place about having a meeting when the weather was bad and a question of whether or not they would have a quorum, or if a quorum was needed. Mrs. Gilbert felt they needed to get a procedure in place dealing with canceling a meeting especially since they have had unusually bad weather. She felt nothing was important enough to put someone's life in jeopardy to come out in extremely bad weather that couldn't wait until another day. Mrs. Gilbert missed the Genesis Meeting because she was under the impression that when the schools were closed that also meant the meeting would be canceled. She found out the next day that wasn't true.

Mr. Pickett stated that he would have to check that out. There is no statutory or regulatory issue on that basis at all. It's a decision that is left up to the Board of Education. It's up to the Board whether or not there should be a policy in place to do that. Board meetings are governed by the Board and Madam President or whoever is sitting in that chair can make that determination. It's really a judgment call whether or not you want to risk the safety of the staff where the weather is adversely inclement. Meetings that do not require any action, no quorum is required and Mr. Pickett is very clear about that. If action is to be taken, it requires a minimum of five members in attendance.

Mrs. Logan-Leach indicated over her eight years on the Board there have been different things that have transpired. There hasn't been a procedure or a policy. Under the leadership of Hunt, Hamlin and Ridley they indicated the Board needed a minimum of five members every single meeting, which was contrary to the legal advice previously and contrary to the legal advice tonight. Mrs. Logan-Leach didn't want a violation against the Board if they canceled the meeting since it was an advertised meeting and the Board members didn't show up. Mrs. Mathis shared with her long-time working in the District before she retired there would be a sign on the door or marquee that the meeting has been canceled due to the inclement weather. Mrs. Logan-Leach didn't want to cancel the meeting and the Board has an ethics charge or a legal proceeding lodged against them because of the cancellation. She agreed a policy or procedure should be put in place so it is very clear how it will be done since they are in the very heart of winter.

Mr. Pickett asked Board President if she would permit them to review whether or not there is an existing policy in place to address the cancellation issue and asked Madam Chair to permit them to develop a proposed policy on the issue that would fairly address everyone's concerns as it pertains to the Board. The school District is another matter. The Superintendent has full control and authority of making that decision. Mrs. Logan-Leach indicated that in order for a policy to take affect, it would mean two readings or two months and she asked if they could email a preliminary document to the Board with a thorough opinion letter so they could have something to review.

Mrs. Hernandez stated that along with how one goes about canceling a meeting, there's a question as to who has the authority to cancel the meeting. Does that kind of information or consideration come from the President? She didn't think it was appropriate for just anyone at this table, the Chair or whatever should be able to just arbitrarily decide to cancel a meeting. They need one channel based on the rules and regulations.

Mrs. Campbell expressed her concerns, which were very similar to the ones already received. Mrs. Logan-Leach shared with Mrs. Hernandez and Mrs. Campbell that Mr. Pickett will take the points and concerns that have been expressed and give an opinion to the Board. Since it would take two months for a policy to be in place and since there is the possibility of inclement weather prior to that, Mr. Pickett's office will send them something to review.

Just for clarification, Mr. Pickett indicated at this point there is no way to cancel a meeting; historically in inclement weather just a notice has been posted where the meeting is going to take place that the meeting has been canceled. He will clarify it for them.

Mrs. Gilbert invited the non Board members in attendance to join them at the table and introduce themselves. They were Yolanda Henry, Assistant School Business Administrator, Tonia Rivera, her son attends Plainfield High School; Lindsey Council, another parent. Ms. Council suggested they add the global connect to their consideration of ways to cancel Board meetings. Board members introduced themselves as well as Lionel Anthony Leach and Millani Hernandez, PAAAS student.

Mrs. Gilbert opened the floor for discussion on Policy 4119.26/4219.26 Staff use of Internet, Social Networks & Other Forms of Electronic Communication. Mrs. Logan-Leach's concern is on page 2 of the policy, under Computer Communication; letter C. that deals with deletions. She appreciates the line that was put in there about "all email records shall be retained for the period of time specified by law and board policy." The concern was if someone goes in and just deletes information and records are subpoenaed, or if they delete things before they are supposed to be deleted errors can happen. Because of the word "delete," Mrs. Logan-Leach still has serious concerns about that.

Mrs. Campbell thought the last sentence would take care of that since it does allow them to adhere to federal laws.

Mrs. Hernandez stated that the 90 days would be moot; if there is a one-year retention, the 90 days would not be applicable.

Mrs. Belin-Pyles felt that it was dealing with actual space; some people may maintain 5,000 emails. The system tells you you're above your authorized amount of emails. Nothing is ever really deleted; it stores somewhere where it can be retrieved. It remains on the server. Her interpretation is users not being allowed to maintain someone else's emails.

Mrs. Gilbert asked Mrs. Logan-Leach if her concern was the amount of time records are retained. Mrs. Logan-Leach replied yes.

Mrs. Hernandez asked if Counsel could supply them with something so they can stop this speculation.

Mrs. Gilbert asked Mr. Pickett if he is aware of a law that governs a certain amount of time. Mr. Pickett replied yes for different types of records. Mrs. Hernandez stated in her organization they are tested on retention laws so that they don't delete something they should not have. Mr. Pickett said that with the OPRA law there are certain things they have to retain. Mrs. Belin-Pyles suggested this be rewritten for more clarity. Mrs. Hernandez suggested the record retention requirement would be part of this. Mrs. Gilbert asked Mr. Pickett, if it is possible, for him to pull that section out and categorize it for them and send it to the Board members in their packet to see how it should be written or modified to fit into their policy.

Mrs. Hernandez asked, since this is dealing with social networking, why would they imbed retention into this policy. The retention should probably just be referenced and they should establish a retention policy and cross reference it into this policy. Her other concern is that she is currently working with a social networking team within the District. (A copy of the School Redesign Survey was distributed.) The language used in the policy negates the purpose of the team. The survey was held Districtwide; basically parents, teachers and administrators answered a series of questions regarding the relevance of social networking in the District. Mrs. Hernandez felt it would behoove them to go through this information that their constituents have said is of value to them before they try to firm up a policy; especially within section A. The language starts to be counter productive of what this whole survey was about; the very structure of the policy details restrictions and what they were trying to do as the Social Networking Task Force was trying to understand how they could utilize social networking as an educational tool in the District so teachers would be communicating with their students.

Mrs. Gilbert still wanted Mr. Pickett to do the breakout. Once they receive the findings from the Task Force they can compare the two then they can modify what's already in the District.

Mrs. Campbell said one of the cross references should be cyber bullying. Mrs. Gilbert saw in the New Jersey School Boards newsletter they receive there was a section about the law that was passed regarding cyber bullying.

There was discussion regarding parent involvement. Ms. Rivera felt most of the parents weren't interested in getting involved. She has lived in Plainfield for a year, but she is very involved with her children and their schools. She has been to PTO meetings where she was the only other parent. Mrs. Gilbert disagreed that the parents don't care and gave her views regarding the economic situation a lot of parents are faced with, where some of them have to work two and sometimes three jobs.

In reading the survey that was distributed Mrs. Campbell noticed that there was profanity in it and gross language and because of that all of the copies were returned. The Board did not want the survey to get in the wrong hands as written.

Mrs. Gilbert referenced 5020 Role of Parents/Guardians. Mrs. Hernandez stated this is why she ran for the Board of Education. Looking at the breadth, and scope that the attached sample policies from other Districts go through to ensure there's clarity and specificity and direction and look at Plainfield's in comparison it's very frustrating. If they hold this up to the No Child Left Behind requirement for a parent policy, it's a non-mandated recommendation; this is just enough to say they have a Parental Policy. Their goal should be to have a Parental Policy that engages parents in this community in the process of the education of their children. That is giving them access and instruction on how to navigate through the school system.

Mrs. Gilbert asked Mrs. Belin-Pyles if there are policies in Ms. Ciccone's funded programs that require separate policies for parental involvement. Mrs. Belin-Pyles responded that there are certain mandates in terms of meeting with parents or different activities; parental involvement as it relates to they're supposed to educate parents about Title funding. There are requirements that are necessary to follow and guidelines so there are materials that are given out. Mrs. Belin-Pyles felt what Mrs. Hernandez was saying was that information needs to be included in the policies, take all of that information and merge it, but also have more of the District's vision of parental involvement of how they want to have the parents engaged.

Mrs. Hernandez stated that one of the first requirements in creating the policy is to have parents involved in creating the policy. Mrs. Gilbert indicated that Ms. Barksdale is sick and that's why she isn't at the meeting, but this was a grave concern of hers. She felt Ms. Barksdale wanted to do some of the things they were talking about. Ms. Barksdale wanted to get the parents involved, a survey from the parents, and as a result getting a policy in place. Ms. Barksdale has done an in-depth study of this and that's why it was added to the packet. It's going to be corrected. Mrs. Gilbert is going to ask her to write her thoughts down and put it in the Board's packet.

Mr. Abdul-Haqq stated he has been here for years and it hasn't manifested itself. He felt it needs to be a mandate to the Principals; they need to go out of their way for the parent involvement. They need some money to be able to do things. Mrs. Belin-Pyles stated they do have a small amount of money for parent involvement. They plan to do some workshops and training for parents.

Mrs. Campbell asked when this was going to happen. She is feeling a level of frustration about what's not happening. It's February. Mrs. Logan-Leach stated it's not just having a workshop for parents. It's also making sure the administrators know. Mrs. Logan-Leach shared her experience when she was on the PTA and working with Doris Williams. Mrs. Gilbert also shared her experience working with the PTA at Cedarbrook School and the different things they did to get the parents involved. In her opinion the only thing they can do is once they put the Districtwide policy in place and share it with the administrators and let them know they expect them to get as much parental participation as possible, that they are expected to get the parents in the building and get them involved. Maybe it will strike a fire.

Mrs. Campbell asked if that is part of their evaluation. Mrs. Belin-Pyles replied yes. Mrs. Campbell felt if it was known to the administrators that their performance is being measured based on their parental involvement that might be the fire. Ms. Council asked is it fair to penalize administrators for parents choosing not to be involved in their children's education. Mrs. Campbell replied if the administrators are not encouraging parents to be a part of their children's education, that's something they should know.

Mr. Abdul-Haqq said they were looking at a consultant they may use in the District. He had written an article and he said that they have got to have significant parent involvement. It seems to be the thing nobody really knows how to do. Mrs. Belin-Pyles indicated that the person's name is Pedro Noguera and he's a professor, motivator, involved as a consultant, worked with schools, he's worked in Newark and all over the country. She is going to get some suggested dates where he can come in and have a meeting.

Mrs. Gilbert stated that they are not moving either of the policies discussed this evening to the Work & Study Agenda. They may have to be rewritten, especially the Role of Parents/Guardians. They may have to take some sections out and rewrite them as a stand alone policy. They can't move the Social Networking one until they get the feedback from Mrs. Hernandez's team and from Mr. Pickett.

Mrs. Gilbert felt that job descriptions, which is on the agenda, is really for the HR Agenda.

Ms. Council wanted to know how one goes about having a policy brought to the Board for review. Mrs. Gilbert replied that Ms. Barksdale is going to be meeting with the PTO round table to get a consensus. Perhaps she can meet with Ms. Council and also get some guidance from the Superintendent.

Tonia Rivera expressed an interest in getting involved in the District. She is unemployed at the moment, a single parent with a child in Emerson and one at the high school. She shared that she possessed skills that could be useful. It was suggested she give Mrs. Belin-Pyles her contact information.

Mrs. Logan-Leach shared several upcoming events with the Board.

Mrs. Gilbert reiterated that in terms of the electronic communications as well as other communications they have tabled that until they get the results back from the team that did the survey and they are in comparison with their policy in place and they have a chance to discuss that because they may modify their own policy at that time, after they get the recommendations from the team. The Parental Involvement piece, until they hear from Ms. Barksdale and her ideas of how to make their parental policy more extensive they will not move on that.

They will also be waiting for some feedback from Mr. Pickett in terms of canceling meetings. Ms. Council and Mrs. Belin-Pyles have been given the responsibility at the next PTO round table to give the Board recommendations in terms of their concerns. Tonia Rivera will give her name and address to the Superintendent and it will be determined the best way to utilize her skills and how she can be involved in the District.

Mrs. Logan-Leach moved, seconded by Mrs. Campbell and unanimously approved by the Board, to adjourn the meeting at 8:35 p.m.

Recorded by:

Roslyn Mathis