

# POLICY REVIEW COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES

Suffolk City Hall Building  
Conference Room #3, 2<sup>nd</sup> floor  
132 Robertson Street, Suffolk, VA 23438  
January 29, 2025

## Present:

### Members

- ✓ Mrs. Kimberly Slingluff, ***School Board Member***
- ✓ Mr. Sean McGee, ***Vice-Chair School Board Member***
- ✓ Mrs. Karen Jenkins, ***School Board Member***

### Participants

- ✓ Dr. John B. Gordon III, ***Superintendent***
- ✓ Wendell M. Waller, Esq. ***School Board Attorney***
- ✓ Renee Davenport, ***Legal Administrative Assistant***

### Attendees

Member of the Public

## ➤ Meeting called to order.

- Ms. Jenkins called the meeting to order and opened the committee with the election of the chairperson for the 2025 year. The committee nominated and chose Mrs. Slingluff as the chairperson.
- The minutes were reviewed and approved for the meeting held on December 2, 2024.

## ➤ Unfinished Business

### • POLICY SECTION 9-11.6 – Cell Phone Policy

This is the general statement of policy regarding cell phone free education. The reason for the adoption of such a policy is stated in subsection A. In subsection B, the superintendent is directed to develop regulations that are consistent with but can be more comprehensive than the guidance document provided by VDOE. In subsection C, cell phones and all other personal electronic communication devices cannot be used by elementary students or middle school students within the school building or on school grounds during the school day but are to be stored as provided for by the elementary school or middle school unless

- (1) the student has a medical condition that requires use of a cell phone or other personal electronic communication device during the school day;
- (2) the student has an Individualized Education Program, 504 Plan, or Health Plan that specifies use of a cell phone or other personal electronic device during the school day;

- (3) the student uses an electronic communication device for translation services; or
- (4) to deny the student use of a cell phone or other personal electronic communication device during the school day would result in injury to the student's health, safety or normal development.

These conditions also apply to high school students, except that high school students are allowed to make use of cell phone and other portable electronic communication devices on school property outside of bell-to-bell instructional time.

- Discussion on adding more to the policy in 25/26 school year.
- Policy should clearly dictate offenses and what happens when these offenses are violated. During the discussion, committee members expressed concerns regarding lack of consequences for offenders and that teachers are not enforcing the policy.
- Feedback from teachers is that there is really no clear guidance on what to do for repeat offenders.
- Discussion on what the written process is for SPS. The grace period for students ended after the first semester. Now there is no grace period. The teachers have been sent out reminders. As soon as the teachers write the referral, it is out of their hands and administration handles things from that point. Repeat offenders are handled by administrators.
- Feedback from students that not all teachers are enforcing the rules.
- Issue regarding teachers not following the rules should possibly be added to regulations instead of policy.
- Regulations have clear guidance on violations and punishment of offenders, especially repeat offenders. Violations are not to lead to suspensions. Violations will be in line with classroom disruption and each time a student refuses to follow the policy the disruption escalates.
- Discussion of having an administrator take possession of a student's cell phone, having a parent to physically come to pick up the phone once confiscated, and then possibly having a signed contract between the parent and administration. Discussion of confiscating personal items could be a slippery slope legally. What are the legalities to confiscating personal items? None. Some concerns to consider regarding confiscating phones is:
  - what if it gets lost by the teachers or administration,
  - what if an administrator would be tempted to open the phone and look at the contents.
  - what about placing additional burdens on administration or the classroom teacher with such a policy.
- Someone has to own responsibility, burden shouldn't be put on a teacher, suggest security or administration and have a locked place in the schools where cell phones can be tagged, logged and stored.
- Suggestion to have a policy in place to outline the process of what it looks like when removing a cell phone from a student and then placing it in a secure location. There will need to be a discussion with administrators to review what this whole process looks like. Although we are making suggestions, we must also consider the logistics behind it. Should we have an administrator place student cell phones when confiscated in their desk, or do we need a safe, etc.? It was

suggested that we have some time to review this process for 25/26 school year. This could also be a regulation adjustment that doesn't need to come back to the board.

- Suggestion that the board should have specific requirements on what they want.
- Discussion of "medical situation in item 4". Students could have a psychological problem that has been diagnosed by a doctor and the student needs their phone. It was suggested that a medical professional should diagnose these psychological conditions and the school should not take the word of a parent, also to add language that any condition requiring student use of a cell phone come from a licensed medical provider. Committee advised that the last sentence in B2 starting with "Unless" be indented as a new paragraph.
- Starting mid-year is different, but we are looking at what adjustments need to be made from reviewing the first part of the school year. We appreciate having time to incorporate any changes to the cell phone policy in the 25/26 school year. We also need to get input from teachers as well as administrators in the schools. We have to be careful about adding too much now because it's still new, but we will also look at what does the data say, get feedback from teachers and administrators, that will help us in making changes to the regulations. The superintendent also gets feedback from his student advisory council.
- Committee agreed to add language to the policy regarding diagnosis from a medical professional and this revision to policy will be added as first reading and adoption at the upcoming meeting of the full School Board.

## ➤ **New Business**

- **POLICY SECTION – 2-2.7:01. Special Committee created**

This is a new policy regarding appointment of special committee. The purpose of this special committee is to review the overall effectiveness of citizen advisory committees. This special committee is required to make recommendations to the full School Board relative to the following:

- (1) appointment of members;
- (2) member retention;
- (3) member participation at meetings;
- (4) training for committee members;
- (5) grievance procedures for committee members;
- (6) and committee reporting.

In subsection B, this special committee is to:

- (1) survey citizen advisory committee members to receive their input;
- (2) interview citizen advisory committee chairs,
- (3) attend citizen advisory committee meetings;
- (4) review any written policies, guidelines and/or procedures adopted by any citizen advisory committee; and
- (5) to evaluate the impact of school employees serving on citizen advisory committees.

In subsection C, this special committee is to make a written report to the full School Board on or before April 27, 2025 at a regularly scheduled meeting of the School Board.

- Suggestion to add the specific policies that we are referencing. Two considerations are:
  - Is this going to be one of those policies that once the report is made, this policy will then go away, or will this policy remain in place but need to be tweaked somewhat to cover future situations that arise?
  - What if the citizens advisory committee's change next year, then this policy has to be revisited again if the specific policies are added?
- Discussion ensued regarding the chair's responsibility regarding this committee. Also, should this be presented as a resolution? Should there be a sunset provision (when the policy automatically terminates)?
- Committee voted to approve and have as first reading and adoption with a sunset provision.
- **POLICY SECTION 1-6.2:1 – Transgender Policy**
  - There was an overview and discussion regarding the Transgender Policy. Several questions were raised and they included the following: Are teachers required to call a student outside their legal name when a student requests to be called by a name or pronoun that does not coincide with their birth gender? Are parents notified when a student makes this request? Is there any state law prohibiting us from notifying the parents? The Transgender Policy requires parent notification, unless to do so would be detrimental to the child's health, safety or normal development.
  - Discussion of the process involved when the student requests to be called a pronoun that does not coincide with their birth gender. The process was reviewed and forms that must be completed by the school counselor.
  - There has to be a balancing act between the parents right and the students' rights. VDOE guidance document talks about children being treated with respect and the overall welfare and safety of children.
  - Discussion of whether there is anything that can prevent the Board from requesting that the parent be notified of this request from the student.
  - Discussion of whether school employee's can be made to call a student by the requested pronoun.
  - Review of a recent court decision where a classroom teacher was dismissed for not to using a student's preferred pronoun.
  - Discussion about the Title IX statute and the Title IX regulations.
  - Discussion regarding the number of students that have submitted the required paperwork under the Transgender Policy. It was also suggested that any changes to this policy take effect with the 25/26 school year.
  - Discussion of changes to be done at the beginning of the new school year and whether we are violating teacher rights.
  - The meaning of an eligible student was discussed.
  - There was further discussion regarding teachers that are calling a student by a preferred pronoun without permission from the parent.
  - It was pointed out that we have to be careful not to assume that when a teacher is calling a student by a preferred pronoun that the teacher is doing so without knowledge of the parent.
  - Discussion of the pros and cons of parent notification.

- Discussion of the forms that counselors are required to complete and the questions used to identify whether a parent has to be notified.
- Discussion that safeguards are not being followed by teachers. Students don't know if the transgender student has gone through the process unless the student has told them. People that observe whether students are being called by pronouns by their teachers are not aware of whether this student has gone through this process or not.
- Discussion that it shouldn't be a teacher's decision or any SPS employee's decision to hid things from parents, they are their legal guardians. It is not considered hiding when we are trying to implement the process.
- Discussion to review the policy and return with the changes that they want to be considered in this policy.
- **POLICY SECTION – 2-2.6:1. School Board Norms, Protocols**
  - Discussion will be continued at the next meeting.

➤ **Business by Committee Members**

- Recommendations to review all policies, not just those brought about by the change in law.
- Recommendation to have monthly meetings, Monday's at 3:30, with a 2-hour meeting prior to the agenda meeting.
- Next meeting will be held Monday, February 24, 2025 at 3:30 at King's Fork High School.

➤ **Adjournment**