

Approved Minutes – Voted 2.10.15

Lexington School Committee's Policy Manual Subcommittee

February 5, 2015 at 11:30am Large Conference Room

Central Office, 1

11:42 a.m. Jessie Steigerwald called meeting to order.

Present: Judy Crocker, Jessie Steigerwald, Jordan Frias (reporter from Lexington Minuteman newspaper)

Jessie shared that Jim Hardy from MASC is not able to be here today due to a death in his family. We will reschedule our discussion of Item #3 and #4.

1. Review and Discussion:

- IKB - Homework

Jessie summarized that we are currently working on sections I, J, K and L. The homework policy that is currently in place in Lexington was addressed at public comments early in the fall with a resident (Gil Benghiat) requesting that the School Committee take a closer look at the requirement that feedback should be given in a “timely” fashion. Mr. Benghiat specifically requested that we consider putting a number of days, like 10 business days, into the policy to provide clarity around the meaning of “timely.”

Jessie distributed copies of the current Lexington Homework policy and shared that she had reviewed policies from other towns, selecting two for further discussion today. MASC’s guidance for reviewing our homework policy was to explore the homework policies from other systems. Jessie distributed copies of the homework policy from (1) Brookline and (2) Ashburnham-Westminster Regional School. Judy shared that she had also reviewed other policies and introduced an additional model from Needham and copied that policy to share.

We first reviewed our existing policy, taking a close look at each section and agreed to outline the pros and cons of the existing policy.

Pros/ Strengths of existing policy:

Our current policy includes a general statement of the purpose of homework. Other strengths of the existing policy include:

1. Policy articulates that teachers set educational course, parents/families have a partnership role
2. Captures positive aspects of homework ex: practice skills, promote interest in learning
3. It outlines separate responsibilities and explains the partnership better when each role is outlined

Cons/ Areas for improvement:

1. The policy's scope section is missing key points, like when homework should not be given. The current policy includes that information several times in different sections, but it would be easier to read if it were incorporated at the top and would make the policy shorter.

2. Does not accurately capture the way homework is given today, or address all current concerns. The policy was written prior to the expansion of technology and may need to incorporate this.

3. General language is broad – for example “timely” is not vague

4. Expectations are not clearly defined in the policy – some teachers offer their students information at the start of the year to communicate their specific expectations for their class and that may be helpful to incorporate, or to point to teachers as reference

5. “Monitor the effectiveness of homework as reflected in student performance...” should be clarified – is this meant to be about individual children? What happens when homework is not graded?

6. “Determine and complete homework assigned during absence” should be clarified

7. It is important to clarify whether a child who is out sick is expected to return with the homework completed – or if they are provided time to catch up to the work. Who reaches the agreement about what a reasonable amount of time is? Teacher/student? Younger children – teacher/parent?

8. Change word “neat” to “legible” to be more specific

In “Parents” section

9. Bullet (3) – This language is not clear “Ensure that absence does not interfere with makeup”

10. Bullet (4) Change to: Support students so they work independently when doing homework and allow the teacher to see the child's actual level of understanding of the material.

11. At “Elementary” level, put the reference to reading time before Grade K expectation so that it is clear reading is part of the expectation.

General changes:

12. Move the rule about no homework on religious holidays to beginning.

Questions for administration/staff, maybe Carol Pilarski or principals:

1. Are the elementary level homework time expectations accurate today for elementary, middle and high school?
2. At Middle school, is homework only Monday to Thursday? (says generally) This implies homework free weekends.
3. Does “pre-class” work / summer work count as “homework”? When students are assigned summer reading before they have started a class, how is the context provided.

Other areas to address:

13. Is there any time in which homework may not be given (existing policy says over weekend you can give one day’s worth)...

At “Middle” level:

14. Keep the heading
15. Move religious holidays up to start

At “high school”:

16. Delete first sentence....
17. Keep “expectations...” Keep “in general”... Delete “religious holidays:
18. Add:

Some courses include summer assignments. Summer assignments should comply with the general requirements of this policy, including clarity in the assignment provided.

We next discussed the Ashburnham-Westminster policy.

Strengths include having a shorter policy that separates the policy from guidelines. This step would be consistent with the direction we have taken in the other policies we have reviewed and brought to School Committee.

We agreed to create a draft policy for consideration that would pull from strengths in our existing policy and the models we brought to the meeting. We would then meet again to review the new draft and gather feedback on both.

We next discussed the Brookline Policy and then the Needham “Homework and Make-Up Opportunities.”

Draft language was discussed, merging several policies. This will need to be reviewed at the next meeting.

Next steps:

Jessie type up what we did today.

We will meet next Tuesday to confirm our draft with alternate language for key sections.

We will give Paul the draft and ask him to receive staff feedback & to solicit Carol's feedback.

We will give the draft to PTA/SBSC for input.

We will present to SC last meeting in March for first reading and post again for mid-April.

We will review this at next meeting.

Housekeeping item, Jessie raised issue of Mary Ellen Dunn's request to place more policy material on the web, specifically the full School Committee's version that has been approved in form. One challenge is that we need to bring any edits made during the meeting back to MASC and that process has taken time. A second challenge is that MASC did not recommend posting the "approved in form" versions on the internet because they are not officially enacted and it would not be helpful to create confusion between the existing policies and the set of policies that may include new language that contradicts the existing policies. Third, the administration has not had time to post any policy materials since the summer. Minutes also need to be posted and are behind.

We discussed possible alternatives that could allow us to move forward with posting policy materials in general:

- Ask Paul to identify another staff person who can post materials on the web.
- Teach / authorizes us to post – we do post our agendas through Town Clerk
- Town Clerk – ask to post?

We then returned to brainstorm other ways to help Mary Ellen Dunn as she prepares to transition her work to the next superintendent and to the next Director of Business and Finance. We agreed to ask Jim Hardy if he can send us back the approved in form versions to keep in a binder that staff can easily access. It will be clearly marked to minimize confusion and could also have a header or footer to indicate the status.

We next outlined items that should move to the next agenda, as time had drawn to a close for the meeting. List appears at end of this document.

Finally, we agreed that we will make a short list of policies that have not yet been approved in form when they were part of a section that was approved in form. We agreed to compile this list and review it at our next meeting to keep track of each policy and to monitor progress.

We discussed possible schedule to complete next four sections: I, J, K, L

March 10<sup>th</sup> – Start section I

March 30<sup>th</sup> I / Start J

April 7<sup>th</sup> J

April 13<sup>th</sup> & 15<sup>th</sup> K & L (or add another meeting)

Jessie made a motion to adjourn 2:07 p.m.  
Judy Crocker seconded and the meeting adjourned.

Anticipated agenda items for next Tuesday:

IKB -- Homework

IKAB – Student progress reports to parents

Security Camera

EBB – First Aid, Also, Tuberculosis

BDFa – School Council Policy...

Anticipated agenda items for next meeting with Jim Hardy:

Review and Discussion of Section J - Students

Review and Discussion of Section K – Community Relations

Review and Discussion of Section L – Education Agency Relations