

**Salem Public Schools  
Salem School Committee  
POLICY SUBCOMMITTEE  
Meeting Minutes  
January 25, 2022**

On January 25, 2022 the Policy Subcommittee held its regular meeting using the Zoom on-line meeting platform.

**Members In Attendance:** Ms. Beth Anne Cornell, Ms. Mary Manning, and Mr. Manny Cruz

**Members Absent:** Mr. James Fleming

**Others in Attendance:** Dr. Stephen Zrike, Mary DeLai, Vanessa Fagundes, André Fonseca, Emily Ullman, Ellen Wingard, Laura Assade

**Call of Meeting to Order**

Ms. Cornell called the meeting to order at 4:32pm. And attendance is taken.

Mr. Cruz               **Present**

Ms. Cornell       **Present**

**Approval of Minutes**

Mr. Cruz makes a motion to approve the minutes of January 25, 2022. Ms. Cornell seconded. A roll call vote was made.

Mr. Cruz                       Yes

Ms. Cornell               Yes

Motion carries 2-0

**Review of Policy 3601 Student Transportation Services**

Dr. Zrike opens the discussion surrounding the concern and issues with transportation within the district noting the attendees on the panel during the meeting and the role they all play in regard to transportation. The discussion this evening is highlighting the impact of non-mandatory and mandatory riders for bussing to and from school. Dr. Zrike reviews the qualifications of a student being a mandatory rider. He notes there is a lack of criteria around the non-mandatory riders when it comes to applying for and receiving transportation services. The current process is a first-come-first serve basis.

Dr. Zrike notes the current challenge being that since there is no criteria, who ever signs up first receives the services. From there, more families identify the need for transportation and assignments need to stop because there isn't enough room on the busses. There are more busses running in Salem this year than any other despite enrollment being lower. Some factors for this include: start/end times, schools being spaced out, but also having no discretion in terms of bussing. When mandatory riders enter the district throughout the school year, it's required to put them on busses but we don't have room and therefore add busses. Historically, there have been no buffers to accommodate the policy and the demand.

Dr. Zrike notes this year there has been an influx in immigration and as a result, needing to add more students to busses and more busses to the district. This year we are running 14 busses whereas a few years ago, only 11 busses were in the fleet.

Mr. Cruz provides some historical context. Noting that in past meetings we normed around the phrase "students experiencing homelessness" rather than using the phrase "homeless students." He also flags the last time this policy was reviewed; it was discussed that if newcomers were coming in and there wasn't room for them on a

bus that a new bus would have to be required but the committee didn't receive follow-up to this process other than noting that there was space for every student in need. He notes recognizing this content to bring to light for Ms. Cornell.

Ms. Ullman notes the only mention in the policy is newcomers and mentions Ms. Wingard working to get a caveat in the policy. Ms. Manning notes there is a criteria and the confusion is that the newcomer criteria is within the policy. She wonders unless there's been a change, newcomers are built into the policy. She also mentions brief discussion of adding socio-economic status into the list of criteria but not sure where that conversation stands. Mr. Cruz notes adding the "superintendent's exemption" piece.

Dr. Zrike notes there is state criteria and then Salem has specific criteria. He's noting that the criteria identifies the mandatory-rider status. The policy and state law is clear and Ms. Fagundes' job has been to ensure those students have access to bussing. The issue at hand is everybody else noted as a non-mandatory rider and the process of how they get access to transportation which is a result of who gets their application submitted soonest. The policy notes the district does not need to add more busses or stops for non-mandatory riders, the suggestion given is to look at the policy as a group and begin having discussion on how we make decisions on who gets access to bussing beyond who is considered mandatory. Dr. Zrike clarifies there are newcomers who live across from their school with access to bussing and other students who are chronically absent, low socio-economic level who live quite a distance from school without access to bussing.

Ms. Cornell asks for more information from the team to frame the problems. Mr. Cruz notes one more provision to the policy surrounding chronic absenteeism noting those issues would be presented to the superintendent and would like context surrounding that process. Ms. Manning notes the report to put resources where the issues are and wondering where we are with that process.

Ms. Fagundes provides some background and context for how students have historically been assigned for bussing. She notes if we don't create a system and criteria for non-mandatory riders we will continue to be in a spot where we can't accommodate the students that are mandatory riders because we are serving all of the non-mandatory first-come-first-serve riders. She mentions additional issues the district is facing in terms of NRT not having available fleet, drivers, and the issue with the budget in regard to this issue. Ms. Manning asks the timeline and number for the newcomer influx and Ms. Fagundes notes the timeline is September through January. Ms. Manning also asks if the non-mandatory riders are paying and Ms. Fagundes confirms they are not.

Ms. DeLai notes the importance of maintaining and managing the capacity of what the district is able to run for the fleet. Having criteria around the non-mandatory riders in conjunction to the status of mandatory riders will help to identify the needs and expectations for the operational aspect. Ms. Cornell asks the percentage of current riders being non-mandatory riders, Ms. DeLai notes numbers based on miles away from the school.

Mr. Cruz returns to the topic of chronic absenteeism and wondering how those instances are handled. Dr. Zrike notes the school leader raising the concern and conversations having with Ms. Fagundes. He mentions additional needs coming are parents/guardians who are not able to transport their student requiring superintendent discretion. He notes the biggest issue at hand being that there has been no process for providing a buffer with the transportation registration. He thinks curving the process for allowing anyone who needs to apply. Mr. Cruz notes the last conversation surrounding newcomers and hearing something different at today's meeting – Mr. Fonseca confirms the need for newcomers to have mandatory ridership still remains a necessity.

Dr. Zrike notes that the issue raised today is not surrounding newcomers but rather the non-mandatory riders and the process used to determine who gets bussing within that category. Ms. Ullman notes the importance of newcomers receiving bussing but noting there are flaws in that mandatory criteria that pose inequities. She

notes there are other students that are not called out on the criteria list for which transportation would be a resource.

Ms. Cornell requests data surrounding the ridership and information regarding the registration process. She suggests that we should review the suggestions noted by Ms. DeLai. Ms. DeLai provides an overview on the proposed suggestions. She notes a filter by which non-mandatory riders would be given transportation services. These filters: age, economic status, chronic absenteeism, distance to school, younger sibling is mandatory rider. She also notes that foster children or students facing homelessness would be qualified for transportation.

Ms. Manning questions if the “younger sibling is a mandatory rider” should be broader to if a sibling is a mandatory rider. Ms. Cornell notes she had the same question. Ms. Fagundes asks how that would work logistically – if we would be putting the sibling on the same bus as the special education population. Noting capacity issues. Ms. Cornell notes the issue surrounding policy language versus the policy intent when considering these logistics. Ms. Manning agrees that it would be up to folks to figure out the system but that the sibling consideration should be revisited. Ms. DeLai notes parents requesting siblings ride together.

Mr. Cruz shares that he is okay with the amendments proposed but would like to see data that drives the recommended changes. In terms of population of newcomers, ridership, capacity levels, busses, etc. Mr. Cruz also notes that though the policy reads “In no particular order,” he would like to see economic status of student and chronic absenteeism as close to the top of the list as possible for intent’s sake.

Ms. Manning asks for clarification on the age of student criteria and why that’s being suggested. Ms. DeLai notes that in the situation of a grade 9-12 student applying and a younger student, ridership would likely go to the younger student.

Ms. Fagundes revisits the issue of sibling criteria and notes families may look at the registration process for transportation similar to that of the school registration process with sibling preference. She shares she’s worried to add the sibling criteria for families may think they are entitled to transportation based on sibling preference. Ms. Fagundes mentions the issue of chronic absenteeism and notes receiving calls daily for the reasons they require transportation and threaten to remove their child from school when their requests are not fulfilled. She questions if language could be revisited surrounding chronic absenteeism. Ms. Ullman clarifies language being changed for the sake of absenteeism not becoming a threat to receive services. Ms. Cornell asks if the language should read as school staff noting students needing particular supports to help identify the chronic absenteeism riders. Mr. Cruz identifies Section D outlining these concerns.

Mr. Cruz wonders if the sibling criteria suggested could fall under the discretion of the superintendent. Ms. Ullman notes the use of the superintendent’s discretion is helpful in many situations, but we need to be transparent about what’s a reasonable request. She notes there is a specific population of parents who are comfortable going to the superintendent and raising concern and asking for help whereas many other families read the policy and don’t know how to access additional support or help, or they won’t. To be clear of what the superintendent will review will be helpful for families to determine what requests can be made. Mr. Cruz asks Ms. Ullman what she would do to clarify the policy as proposed in terms of sibling criteria. Ms. Ullman notes where superintendent discretion should be clearer, what is specific to be reviewed on a case-by-case situation and what’s the process by which you get your case identified. A consideration is also noting the capacity for Dr. Zrike to be fielding and granting requests.

Ms. Wingard notes clarifying the policy further in regard to students facing homelessness in reference to Section C, noting that currently, students facing homelessness living within a mile are not considered mandatory riders. If we’re building criteria, identifying students in this pool should be recommended as well.

Mr. Fonseca builds upon Ms. Ullman's suggestions and concerns surrounding discretion and notes the worry of communicating to families. He suggests making a clear understanding of how access is communicated throughout the community.

Dr. Zrike asks if Ms. Wingard has additional thoughts to share. Ms. Wingard shares her experience working closely to the family engagement offices (transportation, PIC, etc.) and noticing that reactive processes such as going to the superintendent to request action require policies to be equitable from the start, but they aren't. She notes developing a system where students who need the most get the most from the beginning. She also notes supporting the staff making these decisions and doing the work as it's a heavy lift.

Mr. Cruz flags the issue of policy and procedure and wondering if within the policy there could be a note regarding the procedure for obtaining Dr. Zrike's exemptions. Ms. Wingard notes that the superintendent's exemption relies on something to fail in order to fulfill a request, so if we want to make an equitable policy we need to do the upfront work in order to level the playing field.

Ms. DeLai notes the criteria and discussion today is to help communicate and establish a process for the transportation registration for next school year.

Ms. Manning identifies the issue surrounding the superintendent's discretion being that he identifies criteria to approve or deny and those issues and topics raised are ultimately up for him to stamp versus us [the committee]. Ms. Manning notes if we're making a list of criteria, it should be black and white – yes or no, not to send off for Dr. Zrike to approve or deny each time a request is made.

Ms. Cornell wants more information about onboarding students, registration, communication to families before moving forward in settling on a process and procedure and then outlining as a policy. Dr. Zrike notes the superintendent exemption process can sometimes be a burden. He shares an idea seen in other district noting that there isn't anything specific surrounding mileage in the policy, nothing noting 7-12 students. Other districts do set it very specifically in their policy the mileage at which a student is subject to transportation. He notes having the clarity and there was never non-mandatory riders unless an exemption. He notes middle schoolers obtaining transportation at 1.5 miles and above and high schoolers at 2 miles and above as a suggestion. His worry is the reality of the mile marker and the population of students needing transportation. He reviews the status of every high school student being a non-mandatory rider except students with disabilities and newcomers.

Mr. Cruz notes the superintendent discretion in policies was added with an interim superintendent in place but if change to this language is requested the committee can make that change. Dr. Zrike notes the discretionary process leads to inequities. Mr. Cruz shares the specifics surrounding mileage in the policy was previously noted as budget busters with school administration previous to Dr. Zrike's era. He notes he would be interested in seeing how criteria surrounding mileage would look in terms of budget and process.

Ms. Cornell asks if there is the possibility of building in a cushion on each bus to assist in the capacity issues for newcomers requiring a seat. Ms. Fagundes notes that being a driving factor in establishing criteria to better identify the capacity needs during the registration process and to ensure availability for midyear needs. Ms. Fagundes notes the goals for transportation to be: sending over mandatory riders to NRT to route, and then identifying the capacity leftover for non-mandatory riders, and ensuring there are available seats after routing to have available for midyear assignments.

Ms. DeLai shares the company working on the Masters Facility Plan is able to configure the 2 mile radius to determine the students who fall within the mandatory ridership and can then determine the need for how many busses for transport.

Ms. Cornell notes having a discussion in two weeks to revisit with data review and further discussion of building the criteria.

The SPS staff supporting the transportation discussion leaves. Conversation surrounding the logistics of committee assignments is had.

#### **Review of Kindergarten batch deadlines in Policy 5103 - Controlled Choice Student Assignment**

Mr. Cruz notes there was conditional approval provided to Dr. Zrike and team to begin communicating the changes needing official updates. The committee is now responsible to put the changes to the policy that were conditionally approved. Dr. Zrike notes a lot of content in Policy 5103 needing revisions. He suggests redlining and making edits to bring forward for review in the future. He asks if there is an immediate need for the update of this policy. Mr. Cruz notes there isn't a rush at this time as the conditional authority has been provided.

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Discussion surrounding scheduling upcoming meetings is had. A schedule of biweekly meetings is had with the expectation of the next meeting being on Wednesday, February 9<sup>th</sup> at 4:30pm followed by February 22<sup>nd</sup> at 4:30pm.

The committee discusses the current structure of policy review and updates. Ms. Cornell notes having efficiency in the process in which policy review occurs and for a future discussion of how policy review occurs. She wonders the strategy in which the policy review occurs. Mr. Cruz notes reviewing policies as they come up and how they're reviewed in respect to the Open Meeting Law.

Mr. Cruz flags the discussion surrounding the Student Advisory Council scholarships being a topic of review and provides context surrounding it's path through the Equity Subcommittee, COW, and now needing to be reviewed through policy with respect to Ms. Campbell providing data requested.

Ms. Cornell requests a motion to adjourn. Mr. Cruz makes the motion. Ms. Cornell seconded. A roll call vote is made.

Mr. Cruz            Yes

Ms. Cornell        Yes

Motion carries 2-0

The meeting adjourns at 6:32p.m.

Respectfully submitted by,

*Jensen Frost*

Executive Assistant to the Deputy Superintendent