

WEST HAVEN BOARD OF EDUCATION MINUTES

March 19, 2012

Health & Wellness Committee Meeting

Council Chambers

The Health & Wellness Committee Meeting of the Board of Education was held in the Council Chambers of the City Hall, 355 Main Street, West Haven, CT on March 19, 2012. The meeting was called to order by Chairman Dorinda Borer at 6:15 p.m. The meeting opened with a pledge to the flag.

POLICY COIMMITTEE

MEMBERS ATTENDING:

Dorinda Borer, Chairman
Betsy Davis
Cebi Waterfield

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

ABSENT:

Eric Murillo

BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT:

Pat Libero
Toni Paine
Bob Guthrie

ADMINISTRATORS PRESENT: Neil Cavallaro, Superintendent of Schools
David Cappetta, Director of Finance

CITY OFFICIALS PRESENT:

**STUDENT REPRESENTATIVES
PRESENT:**

Chairman Borer welcomed everyone to the first Health and Wellness Meeting. This is very casual and there is no format or agenda for the first meeting. It is just a kick off meeting to talk about what we can do to help improve the health and wellness of both the students and the employees. It will be a two part meeting. For the first meeting we will just talk about the students and the next meeting we can get into the employees because they really deserve two separate meeting of their own. When we get into the employee meeting we can talk about the health benefits and what we are doing to make sure everyone is as healthy as they can be. Tonight for the children Christine, Michelle and Rob are here and they are from the Health & Wellness Subcommittee of the PTA Council for those of you who don't know them. Dorinda stated she knows that Alan Belchak is part of the Health & Wellness here and food is a big part of it and there is a separate food subcommittee of the board that works with Alan and he doesn't have to get up on a tangent unless it leads that way. This is more of an overview so I thought that before we reinvent the wheel and talk about new things that we have to do with health and wellness maybe we should take a look at the policy that we already have in effect that everybody has approved and get your thoughts on whether we are following the existing policies and if there is anything the board can do to support the policy.

Donna Kosiorowski, Nursing Supervisor gave some historical background on how all of this came about. The policy was adopted in 2006 because the Federal Government told the State that you had to do something about this and Connecticut said that every district in the state would have a wellness policy. Alan Belchak, Jon Capone and I co-chaired the committee that developed the policy and for a first step everyone thought it was pretty good. We have been meeting over the years as part of the requirement of the policy. Some years we met every other month; if not more often. Our last meeting was on October 27th and Alan and Jon were both there along with our school medical advisor Dr. Meredith Williams, Taryn Driend is the representative for the administrator but was unable to make the meeting and Maureen Lillis from the Health Department.

Donna said she did try to get a representative from the Board of Ed to come to that meeting and contacted Howie Horvath but never heard back from him. Eric Murillo used to sit on the committee with us and we don't really have one but we assume Eric will be our person. We need a board member and we do have a teacher. We were going to reconvene when Alan updated the wellness policy because he had new requirements for the nutritional piece of it. That is pretty finalized so we will be getting together again.

Dorinda thanked Donna.

Alan Belchak stated he was updating the policy for the nutritional, the food end to it because there are several different areas that the policy discusses. It discusses the food program itself in schools and what you can and can not serve. It also addresses physical activity in and out of the classroom and it also discusses things that the teachers should do throughout the school day to address a healthy and wellness attitude in school. Alan was waiting for the federal changes which came through in late January after the bill was signed of what is mandatory. This had a lot to do with whole grains, milk, and fruits. Portion size in fruits & vegetables are going to go up and we have to serve certain types of vegetables. We have to serve a greener vegetable and more colorful fruits because that is where the nutrients for the children are.

It is important that we keep the committee with the proper people that we do need but anybody that wants to be on the committee would be welcome. Donna said we did have a student representative from the high school but she graduated. Alan said that Dorinda received the new policy with the changes made in red. Neil said this is what the board will act on at some point. Alan said yes when we reconvene.

Dorinda said the Wellness Committee meets annually and one of the roles of the Wellness Committee is to monitor and assure there is compliance. Do we have any mechanisms that we have in place now that kind of does a spot check in any of these areas? Alan said in the beginning of the year he sent the policy out and it is on the web page. He sent it to all principals stating that we should follow the wellness policy and also follow the healthy food certificate which is very important for the funding we are getting. Alan thinks it should be enforced more because the policy is sitting there. It is kind of hard to tell children don't drink a coke in school and in the meantime a teacher has a coke of their desk. It is not for adults it is for children but if we all practice wellness that is the way it should go down. Dorinda asked Pat Libero if there were areas that jump out at you like those type of issues that we are not enforcing. Pat said it is difficult because she thinks the teachers feel it is not for them. If they go out and get a soda at lunch time and then come back with it after lunch to the classroom she doesn't think that they feel it applies to them and that is unfortunate; it does and it doesn't. When she looks back on elementary last year it is difficult because she doesn't know how she would feel if you couldn't bring in cupcakes for your kid's birthday. That is very difficult. A further discussion about giving it to kids while at school to bring home took place. This is a big shift and parents have difficulty with it because we celebrate everything with food. Neil agrees and said there are two points. The issue that Pat raised is a very valid one. Mackrille will not allow this because of the many food allergies and you have to draw the line someplace. A lot of the principals have said we will let you take it home but we really need to enforce it. Dorinda said it need to be consistent because maybe at one school the principal has a loose interpretation of what the policy is so one school is doing it one way. Neil doesn't think they have a loose interpretation he thinks it is exactly what Pat said. The heart and the gut say it is OK to have a cup cake or at least let them take it home. It is a difficult issue. Betsy said you have to look at the flip side as she has a nephew with a peanut allergy and if he gets anything he is dead. That is the flip side and it is very hard for the families that have those food allergy problems. It is not an easy issue one way or the other. Neil said we are getting used to it but it is a change in habits and old habits die very hard.

Neil said the other issue is that students receive 100 minutes of physical activity in school each week. There is a 40 minute block for physical education and most of the upper grades have it at least once a week sometimes twice a week so when you add recess and 20 minutes a day we are close to the 100 minutes but we need to get more physical activity but it will be at the expense of art and the special areas. If you have more Phys Ed you will have less art and music and there is a delicate balance.

Dorinda asked how can we go through the schools and ensure that the principals are enforcing it consistently and within policy. Neil said he thinks Donna and Alan do a pretty good job of monitoring it to the best they can. We probably need Jon Capone a little more involved with the

physical activity maybe some suggestions as to what classroom teachers can do to get kids up and moving even some of the coordinators.

Neil said lunch prices may have to go up to meet the new standards and Alan said yes the cost of whole grain breads alone will double the cost of bread and increasing your fruit sizes from a quarter of a cup to a half a cup and they want each child to have a ½ cup of fruit and ½ cup of vegetable with each meal and that will be huge. Dorinda said so you will be presenting that increase most likely. Neil said when we do the budget we will give you an idea. A further discussion continued about sending reminders home during special days like Valentine's Day etc. and the many allergies children have like peanuts, milk, wheat and corn.

Toni said in reference to monitoring it she thinks it would be easier to adopt a policy stating these are the things you are going to do rather than leave it to home rule school to school to school. Then the decision doesn't have to be made by the principal or the teachers here is your guideline right here and this is the safest thing for the children. Spell it out. If we adopt a policy that says this is what you need to do to be safe the decision is already made. Donna said the staff should model healthy eating habits so we have to get the staff to do that as well. She stated that the PTA council had concerns about recess being used as a form of punishment. Many other people agreed stating all the time. Cebi said staff involved in monitoring recess should also be involved in engaging the kids; even if it is to walk around the parking lot. Kids with disciplinary issues need to burn off the things that cause them to have disciplinary issues. There are not a lot of consequences you can use because you can't keep the kids after school because they don't have transportation home etc. Donna said research shows that if students go to lunch after recess they do much better academically. A further discussion continued.

Donna said the discussion is do you think the policy is good the way it is; does it need to be tightened up and who will be responsible for enforcing it. Cebi said hand washing is an issue too; they definitely don't get to wash their hands before lunch. Purel was mentioned as hand washing for all kids in a classroom is difficult. A discussion continued.

Neil said he thinks the policy should be tightened but you don't want to be lock yourself in so tight that you can't enforce it. Remember that while this is very import you can't expect the principals to be only worried about wellness. It has to be something meaningful enough that we can enforce if the board chooses to but we also don't want to lock yourself in where it is all we are doing.

Dorinda said so what we are saying is that the policy needs to be tightened up with respect to parties and holiday celebrations. We sometimes take for granted that the employees understand the importance of health and wellness. Maybe some employees are unhealthy and maybe we need some sort of communication on how important it is to be well in order to produce. Neil thinks this is a reasonable approach to it. This could be one of your special developments not a special tacking on.

Bob said as a parent the communication has gotten much better with the all call phones. Once you establish a policy you might do that. At Pagels Gina does the all call at any time and she is great about it. So if she has a policy for Valentine's Day or Halloween the week before just send

it out so all the parents get the call. Don't wait for the day before because that is where people have more issues with it. It was also mentioned that wiping down the tables as they are sometimes sticky is very important especially for children with allergies.

Neil reiterated that we need to be consistent with whatever is passed and help the principals day to day so we are all singing the same song when it is done. A further discussion took place.

Dorinda said we only have a little time left so for the Wellness Policy we will further define it and have the committee look at it and throw some ideas around and figure out how we will reinforce it. Maybe we can have PTA Council help out with this; she is sure they would be happy to help out and then we need to re-communicate the policy to the parents after it is further defined. Dorinda thinks one of the requirements is that it needs to be mailed to families.

Dorinda asked if we could have some information sent home to parents if there is an illness at the school such as the flu, strep throat so they could be informed and would know what it looks like, who to contact, this is when you have to contact your doctor etc. Neil said we do send out recommendations as to when you should keep your child home from school and maybe we can expand on that. Dorinda said maybe we could educate the families more on what their illnesses are and how to control them. Donna said the Health Services Website is very helpful and we have some links there and some instructions. Donna said they have done a lot with parents who don't have health care providers. We have a great collaboration when we call the Health Dept. and they get referred to a pediatrician one is Stay Well the other is Hill Health. Dorinda asked if we pro-actively send out Husky applications to those who don't have health care. We are supposed to and it was going through the registration forms through the principals' offices. It was on the lunch application. Neil said he thinks nurses are great with that. They put people in the right direction as to where there is a free clinic and here is a Husky application etc.

Dorinda asked if the nurse's office needs anything in support from the board. Is there something that is obstructing them from doing their job? Donna said she thinks we do a really good job with what we have and the staff is wonderful. They are extremely busy and are more and more challenged because we have a log of different kids in buildings now. We are lucky the board does give the nurses the opportunity to go for professional development and that kind of thing. There is an upcoming meeting tomorrow and she will ask them.

Dorinda asked how the nurses do with the language barrier when they are trying to talk to a family. Neil said we try to have at least one person be it a para or a teacher in every building that understands Spanish. Dorinda will send out updates to the wellness policy. A further discussion took place. Dorinda asked for a motion to adjourn. Cebi made the motion and Betsy seconded it. All members were in favor. The meeting ended at 6:55 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Marylou Amendola
Board Secretary