

WEST HAVEN BOARD OF EDUCATION POLICY COMMITTEE MINUTES
November 19, 2012
Policy Committee Meeting
Council Chambers

The Policy Committee Meeting of the Board of Education was held in the City Council Chambers of City Hall, 355 Main Street, West Haven, CT on November 19, 2012. The meeting was called to order by M. Toni Paine, Chairman of the Policy Committee at 6:30 p.m. The meeting opened with a pledge to the flag.

POLICY COMMITTEE

MEMBERS IN ATTENDANCE:

M. Toni Paine, Chairman
Betsy Davis
Robert Guthrie
Patricia Libero

**BOARD MEMBERS
IN ATTENDANCE:**

Dorinda Borer
Patrick Egolum
Mark Palmieri
Cebi Waterfield

BOARD MEMBERS ABSENT: Eric Murillo

ADMINISTRATORS PRESENT: Neil Cavallaro, Superintendent of Schools
Anne Druzolowski, Assistant Superintendent

BOARD ATTORNEY PRESENT: Attorney Carolyn Dugas

**STUDENT REPRESENTATIVES
PRESENT:**

Chairman Paine said there were many hours put into the three policies to be discussed tonight. We will begin with the Truancy Policy.

Truancy Policy 5113.2

Toni Paine asked Attorney Carolyn Dugas to go over the changes made so we are in alliance with the change of statutes with the State of Connecticut.

Attorney Dugas stated that the State Board of Education in June resolved to come out with definitions of unexcused and excused absences. The purposes of the definitions are for defining what establishes truancy. They are leaving it up to different school districts to have different

definitions of excused and unexcused absences for different purposes. West Haven will have one set of definitions that will apply across the board.

Policy 5113.2 is West Haven's truancy policy. What constitutes truancy under the definition hasn't changed. What has changed is the definition of an excused or unexcused absence. For the first nine absences one standard is applied and for the tenth absence moving forward there is a different definition which is from the exact language of the State Board of Education. Absences 1 – 9 require a note to the school from parents within ten day from the date of the absence stating the reason the student was out.

Absence 10 moving forward requires appropriate written documentation for reasons a. – f. listed on the policy. Anything that doesn't meet the definition of an excused absence is unexcused and the State Board of Education is excluding disciplinary actions from these definitions. There were no significant changes in the regulations just a few modifications to make them consistent with the new definitions. A further discussion took place.

Questions

Bob Guthrie stated the last time we discussed this we were sort of hung up on what the general statute's definition of a medical professional was. Attorney said that is addressed in the changes to the attendance policy but should probably be in the truancy policy. Bob said this will make everyone be on the same page going forward.

Attendance Policy 5113

The Attendance Policy is entitled Attendance/Excuses/Class Cuts. Attorney Dugas went on to read the policy and give a further explanation of certain areas. In the previous adaptation of the attendance policy we didn't see the addressing of late, early dismissal, and early dismissal where students come back to school. If you have enough of these the student is missing class. We have modified these and defined what it means to be tardy, what an early dismissal is and what an early dismissal with return might be. We know that any three of the tardy, early dismissal and/or early dismissal with return shall be one unexcused absence at the elementary and middle school. Only a tardy consisting of arrival more than ten minutes after the official start of the day shall be counted for the purposes of determining an unexcused absence

The section for high school students is significantly different from what you have seen before. More than eight absences in a class (be they excused or unexcused) in a semester will result in lost credit. More than sixteen absences (be they excused or unexcused) in a full year course will result in loss of credit and three or more verified cuts in any one course will result in loss of credit.

Superintendent Cavallaro stated that 16 absences in any one class for a particular year is a lot of absences; that is two absences a month. Sometimes kids have reasons even for school activities etc. At some point kids and parents have to make the choice that if you want to do well in school and get all the benefits of being in a particular class you have to attend that class. There will be some excused absences but he intent is in order to get the most out of a particular class you have to be in class.

Questions

Dorinda Borer asked if the child has a serious illness and they are hospitalized and they have an excuse for being out and there is an opportunity to give them their work they will lose the credit. Superintendent Cavallaro said no (for example if the child has a broken leg) after so many days we would offer a homebound plan or some kind of alternative instruction. We certainly wouldn't hold that against a child.

Betsy Davis wanted to go back to the list of medical professionals who are able to sign. Would a physician's assistant fall under that? Attorney Dugas said we could add it if it is not in there. Toni Paine thinks it should be included.

Dana Martinez gave a detailed explanation of Code 79 absences that are excused for the purposes of truancy but are not excused for the purpose of qualifying for credit. A long discussion took place.

Toni Paine said that a lot of hours were put into this and the students that were most affected were those attending high school and that is why we had to be so careful. All these changes which we will be voting on once they are put on an agenda will take effect next year in September. Everything will be announced and introduced to parents, students and teachers, coaches etc. starting in January so everyone is well aware of them.

Dana Martinez said we are trying to get the kids to think about making the right choices and making the decision because they will have to do that when they get to college. There is no such thing as an excused absence in college.

Pam Gardner stated there is a correlation between the amount of class time students miss and their SAT Scores so we have to do something. The number of times kids are missing class is really significant.

Cebi Waterfield asked if they will limit the number of things they will offer to the kids so there is not such a difficult choice. Pam Gardner said yes but it is a fine line. There are a number of things we always say yes to in order to showcase our students so we have to be very judicious in how we do this. A further discussion continued.

Extracurricular Activities Policy 6145.2

This policy sets a minimum academic standard for eligibility for students to participate in extracurricular activities; this includes participation in sports. This policy applies to high school students in the West Haven Public Schools. The student must earn an average of not less than a C (2.0 unweighted) with no more than one F. Eligibility will be determined by grades earned at the close of the previous marking period. For freshman eligibility it will be based on their most recent report card. A further discussion continued explaining a one time exception to the C rule in a student's career by seeking probation or re-instatement that would allow them to participate in extracurricular activities.

Cebi Waterfield thinks it is really important that the coaches and club advisors take a more proactive than reactive approach because sometimes that is the only thing that keeps some of

these kids in school so I would hate to see them drop out just because they can't play whatever sport or activity it is because their grades are suffering.

Patrick Egolum asked if a student would be able to get into college with a C average. The response was that for the most part you need better than a C average to get into college but there are exceptions. A further discussion continued. Neil Cavallaro stated that this policy will keep kids on track for all four years so they are not playing catch up by the time they are a junior or a senior.

Bob Guthrie asked how you do you get this to the students who will be your incoming freshman. All of our coaches do a good job and go to the middle school and seek out the kids who they know who are coming up from the Youth Leagues and there will be a general meeting. Toni Paine said anything that will be instituted will not take effect until the next school year. As of January everything will be presented to parents, students, teachers and coaches. Cebi Waterfield said the Seahawks already have a C average rule.

Toni said she doesn't want to vote on this tonight but asked the board members to take the policies home and look them over again. If you have any questions please email her or call her and she can go over it again before the next meeting. If all the questions can be answered she would like a 15 minute meeting before the next board to vote on it. There are extra copies here if anyone would like a copy. Attorney Dugas will make the adjustments and get the final draft out before anyone asks any questions. The board thanked Attorney Dugas for her assistance.

Chairman Paine asked for a motion to adjourn

Bob Guthrie made the motion

Betsy Davis seconded the motion

All board members present were in favor

The meeting adjourned at 7:10 PM

Respectfully submitted,

Marylou C. Amendola

Board Secretary