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Policies and Procedures Minutes 11/13/2007

Approved Minutes

Arlington School Committee
Policies and Procedures Subcommittee
Tuesday, November 13, 2007

Members present:

Ron Spangler, Chair
Jeff Thielman

Also present

Nate Levenson, Superintendent
Tony Lockhart, Superintendent Intern
Topher Heigham, Bishop Parent

The meeting was called to order at 8:39 AM.

1. Approval of Minutes, October 29, 2007

On a motion by Mr. Thielman, seconded by Mr. Spangler, it was voted 2-0 to approve the minutes of October 29.

2. Relations with home schools (file LBC-R)

On a motion by Mr. Thielman, seconded by Mr. Spangler, it was voted 2-0 to recommend the amendment to this policy, attached hereto as Exhibit A, to the full committee. The amendment adds a due date for the Superintendent's report to the committee.

3. School councils and improvement plans (files BDFA/BDFA-E-1/BDFA-E-2)

Mr. Spangler presented a set of amendments to these policies intended to accurately reflect the requirements in the relevant sections of Massachusetts General Law. He explained that the revision of these policies had been guided by his earlier analysis of discrepancies between policy and statute, attached to the minutes of the October 16th meeting, as well as by the policy adopted by the Bedford school district.

Proposed changes include

- Recoding BDFA-E as BDFA, and renaming it "School Councils"
- Aligning the scope of the new BDFA to the scope of MGL 71:59C
- Consolidating BDFA-E-1 and -E-2 into a single, revised BDFA-E-1 titled "School Improvement Plan"
- Similarly aligning the scope of the new BDFA-E-1 to the scope of MGL 69:11
- Adding, per subcommittee discussion on October 16th, the provision that the committee receive (but not approve) these plans each year
- Eliminating the old file BDFA-E-2

On a motion by Mr. Thielman, seconded by Mr. Spangler, it was voted 2-0 to recommend the amendments to policies BDFA-E and BDFA-E-1, and the elimination of BDFA-E-2, attached hereto collectively as Exhibit B, to the full committee.

4. Superintendent evaluation tool (file CBI-E)

The Subcommittee reviewed evaluation instruments from Arlington, Ludlow, and East Longmeadow. Mr. Spangler reported that the latter two had been recommended by Jim Hardy of the Massachusetts Association of School Committees (MASC).

The Superintendent participated in the first part of this discussion, but had to leave for another meeting shortly after 9am.

For **Arlington's** tool, the group discussed pros and cons as follows.

PROS

- “Components of items evaluated” provides good guidance on how to score each of the six domains ... found it most useful to do written evaluation for each component of domain before numerically scoring that domain. (Mr. Spangler)
- The opportunity to write comments (item 7) is the most valuable part. (Mr. Thielman)
- The commentary is what is most helpful. (Mr. Levenson)

CONS

- No granularity within the six domains ... need to pull the components more clearly into the numerical ratings ... more than 5 components in a domain is too many. (Mr. Thielman)
- It is not clear if this is a top-down or bottom-up evaluation ... domains overlap, if you follow the guidance of the components, and certain aspects of performance end up weighted too heavily. (Mr. Spangler)
- Numerical scoring of subjective measures is troublesome ... individual expectations will differ ... the numerical scale is not uniform (i.e. a 4 is not "twice as good" as a 2) and thus averaging these for a composite score among the members of the committee is not meaningful, mathematically speaking. It comes down to each member's overall opinion of the Superintendent's performance (Mr. Heigham)
- Meeting annual objectives is scored elsewhere now ... should be clear in revised policy that this evaluation is distinct from scoring of district performance against district goals (Mr. Thielman) ... But that performance should also roll up to be a component of the Superintendent's performance evaluation (Mr. Spangler)

Ludlow's instrument assigns a score of 1 to 9 for 40 items grouped into six areas of responsibility, and provides for commentary in each. There are also open-ended questions about strengths, areas for improvement, and general impressions.

- Mr. Spangler liked its relative simplicity in format, but 1 to 9 is too granular.
- Mr. Thielman noted that administrators are encouraged to complete the appraisal as well, and suggested we contact Ludlow's committee to see how many actually participate. Mr. Levenson suggested Arlington's administrators would be reluctant to do this in written form. Mr. Thielman noted how Mr. Spangler had polled the administrators in person while preparing for the Superintendent's contract renewal vote, and proposed stating in the policy that all committee members are encouraged to do this while preparing their evaluations.
- Mr. Heigham also liked the relative simplicity of the instrument, as well as its completeness ... it forces evaluators to think broadly ... suggests we could use some of its cues as indicators in our revised instrument

East Longmeadow's instrument assigns a score of 1 to 9 for 30 items grouped into six domains. Each item includes three performance indicators, but scoring is at the “item” level, with a maximum possible score of 270. However, the final performance rating simplified into four buckets (“quadrants”) where Exemplary = 203 to 270 points, Proficient = 135 to 202 points, Progressing = 68 to 134 points, and Does Not Meet Standards = 30 to 67 points.

- Mr. Spangler liked its breadth, and relative lack of ambiguity, and felt the six domains and 30 items used more accurately reflect a Superintendent's responsibilities than either of the other two instruments reviewed.
- All present agreed that the lack of written commentary is a serious deficiency, as well as the granularity, but Mr. Spangler further pointed out that the scoring method (forced rollup into quadrants) could actually wash out evaluator bias.
- Mr. Thielman pointed out that many of the indicators are difficult to rate, for example how could we know well enough whether the Superintendent “demonstrates personal and professional skills, which facilitate staff involvement.”
- Mr. Thielman expressed a general belief that indicators that draw the committee into personnel issues are to be avoided. Mr. Spangler cautioned against going so far in that direction that the committee no longer evaluates the Superintendent's personnel management skills. Both agreed there is a fine line between personnel issues and personnel management skills.

The subcommittee summarized its conclusions as follows

1. The items rated in East Longmeadow most accurately reflect the Superintendent's areas of responsibility.
2. The format of Ludlow is best of these three, except for the 1-9 scoring.
3. Written commentary should be elevated in importance, and evaluators should be required to back up their comments with examples (“show your work”).
4. There should be less emphasis on numerical scoring.
5. The distinction between the district accountability grid and the superintendent's evaluation should be clearly stated in policy.
6. Policy should contain a reminder that committee members' evaluations will be public documents, and comments should be constructive, refrain from personal attacks, and generally follow the code of conduct laid out elsewhere in our policies.

Mr. Spangler reminded the group that the next step is to draft a new evaluation instrument and submit it to the full committee

(and the public) for review and comment.

5. **Adjourn**

On a motion by Mr. Thielman, seconded by Mr. Spangler, it was voted 2-0 to adjourn at 9:36 am.