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Loudoun County School Board, Student Services Committee Meeting, Thursday, August 17, 2023

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[00:00:06] Ms. Richardson has been good to go. I think we'll wait. We'll have Ms. Ogudekbe join when she joins in. We can board her in. So good afternoon. I call to order the Student Services Committee meeting on August 17th.

[00:00:24] This evening I'm joined by Ms. Sheridan and Ms. Ogudekbe has shared that she'll like to join remotely so when she joins in the committee members we'll make the motion and hopefully vote for it.

[00:00:43] With that, I guess, Ms. Winslow, I don't know if any public comments? No public comments this evening? We can move item number three, approval of the June 28th meeting minutes. Do we have a motion? Okay, okay.

[00:01:00] I'll move that this committee approve the meeting minutes from June 28th, 2023. - Second. - Second. I guess probably no questions. Do you have any questions? All those in favor, raise your hand and say aye. - Aye.

[00:01:16] - All those abstaining? - I'll abstain. - Abstain. So the motion will pass one with Ms. Ogedekbay 011. Ms. Absent and Ms. Sheridan abstaining from the vote.

[00:01:39] Next item, we'll go down to item number four, information items. I know we have 401 policy updates and I think the presentation is an introduction, comprehensive introduction into the things that

we'll be talking of tonight.

[00:01:55] So I appreciate that kind of bringing in because I think typically we've been just jumping into the policies without the context of it. So I'm excited to kind of start this process and see how this goes. So thank you and I'll pass it on to Ms. Evans or Ms. - Yes, good evening.

[00:02:11] I also have Darren Madison here with me. He's a supervisor of student assistance services and oversees attendance as well. But we really wanted to put this into context. as you know we are dealing with chronic absenteeism and LCPS and at this time we have 67 schools who have level 2 or level 3 accreditation we are waiting for the finalization of that data but that's what we've been tracking and as we've talked about before chronic absenteeism includes excused absences unexcused absences and out-of-school suspensions and what it excludes is students who

[00:02:47] have not been enrolled for 50% of the school year those that are receiving homebound instruction those that are in in-school suspension or those that are alternatively placed for disciplinary reasons this is just to get us focused on where we were when we began the school year looking at our 13% in 21 22 and I'll share a slide with you shortly that shows where we are now we are at 19 percent chronically absent so we've seen a significant jump and I remember having a conversation with you about why aren't we going the other way and I

[00:03:27] think the pandemic has a lot to do with that as you can see our attendance rates have stayed steady a ninety five point six two ninety seven point four ninety four point five three and so the chronically absent students who are a smaller number of students but are missing a lot of school again here are our levels and we're waiting for the final numbers from video II and what this means is that at our level three schools they will have to have a plan in place that video we will monitor with our support and our level two schools

[00:04:06] will have a district level intervention plan to help them we're planning to do sessions at the principals meetings ongoing to address this and provide the supports, but we've taken a lot of steps to create better communication about attendance expectations.

[00:04:23] Darren and his team have created an attendance landing page, which we'll be pushing out shortly. We've included a lot of the communication in the SR&R, as well as a parent expectation letter related to attendance that went out in our first day packet. So we have presented this to principals, so none of them were surprised.

[00:04:45] We started presenting to them, I believe, in March, which was right around the time we presented to the school board and we got their feedback about things that they wanted to see changed with the policy and the regulation one was they wanted to eliminate principal discretion there's a lot of requests that come in that they want to be able to say this is how the division does this we don't want it to fall on our plates so we did eliminate that language which you'll see the other was to eliminate prearranged absences they get a lot of requests related to travel um or sports events and out of the country travel and they want that eliminated from the

[00:05:25] regulation and the policy but there still are opportunities for them to excuse those absences if it's a religious related travel if it's related to a family emergency they can approve those within reason unfortunately if the student misses more than those 15 days they will be withdrawn though. So the new policy does have family trips and vacations throughout it saying they will be unexcused. And the other

issue that was raised was that our previous process really focused on unexcused absences, and that's our truant kids, which is a very small percentage. 79% of our

[00:06:03] absences were excused absences. So yes, so what we are doing is aligning the excused and unexcused following the same procedures. So when a student misses five unexcused or excused, we're going to have that conversation with the parent because it's a pattern we want to address. So you'll see in the policy, we've added a language about pattern of attendance, not necessarily unexcused.

[00:06:30] And then again, more communication from the central office about attendance, which I already touched on. So moving into the policy, if you don't have any questions about that presentation, I'll walk you through where we are with 8040.

[00:06:49] So I think then I guess we'll go back and forth. So we'll move to item 402, which is policy 8140, student attendance. Is that what we're going to be doing? Okay. Sorry. Let's move to 402. And I guess we'll come back again. Yes. And then I have another more slides on 5170.

[00:07:06] Fair enough. Okay. So if you look at it, I want to just highlight the main changes. Some of the language, like if you look at 18 through 22, it was redundant. We'll talk about the parent requirement for notification later on, so we removed that language in 18 through 22.

[00:07:26] And then when you look at 34, the field code was just changed, so we still have that automatic withdrawal from enrollment if a student misses 15 days.

[00:07:41] And then in line 44, you'll see we removed by the principal or the designee, and it will say per this policy. And then lines 49, we, looks like there's a line through it, the principal shall excuse absences for any of the following reasons.

[00:08:07] The principal component is removed, so the reasons for excused absences will include, and it says the personal illness or injury, including mental health and substance abuse illnesses. And with that, we wanted to make sure that when someone's missing for mental health or substance use reasons that we have documentation of that a lot of students and families will say we have mental health day we need to take you can't just keep taking mental health days unless you're getting services so then you'll see line those are really just the excused absences line

[00:08:43] 65 we removed principals then down to 79 we have middle and high school in an optional civic activity events we just changed the language there but that remains that's not new and line 93 the maximum number of days for academic year for in for participation in a 4-h educational program or activity it's really up to

[00:09:19] the school board to decide if there's a certain number of days so we didn't put a specific number of days there and then just some rewording with 106 through 117 to include the powwow gatherings as recognizing tribal nations and allowing excused absences for that.

[00:09:43] And then when we get to 119, which is where we're talking about unexcused absences, again, the school administration, in its discretion on line 129, took out in its discretion for the school administration and added per this policy.

[00:10:07] So, again, removing the principals. principals as the ultimate deciding factor and then let's see all school suspensions are those are it's really not just out of school suspensions but suspension absences

which is out of school on lines 135 and then when we get to 157 with makeup work there were a lot of concerns about

[00:10:43] the amount of times teachers were asked to pull and create work for students who were missing school. So we took out some of that language and really put that on the principal to decide, and the teacher can determine what makeup work needs to be provided and decide the amount of time they have to complete that work. All right. Is this one canceled here too? So I think the

[00:11:20] language just changed in 181 through 185, and then when we get to 191 through 192, removing the principal again and also pointing out that there is the collaboration with the unified mental health team in addressing attendance and then in line 202 just talking about how they record the absences

[00:11:47] 216 oh 205 is where we discuss the pattern of absenteeism and disengagement so it's really not just those unexcused absences but it's looking at if they've missed a significant amount of school and are tracking to be chronically absent.

[00:12:13] And then with 216, really just cleaning that up, we still will refer to the attendance officer for unexcused absences if we feel a petition needs to be filed against the student or the parents. And then that language was added to adhere to code 22.1-261.

[00:12:40] But this is also, so that's 224-231. That language is also in our Compulsory Attendance Policy 8120, so it aligns there.

[00:12:58] And then we also have a draft regulation that really steps out the process and provides definitions related to what an attendance officer is, what an attendance plan is, what an attendance conference is, how we define parent, and the steps that schools will take.

[00:13:29] That's it. I'm sorry. Do you have questions? All right. Thank you, Ms. Evans. Sure. For sharing this. I'll open up for questions.

[00:13:47] No, Ms. Sheridan. So thank you for the presentation ahead of time to get us in that mindset. And also asking the principals, I think, was a really great strategy in improving this policy.

[00:14:04] I have a question on line 63, military obligations. While I see it's not a change, is that a student or a parent military obligation? It would be both. So if a parent is in town or getting ready to be deployed, they would have the opportunity to spend time with their family member.

[00:14:22] before they do deploy. Okay. I think that's great. And I honestly had never really noticed that or was aware of that, so I'm glad that we do make that exception. You said I think in the section lines 93 through 104 for the 4-H where I think you said the school board would have to determine how many days.

[00:14:47] But then in the next section it does say one day per year for the tribal nation. So why the discrepancy there as to why are you making that recommendation staff, not you, but not for the other one?

[00:15:04] I guess I'm curious, particularly because that could be seen as maybe not sensitive to the one group. Yeah, I'm seeing if I have notes on that. If not, I'll have to. So, it looks like per Virginia Code, 22.1-207.7, it's up to the school board to determine the maximum number of excused absences it will permit for just the participation in the 4-H educational programs or activities.

[00:15:40] And we did a comparison with Fairfax, Prince William, and Arlington, and they do not see any specific numbers. But what about for the tribal nation? I believe that came from the same code but I'd have

to verify that so i'm i'm just going to suggest after you verify that we run the same and that should not be different so i don't know how mr madavee feels but if we're going to put one day for one i think it should be for both right and not that's fine that was just my opinion on that one i think i have um oh in the makeup work

[00:16:20] i think um it looks like i'm sorry it looks like video we determined the powwow number of days and the code determines the 4-h so the code lets the school board determine and then video e determines what it looks like i'm going to confirm that and let you know okay i mean i think they should be in sync i don't think one is more important certainly than the other um and it's unfortunate that there's a discrepancy in the code um and then in lines 157 through 169 where you spoke about

[00:16:55] the makeup work i know that um in the past we've heard from a lot of teachers that have to produce materials because parents which is great that they let us know ahead of time but that they're expecting special um classwork to be developed because they're taking a trip and i think this certainly changes that and it also removes that support for travel during school so I think that that's really important and I appreciate that language change as well for my only comments I think mr. madby thank you mr. so my my

[00:17:31] sort of question think thank you for bringing this thing up and I think as miss I think you shared and miss shared and echoed running by the principal but I think maybe I'll take a step back I think if you were to think about from a data-driven perspective, because you have, I think this is something you presented both at the committee level and at the board, we were trying to find out what's the reasons, I think, for excused versus unexcused, and as you shared, unexcused is a smaller percentage.

[00:18:03] I think you mentioned it's 21% out of the 19% is unexcused, and 79% is excused. So, again, the different criteria, so let's focus on the excused versus the non-excused, because unexcused I should say, is a smaller percentage.

[00:18:20] So if you look at the excuse, what are the data showing as far as where are the students taking advantage and how the data is driving the decision for the policy change too? Because it has to have some relationship saying, well, here's a reason why, maybe it's, I didn't see anything about whether to say that trips taking overseas by parents is not, even though it's excused or unexcused, but it goes against that.

[00:18:55] We talk about degradation, that's the challenge. We think this is an interesting fact that we're learning. So I just want to, maybe you can give a little more view on what the data is and how that's helping you make this, some of the changes within the policy.

[00:19:10] So that would be my sort of ask to sort of understand that for jumping into some of the questions within that. Yeah, and Darren, feel free to chime in. But a lot of the feedback from the principals at different levels was that there's a lot of inconsistencies with how they address travel and whether they're excusing it or unexcusing it.

[00:19:30] We did do a data analysis to see, you know, are these students that are struggling in other areas, and a lot of these students are not. We also looked at the new holidays, the six new days, and there was a lot of absences before or after our holidays.

[00:19:47] And I remember at the beginning of the school year, we had at least four four-day weeks. A lot of parents were taking extra days there, and also around Thanksgiving, also around winter break and spring break. So we see the pattern, they're adding days here and there, and that's how it's adding up.

[00:20:05] The other pattern that we did notice was who are the students who are missing the most, and it was, surprisingly, well, not surprisingly, juniors and seniors, and then kindergartners. So I think there's a message being sent at kindergarten.

[00:20:24] Maybe they don't have to show up. I don't know if that's in fact. It's optional. But then at junior and senior level, I would think the juniors would be there most of the time. It's the most difficult year. Seniors, I think it's towards the end of the year. They've met all the requirements, and they're not coming.

[00:20:40] So I would imagine that we see a spike with the absences after they've met all their requirements. Would you add anything? Yeah, just to reiterate that, I mean, this was data over the last two years that we've collected just to get that profile of what a chronically absent student here at Long Island County Post Schools looks like.

[00:21:03] And so I agree. And this is our chronic absenteeism work group that we started last school year. so it's made up of principals, unified mills health team workers, attended secretaries, and this is the feedback that we've gathered.

[00:21:22] I know that's not quantitative data, but I think this is the more experiential what they're experiencing on a daily basis. But yeah, what we're seeing also too, is just especially at the high numbers, disproportionately in elementary school level, was kindergarten, first, and second grade.

[00:21:43] And so we know that some of that is about parent and community engagement. So we are working with our CCO office. We have a plan to address that, to engage parents, to educate about chronic absenteeism and good tenants' habits for parents.

[00:22:04] - Thank you. I mean, again, maybe, 'cause I think we're talking about what excused and unexcused are, and even in some policies we talked about what it's, if things are, certain things are the way they are, but then things that they're not.

[00:22:21] So I don't know if there's a way in the policy to communicate, you know, whether, what, I don't know, I shouldn't say what considered excused or not excused, but even these taking days off are detrimental to the child's education. So I don't know if there is, in regulations perhaps, or in some way, I know you mentioned CCO and communication.

[00:22:40] So how do we tie that? I mean, that would be my sort of, yeah. Yeah. We had a presentation at admin leadership two weeks ago, and we had a session related to attendance, and we provided them with the communication for parents related to why attendance matters. Students who miss school are more likely to have reading gaps or to struggle in math. So using those, putting them in the school physically where parents can see that, but also putting them on that landing page as well. We did, like I said, put out a parent letter

[00:23:16] regarding the expectations, a link to the accreditation page and the expectations for them as to what they need to do to make sure that their child comes to school, like establishing a routine, making sure that they have the sleep they need before they come to school.

[00:23:36] So those types of communications have already been sent out to parents. And I have one more other question. Just overall, I think in terms of the reasons, I think Ms. Reeser sort of brought it up in terms of from what is the walk zones or the changing in the timing, how much of that from a data perspective has it impacted?

[00:23:56] Because I think the policy for the walk zone was changed about a few years back. And I think, I'm not sure if, what if, because I think it's again, going back to data-driven, has extending the walk zone impacted absenteeism or carliness?

[00:24:15] I mean, I think that would be really helpful to understand that. And I think if that's something that the board should look at, then that would be another data factor to consider as well as we go on this journey. And I think you mentioned the class.

[00:24:32] I think, I believe my memory is when you presented the chronic absenteeism, I believe you shared the data based on the classrooms as well, like kindergarten, first grade, or I'm not sure it was shared. Yes, we presented data on office referrals.

[00:24:47] So students who had office referrals and students who were on the D or F list, and it was for students for last year's data, we broke it down by a level.

[00:25:05] And I believe it was pretty much under five percent, pretty much on every level, students that were chronically absent had at least one, only one office referral. just kind of indicating that these students are chronically abstinent and not having behavioral issues. We saw a little spike in middle school, but for the most part. But we looked at the behavior, but we also looked at those students that were on the DNF list. The average GPA for a chronically absent high school student was a 3.0. So once again, these students were doing

[00:25:43] fairly well academically um so i don't know if that answered your question i think it's just more of like you mentioned kindergartners have more chronic absentees and seniors have that sort of data so just think to share to our community that this is where the challenges are so everybody's aware that you know kindergartners are have the you know probably bigger or first grade or second grade or even seniors to that not only the community the parent everybody's sort of aware that this is where the challenges are and hopefully we all come together to address that um

[00:26:21] i know for the time just two three questions i think will be quick um on the last section on the 224 uh i'm just curious either do we have adequate staff in the registrar office to chase down absenteeism i mean what's the staff look like i know it's not a policy question but it's still Again, we're looking to comprehensively address this, so I don't know if that's...

[00:26:46] Yeah, so we've really taken an all-hands-on-deck approach to this. So when students are expected to sew, that does go immediately to the attendance, administrative assistant, and the registrar. And they're making those phone calls to parents to find out where they are. And then from there, it gets kicked to the school counselor, the social worker, and the administrator to kind of determine interventions and outreach and, you know, create those plans and have conferences with the parents where appropriate.

[00:27:16] So that's a different shift that we took two years ago. So in monitoring attendance, we've really broadened it to the Unified Mental Health Team, and now we have the new position with student support advisors who will be helping with monitoring chronic absenteeism as well. So there is a little bit of a staff need.

[00:27:33] You'll bring it up to the board that, hey, you know, Because now maybe approach in terms of how you're reaching out or given that we have a higher or the policy is changing now, we've got to go back and reach it. So at some point you'll come back in some capacity to see the staffing level that that is.

[00:27:50] Absolutely. Okay. The question on line number 180, so 191. So why remove unified mental health team and just keep mental health professionals there? I'm just curious.

[00:28:06] Because I think everything we're trying to do is a unified mental health team. So on line 191, it does say school unified mental health team. We changed it from unified mental health team members to school mental health professionals because a lot of people don't know necessarily who those folks are.

[00:28:26] So we changed it to just the school mental health professionals. I think everything that we've been talking about is, I mean, for the last, it's been unified mental health team. So that's kind of a shift away from that. So that's just curious. I don't know if you have any thoughts, but that's typically everything we've been going towards the Unified Mental Health Team, but this seems to be moving away from that.

[00:28:51] Are the staff who would be included as school mental health professionals, are any of them outside of the United Mental Health Team to include more staff? Well, the Student Support Advisor and Attendance Officer isn't technically on the Mental Health Team.

[00:29:07] Then I think, because they're not part of the Unified Mental Health Team, because those are licensed individuals, correct? Right. So if it's inclusive of more people, I think then I'm okay with the change. Right. And you also want to include the family liaison and the school nurse.

[00:29:25] And sometimes they're not in that immediate core unified mental health team. But it says, I'm going to beg to differ because it says school mental health professionals. And then it goes on other staff. I mean, you can definitely add it. Now it's just semantics of, you know, I'm fine with it.

[00:29:43] I don't really have. I mean, I never understood this. because I think Unified Mental Health team, I know Ms. Last time I had a brain freeze. I had-- see, I'm drawing a blank, like completely blank, where we had Mr. Sorotkin sitting next to me.

[00:30:06] And I couldn't pronounce-- I couldn't say his name. And so Mr. Lodi is here. And so that's-- I mean, we've been marketing. I mean, we've been kind of focused on that. So again, I'm sure there's a good reason, but I'd like to understand that.

[00:30:22] because it can't be just like, well, including liaisons and all that, because that's not what mental health professional means. So I'd like to have a better understanding of what that is and if or why that change. I think it would be nice to include some of those other people too so that people like list out who's actually included.

[00:30:39] That's fine, yeah. Even taking away the unit, because the school mental health professionals, who actually are they rather than just clumping them into one group and list them out and include all of the other people that might be a part of it? that aren't necessarily mental health professionals.

[00:30:55] I also think it sounds less intimidating. Sorry, it sounds what? Less intimidating because of the stigma attached to mental health. If you just list out the resources and the people that might be involved in this, then perhaps people will reach out for more help. So on that topic, Ms. Sheridan, I mean, I think you're not going to find any objection from me, but I think that's my challenge has been with the Unified Mental Health Team.

[00:31:19] It's just, it would seem just like what you're describing it to be. It's very official. It's very official, and it's capitalized. I don't know, Mr. Lodi, you're sitting up here, but something to take you back. I don't want to make a decision for you here. I'd like you to kind of come back and present that.

[00:31:35] Well, thank you, and I think that—so the next steps are this. We'll come back to the committee, and then we'll send it back to the advisory councils, and we'll post it on the website next time around to get feedback. Awesome. Thank you. With that, I guess I know we'll be going back to presentation, but I think the topic is policy 5170?

[00:31:59] Yes. Okay, awesome. Ms. Evans? So our previous policy was titled Substance Use Education, and we have looked at the Virginia Code 20-31-10, which is health education, and also the code was updated recently, which requires instruction concerning gambling and the addictive potential of it, And we also looked at the VSBA model policy.

[00:32:31] But back to the health, the VSBA policy has specific criteria that we are supposed to include, which describes teaching about drugs, alcohol, and tobacco. Public schools provide instruction concerning drugs and drug abuse.

[00:32:48] The public safety hazards and dangers of alcohol abuse, underage drinking, underage marijuana use, and drunk driving. The health and safety risks of tobacco products, nicotine vapor products, and alternative nicotine products in gambling, and the addictive potential thereof.

[00:33:03] So we've included all of that. We did not have a policy that referenced health education, so we decided to really kind of rebuild this policy to include all of those requirements. So now we'll look at the policy, unless you have questions about that.

[00:33:22] No, let's jump through policy. Okay. So we titled it Teaching About Substance Use and the Other Risk-Taking Behavior to incorporate some of the other topics that we wanted to include. And as you see on lines 4 through 9, those are the exact same words that I just read that align with the model policy.

[00:33:48] And then 16 through 30 is the verbiage that comes from the code, Virginia code. and what's crossed out was the previous policy and we consulted with legal as well as the health

[00:34:17] MPE supervisor in developing this that's it so I guess I'll begin with so what what impact does this policy change would have on the instructions or curriculum as a result of this policy change none so we're already doing what is required it just wasn't written in policy so health MPE the Student Assistance Specialist, FLE, they all have a part of the substance use education, which does include process addiction, gambling addiction,

[00:34:57] as well as internet addiction. Internet addiction, risk factors. Risk factors. Risk factors and addiction. So there's no change to any instruction. It's just now we have it in writing what we're doing.

[00:35:14] So this is, again, just getting in line with the model policy or the code. I mean, so that's just a change from that point of view. So I want to be clear that it's not about any changes we're making. We're just getting in line with that. Yes. I know it's not a topic for here, but I think I do hear from students that we could do, again, this is for the curriculum and instructions, perhaps.

[00:35:39] We could definitely do a lot more in educating about substance abuse and the challenges with it, I think, in terms of, I know we're doing it, what's required. But I think the feedback is, I'm sure we can be doing more with that. So again, I'll take it with the curriculum instruction policy, nothing to do here.

[00:35:58] So, do you have any questions, board members? Okay. I don't have any questions at the moment either on this policy. It looks like it's pretty straightforward and pretty clear. So I think we'll just kind of bring it back next time around. Or, I don't know, Ms. Sheridan, if you open, if the policy looks good

and we don't have any questions, we could take the next step in sending this policy to our advisory councils and kind of jump that.

[00:36:24] I think that's listed up there. That's where it's going next at the top, right? Yeah, I don't have any objection to that. Okay. Thank you. Sounds great. Thank you. And I think that's all we had.

[00:36:42] Did we have anything else I thought we must find? No. Okay. All right. Can we move up to item number five, new business? No new business? I guess we can adjourn the meeting then. Thank you so much. Thank you.



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