

THE GLOUCESTER PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Our mission is for all students to be successful, engaged, lifelong learners.

Special Program Subcommittee Meeting Minutes

Friday, October 19, 2012

Superintendent's Conference Room – District Office

3:00 p.m.

Members Present

Val Gilman, Chairperson
Roger Garberg, Vice Chairman
Kathy Clancy

Administration Present

Dr. Richard Safier, Superintendent
Erik Anderson, GHS Principal (3:27 p.m.)

I. CALL TO ORDER

Chairperson Gilman called the meeting to order at 3:10 p.m. and stated the mission of the Gloucester Public Schools.

II. REPORTS/DELIBERATIONS/DISCUSSION

GHS Attendance Policy – Dr. Safier noted that he and Mr. Anderson reviewed the policy presented at the October 10, 2012 School Committee meeting and tried to simplify and organize it. They also considered the feedback from several members of the committee to introduce a grade restoration option. Dr. Safier reported that the revisions included in the 10/19/12 draft were guided by the following criteria:

- The policy should provide a strong incentive to attend school regularly.
- The policy should provide the means for grade restoration should a student lose a quarterly grade due to poor attendance.
- The policy should encourage the making up of work missed when a student is absent from school.
- The policy should not be overly punitive.
- The policy must be manageable for teachers and administrators.

Dr. Safier reviewed a chart comparing other districts' attendance policies, including Beverly, Lowell, Lynn, Haverhill, Methuen, Peabody and Salem, showing an average of 4 absences per quarter. Chairperson Gilman noted that the only school that has more than 6 undocumented absences is Lynn, with 7. After a brief conversation about required documentation, Dr. Safier stated that it is unheard of to him that there is not some sort of documentation provided by the court when a minor misses school.

Dr. Safier reviewed GHS attendance statistics for last year showing large numbers of absences and tardies, which he believes calls for raising the expectation on attendance. In the 2011/2012 school year, GHS had a total enrollment of 969 students. There were 280

students with 15 or more absences, or 29% of the student body. These 280 students missed 9,163 cumulative days. In terms of tardiness, 110 students had 24 tardies or more, or 11% of the population, resulting in 4,743 cumulative days missed.

Dr. Safier also provided a transcript request form and an actual transcript, which shows only the student's final grade and number of credits. Therefore, there are no issues about blemishes on a student's transcript. He noted that there are still places for students who graduate with less than a stellar academic record, such as community college, and reported that the administration is possibly looking at free cash for an online credit recovery program.

Mr. Garberg stated that there is an assumption that an "AF" is more negative than a grade of 64, which he is not sure is true. He would prefer to show a problem with attendance separately on a transcript, which may have a different explanation than an academic problem. Dr. Safier prefers that those kinds of explanations come from teachers and guidance counselors rather than showing up on a transcript.

Mr. Anderson joined the meeting at 3:27 p.m. and apologized for being late, stating that he thought the meeting was scheduled for 3:30 p.m.

Dr. Safier read the 10/19/12 revised draft of the GHS Attendance Standards & Procedures, and the subcommittee discussed the following matters:

- Grade Restoration – Mr. Garberg observed that this provision seems to undercut the intent of the policy since we are offering an incentive program that allows for a very large number of absences in a quarter followed by a relatively small number of absences the next quarter. What he would ideally like to see happen is that the "AF" serves as a signal and that in the next quarter, there is a substantial change in behavior, i.e. virtually no absences. He suggested that if the total number of absences for the first and second quarters exceeds the total allowance of absences for both quarters (12), there would be no option for grade restoration. The effect would be to motivate students to keep going to class after a string of absences so that they have the option of grade restoration in the next quarter.

Mr. Anderson stated that the intent of this provision was to address some of the concerns that came up at the October 10th School Committee meeting and that the behavior change is implicit in the student not getting anymore "AFs." However, this makes it easier to swallow inasmuch as if a student does change his/her behavior to the extent that they are no longer chronically absent, they can earn their grade back. Kathy Clancy is okay with the grade restoration provision because she would like to see students being positively motivated to go to school.

Mr. Anderson would like students to have the opportunity, even if they have missed, say, 17 days in a quarter, to be able to work with the administration and guidance counselors towards grade restoration. Mr. Garberg noted if that is the case, there is no longer a cost after 7 absences in a quarter. Dr. Safier stated that, in all likelihood,

the cost is going to come in other ways and that the intent is to capture each and every student where there is a potential to turn their behavior around. Kathy Clancy noted that there is a built-in cap of 24 absences. Therefore, if a student is absent from any class 24 times, they will not get credit for the class.

Dr. Safier respectfully added that in the end, the high school administration has to live with the policy and asked the subcommittee for some measure of deference. He reminded the subcommittee that if and when the policy is approved, the high school will try it out for a year or so and may need to adjust it.

- Excused Absences – A driver's license examination was removed as an excused absence. Failure to provide the appropriate notice of an excused absence within 3 days after the student's return to school will be classified as an unexcused absence.
- Tardy to Class – Chairperson Gilman reviewed the comments from the October 3, 2012 Program Sub Committee meeting to make sure that the latest revisions had taken into consideration the feedback generated by the subcommittee. With respect to Ms. Teixeira's concern that a tardy to class of more than 7 minutes counting as an absence would discourage a student from going to that class at all if he/she is going to be more than 7 minutes late, Dr. Safier stated that if the student does not go to class, it is counted as a class cut. Either way, Mr. Anderson indicated that there will be an administrative intervention.

After discussion, on a motion by Kathy Clancy, seconded by Mr. Garberg, it was unanimously

VOTED: 3 in favor zero opposed, to recommend to the full School Committee that we approve for a first reading the draft GHS Attendance Standards & Procedures, as presented and amended at the October 19, 2012 Program Subcommittee meeting.

Mr. Garberg stated that he is supporting the policy because he believes there is a big problem with chronic absences; however, he would like to revisit the policy in a year. Chairperson Gilman agreed and noted that this policy allows more absences than the other districts' policies. She has also thought about the possibility of allowing grade restoration but penalizing a student one grade level as opposed to restoring their original grade in consideration of their peers who had perfect attendance and may have had some difficulty on a group project because of that student's absence. However, based on the conversation today, she is comfortable supporting the motion.

Mr. Garberg noted that students also have obligations to others in their class to show up and participate. Kathy Clancy believes that having more students in a classroom discussion adds to the learning of all of the students and that students have a responsibility to elevate the class experience for everyone. She asked whether any portion of a student's grade relates to

attendance or participation in class, and Mr. Anderson reported that some teachers grade on that and some do not.

Kathy Clancy left the meeting at 4:29 p.m. to prepare for a GEF function.

The subcommittee discussed presentation of the policy to the School Committee on Wednesday, October 24, 2012. Dr. Safier recommended that he introduce the policy with the chart comparing other districts' policies and the sample transcript and then have Mr. Anderson do the reading of the policy. Mr. Anderson stated that it would be helpful not to have frequent interruptions during the reading and that he would like to be able to get through an entire section before there is commentary or questions. The subcommittee agreed with his recommendation.

Mr. Garberg suggested presenting the policy as a way to help students make the connection between attendance and academic achievement. Chairperson Gilman recommended that, in terms of eye appeal, the policy be formatted to look like a School Committee policy. There was a discussion about whether the policy should be included in the School Committee Policy Manual.

Dr. Safier indicated that he would get a sample attendance review appeal form from his former secretary. Chairperson Gilman noted that the committee should also take into account how the 90 percent of students who are not chronically absent feel about the policy.

Mr. Anderson will ask the Student Advisory Council members to stay and participate at the meeting on Wednesday night if they are able to do so. He is also bringing some teachers who believe the policy will be very beneficial. Dr. Safier indicated that Erin Jermyn will be at the meeting and suggested moving this matter forward on the agenda.

Chairperson Gilman thanked the superintendent and Principal Anderson for investigating best practices amongst seven other school districts and presenting the data at today's meeting.

III. ACTION – See Item

IV. ADJOURNMENT – On a motion by Mr. Garberg, seconded by Chairperson Gilman, it was unanimously

VOTED: 2 in favor zero opposed, to adjourn the Special Program Subcommittee Meeting of October 19, 2012 at 4:42 p.m.

All reference documents and reports are filed in the Superintendent's office.

Maria Puglisi, Recording Secretary