

Board of Education Regular Meeting
April 09, 2018 7:00 PM
PPMS Library

1. Call to Order

Sean Nugent; Board Chair, called the meeting to order at 7:02pm. Other members present: Deborah Burke-Grabarek, Cindy Luty, Ed Gauthier, Tom Turner and Charles Raymond. Dan Harris was absent. Also present: Dr. Roy Seitsinger; Superintendent, John Spang; Director of Finance, and Gloria Homiski; Recording Secretary.

2. Pledge of Allegiance

3. Public Comment

Melissa Lennon; BOF Chair, noted that the FY19 Budget was not on the agenda. Sean Nugent stated that it would be discussed during Finance Committee review.

Heather Helwig; PTO President, made a couple of announcements:
April 27th Science Night, May 31st Palozza.

4. Approval of Minutes

Moved, to approve the minutes of the Special BOE Meeting of 3-12-18 as amended. Luty/Burke-Grabarek. Unanimous. Motion Carries.

Moved, to approve the minutes of the regular meeting of 3-12-18 as presented. Turner/Burke-Grabarek. Luty, Gauthier, Nugent also in favor. Raymond Abstained. Motion Carries.

Moved, to approve the special meeting minutes of 3-22-18 as presented. Burke-Grabarek/Turner. Unanimous. Motion Carries.

5. Principals' Reports

Dr. Davis-Tomczuk: Parent-Teacher conferences were held on March 28th and March 29th. 64% of grade 6 parents attended, 46% of grade 7 parents attended and 49% of grade 8 parents attended. Ivy stated that she is looking towards student lead conferences in the near future.

Class Fundraising: Grade 7 raised \$1653.00 to offset the total cost of \$8500 for the New York trip. Grade 8 raised \$1598 during the Basketball Fundraiser. It will offset the total cost of \$4900 for the Boston trip.

Courage to Speak Presentation will be held on April 23rd at 1:45pm.

April is the month of the military child. A luncheon will be held on April 25th where military parents will be invited to come and eat lunch with their children.

Field Day June 8th (rain date 6-11) at Ocean Beach. Participation in this activity is earned.

STEM Grant: Each grade level has designed a specific activity. Ivy hopes there is enough money for a presenter to come in and speak to teachers.

The Next Generation Science Standards will be presented at the June BOE Meeting.

Ray Bernier: The teachers at PVMS used Sign-Up Genius to schedule their conferences. It was a huge success. 75% of parents attended conferences.

Spirit Week is in force through Friday, April 13th.

The DARE Program for grade 5 is going well under the instruction of Armando Bettini.

The 4th grade will participate in VIP: Violence is Preventable (Safe Futures).

June 13th Field Day (rain date in June 14th).

Dr. Seitsinger stated that Central Office will create a Master District Calendar beginning in September.

6. Reports of Committees

LEARN: Please see attached information from Cindy Luty. The Board will review the Curriculum Committee Policy prepared by Cindy and discuss it at their May meeting.

CABE: Please see attached information from Sean Nugent.

Finance Committee: Sean Nugent stated that the BOE was asked to consider a \$100,000 reduction at the last BOF Meeting. The BOE carefully reviewed individual line items in the initial preparation of their budget. They want to keep the budget intact and move it on to Public Hearing.

Moved, to reconfirm and stand by the budget that was sent to the BOF and already included the impact of any imposed reductions. Turner/Burke-Grabarek. Unanimous. Motion Carries.

Transportation Committee: Charles Raymond stated that a meeting will be held on April 12th at 5pm in the PPMS Library to discuss the purchase of the wheel chair bus. The Board was also asked to review the Transportation Committee Policy that was handed out to them so that it could be discussed at the May meeting.

Capital Project Update: Dynamic Sports Construction is doing a great job on the gym floor at PVMS. Sean stated that some community members have expressed concern over bleacher purchases. He stated that this topic would be discussed at the BOF Meeting on April 10th.

The bus purchase is also underway.

Lockers will be installed at PPMS this summer.

The Science Labs at PPMS may be delayed as the team visits other labs and prepares a final design.

John Spang stated that after a rough winter, the bus garage lot is in need of being paved.

7. Superintendent's Report

2017-2018 Preston School Calendar: 184 instructional days are built into our calendar. The state requires that students attend 181 days. Therefore the revised calendar shows the last day of school for students as June 22, 2018. The last day for staff will be June 27th.

Moved, to approve the revised calendar as presented. Rayumond/Burke-Grabarek. Unanimous. Motion Carries.

Strategic Plan: Cindy requested an editorial change be made to page 5.

Moved, to approve the Strategic Plan as amended. Burke-Grabarek/Luty. Raymond, Nugent and Turner also in favor. Gauthier opposed. Motion Carries.

Preston Public Schools Policy Review: CABA will perform a complete Policy Review after July 1st, pending FY19 budget approval. The cost of this project is \$1800.

Moved, to approve the policy review contingent upon the acceptance of the FY19 Budget. Luty/Burke-Grabarek. Unanimous. Motion Carries.

Grade 8 Achievement and Recognition Ceremony: This event will be held on June 20th at 4pm at PVMS. The NFA graduation will be held on June 21st. Cindy Luty will attend the NFA graduation with Dr. Seitsinger.

2018-2019 Preston School Calendar: An example of the 18-19 Calendar was presented. This calendar has built in storm days. It will be posted on the website for further review in the near future.

Dr. Seitsinger said that he has met with elected officials, the fire chief, troopers, community members and faculty and staff with regard to school safety. All existing safety measures are being reviewed and practiced. Some must remain confidential and others can be shared. Dr. Seitsinger has invested in an enhancement to our school safety protocol with the Raptor System. Visitors' licenses are scanned and reviewed by a registry. A temporary badge is printed out for each visit. Dr. Seitsinger will provide a safety update to the community in the near future.

Free/Reduced Lunch Status: The State of CT Child Nutrition Program has partnered with Medicaid. This is a pilot program designed to ensure that all eligible children are receiving free/reduced school meals. Our current eligibility rate went from 25% to 33%.

Dr. Seitsinger announced a very positive article in The Day newspaper which outlined the school district's successful relationship with YSB.

He also stated that CABA would like to do a Journal Article on the positive impact the Preston School District has had on a family displaced from their previous home in Puerto Rico.

8. Expenditure/Projection Report

John Spang reviewed his projection/expenditure reports with the Board. It was determined that \$85,000 in ECS money will go to the Town. Therefore John will not speculate on any monies that may be returned to the Town at

the end of FY18. John included a financial report taken from our Phoenix financial software. The Board liked the new report and asked that it be used from now on.

9. Public Comment

Heather Helwig: She made several comments.

She asked that the Board confirm that Bleachers will not impact the size of the basketball court.

She asked if Raptor is the best form of defense.

She thanked the Board for not reducing their budget.

Eileen Hargreaves: She suggested that the Board meet the Student Support Director at LEARN.

Andy Depta: He stated that he is disappointed in the Board's decision to not reduce their budget. He believes there is money that can be cut.

Jill Charron: She is concerned with safety issues at PVMS. Contractors going in and out can be problematic. She has seen the Raptor System work well in Lisbon. She believes the social worker is a necessity. She would like to see more nutritious lunches in the cafeteria.

Andy Bilodeau: He stated that audience members must direct their Public Comments to the BOE Chair, not other members of the audience.

Melissa Lennon: She would like to see consistency between the 2 schools with regard to safety and security. Different procedures were followed at each school during Parent/Teacher conferences.

10. Adjournment

Moved, to adjourn the meeting at 8:50PM. Burke-Grabarek/Nugent. Unanimous. Motion Carries.

LEARN Synopsis
March 15, 2018

1. LEARN Development Director, Jack Cross, presented the current work of his department, including supports for the magnet schools, an update on the new Student Support Services LEARNing Academy, work with the Vermont International Academy and work with the National Coast Guard Museum Association on future educational programs.
2. Report from Executive Director, Eileen Howley, included a hiring update, her consent agenda that included the 2017-2018 revenue update, as well as several grant applications.

She presented a correspondence naming The Marine Science High School and the Riverside Magnet School as "Schools of Distinction".

Dr. Howley reported that UCONN announced the partnership between its NEAG School of Education and the LEARN Regional Educational Service Center. Students who take part in the new Masters in Special Education program will be given field placement with LEARN and may receive benefits such as health insurance, mortgage assistance, loan deferment and other benefits.

The legislative update included information regarding RESC Alliance members joining with CAPPS and the CT Technology Assistance Project to work in creating an educational software hub regarding student privacy.

RESC Alliance Directors also testified before the Appropriations Committee regarding fiscal responsibility for magnet schools, rectifying the current burdensome fingerprinting policy and supporting early childhood education.

3. The Board approved the 2018-2019 salary and benefits proposal.
4. The Students-Child Abuse, Neglect and Sexual Assault policy was tabled to the next meeting in April.
5. The Board also voted to non-renew the contracts for non-tenured teachers, per Connecticut General Statutes 10-151, as recommended by the Executive Director.
6. The final plan and cost estimates for the Student Support Services Ocean Avenue LEARNing Academy were approved.

From: **Nancy Propfe** CABE@embrams-mail.com
Subject: CABE Equity Opportunity for Your District
Date: April 4, 2018 at 11:24 AM
To: s.t.nuge@gmail.com



Thanks to generous funding from the Nellie Mae Foundation and the William Caspar Graustein Memorial Fund, the Connecticut Association of Boards of Education's (CABE's) Diversity Committee (Donald Harris, Chair) has been seeking ways to support school boards as they navigate significant demographic shifts to ensure schools are responsive to the needs of their students and communities.

In addition to attracting teachers and board members who reflect the diversity of the children, we have been asking, "How do boards embrace the backgrounds and cultures of students and tap the richness of talents and backgrounds children bring to school? How do communities explore the challenges of a 'mainstream' school culture and potential advantages of a personalized learning approach?"

Opportunity:

CABE seeks three communities to pilot an **Equity Toolkit**, including a guide for boards to engage diverse community stakeholders in conversations about equity and cultural competency. Selected boards will receive technical assistance, materials, logistical backup, and funding for refreshments for up to 50 conversation attendees.

If you are interested in participating as a pilot community in this work, please complete the attached form and return it to Lisa Steimer, lsteimer@cabe.org, by April 18.





CABE
Opport...te.docx

OPPORTUNITY TO PARTICIPATE

Equity Toolkit and Engagement

Background:

Thanks to generous funding from the Nellie Mae Foundation and the William Caspar Graustein Memorial Fund, the Connecticut Association of Boards of Education's (CABE's) Diversity Committee (Donald Harris, Chair) has been seeking ways to support school boards as they navigate significant demographic shifts to ensure schools are responsive to the needs of their students and communities. In addition to attracting teachers and board members who reflect the diversity of the children, we have been asking, "How do boards embrace the backgrounds and cultures of students and tap the richness of talents and backgrounds children bring to school? How do communities explore the challenges of a 'mainstream' school culture and potential advantages of a personalized learning approach?"

Engaging communities in conversations about equity is a vital role school boards can play in encouraging open dialogue and fostering growth in cultural competency while strengthening the community-school relationship.

Opportunity:

CABE seeks three communities to pilot an **Equity Toolkit**, including a guide for boards to engage diverse community stakeholders in conversations about equity and cultural competency. Selected boards will receive technical assistance, materials, logistical backup, and funding for refreshments for up to 50 conversation attendees.

To support this work in the three districts, CABE consultants John Ramos and Mary Broderick will:

- Meet with the board in a public meeting to review and consider the overall toolkit (Spring 2018).
- Meet with a board-designated planning group to design a conversation (Spring 2018).
- Train board and community members to facilitate conversations (Fall 2018).
- Support the board in conducting the conversation (Fall 2018).
- Offer guidance to facilitating a follow-up meeting to the conversation (Fall 2018).
- Gather board feedback (Spring through Fall 2018).

Criteria for Pilot Districts:

This Opportunity to Participate is open to all boards of education in Connecticut. The CABE Diversity Committee will select the pilots, giving preference to CABE member districts and districts where over 40% of students are eligible for free/reduced priced meals.

If your board is interested in being considered, please respond by **April 18, 2018**.

OPPORTUNITY TO PARTICIPATE

Equity Toolkit and Engagement

The _____ Board of Education is interested in being considered as a pilot district for the **CABE Equity Toolkit**. We understand the commitment includes offering feedback on the Equity Toolkit itself, establishing a planning group to organize a community conversation (both Spring 2018), and conducting a conversation and follow-up meeting (Fall 2018).

Superintendent of Schools (Please print)

Superintendent of Schools (Signature)

Date

Please return to Lisa Steimer at CABE: lsteimer@cabe.org by April 18, 2018



Connecticut Association of Boards of Education

Vincent A. Mustaro, Senior Staff Associate for Policy Services

PRESENTS POLICY HIGHLIGHTS

March 16, 2018

Volume 17 – Issue #19

The Role of Schools in Teaching about Sexual Harassment: In an article in *Education Week*, Stephen Sawchuk reports that most school sex education programs have very little content on sexual harassment and consent in relationships. This is a puzzling omission, say some educators. “From the first time that a girl got her ponytail dunked in an inkwell, schools have been places where girls (and, in some cases, boys, too) have experienced gender-based harassment,” says Sawchuk. “Given the amount of time children spend in them, schools are also the most logical places to teach young people how to recognize harassment – and how to avoid perpetrating it.”

The author further indicates that the #MeToo movement is adding urgency to this question, with students sharing stories from the adult world, and their own experiences in the companion hashtag #MeTooK12, which was launched by “Stop Sexual Assault in Schools.” He believes all this casts new light on the age-old view that girls should put up with touching and teasing because it’s a sign that a boy likes them. If schools don’t give clear guidance, students will get their “education” in this area through rumors, anecdotes, social media, and pornography.

Sawchuk asks how early should schools get into all this? Students in the elementary grades need lessons on body autonomy, personal space, and appropriate and inappropriate touching. However, teaching them about assertiveness can be tricky – the idea that you don’t have to hug grandma if you feel uncomfortable can get pushback from families. He believes there can be much worse consequences from not talking about these issues. “If we tell kids they’re too young to talk about this,” says Kate Rohdenburg of the WISE program in Vermont and New Hampshire, “we’re reinforcing the idea that they need to keep their mouths shut...”

Sawchuk states that outside of formal sex ed programs, educators’ personal behavior is key, as are the limits they set (or don’t set) when they see inappropriate touching and hear disrespectful and sexist comments in classrooms, corridors, cafeterias, and playgrounds. In addition, there are the questions students privately ask educators about how women are talked about and treated by peers, TV personalities, and politicians, and the norms around them. “Why, for example, do the most popular Google searches that contain the word ‘girls’ result in images of women in various stages of undress?” writes Sawchuk. “Why do TV shows often show women in catty rivalries with one another? Why are women ‘period shamed’ and taught to use coded words for menstruation?” What adults say in these informal conversations can have a major impact on how young people think about gender norms, relationships, and harassment.

Source: “What Do Schools Teach About Sexual Harassment?” by Stephen Sawchuk in *Education Week*, January 26, 2018, as summarized in *Marshall Memo 721*, January 29, 2018.

Policy Implications: In an article appearing in *The New York Times* on February 24, 2018, written by Susan Chira, a description is provided of a survey of a nationally representative sample of 1,000 women and 1,000 men pertaining to their experience with sexual harassment and assault. Some of the details reported are as follows:

Occurrences, by gender:

- Verbal sexual harassment – 77% of women, 34% of men
- Unwelcome sexual touching – 51% of women, 17% of men
- Online sexual harassment – 41% of women, 22% of men
- Being physically followed – 34% of women, 12% of men
- Sexual assault – 27% of women, 7% of men

Occurrences, by locations:

- A public space – 66% of women, 19% of men
- Workplace – 38% of women, 13% of men
- Own home – 35% of women, 13% of men
- School through 12th grade – 30% of women, 14% of men
- By phone – 28% of women, 13% of men
- Someone else’s home – 27% of women, 11% of men
- Mass transportation – 26% of women, 8% of men
- Online – 25% of women, 11% of men

These findings drive home the importance of K-12 schools educating students to understand, resist, and refrain from these startlingly common practices.

A number of policies pertain to this issue. They include the following:

- #0521 – Equal Opportunity Plan/Nondiscrimination
- #0521.1 – Grievance Procedure-Title IX
- #4111.1/4211.1 – Affirmative Action: Equal Employment Opportunities
- #4118.112/4218.112 – Sexual Harassment
- #4118.113/4218.113 – Harassment
- #5131.911 – Bullying/Safe School Climate Plan
- #5145.5 – Sexual Harassment
- #5145.51 – Peer Sexual Harassment
- #5145.511 – Sexual Abuse Prevention and Education Program
- #5145.57 – Harassment

In addition, a new policy, #6142.111, “Sexual Health Education,” is now available for your consideration and possible use. This policy is available upon request from CABE’s policy Department.

Standards-Based Grading: In this article in *School Administrator*, Matt Townsley, director of instruction and technology of the Solon Community School District in Solon, Iowa, describes how his high school gradually adopted standards-based grading. Teachers shifted from giving students grades on homework assignments, projects, and class tests to monitoring and posting students’ current level of mastery on course standards. (At the end of each reporting period, these were converted to letter grades.) The school moved to standards-based grading for three reasons:

1. *To communicate students' current level of learning* – The best way of explaining this to students and parents was with the analogy of how a band instructor gives feedback to a flute player: “Rhythm could be better, but you’re exceptional at hitting high notes.” Clearly this is a better way to affirm and improve performance than a letter or percentage grade.
2. *To eliminate the influence of practice work on students' final grades* – What really matters is mastery at the end of a unit or course, not on the formative assignments, some of which may not have gone that well. An athletic analogy is apt: some of a football team’s scrimmages may have been less than stellar, but it’s game scores that count. Teachers using standards-based grading keep track of homework and other assignments, as well as student absences, but the key feedback for students and parents is final mastery of content and skills.
3. *To give students multiple opportunities to demonstrate understanding* – Students learn at different rates and find some parts of any curriculum unit more difficult than others. Standards-based grading keeps students’ and parents’ eyes on the ball: mastery of content, which sometimes requires several attempts and some stumbles along the way.

This high school made the transition to standards-based grading gradually over a period of several school years. Initially a small group of teachers participated in a 10-week after-school study group on effective grading practices and started to implement some components of standards-based grading. Then district administrators did a thorough study of this approach, and the early adopters provided informal support to colleagues who were ready to make the shift. After a year of professional reading and presentations to the school board and a community forum, 82 percent of teachers were either using the new system or ready to take the plunge, and the school board unanimously approved a two-year implementation timeline: year one included just-in-time professional support for teachers new to implementation, and year two was full implementation in all courses. District leaders made regular reports to the school board and developed an implementation guide for newly hired teachers.

Some parents pushed back on standards-based grading, says Townsley, mostly based on these misconceptions:

- *Grading this way will hurt students' college chances.* Administrators pointed out that the grades sent to colleges were conventional letter grades based on students’ mastery of the subject matter. Okay, said parents, but what about some neighboring schools that inflated students’ final grades with homework and classroom assignments? True, said administrators, but under standards-based grading, students get more feedback and opportunities to improve their grades throughout each marking period. The bottom line: in every year that standards-based grading has been used, students from this high school were admitted to college at expected levels.
- *This isn't how things work in the real world.* Actually, there are plenty of post-school situations where people have multiple opportunities to demonstrate mastery – for example, drivers’ tests, nursing exams, and bar exams.

Townsley says the district has continued to tweak the system over the last five years, including retrofitting electronic grade books to accommodate standards updates rather than homework, assignments, and tests.

Policy Implications: Districts in many states, including Connecticut, have started to consider and implement competency-based learning as a secondary school reform in order to increase graduation rates and ensure that students have the skills and knowledge for post-secondary success. Many Connecticut schools and districts have begun to implement practices pertaining to a Mastery-Based Learning environment (MBL).

Competency-Based learning lacks a common definition but researchers have found that it has the four following common elements.

1. Students must demonstrate mastery of all required competencies to earn credit or graduate.
2. Students advance once they have demonstrated mastery, and students receive more time, and possibly individualized instruction, to demonstrate mastery if needed.
3. Students are assessed using multiple measures to determine mastery, usually requiring that students apply their knowledge, not just repeat facts. Formative and summative assessments should be developed to measure progress towards mastery.
4. Students can earn credit toward graduation in ways other than seat time, including apprenticeships, blended learning, dual enrollment, career and technical education programs, and other learning opportunities outside the traditional classroom setting.

In a MBL environment, students are given multiple pathways to master critical content knowledge and skills. By demonstrating competency, students meet course expectations and are given credit.

The SDE has stated that traditional assessment is insufficient to support the MBL environment. The traditional practice of averaging a student's achievement over time, including factors such as behavior in determining grades, do not paint an accurate picture of a student's attainment of competencies. In a MBL environment, not only is the learning individualized, but the way students demonstrate mastery is tailored to their needs and strengths.

In a transition to a mastery-based system of teaching and learning, districts and schools will need to review and possibly revise existing policies, while also creating new policies that address emerging models, practices and learning experiences

Some policies are available for districts to consider if they are contemplating moving into a mastery-based learning environment. It must be stressed that these policies should be viewed as a starting point for the district as it transitions into a mastery-based learning environment.

- Policy #6146 – Graduation Requirements (based on a MBL approach)
- Policy #6146.1 – Grading and Reporting System (based on a MBL approach)
- Policy #6146.13 – Multiple Pathways (based on a MBL approach)



Connecticut Association of Boards of Education

Vincent A. Mustaro, Senior Staff Associate for Policy Services

PRESENTS POLICY HIGHLIGHTS

March 30, 2018

Volume 17 – Issue #20

Civility on School Property: Much attention has been given to the issue of preventing bullying. School districts need to continue their efforts to improve the social climate within our schools. Policies in a number of areas, in addition to bullying, impact the issue of achieving the desired moral and ethical climate desired in our schools. These additional policy areas include, but are not limited to, policies pertaining to nondiscrimination, suspension and expulsion, conduct, violent and aggressive behavior, sexual harassment, racial harassment, and equal educational opportunity. Samples are available upon request from CABE.

In today's society there is an increasingly common "in-your-face" model of dealing with conflict. The media and popular culture seem to exemplify the angry argument as the model of communication. However, it is possible for people to disagree but to do it civilly. This could enhance the safe, nurturing culture in the school environment. Therefore, it is appropriate that school districts consider a policy pertaining to civility that provides ground rules for communication among teachers, parents and students.

School districts are required to prepare a safe school climate plan pertaining to the elimination of bullying behavior in the school setting through the overall improvement of school climate. As an extension of this effort and as part of the effort to improve school climate, boards may want to consider a policies pertaining to civility and civil discourse. Safety policies and plans are designed to respond to crisis situations involving violent behavior or natural emergencies. Incidents occur in schools also which involve parents or other members of the community that do not rise to the level of behavior requiring the activation of the district's or school's safety or crisis management plan. Such behavior, however, may involve hostile and/or aggressive actions.

A board of education has every right to expect civility, civil discourse, respect, and orderly conduct among all individuals on school property or at school events. A powerful example is set for the student population when the district indicates that it expects mutual respect, civility and orderly conduct from the adults with whom the district interacts. A civility policy may be used as a preventative measure to stop or curb incidents of violent or hostile behavior by adults before they become a problem. Such a policy could apply to both school employees and to adult patrons of the school community. A civil discourse policy promotes the district's desire to model the desired interaction among all facets of the school community

Boards of education and their employees, through their actions, should be role models of the desired behavior and civil discourse. Board bylaws related to methods of operation will help ensure the appropriate orderly conduct. The premise of such a policy is that schools must be safe, and even when people disagree, they can do so with an air of civility to each other.

This is an important message for the students in our schools, especially in light of the current political climate in our nation. All too often in schools we see examples of loud disruptive behavior by adults and verbally abusive attacks directed toward board members, school administrators and staff. Such incidents impact staff morale. Therefore, the purpose of a civility policy is to promote mutual respect, civility, civil discourse and orderly conduct among board members, district employees, parents and the public. Moreover, through such a policy the board encourages positive communication and discourages volatile, hostile or aggressive actions.

School boards, through C.G.S. 10-221, are given the authority to “prescribe rules for the management, studies, classification and discipline of the public schools.” The same statute indicates that boards of education have the responsibility for the care, maintenance, and operation of buildings, lands, apparatus and other property used for school purposes. Members of the public are subject to the reasonable rules and policies of the board while in attendance at school events and in and on school facilities.

It is reasonable for a school board to ask its employees and patrons to act civilly toward each other when discussing education concerns and other issues. The primary function of the schools is to educate the children. An effective way to perform this vital function is in an environment free of and from interference with teaching the students. Civility is part of that education; it should be practiced by and expected from school employees and members of the community.

Policy Implications: Policy #1316, “Conduct on School Property,” pertains to this topic of civility on school property. This policy has been one of CABA’s sample policies since the time former Commissioner of Education Theodore Sergi requested school districts to work harder on improving the social climate within our schools, over a decade ago. It has been updated and some new models have also been prepared.

In addition, a new policy has been prepared, related to this topic, which specifically addresses the issue of civil discourse. This was developed in relation to CABA’s adopted resolution. This is policy #1316.3, “Promoting Civil Discourse,” which is available upon request.

Weather Impacting School Calendars: Recent inclement weather has necessitated the closing of school or the shortening of the school day on several occasions during the current school year. This is impacting school calendars.

Schools are required by state law to be in session for at least 180 days per school year. Some districts have voluntarily adopted a calendar with more than this required amount. The number of school closings thus far may make it necessary for districts to modify their adopted school-year calendar to comply with the 180 day minimum requirement. In making modifications, districts must be aware that state law prohibits scheduling school sessions held on Saturdays or Sundays. Also, law prohibits making up lost time by extending the hours of the school day. Schools may be in session on legal holidays, provided a suitable nonsectarian educational program is held in observance of the holiday. However, schools may not be in session on those legal holidays that are in December or January.

The State Department of Education (SDE) is permitted by statute to modify the school calendar to contain fewer than the 180 day requirement due to “unavoidable emergency.” However, Commissioner Wentzell has advised superintendents that school closures due to inclement weather generally will not constitute unavoidable emergencies because school closures have occurred early enough in the school year to allow districts to make up the lost days.

The establishment of a date for graduation is also impacted by lost school days due to the weather. As a general rule, because school must be in session for at least 180 days, graduation may not be held until this requirement is met. C.G.S. 10-16l provides an exception to this rule. It provides that boards of education, at the beginning of the school year, may adopt a school calendar with a specified graduation date provided the calendar contains at least 185 dates. "Graduation may then be held on the specified graduation date, regardless of the number of school closings that occur during the school year. If a school has not been in session for at least 180 days at the time of graduation, however, seniors would be required to return to school after graduation to complete the 180 required school days."

Another exception allows a district after April 1 to establish a graduation date that would provide for 180 school days if graduation were held on the established date. If, after this date is set and inclement weather or another emergency necessitates the closing of school, graduation can be held on the designated day. However, as above, if the 180 day requirement has not been met, seniors are required to return to school after the graduation to fulfill the 180 day required school days.

Districts may also need to address their bargaining unit agreements when modifying their school calendar.

Source: "School Closures and the School Calendar," by Commissioner of Education Dr. Dianna R. Wentzell, in a memorandum sent to Superintendents of Schools, March 15, 2018.

Policy Implications: The policy pertaining to the school calendar and graduation date is #6111, "School Calendar." This is considered an optional policy for inclusion in a district's policy manual.