

Connecticut State Board of Education

Hartford

Legislation and Policy Development Committee

Wednesday, March 1, 2023, 8:00 a.m.

Committee Members

Malia K. Sieve, Chair
Karen DuBois-Walton, Donald F. Harris, Bonnie E. Burr,
Martha Paluch Prou, Elwood Exley, Jr., and Valli Pendyala

Minutes

(Approved May 3, 2023)

Pursuant to notice filed with the Secretary of the State, the State Board of Education Legislation and Policy Development Committee met in person on March 1, 2023.

I. Call to Order

Committee Chair Malia K. Sieve called the meeting to order at 8:15. In addition to Ms. Sieve, also present at the opening of the meeting were Committee Members Donald F. Harris, Bonnie Burr, Elwood Exley, Jr., and Valli Pendyala. Committee Members Karen DuBois-Walton and Martha Paluch Prou joined the meeting in progress. In addition, the following individuals from the CSDE were in attendance: John Frassinelli, Director of School Health, Nutrition, and Family Services; Irene Parisi, Chief Academic Officer; Michael P. McKeon, Director of Legal and Governmental Affairs; and Sonya Efanayi, Administrative Assistant, Communications Office.

Presenter:

John Frassinelli, Director of School Health, Nutrition, and Family Services, CSDE

II. Approval of Minutes

Mr. Exley moved to approve the February 1, 2023, meeting minutes, and Ms. Burr seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

III. Review and Discussion: Firearm Safety Guide and Implementation

Ms. Sieve noted that the CSDE's Firearm Safety Guide ["Guide"] had become an issue of interest, with some outside advocates having raised concerns about it, and that Mr. Frassinelli was joining the Committee to discuss it.

Mr. Frassinelli began his presentation by noting that the Guide was designed to address firearm safety in the homes. It arose from Public Act 19-5 (which is codified as Section 29-37i of the Connecticut General Statutes), which, in turn, was the result of a tragedy in which a child found an unsecured weapon and accidentally killed himself. A number of stakeholder organizations, which included law enforcement agencies, had helped inform the Guide.

At the elementary-school level, the instruction is focused on the need to avoid guns, to not touch them, that they are dangerous. At the middle-school level, there is discussion of how guns and weapons are

portrayed in movies and television. There is also discussion as to the reasons police officers carry guns, and the acknowledgement that some use guns to hunt. The underlying message is the danger of guns, and the importance of avoiding them. At the high school level, the Guide is directed toward debate, specifically balancing the danger, and problematic aspects, of firearms with the constitutional right to bear arms. The Guide also provides numerous resources, including sample curricula, and contains citations to relevant federal and state statutes. The Guide was approved by the Board in October 2020. There were also prior discussions with the Committee.

The purpose of the Guide is to provide best practices. There is, however, no requirement that this be part of the public-school curriculum, and if it is offered, students can opt out. The CSDE does not know whether any district is using it as the CSDE has not received any feedback from school districts regarding it, but Mr. Frassinelli noted the Guide is not helpful if no one is using it.

The CSDE has met on several occasions with the Connecticut Against Gun Violence [“CAGV”] representatives, most recently two months ago, regarding CAGV’s concerns. The CAGV did not like the language in the Guide, but it had acknowledged the difficulty even for gun-control organizations such as James Brady’s to come up with appropriate guidance or language. CAGV had concerns about references in the Guide to Second Amendment rights, preferring that it instead focus solely on firearm safety, but the CSDE felt that the Guide should contain a broader dialogue regarding the issues.

Mr. Exley asked what the Committee’s specific role is given that the Guide had been approved by the Board and subsequently published. Dr. DuBois-Walton noted that CSDE guidance can be updated and revised, and thus the State Board could review and either reaffirm it or ask the CSDE to reconsider or revise the Guide. Mr. Frassinelli agreed that the CSDE often updates guidance. The CSDE seeks curriculum that students would engage with, and discussions topics that would excite student interest, and thus would be happy to revisit the Guide if there is pedagogical basis for doing so. Doing so would not necessarily require the reengagement of stakeholders as, again, the CSDE regularly updates guidance when circumstances support doing so.

Mr. Exley raised the question as to the Committee’s responsibility, and Attorney McKeon noted that it ultimately comes down to how the Board would like to proceed. Committee members stated that the Committee would not like to set a precedent by which an individual or entity could demand change to CSDE guidance and the Board would simply do so; rather, it was agreed that the Board should act in a manner consistent with past practice.

To that end, Ms. Sieve proposed inviting the CAGV to the Committee’s next meeting and hearing its perspective, which the Committee would take under advisement in determining whether or not an update was appropriate. There was also discussion about the CSDE possible engaging pediatricians for their opinions. It was decided that the Committee would ask the CAGV to meet with it at the Committee’s April 5, 2023, meeting.

IV. Adjournment

The Committee adjourned the meeting at 8:57 a.m.