

UPPER PERKIOMEN SCHOOL DISTRICT

Education Center

2229 E. Buck Road, Pennsburg PA 18073

Policy Committee Meeting

February 23, 2021

Chair: Peg Pennepacker

Ex-Officio: Melanie Cunningham, President

Members: Stephen Cunningham , Keith McCarrick

Superintendent-Dr. Allyn Roche Asst. Superintendent-Dr. Andrea Farina Business Manager-Sandy Kassel HR Director-Georgiann Fisher

Meeting was called to order and approval of November 16,2020 and January 19, 2021 committee meeting minutes was approved.

Policy 227: Controlled Substances/Paraphernalia. A brief review of the proposed changes to the current policy were viewed. Two of the proposed changes discussed at this meeting were made in the Implementation section of the policy. The first one states "the principal and/or assistant principal shall give the Superintendent immediate verbal notice of all drug violations. Such notice shall be followed before the end of the subsequent day with a written report setting forth the pertinent details of the incident. The second one states, "the principal and/or assistant principal shall recommend expulsion to the Superintendent of Schools."

The current AR states that upon the first offense the following will occur: the principal or designee will promptly notify the student's parent/guardian concerning the incident and will schedule a parent conference to seek additional information that could guide disposition of the possible policy violation. The principal or designee will notify the local police. The student will be placed in out of school suspension for 10 consecutive school days. A referral would be made to the Student Assistance Program. A one year probation is enacted. In cases where a student possesses a large amount of prohibited drug related items suggestive of intent to distribute drugs, the Superintendent may recommend expulsion.

Data from the PAYS surveys has shown an increase in drug usage and distribution over the years. If the proposed changes stated above are approved, the hope is that this will diminish the increase in usage and distribution. Peg stated that she doesn't believe expulsion on the first offense would be helping with drug issues. Keith asked if this is the only option for the first offense. Stephen agrees with both Peg and Keith that "one strike and you're out" may not be effective with curbing drug usage. Peg asked for feedback from the administrators in attendance. Mo Zavadel and Art Vigilante spoke about how this is not currently an issue in their buildings and that due to the ages of the students, they believe a different approach may need to be discussed. Joanna McCourt (interim principal at Marlborough) followed up with the same sentiments on how this proposed policy isn't necessarily appropriate due to the developmental levels of elementary students. Brian Callan stated that at the middle school they haven't seen many offenses. Chris Siegfried stated that perhaps an expulsion of a shorter length of time would be something to consider and counseling is an important piece to assist students with growth.

Kyle Somers stated that from a legal perspective the board has the authority to enact the policy. The district may have additional legal challenges with this zero tolerance policy (increased hearings, concerns about strictness). The current policy allows for an informal hearing which may provide administration additional context about the offense which may result in a lesser number of days suspended and/or open the door for mental health assistance.

Josh Miller addressed that if there are cases at the high school where a student who has been found in possession of drugs/paraphernalia and is also found to be distributing, this zero tolerance policy may be necessary due to the larger safety issues with our student population.

Dr. Farina asked Kyle Somers if the current A.R. could be changed so that the context surrounding the offense is taken into consideration. He replied that there may be a middle ground where, depending upon the circumstances, the student isn't expelled on the first offense, but, if the act is determined to be egregious, expulsion is recommended on the first offense.

Art Vigilante asked if there has been a consideration of tying the referral for expulsion to requiring support services, such as, completion of a certain number of drug/alcohol education classes.

Keith McCarrick stated that he doesn't feel that a first offense and expulsion is the way we should go. Stephen Cunningham added that in the current policy or AR does it state who the person responsible for identifying the student under the influence is (principal, coach, etc). Dr. Farina answered that the person reporting can be anyone, student, teacher, etc. How we get that information may vary, but the way we investigate has to be very prescriptive and precise and follow the policy.

Dr. Farina stated that we need to discuss how we will further increase and implement preventative measures. Once a child is expelled there may not be supports available to address substance abuse and assist with the root cause.

Mrs. O'Hara, Upper Hanover resident, expressed her concern over the proposed policy change and how it can permanently impact a child's life.

Dr. Roche expressed his appreciation of the participation and discussion. Dr. Farina expressed her agreement with Dr. Roche and reiterated that we need to take into consideration the recommendations of the PSBA, the community, and the administrators and come together to develop the policy. We still need to do a lot of work on this policy.

Peg Pennepacker proposes that the committee members pass the policy back to Dr. Farina. She agrees with Kyle Somers in that we need to come to a middle ground. Both Keith McCarrick and Stephen Cunningham agree with the proposal.

Keith McCarrick asked about the parameters of the jurisdiction of the district with this policy. Kyle Somers stated that the district has jurisdiction when students are coming to and from school and cited examples. Dr. Farina stated that if there is ambiguity in the meaning of this, it may be necessary for review.

Dr. Farina will work with the administrative team and Kyle to find some middle ground with the policy and to add more supportive measures and bring it back for review. For next month, AR 233 will be reviewed, along with the policy.

Mrs. O'Hara would like the full board to participate in expulsion hearings. She questioned the informal hearing process as it is stated and practiced. She believes it needs to be looked at by administration.

Peg expressed her appreciation for participation. Keith made a motion to adjourn and Stephen seconded it. Meeting adjourned.