

SALINE AREA SCHOOLS BOARD OF EDUCATION

POLICY COMMITTEE SPECIAL MEETING

MINUTES

Union School Boardroom
Tuesday, October 20, 2009
5:00 PM

1. **CALL TO ORDER** of the Board Policy Committee Special Meeting of October 20, 2009, by Chairperson Paul Hynek at 5:00 PM.

Members Present

Trustee Cattell, Chairperson Hynek, and Secretary Lesch

Members Absent

Trustee Slawson

Central Administrators Present

Superintendent Graden and Assistant Superintendent Wall

2. **PUBLIC COMMENT**

Vickie Kiningham asked the committee to consider class ranking as well as the weighted grade point average in the discussion about the grading policy. She stated that although she supports weighted grades, she has been going on college visits with her son and one student stated he had a 6.2 GPA so it can get out of hand as well.

She was also concerned with the requirements for admission into the National Honor Society. At Saline High School a student must have a 3.7 GPA before they can be considered for National Honor Society. According to Ms. Kiningham, despite having taken the hardest courses during his sophomore year, NHS did not consider her son because he did not meet the GPA criteria. The three public schools in Ann Arbor use a 3.5-weighted GPA for consideration. She did indicate that she had called the National Honor Society offices and they stated that GPA ranges are provided to schools and Saline is within the range provided by NHS.

Gretchen Waters asked what would be the downside to weighting grades? She wondered if it was that some students aren't capable of taking AP classes and so it wasn't fair to them. She hoped that wasn't the reason because some kids just don't have that capability. As with sports, some kids are not as athletic as others and may

be cut from teams. If a kid is cut from the team you don't punish the rest of the athletes and not have sports. If kids can excel academically then what is the downside? Her son has excelled in high school and has a 3.97 GPA and is ranked 36th in his class. She does not believe that there are 35 kids above him. It looks like he has not worked hard even though he has worked harder and taken a more challenging curriculum than other students. He had completed four AP classes after his junior year. It doesn't cost the district any money to weight grades.

Another audience member asked for an explanation of weighted grades and whether earning college credit was already rewarding students. Superintendent Graden explained the concept of weighted grades and indicated that a student must pass the AP exam prior to getting college credit for the course. You can pass an AP class but if you do not pass the AP exam you will receive high school credit but not college credit for the class.

David Zimmer stated that weighted grades have been around for 30 years and that 55% of the high schools that have honors programs have weighted grades. He cited a study that showed that graduation rates go up, grade points go up; they have a better chance of getting scholarships, and a higher admittance rate with weighted grade points. He indicated that every child at every level did better as a result of weighted grades.

Denise Frost stated that she has heard a lot of reasons to weight grades but hasn't heard any discussion of why you wouldn't weight them. Superintendent Graden indicated that our current PowerSchool system does not have the capability to weight and unweight grades simultaneously.

Another parent was encouraged to hear that the Board was having a discussion on the weighted grade issue. He felt that the school has discussed the topic for many years but nothing has ever happened. He hoped that some action would finally take place.

Another audience member with three children – two of whom have graduated from Saline High School expressed concern with taking an AP class and having it negatively affect their GPA for college entry. Both students felt that the AP classes better prepared them for college and both were admitted into the Honors College at the University of Michigan.

Marilyn Geiger stated that other schools are positioning their graduates stronger than Saline. She felt that we needed to critically look at this issue on a national level.

A former admissions officer was in the audience and she stated that when she took the survey in the summer she was against weighting the grades. She stated that when she was an admissions officer it was part of her job to go through and recalculate the grade point averages because some schools weighted them and some schools didn't.

She felt that her opinion had changed somewhat but felt that the Administration should call the universities and ask what their policies and practices are. She stated that the admissions offices decide acceptance – not the parents or school administration.

Marilyn Chong asked the question of whether all colleges recalculate GPA's and at what stage do they recalculate? Trustee Hynek indicated that college websites will provide generalities but are not specifics as to admission criteria. Superintendent Graden indicated that some colleges were in contact with them about specific questions from the block to trimester change.

David Zimmer cited a Fairfax County of Virginia survey that stated that 55% of schools do not recalculate GPA's and that no school can recalculate a class ranking. He stated that the GPA had a direct impact on admission rates, scholarships, and 76% of the time a weighted GPA was admitted over a nonweighted GPA.

Another parent asked that the Policy Committee look at the practice of giving A+ grades. They felt that the students taking band always receive A+'s and rise to the top of the class ranking.

If class ranking does have admissions implications in college then another parent felt that the grades should be weighted. He felt that it doesn't really save the parents any money because they still need to fulfill the college requirements.

Vickie Kiningham stated that everyone is trying to collect research on that which is uncollectable. The administration must make decision on incomplete information. She thinks that a lot of the students who have weighted grade point averages do not receive class ranks anymore because it makes them look better.

Marilyn Geiger asked about class ranking in regard to the survey from this summer. Superintendent Graden will review the survey results to determine what the opinion was on this issue.

One parent indicated that she had just made a college visit to Michigan State with her child and they told her that MSU goes back all four years and only calculates academic classes. If they make you an offer and your grades fall off senior year they have the right to rescind that offer.

Chairperson Hynek wondered if in the year 2000 study 50% of the schools were weighting grades why nine years later are only 50% still weighting grades. He would have thought that the number would have increased.

3. POLICY MANUAL

Policy 1370 – Public Participation

Chairperson Hynek went over the change to add a warning after 2 ½ minutes during public comment.

Policy 7650 – Testing Out Program

Superintendent Graden went over the changes to the testing out policy which included adding a paragraph for testing out for students moving into the District.

Policy 8920 – Foreign Exchange Students

Superintendent Graden went over the logistical changes to this policy, which included an address change for the high school.

Policy 7490 – Field Trips and Excursions

On the Field Trip and Excursion Form and “A” needed to be added to read Saline “Area” Schools.

4. DISCUSSION

Policy 9350 – Gifts and Bequests

Assistant Superintendent Wall reviewed the proposed changes to this policy. The Policy Committee will review the changes and discuss at the next meeting.

Policy 9710 – Relations with Parental/Guardian Organizations

The intent of this policy is to improve our reporting relationship with organizations who do business on behalf of the District, i.e., booster clubs, foundations, PTOs and PTAs raising money by using the District name. We are currently in compliance as it stands right now but would like to strengthen this relationship.

Policy 9730 – District Support Organizations

Assistant Superintendent Wall went over this policy and explained that we do have some control if these groups want to be associated with Saline Area Schools. We cannot control their fundraising but the groups must report to the Board. The Policy Committee will review this policy and bring any changes back to the next meeting.

Policy 7560 – Grading Policy

Trustee Slawson asked that this agenda item be brought to the table tonight and unfortunately she is absent this evening for the discussion.

Superintendent Graden reviewed our current grading scale and what the current point values are. We are currently operating on a 4.0 scale. The committee then went over the guidelines for final exams.

Superintendent Graden spoke about discussions at the building level about a 5th and 6th grade honor roll or improvement honor roll.

Secretary Lesch stated that it is going to take a good team effort between Assistant Superintendent Laatsch, Executive Director of Assessment/Secondary Education Enright, and Superintendent Graden to figure out the best option for Saline Area Schools. He indicated that although 15 states were currently weighting grades that meant that 35 still were not and the reasons why not needed to be established.

Trustee Cattell asked if weighting grades would help the majority of the students? It is a public school and we are here to educate the majority of students. Consortium students come in an hour early to school and receive nothing in return. She indicated that she also has a senior in high school this year and has been visiting colleges including Big 10 and Mid-conference schools and the majority of them have said that they do not look at weighted grades any differently. She felt that we really need to focus on how many students this would benefit.

Chairperson Hynek commented that in the recent survey there was mention of “shop” kids having higher GPA’s. Just because these students do not take AP classes does not make them less valuable than the other students. He referenced a study from 2000, which reported seven advantages to weighting grades and 10 disadvantages.

He also referenced a school in Oak Park, CA, which use to weight grades and have changed back to the 4.0 scale because colleges ignore weighted grades and focus more on rigor of schedule. He also cited an article in the NY times in January which indicated that many schools, i.e., Michigan, Duke, and Yale have different criteria for admission. On the Yale application there is a box you can check if you want to discuss the application with an admissions officer. There is also a place to check whether the GPA is weighted or unweighted.

Another school solved the problem by only counting four AP classes toward a weighted GPA.

Superintendent Graden stated that they have received information from Cornell, Michigan, Yale, and Stanford about admissions practices.

It was indicated that at the James Madison Honors College at Michigan State if you are not in the top 10% of your class you would not get in. Superintendent Graden stated that a student who was 13% in their class was accepted recently because of the rigor of their work. They do look at each applicant and do not always look at just the top 10%.

He asked the question of whether this is the direction we really want to go as a District? One of the pros of weighting grade point averages is to increase participation in AP classes. Last year Saline administered over 700 AP tests. One of the points of pride in our District is the depth of the curriculum and focus on developing life long learners. Superintendent Graden will be calling the other four Board members to find out their opinions on this subject.

5. NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of the Policy Committee will be held on Tuesday, November 17th at 5:00 PM.

6. PUBLIC COMMENT

Paul Firehammer felt that having a weighted grade point average would help students. Due to the fact that a student was concerned about taking an AP class is the most compelling reason he can see to support it because it would eliminate that fear. He felt as to the fairness issue that a lot of things about the school curriculum aren't fair. He felt that whether a student gets the "good" teacher is more important than what their grade point average is.

Trustee Hynek concurred that he knew someone who had opted out of an AP class and felt that his "regular" class was harder than an AP class because of the teacher. He referenced a study that stated that the most important criteria for admissions were strength of curriculum and grades in college preparatory classes.

David Zimmer also referenced the University of Maine study that indicated that 76% of the time a student with a weighted GPA was selected over a student with a nonweighted GPA. He felt that in the age of electronics – human file review only happens in the final assessment of the candidates.

Kevin Wong agreed with Mr. Firehammer's comments and added that he has a 9th grade student and when they approached him about taking AP classes his son indicated that he didn't want his grade point average to go down. He asked whether the best teachers taught the AP classes?

Denise Frost asked whether Honors or AP teachers were compensated more and Superintendent Graden indicated that they were not.

Marilyn Geiger asked what the purpose of the survey was that they filled out this past summer. Superintendent Graden indicated that it was to obtain feedback on this issue. Trustee Cattell indicated that perhaps it should be done again since doing it in the summer might not have reached a lot of people.

Marilyn Geiger inquired what had been done with the feedback from last summer if anything. Superintendent Graden indicated that he has looked at the feedback; shared it with the Administrative Team, and Board Members. Part of the discussion tonight was to determine the process with which to proceed.

Kevin Wong asked that the Board not table this forever and move forward and take some action on this issue. He indicated that it was impossible to make everyone happy. It appears to be a 50/50 split on the issue and he felt that by not doing anything that would make more people angry.

Superintendent Graden stated that the decision of the Board was made not to weight grades and this group is asking for a change in that decision. Now they need to determine the procedure. He then discussed the hierarchy between the Policy Committee and the full Board. The full Board has the authority to change the policy not the Policy Committee.

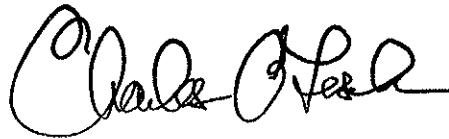
An audience member indicated that students were being placed in Honors course that weren't interested. They shouldn't be forced to take them just because a teacher recommended them.

David Zimmer requested that a subcommittee be put together to investigate this issue. He indicated that he appreciated having the opportunity to have this dialogue with the Board members but feels that an intelligent discussion involving others is necessary to make an informed decision not a philosophical one.

7. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 6:34 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Chuck Lesch". The signature is stylized with large, flowing letters and a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Chuck Lesch, Secretary

By: Patti Waltz, Recording Secretary