

Policy Committee Update #5

December 7, 2010 – J. Karmel

The Policy Committee met in the Library Conference Center on Tuesday, December 7, from 12:00 – 1:00. Committee members began with a review of the current attendance policy, with a view for making more affective for students who are chronically absent:

Policy:

- I. Teachers will record attendance every class, and report absenteeism to the office at the start of each period.
- II. A student is responsible for making up any work missed owing to an absence from school.
- III. If students know in advance that they will be missing school, it is expected that they will inform their teachers and make arrangements to get their assignments in advance and complete the work so as not to fall behind in their studies.
- IV. If the school is not been notified of a student's absence the office staff will contact the parents/guardians to report the absence and inquire as to the reason. Upon returning to school the student is expected to see their respective teacher(s) and make arrangements to receive and complete any assignments missed during the absence.
- V. Unexcused absenteeism will be considered excessive after 18 absences in a semester and alternative arrangements made.

Procedures:

Student absenteeism will be reported to the office at the beginning of each class.

- i. A distinction will be made between excused and unexcused absences at the office.
- ii. Once the office confirms an unexcused absence and that a student is not where he/she should be, and not in the school building, a call will be made to inform parents that the student has not shown up for class and that the school cannot account for their child's whereabouts at the present time.
- iii. The school will send a letter home after four unexcused absences and again after eight absences to inform parents of the accrued absences, and to invite the parents and student to meet with the Principal, teacher(s) and/or members of the School-based Team to develop an Attendance Support Plan for the student. The letters will be kept in the student's file.
- iv. If unexcused absenteeism reaches either 9 classes in the same subject area or 9 days of school, School Council will require that the student and his/her parent(s) meet with the Council to hear their concerns and reasons for the absenteeism.
- v. Should the number of unexcused absences reach 12, School Council would again require the student and his/her parent(s) to meet with the Council to hear their concerns and the reasons for the continued absenteeism and, if necessary, revise the Attendance Support Plan to prevent further occurrences.

- vi. Should unexcused absences reach either 18 classes or days of school (20% of total instructional hours), the student and parent/guardian will be directed by School Council to meet with the teacher(s) involved to implement an alternative program. Using a similar strategy designed for a student who misses a substantial amount of school time owing to an extended illness, a make up assignment(s) would be offered so that a student could recover the lost class time and loss of credit.

Difficulties have arisen with the recommended Procedures beginning with item iv. The concern is that in the past, neither parents nor students have come to Council to express concerns or to receive assistance in working through the attendance issue. Even though the school has made the required calls home, and sent out the required letters, there is no attempt by parents to engage in conversation or work towards a solution.

For much of the meeting we discussed the complexities inherent in enforcing a behaviour policy for students and parents that will not engage in the school's requests to address the issue. Absenteeism is something that often starts in the primary grades and, therefore, a policy that takes effect once a pattern is already well established will likely have little effect by the time the students are in high school. It was felt that although the existing policy is written for students at the high school level, early intervention is recommended, and a revised attendance policy should focus on Grades 1 - 12.

Also, the number of unexcused absences needed before decisive action is taken - 18 in a semester – seemed, upon reflection, excessive. It was generally felt that corrective action should be taken much sooner. The idea of a “3-strike rule” was introduced. That is, after three *unexcused* absences and three corresponding phone calls home to advise parents and clarify the nature of the absences, interventions should be introduced to improve attendance and, equally important, put an end to the disruptions caused during instructional activities due to students being unprepared for class on a regular basis.

The Committee thought it best to table the discussion until the TH Education Manager, Jim Complak, and the TH representatives on Council could weigh in on the discussion and offer their perspectives. It was also acknowledged that the current policy is effective for 90% of our students, primarily because 90% of the student body has excellent attendance. What is needed is a strategy/policy that will assist the school and the families concerned in increasing the attendance of this 10%. Because this policy review will take some time to consider, the Committee will proceed next week to work on the policy covering electronic devices in the school.

The next Policy Committee meeting will be held at 1:00-2:00 p.m. on Tuesday, December 14 in the Library conference room. Everyone is welcome.

J. Karmel