

Trumbull Public Schools
Trumbull, Connecticut
Trumbull Board of Education Policy Committee
Regular Meeting – March 11, 2015
Long Hill Administration Building Assembly Room

The Trumbull Board of Education Policy Committee convened in the Long Hill Administration Building for a Regular Meeting.

Members present:

Rosemary Seaman, Chair, BOE member
Loretta Chory, BOE member
Susan LaFrance, BOE member
Patricia Colello, Central Office Rep
Patricia Frillici, TAA Rep
Jane Kluspes, TEA Representative
Jennifer Mottolese, Parent Rep
Kristine Kelty Murano, Parent Rep
Cindy Katske, Community Rep

Members absent:

Mary Pierson, Community Rep
Bryan Woodward, Parent Rep

Guests: Board Chair Mrs. Herbst
Board Attorney Floyd Dugas

Tiffany Monteiro, Student Rep
Daniel Netting, Student Rep
Rita Ciarmella, Admin. Assistant

Agenda Item I—Preliminary Business

- A. Introduction—The meeting was called to order at 5:35 p.m. Mrs. Seaman introduced Board Attorney Floyd Dugas who was in attendance at the meeting to give input on international trips from a legal perspective.
- B. Correspondence—Mrs. Ciarmella conveyed that the Committee received two emails in support of keeping international trips in the Field Trip policy.
- C. Public Participation—Parents Jonathan Tropp and Kathy Kosak and community members Claire Weitzman and Vicki Tesoro spoke in support of retaining international trips in the Field Trip policy (comments presented to the Committee attached).

Agenda Item II—Consent Agenda

- A. Approval/Minutes 2/11/15 meeting—It was moved (Chory) seconded (Mottolese) to approve the minutes as presented. Vote: in favor (Chory, Frillici, Katske, Kelty, Mottolese, Monteiro) 3 abstentions (Kluspes, LaFrance, Netting). Motion passes.

At this time, Attorney Dugas shared his view on international trips. He noted that he is a member of the National and State organizations of School Attorneys and has had many conversations regarding student international travel and Boards of Education's liability in sponsoring such trips. Attorney Dugas conveyed that after 9/11, the level of concern remains high for international trips and some districts, including Milford and Windsor Locks, discontinued approval of international travel. He shared that the impact of 9/11 and the tragedy at Sandy Hook Elementary School raised safety concerns and Board liability. Attorney Dugas gave background on several lawsuits against private

schools/Boards of Education where although a waiver of liability was signed, the ruling went against the schools. He commented that CIRMA (Connecticut Interlocal Risk Management Agency), provider of municipal risk financing and risk management services for municipalities including public schools, has raised concerns with student international travel. Attorney Dugas expressed his concerns with safety and security of international trips and the liability exposure for Boards of Education approving such trips. Discussion ensued regarding the difference of liability with domestic travel versus international travel and possible increased insurance rates. Attorney Dugas suggested that the Committee contact CIRMA for input about liability insurance and the risk of international travel. Mrs. Katske commented that she surveyed districts in Fairfield County and Trumbull's DRG and found that while most of these districts have policies on international travel, she could not confirm if those districts/Board had approved any trips. She cited information from various districts' policies and noted that other policies include more guidelines with regard to international travel. Attorney Dugas shared that teachers can organize private international trips without Board approval and suggested that any information regarding these trips should not be dispersed through the school (i.e. flyers, notices in student bulletins) as it could still present liability to the Board. Board Chair Mrs. Herbst shared her concerns with safety and security of international travel and Board liability.

Agenda Item III—Reports

A. Board Meetings—No report given.

Agenda Item IV—Policy Review/Discussion

A. Field Trips, Policy Code 6153—It was noted that changes highlighted in pink were suggested by Mrs. Ciarmella based on Board discussion at their February 17th meeting. Considerable discussion ensued regarding student international travel. Mrs. Chory commented that she always votes against international trips. Ms. Klupses commented that the teachers (trip leaders) spend considerable hours outside the classroom organizing international travel. Mrs. LaFrance shared information on an insurance rider, used by Fairfield University in their study abroad program, which can be provided to students for international travel. She spoke in support of keeping international travel in the field trip policy and suggested that the policy could include more thorough guidelines for international travel. Mrs. Herbst commented that there have been various issues with past international trips and she has received some complaints with regard to chaperone costs being paid by students (included in a student's cost for the trip). Mrs. Herbst shared that at this time she isn't comfortable approving international travel. Mrs. Kelty, along with several other committee members, suggested having a separate policy for international travel. Mrs. Seaman asked for a consensus on international travel and most Committee members were in favor of keeping international travel. More discussion ensued with developing a separate, more extensive policy for international travel, obtaining information from CIRMA and the Board's insurance provider, and the timeframe of presenting the policy to the Board for approval. It was decided that the Committee would recommend to the Board to keep approval of international travel and construct a separate policy. It was noted the Committee would not bring the Field Trip policy to the Board for a second

reading and approval at their March 24, 2015 meeting, as considerable work was needed in creating a separate policy on international travel.

- B. Civility and Decorum, Policy Code 1316.1— This policy was tabled to the next committee meeting.
- C. Audit Committee of the Trumbull Board of Education— This policy was tabled to the next committee meeting.
- D. Bullying Prevention and Intervention, Policy Code 5131.911—Mrs. Seaman reviewed the Policy Overview and commented that the policy needed to be updated to reflect legislative changes to the law. PPS Director Pauline Smith has already made changes to the policy which will be brought to the Committee at their next meeting.

Adjournment

The next meeting for the Policy Committee will take place April 22, 2014 at 5:30 p.m. The meeting adjourned at 7:15 p.m.

In evaluating the need to revise the field trip policy, I encourage you to ask yourselves the following questions, and to be prepared to answer them to the full Board and the constituents it serves:

1. Why is the existing policy, which permits full board review of each proposed international trip on a case-by-case basis, inadequate?
2. Why would you wish to remove the board's discretion to exercise its judgment to approve worthy field trips?
3. Can you imagine even one case for which you would wish to make an exception? For example, if the Model UN team were invited to participate in a worldwide assembly in Toronto, Canada, would you wish to foreclose the possibility? What if the baseball team were invited to participate in a high school world series event in Toronto? Would the answer necessarily be different if the invitation were to Tokyo?
4. What makes international travel different?
 - a. Is a flight from JFK to Rome more dangerous than from Logan to LAX?
 - b. Is Vatican City any more dangerous than Times Square?
 - c. Has there been even one incident on an international trip that would not have occurred, or would have been less severe, if the trip had been domestic? If so, could that incident have been avoided with better planning or supervision?
5. What exposure does the Board accept/increase by permitting international travel that is not adequately covered by available insurance?
6. What reasonable steps could the Board take to mitigate that risk, short of banning all international travel, such as enhanced due diligence, enhanced disclosure, and enhanced waiver?
7. How do other school districts in the area address international field trips?
8. What would be forfeit if international travel is banned?
9. What would we say about ourselves, and what lessons would we teach our youth, if we ban international travel?

Submitted by
Jonathan Tropp

The Field Trip policy should not be revised to prohibit travel outside the United States. When I was a sophomore at Trumbull High School, I was given the opportunity to travel to Costa Rica with a group of 30 other students. I signed up with some apprehension, not knowing how profound of an impact it would make on me. The trip turned out to be one of the greatest experiences of my life; it allowed me to meet locals, learn a bit about Costa Rica's history and ecological background, visit breathtakingly beautiful rural areas, and use Spanish in a real-world setting. All the while, I was also forming close bonds with the other students on the trip. There is a certain sense of anticipation I remember feeling within the group at the start of every day, knowing the itinerary like the back of our hands and diving off the deep end into a land with which we all had no prior familiarity. The experience of touring a foreign country with my peers is something that has had a lasting impression on me. As it is a well-facilitated exposure to a foreign land that brings about a more seasoned worldview in the beholder, I would encourage all students to take advantage of such trips. If the revision to the Field Trip policy passes, hundreds of students will miss out a great opportunity to grow as thinkers, friends, and world citizens. In retrospect, if I had never gone on my trip to Costa Rica I would not be the same person I am today. I am grateful for the opportunity that THS made available to me 3 years ago, and the opportunity should still be alive today.

Gabriel Weitzman

To the Board of Education:

I understand there will be some spirited discussion regarding a possible change in policy governing international field trips for students attending Trumbull Public Schools. Specifically there is talk of prohibiting, banning all future international field trips due to some “liability” concerns.

I would like to voice my strong opposition to such a change in policy.

I am a parent of students who have attended Trumbull Public Schools and who have benefited from international field trips. My son went to Costa Rica under the auspice of the Foreign Language Department, and my daughter went to Italy with the Choir. Both experiences were life changing - travel often does this to people.

I am an educator, psychotherapist and concerned citizen who likewise wishes that the Board of Education consider the negative messaging that such a policy change will surely bring. If you ban international field trips you will be sending the message to children to “*be afraid, be very afraid*” of conflict, of people different than yourselves, of the potential for danger, although it lurks everywhere. You will be inadvertently sending the message that this is a very dangerous world, one to be avoided.

As an educator I find it ill advised to break an unspoken covenant of education – that you take risks in life, grow beyond your limitations, and put yourself into experiences that won’t always be predictable.

As a psychotherapist I have learned that what kids need to know is that when it comes to processing horrible events, i.e. Newtown, 9-11, we need to remind them that we live in a world of probability, not possibility. Every good/bad or horrific event in the world has an equal possibility of occurring; yet, they do not all have the same probability. We need to help children manage potentially distressing events by giving them the tools of imposing logic and sensibility to counteract the reactive posturing of emotions gone wild. This serves their long term mental health needs best. If you send the message that we live primarily in a world of possibility then by that reasoning we should not visit NYC or Newtown, Connecticut. Not smart.

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As a concerned citizen I think of the courageous actions of the brave men and women of our armed services, who fight the good fight overseas, ostensibly for democratic ideals and for the continuance of freedom. They need to be honored through practice, not rhetoric, through sensible discussion, not scorched earth politics. This freedom includes the freedom to travel, to go wherever, and whenever you want to, with prudence, planning and a plan for safety. This is what reasonable people do. If you ban international field trips you are sending the message to our armed service men and women that fear trumps freedom. That is not what the United States stands for. It stands for courage in the face of fear.

I implore the Board of Education to set a good example for the children of our community by encouraging international travel so they can grow up in world that they meet head on, with courage, perseverance, determination and optimism. Anything less is stone age thinking. You can run from adversity, but you cannot hide. It is a primary responsibility of this Board of Education to assure that all of our children hear this message loud and clear. To serve them otherwise, to indulge their fears, to build cynicism, to encourage an "us versus them" mentality, to limit the experiences that public education has the power and potential to offer; that is the true liability.

David Weitzman
Trumbull, Connecticut