

**New Milford Board of Education
 Policy Sub-Committee Meeting Minutes
 October 1, 2024
 Sarah Noble Intermediate School Library Media Center**

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 NEW MILFORD, CT

Present:	Mrs. Leslie Sarich Mrs. Tammy McInerney Mr. Dean Barile Mr. Randall Scofield
Absent:	

Also Present:	Dr. Janet Parlato, Superintendent of Schools Ms. Holly Hollander, Assistant Superintendent
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1.	Call to Order The New Milford Board of Education Policy Sub-Committee was called to order at 6:45 pm by Mrs. Leslie Sarich. Mrs. Sarich welcomed Mr. Scofield to the Policy Subcommittee.	Call to Order
2.	Public Comment None	Public Comment None
3.	Discussion and Possible Action A. Continue Review of Policy 5131.91 in Preparation for Second Review and Approval at October 15, 2024 Board Meeting 1. 5131.91 Connecticut School Climate Policy Dr. Parlato stated the policy is required to be approved by July 31, 2025, but can be adopted and implemented sooner. Dr. Parlato reviewed the major points of the policy, highlighting the importance of the school environment for academic success. Dr. Parlato explained the definitions come from statute. The term “challenging behavior” is now an umbrella term for all behaviors that fall under that definition. There is an area that provides specific terms and conditions for what school climate should look like. Many of these things the district already follows or has in place, including a School Climate Coordinator, a School Climate	3. Discussion and Possible Action A. Continue Review of Policy 5131.91 in Preparation for Second Review and Approval at October 15, 2024 Board Meeting 1. 5131.91 Connecticut School Climate Policy

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	<p>Specialist and each school has a School Climate Committee. The district does do a school climate survey, and has been for years. It measures the perception of the school by staff, students, and families. The district also has done training regarding social/emotional learning and restorative practices. Funding shall be allocated to satisfy the schools' professional development, assessments, school community outreach and consultant fees. There are standards already in place for our practices in promoting learning, how students are engaged, addressing barriers, and infrastructure of students feeling a sense of belonging and school discipline.</p> <p>Dr. Parlato continued to explain the difference is the notion of how you apply traditional school discipline combined with a restorative piece. The challenging behavior form has expanded the audience to parents and students. There is also an investigation form. There is a consistency of practice, standardized guidelines to look for during an investigation and an expanded discipline referral.</p> <p>Mrs. McInerney asked if there was any funding coming from the state to help schools formulate a plan and for training. Dr. Parlato stated Ed Advance offers some trainings that are free, and teachers can attend those trainings. We applied for and received a \$50,000 grant that will be used over 2 years. It will be split between Schaghticoke Middle School (SMS) and New Milford High School (NMHS).</p> <p>Mrs. Sarich asked if the information from the school climate survey was given out to other entities. Dr. Parlato stated the district uses Panorama Education to send questions and receive answers. It is not sold to other entities. Dr. Parlato stated Panorama may be able to look at the aggregated data. To avoid this, the district can do the survey in house using a google form. Ms. Hollander stated the data is used by a committee for each building and the data helps set goals. Dr. Parlato added, that is why the</p>	
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	<p>survey asks similar questions each year, to track trends.</p> <p>Mr. Barile stated he has major concerns with the school climate policy. It was created out of the tragedy at Sandy Hook and the primary focus was around bullying. Mr. Barile stated he is concerned it is being changed. In the research he has done, it leads him to understand that terms are too broad and subjective. There needs to be more definition. Mr. Barile stated he is concerned the district is working with Panorama, at a cost of \$20,000 a year. Mr. Barile asked how the survey platform is being used and to what degree. In the contract it has information identifying personal information. The district may not allow them to sell the information but Mr. Barile stated he suspects they utilize it for non-educational purposes. Mr. Barile stated he does not like the potential for the misuse of the data, especially if there's talk of adding a psychological profile.</p> <p>Dr. Parlato stated the district is not currently adding the psychological portion.</p> <p>Mr. Barile replied that the door is open for that. The policy, as it is written, allows it. When it is held in a database, the chance of misuse is too great. We need to be careful what data we're using in those profiles, especially since we use Panorama, which is not trustworthy. Mr. Barile stated he does not think the policy is strict enough in how it is being held.</p> <p>Mrs. McInerney asked about the survey platforms, and if they are vetted by the district. Dr. Parlato stated they are, and there are also data protection privacy laws for students. Vendors have to follow certain compliance rules.</p> <p>Mrs. McInerney asked what the value is to using Panorama. Ms. Hollander stated there are a number of questions that could be asked, should the district choose to. The district currently does not use it to its fullest capacity but Panorama</p>	
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	<p>offers tools that can be used to meet the needs of students.</p> <p>Mrs. Sarich stated if it's used to send out a small number of questions, and it isn't being utilized for anything else, the district should move it in-house. Mr. Barile stated, if we utilized the platform in a socially/emotionally way, PII must be maintained in the database. How would the school climate coordinator collect and maintain data regarding school climate improvement, including, and not limited to, school discipline records, school climate assessment, social emotional learning assessment, academic growth, etc. If all these things are with Panorama and if we begin utilizing Panorama for psychological components, the agreement allows them to see aggregated data. This policy would allow them to compile data on our children.</p> <p>Dr. Parlato clarified the district does not currently upload academic growth data on Panorama.</p> <p>Mr. Barile stated he would like to pause rushing this policy through and fully vet it.</p> <p>Mr. Scofield asked if this is mandated by the state. Dr. Parlato replied, this is a model policy from the Connecticut Association of Boards of Education (CABE), in collaboration with other groups. It is based on state legislation that states there needs to be a school climate policy in each school, in Connecticut, that is more expanded than the current policy. It must be adopted by July 1, 2025, with the option of early adoption. Either way, you must have a school climate policy that aligns with the legislation and one way to do that is to use a model policy from a firm such as Shipman & Goodwin or an organization like CABE.</p> <p>Mr. Barile stated the standards were developed by CABE based on guidance from the Commission on Women, Children, Seniors,</p>	
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	<p>Equity and Opportunity, and the School Climate Collaborative. Digging deeper into the School Climate Collaborative, it is made up by members of our State Representatives from the house and the senate. It is worth noting there is no mandatory minority representation at the state board of education level. Thus, the breakdown is at least 21 Democrats and 6 Republicans. It should be neutral, and it is not. Not even close. When we had Attorney Schurin on the phone at the last policy meeting about changing a possible word, Attorney Schurin stated the board had to adopt the policy as it is written. Mr. Barile stated he finds that ironic because looking at the actual standards themselves, not the policy but the National School Climate Standards, # 5, changed between the standard and the policy. Mr. Barile stated the school community develops meaningful and engaging practices and activities of the most civil and civic responsibility in commitment to social justice. In our policy, it spells it out with diversity, dedication to cultural responsibility, etc. Mr. Barile pointed out that the district did not adopt it exactly as it was worded in the standards.</p> <p>Mr. Barile asked why we have to adopt them and not define a word like “harm” or “safe.” Those are the words that cause concern. The board definition of harm and safe will be determined by the school climate counselor or specialist. At this point, no one has explained what “emotionally unsafe” is. Interestingly, “harm” was actually defined by the National School Board Association (NSBA). It states, applying the first amendment of free speech standards for students, whether assessing a public school can regulate student speech. If the expression is not likely to cause disruption determining whether the student expression is harmful, i.e. criminal behavior or drug use. NSBA defines harmful as criminal or drug use. Harmful to some is subjective. It’s important that we are not conflating, and not to have a policy that allows for compelled speech. Compelled speech is</p>	
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	<p>different from restrictive speech. There is precedent set for this. No official can prescribe what shall be orthodox in politics, nationalism, religion or other matters of opinion, or force citizens to confess by word or act. Mr. Barile continued by stating, this is why we need to define “harm” and “safe.” If you say mis-gendering someone creates an unsafe environment, it is compelled speech and it is unconstitutional.</p> <p>Dr. Parlato stated, some of the points Mr. Barile is bringing up are in the domain of the legislation. Practically the board has to look at the policy that is on the table and take into consideration legal advice.</p> <p>Mr. Barile asked for Dr. Parlato to define “harm” and “emotionally safe.” If those cannot be defined then it’s left to the subjective nature of whoever is the coordinator or the specialist or climate committee. Dr. Parlato said to Mr. Barile that it sounds as if he is telling someone how they need to feel. Mr. Barile stated likeness cannot be legislated. Then he asked Dr. Parlato if she feels it is a right not to be offended. Dr. Parlato stated it is not a right but there are guidelines and there are guidelines to try and establish a welcoming climate in the school for people to feel comfortable, not attacked.</p> <p>Mr. Barile agreed being rude or vulgar should not be allowed, but misgendering someone should not fall under that definition.</p> <p>Mrs. McInerney asked if they were discussing this topic as if it was accidental or purposeful. Bullying has a very clear definition. If someone's feelings are hurt, and it was accidental, that will not rise to bullying in any investigation. Mr. Barile stated, if that is the case, why did they change the policy at all. Mrs. McInerney stated it is being changed but not because of New Milford specifically. There are other districts that have climate policies that need to be realigned. This is bringing it all in</p>	
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		<p>alignment. Mrs. McInerney stated she believes it is insensitive to say to someone, “I know you want to be called a ‘she’ but in my eyes you will always be a ‘he’ and I don’t care how you feel about it. I’m going to refer to you as a ‘he.’”</p> <p>Mr. Barile replied, with all due respect, you’re forcing a belief.</p> <p>Mrs. McInerney stated it is a slippery slope, and where does it end. It allows someone to say they don’t believe in someone else’s religion.</p> <p>Mr. Barile stated it is not about theology, it is about compelling someone to say something, and you cannot compel speech. This is happening around the country. What happens next, in school these kids continue on and see this as a rule, then they become our lawmakers. Next it’s not only compelled speech, but people are afraid to speak out.</p> <p>Mrs. Sarich stated she believed Mr. Barile is saying, if we start saying someone is misidentified by someone, then the climate coordinator can then say the person who did the misidentification is in trouble.</p> <p>Dr. Parlato stated she believes people will be respectful in our school system. If I feel disrespected by someone calling me a different gender, that I don’t subscribe to, that is disrespectful. Mr. Barile stated he agreed, but that cannot be mandated. Mrs. Sarich agreed feelings cannot be legislated. Dr. Parlato stated climate is about respect. Misgendering is disrespectful. Mr. Barile stated it is a matter of honesty. You’re asking someone that does not believe the lie, to believe the lie. Remember the phrase “sticks and stones may break my bones but names will never hurt me,” but we’re now saying someone could be suspended for not following gender identification. Without defining these terms it is leaving the door open to subjectivity.</p>	
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	<p>Dr. Parlato stated the coordinator and committee do not give out the punishment.</p> <p>Mr. Barile asked then, why are there restorative practices here. There is a restorative system that will be implemented. Restorative practices will be implemented for students who create an offense, and we have not identified what the offense may or may not be.</p> <p>Dr. Parlato stated restorative does not mean no discipline, however it does mean how a relationship between two people can be considered. How do we restore the relationship if one kid swears at me. There can be punitive measures in place in the traditional sense and a restorative piece of discipline. Mrs. McInerney stated they can both happen. The restorative piece is how it can correct the situation and have a conversation and talk about why. The discipline is the consequence.</p> <p>Mr. Barile, reading from a resource on restorative system, stated, the restorative system is a cooperative model that aims to achieve offender accountability reparations to the victim and all parties impacted by the crime. It is a paradigm that challenges existing justice structures and advocates for a different approach to conflict rather than the process allocating responsibility in a seemingly autonomous manner or a restorative process concedes responsibility and tolerance and promotes reparation and restoration. Mr. Barile stated, in the end, these terms need defining and he will provide all his sources.</p> <p>Dr. Parlato stated the good news in having an elected body in a democracy means you get to vote on policy as a Board member, one vote per member.</p> <p>Mrs. Sarich stated the full board can vote on it in the next full board meeting, or send it back to policy.</p>	
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		<p>Mrs. McInerney asked how many times the full board should see it. Dr. Parlato stated she would double check.</p> <p>Mrs. Sarich added she would still like to make the changes she suggested at the previous meeting, adding the word “respected” and having “physically safe” on its own.</p> <p><i>Mr. Barile moved to bring policy 5131.91 for second review and approval at the October 15, 2024 Board Meeting. Seconded by Mrs. McInerney.</i></p>	<p>Motion made and passed unanimously to bring policy 5131.91 for second review and approval at the October 15, 2024 Board Meeting.</p>
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4.		<p>Public Comment None</p>	<p>Public Comment</p>
5.		<p>Adjourn <i>Mrs. McInerney moved to adjourn the meeting at 7:29 pm, seconded by Mr. Scofield and passed unanimously.</i></p>	<p>Adjourn Motion made and passed unanimously to adjourn the meeting at 7:29 pm.</p>

Respectfully submitted:



Mrs. Leslie Sarich
 Chairman, Operations Subcommittee