

August 21, 2007

Ms. Tarsha Calloway
Ms. Cynthia Shannon
Ms. Natasha Smith
Teach our Children
P.O. Box 9311
New Haven, CT 06533

Dear Ms. Calloway, Shannon and Smith:

Thank you for your letter of August 20, 2007. I am responding on behalf of Mayor John DeStefano, Jr. and myself to ensure that your participants receive **accurate** information on what's being considered by the Board of Education as we undertake revisions to our policy manual. Enclosed is the full draft of each of the two policies in question as they were drafted for a first reading. We have highlighted the sections in question and we respectfully ask that you share this information at your August 22 meeting. **We expect to revise these with input that we receive from the public, including your input.**

Please be aware that the appropriate forum for public input is the next Board of Education meeting, which is scheduled for **Monday, August 27, 6 p.m. in the second floor boardroom of 54 Meadow St.** Monday's meeting constitutes the second reading of policy revisions and is the proper time for public comment. No action will be taken by the Board on the two policies at issue (Policy #1120 and Policy #1250) until adequate public input has been received. Comments also can be emailed by logging onto: <http://www.nhps.net/contact/index.asp> on the district's website. All comments will be shared with board members.

In the meantime, please be aware that nothing we are contemplating will change the right of parents to address the Board of Education. We regret that an August 15 New Haven Register article left the impression that the Board of Education is trying to stifle parental/public input. An August 16 Register story clarified with the headline, "Policy proposal would not halt public comment at city school board meetings," and that is accurate.

As you already know, parents and the public for many years have enjoyed – and will still enjoy - two opportunities to address the Board. The first opportunity gives the public a chance to comment on agenda items, and the second gives the public a chance to comment on matters of general concern.

It has not been the practice of the Board to curtail public discussion and there are no plans to do so now, other than in instances regarding personnel, which by state law must be treated with confidentiality.

The policy revisions being considered by the Board for its meetings are the very same adopted by the majority of school districts in the State. It is common for public boards (including school boards) to allow public comment but with guidelines. Examples include asking that speakers observe rules of common etiquette, that they speak for a set number of minutes and that they avoid repetition, to insure that boards can conduct the business at hand. But we would not support any policy revisions that would curtail public input. That would be counterproductive at a time when we are trying to increase parental and community involvement in public education.

With regard to the issue of visiting schools, the Board is considering a requirement that visitors make appointments before visiting schools. The proposed revision clearly states, "if at all possible," recognizing that it may not always be possible to make an appointment in advance. Given that we are a large urban district, this draft language is being considered to avoid disruption of the instructional day and to further ensure security of our students and staff.

Given that all of these policy changes are still in draft form (and not tentatively approved), we are still in a review phase and we welcome public input. Parental/public involvement in education is critical to us and any changes we make should strengthen that involvement. Thanks for taking the time to write.

Sincerely,

Dr. Reginald Mayo

cc: Mayor John DeStefano, Jr.
Board of Education

Enclosures

**AMENDED POLICY (ADDITIONS ARE IN BOLD
ITALICS AND DELETIONS ARE STRUCK THROUGH)**

1120(a)

Community Relations

Board of Education Meetings

The regular and special meetings of the Board of Education are open to the public and representatives of the press except that a part of any meeting may be designated an executive session as provided by law. (See 9322 for details)

The Board welcomes participation of interested organizations and individuals. Advance announcement of all regular and special meetings of the Board is made through the posting of the agenda, notices to newspapers and directly to those citizens and community and professional organizations who specifically request such notification. A reasonable charge may be made for those persons or organizations requesting continued advance announcements of meetings and agenda materials.

Public Participation at Board of Education Meetings

Any member of the public may appear before the Board at Board meetings to express his/her opinion concerning the educational program of the district. The public is advised that any discussion of specific Board employees will not be allowed at meetings and should be addressed to that employee's immediate supervisor. The Board agenda provides opportunities for comments and questions from persons attending the meeting. Persons wishing to address the Board should give their names and addresses.

Once the Board moves into regular agenda the public may participate as allowed by the Chairperson and with the following restrictions:

- 1. Questions and/or comments by the public may be restricted by the Board Chairperson;***
- 2. The Chairperson may, at his/her discretion, curtail public discussion at any time.***

Every effort will be made to answer questions orally or in writing at a later time by the Chairperson or by an appropriate staff member.

**AMENDED POLICY (ADDITIONS ARE IN BOLD
ITALICS AND DELETIONS ARE STRUCK THROUGH)**

Community Relations

Visits to the Schools

The Board of Education and ~~staff of the~~ school *personnel* welcome and strongly encourage *adult* members of the community and other interested persons to visit the schools.

The Superintendent shall establish regulations which:

1. *Encourage visitors to observe our schools.* ~~Encourage school visitations.~~
2. *Ensure that staff will greet and assist the visitors.* ~~Provide for appropriate hospitality for visitors.~~
3. Channel expressions of approval and constructive criticism to the Board of Education *as appropriate.*
4. *Require, to the extent possible, that visitors make an appointment prior to coming to the school. This will* ensure that public visits will not hinder the educational program.
5. Require all visitors to register in the ~~principal's~~ *school's* office upon arrival at school *and state the purpose of the visit.*

~~Although Board of Education members are encouraged to visit schools independently, they have authority only in regularly called meetings of the Board of Education, or when delegated specific tasks by specific Board of Education action.~~

A Board of Education member who visits a school does so in the capacity of parent or visitor unless delegated specific tasks by specific Board of Education action.