Jennifer Patterson opened the meeting at 5:30 p.m. The agenda was to consider changes and updates to several student-related policies.

Superintendent Forsten noted the committee membership. She noted several goal-setting topics derived from the Board Retreat, which was held on January 12: to revise policies; stay current on legislation impacting education; and gain understanding of contract language.

Chuck Crush asked how many policies the Board has and how far through them the Committee has made its way. It was suggested that this initial review has completed about half of the policies.

Ms. Patterson invited public comment on items unrelated to the agenda.

Eric Sommer and Julie Lane spoke about several inconsistencies among the policies, in particular about vaping which, while it falls under the Tobacco-free policy, may be referenced in the disciplinary code policy, then the code of student conduct policy. Even then, a student, or parent, still may not discern the actual discipline. Ms. Lane said the Board needs to consider a more appropriate way to handle a situation such as vaping; students shouldn’t be judged guilty by association (standing in a group of students where one student has vaping materials, for example).

Barb Higgins suggested that the Committee speak with coaches about how they handle their very specific behavioral athletic team requirements.

Tom Croteau summed up the concerns as being, first, the content of a particular policy, and second, the way the policies fit together.

Ms. Lane said there is a lack of due process for students.
Policy #641 Class Size Guidelines

The Superintendent noted that this policy was reviewed in November, during which the committee considered state standards and associated research. Although the policy was adopted in 1983, it has been reviewed many times and has stood the test of time. The committee opted to maintain the policy as it currently stands. It was being reconsidered at this meeting following a request by three parents who attended the January Board meeting.

The guidelines offer a range of class sizes. Superintendent Forsten briefly reviewed 2017-2018 data on national, state and Concord class sizes, NH class size standards, and research from the Center for Public Education Research and the Tennessee Project STAR dating from 2002.

National, State and Local Class Size Data

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<th>Elementary</th>
<th>Middle</th>
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<tr>
<td>United States*</td>
<td>23.1</td>
<td>25.5</td>
<td>24.2</td>
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<tr>
<td>New Hampshire</td>
<td>18.4</td>
<td>19.7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Concord</td>
<td>19.8</td>
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* National Center for Education Statistics 2017 Data
** Unavailable

(a) Class size for instructional purposes, in each school shall be:
   (1) Kindergarten –grade 2, 25 students or fewer per educator, provided that each school shall strive to achieve the class size of 20 students or fewer per educator;
   (2) Grades 3 –5, 30 students or fewer per educator, provided that each school shall strive to achieve the class size of 25 students or fewer per educator; and
   (3) Middle and senior high school, 30 students or fewer per educator.
(b) These class size requirements may be exceeded for study halls, band and chorus, and other types of large group instruction, including but not limited to, lectures, combined group instruction, and showing of educational television and films.
(c) In the interest of safety, the maximum number of students in laboratory classes in such areas as science and career and technical education shall be determined by the number of workstations and the size and design of the area. In no case shall the number of students in laboratory classes exceed 24.

Under NH state standards, kindergarten through grade 2 should have no more than 20 students per teacher; grades 3 to 5 should have no more than 25 students per teacher; and middle or high school classes should have 25 students per teacher or fewer. The current average number of students per class in Concord are: elementary schools are 18.8 per teacher; middle school is 20.5 students per teacher; high school is 20.8 students per teacher.
“From the review of the research, we can scientifically document several important findings about reduced class size, which local school districts may find useful: smaller classes in the early grades (K-3) can boost student academic achievement; a class size of no more than 18 students per teacher is required to produce the greatest benefits; a program spanning grades K-3 will produce more benefits than a program that reaches students in only one or two of the primary grades; minority and low-income students show even greater gains when placed in small classes in the primary grades; the experience and preparation of teachers is a critical factor in the success or failure of class size reduction programs; reducing class size will have little effect without enough classrooms and well-qualified teachers; and supports, such as professional development for teachers and a rigorous curriculum, enhance the effect of reduced class size on academic achievement.”

Tennessee’s Research

“The most influential contemporary evidence that smaller classes lead to improved achievement is Tennessee’s Project STAR. Because this program set up randomly selected control and experimental groups of students, researchers could compare students who had four years of small class participation to students who had none. This meant that researchers could more reliably evaluate the impact of the class size reform. Project STAR (Finn, 2002) found that "students in smaller classes did better than those in larger classes throughout the K-3 grades; minority and inner-city children gained the most from smaller classes; and the more years spent in reduced classes, the longer lasting the benefits.”

Superintendent Forsten then reviewed the current policy, noting that when the policy was developed, grade 6 was still considered part of the intermediate grades.

Current Policy #641

The average class size objectives shall be:

- Kindergarten 17 14–17–20
- Primary (grades 1-3) 21 18–21–24
- Intermediate (grades 4-6) 25 22–25–28

If class size exceeds 20 students in kindergarten, 24 students in grades one through three, or 28 in grades four through six, educational consideration will be given to regrouping, employment of an aide or employment of an additional teacher.

Secondary administrators will consider 30 students as a maximum class size and 15 as a minimum class size. Classes with student enrollment of less than 15 must have approval of the central administration.
Currently, seven elementary classes fall below the class size objective for each grade range. Seventeen classes fall within the range of the policy, and seven classes exceed the mid-range.

Superintendent Forsten described class sizes at the middle school, including language arts (classes between 17 and 42 – the higher numbers accounted for by band, orchestra, chorus); math; “exploratory;” (classes from 19 to 23 students).

She noted that class sizes at CHS range between 9 (specialized reading instruction) and 43 (performing arts) students. There are 52 classes of 9-16 students; 152 classes of between 18 and 24 students; 219 classes of between 25 and 30 students; 12 classes of 30+ students, for a total of 435 classrooms.

Ms. Patterson noted that the committee would take public comment and then Committee members would have an opportunity for questions and comment.

Emma and Olivia O'Connor are students at ADS. They said they wanted classes at 20 or fewer. They said they can fit desks in their classrooms but not much else. They talked about the teacher time required to organize reading groups.

Amelia Crumrine (grade 5 at CMS) said she is in a class of 26 students, where it can be loud and hard to concentrate. She said that students may have to wait longer to get help from a teacher.

Heidi Crumrine, Concord resident and CHS teacher, noted that she loves Concord’s diversity and belief in inclusion and noted that when class sizes increase, it’s harder for teachers to spend time focusing on each student.

Deodonne Bhattarai, a Concord resident, has a 4-year-old at MBS. She. Noting that student demographics have changed over the years, and 15% of students have an IEP, she asked how the District could do better going forward. She noted Concord’s legacy of inclusion and asked the committee to take its time to review the latest research.

Board member Barb Higgins noted she has received several emails from residents concerned about the impact on their property taxes, commenting “we can spend the money on taxes or we can spend the money on special education.” She left the meeting.

Mike Pelletier, Concord resident and CMS teacher of 14 years; both daughters attend CMS. He noted he teaches 26 5th graders, the largest class he has ever taught. As the teaching model is focused on small groups and student needs are varied, he finds it frustrating he cannot get to every student. He noted that it is not possible to form necessary personal connections with students with this size class. As a matter of practicality, he noted that classrooms are too small for this many students; class size also impacts hallway management. He asked the committee to reconsider the class size policy.

Nicole Fox, a Concord resident, has 3 children at CMS in grades 1, 3, and 5, and each child is in a class on the larger size of the range. She said her more reserved children, who may not ask for the help they actually need, may not get this help although the teachers are excellent. She urged the committee to consider revising the policy.
Cate Fox, daughter of Nicole Fox, is in grade 5 at CMS. She said there are 26 students in her class, and this situation is difficult for the students and also for teachers.

Katie Brissette is a Concord resident and has several children in the District. She thanked the committee for holding the meeting and hopes to come to a consensus on the issue.

Ms. Patterson thanked Betty Hoadley for her comments submitted to the Board in writing. Ms. Patterson noted a previous focus on class size when her children attended Broken Ground School and she was first on the Board; that larger class sizes can be difficult. She said that the language of the policy does not reflect the complicated, strenuous process the Superintendent and Principals go through in assigning students to classes. She stated that, at a minimum, the policy should reflect more clearly the manner in which the administration administers the policy. She noted that the administration very actively makes efforts to establish the vast majority of classes at the middle level of the range. She referenced the STAR study, noting that the Board looked at that information when the elementary schools were consolidated in 2012, and made the conscious effort to stay at the low end of the range for grades K-3 particularly. She suggested the Board may want to stay on the low end of the range for required classes at CHS, as these are core classes. She said she does not want to look just at average class sizes; but also to analyze the outliers. She suggested continued discussion could include how to bring more clarity to the application of the policy.

Committee member Chuck Crush noted that he continues to hear how much education has changed over the past few decades, and that other factors need to be taken into consideration, including the specialists in the classroom, etc.

Committee member Tom Croteau thanked Superintendent Forsten and Betty Hoadley for the information each has provided. He noted that the demographic study commissioned by the Board will be presented on February 11 at a special Board meeting. He noted that the committee has heard about space issues including desks and rugs, and also teacher attention. He said the Committee and the Board will continue to research and discuss the topic.

Committee member Nancy Kane suggested that the raw numbers in the class size guidelines may not tell the entire story, that there is more going on in terms of the methodology used and Concord’s student population. She suggested looking more closely at how these can be balanced.

Board member Liza Poinier suggested there may be value in adding additional layers to the policy to provide more creative ideas to address the issue.

Board member Pam Wicks suggested the possibility of reducing the upper limit by one or two students. She noted that enrollments are declining, and taxes are going up. She encouraged audience members to write to state legislators to increase adequacy funding and building aid, which would reduce the particular burden on Concord taxpayers. She suggested more innovation is possible as happened at BGS this year. She thanked the administration for focusing on keeping kindergarten class sizes small.
Board member Danielle Smith said that, as a teacher, she has taught classes of 16 and of 25 kindergarteners and knows the significant difference this makes in a teaching day. She encouraged the administration to be creative about co-teaching and other factors.

Superintendent Forsten noted how students with special education needs, socioeconomic and other factors are “folded into” the guidelines currently. She suggested the administration and Board start looking at where there is enough space to add classes, and whether class sizes could be adjusted by adjusting school boundaries.

Ms. Wicks also commented that part of the demographic study would including the possibility of neighborhood school boundaries changing, and also that the declining enrollment trend will continue. Superintendent Forsten noted that it is not likely boundaries would be moved this year.

Mr. Crush asked whether metrics related to teacher satisfaction/turnover exist. Superintendent Forsten noted that teacher turnover is not significant in this District.

Mr. Pelletier added a comment that class size has not typically been a problem, but the top number may be problematic. He said a top number of 25 would be better.

Ms. Patterson noted that one issue related to class size is the budget, and one is the policy. She said there does not exist enough clarity to move forward with specific changes to policy at this time.

Ms. Wicks noted the amount of time and thought that goes into class makeup, including gender, reading level, etc. She said it is always an interesting challenge how to best group students to balance classes with differing numbers.

Mr. Croteau asked the administration to produce data about the actual cost of changing the class size ranges.

Ms. Patterson asked for a motion to adjourn.

Committee members voted 4-0 to adjourn (moved by Ms. Kane, seconded by Ms. Patterson).

The meeting adjourned at 7:06 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Jennifer Patterson, Chair
Linden Jackett, Recorder