Committee chair Jennifer Patterson called the meeting to order at 5:30 p.m. Three items were on the agenda.

1. Review of Concord School District Policy #529: Homeless Students

The School Board is required to affirm the District’s policy regarding homeless students every three years as part of the application process for state grants. Superintendent Rath noted that the school district has a variety of responsibilities regarding students who are homeless, including identifying students, and providing transportation to and from school. Homeless students have the right to continue in the same school they attended before becoming homeless. The district sets aside a portion of the Title I grant to provide support and resources to students who are homeless. Homeless students are automatically eligible for Title I academic support.

   The Committee voted 4-0 to recommend to the full board that Policy #529 pertaining to homeless students be affirmed as written.

2. Review of Concord School District Policy #512: Entrance Age

This policy speaks to the entrance age for kindergarten (five years on or before September 30) and first grade (six years on or before September 30.) The committee discussed the recommendation that there be no exceptions to this policy.

Superintendent Rath noted that, in general, if a parent is seeking an exception to the policy, the parent would make that request to the building principal. Principals have generally not made any exceptions to the policy.

Superintendent Rath noted that public schools enroll all students regardless of skill or entrance level. There would be no consistent way to determine which child would be eligible for early enrollment. Mr. Glahn indicated that in the 1980s, parents did come before the board to request exceptions, and he was not in favor of granting them. He did not find that there was a good rationale for judging exceptions and doesn’t believe that the Board is in a position to judge who should have an exception to the entrance age policy. He noted the wide range of development of young children. One child may be accelerated at age five, but not by age seven. Some children may be highly
successful in one area, but not in others. Mr. Casko indicated that making exceptions could have significant negative effects. Based on variability in the decision-making, it seemed to him to make sense to make no exceptions. Ms. Patterson noted that administratively it would be complicated to make decisions about exceptions.

Superintendent Rath indicated that if a youngster moves to Concord after completing kindergarten in another district, the child would be enrolled in first grade even if the child’s birthday is after the September 30 cutoff. Superintendent Rath noted that there are occasional cases when students have been provided with a double promotion later in elementary years.

The Committee voted 4-0 to recommend to the full Board that Policy #512 pertaining to entrance age be revised by adding the following sentence: There are no exceptions to this policy.

3. Review of Concord School District Policy #651: Request for Reconsideration of Instructional Materials, and related procedures regarding objections to instructional materials

A new state law was passed in the last session of the legislature relating to objections to instructional materials. The new law requires school districts to adopt a policy allowing an exception to specific course materials based on a parent’s or legal guardian’s determination that the material is objectionable. The law doesn’t require the parent to provide a reason for the objection, requires that the alternative material be agreed upon by both the parent and the school district, and requires that the parent pay for the alternative material. The alternative material must meet state requirements for the particular subject area.

The district has a policy (#651) that was revised in 1996. The policy describes procedures for handling objections to instructional materials. The board doesn’t have a policy about the selection of materials, but the district does have a detailed set of procedures for the selection and reconsideration of instructional materials.

Committee members discussed developing policies regarding instructional materials:

1. Regarding the selection of instructional materials
2. Related to parent requests for alternative material for their own children
3. Regarding requests for reconsideration of instructional materials for all children

Ms. Higgins noted that she experienced parent complaints occasionally during the years she taught health classes at Concord High. Usually this was resolved by the teacher discussing the issue with the parents; only twice did the student do an alternative assignment. She found that most parents were flexible and willing to work with the teacher and student.

Superintendent Rath noted that most of the situations involving objections to instructional materials are similar to those described by Ms. Higgins. There are fewer requests to remove material completely from use in the schools. The district’s current policy and procedures seem more focused on a potential request for a general
exclusion of materials for all children. The new law pertains only to parents objecting to instructional materials used by their own child.

The committee was provided with a sample policy adopted by the Governor Wentworth School District in response to the new law.

The committee discussed options to amend Policy #651, or develop a new policy.

Superintendent Rath suggested that the committee consider three policies:

- Policy #651a: a school board policy related to the selection of materials, referencing the procedures currently in place, with minor revisions.
- Policy #651b: a policy that would be responsive to the new law, related to a parent’s objections to instructional material being used with his/her own child and requests for alternative material.
- Policy #651c: a school board policy related to parent or community member objections to instructional material and requests that the material be removed from the curriculum for all children.

Superintendent Rath was asked to bring the three policies as described back to the committee for consideration.

The meeting adjourned at 6:15 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Jennifer Patterson, Chair
Donna Palley, Recorder