

## SCHOOL COMMITTEE EQUITY POLICY OVERVIEW

**TO: School Committee**

**FROM: Margie Ross Decter and Angela Pitter Wright**

**DATE: May 10, 2014**

**RE: Equity Policy Overview**

### **Overview:**

In preparation for our deliberations on Monday, we thought that it might be helpful to distill some of the data and presentations we have heard over the last several weeks regarding the equity discussion. We have received a lot of information to digest and the policy has multiple components to it.

Discussions to date have centered primarily on technology funding. Our recommendations for changes in the policy will center primarily on these issues. Since the PTOC working groups along with NPS input has also suggested some clean-up of content, we are working off of the PTOC's version of the policy they edited from 2008. We have highlighted any substantive changes for your review in the attached document.

There are other areas of the Equity Policy that we may wish to address through a further review by the Equity Committee, which we are also suggesting to reinstate.

On Monday night, we will review past input and deliberate the specific amendments proposed to the equity policy. We may entertain a motion for a vote at this meeting or the next one.

### **Summary of Discussions to Date:**

Historical data have shown some disparities in technology acquisition among elementary schools. Some schools were able to gain earlier access to technology through aggressive fundraising, while some others either did not or could not. PTOs have continued to submit required equity reports, and while the Equity Committee has not formally met recently, discussions about fundraising equity have been ongoing among PTOs, Newton Public Schools (NPS) and the School Committee (SC) for some time.

NPS assures us that education has not been compromised by the technology roll out. While the standard has not yet been reached in all schools, deployment has been concurrent with curriculum development and teacher training and is being rolled out grade-by-grade across all 15 schools. NPS has expressed that it will continue to purchase and distribute technology equitably among schools, with a focus over the next several months on schools most in need.

Current data and projections show the "technology gap" closing. In the last few meetings, NPS has presented more current data and information around planning for technology. These reports now suggest that with planned technology purchases, our elementary schools will be very close to meeting the "ambitious technology standard" outlined. This is new information and is due to the marked progress NPS has made with one time funds, increased operating budget, PTO funding, and the projected replacements that will come with new construction (e.g. Angier, Zervas, Cabot).

By updating the Equity Policy, we hope to support and maintain equity. The next big technology purchases will be in support of replacing devices, which will peak in FY 18 when original bulk technology purchases will begin to be retired. Going forward, this is an area our policy that will be impacted by PTO fundraising and we want to ensure this is done equitably. In addition, there are a number of new equity issues that will emerge due to proliferation of technology advances and NPS planning. We suggest using the Equity Committee to serve as a working group for the School Committee and School Department to advise on implementing the equity policy and make recommendations as needed.

Funding of Technology is an important and related topic. For example, it was noted by PTOC that this year's SC budget guidelines ask NPS to reduce reliance on PTO fundraising for technology and increase operating funds in this area. However, we would suggest that deliberations impacting budget should be had in the context of goals, budget guidelines, and proposed planning with NPS recommendations.

### **Summary of School Committee Points of View:**

In recent meetings, the SC expressed support for many of the PTOC recommendations on the NPS Equity Policy. From the 4/7 and 4/28 SC meetings and prior discussions, there appears to be some consensus around the following aspects of the PTOC's proposed revisions to the equity policy:

- Reestablishing the Equity Committee and giving it a specific charge
- Ensuring gifts made to specific schools are counted in the school equity cap
- Honoring PTOs as providing a valuable public-private partnership in the short term, but developing a longer-term, sustainable technology funding plan that phases out PTO funding for access devices.

There did not appear to be support around the following aspects of the PTOC's proposed revisions to the technology policy:

- The new proposed per pupil funding cap and associated process for applying for exceptions to the equity policy.

Therefore, the following recommendation was suggested:

- Limiting PTO funding of technology to purchase access devices in order to reach or maintain the NPS "ambitious standard"

Finally, we are recommending approving a category that PTOs may not fund that NPS committed to fund fully and was recommended by PTOC and NPS. We are highlighting it separately because it was not discussed yet with SC:

- Eliminating PTO funding of expenses related to other technology items (not access devices), such as maintenance, copiers, teaching and learning software, toner, etc.
- Amending elements relating to the Equity Committee

### **Suggested Next Steps**

1. Deliberate recommended changes at 5/12 meeting. Joe, Leo and PTOC leadership will be there for any questions or clarification

2. Entertain any motions for a vote or consider voting at next meeting
3. Appoint a School Committee member to EC
4. Convene the EC with a specific charge, with timed milestones to report back to School Committee:
  - a. Review equity reports and other duties as outlined in the policy
  - b. Make ongoing recommendations for areas such as:
    - i. further adjustments to the equity policy
    - ii. options to facilitate PTO donations to help support “NPS technology equity”
    - iii. review the per pupil rate for PTO Spending
    - iv. communicate to PTOs about the revised equity policy

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