

Report of the Stakeholder Committee on Middle School Sports Travel

February 28, 2014



I. Introduction

The Stakeholder Committee on Middle School Sports Travel formed for the purpose of developing recommendations to the Juneau Board of Education to revise Board Policy #1430 regarding travel for middle school sports.

At its September 10, 2013, meeting, the Board voted 4-3 to approve an amendment to Policy #1430 that prohibits out-of-town travel for middle school athletics, effective July 1, 2014. Many Juneau citizens were surprised and disappointed by the Board's decision. At its October 15, 2013, meeting, the Board agreed to a request from concerned parents and other community members to acknowledge the creation of a stakeholder committee that would review the policy, study the issue, and develop suggested revisions to the policy that better meet the needs of students while addressing a number of issues and concerns raised by Board members. The Board subsequently released a letter providing additional guidance and suggestions for the committee, stating that if a revised policy is presented to the Board by the March 2014 meeting, the Board will consider that recommendation as a potential action item for the Board's April and/or May meetings.

This report summarizes the committee's work and its conclusions. To address the specific issues and concerns raised by Board members and the middle school principals, the report discusses each of those issues directly and suggests solutions. The report concludes with recommended language for revising Policy #1430, proposing a series of conditions that would need to be met for any out-of-town travel for middle school sports to be permitted. The committee offers amicable solutions that are responsive to all of the concerns the committee heard.

II. The Committee's Process

Membership on the committee was open to all. Participants included parents, teachers, and coaches from both middle schools as well as other interested members of the community. The committee developed an email list of interested people to facilitate open communication, and encouraged recipients to spread the word and provide additions to the list, which grew to 68 people. The committee also shared information via an existing "Save Our Middle School Sports - Juneau, Alaska" Facebook group comprised of 213 members.

The committee began by coordinating with the middle school principals, site councils, and the Juneau School District's Activities Advisory Committee to be sure they were aware of the committee and its work. Next, the committee met with each middle school principal to obtain information about existing middle school athletic programs, the challenges faced by the two schools, the principals' concerns, and the principals' vision for the kinds of athletic opportunities their respective schools should provide in the future.

After reflecting upon the information gleaned from the principals and the issues raised by the principals and Board members, the committee developed preliminary recommendations and circulated a draft version of this report. Committee representatives met again with the middle school site councils and the Activities Advisory Committee and sought comments from all interested parties to help improve the report, specifically requesting input on any errors or omissions as well as feedback on whether any of the recommendations seemed unworkable. As a final step, the committee undertook a brief online survey to gauge the opinion of a broader group of community members. The committee used all of the feedback received on the draft report and via the survey to refine its recommendations and develop this final report for presentation to the Board.

III. Commonalities

The debate over middle school travel in Juneau involves some difficult issues and engenders strong feelings. Before delving into the details, it is important to remember that people on all sides of this debate share many common goals. School Board members, administrators, teachers, coaches, parents, and other members of the community all recognize that students' participation in extracurricular activities has value and contributes to their academic and social success. We all realize that budgets are tight and school resources are stretched thinly. We all want kids to engage in school and connect with adults in ways that help them succeed. While there are different opinions about how best to cope with limited resources and set priorities, there is broad agreement that participation in activities outside the classroom – including athletic teams and competitions – enriches middle school students' educational experience and helps prepare them to succeed in high school and beyond.

IV. Current Practices at Juneau Middle Schools

The following provides a brief overview of the approach now being used for athletic opportunities at each middle school, the strengths and weaknesses of each model, and potential directions these programs may take in the future. Much more detail could be provided about the numbers of participants, trends over time, the history of travel by sports teams, associated costs, sources and amounts of outside fundraising, etc. The committee was sensitive to the concern that compiling such detailed information would require data and records from the two schools, which could be time consuming for school personnel to provide. Not wanting to burden the schools with such a request, the committee chose to keep this overview fairly broad.

Dzantik'i Heeni Middle School (DHMS)

DHMS currently has teams for the following sports: basketball, soccer, volleyball, cross country, track and field, wrestling, rifle, gymnastics, and archery. Basketball and soccer have A teams that compete against FDMS and intramural teams with squads that play against one another but not against any other school. None of the teams have cuts. DHMS

principal Molly Yerkes explained to the committee that the intramural structure is intended to allow opportunities for students to play sports without the pressure of interscholastic competition. DHMS sports teams have not traveled out of Juneau since the 2011-12 school year. A combination of factors prompted DHMS to stop out-of-town travel, but the two most prominent reasons cited by the principal were decreased office staffing (less staff available to handle travel arrangements and paperwork) and concerns about whether travel opportunities could be offered equitably to students who lack the financial resources to pay or the active family involvement to fundraise. The principal also conveyed to the committee that DHMS has many needs and priorities besides travel for athletics. The principal noted that the number of students participating in sports since DHMS stopped traveling has remained about the same as before.

Pros of the DHMS Approach

- Inclusive: involves some students who might not otherwise participate in sports at middle school (i.e., those who would prefer not to compete against other schools)
- Pragmatic: copes with decreased resources (less coaches, less administrative staff) by cutting back to a less ambitious program

Cons of the DHMS Approach

- Restrictive: denies opportunities for B and C teams to compete against FDMS, and for all teams to travel out of Juneau
- Collateral effects: results in B and C teams at FDMS having less opportunities to compete

Floyd Dryden Middle School (FDMS)

FDMS currently has teams for the following sports: basketball, soccer, volleyball, cross country, track and field, wrestling, rifle, and cheer. Basketball and soccer have A, B, and C teams due to the number of participants. The A basketball team currently has cuts because gym space availability is insufficient for the number of students who would like to play. All teams and all skill levels (A, B, and C) are eligible to travel to DHMS or out of town. When asked why FDMS continued allowing sports teams to travel despite recent budget cuts and DHMS's decision to try another approach, FDMS principal Tom Milliron explained to the committee that in addition to his personal philosophy that travel opportunities are beneficial, allowing travel is consistent with the FDMS community's wishes. He noted Board Policy #8140, Site-Based Decision Making, which commits to a process of decentralized school governance for matters other than curriculum. FDMS's approach to ensure equitable opportunities for travel for students who lack the financial resources to pay or the active family support to fundraise has been "nobody gets left behind" – scholarships are provided for any student who needs support, funded by donations from other families, fundraising by the teams, sales of banner advertisements in the gym, etc. The principal noted that some students on B and C teams have quit because the teams play few games now that DHMS B and C teams do not compete interscholastically. He also expressed hope that in the future the FDMS basketball A team will find a way to have enough gym time and space for all students who wants to play, so cuts will be unnecessary.

Pros of the FDMS Approach

- Institutionalized: reflects a commitment to athletics as part of the fabric of the school
- Resilient: continues to be a robust program in spite of decreased JSD activities funding by drawing upon external funds from the Parent Teacher Organization, donations from families and businesses, etc.
- Measured support for travel: offers the opportunity for out-of-town travel, provided the athletes and teacher-coaches miss no more than two days of school and provided the principal agrees that the benefits of a proposed trip outweigh the downsides

Cons of the FDMS Approach

- Competitive: does not include an intramural component, which could be appealing to students who do not want to compete against other schools; includes cuts in basketball, meaning some students who want to play cannot

Changes Considered by the Activities Advisory Committee (AAC)

The AAC recently discussed the existing programs for middle school sports and other activities, including issues such as the degree of competitiveness in middle school sports, the structure of having A, B, and C teams for some sports, and the Board's policy regarding out-of-town travel. The AAC decided at its January 2014 meeting to begin a process to develop a set of overall guidelines and a developmentally-responsive philosophy statement to present to the Juneau School District to govern middle school sports and other activities. The AAC also recently affirmed to the Board its view that out-of-town travel should be allowed for all middle school activities, including athletics.

V. The Benefits of Travel Opportunities for Middle School Sports

While it certainly is possible for middle school students to participate in sports without travelling out of Juneau, numerous advantages accompany the opportunity for out-of-town travel. Some of the main benefits are as follows:

Build athletic skills and character – Traveling allows athletes to compete against unfamiliar teams, challenging them to test the skills they have learned and apply those skills in an unfamiliar setting. Those challenges help to build bonds between teammates and build character in individual athletes.

Build confidence – Opportunities to compete can help young people build confidence in their athletic abilities. Likewise, being in a different place and away from their parents can help young people build confidence in their ability to function more independently, yet in a setting with adult supervision.

Build memories – Many alumni of Juneau middle schools speak fondly of their experiences traveling to other Southeast Alaska communities as part of a middle school sports team. They remember their friends, the long ferry rides, housing out with other families, and more. The memories can last a lifetime.

Be an athlete – Some kids who travel with middle school sports teams may already have experience playing a club sport, and they may be sufficiently athletic that they will play varsity sports in high school. For other kids, however, the chance to be on a sports team in middle school, especially where there are no cuts, may be their first or only opportunity to experience being part of an athletic team. For those kids in particular, the opportunity to travel as part of a team may be the only such experience they have, or better yet, it may help them to blossom in ways that will enable them to pursue sports in high school and beyond.

Experience life in other communities – Kids' lives are enriched when they travel. Living in a community that is not connected to the road system, Juneau students have limited opportunities to see other places and meet other people. While students from affluent families may travel out of Juneau several times a year, for many kids the chance to travel with a school team is an uncommon adventure.

Connect with teachers – The Juneau School District espouses a philosophy that it is important to build connections between students and teachers. The District has gone to great lengths to promote engagement between students and teachers and to recognize that as kids become teenagers and young adults they need connections to keep them succeeding in school. When teacher-coaches travel with their teams, the teachers and students have opportunities to get to know each other better and to build positive relationships that carry over into the classroom.

VI. Concerns Raised by Board Members and the Principals

This section summarizes the main concerns raised by Board members and the middle school principals regarding travel for middle school sports. For each concern we state the issue, provide brief background including any context or explanation needed to clarify the perceived problem, and offer one or more solutions to address the concern.

Concerns from the School Board

Board Issue #1: Inadequate Juneau School District funds to pay for travel

Background: The District has faced repeated cuts in recent years due to escalating costs and no increase in the base student allocation provided by the legislature. As a result, the District has cut activities funding for the middle schools.

With respect to the direct costs of travel (transportation etc.), the District's current budget situation has no bearing because District funds for middle school athletics have never included money for out-of-town travel. Indirect costs (paying substitute teachers, making travel arrangements) are a separate matter and are discussed under Board Issue #2 below.

Solution: The absence of District funds for direct costs of travel has not precluded middle school teams from travelling in the past – teams have always needed to raise funds to cover

their travel costs. The same would be true in the foreseeable future if the Board allows out-of-town travel, so inadequate District funds for travel is not an insurmountable constraint.

Board Issue #2: Ancillary costs must be addressed

Background: In addition to direct costs such as transportation, travel for sports teams results in indirect costs such as hiring substitute teachers and having school personnel make travel arrangements. The latter is a particular concern due to decreased office staffing in the schools.

Solution: Several options could address this concern:

1. Principals could require that some or all of the ancillary costs be borne by the team that is proposing to travel, so the team would use fundraising, donations, etc. to pay the school for these costs.
2. Coaches or parent volunteers could do the bulk of the work to make travel arrangements, such as preparing paperwork and making ferry reservations, so office staff would only need to do the things that must be done by classified personnel, such as purchasing tickets.
3. If a middle school principal is not comfortable with allowing volunteers to assist with travel arrangements, a team that is proposing to travel could supply parent volunteers to cover other administrative duties in the school office for a period of time (e.g., answering the telephone), freeing up school staff to make the travel arrangements.
4. The District could centralize travel arrangements for middle school sports as it does for high school activities, relieving middle school office staff of that responsibility. (Of course this option would depend upon District activities personnel having the staff capacity to handle making travel arrangements for the middle schools.)

Board Issue #3: Maximizing student participation in middle school sports

Background: The amendment to Policy #1430 that the Board adopted in September 2013 included language stating that “the goal of the middle school athletics program is to maximize participation by the greatest number of students in the broadest range of activities at the lowest possible cost to families and the community.”

Solution: One avenue that DHMS has pursued recently to maximize student involvement in athletics is to offer intramural sports. Interscholastic competitive sports and intramural sports are not mutually exclusive. Each middle school has the flexibility to offer intramural programs to meet the level of demand from students. Given resource constraints, principals may need to decide on the relative priority of competitive versus intramural sports and the appropriate balance between the two to maximize overall student participation in athletics. The committee recommends that when seeking this balance, the principals ensure the competitive sports that are offered are viable programs, including opportunities for occasional out-of-town competitions.

Another option for maximizing student participation in middle school sports is to recognize something that two middle school coaches pointed out to the committee: some students join sports specifically because they know there is an opportunity to travel. Travel can be the main reason a student initially joins a team and may keep him or her motivated to practice hard and maintain the grades required to travel.

Board Issue #4: Ensure equity (considering Board Policy #1265)

Background: Board Policy #1265 notes that removal of systematic barriers is essential to achieving equity in education, and that the Board seeks to sustain an educational system that reduces and eliminates discrimination. The Board has developed “Equity Standards” that elaborate on these goals. In the committee’s discussions with the two middle school principals, both of them emphasized the importance of providing athletic opportunities in a way that is equitable to students of different cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds.

The approach to ensuring equity presents one of the most stark contrasts between current practices at the two middle schools, despite the principals’ shared position that achieving equity is very important. The DHMS principal cited concern about whether it is possible to offer sports travel opportunities equitably to students who lack the financial resources to pay or the active family support to fundraise, and framed this concern as a major reason not to allow travel for DHMS. The FDMS principal cited his requirement that “nobody gets left behind” and noted that FDMS teams routinely cover travel costs for any team members who need support.

Having a consistent practice between the two middle schools with regard to sports travel is a different issue from ensuring equity, and is discussed under Board Issue #6 below.

Solution: Strictly speaking, equity with respect to out-of-town sports travel can be achieved in either of two ways: banning all travel, or allowing travel while ensuring that costs are not a barrier for those who are not able to pay. The committee notes that FDMS has a practice of covering travel costs for all students that need help. The success of that model suggests that it is indeed possible to offer out-of-town travel opportunities equitably. The committee was not able to identify any information to support a conclusion that a similar model cannot be successful at DHMS (i.e., that DHMS teams would be unable to offer travel scholarships via donations from other families, business donations, and fundraising).

Additionally, the middle schools can support equitable opportunities for out-of-town travel by ensuring that if a team travels, students of all skill levels and grade levels are invited and encouraged to go on the trip, so travel is not reserved for only the top athletes.

Clearly there are practical limitations to the amount of funds that can be raised and the total cost of scholarships that can be offered to ensure equitable opportunities, so travel cannot be limitless. To put realistic sideboards on the scope of sports travel, the committee recommends two measures:

1. Principals may place a reasonable per-student cost ceiling on allowable travel, if necessary to ensure that costs are manageable.
2. Out-of-town travel should be limited to no more than one trip per team per academic year, lasting no more than two school days unless a longer duration is approved by the principal.

Board Issue #5: Minimizing impacts to instructional time

Background: Under the existing negotiated agreement between the school district and the teachers' union, teachers have preference in hiring as activities advisors and coaches. Many coaches are teachers, and when teacher-coaches take their teams on a trip out of town on school days, substitute teachers cover their classes. The concern is that having a substitute teacher (even a very good substitute) is suboptimal for students.

It is worth noting that teachers miss class for a variety of reasons besides sports travel (illness, personal days, professional development, travel for activities other than sports, etc.). Likewise, students are pulled out of class for a variety of reasons when their teachers are present (standardized testing, assemblies, etc.). Another relevant consideration is that several staff at each middle school are coaches for high school sports teams and are absent from school whenever their teams travel. Because high school teams may take several trips per season, the absences for these teacher-coaches can be substantial, vastly exceeding historic levels of travel by middle school teachers who are middle school coaches.

Solution: The committee acknowledges that the best option for students is for all teachers to be in the classroom every school day. That said, three options (not mutually exclusive) could alleviate the impacts of middle school sports travel on instructional time:

1. As suggested by the FDMS principal, prior to approving a trip the principal should evaluate the pros and cons of the opportunity, comparing the benefits of the trip for student athletes against the downsides. One of the downsides is the effect of a teacher-coach's absence from class. Before approving a trip, the principal would need to conclude that the net benefits outweigh the costs
2. Part of the approval process for a trip could be a review of substitute plans prepared by the teacher-coach, so the principal can ensure that meaningful academic work would be accomplished in the teacher-coach's absence.
3. Either the school district or the principals could establish limits on the loss of classroom instructional time, such as no more than one trip per team per academic year, lasting no more than two school days unless a longer duration is approved by the principal.

Board Issue #6: Seeking a consistent practice between the middle schools regarding sports travel

Background: The issue that prompted the Board to address policy for middle school sports travel was the disparate practice between the middle schools: beginning in the 2012-13 school year, DHMS stopped allowing sports teams to travel out of Juneau while FDMS

continued to allow travel. Some parents raised concerns about unequal opportunities at the two schools. Unlike the Juneau high schools, which have open enrollment regardless of where students live, the middle schools have boundaries and grant only limited boundary exemptions, so a family that prefers the offerings at the middle school that is not their local school cannot necessarily switch schools.

Solution: A simple solution that provides a consistent practice between the middle schools regarding sports travel is the one approved by the Board in September 2013: prohibit all out-of-town travel for middle school athletics. Another solution that is more complex (but, in the opinion of the committee, a better outcome for students) is to stipulate a set of conditions that must be met for any out-of-town travel to be permitted, and to tailor those conditions to address the concerns that gave rise to the September 2013 policy change, as well as the other concerns raised by Board members and the principals as highlighted in this report. The committee's recommendations to provide a consistent practice between the middle schools are presented in section VII, articulating conditions under which out-of-town travel could occur at both middle schools. The committee devised the recommendations to address the concerns raised by the Board members and principals, and the committee hopes that both principals would agree to permit travel under these conditions.

If the committee's approach were adopted by the Board and one of the middle school principals were to decide not to support out-of-town travel anyway (i.e., even under the specified conditions), the Board and the superintendent would face a policy decision between the importance of site-based decision making (allowing the principal to decide whether to permit travel – see FDMS Issue #1 below) and the importance of having a consistent practice between the middle schools. The committee recognizes that this could be a difficult decision, and recommends that whichever choice is made, the solution should not be to ban travel at both middle schools. The committee's preferred option in that scenario would be for the Board or the superintendent to instruct both principals to permit out-of-town travel for middle school sports with the conditions recommended by the committee (again, noting that the conditions were designed expressly to address the concerns about travel that have been voiced by the principals and Board members). Alternatively, the Board could accept having an inconsistent practice between the middle schools for sports travel, just as the middle schools have other practices that are not consistent (e.g., whether to offer foreign language classes). While that solution would be far from ideal, at least it would allow each principal to decide whether travel should be permitted for that particular school, while providing the option under District policy for a school that decides not to allow travel to reinstate travel opportunities in the future if conditions or philosophies change. An additional possibility would be to allow students from the middle school that does not allow travel to join teams from the other middle school. This too would be far from ideal, but at least it would provide a means for students who want more opportunities for interscholastic competition.

Board Issue #7: Impacts of the proposed remedy on other middle school programs

Background: Policy changes sometimes have consequences for other programs besides the intended target.

Solution: The committee is unaware of any adverse consequences for other middle school programs that would result from adopting the committee's recommended change to Board Policy #1430. The committee would welcome the opportunity to address any such concerns.

Concerns from Dzantik'i Heeni Middle School

DHMS Issue #1: Decreased office staffing due to budget cuts

Background: As noted above under Board Issue #2, in addition to direct costs such as transportation, travel for sports teams results in indirect costs such as having school personnel make travel arrangements and complete necessary paperwork. Recent budget cuts have reduced the number of paraprofessionals and office staff, decreasing the schools' capacity to handle such tasks.

Solution: As noted in the proposed solution to Board Issue #2, several options could address this concern:

1. Principals could require that some or all of the ancillary costs be borne by the team that is proposing to travel, so the team would use fundraising, donations, etc. to pay the school for these costs.
2. Coaches or parent volunteers could do the bulk of the work to make travel arrangements, such as preparing paperwork and making ferry reservations, so office staff would only need to do the things that must be done by classified personnel, such as purchasing tickets.
3. If a middle school principal is not comfortable with allowing volunteers to assist with travel arrangements, a team that is proposing to travel could supply parent volunteers to cover other administrative duties in the school office for a period of time (e.g., answering the telephone), freeing up school staff to make the travel arrangements.
4. The District could centralize travel arrangements for middle school sports as it does for high school activities, relieving middle school office staff of that responsibility.

DHMS Issue #2: Limitations on the tasks volunteers can handle on behalf of the school

Background: During discussion of the administrative burdens of making travel arrangements with decreased office staffing, the DHMS principal expressed that volunteers cannot handle some important tasks such as purchasing ferry tickets or handling private information about students, and thus if out-of-town travel were permitted the schools would need to rely on dwindling staff resources for those tasks.

Solution: Several options could address this concern (note partial overlap with the options identified under DHMS Issue #1 above):

1. Coaches or parent volunteers could do the bulk of the work to make travel arrangements, such as preparing paperwork and making ferry reservations, so office staff would only need to do the things that must be done by classified personnel, such as purchasing tickets.
2. In the case of private information, volunteers could be required to sign an agreement not to disclose information that may be considered confidential.
3. If a middle school principal is not comfortable with allowing volunteers to assist with travel arrangements or handling private information, a team that is proposing to travel could supply parent volunteers to cover other administrative duties in the school office for a period of time (e.g., answering the telephone), freeing up school staff to make the travel arrangements and handle private information.
4. The District could centralize travel arrangements for middle school sports as it does for high school activities, relieving middle school office staff of that responsibility.

DHMS Issue #3: Concern about whether travel opportunities can be offered equitably to students who lack the financial resources to pay or the active family support to fundraise

Background: As described under Board Issue #4 above, there is broad recognition of the importance of providing athletic opportunities in a way that is equitable to students of different cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds.

Solution: The committee recommends that any out-of-town travel opportunities be made available equitably to all members of a team, including those with a demonstrated financial need and/or a hardship that impedes the student's ability to fundraise. Costs for students who require such assistance must be borne by the team.

FDMS has a "nobody gets left behind" requirement whereby FDMS teams cover travel costs for any team members who need help. The success of that model suggests that it is indeed possible to offer out-of-town travel opportunities equitably. The committee was not able to identify any information to support a conclusion that a similar model cannot be successful at DHMS (i.e., that DHMS teams would be unable to offer travel scholarships via donations from other families, business donations, and fundraising). As discussed above under Board Issue #4, the committee recommends two measures to put reasonable limits on the scope of sports travel so that costs can be kept in check and funds can be raised to pay for students who need financial assistance:

1. Principals may place a reasonable per-student cost ceiling on allowable travel, if necessary to ensure that costs are manageable.
2. To minimize fundraising and logistical burdens, as well as the loss of classroom instructional time for athletes and teacher-coaches, out-of-town travel should be limited to no more than one trip per team per academic year, lasting no more than two school days unless a longer duration is approved by the principal.

DHMS Issue #4: Priority of sports travel relative to numerous other needs

Background: The DHMS principal conveyed clearly to the committee that DHMS has many needs and priorities besides travel for athletics, suggesting that if the energy of stakeholders is to be devoted to addressing the middle schools' needs, other things would likely be higher on her list.

Solution: The committee respects that the principals, the superintendent, and the Board are all working diligently to improve educational outcomes for Juneau students, and that the schools have many needs. The committee's recommendations would reestablish travel opportunities for middle school sports without impinging on other middle school programs or detracting from efforts to address other needs.

DHMS Issue #5: A principal needs to be confident that coaches are well-suited to supervising a trip, or else travel cannot happen

Background: There may be circumstances under which a principal has concerns about having a particular coach supervise a group of students on an out-of-town trip.

Solution: This situation describes a personnel matter rather than a constraint on travel for sports teams per se. The committee agrees that if a principal has concerns about whether a particular coach can safely supervise a trip, that coach should not be allowed to do so.

Concerns from Floyd Dryden Middle School

FDMS Issue #1: Site-based decision making should govern whether travel for sports is allowed at a school

Background: Board Policy #8140 on Site-Based Decision Making commits to a process of decentralized school governance. It directs the formation of site councils for each school, noting that the composition of the site councils should be broadly representative of the school community. The FDMS principal expressed the view that Policy #8140 and the concept of site-based decision making should prevail for matters other than curriculum.

Solution: The committee agrees that prohibiting travel for middle school sports at the District level runs counter to Board Policy #8140. Of course, the same argument could be made if the Board or Superintendent were to instruct both principals to permit out-of-town travel for middle school sports if one of the schools would prefer not to. Nevertheless, as noted above under Board Issue #6 and below in section VII, the committee's preferred solution is for the Board to revise Policy #1430 to establish conditions under which out-of-town travel could occur at both middle schools, and for both principals to agree to permit travel under those conditions.

FDMS Issue #2: School practices should reflect what the school community wants, insofar as possible

Background: Similar to FDMS Issue #1 above, the FDMS principal expressed the view that if the school community believes travel for athletics should be allowed, then the school should find a way to make such opportunities possible.

Solution: The committee's recommended revisions to Board Policy #1430 would address this issue by establishing conditions for travel that are responsive to all of the concerns the committee has heard. Most importantly, these conditions would maximize student participation in athletics, require costs of travel to be paid by external sources (including ancillary costs, if required by the principal), require that any travel opportunities be made available equitably to all members of a team regardless of their ability to pay or fundraise, and minimize impacts to instructional time by limiting out-of-town travel to one trip per team per academic year lasting no more than two school days unless a longer duration is approved by the principal.

FDMS Issue #3: Need to compare the pros and cons of any proposed trip: how many kids, what kind of experience they would have, how to pay for all who are eligible to go, how much school students would miss, effects on the non-traveling students of the teacher-coaches; etc.

Background: If principals undertake a case-by-case evaluation of any proposed trip, they can consider the benefits of the travel opportunity and weigh those against any detriments. That process facilitates informed decisions on the merits of each proposed trip, versus deciding categorically that travel should not be permitted.

Solution: The committee's recommendations would encourage this type of case-by-case evaluation of trips proposed by middle school sports teams.

FDMS Issue #4: Middle school teachers who are high school coaches miss many more classes due to travel than middle school teachers who are middle school coaches

Background: Board Issue #5 above is a concern about effects on instructional time when middle school teacher-coaches travel with their teams and miss classes. Several staff members at each middle school are coaches for high school sports teams and are absent from school whenever their teams travel. Because high school teams may take several trips per season, the absences for these teacher-coaches can be substantial, vastly exceeding historic levels of travel by middle school teachers who are middle school coaches.

Solution: The committee's recommendations would limit out-of-town travel to one trip per team per academic year lasting no more than two school days unless a longer duration is approved by the principal. Under that restriction, middle school teachers who coach middle school teams could miss very little school due to sports travel. The likely amount of school missed would be even less because in reality all teams probably would not travel every year.

Minimizing the effects of high school sports travel on middle school instructional time is beyond the scope of the committee's work. The committee does not intend to convey that middle school teachers should be prohibited from coaching high school sports, but simply to emphasize that the number of school days missed by middle school teachers who coach middle school sports has been very small and would continue to be so in the future if out-of-town travel is allowed for middle sports.

VII. Recommendations

When a majority of Board members voted to revise Board Policy #1430 to prohibit out-of-town travel for middle school athletics, those Board members cited a number of specific concerns that led them to support the policy change. Likewise, the middle school principals have cited a number of specific concerns related to out-of-town travel for athletics. The committee has addressed each of those concerns in this report.

The committee's overall conclusion is that a better solution exists for Juneau middle school students. That solution lies in stipulating a set of conditions that must be met for any out-of-town travel to be permitted, and tailoring those conditions to address the concerns raised by Board members and the principals.

The committee offers two levels of recommendations below: specific language for revising Board Policy #1430 to allow middle school sport travel under a set of conditions, and other recommendations for addressing related issues that are more specific than would typically be covered in a Board of Education policy.

Recommendations for Revising Board Policy #1430

Existing pertinent text from Policy #1430 (as of September 10, 2013):

"Out of town travel shall not be permitted for middle school athletics, effective July 1, 2014. The goal of the middle school athletics program is to maximize participation by the greatest number of students in the broadest range of activities at the lowest possible cost to families and the community."

Recommended replacement text for Policy #1430:

Out-of-town travel may be permitted for middle school athletics under the following conditions:

1. Middle schools shall seek to maximize participation by the greatest number of students in the broadest range of activities at the lowest possible cost to families and the community.
2. Juneau School District general funds shall not be used for out-of-town middle school athletics travel. Costs may be paid for by donations, fundraising, grants, or students' families. Principals may require that ancillary costs (e.g., for arranging travel and for substitute teachers) also be paid for by these external sources.
3. All funds for out-of-town travel shall be deposited in a dedicated account prior to the commencement of travel.

4. Any out-of-town travel opportunities shall be made available equitably to all members of a team, including those with a demonstrated financial need and/or a hardship that impedes the student's ability to fundraise. Costs for students who require such assistance must be borne by the team.
5. Principals may place a reasonable per-student cost ceiling on allowable travel, if necessary to ensure that costs are manageable.
6. To minimize fundraising and logistical burdens, as well as the loss of classroom instructional time for athletes and teacher-coaches, out-of-town travel shall be limited to no more than one trip per team per academic year, lasting no more than two school days unless a longer duration is approved by the principal.
7. Principals may establish academic and/or discipline requirements for individual students to travel.

Other Recommendations

Below we summarize additional recommendations for implementing middle school sports travel effectively, beyond the broad framework recommended above for Board Policy #1430. This list recaps other recommendations mentioned in section VI that respond to specific issues raised by the Board members and principals.

Direct Costs of Travel

1. The direct costs of travel (for transportation etc.) should not be considered an insurmountable constraint under the current budget climate because Juneau School District funds have never been available for these costs – teams have always needed to raise funds externally to cover their travel costs.

Ancillary Costs

2. If ancillary costs (for substitute teachers, making travel arrangements, etc.) are an impediment for a middle school to allow out-of-town travel, the principal should require that some or all of the ancillary costs be borne by the team that is proposing to travel, so the team would use fundraising, donations, etc. to pay the school for these costs.
3. If office staff in a middle school cannot easily make travel arrangements for sports teams, the principal should ask coaches or parent volunteers to do the bulk of the work, such as preparing paperwork and making ferry reservations, so office staff would only need to do the things that must be done by classified personnel, such as purchasing tickets.
4. If a middle school principal is not comfortable with allowing volunteers to assist with travel arrangements, a team that is proposing to travel could supply parent volunteers to cover other administrative duties in the school office for a period of time (e.g., answering the telephone), freeing up school staff to make the travel arrangements.
5. Alternatively, if the principals have concerns about any of recommendations 2-4, the District should centralize travel arrangements for middle school sports as it does for high school activities, relieving middle school office staff of that responsibility.

Maximizing Student Participation in Middle School Sports

6. To maximize student participation in sports, both middle schools should offer intramural sports in addition to competitive sports.
7. Given resource constraints, principals may need to decide on the relative priority of competitive versus intramural sports and the appropriate balance between the two to maximize overall student participation in athletics. When seeking this balance, the principals should ensure the competitive sports that are offered are viable programs, including opportunities for occasional out-of-town competitions.

Ensuring Equity

8. The onus for demonstrating that a proposed sports team trip outside Juneau is being offered equitably to all members of a team, including those who lack the financial resources to pay or the active family support to fundraise, should rest with the team's coach. Ultimately the coach should be required to verify to the principal that donations and/or fundraising are sufficient so that any team member who is eligible to travel can go.

Minimizing Impacts to Instructional Time

9. Prior to approving a trip, the principal should evaluate the pros and cons by comparing the benefits of the trip for student athletes against the downsides, including the effect of a teacher-coach's absence from class. The principal should not approve the trip unless the principal concludes that the net benefits outweigh the costs.
10. Part of the approval process for a trip should be a review of substitute plans prepared by the teacher-coach, so the principal can ensure that meaningful academic work would be accomplished in the teacher-coach's absence.

Seeking a Consistent Practice Between the Middle Schools

11. Assuming the Board revises Policy #1430 as recommended above to allow out-of-town travel for middle school sports under specified conditions, the two middle school principals should approve travel that meets those conditions.
12. In the event the Board adopts the committee's approach for Policy #1430 and one of the middle school principals were to decide not to support out-of-town travel anyway (i.e., even under the specified conditions), the Board should ensure that the superintendent instructs both principals to permit out-of-town travel for middle school sports with the specified conditions (noting that the conditions were designed expressly to address the concerns about travel that have been voiced by the principals and the Board).
13. Alternatively, if the Board prefers not to confront a principal who does not want to allow sports teams to travel under the specified conditions, the Board could accept having an inconsistent practice between the middle schools for sports travel. While that solution would be far from ideal, at least it would allow each principal to decide whether travel should be permitted for that particular school, while providing the option under District policy for a school that decides not to allow travel to reinstate travel opportunities in the future if conditions or philosophies change.
14. An additional possibility the District could pursue in the event one middle school principal were to decide not to support out-of-town travel under the specified conditions and the Board prefers not to confront that principal would be to allow students from the middle school that does not allow travel to join teams from the other middle school. As with recommendation 13, that solution would be far from ideal, but

at least it would provide a means for students who want more opportunities for interscholastic competition.

VIII. Conclusions

In summary, the committee recommends that the Board of Education revise Policy #1430 as described in section VII above, permitting out-of-town travel for middle school athletics and specifying a set of conditions under which such travel could occur. Those conditions and other recommendations discussed above address concerns raised by the Board and the principals by requiring teams to raise the funds for direct travel costs; providing options to help the middle schools cover indirect costs; maximizing student participation in athletics via both competitive and intramural sports; ensuring equity by requiring that teams cover the costs for any student who is unable to pay; and minimizing impacts on the classroom by limiting the number and length of trips and having principals assess the pros and cons before giving approval for any trip.

The committee recognizes that the two Juneau middle schools have recently taken different approaches to sports travel, and this difference presents an inherent policy tradeoff between the importance of site-based decision making (allowing each principal to decide whether to permit travel) and the importance of having a consistent practice between middle schools. **The committee sincerely hopes that should the Board revise Policy #1430 as we recommend, both middle school principals would support out-of-town travel for sports under the specified conditions. In the event that is not the case, this report suggests three different implementation strategies** the Juneau School District could use once Policy #1430 is revised: travel could be at the principal's discretion so that one middle school might allow sports teams to travel and the other might not; both middle schools could be required to field competitive sports teams with the opportunity to travel and also offer intramural sports; or competitive sports teams with the possibility of out-of-town travel could be available for all Juneau middle school students, but only at one of the middle schools.

The Stakeholder Committee on Middle School Sports Travel thanks the Juneau Board of Education for acknowledging community concern regarding the Board's September 2013 decision to prohibit middle school sports travel, and for offering an opportunity for the committee to evaluate the issue and recommend a different approach. The committee would be pleased to address any questions or concerns Board members may have regarding this report.

Appendix: Community Survey

The committee developed and administered a brief online survey in February 2014 to gauge the opinion of a broader group of community members. The committee publicized the survey via email, the Facebook group “Save Our Middle School Sports - Juneau, Alaska,” and word of mouth, seeking one response per family from any Juneau residents, regardless of whether the respondent currently had children enrolled in the Juneau School District. The committee received 260 responses to the survey.

- Of the 260 responses, 188 (72%) had a child enrolled in the Juneau School District and 72 (28%) did not.
- The responses from parents represented 316 students, 36% of whom were in elementary school, 38% in middle school, 24% in high school, and 2% “other.”

The survey asked participants to indicate which of four options they would most like to see the Juneau School District follow as the policy for middle school sports travel:

A) EXISTING POLICY: Policy #1430 prohibits out-of-town travel for middle school athletics, effective July 1, 2014. There is no restriction on travel for other middle school activities, only for sports. This is the current policy that the school board will follow starting next school year, 2014/2015. Under this policy no middle school athletic teams would be allowed to travel out of town for any sporting event.

B) PROPOSAL: Amend policy #1430 so that middle school principals can allow out-of-town travel for athletic teams under a set of conditions. The conditions would require teams to raise the funds for direct travel costs; provide options to help the middle schools cover indirect costs (such as costs of making travel arrangements); establish a goal of maximizing student participation in athletics via both competitive and intramural sports; ensure equity by requiring that teams cover the costs for any student who is unable to pay; and minimize impacts on the classroom by limiting the number and length of trips and having principals assess the pros and cons before giving approval for any trip. Under this proposal travel would be at the principal’s discretion so it is possible that one middle school might allow sports teams to travel and the other might not.

C) PROPOSAL: Amend policy #1430 as described in “B” above, but have the Board of Education require a consistent policy to allow athletic travel under the set of conditions described in “B” at both middle schools. Under this proposal both middle schools would be required to field competitive sports teams and also offer intramural sports.

D) PROPOSAL: Amend policy #1430 as described in “B” above, but if one middle school principal were to decide not to support out-of-town travel under the set of conditions described in “B” then allow students from that middle school to join competitive teams from the other middle school. Under this proposal competitive sports teams with the possibility of out-of-town travel would be available for all middle school students, but only at one of the middle schools.

- **Of the 260 responses, 22 (8%) favored the existing Policy #1430 and 238 (92%) favored amending Policy #1430 as proposed by the committee and adopting one of the three implementation strategies discussed in the committee's report** (travel would be at the principal's discretion so one school might allow travel and the other might not; both schools would be required to allow travel and also offer intramural sports; or travel would be available to all students but only at one of the middle schools).
- Of the 35 responses from families with a student at DHMS or an elementary school that feeds into DHMS, 4 (11%) favored the existing Policy #1430 and 31 (89%) favored amending Policy #1430 as proposed and adopting one of the three implementation strategies discussed in the committee's report.
- Of the 116 responses from families with a student at FDMS or an elementary school that feeds into FDMS, 10 (9%) favored the existing Policy #1430 and 106 (91%) favored amending Policy #1430 as proposed and adopting one of the three implementation strategies discussed in the committee's report.

(Respondents who said they have a child at Auke Bay Elementary School but not at a middle school could not be ascribed to either FDMS or DHMS.)