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Communications to go through Superintendent

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New Superintendent of Schools Dr. Harry Harutunian has said that due to requests from school administrators, all press communications will go through his office.

Harutunian, who says communications between the schools and the public is a high priority with him, said the "Clearing House" communications policy will facilitate rapid, coordinated responses from the schools.

"This was brought up by principals who were getting four or five press calls a day when they were trying to get ready for the first day of classes," said Harutunian.

He said that at an administrative council meeting it was decided that it would be most expedient if all press inquiries went through his office. Harutunian said the policy is not one he has worked with before, while Superintendent of Schools in Reading, nor is the policy meant to be a gag-order on teachers. It is meant only to provide an easy and accessible protocol for communications.

"I'll do whatever the principals want. I'm trying to find the system that works best for everyone involved," said Harutunian.

Franklin School Principal Pam Lathrop said she and other administrators are glad to see the policy enacted and think it is a good thing for the schools.

"I think it is a great policy," she said. Any time people want to talk to the schools, they just go through the superintendent and he passes the message along to us. It gives us the opportunity to set aside a little time ... and it's a little heads up."

Not only that, she said, but the policy allows for a better flow of communication among the schools, and lets everyone stay on the same page.

"It's just like if a teacher was going to have someone in his or her classroom to talk to the kids, I like to be notified, just to stay on top of everything happening in the school," Lathrop said.

Board of Selectmen Chairwoman Wendy Wakeman said that she felt any moves to centralize communications coming out of the schools was a step in the right direction.

Wakeman said that events in the past have brought her to the point that she felt she could not trust school communications to be accurate.

"I am delighted that Dr. Harutunian will be keeping an eye on communications coming out of the schools," she said. "It is good to have an office that is responsible."

She said that since everyone who works for the schools is an employee of the superintendent, it is fitting that all communications would go through his office.

"If you were an employee for Fidelity, I wouldn't think you would feel comfortable commenting on behalf of the entire company," she said.

"It makes sense," said School Committee member Bruce Baker when told about the new plan. However, he said the School Committee had not yet been briefed about the policy change.

"It's probably a good idea to make sure the right person is talking about the right things and that everybody has their facts straight," he said.

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