

EASTON BOARD OF EDUCATION REGULAR MEETING

Zoom link:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84036998290?pwd=S3E5NEpjQm10SDBRVdVQa0VscWRTdz09>

May 12, 2020

7:30 p.m.

Minutes

ATTENDANCE

Board members: Parker, Chieda, Goldstein, Hicks, Reed, Stinson

Administration: McMorran, Pierson Ugol, Reiss, Del Conte, Kaplan, Fox Santora, Mohr, Brownstein

Others: 100+

CALL TO ORDER

J. Parker called the meeting to order at 7:31 p.m.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Motion: move that the Easton Board of Education approve the minutes of March 30, 2020 Special Joint Meeting of the Easton, Redding, and Region 9 Boards of Education as submitted. Hicks, Reed. Approved. 4-0 (Reed abstained.)

Motion: move that the Easton Board of Education approve the minutes of the March 31, 2020 Easton Board of Education Special Meeting as submitted. Hicks, Goldstein. Approved. Unanimous.

PUBLIC COMMENT

-Chase and Camden Kaldawy, Staples Road, Easton: shared how much they appreciate the work of their teachers.

-Nikki Kaldawy, Staples Road, Easton: shared that homeschooling is challenging. She thanked the teachers for their time, particularly when some are faced with the pressures of not knowing if they have jobs. She respects the Board of Education and Board of Finance, but was disappointed with the final numbers from last night's Board of Finance meeting. She continued that we don't know what students will need emotionally and academically when they return in the fall and that we may expect an increase in the Easton population due to the pandemic: city residents are migrating to the suburbs.

-Adam Parker, Wedgewood Drive, Easton: thanked Jeff Parker, Dr. McMorran and Mr. Reiss for the manner in which they conducted themselves at the previous evening's Board of Finance meeting. He is disgusted and outraged by the behavior of the Board of Finance.

-Kristi Sogofsky, Adams Road, Easton: thanked Dr. McMorran and Jeff Parker for this budget and the time spent preparing it.

-Carolyn Oppenheim, Hunting Ridge Road, Easton: commended Jeff Parker and Dr. McMorran for rising above the fray. The Board of Education went in with a fair number. Now, it is not a fair number. We hope the teachers will be the first to be saved.

BOARD MEMBER COMMENT

- J. Stinson thanked Jeff Parker for exhibiting grace under pressure. Jeff was composed and advocated for the schools. Dr. McMorran and Mr. Reiss were also thanked for their preparation. Twelve years of austere conditions has taken its toll on the system. When you add the current crisis, we have to get creative. There is a limit to what the Board can do. We must do something to change the tide.
- R. Hicks was disappointed in the outcome of last night's Board of Finance meeting. We started in the fall to educate the Board of Finance; we have to continue to educate and advocate for more money to the schools.
- G. Goldstein stated that numerous members of the Board of Finance don't understand teachers or administration. The Board of Education is going to have to do the very best it can.
- K. Reed commended Jeff Parker, Dr. McMorran and Mr. Reiss for speaking with grace and persistence, calmly in the face of a torrent of opposition. She also thanked Easton residents for their presence at the meeting and their emails.
- J. Chieda expressed her gratitude to Jeff Parker for fighting on behalf of the Board of Education and representing the board in such a positive way. Other systems are making more drastic cuts to budgets. Thank you to the public. There is anger and frustration as a result of the Board of Finance meeting outcome. We will take the number and do the best possible.
- J. Parker stated that it is most important to move on, working as best we can with the Board of Finance. If you want a crowd to attend board meetings, Zoom is a great vehicle.

BUILDING ADMINISTRATOR UPDATES:

Helen Keller Middle School - Mrs. Kaplan shared that the PTO granted the Music Department \$1,999.75 for the purchase of keyboards. She asked the Board to approve the grant.

Motion: move that the Easton Board of Education approve a PTO grant in the amount of \$1,995.75 given to the Music Department for the purchase of keyboards. Hicks, Stinson. Approved. Unanimous.

Mrs. Kaplan thanked the PTO for Teacher Appreciation week and for making everyone on the staff feel special. She, Mrs. Mohr, and Mr. Brownstein attended a seminar hosted by Dr. JoAnn Freiberg on the social/emotional impact on children when they return to school. The Student Support Staff is providing excellent support, for example: hosting Lunch Bunch virtually. Students are attending for their social/emotional health. Twenty-three percent of students require support. The team has picked up other children since the pandemic, as it is taking its toll on children.

All staff are offering Google Meets for children, recording live lessons, and giving written feedback. Ninety percent of Keller students are right on track, and the staff is trying to engage the other ten percent. Mrs. Kaplan thanked students for working so hard. Extracurriculars are also running virtually. Community Outreach: 15 students are penpals to senior citizens. This endeavor is helping seniors who are feeling lonely. There are also opportunities for Keller students to read books to Staples students. Parents are encouraged to visit the Distance Learning page on the school website for all communication. Closing ceremonies will be a virtual event, students invited at a particular time and day. Fifth grade orientation will be held virtually.

Samuel Staples Elementary School - Mrs. Fox Santora thanked the PTO for the Teacher Appreciation Week. Mrs. Fox Santora pops into Google Classrooms and attends team meetings and is inspired by the creativity of lessons. She highlighted a few examples, including a time capsule project whereby

memories of this unique time will be captured. Field trip money will be refunded to families. As soon as funds are returned to Staples, money will be reimbursed to families.

DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE ACTION: HEALTHY FOOD CERTIFICATION AND EXEMPTION FOR FOOD AND BEVERAGE ITEMS

Mr. Reiss shared that the following two motions related to food service must be approved every year.

Motion: move that for the 2020-2021 fiscal year, the Easton Board of Education will continue to certify to the Connecticut State Department of Education that all food items offered for sale to students separately from a reimbursable lunch will meet Connecticut Nutrition Standards. Such certification shall include all food offered for sale to students at all times, in all schools, and from all sources including, but not limited to, school stores, vending machines, school cafeterias, and any fundraising activities on school premises sponsored by the school or by non-school organizations and groups. Hicks, Goldstein. Approved. Unanimous.

Motion: move that for the 2020-2021 fiscal year, the Easton Board of Education will allow the sale to students of food items that do not meet Connecticut Nutrition Standards and beverages that do not meet the requirements of state statute (Section 10-221q of the Connecticut General Statutes), provided (1) such sale is in connection with an event occurring after the end of the regular school day or on the weekend, (2) such sale is at the location of the event, and (3) such food and/or beverage is not sold from a vending machine or school store. An "event" is an occurrence that involves more than just a regularly scheduled practice, meeting or extracurricular activity. The "school day" is the period from midnight to 30 minutes after the end of the official school day. "Location" means where the event is being held and must be the same place as the food and beverage sales. Hicks, Stinson. Approved. Unanimous.

DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE ACTION: 2020-2021 OPERATING BUDGET

Dr. McMorran began the discussion. He stated that 81% of the budget is people. Upon the fall return, he is most concerned about the disciplines that build sequentially. He has asked administration and the math specialists to bridge with activities for the summer. He is also concerned about the social/emotion impact on students. The other approximately 20% of the budget is pre-spent: 6% on transportation (a bus was already taken out of the system, so reducing transportation further is not an option), 1.2% accounts for outplacement of students to specialty schools, 5% goes to the buildings and grounds. Dr. McMorran urged board members to consider that the building will need to be retrofitted for the return to school. We are looking to Hartford for direction regarding the safe reopening of schools. It is not prudent to take money out of the supply lines due to previous cuts. 2% goes to academic programs, 3.7% goes to the Central Office, which has a lean structure.

How to lessen the impact?

4.2% increase = \$263,000 to Special Education

\$128,000 = excess cost reimbursement

The Board tried to restore the Middle School Library Media Specialist; the Board also tried to restore clubs. The question is what can we live without for one year? First priority is to protect the workforce. Here is a proposal:

1. Defer the Library Media Specialist position

2. Reduce the substitute account
3. Reduce professional development for staff
4. Cut the upgrading of class libraries
5. Cut the library collection
6. Cut in half summer curriculum work
7. Cut extracurricular programs, except the yearbook
8. Postpone study of school hours
9. Cut capital improvements, including window security. (Reminder: SSES is 15 years old.)
10. Cut electricity budget by 10%
11. Include the resignation of one teacher and the savings when hiring a less experienced teacher

That's a savings of \$171,890 from Keller and \$53,000 from Samuel Staples for a total of \$241,000. Where do we cut in order to make up the \$135,000 difference? We're running out of ways not to touch the workforce. Another issue to consider: How to improve the math program? Find a veteran teacher to fill this opening. Set hiring allowance to eight years experience in order to cast a wider net. When considering cutting a teacher, it is important to remember that the last person in is the first person out. This likely means that the teacher impacted is one of the least expensive teachers. This is a savings of approximately \$56,000, not \$100,000.

Mrs. Fox Santora shared her concerns regarding increasing class size in light of social/emotional issues of returning students; the anticipated loss of academic skills; and the expected need for social distancing. She feels strongly about preserving the number of sections at each grade. Instead, she is looking at art and music:

Music: Reduce 1.8 music to 1.0. All students take general music, eliminating grade 4-5 choral and all instrumental music. This would result in a savings of \$60,000.

Art: Reduce 1.6 art teachers to 1.0. All students K-5 currently have one 60-minute art lesson per week. The reduction would mean one 45-minute class per week. This would result in a savings of \$60,000.

Board Questions:

R. Hicks asked about the health care reserve, perhaps reducing that amount. Mr. Reiss shared that staff are foregoing anything elective. Brown and Brown have advised that those claims will occur at a different time. G. Goldstein stated that doctors will be working overtime to make up for the backlog of elective procedures. K. Reed suggested a special meeting to continue the discussion. J. Parker said that they need a document from insurance consultants in order to move forward. He agreed to setting up a special meeting to deal with just this issue. Waiting until June 12th is late for teachers who are sitting in limbo. Dr. McMorran clarified that the teacher contract states that the beginning of June is when teachers receive their assignments.

J. Chieda reminded everyone that these are possible cuts. The Board has not cut the Library Media Specialist. There are lots of letters in support of this position. Dr. McMorran confirmed that the administration needs more time to discuss the possible cuts outlined this evening.

J. Chieda questioned the use of unspent funds. A discussion ensued regarding the current spending of unspent funds/surplus. Could these funds be used this spring? Dr. McMorran suggested using this money to make capital improvements. The administration can come back with suggestions. He reminded everyone that when there is a surplus, this does not indicate poor money management.

DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE ACTION: UPDATE ON REOPENING PLANS

Guidance from Hartford will be shared as early as Friday, May 14th.

Dr. Pierson Ugol shared that the plans for the reopening of the buildings in the fall are complex. There are categories of work:

- Schedule (including a staggered entry)
- Cleaning: hygiene and safety (taking temperatures and an isolation area)
- Transportation: cleaning, schedule: efficiency and safety
- Academics: technology resources may no longer be free, necessitating prioritizing our needs
- Counseling (social/ emotional needs are first priority)
- Training protocol: training the staff
- Special Education: Summer program? Compensatory services?
- Facilities: spaces, entrances, limiting congestion and movement
- Serving of meals
- Exercise
- Family Engagement: no visitors
- Personnel: staff with medical conditions, age concerns (working closely with Teacher Associations)

J. Parker stated that this will be a daunting task. J. Chieda asked if we want to open school? This sounds like a high stress environment. Dr. McMorran stated that these conversations are occurring. G. Goldstein raised the question of how a Board of Education could possibly fund all of what reopening could entail. Dr. McMorran concurred, stating that money often goes to the cities. He suggested lobbying representatives for more funding.

G. Goldstein read the formal letter from the Easton Board of Education to Region 9. Mr. Reiss said, if not expended, funds must be returned to the town. J. Chieda preferred that the letter not be sent. She did not feel it was necessary given previous communication. K. Reed concurred.

Motion: move that the Easton Board of Education send a revised letter to the Region 9 Board of Education regarding the return of funds from the final surplus. Stinson, Hicks. Approved, 4-2. (Reed, Chieda opposed.)

J. Chieda asked how to handle a letter from the Board that does not reflect everyone's views. Dr. McMorran said communication of this nature generally is between board chairs.

Motion: move that the Easton Board of Education give Jeff Parker and Gretchen Goldstein permission to send a letter to the Region 9 Board of Education regarding the return of funds from the final surplus. The letter takes into consideration guidance received from Superintendent, Dr. Thomas McMorran. Stinson, Chieda. Approved. Unanimous.

DISTRICT ADMINISTRATOR UPDATES

None

PUBLIC COMMENT

- Todd Johnston, Chairman of the Region 9 Board of Education: Region 9 is committed to giving back money to the towns. By next Tuesday, he will have an actual number.
- Devon Wible, Woodland Drive, Easton: shared her appreciation for the work the Board has done.
- Nikki Kaldawy, Staples Road, Easton: wants the Board to consider unspent funds. The Board of Finance is not giving money back, so use those funds before the end of the school year.

BOARD MEMBER COMMENT

J. Parker reminded the Board that office elections (Chairperson and Secretary) will be held at the next meeting. J. Parker remained as Chair in order to see the budget process through its completion.

ADJOURNMENT

Motion: move that the Easton Board of Education meeting be adjourned. Hicks, Reed. Approved. Unanimous.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:54 p.m.

Submitted by,
Jenny Chieda, Easton Board of Education Secretary

Recorded by Liz Rimkunas