

EASTON BOARD OF EDUCATION REGULAR MEETING

Virtual Meeting via Zoom

Access as follows:

<https://zoom.us/j/95805786838?pwd=TFIMbmNpSTQ0dmh2Y0huVjJUWHdZQT09>

Meeting ID: 958 0578 6838

Password 06612

October 13, 2020

Minutes

ATTENDANCE

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

Administration: Harrison, Pierson Ugol, Reiss, Del Conte

Others: 26 members of the staff and public, and the recording secretary

CALL TO ORDER

The Easton Board of Education Regular meeting was called to order at 7:30 p.m.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

**Motion: move that the Easton Board of Education approve the minutes of September 8, 2020, Regular Meeting as submitted. (Hicks, Goldstein). Approved. 5-0.**

PUBLIC COMMENT

Carolyn Oppenheim, Hunting Ridge Road, said that she had spoken with Dr. Harrison and J. Stinson, but that she still had concerns about the HVAC system at HKMS. She also said that she had seen the first report on the HVAC system and hoped that the second report would be addressed at the BOE meeting tonight.

BOARD MEMBER COMMENT

J. Parker thanked S. Reiss and said that he has been a tremendous help for all of us with budgets and project management, and that he did it all with grace and class.

D. Wible thanked faculty and staff for the great reopening and said that in a world where teachers are teaching three ways, we should recognize that the job of an educator has tripled and we should think of ways to give them more time to plan and organize. D. Wible also said that she thinks we need to increase our communication so that families hear from our schools in a more regular way. She said thank you to S. Reiss for his dedication and that he will be missed.

J. Chieda said that she agrees with D. Wible's comments and that she wants to know how everybody is doing.

R. Hicks said that he will miss S. Reiss and that S. Reiss brought an expertise to the role. He also said that he is interested in thinking of ways to lessen administrator and Central Office staff time at the BOE meetings.

J. Stinson said that he echoes all the comments about S. Reiss, and that he wants everyone to remember empathy in our everyday lives.



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CHRISTINE HALLORAN  
TOWN CLERK EASTON CT

## REPORTS

Superintendent of Schools, Dr. Rydell Harrison, first said that he agrees with all the comments about the professionalism of S. Reiss and had a huge thank you to administrators, staff, teachers, Central Office staff and parents for making the return to in-person learning happen. He said that he had been in the schools and had seen teachers engaging students and students happy to be there, and that this does not happen by mistake. Dr. Harrison said that we need to continue to support our teachers and come up with creative ways to support the good things that we see happening. Dr. Harrison also spoke about the COVID-19 data that the District uses to guide learning decisions; he said the District looks at data from the State of Connecticut, Fairfield County and the towns of Easton and Redding with the two most important indicators being: % of positive tests and # of cases per 100,000. Dr. Harrison said that so far numbers are strong and there are not any signs of an impact that in-person learning has had on the number of cases. He also said that he is looking forward to getting into additional classrooms to see more teachers in action.

Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction, Dr. Pierson Ugol, first thanked J. Chieda for asking how everybody is doing; she said that teachers are learning new skills while being in a fishbowl, and for this, she applauds them. Dr. Pierson Ugol reported on the upcoming professional development called "Technology Integration Academy," taking place on Wednesdays in October, by first clarifying that, even though we call these "half-days," the professional learning is actually one hour and forty-five minutes long. She said that the learning will afford the teaching staff the opportunity to become equipped with the necessary skills, resources and support to engage students in a virtual learning environment. Dr. Pierson Ugol said that part one of the Academy will focus on technology improvements, followed by skill building and finally, authentic learning. She said that this is important in order that professional learning aligns with our enduring goals and aspirations of: 1) Academic Excellence; 2) Building a Caring Community and; 3) Cultivating Future Ready Learners. Dr. Pierson Ugol said that there will be a number of common topics for all buildings, that teachers will also use the time for issues specific to them and that this work will continue throughout the school year.

Director of Special Services, Jennifer Del Conte, explained the difference between the terms, "exited" and "declassified" within the area of special services: "exited" meaning students still have an IEP, and "declassified" meaning students no longer need an IEP. J. Del Conte reported on the Junior Bridges program, which now has four students participating and there is a potential for two more students.

Samuel Staples Elementary School Principal, Kimberly Fox Santora, said that she recognizes the many challenges that exist and that she has also seen so many professionals -- bus drivers, custodians, teachers, paras -- and how they resolve these things along the way. She reported on data asked for previously by the BOE regarding SSES student withdrawals: 11 moved out of town; 9 moved out of state; 6 attending private/parochial school; 6 home schooled. K. Fox Santora shared stories of: the Silo being a busy place; the drop-off & pick-up line; how mini lessons are working; mask breaks; lengthy handwashing; being down lunch/recess aides; and difficulty in establishing routines.

Helen Keller Middle School Principal, Susan Kaplan, reported that 84% of students are all in; 9% of students are learning in a hybrid model; and 8% of students are temporarily learning from home. She said that there have been no problems with mask wearing and that passing in the hallways is a concern. S.

Kaplan said that the staff is working very hard to meet the needs of the students, including the social and emotional needs. She also explained a potential PTO grant to purchase voice amplifiers for all staff members.

**Motion: move that the Easton Board of Education approve the agenda change of adding Item 6.D. Amplifier Grant to the Agenda. (Goldstein, Chieda). Approved. Unanimous.**

Director of Finance & Operations, Scott Reiss, provided updated information about two COVID-related grants for the District: the Everybody Learns initiative is having a second wave of donations and Easton will receive 166 more Chromebooks; and the Coronavirus Relief Fund will provide the District with reimbursements of \$87,302. He said that the new financial system, EFinance Plus, will take effect on January 1, 2021. S. Reiss reported on the financials related to the reopening: of the \$350K allocated, \$160K has been spent to date; he said that this amount is for a 90-day estimate and that if more than 90 days are needed, then the costs will go up. S. Reiss also said that he is here until the end of October and that it has been his honor to serve and work with all of you. He wanted to acknowledge the Central Office team, saying that they are dedicated and do the right thing every day.

#### DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE ACTION: HVAC REPORTS

Dr. Harrison reported that SSES and HKMS each had two HVAC tests conducted, with NANC doing a mechanical check and ATC doing an indoor air quality check. He said they paid particular attention to HKMS due to the age of the building. Dr. Harrison said that according to State of Connecticut Department of Public Health guidelines, the existing equipment is working properly and the air quality is good. He said that based on the findings we are in a good situation for going forward.

#### DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE ACTION: NOVEMBER SCHEDULE AND ACADEMIC FOCUS

It was reported that there is still professional development time scheduled for staff in November. R. Hicks asked why there is more time scheduled for specials than there is for core subjects. S. Kaplan explained that FPAs only meet two times per week and there is transition time built into the FPA timeframe. R. Hicks also said that, while he does not want to minimize the SOAR program, he is wondering about what takes place during this time period. S. Kaplan said that IXL is used during SOAR and that this time helps students with what they need.

#### DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE ACTION: POLICY COMMITTEE UPDATE

J. Stinson said that the Policy Committee continues to meet on a regular basis and that they are compiling an unbelievable number of items all in an effort so that Central Office will have more operational efficiency. He also said that two of the four members of this committee are attorneys and that this is very helpful.

#### DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE ACTION: AMPLIFIER GRANT

**Motion: move that the Easton Board of Education approve the grant from the PTO of \$1,511.58 for the purpose of purchasing a voice amplifier for every staff member at Helen Keller Middle School. (Parker, Hicks). Approved. Unanimous.**

#### PUBLIC COMMENT

Allison Bonoff, Gregory Farm Road, said that her family is happy to be in all five days, but not happy

about the half-days; that Kahn Academy and IXL have their place, but she is worried that they are taking the place of teachers; that there are kids who don't need emotional support and are on grade level who need more academics; and she said that she is thankful for all the hard work.

Tracy Carlucci, Morning Glory Lane, thanked all the administrators and teachers and said that she has a first grader who is temporarily learning from home. She said her child's teacher has been great, but that she would love for her child to have science, social studies and small reading groups.

Sam Salzberg, did not state address, said that she has two children temporarily learning from home and that: her child at HKMS is happy with everything except that they cannot hear the children in the classroom; her child at SSES feels left out and that there has been live-streaming for the humanities subjects only. She said that she has spoken with the administration at SSES and had read the guidelines set forth by the State of Connecticut and still she is asking for more live-streaming class time.

Carolyn Oppenheim, Huntington Ridge Road, spoke about when her current 9th grader was in 7th grade and had less homework, and that a previous member of the public should not be worried about this. She feels that this is deliberate so that this age group can have more down-time.

Pat Hamlin, Old Field Road, said that she appreciates everything that has been done in all three schools. To Dr. Pierson Ugol, she said that everything you're doing is great; to K. Fox Santora, she said that the car line is great; to R. Hicks and J. Chieda, she said to please be mindful of the SOAR program and that she would walk them through it.

Adam Parker, Wedgewood Drive, said that out of three kids in school there has been an excellent experience for all so far. He also said thank you to everybody and thank you for the effort.

#### BOARD MEMBER COMMENT

J. Chieda said that she wanted to comment on D. Wible's earlier comment about communication, that the BOE should make this topic a discussion at a later BOE meeting. She also said that she appreciates S. Reiss and his professionalism and that he is a warm and sincere person.

#### ADJOURNMENT

**Motion: move that the Easton Board of Education Regular meeting be adjourned. (Hicks, Goldstein). Approved. Unanimous.**

The meeting was adjourned at 10:13 p.m.

Submitted by,  
Gretchen Goldstein  
Secretary, Easton Board of Education

Recorded by,  
Sarah Ota