

EASTON BOARD OF EDUCATION REGULAR MEETING
Virtual Meeting via Zoom

<https://zoom.us/j/91423568807?pwd=Tj12Nk1DTzJkK3JRZ1BGZjQ1Zn1GZz09>

Meeting ID: 9142356 8807 Password: 76216

November 10, 2020 – 7:30 p.m.

Minutes

ATTENDANCE

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

Administration: Harrison, Pierson Ugol, Del Conte

Others: 80 members of the staff and public, and the recording secretary

CALL TO ORDER

J. Stinson called the Easton Board of Education Regular meeting to order at 7:30 p.m.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Motion: move that the Easton Board of Education approve the minutes of the September 30, 2020 Easton, Redding and Region 9 Joint Boards of Education Special Meeting; the October 13, 2020 Easton Board of Education Regular Meeting; the October 27, 2020 Easton, Redding and Region 9 Joint Boards of Education Regular Meeting; and the October 30, 2020 Easton, Redding and Region 9 Joint Boards of Education Special Meeting as submitted. (Chieda, Parker) Approved. 5-0-1 (Hicks abstained).

PUBLIC COMMENT

Barry Hakim, Harvest Moon Road, said that he had a general comment/question about the hybrid model. He said that he wondered if there is a plan for minimal levels of education, that kids have had difficulty keeping up and that he wants to make sure that students are being taken care of.

Nikki Kaldawy, Staples Road, said that she wondered if we could stay full in until Thanksgiving break and then go all remote after Thanksgiving. She said she hopes that there is some consistency and that teachers are working very hard now.

Heather Murray, Special Education teacher from SSES, said that she was representing the Easton Education Association and their position is that the Easton public schools should be in full distance model at this time. She said they have taken this position because of: the rising number of COVID cases in the schools and in the community; the staffing challenges due to quarantining; and, the preparedness of the staff to provide a curriculum for a distance learning model. H. Murray said that the staff is ready and willing to take on the challenges of distance learning and make sure students have the quality education they deserve.

BOARD MEMBER COMMENT

J. Parker said that he understands that this year would require some ramp up time, but that he believes the time being spent at the middle school level on SOAR and Homebase will make it too difficult for

teachers and students to cover all the material necessary. He encourages the Board and the administration to make a course correction and see the time for Homebase and SOAR taken back and devoted to academic growth.

J. Chieda said that she is disappointed at the decision to go back to a hybrid model of learning and wants more information on the decision making process. She also said that the BOE is not as informed or involved as they could be in matters such as these.

D. Wible said that she would have liked to have seen tighter protocols utilized before we moved into a learning situation where we know our kids struggle. She said, especially for the youngest learners, she wants to find a way to keep them in for a longer amount of time.

R. Hicks asked administration about testing and about where we are as a district. He said that he was interested in hearing from administration about how the decision to return to a hybrid model was made and that the issue of communication needs to be addressed. R. Hicks said that he hopes the lines of communication between board members stay open between monthly meetings.

J. Stinson said that Central Office and Board members are hemmed in on what dialogue can be sent back and forth, but that we can do a better job of informing the community. He said that we all desire to get out of this world of COVID, but unfortunately, that desire is not possible right now. J. Stinson said that administrators should be focusing on accomplishing strategic goals, but that COVID issues steal that focus. He also said that he would like to re-center the conversation around expectations.

ADMINISTRATIVE REPORTS

Superintendent of Schools, Dr. Rydell Harrison, reported on the decision to return ER9 schools to the hybrid learning model, saying that it was a decision made with the health directors of the towns of Easton and Redding and based on: the number of COVID cases per 100,000 in the community; the probable evidence of in-school transmission; the shift to the community now being defined as in "orange" mode; and, the ability to staff the schools in light of staff members needing to quarantine. Dr. Harrison responded to BOE questions about contact tracing by stating that every COVID positive case is different and that Central Office cannot go into specifics about cases with the community because of confidentiality rules. He said that he understands how frustrating all of this is, as he spends a large portion of his day on COVID issues; Dr. Harrison also said that his biggest challenge is that there is no predictable formula for planning which educational model to utilize.

Director of Special Services, Jennifer Del Conte, said that her department is in the process of "right-sizing." She said that while the number of students with IEPs has gone down, the number of students with 504s has increased and that this is typical when declassifying students. J. Del Conte said that the largest cohort of special services students is in 8th grade.

Samuel Staples Elementary School Principal, Kimberly Fox Santora, explained the details of the recently quarantined students and staff saying that a group of them were ending their quarantine today and the next group ending on November 16. She identified the biggest social distancing issue as recess when the students don't always stay in their designated recess area; their solution is to hand out different colored break-a-way lanyards to the different classrooms as a way to differentiate the classes and keep

the students where they should be for recess. K. Fox Santora also said that informal observations of teachers had begun.

Helen Keller Middle School Principal, Susan Kaplan, explained the details of the recently quarantined students and staff, and said that we should all be prepared for it to happen again. She reported on the November 3 professional development day for staff and said that informal observations of teachers had begun. A discussion took place about the PRIDE and Homebase programs and whether the time during the school day should be dedicated to these programs, or instead, should be dedicated to academics. It was decided to discuss the topic further at the next BOE meeting. S. Kaplan also said that she would provide the BOE with a report on the diagnostic academic testing that was recently completed by students.

Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction, Dr. Pierson Ugol, reported on the one-time flexibility for implementing educator evaluation plans as granted by the Connecticut Department of Education. The ER9 Professional Development and Evaluation Committee met on September 17, 2020 and adopted the plan. For teachers, this evaluation includes: student learning objectives that will focus on social and emotional learning, student engagement and family engagement; two to three observations of teaching practice to be conducted by an evaluator in an informal model; and, the end of year cycle of teacher self-reflection will occur as usual. For administrators, this evaluation includes: a minimum of two measures of accomplishment; a minimum of two to three site visits for administrators based on experience and need. Dr. Pierson Ugol's written report to the BOE also included an update on the October Technology Integration Academy, in which staff participated on Wednesday afternoons in October.

DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE ACTION: 2020-2021 BUILDING GOALS

K. Fox Santora presented the SSES goal, "During the 2020-2021 school year, students will explore the theme of diversity and engage in discussions and tasks that broaden their understanding of and respect for people who come from different races, socioeconomic backgrounds, follow different religious traditions, speak different languages, and see all individuals as unique and valuable. As a result of this work, students will demonstrate empathy by intentionally seeking to understand another's perspective or points of view and respecting each person's differences." She said the action steps toward this goal are: provide PD with Welcoming Schools; provide diversity, equity and inclusion training; connect students with Empatico; build diverse classroom libraries; use read-alouds to model; and, encourage kindness with bulletin boards and sticky notes displayed.

S. Kaplan presented the HKMS goal, "The goals for our school community for this year will focus on three key areas, student engagement, technological skill development and social emotional learning support of learners and colleagues. Through the following action steps, we aim to build our capacity to implement social and emotional learning and support into all models of education during this unique year as well as ensure personal growth for all educators in the area of educational technology that supports the new models of education for students. Furthermore, work this year aims to build the capacity of staff to support students of all religions, races, sexual orientation, gender expression/expression, national origin, or disability so that every student feels included and valued as a member of our school community." She said the action steps toward this goal are: student engagement in blended learning models, technology & instructional skill development and social & emotional learning.

DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE ACTION: ELF DONATION FOR \$2,100 SSES KINDERGARTEN YOGA INSTRUCTION

Motion: move that the Easton Board of Education accept with gratitude the Easton Learning Foundation donation of \$2,100 for kindergarten yoga instruction at Samuel Staples Elementary School. (Parker, Hicks). Approved. Unanimous.

DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE ACTION: RATIFICATION OF EASTON EDUCATION ASSOCIATION AGREEMENT WITH BOE

Motion: move that the Easton Board of Education approve the agreement with the Easton Education Association for the period of July 1, 2021 to June 30, 2024. (Hicks, Goldstein). Approved. Unanimous.

J. Stinson thanked the members of the negotiating committee for their efforts in this process.

DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE ACTION: OVERVIEW OF 2021-2022 BUDGET PROCESS

J. Stinson explained the process for the upcoming budget development as follows: December 2020 will include contractual obligations and healthcare; January 2021 will include school and district goals, enrollment projections and special education & Junior Bridges programs; February 2021 will include a complete budget review; and, March 2021 will include submitting budget to the Board of Finance.

J. Parker reported on finance and operations with: the Budget Object Summary is 1% better than it was last year at this time; COVID spending is half as much as what we thought it would be; and, health insurance claims are higher than the last two months, but still lower than they were at this time last year.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Tracy Carlucci, Morning Glory Lane, said that she was advocating for the stay-at-home kids; she said that there is no community whatsoever for the remote learners. She said that her daughter's teacher is doing a great job, but there is still just a little bit of science and social studies and no social emotional learning and no reading groups. T. Carlucci said that she'd like the administration to address this.

Robin Abramowicz, Morehouse Road, said that she was disappointed to have gotten the email today about going back to the hybrid model. She asked what is the barometer for making these decisions, and said that she doesn't know if this decision was made with the best medical information.

Videlina Papanikolaou, Harvest Moon Road, said that she was disappointed to have received the email about going back to the hybrid model as it is difficult to learn. She also said that her children will be losing their cohort days during the week of Thanksgiving and Christmas break and asked if there was a way to even it out for both cohorts.

Kendra Falkenstein, North Street, asked how the COVID data is being used as metrics.

Amy Lane Zima, Silver Hill Road, said that she was concerned about communications from Central Office and asked if the entire community could be notified when there is a positive COVID case in any of the schools. She also said thank you to everybody for all of your work.

BOARD MEMBER COMMENT

R. Hicks said that he was following up on R. Abramowicz's comment about how the Health Department is making their determination and about the numbers. Dr. Harrison responded that the numbers within the schools and the numbers within the communities are what helped to inform their recommendations.

J. Chieda said thank you for the information and that she wished she had gotten it sooner. She said that she hadn't heard anything that tells her that we should be going in the hybrid model. J. Chieda asked that the decision be reconsidered.

D. Dible asked what are we looking for -- in an indicator -- for coming back to an All-In model.

J. Parker said that he echoes the comment about wanting to have had numbers ahead of the BOE meeting to look at. Dr. Harrison responded that the numbers are in the Reopening Plan, and that if those numbers had been followed, then we would have been in a hybrid model weeks ago. He said that we want to maintain in-person learning for as long as possible, and that is what the District is doing.

ADJOURNMENT

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

The meeting was adjourned at 10:12 p.m.

Submitted by Gretchen Goldstein
Secretary, Easton Board of Education

Recorded by
Sarah Ota