

Filed subject to approval

Special Meeting
Easton Board of Education
December 15, 2014
Minutes

Attendance:

Board of Education: Parker, Bobroske, Hicks, Horowitz, Peskay, Underberger

Administration: Josefsberg, Pierson Ugol, Friedlander, Fox Santora, Brownstein, Kaplan, Burke

Others: two members of the community

Mr. Parker opened the meeting to order at 7:30 pm.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Motion: move that the Easton Board of Education accept the minutes of the November 18, 2014 meeting as submitted. Horowitz, Bobroske. Abstain – Underberger. Approved 5-0-1.

PUBLIC COMMENT - None

BOARD MEMBER COMMENT – None

DISCUSSION OF TWO TIERED BUSING PROPOSAL

Dr. Josefsberg began his presentation by showing district enrollment for 2008 of 1,122. Kindergarten through grade 8 enrollment projected for the 2015-2016 school year by Mr. Prowda is 869, a 22% decline. Fewer students overall means fewer students requiring transportation; present capacity exceeds our needs. Tonight's presentation is the same given to the Redding Board of Education on December 2, 2014. Dr. Josefsberg encouraged the board to consider the same approach – absorb the information and create a community discussion, including discussion at the board level, which will include a FAQ on the district website. Following the discussion, consider voting at the February board meeting.

The question is if the district should move from a three-tier bus schedule to a two-tier schedule, affecting start and end times. Dr. Josefsberg outlined current start and end times at each school, as well as possible changes and discussed tradeoffs: a later start time for the high school (7:45 a.m. as opposed to 7:30 a.m.), a common K-8 schedule aides in professional development planning, taxpayer benefit (reduction in fuel cost). Bus routes would decrease from 97 to 63 with an estimated \$39,500 in fuel savings, and a possible ease to the morning rush. Cons: disrupt family routines, K-8 mixed age busing (elementary school parents feel out of the loop), and the impact of K-1 driveway drop-off may lengthen the afternoon bus ride. Dr. Josefsberg reviewed the current bus schedule, with the earliest pick-up in Easton and Redding occurring shortly after 6:00 a.m., and discussed the elementary bus route length in miles and drop-off duration in minutes. The board discussed the need to look at total cost savings, including for less buses being on lease.

Dr. Josefsberg encouraged the board to craft questions and concerns to be included in the FAQ.

DISCUSSION OF LONG RANGE PLANNING COMMITTEE

Mrs. Bobroske reported that since the last board meeting, the Long Range Planning Committee has conducted two meetings - one with Dr. McMorran and Mrs. Pierson Ugol regarding the K-12 continuum; what school should/could/would look like in light of declining enrollment. Middle school offers the greatest opportunity. The common headline among other districts is that it is difficult, with much to consider. Discussed staffing and how we presently arrive at decisions. The second meeting involved a

joint conversation with the Redding Long Range Planning Committee and Jonathan Costa of Education Connection, who has done a great deal of work with districts facing declining enrollment. Mr. Costa introduced 4 options. Option 1: business as usual, tighten up staffing, ride it out. Option 2: attract more students (the road less taken). Option 3: become a cooperative region; that decision would be made at the board level - a one year deal, subject to renewal each year. Option 4: formal regionalization; however, it is clear there is resistance from both towns. Mr. Costa can assist in our efforts; more work is necessary. For the short term – Easton & Redding should conduct separate meetings in January and beyond, and conduct further discussions with Mr. Costa and other key stakeholders. A grant is available to Redding through Education Connection. Easton needs to determine options and the next steps. The Redding grant can be used to cover our joint work with them so we will also benefit from the grant if we move forward with working with Mr. Costa.

DISCUSSION AND ACTION ON SUPERINTENDENT SEARCH UPDATE

Mr. Hicks provided an update – as of the last meeting, the district engaged Dr. Gary Richards to assist in the superintendent search. A survey was initiated to which 650 people responded. Dr. Richards held 16 focus group meetings and a community meeting last Wednesday, which 5 community members attended. The subcommittee met this evening and reviewed the findings of the survey and focus groups. Dr. Richards pointed out common themes – a job posting will go out tomorrow and interviews will be held late January/early February.

DISCUSSION AND ACTION ON WORKERS COMPENSATION LOSS ANALYSIS

Mr. Hicks attended a meeting with Mr. Horowitz and the insurance agent for the Town. What appeared to be an issue is not at this point after reviewing with Mrs. Sullivan. The custodian associated with the \$\$ history is no longer with the Town. A number of incidents with no monetary implications have occurred with paraprofessionals (who are encouraged to file precautionary claims). The district looks good.

DISCUSSION AND ACTION ON 2015 BOARD MEETING SCHEDULE

The meeting dates for 2015 were reviewed. One correction since last meeting – changing November 17 to November 10. A discussion ensued with regard to changing the January 13 meeting to January 12 and the January 15 Budget Workshop to January 13.

Motion: move that the Easton Board of Education accept the 2015 Meeting Schedule with the following changes: move the January 13, 2015 Board meeting to January 12, 2015 and move the January 15, 2015 Budget Workshop to January 13, 2015. Bobroske, Underberger. Abstain – Peskay. Approved, 5-0-1.

ADMINISTRATIVE REPORTS

Helen Keller Middle School: Mrs. Kaplan reported the pancake breakfast was very successful. Last week, 25 parents attended a presentation given by Sara Broas regarding the ILA curriculum. BASES students conducted a canned food drive and collected over 1,000 cans of food with sixth grade alone collecting over 600 cans. Students and teachers traveled to the Bridgeport Rescue Mission to deliver the cans. A toy drive is ongoing. A group of unknown students have taken it upon themselves to bring kindness into the school – the cafeteria has been decorated since returning from Thanksgiving break. Mrs. Kaplan reported that she and Mrs. Fox Santora attended a conference: “Learning and the Brain” which focused on the benefits of mindfulness in learning – performed a stress reduction activity with staff this week. Staff had similar experiences in professional development – guidance counselors have been working with a small group of students on stress reduction. We are encouraging teachers to bring these practices into the classroom.

Samuel Staples Elementary School: Mrs. Fox Santora reported that Cindy Kernahan-Bertrand, Staples' School Psychologist and Jillian Desiderio, Staples' Social Worker attended a conference which spoke to the connection between kids' anxiety and stress levels and attentiveness. They in turn did a training for our teachers on December 11, which included the science behind mind-body approach and introduced some techniques that have been proven to reduce anxiety. Six classroom teachers will partner with them for the balance of the school year and Cindy and Jillian will provide weekly in-class training for the students. Teachers will be asked to continue the same strategies between sessions and will measure its success by students self-reporting if the techniques helped. Under Michael Brownstein's leadership, a building-based team is talking about ways to warm our school which resulted in 2 initiatives. Pick a quote and a child had to illustrate what it meant to them. K-5 students were asked to create posters about how kindness is contagious which resulted in 18 winning posters. Pictures have been taken which will be turned into a video and posted on the district's website.

Easton Special Education: Mrs. Friedlander had planned to report on the BASES food collection and noted how sped and regular ed. are working together. Mrs. Friedlander also reported that Fairfield County Sped Directors are trying to make sense of the addition of dyslexia as a primary disability for eligibility of special education instruction and related services. Mrs. Friedlander met with Mark Palmieri and Mr. Joel Silkoff, Director of the Easton Community Center, regarding the summer program.

Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum & Instruction: Earlier in the year, Mrs. Pierson Ugol reported that K-3 teachers would need to participate in a mandated reading survey attesting to their understanding of the fundamentals of reading. Districts are required to provide a 3 hour window. The State has experienced glitches with the process and teachers are greatly relieved they will not have to take the survey until the start of next year. A great deal of focus has been placed on vertical articulation this year, to which the high school has played a bigger role. A math informational meeting for middle school students entering the 9th grade is currently being planned.

Director of Finance and Operations: Dr. Josefsberg reported in Mrs. Sullivan's absence - health benefit numbers continue to be good. Transfers are mostly incidental; transfer of \$18,675 from the health insurance account to "other" to cover non-contractual salary increases that were retroactive. Nothing unusual in object summaries. Work continues on the budget. Working through permit requirements now regarding the Staples' septic system.

Dr. Josefsberg shared a letter of commendation he wrote this morning to David Spellman, Datto bus driver, regarding the recent home burglary attempt on Beers Road in Easton.

PUBLIC COMMENT – None

BOARD MEMBER COMMENT - None

ADJOURNMENT

Motion: move that the Easton Board of Education adjourn the meeting. Underberger, Bobroske. Approved. Unanimous.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:05PM

Submitted by Regina Bobroske

Recorded by Wendy Brighindi