

EASTON, REDDING, REGION 9 JOINT BOARDS OF EDUCATION REGULAR MEETING

January 26, 2021 - 7:30 p.m.

Held Remotely Pursuant to Executive Order No. 7B

Virtual Via Zoom

<https://zoom.us/j/99626882863?pwd=a3E5N3Y3U0NESHQxendwY0c5OUh1QT09>

Meeting ID: 996 2688 2863

Passcode: 367319

Minutes

On YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCSJhKa9oQfe3lydov_I-EvA

ATTENDANCE

Board members: Easton: Stinson, Chieda, Goldstein, Hicks, Parker, Wible
Redding: Parkin, Whaley, Pilato, Hocker, Hoffman, Oulton, Reilly
Region 9: Johnston, Graziano, Berry, D'Agostino, Denny, O'Brien, Pampel, Williams

Administration: Harrison, Pierson Ugol, Zachery

Others: 79 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 7:32 p.m.

C. Parkin called the Redding Board of Education Regular Meeting to order at 7:32 p.m.

T. Johnston called the Region 9 Board of Education Regular Meeting to order at 7:32 p.m.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Abbie Winter, Old Orchard Road, Easton, said that she doesn't want another JBHS graduate to have the same naivety about racial discrimination as she did. A. Winter also said that she was happy to see that the superintendent apologized and the Board of Education accepted the apology, and now we can move on.

Robin Hurta, representing the Easton Education Association, read a prepared statement in which she said that the EEA thinks the decision to go to the all-in learning model poses a danger to staff and students as COVID mitigation guidelines are being violated in all buildings. R. Hurta said that the EEA is requesting the Wednesday afternoon professional development time be reinstated and the all-in model of learning be re-considered.

Alisha Gorder, Sport Hill Road, Easton, said that it seems that a personal Facebook post from Dr. Harrison has ruffled some feathers in the community. She continued that if you have read his post, then you know that it's truthful; if you have not read it, and are angered about it, then you have been duped.

Jazmin Jinnah, Algonquin Lane, Easton, thanked Dr. Harrison for fighting for the marginalized and that that his words make her feel safe living in Easton.

Sarah O'Dell, Blackrock Turnpike, Redding, thanked Dr. Harrison for his email earlier this month. She said she really appreciates the guidance from someone with his level of education and experience.

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CHRISTINE HALLORAN TOWN CLERK EASTON CT

Sherry Harris, Ridgeway Road, Easton, said that when she was a member of the Region 9 Board of Education she authored a policy to assure parents that their rights were protected in the schools. She noted that this is no longer in the manual, and so she was there to mention that, and remind the schools that must respect parental decisions and wishes.

Milo Goldstein, Briana Lane, Easton, said that in his classes at JBHS the teachers engaged in class discussions about the terrorist attack on the Capitol building that were open and positive, and had no political agenda.

Seana Bedard, Winding Brook Lane, Redding, said that she commends Dr. Harrison for keeping the schools open and that he's the best person for the job right now.

Carolyn Baker, Indian Hill Road, Redding, thanked everyone in this difficult budget season and that she admires and respects Dr. Harrison for using his own personal platform for speaking out. She said she hopes we can move forward and focus on keeping our schools safe during this pandemic and understanding what the schools need from a budgetary standpoint.

Beth Natt, Maple Road, Easton, said she wanted to speak to the importance of what happened and Dr. Harrison's letter not only in terms of education, but also in terms of the health of our children. She said as a pediatrician she sees the emotional health risks on children and she applauds the District for establishing the Diversity Equity and Inclusion Task Force.

Elizabeth Hayman, Fire Hill Road, Redding, said that she's very grateful for Dr. Harrison's leadership and said that she wished we had him when she was in school.

Jonathan Hopkins, Little Boston Lane, Redding, said he was speaking in support of Dr. Harrison and that he's shown kindness and understanding in the middle of an impossible situation of a pandemic.

Suzanne Nolan, Lonetown Road, Redding, thanked Dr. Harrison for his email and leadership. She said she is begging the Boards of Education to be mindful of the kids during this budget season and not cut the special programs that make Easton, Redding and Region 9 special.

Anne Manusky, Morning Glory Road, Easton, said she has many concerns about this year, COVID being one of them, and is worried about the kids' mental health and how the kids will bounce back from this. She also said that the "1776 Commission" should be reviewed by the schools to create a positive learning experience.

Tallulah Whaley, Windy Hill Road, Redding, said that she wanted to respond to the previous speaker saying that the previous speaker is ridiculous in saying that there are two sides to this. She also said that the main reason that this riot even happened is because people like the previous speaker are refusing to acknowledge that racism is not political issue, it is a human rights issue.

T. Johnston asked the Chairman to make sure that comments are directed toward the Boards of Education and not a political debate.

C. Parkin said that we are not going to litigate the events of January 6, and asked that all comments focus on the Boards of Education and educational topics.

Amy Arnold, Werf Drive, Redding, said that she would like to be notified if Easton, Redding and Region 9 is using the "1776 Commission" in the schools because she will pull her children out of school, and that this is something that is not ok.

Carolyn Oppenheim, Hunting Ridge Road, Easton, said that she truly believes in Dr. Harrison's ability to lead us through this budget season and that we have to support our leadership as much as we can.

BOARD MEMBER COMMENT

J. Chieda thanked T. Johnston for interjecting. She said that Public Comment is not a place for personal attacks, nor is it for members of the public to make directed comments at one another and she doesn't think it's an appropriate place for the unions to read letters out loud. J. Chieda said she thinks it is damaging to the relationship between teachers and Board of Education members and would like other avenues of communications to be used.

C. Pilato thanked people for their perspectives and comments and said that, as two communities, she truly hopes we can find a way to work together even when we disagree. She said that it's very important to her, as a Board of Education member and as a parent, that we focus and not get distracted.

M. Hoffman thanked J. Chieda for her comments and thanked C. Parkin for reminding us to keep public comment relevant to education in Redding and Easton.

J. Reilly thanked the participants in the Public Comment and in particular, those high school and other young adults who participated; that their voices are important and we value them.

H. Whaley thanked everyone for their comments, especially the students.

C. Graziano, thanked everyone for their views in Public Comment and their emails, and that everyone has the right to share their personal views on Facebook in accordance with our first amendment. She said she supports Dr. Harrison's email on behalf of Easton, Redding and Region 9 to discuss what is going on in the classroom, as it is a current event like any other current event. C. Graziano said that as a parent she was personally glad that the topic was shared and discussed, and that she has a lot of trust in Dr. Harrison and Joel Barlow staff that it was used as a teaching and educating moment.

M. D'Agostino thanked members of the public and our brilliant students for coming forward and having the courage to speak at a meeting and to share their perspectives. He said his hope is that we can create positive change and that with collaboration and mutual respect we can get there a lot faster.

M. Williams said that she echoes C. Graziano's comments and that she thinks Dr. Harrison has evidenced leadership in a really difficult time. M. Williams also said that she thought that the letter to the parents was entirely appropriate and factual in nature.

M. Pampel said that she agrees with all of her fellow Board of Education members that our students are bright and reflective, and that it's important to give them the facts and the opportunity to form their own opinions.

J. Berry thanked everybody for their comments and said she appreciates being informed about what is happening in the community. She said it's helpful to gain perspective from both sides of the situation. J. Berry said that we've learned that digital education and footprint is important and has consequences.

DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE ACTION: LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

Attending the Boards of Education meeting were representatives to the Connecticut State Legislature whose districts include portions of Easton and Redding.

State Senator Tony Hwang said the discussion so far had been moving and that he thanks the young speakers, that this is all a valuable lesson. He also reiterated his support for Dr. Harrison, saying that his voice is a very important.

State Senator Will Haskell said he is grateful for Dr. Harrison's leadership. He also reported that: Connecticut's allocation of the most recent federal COVID relief fund is \$492M; he has sponsored SB183, concerning electronic meetings under FOIA; and he has sponsored SB338, concerning online public notices. He also mentioned upcoming legislation for Open Choice.

State Representative Anne Hughes said that she is proud of Dr. Harrison's leadership and the leadership of our young people. She said that she is laser focused on supporting the staff and people on the front lines.

State Representative Raghib Allie-Brennan thanked Dr. Harrison for his leadership and looks forward to hearing from teachers to continue to understand what they need and how he can help.

Members of all three Boards of Education asked the representatives questions concerning: vaccinations for school staff, PPE school supplies for the Fall, priority testing for school staff, burden of proof for Special Services, mandates, excess cost reimbursement, health insurance public option for school districts, allocation of COVID funds, and regionalization.

DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE ACTION: HEALTH INSURANCE REVIEW

Rob Fitzpatrick and Joseph Fiorello from Brown & Brown presented a health insurance review for Easton, Redding and Region 9 collectively and then also for each of the three districts individually. They said a standard rate of medical cost inflation is 8.5%, but COVID is having a huge impact. They also noted that there is a lack of competition of medical services in Connecticut, which contributes to rising costs. They recommended the reserve be kept at 18% of the total budget because it is very important to conservatively plan reserves.

DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE ACTION: POLICY COMMITTEE REPORT

J. Stinson reported that they are continuing to work through the series of policies. He said that they have found they need to confer with other Board of Education subcommittees, such as Food Service and Transportation. J. Stinson said that the Committee is reviewing the Title IX matter after consulting with the District legal counsel.

DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE ACTION: MILONE & MACBROOM ENROLLMENT ANALYSIS AND ENROLLMENT PROJECTIONS

C. Zachery proposed that the district consider using Milone & MacBroom for enrollment analysis services to provide a new perspective on enrollment projections for Easton, Redding and Region 9, and explained the cost would be \$11,000 and take four to six weeks to complete. Board of Education members asked where the funding would originate, and C. Zachery explained the funds could be taken from Central Office budget. Several Board of Education members voiced support for this initiative to go forward.

DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE ACTION: CENTRAL OFFICE BUDGET

Superintendent of Schools, Dr. Harrison, first explained his Budget Development Theory of Action and said that it's important to all have all things relate back to the mission and enduring goals and aspirations of the District. Dr. Harrison explained the role of Central Office as falling into two categories of, Instructional Services: Teaching & Learning; and, Support Services: Business & Operations; he also presented an organizational chart of Central Office staff. Dr. Harrison and Dr. Pierson Ugol presented the request for a new Central Office level position, Director of Digital Learning & Technology. Dr. Harrison presented the proposed Central Office budget at \$2,052,268, which is a \$138,353 - or 7.2% - increase. He presented a breakdown of the proposed budget as follows: salaries at 69.6%; benefits at 17.7%; professional services at 4.1%; purchased property services at 5.7%; other purchased services at 1.3%; supplies at 0.9%; equipment & software at 0.2%; and dues & fees at 0.4%.

A lengthy discussion followed, with Board of Education members asking questions about: the need, pay rate, job description, staff-level, and potential impact of the proposed Director of Digital Learning & Technology; pay raises at the Central Office; and, the status of the unfilled Data Analyst position from 2019-2020.

Motion: move that the Easton Board of Education accept the Central Office budget as presented. (Parker, Wible). Tabled.

Motion: move that the Redding Board of Education accept the Central Office budget as presented. (Reilly, Hocker). Tabled.

Motion: move that the Region 9 Board of Education accept the Central Office budget as presented. (Graziano, Williams). Tabled.

Motion: move that the Easton Board of Education table the Motion regarding the Central Office budget as presented. (Parker, Chieda). Approved. Unanimous.

Motion: move that the Redding Board of Education table the Motion regarding the Central Office budget as presented. (Hocker, Whaley). Approved. Unanimous.

Motion: move that the Region 9 Board of Education table the Motion regarding the Central Office budget as presented. (O'Brien, Pampel). Approved. Unanimous.

Motion: move that the Easton Board of Education approve the creation of a new Central Office position of Director of Digital Learning & Technology, not to exceed \$160,000 in salary and benefits. (Wible, Parker) Approved. Unanimous.

Motion: move that the Redding Board of Education approve the creation of a new Central Office position of Director of Digital Learning & Technology, not to exceed \$160,000 in salary and benefits. (Hocker, Whaley) Approved. 6-1. (Hoffman dissented).

Motion: move that the Region 9 Board of Education approve the creation of a new Central Office position of Director of Digital Learning & Technology, not to exceed \$160,000 in salary and benefits. (Graziano, Williams) Tabled.

Motion: move that the Easton Board of Education call the question of the Motion regarding the creation of a new position in Central Office. (Parker, Wible). Approved. 5-0-1. (Chieda abstained).

Motion: move that the Redding Board of Education call the question of the Motion regarding the creation of a new position in Central Office. (Hoffman, Reilly). Approved. 5-2. (Parkin, Hocker dissented).

Motion: move that the Region 9 Board of Education table the Motion regarding the creation of a new position in Central Office. (Graziano, O'Brien). Approved. 7-0-1. (D'Agostino abstained).

Motion: move that the Easton Board of Education accept the Central Office budget with a 3.05% increase. (Hicks, Wible). Withdrawn.

Motion: move that the Redding Board of Education accept the Central Office budget with a 3.05% increase. (Hoffman, Whaley). Withdrawn.

Motion: move that the Region 9 Board of Education accept the Central Office budget with a 3.05% increase. (Graziano, Williams). Withdrawn.

JOINT BOARD COMMITTEE REPORTS

Negotiating Committee: J. Stinson reported that, after consulting with the District council, a process for hiring Central Office staff has been drafted as a full 19-step process, and also an alternate expedited process for when it may be necessary to move more quickly.

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Task Force: H. Whaley reported that they had met with the community members and will do an assessment of their strengths and weaknesses.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Julia Pemberton, Umpawaug Road, Redding, said that she hopes the three Boards of Education approve the new position and that we need to give our staff the tools to succeed.

Jeff Fligelman, Redding, thanked the Boards of Education for their dedication to our students and our town.

BOARD MEMBER COMMENT

None.

ADJOURNMENT

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

Motion: move that the Redding Board of Education Regular meeting be adjourned. (Whaley, Hoffman). Approved. Unanimous.

Motion: move that the Region 9 Board of Education Regular meeting be adjourned. (O'Brien, Pampel). Approved. Unanimous.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:46 a.m.

Submitted by Colleen Pilato
Secretary, Redding Board of Education

Recorded by Sarah Ota