

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

Tuesday, June 1, 2021 - 6:30 p.m.

Held Remotely Pursuant to Executive Order NO. 7B

Virtual via Zoom

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Meeting ID: 944 0953 2695

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One tap mobile

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Minutes

ATTENDANCE

Board members:

Easton: Stinson, Chieda, Hicks, Parker, Wible; Absent: Goldstein

Redding: Parkin, Whaley, Pilato, Hocker, Hoffman, Oulton, Reilly

Region 9: Johnston, Graziano, Berry, D'Agostino, O'Brien, Pampel, Williams, Denny

Administration: Harrison, Pierson Ugol, Zachery

Others: 48 members of the staff and public, and the recording secretary.

CALL TO ORDER

C. Parkin called the Redding Board of Education Regular meeting to order at 6:37 p.m.

J. Stinson called the Easton Board of Education Regular meeting to order at 6:38 p.m.

T. Johnston called the Redding Board of Education Regular meeting to order at 6:38 p.m.

C. Parkin first provided context and framing for the meeting.

Motion: move that the Redding Board of Education adopt as a rule for this meeting a Public Comment period, for the first instance, of no more than 40 minutes. (Hocker, Reilly). Approved. Unanimous consent

Motion: move that the Easton Board of Education adopt as a rule for this meeting a Public Comment period, for the first instance, of no more than 40 minutes. (Parker, Wible). Approved. Unanimous consent.

Motion: move that the Region 9 Board of Education adopt as a rule for this meeting a Public Comment period, for the first instance, of no more than 40 minutes. (Williams, Berry). Approved. Unanimous consent.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Gale Bellas, Crescent Dr, Easton: Although she believes in Critical Race Theory (CRT) as a theory, she'd be thrilled to not hear that term again because it is dividing our town and preventing us from moving forward. She is in favor of the survey.

Howard Sherman, no address shared: Was proud that the Board took on the DEI Statement and Survey, but was embarrassed by the word-smithing which suggests Redding is not open to embracing DEI. He



also said that the pressure on kids is enormous and complex, and that he supports the statement and questionnaire.

Brenda Phelps, Indian Hill Road, Redding: Gave full support of the survey, if anyone got stuck on the first few pages, please read the survey in its entirety. These are questions we want to hear the answers to, and she urged the Boards to support it.

Cheryl Cowherd, Silversmith Lane, Redding: Urged the Boards to adopt the survey and shared her concern regarding the impact on students should they hear the Board did not adopt it.

Kat Karl, Peaceable Street, Redding: As a Barlow graduate, shared the example of how students petitioned staff to update language used in Sex Education Class as a way to highlight how overdue this type of work is. She said this survey does not hurt anyone because it is optional and gives a voice to students.

Ken Unfried, Cross Highway, Redding: Opposed to statement and survey, and shared alternate definitions of equity, inclusion and diversity and explained how the definitions presented are double-speak that pretend to be promoting values, but they are lies.

Dana Benson, Pond Rd, Easton: Explained that he represents a group of 88 parents and submitted an open letter to the Board opposing the survey, and asked that the Boards give parents more time to review.

Agnes Bebon, Black Rock Turnpike, Easton: Urged the Board to vote yes to the survey to include all identities and reminded the Boards of the 500 people that signed the petition asking the schools to look into this subject matter more.

Lew Andrews, High Ridge Rd, Redding: Asked the Boards to delay the survey until more people have a chance to digest it and review it. People without kids in the schools don't know about this, and he asked why we are rushing, and suggested the focus be put upon test scores and bullying instead.

Montana Alexander, Stepney Rd, Redding: Having recently moved to Redding, she is freaked out by the questions in the survey, and feels it is wrong to ask about sexual preference. The questions are inappropriate and asked why does a Board need to know.

Kori Gawrych, Dayton Rd, Redding: Said that she would not allow her child to answer this survey, and suggested we provide resources to the community instead of questioning students. She said bullies and parents of bullies need to be held accountable, said the major problem is in the faculty and staff.

Robert Santagelli, Honeysuckle, Easton: Opposes the survey, and said we must dispatch with the claim that this addresses bullying or offers something different than the School Climate Survey. The opt-out invalidates survey results because you get one viewpoint which is unfair to the rest of the community.

Jack Bebon, Black Rock Turnpike, Easton: Clarified that the survey is opt-in, and explained that Elementary and Middle school students are calling each other terms and categorizing other students so these topics are being talked about, and he questioned if there could be an agenda if everyone is included in the survey.

Mary Beth Belfatto, Portland Ave, Redding: Asked that the survey be delayed and explained: that the School Climate Survey already covers bullying; if the majority opts-out, the data will be skewed; and she questioned who the 500 signers of the petition were.

Brian Matzke, Seventy-Acre Rd, Redding: Opposes the survey because kids are too young and the questions are inappropriate. He asked that the survey be delayed to allow for community input.

Julianne Licamele, Wells Hills Rd, Easton: Explained why the survey was created, to acknowledge and uplift marginalized groups and protect them so their voices are heard, but because they are not the majority, their voices will not be the majority. She supports the survey.

Stephanie Christie, Austin Dr. Extension, Easton: Parents are concerned because past survey results have not been forthcoming and asked that results be made publicly available. She said the point is so that our staff can identify marginalized people so all kids feel comfortable.

Maureen Hanley, Andrews Rd, Easton: Spoke about the curriculum of 10th grade Wellness Classes, questioned how DEI would be implemented, and questioned how the intrusive surveys would be used. She said FOI requests have been unanswered by the Superintendent, said bullying happens to a lot of people, and spoke about how meetings are posted. She is against this work, and urged the Boards to vote no.

Carolyn Oppenheim, Hunting Ridge Rd, Easton: Supports DEI survey, because there are marginalized groups, and while bullying is not widespread, it does exist, and when you hide from it you get fear. Students need more and better education and the schools need to address how students are treated among their peers.

Claire Matzke, Seventy Acre Rd, Redding: The survey should be delayed and the community needs more time to wrap their heads around the issue. Residents that do not have students in school do not know about this. She questioned if students would be familiar with the terms in the survey, and wondered how the opt-in works, and thinks some of the questions are unnecessary.

Kevin Oliver, Lilac Lane, Easton: Generally, people are supportive of DEI, but the survey questions need to be cleaned up and cleared up, and the Boards should not push something people have a lot of questions about. The most important survey is our test results, which show students are doing horribly academically and that is where the schools should focus.

Motion: move that the Redding Board of Education extend Public Comment by 10 minutes. (Hoffman, Whaley). Approved. Unanimous consent.

Motion: move that the Easton Board of Education extend Public Comment by 10 minutes. (Wible, Hicks). Approved. Unanimous consent.

Motion: move that the Region 9 Board of Education extend Public Comment by 10 minutes. (Williams, O'Brien). Approved. Unanimous consent.

PUBLIC COMMENT CONTINUED

Jay S., full name and address not given: The Boards should focus on academics, and instead of having kids feel like they are victimized, teach them to be resilient. Teach math and science. Provide more information about the survey, and delay the survey until the community is more informed.

Rani Menon, Stone's Throw Rd, Easton: Supports the survey and is concerned that people are trying to delay it. She thinks parents who are opposed to it should become more comfortable talking about these subjects because kids are talking about it. She also feels marginalized communities are not consistently recognized and their voices are more important than any fear we feel.

Paul Dzielinski, Giles Hill Rd, Redding: Survey is a bad idea, self-selecting survey has no statistical validity, and he does not want his tax dollars wasted. Suggested the Boards go to the Teachers Union so they will stop standing in the way of student performance and he said the Boards' focus is misguided and that the Boards are doing a disservice to the town.

Tracy Darmofal, Archers Lane, Redding: Fully supports the survey, and if there are questions that are uncomfortable, the survey, questions and sections can be skipped. Voices need to be heard, kids are being exposed to these topics, and she explained that academics drop as mental health drops, so we have to help our students learn in a healthy environment.

Laura Nelson, Deer Hill Rd, Redding: My main concern is the comments from parents, which is why this survey should not happen, it is causing a divide as parents are telling others to wake up and how to handle the mental health in their home.

Pamela Caraluzzi, No Address Given: Spoke about the opt-out portion of the discussion, and wondered what happens when others question why certain people opt-out, and then people will become afraid to opt-out.

DEI SURVEYS: RECOMMENDATION OF THE DEI TASK FORCE

H. Whaley presented the background and timeline of the DEI Task Force. She explained that in February 2021, the Task Force developed a plan to take Step #1 which was to assess the strengths and weaknesses via a survey. She explained that there were numerous opportunities for comment from the Boards and community through-out the process of developing the survey.

Dr. Harrison, Superintendent, and Dr. Pierson-Ugol, Assistant Superintendent, walked the Board through a presentation outlining the survey.

Dr. Harrison, Superintendent, reviewed the purpose of the survey and explained the absence of bullying is not inclusion, so this survey is looking for a more nuanced story of the student experience.

Dr. Pierson-Ugol, Assistant Superintendent, explained the opt-in nature of the survey and how an opt-in survey works: parents will be sent an email with the survey for their review, once they opt their student(s) into the survey, the students will be emailed a link to the Student Survey. Dr. Pierson-Ugol explained how privacy for all data is taken very seriously, and that the district will own this data. IP addresses will not be collected, and Central Office will redact any identifying information that might be written in the survey answers.

Dr. Harrison, Superintendent, explained that the survey will use the familiar Survey Monkey platform, and that a statistical threshold of data is not being sought, but much like a focus group, the goal is to get a broad picture of the student experience in school. Although curriculum will continue to be reviewed and developed in public meetings, as it has always been done, the survey results will not be used to make curriculum changes.

The Boards then asked clarifying questions such as: will wording continue to be updated, how is Survey Monkey used, when will the survey be taken, what is the expected level of participation, with whom will results be shared, when will action be taken, if the surveys were reviewed by legal counsel, how the survey differs from existing surveys, and if all students require parental consent.

Motion: move that the Redding Board of Education approve the Student, Staff and Parent/Guardian Surveys as written by the DEI Task Force and presented on 5/25/21. (Reilly, Whaley).

Motion: move that the Easton Board of Education approve the Student, Staff and Parent/Guardian Surveys as written by the DEI Task Force and presented on 5/25/21. (Wible, Chieda).

Motion: Move that the Region 9 Board of Education approve the recommendation of the DEI Task Force to provide parents, students and staff the opportunity to participate in the DEI Parent, Student and Staff Surveys as presented, to be administered in full compliance with all Board policies for Surveys of Students, and consent of Board counsel. (D'Agostino, Graziano)

The Boards then entered into a discussion. D. Wible asked that the Boards approve the survey as-is.

J. Chieda thanked the Administration for their presentation as it was the best part of the night, but she wished it had been front-loaded to avoid some of the dissention in town.

R. Hicks said he could not support the survey because he needs more changes.

J. Parker said the survey does not hit the mark so he cannot support it.

H. Whaley encouraged the Boards to accept the survey because it gives people the chance to be identified the way they want to be identified.

C. Hocker reflected that many seem to have already decided what the outcome will be, but it is a survey that will help, in part, to create a better learning environment.

M. Hoffman thanked the residents for writing to us, and he feels there is a line between the schools' responsibility and the parents' responsibility, and the schools should not cross it. He cannot support the survey.

C. Pilato explained that the schools already collect binary gender information, and said if the survey makes people uncomfortable, then those people should not take it; that even if the survey is not passed, the schools will find other ways to communicate with marginalize groups; and that she supports the survey.

J. Reilly read the CAGE responsibilities of a Board Member and said he supports the survey.

C. Parkin reflected upon the ABC Aspirational Goals, especially Building a Caring Community, and supports the statement and survey as a step in that direction.

S. Oulton supports the survey as a way of teaching the whole child.

M. Williams supports the survey as a way of collecting information and engaging with our students.

J. Berry thanked everyone for the emails, and thinks the survey is an opportunity to create awareness, but perhaps the best option is for parents to take the survey with their children.

K. O'Brien reflected on the unfortunate extremes in the community that did a divisive disservice because the survey is a tool and parents have complete control.

T. Johnston asked that we send the final version of the survey to legal counsel again for another approval and to specifically seek any necessary legal disclaimers.

M. D'Agostino thanked all of those that reached out, especially the students, and asked everyone to set aside divisive language and embrace every student.

C. Graziano explained how she herself was marginalized in a Board of Education meeting, and that if the survey helps just one child feel less isolated, then she will vote in favor of it.

Motion amended to: Move that the Redding Board of Education approve the recommendation of the DEI Task Force to provide parents, students and staff the opportunity to participate in the DEI Parent, Student and Staff Surveys as presented, to be administered in full compliance with all Board policies for Surveys of Students, and consent of Board counsel. (Reilly, Whaley). Amendment approved by unanimous consent.

Motion amended to: Move that the Easton Board of Education approve the recommendation of the DEI Task Force to provide parents, students and staff the opportunity to participate in the DEI Parent, Student and Staff Surveys as presented, to be administered in full compliance with all Board policies for Surveys of Students, and consent of Board counsel. (Hicks, Wible). Amendment approved by unanimous consent.

J. Chieda spoke to the Boards Members and members of the community who are reluctant to support the survey and explained why she supports the survey, as it creates a space to share experiences that wouldn't be shared otherwise. She also noted that Professional Development may be needed for our staff.

K. O'Brien explained that she had been on the fence, especially delivering the survey to 6th graders, but because of the presentation she now feels comfortable supporting it because people in the schools are dealing with this topic now.

C. Hocker said he hopes kids that are not marginalized also take the survey because it is for all kids.

J. Chieda also spoke about the timing of the survey and explained that this work was done under COVID crisis circumstances.

Redding Call to Question: 6-1-0, Hoffman dissented.

Easton Call to Question: 3-2-0, Parker and Hicks dissented.

Region 9 Call to Question: 7-0-1, Johnston abstained.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Beth Natt, Maple Rd, Easton: Thanked the Boards for their rational conversation and for passing the motion to approve the survey.

Jen De Jesus, Laurel Dr, Easton: Thanked the Boards.

Beatrix Eriksen, Sidecut Rd, Redding: Thanked the Boards for the open and frank dialogue.

Carolyn Oppenheimer, Hunting Ridge Rd, Easton: Thanked the Boards for the conversation and the Administration for the presentation.

Agnes Bebon, Black Rock Turnpike, Easton: Thanked the Boards for listening to marginalized voices.

Marnie Waiwat, Flat Rock Rd, Easton: Supports the survey, said that a survey question cannot change a student's age, skin color, gender or sexual orientation, and she thanked the Boards for passing the survey.

Jack Bebon, Black Rock Turnpike, Easton: Thanked the Boards for lifting up the voices of the marginalized.

Stephanie Christie, Austin Dr. Extension, Easton: Suggested sending information home to parents so they will know what the students are being taught. She thanked the Boards.

Vanessa Alward, Cross Highway, Redding: Felt lucky to hear the positive comments, and thanked the Boards for passing the survey and for listening and keeping an open mind.

Julia Pemberton, Umpawaug Rd, Redding: Thanked the Administration and the Boards for their work on the statements and survey and said all students must feel safe in our schools.

BOARD MEMBER COMMENT

D. Wible thanked the Boards and acknowledged the sensitive topic and that she appreciates the open dialogue. She also thanked the DEI Task Force.

J. Cheida said this is not perfect, it is the first try, and conversations have to continue.

J. Stinson acknowledged the dissenting voters among the Boards and explained that although we don't agree on this topic, each has done a lot of good for the community. He apologized to C. Graziano and to Dr. Harrison for not standing up more for the language they suggested was important.

J. Chieda implored everyone to not allow this to create more division. Keep being kind. Keep listening.

H. Whaley also wanted to publicly apologize to C. Graziano and to Dr. Harrison and thanked: Julianne Licamele for holding her accountable, the families that have spoken out and shared their stories and the Task Force. She also congratulated JRMS for hosting their first Pride Day.

C. Pilato thanked the DEI Task Force for their patience and guidance.

M. Hoffman thanked J. Stinson for his words.

C. Parkin appreciated the tenor of the conversation.

C. Graziano thanked J. Stinson and H. Whaley for their honesty and vulnerability and said there is still a lot of work to be done. She thanked H. Whaley for chairing the Task Force.

M. Pampel thanked the students who spoke and wrote about the challenges they are facing so we can find ways to make the environment ready for learning.

Dr. Harrison, Superintendent, thanked all of the Boards members for their dedication, and acknowledged the community for their sincere interest in what our students need and it is good knowing so many people are standing-by to support our students. He said that the survey is a way to gather information and to see and hear from students who may not have felt seen or heard. It is important to include student's voices when we make decisions about them, and that students are at the center of every decision we make.

**Motion: move that the Redding Board of Education meeting be adjourned. (Hoffman, Whaley).
Approved. Unanimous. 9:26 PM**

**Motion: move that the Easton Board of Education meeting be adjourned. (Chieda, Wible).
Approved. Unanimous. 9:26 PM**

Filed subject to approval

**Motion: move that the Region 9 Board of Education meeting be adjourned. (O'Brien, Denny).
Approved. Unanimous. 9:26 PM**

Submitted by Colleen Pilato
Secretary, Redding Board of Education