



INSTR # M2020000300
DATE FILED 04/28/2020 02:47:32 PM
CHRISTINE HALLORAN
TOWN CLERK
EASTON CT

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REGION 9 BOARD OF EDUCATION

Regular Virtual Meeting via Zoom

April 21, 2020 – 7:30 p.m.

Join Zoom Meeting:

<https://zoom.us/j/95519973197?pwd=UXg1YWwh1aWFxSXlhVUY3ZE4rMDhNZz09>

Meeting ID: 955 1997 3197

Minutes

ATTENDANCE

Board members: Johnston, Graziano, Berry, D'Agostino, Denny, O'Brien, Pampel, Williams

Administration: McMorran, Pierson Ugol, Pin, Reiss

Others: 29 members of the public, student representative and the recording secretary

CALL TO ORDER

T. Johnston called the Region 9 Board of Education meeting to order at 7:33 p.m.

Motion: move that the Region 9 Board of Education approve the minutes of the March 17, 2020 Special Meeting as submitted. (Pampel, Berry). Approved. Unanimous.

Motion: move that the Region 9 Board of Education approve the minutes of the March 20, 2020 Special Meeting as submitted. (Williams, Pampel). Approved. Unanimous.

Motion: move that the Region 9 Board of Education approve the minutes of the March 30, 2020 ER9 Joint Boards of Education Special Meeting with the following three revisions:

- Public Comment: White should be Witte; Taos should be Caes
- Board Member Comment: Whalen should be Whaley

(D'Agostino, Graziano). Approved. Unanimous.

STUDENT COMMENT

Student Council Representative Max Monson showed his PowerPoint presentation, entitled "18 Days of Distance-Learning and Counting." The presentation was an amalgamation of the views of 100 Joel Barlow High School students on the three topics of: video chats, scheduling and workloads.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Ed Miller, Lamppost Drive, Redding, said it has been the experience in his home that if the students do not reach out to the teachers themselves, then there is no contact with the teachers. He said that there are secure platforms out there and there is even the method of conference calls that would work for contact. E. Miller said that without this student contact, teachers are not reaching their full potential for teaching, and that we are not being creative about solutions.

Jeff Parker, Morningside Drive, Easton, said that he understands that Region 9 is on track for a 7-figure surplus and he was here to ask the Region 9 BOE to return every dollar that they can to the towns of Easton and Redding. He said we need to continue the tradition of excellence schools and that the return of this money would be a great help to everyone.

Jamie Barickman, Church Hill Lane, Redding, said that he will build on J. Parker's comments as he shares his sentiments entirely. He said that at tomorrow night's Redding Board of Finance meeting, he will make a motion to request a return of all unused funds from Region 9.

Jenny Chieda, Wildwood Road, Easton, said she wanted to acknowledge all the faculty at Barlow for their wonderful efforts. She asked that the Region 9 BOE give serious consideration to returning all unused funds to the towns. J. Chieda asked that "the Region 9 BOE respectfully consider your younger constituents in your planning."

Jean Fones, Staples Road, Easton, said that so far, her family has been able to do it, but the lack of contact from teachers is difficult. She said that there is only student-initiated contact going on and that maybe a phone session could happen.

BOARD MEMBER COMMENT

M. D'Agostino said that he wanted to remind the administration that the BOE members are supposed to receive all communications that the parents receive. He said that a motion was passed on this topic last year. M. D'Agostino also said that he wonders if any considerations have been given to students who want to take Latin next year; he said the sooner they know what is going on, the better.

J. Berry said that we have come a long way in the last couple of weeks.

K. O'Brien said that her neighbor told her that this has been a challenge; the neighbor has seven children.

M. Pampel said that communication is key and that she can't imagine having to turn an entire curriculum around. She said that parents must be frustrated, but we all need to have patience as it is a tough task.

M. Williams said that the most flexible parents are having the best results.

T. Johnston agreed that yes, we all need to be flexible.

ADMINISTRATIVE REPORTS

Joel Barlow Head of School, Dr. Gina Pin, reported on the recent grant from the Carl D. Perkins Foundation, to be used for technology education classes.

Motion: move that the Region 9 Board of Education accept, with great appreciation, the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Secondary Supplemental Enhancement Grant in the amount of \$37,175 for use in technology education classes. (D'Agostino, O'Brien). Approved. Unanimous.

C. Graziano asked if any of the funds could be used now for technology needs within this distance-learning period. Dr. Pin said that, as stated in the award letter, the grant is specifically for technology education classes. Dr. Pin also reported that the Weller Foundation recently awarded grants to JBHS students Matthew Sun, Robert Babcock, Mia DiAmico and Owen Reilly.

Assistant Superintendent of Schools, Dr. Stephanie Pierson Ugol, said that she is finishing up a written report on the responses from the distance-learning survey; there were about 1,000 responses to this survey. She reported on initial findings of the survey: at the high school level, things seem to be working most smoothly; families are looking for consistency in feedback and assessments; there's a high level of stress in homes; and that everyday people are seeing more progress. Dr. Pierson Ugol said that building leaders have shared this raw data with their staff and that all staff members will get a summary of the report.

Superintendent of Schools, Dr. Tom McMorran, reported that Central Office has met with teacher associations and that everyone wants the same thing, which is to move forward. He said that teachers are extremely grateful for the professional development days, and that one of the results is that you will see more office hours for the teachers. Dr. McMorran said that the community should know that what parents want, teachers want to give.

Joel Barlow High School Director of Building and Grounds, Walter Czudak, reported that the tennis courts, fields and stadium have been locked up and secured, and that signage has been posted throughout the Barlow property. He said recently there has been only one adult seen on the track, and that person left the track when asked. Dr. Pin thanked the Redding Police Department for the great job they are doing with patrolling the school grounds.

Director of Finance and Operations, Scott Reiss, reported that through March, health claims continue to be surprisingly low. He said that it is possible that the health insurance reserve fund could have a balance of 1.5M at the end of the year. M. D'Agostino asked if an increase should be planned for next year's budget. C. Graziano said that in any fiscal year 2-3 months of claims should be in the reserve, in the event of a high claims year. T. Johnston said that there will be a spike in claims once people can get out and go to a doctor. S. Reiss agreed that health claims are not going away, but rather, they are coming later.

S. Reiss reported that some budget items are down, such as electricity, some services and spring athletics. He said that the final amount due to the bus company, First Student, was still being negotiated. A lengthy discussion took place during which the merits of placing unused funds in the health insurance reserve, the capital reserve or the pension reserve were broadly explored.

M. D'Agostino stated that the district should get everything in place in the event that we are virtual in the fall too. He said that we should have a proactive approach and enhance what we are doing now. M. D'Agostino said that these considerations could have budgetary effects as to where expenses would fall: this year's budget or next year's?

T. Johnston said that usually the BOE waits until the June meeting to decide what to do with unused funds, but that he wanted a quick consensus from BOE members tonight. J. Berry said that at this time it is hard to decide, but she is thinking fund the healthcare. G. Denny said that she agrees with J. Berry that it has hard to foresee right now but is also in favor of funding the healthcare.

M. Williams said that some of this money needs to be returned to the towns; people will be suffering.

K. O'Brien said that she agrees with M. Williams that some of the money needs to go back. C. Graziano said that she is a supporter of returning some of the money back to the towns. M. Pampel said that she concurs with C. Graziano; that if there is a safe amount that we can give back, then we should. She also said that we need to be careful though. M. D'Agostino asked S. Reiss for specific numbers in the considered budget lines. T. Johnston said putting some money in the health and pension reserves is a good idea and that we need to be sure that there is the 1% for the capital reserve too. He said that we should return some money to the towns.

T. Johnston concluded the consensus discussion by stating that the BOE will make a final decision in June and at that time they will have more clarity on the issue. C. Graziano asked that this topic be a formal agenda item at the June meeting and that the BOE members receive the numbers in advance of the meeting.

BOARD OF EDUCATION COMMITTEE REPORTS

None.

Motion: move that the Region 9 Board of Education make the following agenda change: Item VII. F. be moved ahead of Item VII. A. (O'Brien, Williams). Approved. Unanimous.

DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE ACTION: DISTANCE LEARNING-LESSONS LEARNED AND POSSIBLE CHANGES

Joel Barlow High School faculty members Erin Pinsky (social studies) and Daniel Rivers (math) gave a lengthy presentation on what asynchronous teaching and learning currently looks like at JBHS. E. Pinsky began by thanking the BOE for the opportunity to share their perspective and to Central Office for the flexible framework. She then focused on the three areas of: flexibility, communication and professional development time.

E. Pinsky said that flexibility is key on everyone's part, and that without it, we would not have anything meaningful; she said that, from a faculty perspective, the communication loops have remained strong between everyone; and, she said that the faculty is thankful for the professional development time when they all acted as teachers and as students by sharing and learning with one another.

D. Rivers said that affirmations of good learning occur daily when he and his colleagues review student work, and that students are thriving in this environment. He said there are multiple opportunities for direct and live communication between students and teachers; and that he has been impressed with the communicating and sharing going on among students. D. Rivers said that the faculty is working to keep a sense of community for the students and they are constantly asking the students to consider "the where, when and how" of their work.

Dr. Pin said that she could not be prouder of the JBHS faculty. C. Graziano asked how the struggling students were being addressed. Dr. Pin replied that there are many resources at JBHS, including the counseling department.

G. Denny asked "what is our goal," and said that she would like to see the definition of "where we'd like to be," such as "synchronous model, more PD, how do we support struggling students?" Dr. Pin replied that there is much flexibility with students within a structure.

M. D'Agostino asked "what can we do better, and, what do we need to do better, and, what are the costs?" He also said that we need to be more focused on how we can do better. Dr. McMorran said that we are going through stages in this: react, manage, improve and then post-mortem. He said that we don't have all the answers yet.

DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE ACTION: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CONTRACT NON-RENEWALS

Dr. McMorran said that he had already spoken with the following staff member about her position at Joel Barlow High School and that she understood the situation in its entirety. He said that this position was a social studies teacher.

Motion: move that the Region 9 Board of Education determine that the contract of employment for Megan Lane be terminated effective July 1, 2020 due to reduction in force, and that the Superintendent of Schools is directed to advise such person in writing of this action. (Graziano, Denny). Approved. Unanimous.

DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE ACTION: FORMAL VOTE TO APPROVE 2020-21 BUDGET-SUBSEQUENT TO EXECUTIVE ORDER 7I ON MARCH 25, 2020

Motion: move that the Region 9 Board of Education approve the budget for the 2020-2021 year in the amount of \$24,351,255, reflecting a .9% increase, and in accordance with the March 21, 2020 Executive Order 7I from Connecticut Governor Ned Lamont. (D'Agostino, Graziano). Approved. Unanimous.

DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE ACTION: 2020-2021 BUDGET REFERENDUM POSSIBLE SCHEDULE CHANGES SUBSEQUENT TO EXECUTIVE ORDER 7I ON MARCH 25, 2020

Motion: move that the Region 9 Board of Education use the currently scheduled Annual Region 9 District meeting as a forum to communicate public comments submitted to Central Office no later than Friday, May 1, 2020 at 2:00 p.m. with respect to the Region 9 budget, and during that Region 9 meeting, the Region 9 BOE will consider the comments and then determine at that meeting or at a future meeting to vote on that budget. (Graziano, Williams). Approved. Unanimous.

DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE ACTION: CONTINUATION OF SCHOOL CLOSURE

Dr. McMorran reported that the return to school date is still officially May 20, 2020, but that he anticipated coordination with the states of New York and New Jersey.

DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE ACTION: GRADING PRACTICES FOR END OF YEAR

Dr. Pin said that the State of Connecticut has presented eight different versions for grading. She said that at JBHS, there will be a one semester grade, rather than two quarter grades for the spring 2020. Dr. Pin said that all AP exams will take place and that the exams had been modified. M. D'Agostino said that all DRG A schools should utilize the same grading system for the spring 2020.

DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE ACTION: POSSIBILITIES FOR GRADUATION AND AWARDS CEREMONIES

Dr. Pin said that JBHS administration had met with a group of seniors and that they are preliminarily thinking of the following ideas: drive-through graduation, graduation parade in cars, festive atmosphere possibly with bubbles, publish an award book for seniors, have awards night for non-seniors in the fall. She said that the yearbooks will be distributed.

PUBLIC COMMENT

None.

BOARD MEMBER COMMENT

C. Graziano asked that weighted grading not be forgotten. She also said thank you to all administration, staff, teachers and parents; that we appreciate all their hard work.

ADJOURNMENT

Motion: move that the meeting be adjourned. (O'Brien, Pampel). Approved. Unanimous.

The Region 9 Board of Education regular meeting was adjourned at 11:19 p.m.

Submitted by,
Juliette Berry, Region 9 Board of Education Secretary

Recorded by,
Sarah Ota