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REGION 9 BOARD OF EDUCATION REGULAR MEETING

May 19, 2020 – 7:30 p.m.

Virtual Meeting via Zoom

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Minutes

ATTENDANCE

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

Administration: McMorran, Pierson Ugol, Reiss, Del Conte, Pin, Santangeli, Desmarais, McTague

Others: 52 members of the staff and public, and the recording secretary.

T. Johnston called the meeting to order at 7:35 p.m.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Motion: move that the Region 9 Board of Education approve the minutes of the May 4, 2020 Special meeting with two revisions. (page 2 should read: M. Agostino asked if the Food Services and Wellness Committees had considered continued participation in this program; page 4 should read: C. Graziano said the committee advised on contributions of 100K to the pension fund.) (D'Agostino, Williams). Approved. Unanimous.

STUDENT COMMENT

Student Council Representative, Max Monson, read the "Noteworthy News" report from Dr. Pin's office which included recent accomplishments from the JBHS Debate Club and names of students who had signed Letters of Intent to play athletics in college.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Suzanne Romano, Starrs Ridge Road, Redding, said that the JBHS graduating seniors deserve the closure of a ceremony to receive their diplomas, while being mindful of the guidelines for public safety.

Paige Romano, Starrs Ridge Road, Redding, said that she would like to get out of the house for a unique graduation ceremony.

Joanne Gray, Lonetown Road, Redding, said thank you to the staff and administration for all of their hard work this year, and to please not change the budget. She also said she wanted to thank Dr. McMorran for being an excellent superintendent.

Noreen Winig, Harvest Moon Road, Easton, said best wishes to Dr. McMorran on his retirement and that she thinks the graduating seniors have missed out on so much and deserve something for graduation, but in a healthy way. She said that we should all put our collective and creative minds together.

Chris Griffin, Flat Rock Road, Easton, said that he wanted to add his voice to those who already spoke in favor of an in-person graduation ceremony. He said over time, these students will be well-served by the lessons they are learning now, but that they need some kind of in-person ceremony. He also said that he would be glad to help.

Meghan Emanuelson, Birch Drive, Redding, said that she is an administrator in a different school district and that, to the best of her knowledge, ceremonies to be held in July and August are ok for now. She said we owe it to them to have an in-person ceremony, and that she will help with whatever she can.

Jeff Figelman, Pocahontas Road, Redding, said he wanted to express his gratitude and appreciation to the teachers at Barlow for all of their efforts.

Eileen Carroll, Crescent Drive, Easton, said that she was speaking on behalf of the most amazing coaches at JBHS, who continue to provide educational and emotional support to their student athletes. She said she advises the BOE to pay these people so that we do not lose them.

Kelly Cummings, Weathervane Drive, Easton, said she wanted to show her support to the students and parents. She said finding a way to honor these kids is so important.

John Wergeles, Flat Rock Road, Easton, said he understands that we need to keep everyone safe, but that we need to give these kids a thank you and recognition.

BOARD MEMBER COMMENT

M. Pampel said thank you to Tom.

K. O'Brien said she is appreciative that everyone, especially the kids, are trying so hard.

J. Berry said thank you to Tom and wished him all the best.

C. Graziano said that she will echo the sentiments to Tom and wish him luck, and acknowledge his ability to balance the quality of education and our resources. She also said thank you to the community for all of their comments and to stay engaged.

M. D'Agostino thanked Dr. McMorran for his service to the district and that he wanted to recognize his significance to our district.

AGENDA CHANGE

Motion: move that the Region 9 Board of Education make the following Agenda change: move Item XIII. to now be Item VIII. A., and move current Items VIII. A.-E. down in the Agenda to now be Items VIII. B.-F. (D'Agostino, Denny). Approved. Unanimous.

Before the Administrative Reports were presented T. Johnston said he wanted to thank Tom for his service and hard work, especially through budget and crisis time.

ADMINISTRATIVE REPORTS

Director of Finance & Operations: Scott Reiss said that his reports pertain to agenda items that will occur later in the meeting.

Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction: Dr. Pierson Ugol presented her report on the May 15 early dismissal professional development day; a survey update; and, the reopening committee. She said that the May 15 PD day provided teachers with the opportunity to engage in open forum discussions concerning best practices of distance learning, grading and content-specific strategies. Dr. Pierson Ugol said the ER9 April parent survey did provide useful feedback, and that a second survey is being developed that will revisit certain topics. She said that there is a Reopening Committee for the 2020-2021 academic year that consists of Central Office and building administrators and that this committee meets weekly. This committee will soon include additional members from within and outside of the ER9 staff, such as medical and nursing personnel, counselors, BOE members, teachers, students and parents.

Joel Barlow High School Head of School: Dr. Gina Pin reported that an email had gone out to all parents about the grading system. She said that the Powerschool grading has been updated and that it was a very complex task so she'd like to give a shout out to Gail Persico for working on it.

BOARD COMMITTEE REPORTS

Facilities and Fields Committee: M. D'Agostino reported that a Capital Plan will be coming to the BOE in the near future with priority projects. He said that each project is related to the health and safety of students and that these projects are: air quality; ionization process; and, flooring. M. D'Agostino said that Capital Plan is a living document that is continually updated and that he is looking to the support of the BOE in moving these items forward.

Audit Committee: C. Graziano said that this committee recently met, and because of the change in the financial system, that we are going to start at the start of the calendar year instead of the start of the fiscal year. She also asked for an informal opinion of what other BOE members thought the Curriculum Committee should consider for agenda items. M. D'Agostino and T. Johnston both said they thought the committee should focus on the near term.

ADMINISTRATIVE REPORTS

Superintendent of Schools, Dr. Tom McMorran: Dr. McMorran said that he would like to express his thanks to all that have sent him a kind message. He also said that it's been a privilege for him to serve in the district and that he remains grateful for everyone's support.

DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE ACTION: SPRING ATHLETIC COACHES COMPENSATION

A discussion took place regarding the period of time the proposed motion would cover, the amount of money for the compensation and the number of coaches this involved; it was determined that the period of time was for the Spring 2020 athletic season which ends with FY20, the total amount of compensation is \$65,722 and the number of coaches this involved is 16. JBHS Director of Athletics, Health and Physical Education, Mike Santangeli, said that the Athletic Department had drawn up a plan for the coaches to stay

active, but without being paid they were not obligated to participate. M. Santangeli said that all of the coaches had stayed with the plan.

Motion: move that the Region 9 Board of Education rescind the administrative decision to withdraw partial stipend payment from our highly valued coaches and employees, regardless of their membership in the JBEA collective bargaining unit, and direct full payment through the 2019-2020 fiscal year in alignment with past payment practices. (D'Agostino, Denny). Approved. Unanimous.

DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE ACTION: SELECTION OF NEW AUDIT FIRM

C. Graziano and S. Reiss explained that the previous audit firm no longer had the resources to service the district, so the Audit Committee had gone through the process of selecting a new audit firm. They said they received three bids before selecting the firm of P. K. O'Connor, Davies.

Motion: move that the Region 9 Board of Education approve the recommendation of P. K. O'Connor, Davies to be our new auditor, and direct the Director of Finance & Operations to finalize the agreement and sign on behalf of the Region 9 Board of Education. (D'Agostino, Graziano). Approved. Unanimous.

DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE ACTION: GRADUATION CEREMONY PLANNING

Dr. Pin explained that the planning process for graduation started on April 27 and has continued until now, and has involved many hours. She said that administration, staff, students and some parents have been involved all along. Dr. Pin said that the administration is recommending a drive-up procession on the grounds of JBHS. She said that her team was meeting the next day with the Health Departments and Police Departments of Easton and Redding to discuss compliance of the graduation plan and get approval from both towns. She said that the plan would be shared with the public by June 1, 2020. Assistant Principal, Jennifer Desmarais, talked about the results of a graduation survey sent to all JBHS seniors: 137 out of 215 seniors replied to the survey; the majority of them want to receive their diploma on the campus; and, the majority of them still want to receive their diploma on campus even if the handout is staggered.

DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE ACTION: REVIEW 2019-2020 SURPLUS FUNDS AND POTENTIAL ALLOCATIONS

T. Johnston began by stating that this is an action that the BOE usually takes up at the June BOE meeting, but that this year the timetable has been moved up as a help to the towns. S. Reiss said that this is an annual process for the BOE and presented a Region 9 BOE financial update. He asked the BOE to consider the issue of putting unexpended funds into the health insurance reserve fund. A lengthy discussion took place considering using unexpended 2019-2020 funds for the capital reserve fund, the pension fund and the health reserve fund. M. D'Agostino said that the fact that we now have unused funds is testament to our good fiscal responsibility. He also said that he was not comfortable coming up with a ballpark figure right now for these things; that this is all going to change. G. Denny said that she is also concerned about next fall and concerned about the health insurance reserve fund because people will start doing elective stuff soon and we need to be ready for a potentially bad year. S. Reiss said the district's firm, Brown & Brown, recommends a higher amount to be in the health insurance reserve fund. K. O'Brien said that she agreed that there are a lot of unknowns, but that it will look badly if we have the ability to give back and we don't do that. M. Williams said that we are the stewards of public trust. C. Graziano said that she agreed with K. O'Brien and M. Williams, and that we agree that we will return some money to towns, so we should decide so that the towns have an indication of what we will return to

them. Walter Czudak, Director, Buildings and Grounds for JBHS, gave a brief update on anticipated costs for some COVID-19 related improvements needed for JBHS.

Motion: move that Region 9 Board of Education approve the contribution of \$241,331.14, of anticipated unexpended funds from the 2019-2020 budget, to the Capital Reserve Fund. (Graziano, O'Brien). Approved. Unanimous.

C. Graziano led a discussion about the Pension Fund, during which she explained and explored market values.

Motion: move that Region 9 Board of Education allocate \$100,000, of anticipated unexpended funds from the 2019-2020 budget, for an additional payment to the Pension Fund, but not authorize that payment until June 15, 2020. (D'Agostino, Williams). Approved. 7-1. (O'Brien dissented).

A lengthy discussion took place on the subject of the health insurance reserve fund.

Motion: move that Region 9 Board of Education direct the administration to pay the second half payment of budgeted contribution to the Health Insurance Reserve Fund in the amount of \$876,166. (D'Agostino, Graziano). Failed. 2-6.

Motion: move that Region 9 Board of Education fund the Health Insurance Reserve Fund in the amount of \$100,000, (which would cover a 5-month period), from the anticipated unexpended funds from the 2019-2020 budget. (O'Brien, Williams). Failed. 4-4. (Graziano, D'Agostino, Denny, Pampel dissented).

Motion: move that Region 9 Board of Education fund the Health Insurance Reserve Fund in the amount of \$300,000, (which would cover a 6-month period), from the anticipated unexpended funds from the 2019-2020 budget. (Denny, Graziano). Approved. 6-2. (O'Brien, Williams dissented).

The last two Agenda Items were tabled by T. Johnston.

DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE ACTION: REVIEW PUBLIC COMMENTS SUBMITTED TO CENTRAL OFFICE WITH RESPECT TO THE APPROVAL OF THE REGION 9 2020-2021 BUDGET UNDER CT EO71

T. Johnston said that the Region 9 BOE received 32 comments via email regarding the 2020-2021 budget; all BOE members received the comments.

AGENDA CHANGE

Motion: move that the Region 9 Board of Education move Public Comment to occur before Agenda Item VIII. F. (D'Agostino, Pampel). Approved. Unanimous.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Christine Calvert, North Street, Easton, said thank you to Tom, Scott and all the other administrators for all their work. She also said that she'd like to see a graduation ceremony; would love something in person.

Tracy Anderson, Meeker Hill Road, Redding, said thank you to Dr. McMorran, teachers and administrators. She said that she's in support of the budget and to please vote yes tonight.

DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE ACTION: APPROVAL OF REGION 9 2020-2021 BUDGET UNDER CT EO71

Motion: move that Region 9 Board of Education, in accordance with Governor Ned Lamont's Executive Order Number 71, approve the 2020-2021 Budget in the amount of \$24,351,255, reflecting a 0.9% increase. Redding's share of the budget is \$13,227,602, or 54.32%; Easton's share of the budget is \$11,123,653, or, 45.68%. (D'Agostino, Graziano). Approved. Unanimous.

BOARD MEMBER COMMENT

M. Williams said thank you to Tom and that we will all miss you and wish you the best.

K. O'Brien said Tom's heart is always with the student; thank you very much.

G. Denny said your service has been highly valued here.

M. D'Agostino said I'll thank Tom again and again. He also said thank you to my fellow BOE members and that he thinks we all have the best interest of our students at heart.

M. Pampel said thank you so much for everything that you've done.

ADJOURNMENT

Motion: move that the Region 9 Board of Education meeting be adjourned. (D'Agostino, Graziano). Approved. Unanimous.

The meeting was adjourned at 11:24 p.m.

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

Recorded by,
Sarah Ota