

Filed subject to approval

REGION 9 BOARD OF EDUCATION REGULAR MEETING

June 23, 2020 – 7:30 p.m.

Virtual Meeting via Zoom

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Minutes

ATTENDANCE

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

Administration: McMorran, Pierson Ugol, Reiss

Others: 42 members of the staff and public, and the recording secretary.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Motion: move that the Region 9 Board of Education approve the minutes of the Special Meetings of June 3, 2020 and June 12, 2020 with one revision in the June 3, 2020 minutes: page 3, paragraph 3 should read "Cricklewood Drive," instead of "Picklewood Drive." (Graziano, Williams). Approved. Unanimous. (Pampel abstained for June 3, 2020).

PUBLIC COMMENT

Heather Whaley, Windy Hill Road, Redding, said that at the recent Easton and Redding Boards of Education meeting, the two Boards had voted unanimously to form a Task Force on Diversity and Inclusion. She asked how could we expect to attract support and sustain diversity if we have not made a commitment to diversity and inclusion at the District level. H. Whaley said that she hopes to have Region 9 also participate in the Task Force.

Julianne Licamele, Boswell Road, Easton, said that a group of Barlow alumni had sent all members of the three ER9 Boards of Education a curriculum guide and action plan with 437 alumni signatures in support of it. She recommends all incoming freshmen read the book So You Want to Talk about Race and said she looks forward to, and hopes to, work with the ER9 Boards of Education. J. Licamele also said that there should be a zero tolerance policy at Barlow toward racism.

Melanie Zuckerman, Redding, said that she could not recall a single time when racial talking points in history class were truly addressed in Redding, and that this should not be a partisan issue.

L. Arici, North Park Road, Easton, said that currently, not enough is being done to address issues of race in the schools here, and that everybody should view the Ted Talk, "The Danger of a Single Story," and read the book So You Want to Talk about Race.

Blythe Graziano, Deacon Abbott Road, Redding, said that her history education in Redding and at Barlow would leave one to believe that once the Civil Rights Movement ended, everything was fine; that they do not learn about modern day racial inequalities. She said that she had two teachers who made efforts to include internal biases.

Elizabeth Hayman, Fire Hill Road, Redding, said that she would like to emphasize the privilege we have had here in Redding, and that students of color should not have the responsibility to teach their classmates about racism.

Caitlin Colangelo, Wyldewood Road, Easton, read - from a survey of JBHS graduates - descriptions of racially insensitive remarks made to them while at JBHS.

Heather Satin, Fairview Farm Road, Redding, said that she was shocked at the results of the recent ER9 survey about distance learning which said that 60-70% of respondents were satisfied; she said that there is no way that these results could be accurate and asked if the teachers were also surveyed. H. Satin also said that this is the 5th year that she has approached the school system offering to fund a Holocaust Survivor program and has heard nothing back; she said she is willing to do all the work and fund the program.

Mia DiScipio, Soundview Drive, Easton, said that her friend recently asked her when she first thought about her race as it relates to society and she said she never had until junior year of college, whereas her friend had been thinking about it since elementary school. M. DiScipio said that people of color think about this from early childhood and white people do not until early adulthood.

Jenna Thoretz, Asmara Way, Easton, said that she echoes the words and thoughts of the previous speakers and that she wasn't educated enough to understand racial slurs which set her up for failure for her interaction with fellow students of color. She said that investing resources in a better inclusion curriculum will better serve all students.

BOARD MEMBER COMMENT

T. Johnston thanked the speakers for their comments and asked for Board of Education member comments.

C. Graziano said that she's listened to and received similar feedback from across demographics in the community and that this indicates that our community believes there is more that we can do and should do to enhance diversity in the curriculum at Barlow. She said that she hopes that the Region 9 Board and the communities of Redding and Easton support this initiative on diversity and inclusion by joining the Task Force and including perhaps its own initiatives and establish metrics to determine progress.

M. D'Agostino said that he applauds the Barlow alums' support of the Black Lives Matter movement and appreciates their feedback on their educational experience at Barlow. He said that curriculum revisions are an essential element as we work towards ending systemic racism in this country. M. D'Agostino said that he is committed to creating a learning environment free of biases and discrimination where students can become better informed of the hardships Black Americans have endured for generations.

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He also said that he believes a quick, but thorough, plan for improvement is warranted to better reflect the expectation of our Barlow community and the towns of Redding and Easton.

G. Denny said that she is so impressed with the Barlow alums and the work they're doing. She said, clearly we all need to do a better job.

K. O'Brien said that she is really impressed by the alums and their letters. She said that as a school and as a community, we need to rise to the occasion and include diversity in our curriculum.

M. Pampel said that she is so impressed with everybody who spoke and the information. She said that she had learned a lot from their letters. M. Pampel also said that she wants to work with these individuals toward more diversity in our educational system.

M. Williams said that from her three children, who are Barlow graduates, she learned that Barlow did not prepare them for the wider world and different perspectives, but they have now learned a lot.

T. Johnston said that all the speakers were very helpful and very informative, and that it will be the start of some dialogues in his own home. He said congratulations again to the Class of 2020, and thanked the administration, teachers and community for a fantastic graduation ceremony.

ADMINISTRATIVE REPORTS

Joel Barlow High School Head of School, Dr. Gina Pin, reported on Noteworthy News with: Abby Ota, Class of 2021, has been named the Softball Gatorade Player of the Year for 2020; Dr. Katherine Nuzzo hosted the 10th JBHS Science Symposium via Zoom with approximately 79 attendees; Ryan Swift was named JBHS 2020 Teacher of the Year; and, Kim Pack was named Region 9 2020 Para educator of the Year. Dr. Pin said that although this is not the way we wanted to end the year, our students and community came through for us and that she is glad to be entering this time with this community. She said that special thanks go to Jennifer Desmarais, Ryan Paola, Karen Bender, and Chris Angell for all their work on the Car Procession Graduation Ceremony, and to Class of 2020, Annie Gregory, for making a student farewell video. Dr. Pin urged everyone to watch the ceremony through the link on the school website. She then presented a report to the Board of Education on Class of 2020 post-graduation plans, end of year grading, and athletics update.

C. Graziano asked if there was a plan for paying the fall athletic coaches in the event of fall sports being curtailed, specifically union coaches vs. non-union coaches. Dr. Pin replied that if anything changes for the fall, they will come back to the issue.

The discussion turned to athletics and was led by Director of Athletics, Health and Physical Education, Mike Santangeli, who explained how athletic practices will operate starting on July 6, 2020. According to the CIAC, with whom M. Santangeli has weekly meetings, athletic practices adhere to the following guidelines: sports conditioning with a ball can take place; cohorts of 10 athletes are made and these cohorts stay together throughout the timeline of practice for contact tracing purposes; anyone standing and not being active must wear a face mask; there is a check-list of symptoms that coaches and athletes review; PPEs have been ordered; and, August 3, 2020 is the current date for indoor practices to resume.

T. Johnston and M. D'Agostino asked Dr. Pin about an end-of-the-year grading comparison from last year to this year and asked if this could be put into a report format. M. D'Agostino also asked for an analysis of where students in the Class of 2020 went to college. Dr. Pin said that she would compose such a report over the summer.

Director of Finance & Operations, Scott Reiss, reported that with a refinement of expenses, catching up with out-placement costs and a multiple of smaller areas, the unspent funds now amount to \$1.7 M. He said this breaks down to roughly \$720K for Easton and \$980K for Redding. M. D'Agostino asked if Region 9 was eligible to apply directly for federal COVID-19 funds since it is its own entity. S. Reiss replied that Region 9 can do this and that he had just gotten access to the application system this week. M. D'Agostino asked if what he had read, about a judge ruling that student services must now be provided to students until the age of 22, was true. Dr. McMorran answered that news of this judge's ruling was true, but that the State and other organizations are currently contesting this judicial decision; he also said that, if upheld, this decision will have financial considerations for the Region 9 budget. S. Reiss ended with a report that the health insurance reserve fund now has a six month balance.

BOARD COMMITTEE REPORTS

Steering Committee of the Superintendent Search Committee: M. D'Agostino said that all Board of Education members should have received an email with all of the pertinent dates, and that Dr. Joseph Erardi is moving forward with dates for the community. C. Graziano asked how the community will be involved. M. D'Agostino replied that there will be dates for the community, staff, elected leaders and all stakeholder groups to share their views on what is needed in a Superintendent of Schools for ER9.

DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE ACTION: RECOGNITION OF RETIRING FACULTY

Dr. Pin shared a power point presentation about the JBHS staff that has retired at the end of this school year. These staff members are: Rosemary Riber (at JBHS for 21 years); Charlie Detelich (at JBHS 17 years); Patty Roszko (at JBHS 32 years); and Dr. McMorran (at ER9 13 years). T. Johnston said a collective thank you from the Region 9 Board of Education to these staff members.

DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE ACTION: SUMMER CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT PROJECTS AND GOVERNANCE

S. Reiss outlined the three capital improvement projects that were to be completed this summer at JBHS as: HVAC system in the cafeteria and lower gymnasium; air purifier system; and, a new floor in the lower gymnasium. A lengthy discussion ensued about the feasibility in completing any of the three projects given the new COVID-19 planning that needs to be conducted for the coming school year, the immense workload of administration (now and for the past three months) and the significant employment vacancies in the district. Several Board of Education members voiced concern for the air quality at JBHS and the need to now have improved air quality. It was decided to send the possible action back to the Facilities Committee to figure out a timeline and a possible RFP, and make a recommendation as to whether or not these projects should wait until next summer.

DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE ACTION: REVIEW OF DIVERSITY IN CURRICULUM AND SUMMER READING LISTS

T. Johnston opened the discussion by asking for board member comments on joining the newly formed Joint Easton/Redding Task Force on Diversity and Inclusion. M. D'Agostino said that he's happy to have representatives from Region 9 on this Task Force.

He also said that he thinks the Region 9 Curriculum Committee would be able to work more quickly, but thoroughly, to bring about change, and would like to see the two entities work concurrently. T. Johnston said that he would also like to see the two groups working concurrently. M. Pampel said that as a member of the Curriculum Committee, she agrees that the Board of Education should do the two groups concurrently. C. Graziano said that she likes the dual tracks and that this will enable long term sustainable changes.

Dr. McMorran acknowledged the earlier comments and thanked the graduates and current students for their comments. He said that everyone needs to realize that changes must occur within pre K-12 and the larger community. Dr. McMorran urged the Board to give the resources necessary for this to happen and to think about how to get the resources. He said that in the absence of funding, it's hard to take swift action. Dr. Pierson Ugol acknowledged all the public and board member comments and thanked those who spoke at the beginning of the meeting. She said that the District's first priority is to listen. Dr. Pierson Ugol outlined a year-long plan for curriculum change that starts with the immediate review and editing of the summer reading lists, continues with Curriculum Committee reviews and meetings throughout the school year, and involves the assistance of a consultant who works on diversity issues for schools and concludes with an evaluation of the year-long plan in the following fall.

Several Board of Education members felt that these issues need to be addressed immediately and that there are many short-term items that can take place now. A lengthy discussion took place involving timelines; work load of personnel; how and when to involve the community; how quickly to act on items; and, the hiring of a consultant in the field of diversity and inclusion.

Motion: move that the Region 9 Board of Education join the Easton/Redding joint Board of Education task force on diversity and inclusion to be comprised of Educators, Administrators, Board of Education Members, and Members of the Community to discuss and recommend action to the Boards related to the topics of hiring, curriculum, student demographics and funding for diversity and anti-racism initiatives. (Graziano, Pampel). Approved. Unanimous.

J. Berry, C. Graziano and M. Pampel all said that they would volunteer to serve on the Task Force.

Motion: move that the Region 9 Board of Education appropriate an amount not to exceed \$45,000 for the purpose of supporting Region 9 in their efforts for immediate curriculum revisions related to diversity, inclusion and anti-racism. (Graziano, D'Agostino). Approved. Unanimous.

DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE ACTION: START OF SCHOOL PREPARATIONS AND POTENTIAL PURCHASES

Assistant Superintendent of Schools for Curriculum and Instruction, Dr. Pierson Ugol, reported on the three possible models for reopening school in August: Brick and Mortar (all in the school building); Distance Learning (all out of the building); and, Hybrid (Distance Learning combined with Brick and Mortar). Dr. Pierson Ugol then further explained the six areas of the Reopening Planning: Scheduling, Transportation, Academics, Health & Safety, Facilities and Food Services. She said that the Central Office, building administrators and staff are actively working to plan for a variety of possible directives from the State of Connecticut related to a broad set of reopening challenges. Dr. Pierson Ugol said that she believes the State will offer more suggestions and guidance by the end of June.

Some Board members asked about whether or not the school building has the necessary equipment and supplies, and about the timeline of ordering these items. S. Reiss said that he is in conversation about many of these items and that PPEs have already been ordered. He also said that the State of Connecticut is assisting with the ordering and acquiring of necessary items. S. Reiss said that an expansion of PowerSchool and security software needed to be purchased as well as several incremental purchases, such as: plexiglass; supplies for sanitation stations; sanitizers; electro-static sprayer; paper towel dispensers; and, self-flushing toilets.

Motion: move that the Region 9 Board of Education direct the Director of Finance & Operations to allocate \$33,000 of unexpended funds from the 2019-2020 budget for building supplies and software related to the COVID-19 pandemic. (D'Agostino, Graziano). Approved. Unanimous.

DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE ACTION: FINALIZE 2019-2020 UNEXPENDED FUNDS FOR THE FISCAL YEAR

Because of the two motions passed at tonight's meeting, \$78K will be taken out of the unexpended funds. S. Reiss said he has everything he needs to close out the financials.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Heather Whaley, Windy Hill Road, Redding, said thank you to everyone for the thoughtful discussion. She said that you can't correct a deficit until you name it, and hopefully now with more hands working on this issue, it won't take a year-long review process.

Scott Charmoy, Easton, said that his Barlow student was really hit hard from the lack of structure; he said he really feels a lot more could have been done in terms of interaction. He said he has heard similar feelings voiced from many other Barlow parents as well.

Julianne Licamele, Easton, said that for the Superintendent of Schools search she would like to see the following: someone who is addressing diversity, would like this person to be asked about diversity issues, and someone who has experience in diversity issues.

Elizabeth Hayman, Fire Hill Road, Redding, said that she is glad that the Region 9 Board of Education has joined with the Easton/Redding Task Force, and that the new Superintendent of Schools should have experience in these issues.

Blythe Graziano, Deacon Abbott Road, Redding, said she wanted to respond to an earlier comment that time and money was needed by pointing out that there are many free resources available for short-term actions.

Jennifer Sites, Beer Road, Easton, said thank you and she appreciates all the work that went into the graduation ceremony, and she compliments the alumni who spoke earlier and wholeheartedly agrees with them.

J. Sites said that she is concerned about the capital projects and is struggling to understand why a new HVAC system and air quality would be pushed back until possibly next summer.

Mia DeSpicio, Soundview Drive, Easton, said that she is asking Region 9 Board of Education to decolonize the curricula and take on an intersectional approach to education.

Jazmin Jinnah, Algonquin Lane, Easton, said that hiring an outside consultant is not enough, and that the consultant and the Board of Education need to know that staff need to examine themselves and their own identities first. She also said that there is a list of possible consultants in the alumni document.

BOARD MEMBER COMMENT

C. Graziano said thank you for all of the comments, especially the Barlow grads.

J. Berry thanked everyone for their comments, and said that we are going into new territory with distance learning and diversity, and hopefully we will come out better.

M. Agostino said that he wanted to reinforce his appreciation to the Barlow community and alumni for their comments, and also appreciation to his Board of Education colleagues for the thoughtful discussion about this important topic and how we need to do something now.

G. Denny said that she echoes everyone's comments about our alums, and that she had just gotten a private message from someone in support of the work in the gymnasium.

K. O'Brien, M. Pampel and M. Williams all thanked everyone for their comments.

T. Johnston thanked everyone for their comments and said that we will move as quickly as we can. He also gave a shout-out to the Barlow PTSA for their efforts on the graduation ceremony.

ADJOURNMENT

**Motion: move that the Region 9 Board of Education meeting be adjourned. (Denny, Williams).
Approved. Unanimous.**

The meeting was adjourned at 11:48 p.m.

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

Recorded by,
Sarah Ota