

Filed subject to approval

REGION 9 BOARD OF EDUCATION

Special Meeting - Virtual via Zoom

Monday, May 4, 2020-7:45 p.m.

Zoom Details: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/87501485064>

Meeting ID: 875 0148 5064

Dial by your location: +1 929 205 6099 US (New York)

Minutes

ATTENDANCE

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

Administration: McMorran, Pin, Pierson-Ugol, Reiss, Santangeli

Others: 8 members of the public

CALL TO ORDER

Mr. Johnston called the meeting to order at 7:46 p.m.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Minutes from the April 21, 2020 Region 9 Board of Education regular meeting were reviewed, and the following corrections suggested:

- C. Graziano noted a correction in minutes on page 6, under *Discussion and Possible Action: Grading Practices for End of Year* to read:
Barlow has been considering eight options to address grading and the State of CT proposed only one grading system for consideration: Pass, Fail or Pass with Distinction.
- M. D'Agostino noted a correction on page 5, under *Discussion and Possible Action: 2020-2021 Budget Referendum*, the *Motion* should read as follows:
"move that the R9 BOE use the currently scheduled Annual R9 District Meeting date to communicate public comments".

Motion: Move to approve the April 21, 2020 Region 9 Board of Education Meeting Minutes as amended. (D'Agostino, Pampel). Approved. Unanimous.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Adam Parker, Wedgewood Dr., Easton, spoke about returning any surplus funds from the Region 9 Board of Education budget to the town. The town is under financial pressure due to the pandemic.

Devon Wible, Woodland Dr., Easton, spoke about the challenges that Easton faces due to cuts by the Board of Education and the Board of Finance. She said that any money returning to Easton as a surplus can be put back into schools to bring back positions that were cut in the past.

Jenny Chieda, Wyldewood Rd., Easton, said she is hopeful that the board will proceed with its already low budget at only a 0.9 percent increase.

Carolyn Oppenheim, Hunting Ridge Rd., Easton said that the board should consider using the surplus for hiring a library media specialist at this time.

BOARD MEMBER COMMENT

Ms. Williams said that the time to use any surplus funds is now. Mr. Johnston spoke about the upcoming budget voting on May 19, 2020.

DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE ACTION: HEALTHY FOOD CERTIFICATION AND EXEMPTION FOR FOOD AND BEVERAGE ITEMS

Mr. Reiss spoke about motions to clarify foods served at schools and events will meet Connecticut nutritional standards.

Motion: move that for 2020-2021 fiscal year, the Region 9 Board of Education will continue to certify to the Connecticut State Department of Education that all food items from a reimbursable lunch will meet Connecticut Nutrition Standards. Such certification shall include all food offered for sale to students at all times, in all schools, and from all sources including, but not limited to, school stores, vending machines, school cafeterias, and any fundraising activities on school premises sponsored by the school or by non-school organizations and groups. (Graziano, D'Agostino). Approved. Unanimous.

Mr. D'Agostino questioned if this is the best choice to approve at this time. Mr. Reiss answered that we are obligated to meet nutritional standards in order to receive funding from the state. In addition, the number of free and reduced-price lunch recipients has increased by approximately 10 percent in past few years.

Motion: move that for the 2020-2021 fiscal year, the Region 9 Board of Education will allow the sale to students of food items that do not meet Connecticut Nutrition Standards and beverages that do not meet the requirements of state statute (Section 10-221q of the Connecticut General Statutes), provided (1) such sale is in connection with an event occurring after the end of the regular school day or on the weekend (2) such sale is at the location of the event, and (3) such food and/or beverage is not sold from a vending machine or school store. An "event" is an occurrence that involves more than just a regularly scheduled practice, meeting, or extracurricular activity. The "school day" is the period from midnight to 30 minutes after the end of the official school day. "Location" means where the event is being held and must be the same place as the food and beverage sales. (Berry, Graziano). Approved. Unanimous.

DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE ACTION: REVIEW OF DISTANCE LEARNING AND POTENTIAL ENHANCEMENTS TO THE CURRENT MODEL GOING FORWARD

Dr. McMorran spoke about the governor's decision about school closure for the remainder of the school year. He also spoke about improving school cleanliness and possible changes to custodians' work hours. There is a need to increase cleaning of surfaces and the possible addition of custodial staff. He also spoke about possible transportation changes, for example staggering pick up and drop off times for students and a possible shortened school week for students is being explored.

Also, Special Education teachers and staff may need additional funds. Considerable building changes are needed, additional furniture and upgrades to facets with "no touch" fixtures to reduce spreading germs and saving water.

Another area is how to address social distancing at lunch for students, in particular, the elementary grades. Dr. McMorran is hoping for a regional approach to distance learning in order to unify our efforts and save money. We need to work on synchronizing lessons and design them for online learning. At this time, he says we can only put an approximate dollar amount on what we will need going forward. There is no way to predict the cost of all necessary changes at this time.

Mr. D'Agostino mentioned using any unspent funds for improvements. For example, calling on digital learning professionals to help improve distance learning for students and maintain rigor of material and improve delivery of educational services. He also suggested adding more professional development days to train staff on how to teach online and use of online resources.

Ms. Denny suggested using the funds for training staff in June 2020, so the funds are included in this fiscal year. Dr. McMorran said that the teachers are available to the students throughout the day and it is important for the students to reach out and have direct contact with teachers when they need support. Dr. McMorran spoke about the May 19, 2020 meeting and how they will discuss surplus funds in more detail.

DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE ACTION: UPDATES ON GRADING PRACTICES DUE TO DISTANCE LEARNING

Dr. Pin spoke about the re-grading policy memo upon entering distance learning, and that it will combine 3rd and 4th quarters for grading. She spoke about the Pass/Fail option in lieu of letter grades. Students can choose this option for as many classes as they choose. They all do not have to be Pass/Fail or letter grades, a combination of the two is allowed. She emphasized that colleges will not look down on this grading system and it will not affect student GPA's. She said that parent and student reaction to the Pass/Fail option has been both positive and negative. Dr. Pin said that the school year ends on June 1 for seniors and graduation will be June 11.

Mr. D'Agostino felt that the board was not included in the decision for the grading option of Pass/Fail. He indicated that the Board of Education sets grading practices and it is a board decision. He added that he was disappointed not to be included in the decision-making process.

He feels that the board should propose a motion on this issue. Dr. Pin stated that Pass/Fail was always an option for students, it was just a lengthier process for students to have this choice.

Motion: move that the Board approve the system of grading as outlined in Dr. McMorran's email dated today. (Denny, O'Brien). Approved. Unanimous.

DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE ACTION: SURPLUS FUNDS UPDATE (INCLUDING POTENTIAL PENSION CONTRIBUTION)

Ms. Graziano said the committee voted on contributions of 100K to the pension fund. The board could choose not to contribute also. Mr. Johnston spoke about putting this pension contribution as a topic for the next meeting. Board members asked about how the committee arrived at the 100K number. Mr. Reiss explained how funds fluctuate and based on research by the actuaries, the committee settled on this number.

Mr. Reiss spoke about a reduction in insurance claims for the past two months. He also spoke about additional funds in the operational budget. Dr. McMorran spoke about special education services will likely need an additional 60K for the summer months to continue to provide additional service hours.

Mr. D'Agostino asked if some of the funds were a result of unpaid extra-curricular stipends. He also asked if we are still obligated to fund stipends when sport activities are not taking place. Dr. McMorran spoke about some coaches who are not members of the CIAC that are not receiving a stipend since the school closure in March. Ms. Denny questioned the differences in coaching jobs and asked about the reason some coaches are not getting a stipend. Dr. McMorran explained that coaches who are members of the JBEA will get the stipend and the coaches who are not members are not covered by the executive order. Mr. Santangeli said that 80K will not be paid out this year in stipends to the coaches who are not in the JBEA.

Mr. Reiss spoke about budget object summary as relating to the medical plans.

Mr. Johnston asked about reserve funds and amount of surplus.

Mr. D'Agostino spoke about the health reserve.

DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE ACTION: REVIEW PUBLIC COMMENTS SUBMITTED TO CENTRAL OFFICE WITH RESPECT TO THE APPROVAL OF THE REGION NO. 9 2020-2021 BUDGET UNDER CT E071

Mr. Johnston spoke about public comments on the website and that they will not be read at this meeting however, we did receive all the public comments. They are still posted on the website. Mr. D'Agostino said it would be good to give public opportunity to provide input. Mr. Johnston suggested leaving public comment option open and extend the deadline for receiving comments to May 15.

Motion: move to extend the opportunity for the public to post "Public Comment" via email from now, through May 15, 2020 at 2:00 p.m. and comments to be distributed to board members for review before May 19, 2020 meeting. (D'Agostino, Williams). Approved. Unanimous.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Jenny Chieda, Wyldewood Rd., Easton, spoke about the budget and how it is very conservative, and the board has made very responsible decisions. She added the board needs to continue to be careful with spending as there could be unpredictable expenses coming up.

BOARD MEMBER COMMENT

Mr. D'Agostino asked about the Latin program and if students were aware that Latin is now offered in the schools. Mr. Johnston spoke about the board's hard work and efforts to effectively manage surplus funds.

ADJOURNMENT

Motion: move that the Special Meeting of the Region 9 Board of Education be adjourned. (Graziano, O'Brien). Approved. Unanimous.

The meeting was adjourned at 10:11 p.m.

Submitted by
Juliette Berry, Region 9 Board of Education Secretary

Recorded by
Deborah DeLorenzo