

MINUTES OF THE WOODBRIDGE BOARD OF EDUCATION SPECIAL MEETING

Thursday, March 26, 2020

VIA WEBEX TELECONFERENCE

CALL TO ORDER: Dr. Fleischman, Chair called the meeting to order (6:06 PM).

BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT: Dr. Steven Fleischman, Chair, Mr. Dan Cowan, Ms. Maegan Genovese, Secretary; Mr. Jeff Hughes, Ms. Lynn Piascyk, Vice Chair; Dr. David Ross, Ms. Joyce Shavers, Dr. Michael Strambler and Dr. Jeffrey Townsend.

STAFF: Mr. Robert Gilbert, Superintendent; Cheryl Mammen, Special Services Director; Analisa Sherman, Principal; Doreen Merrill, Assistant Principal; and Marsha DeGennaro, Clerk of the Board.

MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC: Sandy Stein, BOS Liaison; Tom Kenefick, BOF Liaison; Jeanne Ciarleglio, Larissa Crocco, James Crawford, Maria DePalma, Kristen DeManche, Dee Don, Carrie Fanelli, Kim Franklin, Stephanie Goldberg, Emily Jacober, Bill Letsch, Teresa Nakouzi, Michelle Shepard, Susan Simoniello, Nancy Smerekanicz, Christina Thompson, Ashley Wagner, Shannon Wyman, Cathy Zdrowski, Teachers; Pua Ford, Erin Williamson, community.

BOARD CHAIR REPORT – The Board extended their heartfelt thanks to the Superintendent and administrative team for their leadership and maintaining communication with parents and the community to keep education moving forward and on track given the unforeseeable future.

SUPERINTENDENT REPORT – Superintendent Gilbert apprised the Board on the collaborative efforts by BOWA to disseminate information to launch a cohesive learning plan that adheres to recent mandates from the Governor in the instantly changing and uncertain times we are in. Communication is occurring daily, sometimes hourly, with board members, staff, parents and community to ensure everyone has the most up-to-date information possible.

Distance Learning / Special Services Update – Ms. Sherman noted that supplemental learning packets were prepared and distributed to students prior to the closing of school. Parents were surveyed to ensure all students had sufficient internet access and learning devices were accessible. Resources, daily lessons and supplemental learning materials have been made easily available to ensure efficient delivery of instruction meets the needs of students. Teachers have been in communication with their students and have spent countless hours preparing and collaborating to deploy distance learning beginning Monday, March 30 inclusive of lessons from the specialists. Work will continue to make as many resources, manipulatives and supplemental materials readily available and shareable. Ms. Mammen noted that all student interventions, current IEP's and accommodations will be kept intact. Per the direction from the CSDE (*Connecticut State Department of Education*) PPT's and 504 meetings will not be occurring and teachers will communicate directly with parents to coordinate schedules to meet individual student need(s). It remains an unknown for whether the extended school year summer program will occur, and if it does, in what capacity, shape or form. It was requested that movement breaks and physical exercise be incorporated into daily lessons. Also noted was the necessity for adequate schedule coordination as parental supervision during distance learning may prove challenging for families.

2019/20 School Calendar – Superintendent Gilbert recommended maintaining the calendar as is, keeping the April break and the last day of school as June 15. Each of the BOWA districts have also proceeded in this same direction. In addition, CAPSS (*Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents*) has recommended that districts adhere to their Board adopted calendar. While it remains an unknown for what other edicts from the Governor may be forthcoming, districts have been notified that SBAC spring testing has been cancelled and the 180 day requirement has been waived. Retaining the current calendar, will be allow families to start their summer planning.

Concern was expressed for assessing student learning / knowledge at the end of the year as well as the start of next year given the removal of the 180 day requirement and the possibility of inequitable resourcefulness of families. As is our usual practice at the start of each school year, an overview of the prior year's learning is incorporated to assess where students are in their individual learning pathway. It is possible that a longer refresher may be necessary and that pacing guides may require adjustment. Also, as STAR is an internal assessment and just completed in January, it may be possible to test at the end of the school year to tailor programming in the fall as well as create transition classes where necessary.

As the Governor has determined that all school districts are closed until April 20, why the push to decide the end of the school year right now when no one knows what will happen after April 20. What are the factors driving the decision to determine the end of the school year now. Our focus should be on distance learning and whether we are achieving our learning objectives and goals. It was agreed that for the time being the calendar would remain as is and the topic would be revisited after April 20 once a decision is made by the Governor on the duration of the school year.

Employment Contracts / Agreements – Superintendent Gilbert recommended wage and benefit continuance for all regular employees in sync with the Town. Custodians are working their usual shifts on site, secretaries have the option to work from home part of the time and we are currently in process to define a Memorandum of Understanding for the TA's and cafeteria workers moving forward as well. There was general agreement that this issue will be revisited after April 20 to determine the next steps.

Miscellaneous Contracts – Superintendent Gilbert indicated the Governor has stated that all transportation contracts should continue to be paid in their entirety. It is anticipated that an Executive Order will be issued in the next several days stating this. The language in our owner/operator contracts supports that position and we are obligated to adhere to the terms of the contract.

Food Service Update – Superintendent Gilbert noted that several members of the cafeteria staff were participating in the delivery service of breakfast/lunch to BOWA families. This delivery service is currently disseminated from Amity High School and will be expanded to both middle schools in the coming week. Concern was expressed for family units, the challenges/daily struggles they are facing and children who may be in unsafe homes. It was acknowledged that we are generally aware of the families in those situations and staff will continue to reach out to those families. We are also collaborating with the Town to ensure families in need have access to the food pantry as well.

Facilities Update – Superintendent Gilbert stated that the entire building has been cleaned, sanitized and continues to receive a deep cleaning by the custodial staff. In addition, several specialized projects are slated for completion over the next several weeks. It is anticipated the building will receive another deep cleaning prior to the return of staff and students.

2019/20 Budget Impact – Superintendent Gilbert noted that there is an approximate surplus of \$35,000 – 40,000. As a result of Covid 19, savings will be achieved in instructional supplies, utilities, professional development, technology and the school resource officer. However, we have increased costs in teacher substitutes, legal fees and technology equipment / replacements. There will also be a loss of revenue for the cafeteria and an additional subsidy may be necessary. Further information will be shared at either the April or May Finance Committee meeting.

2020/21 Budget Impact – Superintendent Gilbert apprised the Board on recent action by the Town Board of Finance which reduced the proposed budget to a zero percent (0%) increase. In addition to the elimination of the half-time social worker, this action necessitates the reduction of both a Library / Media Specialist and an Art teacher to 0.7 FTE as well as reduces the proposed full-time psychologist position to half-time. Line item adjustments will also be made in technology and professional development. It is anticipated that insurance costs in the range of \$60,000 will be higher than originally projected and the impact of distance learning on fulfillment of special education mandates remains unknown.

A suggestion was made for the Board to reopen the Voluntary Early Retirement Incentive to certified staff, without the inclusion of the early bird option, to offset proposed staff reductions. It was clarified that one retirement would not necessarily have an impact on restoration but it may be possible that two or three could move us in the right direction. It was questioned whether staffing reductions / elimination would be necessary if this proves successful. It is anticipated the VERP would remain open until May.

MOTION 1 – REOPEN CERTIFIED STAFF VOLUNTARY RETIREMENT PLAN

Move that we reopen early retirement incentive proposal from October less the \$15000 early bird incentive

Mr. Cowan

Second by Ms. Piascyk

UNANIMOUS

Chair Fleischman informed the Board that as the prerogative of the Chair, he was inviting Nancy Smerekanicz to make a statement.

Ms. Smerekanicz thanked the Board for the opportunity to speak. The WEA is concerned regarding the comments and decisions made at the Town Board of Finance meeting on March 19 to reduce the budget and urged the Board to reconsider these reductions and read a letter from a staff member in support to maintain the part-time social work position.

MOTION TO ADJOURN: (7:34 PM)

Mr. Cowan

Second by Dr. Townsend

UNANIMOUS

Recorded by Marsha DeGennaro, Clerk of the Board