

**NEW FAIRFIELD BOARD OF EDUCATION  
NEW FAIRFIELD, CT**

The New Fairfield Board of Education held a special meeting on Wednesday, September 23, 2020 at 5:00 pm.  
Virtual meeting via Zoom

**MINUTES – September 23, 2020**

**PRESENT:** Peggy Katkocin (Chairman), Kathy Baker, Dominic Cipollone, Greg Flanagan (left 5:50 p.m.), Kimberly LaTourette, Samantha Mannion, Rick Regan, Ed Sbordone and Stephanie Strazza

**ABSENT:** None

**ALSO PRESENT:** Superintendent of Schools Dr. Pat Cosentino, Director of Business and Operations Dr. Richard Sanzo, Pupil Personnel Director Katherine Matz and Special Education Supervisor Melissa Busnel.

Director of Business and Operations for the BOE, Dr. Richard Sanzo, explained the procedure for the virtual meeting and noted that this virtual meeting is available to everyone including members of the public.

**I. CALL TO ORDER:** Chairman Peggy Katkocin called the meeting to order at 5:01 p.m.

**II. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

**III. INFORMATION ITEMS**

A. ELC Program

The purpose of this special meeting was to discuss a change to the Early Learning Center and to get feedback from the BOE and members of the public.

Superintendent of Schools Dr. Pat Cosentino spoke of her decision to reassign a teacher from the Early Learning Center and reassign that teacher to Meeting House Hill School. This reassignment will result in a reduction from eight sections of ELC classes to six classes.

Pupil Personnel Director Katherine Matz spoke of the role of the Early Learning Center noting that it is a preschool program for special needs students starting at the age of three, with typical students added. She spoke of the early learning standards and the number of teachers in each classroom. She spoke of the current COVID rules and regulations for preschool children and noted that physical distancing is not realistic for this age group, but masks are required for ages 3 and up. She noted that enrollment in ELC has been decreasing over the past four years. She stated that this reallocation will not reduce any services to the ELC program and is confident that the staff is well equipped to handle this change.

Special Education Supervisor Melissa Busnel spoke of mitigation strategies that ELC is practicing during the pandemic. Specific examples include staggering of snack times, cleaning stations and toys, supplying each student with their own box of supplies. The students are spending as much time as possible outside and the pick-up and drop-off procedures have changed.

Dr. Cosentino explained the breakdown of the staff for the ELC program and noted that this is not the only staffing change for this school year. She spoke of the need to be flexible during the pandemic and is confident that this will be a smooth transition.

Dr. Sanzo spoke of additional expenditures due to COVID-19 which amounts to approximately \$1.7 million. This includes staffing and non-personnel expenses. He spoke of grants that the district received that will offset some of these expenses, as well as the anticipation that the BOF will appropriate the BOE 2019-2020 surplus for COVID expenses. Despite this, there is still expected to be a deficit of approximately \$330,000. He spoke of needs for all the students in the district and specifically the need to hire an additional Intensive Learning Support (ILS) teacher as well as additional paraprofessionals at Meeting House Hill School.

Members of the Board of Education asked about the size of classes in the ELC program and the status of each student's IEP. There was a brief discussion of the teacher certification and requirements for moving teachers to other grades.

#### **IV. PUBLIC COMMENT**

Many parents of ELC students expressed their concerns with this change and how it would affect the emotional and mental health of the youngest students in the district. Many expressed their disappointment with larger classes especially during a pandemic.

Dr. Cosentino responded to the comments and spoke of the challenges of hiring staff this year. She reiterated that this is expected to be a smooth transition and spoke of the resiliency of young students.

Many of the Board of Education members responded to the parents' comments and spoke of the challenges of the budget and the need to weigh pros and cons on all decisions. It was decided by the Board of Education that this would be an Information Item and that there is no need for Action at this time. Board members Kim LaTourette, Samantha Mannion and Stephanie Strazza expressed their disappointment with this decision that it is contrary to the original plan. They expressed their disappointment with how this change was presented to the BOE and to the parents.

#### **V. ADJOURNMENT**

**MOTION:** Peggy Katkocin made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 6:47 p.m. Samantha Mannion seconded the motion. **IN FAVOR:** Kathy Baker, Dominic Cipollone, Peggy Katkocin, Kimberly LaTourette, Samantha Mannion, Rick Regan, Ed Sbordone and Stephanie Strazza

Respectfully submitted,  
Suzanne Kloos