

MINUTES OF THE REGULAR WOODBRIDGE BOARD OF EDUCATION MEETING

Monday, February 24, 2020

Stella Library Media Center

CALL TO ORDER: Dr. Fleischman, Chair called the meeting to order (7:01 PM).

BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT: Dr. Steven Fleischman, Chair; Mr. Dan Cowan, Mr. Jeff Hughes, Ms. Maegan Genovese, Secretary; 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; Al Pullo, Director of Business Operations/Services; Analisa Sherman, Principal; Doreen Merrill, Assistant Principal; and Marsha DeGennaro, Clerk of the Board.

MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC: Kim Franklin, Louise Golden, Kris Hart-Rooney, Nancy Smerekanicz, Cathy Zdrowski, Teachers; Pua Ford, James and Kristen Turkosz, community.

CORRESPONDENCE – Ms. Genovese noted that three emails had been received from parents regarding proposed state legislation pertaining to religious exceptions for vaccines.

PUBLIC COMMENT –

Mr. Turkosz expressed disappointment on the recent public hearing in Hartford regarding the proposed state legislation pertaining to religious exceptions for vaccines. It is a constitutional right for every child in this state to receive an education. Removing children from their education is not the solution. He found it disheartening that CABA is advocating and supporting removal of the exception. He remains hopeful the local Board of Education will be more thoughtful and extended his thanks for having the discussion.

Kristen Turkosz noted that she had forwarded public hearing testimony to all Board members. Also stated was that at the 22 hour public hearing approximately 88% of the people in attendance opposed the proposed legislation eliminating religious exemptions to vaccine requirements for school entry. She noted that as a professional educator in this state for 14 years, teachers have a professional responsibility to provide an education without discrimination based on religion, race, color, ancestry, sex, gender identify or expression, national origin or sexual orientation. Many board members push through policies to make 1 or 2 transgender students more comfortable yet have no problem removing more than a dozen children for religious beliefs. She cited her son's paper on dreams and his hope that all children will be able to attend school even they do not get their shots.

CONSENT AGENDA

MOTION #1 – CONSENT AGENDA

Move that we approve the consent agenda as presented.

Ms. Piascyk

Second by Mr. Cowan

Mr. Cowan requested the extraction of Policy 5000 under Policies for 30-Day Review. It was agreed Policy 5000 would be discussed under Policy Committee – as Agenda Item 3.8.3.

MOTION #1A – CONSENT AGENDA

Move that we approve the consent agenda with the extraction of Policy 5000.

Ms. Piascyk

Second by Mr. Cowan

IN FAVOR: Dr. Fleischman, Mr. Cowan and Ms. Genovese, Mr. Hughes, Ms. Piascyk, Dr. Ross,
Dr. Strambler and Dr. Townsend

ABSTAIN: Ms. Shavers

MOTION PASSES 8-0-1

REPORTS

Pending Legislation on Religious Exemptions/Immunizations – Mr. Cowan urged Board members to develop a statement supporting religious exemption language as currently depicted in WBOE Policy 5141.3 reviewed by the Board on September 16, 2019 and ask that the State of Connecticut not pass any law that would require the WBOE to review our policy again. This statement letter should be sent to our representatives and senators.

MOTION #2 – STATEMENT REGARDING RELIGIOUS EXEMPTION LANGUAGE

Move that we make a BOE statement supporting our Policy 5141.3 was reviewed on September 14, and included language with the religious exemption in it, that we ask the State of Connecticut to pass no law that would require our policy to be reviewed again at this time.

Mr. Cowan
Second by Ms. Genovese

Discussion ensued for whether this was a parent's right issue more than a medical issue. There is no actual emergency in the State of Connecticut. Our policy is functioning well in the school. Parents have the right to make this decision regardless of someone's religious beliefs. Religious freedom is a fundamental first amendment right and vaccines are not necessarily safe for everyone. Parents should have the right to protect their children based on their beliefs. While there is not a large outbreak of measles, measles is a highly contagious disease and the Board has a responsibility to protect all children. Whether a child is immunized or not, that same child could be attending Beecher. There is significant evidence to support both sides. This is being legislated at the state level, it is questionable whether Board action would be as effective as some members would like it to be. It was further noted the statement would be sent to our state representatives and senators.

IN FAVOR: Mr. Cowan and Ms. Genovese
AGAINST: Dr. Fleischman, Mr. Hughes, Ms. Piascyk, Dr. Ross, Ms. Shavers, Dr. Strambler and Dr. Townsend

MOTION FAILS 2-7-0

It was suggested that an alternate a statement be developed indicating support for the vaccination of children and provide an exemption for those who are unable to medically receive the vaccination. While parents have a right to make a different choice, the Board has an obligation to protect all students. The benefits of vacation are well documented through international medical boards and various pediatric organizations and there is sufficient proof that not vaccinating children provides a greater risk of exposure. There are enough reasons to show why vaccination is not good for everyone. Parents should still have the right to decide what is in their child's best interest. The Board has a code of ethics to protect all students and to understand to the best of their ability, what vaccination would or would not mean at Beecher Road School and the impact it could have on everyone involved. It was noted that each individual citizen could contact state legislators and representations and voice their personal perspective without the Board taking a formal position.

MOTION #3 – STATEMENT IN SUPPORT OF VACCINATION

Move that we develop a statement indicating the Woodbridge Board of Education has reviewed the evidence and supports legislation that would abolish exemption from vaccination for any non-medical reason.

Dr. Ross
Second by Dr. Townsend
IN FAVOR: Dr. Fleischman, Mr. Hughes, Dr. Ross, Ms. Shavers, Dr. Strambler and Dr. Townsend
AGAINST: Mr. Cowan, Ms. Genovese and Ms. Piascyk

MOTION PASSES 6-3-0

PTO Update – No Report

Superintendent Report – Superintendent Gilbert highlighted the work of the Town safety consultant, the upcoming Read with Empathy program, the BOWA Regionalization meeting, deployment of the annual parent/staff/student survey in the coming week inclusive of questions regarding school calendar vacations and strategic planning, the PTO/Superintendent Parent Academy regarding a parent workshop by Dr. Deborah Kraemer entitled "Guiding Young Children's Use of Technology while Promoting Family Relationships", the generous \$1,000 donation from Master Kim in support of the Physical Education program, the Board Retreat with Patrice McCarthy, professional learning session for staff with Dr. Steve Sobel, CABE legislative breakfast and negotiation of the transportation contract to align with Amity.

BRS Update – Ms. Sherman apprised the Board on Bingo Night, the last PTO Social for Grades 4-6, the band’s rendition of *America the Beautiful* at the Sound Tigers game, the Rainbow Forest MAG Feast, promotion of the recycling program and upcoming fun adventures in the STEAM Lab.

Accountability Report – Ms. Sherman and Ms. Mammen presented an overview of spring testing results on student performance and the specific indicators that affect measurement on student growth and progress. SBAC is a different form of standardized testing, completed on-line and provides a more holistic approach with a broad set of 12 indicators incorporating student growth over time. Of the 12 indicators, five are applicable to BRS – (1) academic achievement measured by state assessments; (2) academic growth; (3) assessment participation rate; (4) chronic absenteeism; and (5) physical fitness. Each district attains an “accountability index” score as well as a “performance index” score (subject specific English/Language Arts, Math and Science). High needs students are categorized by Free/Reduced, English Learners and Special Education. All districts are required to have a 95% student participation rate in testing, inclusive of high need students. As in previous years, our participation rate was the only factor prohibiting us from attaining the rank of “*School of Distinction*”. Overall, we continue to close the achievement gap with slight increases in math 79.0% from 76.5% last year and language arts 83.6% from 81.1% and a significant increase in physical fitness to 84.5% from 75.3% last year. Chronic Absenteeism rose again this year to 5.9% from 5.5% last year. Our Accountability Index rating increased to 85.3% from 78.6% with our school classification remaining the same - Category 2. The Board extended their congratulations.

MOTION #4 – SBAC ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I move that the Board of Education send a statement congratulating the administration, teachers, and students of Beecher Road School for their remarkable academic performance and academic growth in language arts, math, science, and physical fitness.

Dr. Townsend
Second by Mr. Hughes
UNANIMOUS

Summer Programs – Superintendent Gilbert reviewed the summer schedule (Recreation, Summer Enrichment, Summer Scholar, Eday, and Special Education) noting that information for parents will be disseminated electronically shortly.

Upcoming Meeting Presentations – Facilities Committee Overview was deferred to March. The Policy Committee Overview will proceed as scheduled. Discussion ensued on the effectiveness of committee overviews as monthly committee reports and minutes are provided and whether we should continue these for each committee or develop an annual report for review every two years. It was also noted that the overview may be helpful for those not attending individual committees. It was agreed that overviews were not necessary for next month and the monthly committee report would suffice.

Facilities Committee – Mr. Hughes noted that work began on February 18 with the town LED lighting upgrade project and the completion of various HVAC odds and ends.

Finance Committee – Ms. Shavers noted that presently there is a \$35,000 surplus as a result of lower than anticipated out-of-district placement costs although there are larger legal fees than planned for.

Curriculum Committee – Ms. Piascyk reviewed the February 20 meeting regarding responsive classroom. She invited members to attend the March 19 meeting with a math consultant from the CSDE as well as a representative from Amity and will focus on differentiation. The April meeting will be moved to April 23.

It was noted that the Curriculum Committee presently has five (5) Board members on the committee, which presents a majority, and theoretically conversations could become binding. Further, as there are other Board members in attendance the flow of conversation becomes restricted as they are not necessarily included in deliberations. Suggestions were made for holding a full second Board meeting each month solely for curriculum, keeping Curriculum as a committee structure and/or changing the meeting format. There was general consensus for maintaining Curriculum as a committee with three to four board members as official members and allow participation of other Board members present. It will be the purgative of committee chairs to acknowledge additional Board members in attendance and include participation in committee discussions. It was also noted that as there are presently five board members sitting on Curriculum, one member will need to be removed.

Policy Committee – Ms. Genovese noted this committee met on February 11 to discuss five policies, four of which were placed on tonight’s agenda for 30-day review and one which was extracted from 30-day review. The March meeting will be held on the 10th. She presented policies for adoption.

MOTION #5 – POLICY ADOPTION (9271, 9330)

Move that we adopt Policy 9271 Code of Ethics for Board Members and Policy 9330 Board/School District Records as revised.

Ms. Genovese
Second by Dr. Townsend
UNANIMOUS

Chair Fleischman noted that Policy 5000 Concepts and Roles in Student Policies, extracted from the Consent Agenda for 30-day review, would now be discussed.

MOTION #6 – POLICY 5000 (CONCEPTS AND ROLES IN STUDENTS POLICIES)

Move that we do not accept Policy 5000 for review and refer it back to the Policy Committee.

Mr. Cowan

As there was no second to this motion, the motion fails.

It was requested that Policy 5000 be referred back to committee, placed at the end of the review process and left as currently written. Presently, there are three pending lawsuits in Connecticut surrounding “gender identity” language and there is no pressing need to revise the present policy approved in 2014. It was also noted that similar language exists in other policies already adopted, appears in both state and federal law and is also depicted in several other policies yet to be reviewed by the Board.

MOTION #7 – POLICY 5000 (CONCEPTS AND ROLES IN STUDENTS POLICIES)

Move that we accept Policy 5000 (Concepts and Roles in Students Policies) for 30-day review.

Dr. Townsend
Second by Dr. Ross

IN FAVOR: Dr. Fleischman, Ms. Genovese, Mr. Hughes, Ms. Piascyk, Dr. Ross, Dr. Strambler and Dr. Townsend

AGAINST: Mr. Cowan

ABSTAIN: Ms. Shavers

MOTION PASSES 7-1-1

CABE Liaison – Ms. Genovese invited Board members to attend CABE Day on the Hill on Wednesday, March 11 in Hartford.

NEW BUSINESS

Superintendent Gilbert presented the annual Healthy Food Certification.

MOTION #8 – HEALTHY FOODS CERTIFICATION PARTICIPATION 2020/21

The board of education or governing authority will allow the sale to students of food items that do not meet the Connecticut Nutrition Standards and beverages not listed in Section 10-221q of the Connecticut General Statutes provided that the following conditions are met: 1) the sale is in connection with an event occurring after the end of the regular school day or on the weekend; 2) the sale is at the location of the event; and 3) the food and beverage items are 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. For example, soccer games, school plays, and interscholastic debates are events but soccer practices, play rehearsals, and debate team meetings are not. The “regular school day” is the period from midnight before to 30 minutes after the end of the official school day. “Location” means where the event is being held.

Ms. Piascyk
Second by Mr. Cowan

IN FAVOR: Dr. Fleischman, Mr. Cowan Ms. Genovese, Mr. Hughes, Ms. Piascyk, Ms. Shavers Dr. Strambler and Dr. Townsend

ABSTAIN: Dr. Ross

MOTION PASSES 8-0-1

It was requested that the Board discuss the addition of questions to the annual parent/staff/student survey. As this was not an agenda item, a motion was required.

MOTION #9 – PARENT/STAFF/STUDENT SURVEY QUESTIONS

Move that we add discussion of additional questions for the annual survey to tonight’s agenda.

Mr. Cowan
Second by Dr. Ross

IN FAVOR: Mr. Cowan Ms. Genovese, Dr. Ross, Ms. Shavers, Dr. Strambler and Dr. Townsend
AGAINST: Dr. Fleischman and Ms. Piascyk
ABSTAIN: Mr. Hughes

MOTION PASSES 6-2-1

Several Board members indicated a desire to change the formatting of questions as well as modification of language. As this is an annual survey, the opportunity exists for assessing what areas are not being addressed and for making changes this year. Since the survey was scheduled to be deployed on March 2, the timing is extremely short for modifications and/or changes. In addition, consultation would need to occur with Panorama to assess what modifications could be made and what the adjusted deployment timeline would be. Further, this is a discussion that should involve all stakeholders in the process as changing questions could invalidate historical comparison data. Presently, there are 59 questions in the parent component with staff and student each comprised of 51 questions. In addition, Panorama is nationally recognized and is the CSDE selected vendor. It was agreed a special board meeting would be held on Monday, March 2 at 6:00 PM to further discuss this topic. All Board members were asked to forward questions to the Board Clerk, Marsha DeGennaro.

PUBLIC COMMENT – Mr. Turkosz thanked the Board for agreeing to hold a discussion on the topic of vaccinations. While the vote did not turn out as hoped, everyone shares the same goal of educating all children in a safe environment. He hoped Board members would take the time to review the public testimony from the hearing.

The Board entered Executive Session to conduct the mid-year evaluation of the Superintendent.

MOTION #10 – EXECUTIVE SESSION

Move that we enter Executive Session (9:05 PM).

Dr. Ross
Second by Ms. Genovese
UNANIMOUS

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

STAFF: Mr. Robert Gilbert, Superintendent.

The Board conducted the mid-year evaluation of the Superintendent.

MOTION TO ADJOURN: (10:50 PM)

Dr. Fleischman
Second by Ms. Genovese
UNANIMOUS

Recorded by Marsha DeGennaro, Clerk of the Board