

MINUTES OF THE REGULAR WOODBRIDGE BOARD OF EDUCATION MEETING

Tuesday, May 26, 2020

Via WebEx Meeting number (access code): 791 267 027

Meeting password: Sp6dwu6TFG5 (77639868 from phones and video systems)

CALL TO ORDER: Dr. Fleischman, Chair called the meeting to order (7:00 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; 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: Joi Prud'homme, PTO; James Crawford, Larissa Crocco, Kristin DeManche, Maria DePalma, Carrie Fanelli, Kim Franklin, Stephanie Goldberg, Emily Jacober, Elena Lavigne, Aimee Meacham, Lori Patrick, Nancy Smerekanicz, and Cathy Zdrowski, Teachers; Stacey Katz, Nursing Supervisor; Kit Dunbar, Wendy Glynn, CSEA; Pua Ford and Ruchi Jain, community.

CORRESPONDENCE – None

PUBLIC COMMENT – None

CONSENT AGENDA

MOTION #1 – CONSENT AGENDA

Move that we approve the consent agenda as presented.

Ms. Piascyk

Second by Ms. Genovese

UNANIMOUS

REPORTS

PTO Update – Ms. Prud'homme informed the Board on the cancellation of numerous events – spring book fair, earth balloon, birds of prey, book swap week, artsweek, quassy family/friends night, 6th grade graduation festivities as a result of Covid 19. The PTO coordinated the wave parade led by First Selectwoman Heller, Police Chief Cappiello, Officer Lynch, nine (9) fire trucks and over 300 cars to celebrate BRS staff and say goodbye to the most unusual school year. Funds have been raised to support the town food and fuel drive. The Board extended their sincere appreciation to the PTO for all their efforts.

Superintendent Report – Superintendent Gilbert apprised the Board on progress with Distance Learning, the Wave Parade, disbursement of student belongings, mandated requirements for establishment of local reopening advisory committees, participation in the DARE ceremony for Grade 6 students, the potential for the CSDE waiving of next year's accountability and assessment reporting, utilization of summer curriculum planning time to revamp curriculum and assessments for distance learning, celebration of the SCASA and CAPSS student awards at the June 15 meeting, dissemination of *The Bridge* at the end of the June to the entire Woodbridge community, final action by the Town Board of Finance to reduce the 2020/21 budget proposal by approximately \$115,000, unanticipated expenses related to Covid in the 2020/21 budget and allocation for the surplus in the 2019/21 budget.

Ad Hoc Security Personnel Committee – Superintendent Gilbert requested that the Board re-establish this committee to review SRO / security needs and associated costs. It is anticipated the committee membership and charge will be similar to the prior committee established three years ago. Currently, the SRO position costs \$130,000 annually and covers much of the standard school day. A short survey will be disbursed to parents to obtain feedback. The committee will be chaired by the Superintendent with membership comprised as follows: representatives from both the BOS and BOF, Police Chief and/or Police Commission, Board Chair and Vice Chair, Principal Sherman, PTO and additional Parents-at Large; Recreation Department, EDay, WEA, CSEA and CILU unions. The Committee Charge will be to make a recommendation to the Board of Education at their September 21, 2020 meeting on security personnel needs and costs for

2021/22 school budget. Questions were raised regarding assignments to Ad Hoc Committees as a request had been made in the fall to revise current policy language and outline a different process. It was noted that there is a Board policy in place and the Board will adhere to the current policy. There was agreement each union would select their individual representatives and depending upon the number of interested parents a lottery will be held. Mr. Cowan indicated his interest in serving on this committee.

MOTION #2 – AD HOC SECURITY COMMITTEE

Move that we establish an Ad Hoc Security Committee chaired by Superintendent Gilbert to review the SRO Process with membership as presented and the charge to the committee is that they make recommendation to WBOE at on security personnel needs and costs for 2021/22 school budget at the September 21, 2020 meeting.

Ms. Piascyk
Second by Ms. Genovese
UNANIMOUS

Distance Learning Surveys – Superintendent Gilbert presented a brief follow-up survey to staff, parents and students regarding distance learning implementation. It is hoped that the feedback provided will help to inform instruction should it become necessary to continue with this format in the fall / winter. The survey will be disseminated through the Swift K12 system. Suggestions were made for families having more than one child have the opportunity to respond for each child as the needs may be different based on their grade level, consistency in response category format (lower numbers being negative and higher positive), development of open ended questions for all categories and a generic statement indicating that names and identifiable / sensitive information should be excluded. There was general consensus that the following questions would be added:

- Do you have what you need, i.e., resources, training etc. to conduct distance learning.
- How effective is the BOE in leading this crisis.
- Do you feel supported by the Board, Superintendent and/or administration.
- What could the Superintendent / Board / administration do to better support you.
- What additional professional development and/or training could be provided to teach distance learning more effectively.

Discussion ensued for ascertaining and assessing student learning and needs. Are students able to complete their work without additional guidance, what challenges students are having when working at home, are parents able to provide the necessary support to complete the work required, is the work too challenging, not challenging enough, do students need more instructional support etc. It was noted that there are numerous family structures with many parents who are essential workers and it is important to know what is behind the child’s response to the question. It was agreed the response category would be structured as not supported, slightly supported, moderately supported, mostly supported and fully supported. Suggestions were made for conducting some form of assessment either at the end of the year, over the summer or at the start of the next school to assess where students are, if there is learning loss, and if so, how much. It was noted that assessments require accommodations and/or modifications for students with IEP’s and 504’s. At the present time, it is simply not feasible for individual assessments to be conducted.

Summer Programs – With the safety and well-being of all students at the forefront, it was the recommendation of Superintendent Gilbert that distance learning be continued for summer school and summer scholars and that programming for SEP and EDay be offered remotely. While the CSDE guidance will not be definitive until mid-late July, it is important that the primary focus is on the return of students for the fall. Sentiments were expressed for having students return for summer programming as a trial run, however, there was general consensus that it would be premature to bring students together in groups in the summer and we should continue to concentrate on planning for the fall.

MOTION #3 – SUMMER PROGRAMS

Move that we as a Board of Education, in consultation with the Superintendent, endorse his recommendation to cancel all on-site summer programs and replace them with virtual instruction and virtual programs.

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

MOTION PASSES 8-1-0

Shared Services – Superintendent Gilbert apprised the Board on the discussions with BOWA regarding the sharing of legal services. Each BOWA district has a unique relationship with their counsel and each retain different firms for general and Special Education legal services. BOWA Superintendents are pleased with their legal counsel and do not support changing/ sharing services for a variety of reasons, although there have been opportunities of common interest when they do share services. Each district districts pay an hourly rate as flat rates do not always provide optimum service and retainer based systems are predicated on the average of past years costs and more conducive to businesses that have cash flow challenges / services. While it is not recommended to share legal services, the Board could make this topic part of any future combined BOWA meeting. It was noted that a fresh set of eyes could generate different ideas and identify potential areas that may be shareable. It may also be possible to create a hybrid approach. It was requested that contact be made with Bethany to continue the shared services conversation and explore other topics for consideration.

Leadership Plan – As part of standard operations, each Superintendent is required to identify coverage any time they are out-of-district. Superintendent Gilbert presented the district contingency plan for as mandated by the CSDE during the Covid-19 pandemic. This is not intended to be a succession plan, but rather a plan that outlines back-up coverage should an administrator experience a short-term illness. If long-term coverage was required, i.e. 3-6 months or more, a different set of options and process would be utilized. As the Administrative Team works in concert with each other daily, the first level of back-up for district coverage is always internal. Unlike outside administrators, in-house administrators are familiar with staff, students and building functionality. Sentiments were expressed that this plan did not allow for Board input nor selection of the individual(s) best suited for each position. A different process was envisioned with defined questions, position manuals, areas of expertise, teacher/staff responsibility and experience relative to each position.

BRS Update –Distance learning is going well with teachers finding new and creative ways to engage students. Coordination of efforts to pack-up classrooms and return student and staff belongings are in process. 6th grade graduation plans are underway and are being coordinated with the PTO, our technology department and Bethany Middle School. Summer curriculum work will focus on adjusting pacing guides and curriculum to support distance learning and conversations have begun regarding the fall re-entry process as we await guidance from the CSDE. The PTO organized a wave parade to thank staff and honor students. PPT’s are occurring virtually and staff is continuing to work with families to ensure student needs are being met.

Upcoming Meeting Presentations – A virtual recognition ceremony will be held on June 15 from 6:30 – 7:00 PM to recognize student recipients of the annual CAPSS and SCASA Superintendent Awards. The annual wellness report is being deferred to July or August. The June meeting will include an update on the reopening committee as well as a follow-up assessment report on the issues raised earlier.

Finance Committee – Ms. Shavers noted the \$110,000 projected surplus and whether the Town will allow the Board to advance purchase items or return it to the town. Once that has been determined, it is anticipated the Board will be able to finalize the 2020/21 budget.

Policy Committee – Ms. Genovese noted that policy meetings are currently on hold as there are no pressing issues and the policies presented were deferred from a prior meeting.

MOTION #4 – POLICIES FOR ADOPTION

Move that we adopt Policies 5000 Concepts and Roles in Student Policies, 5145.71 Surrogate Parent Program, 5148 Electronic Information/Technology/Media, 6114.1 Fire Emergency (Drills)/Crisis Response Drills and 6141.321 Internet Acceptable Use as revised.

Ms. Genovese
Second by Dr. Townsend

Concern was expressed regarding language in Policy 5000. The Board was asked to consider various lawsuits that could potentially change the language in Policy 5000, specifically “gender identity”. The Board has an obligation to stand firm and avoid the whims of lobbying groups and the CAGE suggested language changes do not clarify the policy. This language could potentially violate first amendment rights, student privacy and/or safety in locker rooms, changing areas, restrooms, overnight trips and parental rights. Subjective gender identity is not biological sex and policies should be based on objective facts. The Board was urged not to vote approval of Policy 5000 as submitted and that the policy be pushed back to committee for rewrite and the words “gender identity” be removed.

It was noted that the language in this policy is current law, completely appropriate and the language modifications are specific for legally protected classes. Further, there are a number of policies previously adopted that contain the same language. Sentiments existed for understanding that while any language can be abused in different ways to render lawsuits plausible, the suggested language in simply about not discriminating against any individuals on several bases. There should be agreement that discrimination on any characteristic of individuals, including gender identity, is not something that should be allowed by this Board. There is plenty of objective data and explicit recommendations to support that implementing rigorous anti-discrimination policies and procedures at the elementary level is the primary intervention to preventing harassment and discrimination in schools. The Board has an obligation to protect all students regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity. To advocate differently invites discrimination.

It was agreed Policy 5000 would be separated out from the original motion.

MOTION #4A – POLICY 5000 FOR ADOPTION

Move that we adopt Policy 5000 Concepts and Roles in Student Policies.

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

MOTION PASSES 8-1-0

MOTION #4B – POLICIES FOR ADOPTION

Move that we adopt Policies 5145.71 Surrogate Parent Program, 5148 Electronic Information/Technology/Media, 6114.1 Fire Emergency (Drills)/Crisis Response Drills and 6141.321 Internet Acceptable Use as revised.

Ms. Genovese
Second by Dr. Townsend
UNANIMOUS

CABE Liaison Report – Ms. Genovese noted the freezing of dues for the 5th year in a row and the continuation of hosting virtual meetings. If Board members have “hot” topics they wished discussed, they should contact Lisa Steimer.

NEW BUSINESS – It was suggested that Board meetings via WebEx be continued even if meetings are convened in person. It is a more convenient way to allow participation. Numerous staff members are participating and the platform works well. While WebEx does present navigation challenges, in being able to hold discussions and recognize everyone, there was agreement that it increases visibility, especially for those who do not live in town and have access to Channel 79.

PUBLIC COMMENT – None

MOTION TO ADJOURN: (9:31 PM)

Ms. Piascyk
Second by Ms. Genovese
UNANIMOUS

Recorded by Marsha DeGennaro, Clerk of the Board