

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

The New Fairfield Board of Education held a regular meeting on Thursday, February 4, 2021, at 7:00 p.m. via Zoom.

**MINUTES – February 4, 2021**

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

**ABSENT:** None

**ALSO PRESENT:** Superintendent of Schools Dr. Pat Cosentino, Assistant Superintendent of Schools Julie Luby, Director of Business and Operations Dr. Richard Sanzo, Director of Instructional Technology and Communications Dr. Karen Fildes, Pupil Personnel Director Katherine Matz, High School Principal James D’Amico, High School Assistant Principal Scott Rohwedder, Middle School Principal Christine Baldelli, Meeting House Hill School Principal James Mandracchia, Meeting House Hill School Assistant Principal Allyson Story, Consolidated School Assistant Principal Karen Gruetzner, Athletic Director Mark Ottusch, Director of Curriculum Alyce Misuraca.

Network Administrator Paul Gouveia 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 7:01 p.m.

**II. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

**III. APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

- A. January 21, 2021 - Regular meeting - approved by consensus
- B. January 27, 2021 - Special meeting - approved by consensus

**IV. APPROVAL OF AGENDA** - approved by consensus

**V. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

Amanda Burger spoke as a parent in the school system and her concerns of the possibility of Open Choice schools and Regionalization. Dr. Cosentino noted that she will address this during her Superintendent’s report and in more depth at a future meeting.

**VI. BOARD AND ADMINISTRATIVE COMMUNICATIONS**

A. Chairman’s Report - Peggy Katkocin spoke of the following:

- Attended the Permanent Building Committee meeting on January 26<sup>th</sup> and saw rough drafts of the building projects. She noted that the projects are currently going through the various town boards for approval.

B. Superintendent’s Report - Dr. Pat Cosentino spoke of the following:

- Winter Sports have started in the district with no spectators.
- She thanked school nurses, bus drivers and teachers as well as all personnel in the district for going above and beyond with their work this year.

- Spoke in response to the public comment regarding the possibility of open choice regarding schools in Danbury. She expects to get some information soon and will share with the BOE. Dr. Cosentino noted that nothing regarding the open choice will happen anytime soon and it will not affect the building projects in any way.
- Director of Business and Operations Dr. Richard Sanzo spoke of the ESSER II Grant that is being awarded to the district in the amount of \$900,000 to be used to support needs of students in the district during and through the recovery from the pandemic. This grant cannot be used to offset operating costs of the district. This money can be used for additional academic support, technology needs and mental health needs for students over the next two years. More information regarding this grant will be available in the next few years.

#### C. Student Representatives' Report

Senior Representative Nick Thiel-Hudson noted that:

- Thanked NFHS school counselors during National School Counselor Week.
- The NFHS players will be performing a virtual musical "Working." This will be streamed from May 21-23.
- All Juniors will participate in SAT Boot Camp on March 10<sup>th</sup>.
- He spoke of concerns from fellow classmates regarding the SEE project and noted that due to the pandemic, many students would like the SEE project either cancelled or made optional for this year.

Junior Representative Cayden Walker noted that:

- A course in Medical Terminology will be offered next year through the UCONN Early College Experience.
- Registration for 2021-2022 courses begins on February 17<sup>th</sup>.
- A survey will go out to all Remote Learners at the high school on Monday, February 8<sup>th</sup>.
- The SEE project coordinators for the Senior Class held an information meeting on Feb 3<sup>rd</sup>. Anyone who missed it can log onto Google Classroom for information.
- Winter Sports will start on February 8<sup>th</sup>.

#### D. Committee Reports

1. Curriculum - Dominic Cipollone noted that this subcommittee met on January 25<sup>th</sup> and discussed:

- New course proposals as English Selectives. These courses are on tonight's agenda as Information Items.
- Civil Air Patrol will be combined with Danbury which allows the program to continue during the pandemic.
- Discussed the attributes and visions for a New Fairfield graduate.
- Spoke of Math instruction, specifically from grades 6-12.

2. Special Education Ad Hoc - Stephanie Strazza noted that this subcommittee met on Feb. 4<sup>th</sup> and discussed the following:

- The Transition Program will begin in fall 2021. This will allow special education students to stay in district.
- Discussed forming a PTA for parents of Special Education students (SEPTA).

#### E. Liaison Reports

1. School Security and Safety Committee- Samantha Mannion noted this meeting will meet on February 16<sup>th</sup> at 7:30 p.m.

## VII. INFORMATION ITEMS

A. Remote Learning - Assistant Superintendent of Schools Julie Luby spoke of the following regarding remote learning:

- The district currently has 37% remote learners throughout the district. This varies by school with 18% at Consolidated and 63% at the high school.
- She received over 150 responses from parents interested in virtual workshops for parents. These will be interactive programs and will cover a variety of topics.
- There was a brief discussion of after-school activities.

B. Winter Sports - Athletic Director Mark Ottusch gave an update on winter sports.

- Boys basketball had a scrimmage with no spectators.
- Girls basketball is having a scrimmage with Newtown.
- Swimming and Diving will start on Tuesday, February 9<sup>th</sup>.
- Indoor track is having a conditioning season preparing for the spring. He thanked Bethel for allowing New Fairfield track athletes to use their field house.
- Wrestling has been conditioning and training.
- Noted that approximately half of the winter athletes are remote learners.
- Parents will be allowed to be spectators for varsity sports only. This will be reassessed on February 12<sup>th</sup>.

C. New Course Proposals: Four English Selectives (First Reading)

1. Exploring Sports and Outdoor Literature
2. The Power of Language: Ethics, Persuasion and Manipulation
3. Film as Literature
4. Exploring Justice and Injustice

Julie Luby spoke of options for seniors for English. All seniors must take an English class but will be able to choose from the any of the four options or regular English.

D. New Fairfield High School/Consolidated School Building Project Update

Dr. Rich Sanzo noted that the Zoning Commission has decided to have three separate meetings to discuss the respective building projects. The high school project will be discussed on February 17<sup>th</sup>. The Meeting House Hill site will be discussed on February 24<sup>th</sup> and the Consolidated Early Learning Academy will be discussed on March 3<sup>rd</sup>. Agendas for each meeting will be provided.

A walk through of the Meeting House Hill Site was done recently with representatives from O&G. A final set of estimates are being completed on the Consolidated School project.

E. Superintendent's Mid-Year Evaluation

Dr. Cosentino gave an overview of work and goals that have been completed in the past year. She thanked administrators, educators, members of the BOE and the entire district for going above and beyond this year despite the pandemic. She spoke of in-person and remote learning and the flexibility that allows parents to choose the best option for their family. She spoke of the improvement in student achievement for all students and the iReady Program. She spoke of the increase in technology due to the pandemic and progress made to NEASC recommendations.

Dr. Cosentino spoke of social and emotional learning and focusing on diversity and equity. She further spoke of the building projects and the 2021-2022 budget.

Dr. Cosentino thanked the entire team and everyone in the district for all their hard work during this outrageously difficult year.

## **VIII. ACTION ITEMS**

### **A. Personnel Report**

**MOTION:** Kathy Baker made a motion to approve the Personnel Report as of January 28, 2021, as recommended by the administration. Greg Flanagan seconded the motion. **IN FAVOR:** Kathy Baker, Dominic Cipollone, Greg Flanagan, Peggy Katkocin, Kimberly LaTourette, Samantha Mannion, Rick Regan, Ed Sbordone and Stephanie Strazza

### **B. Board of Education Policies**

**MOTION:** Samantha Mannion made a motion to recommend to the full Board the approval of the Board of the Education Bylaws listed below as presented. Dominic Cipollone seconded the motion.

**IN FAVOR:** Kathy Baker, Dominic Cipollone, Greg Flanagan, Peggy Katkocin, Kimberly LaTourette, Samantha Mannion, Rick Regan, Ed Sbordone and Stephanie Strazza

1. Bylaw 9200 - Number of Members and Terms of Office
2. Bylaw 9221 - Filling Vacancies
3. Bylaw 9222 - Resignation/Removal from Office/Censure
4. Bylaw 9230 - Orientation of New Board Members
5. Bylaw 9250 - Remuneration and Reimbursement
6. Bylaw 9270 - Conflict of Interest
7. Bylaw 9271 - Code of Ethics

### **C. 2021-2022 Budget**

**MOTION:** Ed Sbordone made a motion to recommend to the full Board the approval of the 2021-2022 Board of Education operating budget in the amount of \$42,229,700, an increase of 2.48% which includes a \$3,219 decrease from the Superintendent's operating budget as shown on the budget adjustment revision #3 schedule provided and the 2021-2022 BOE's debt service and capital and nonrecurring budget in the amount of \$4,180,289, an increase of 67.17% for a total 2021-2022 BOE budget in the amount of \$46,409, 989, a total increase of 6.18%. Kathy Baker seconded the motion.

**IN FAVOR:** Kathy Baker, Dominic Cipollone, Greg Flanagan, Peggy Katkocin, Kimberly LaTourette, Samantha Mannion, Rick Regan, Ed Sbordone and Stephanie Strazza

## **IX. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

High School senior and SEE Project Coordinator Kelly Gibbons spoke of a petition circulated by high school seniors asking to cancel the SEE (Senior Enrichment Experience) project. She noted that the petition refers to false claims that students would be required to be put in unsafe environments during COVID in order to complete the SEE project requirement. She spoke of four virtual options for the SEE project and alternative ways to complete this assignment without leaving the house. High School Principal James D'Amico thanked the SEE coordinators and spoke further of the virtual options and shared his opinion that there is no reason to cancel the SEE project this year.

High School parent Christina McCartney asked if the theater course at the high school will come back. High School Principal James D'Amico noted that this course will be offered if there is enough interest.

**X. FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS** - The Board will discuss the policy that currently allows out of district children of teachers to attend New Fairfield schools tuition free. The Board will also discuss Open Choice for schools and Regionalization.

## **XI. BOARD MEMBER COMMENTS**

Kimberly LaTourette thanked everyone in the district for going above and beyond their jobs especially since COVID exhaustion has begun. She also thanked SEE Coordinator Kelly Gibbons for coming to the board with her concerns. She encouraged parents to check on their kids and to look for signs of stress during these difficult times.

Ed Sbordone encouraged the public to stay informed with the budget process and noted that the BOE will present their budget to the BOF on March 6<sup>th</sup>.

Samantha Mannion encouraged everyone to get involved in budget process.

Stephanie Strazza thanked Kelly Gibbons for handling the situation with the SEE project well. She noted that she was impressed with the Fine Arts Booster meeting that she intended recently.

Kathy Baker thanked Student Representatives Cayden Walker and Nick Thiel-Hudson for their hard work.

Greg Flanagan encouraged everyone to stay involved in the budget process.

Dominic Cipollone noted that he is very proud of the administrators during this challenging time. He encouraged students to get back in school and spend less time on the computer screen. He cautioned parents about the perils of social media.

Peggy Katkocin thanked high school students Kelly Gibbons, Cayden Walker and Nick Thiel-Hudson for all their hard work.

## **XII. EXECUTIVE SESSION FOR THE PURPOSE OF DISCUSSING THE SUPERINTENDENT'S MID-YEAR EVALUATION**

**MOTION:** Peggy Katkocin made a motion to go into Executive Session at 8:39 p.m. to discuss the Superintendent's mid-year evaluation and to invite Dr. Cosentino into the Executive Session. Kathy Baker seconded the motion. **IN FAVOR:** Kathy Baker, Dominic Cipollone, Greg Flanagan, Peggy Katkocin, Kimberly LaTourette, Samantha Mannion, Rick Regan, Ed Sbordone and Stephanie Strazza

**MOTION:** Greg Flanagan made a motion to come back from Executive Session at 9:26 p.m. Kathy Baker seconded the motion. **IN FAVOR:** Kathy Baker, Dominic Cipollone, Greg Flanagan, Peggy Katkocin, Kimberly LaTourette, Samantha Mannion, Rick Regan, Ed Sbordone and Stephanie Strazza

## **XIII. ADJOURNMENT**

**MOTION:** Greg Flanagan made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 9:27 p.m. Kathy Baker seconded the motion. **IN FAVOR:** Kathy Baker, Dominic Cipollone, Greg Flanagan, Peggy Katkocin, Kimberly LaTourette, Samantha Mannion, Rick Regan, Ed Sbordone and Stephanie Strazza

Respectfully submitted,  
Suzanne Kloos