

MINUTES OF THE REGULAR WOODBRIDGE BOARD OF EDUCATION MEETING

Monday, September 16, 2024
Town Hall Main Meeting Room

CALL TO ORDER: Ms. Lynn Piascyk, Chair, called the meeting to order (6:33 PM).

BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT: Lynn Piascyk, Chair; Dr. Jay Dahya, Sarah Beth Del Prete, Secretary; Dr. Laura Francese; Jeff Hughes; Dr. Michael Strambler and Erin Williamson.

STAFF: Vonda Tencza, Superintendent; Donna Coonan, Director of Business Services/ Operations.

Executive Session

The Board entered Executive Session in accordance with State statute to discuss negotiations with respect to collective bargaining and invited the Superintendent and the Director of Business Services / Operations to join the Executive Session.

MOTION #1 – EXECUTIVE SESSION (6:34 PM)

Move that we enter Executive Session to discuss negotiations with respect to collective bargaining and to invite the Superintendent and the Director of Business Services / Operations to join the Executive Session.

Dr. Dayha

Second by Dr. Strambler

UNANIMOUS

BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT: Lynn Piascyk, Chair; Dr. Jay Dahya, Sarah Beth Del Prete, Secretary; Dr. Laura Francese; Brooke Hopkins (6:38 PM); Jeff Hughes; Steven Lawrence, Vice Chair (6:45 PM); Dr. Michael Strambler and Erin Williamson.

STAFF: Vonda Tencza, Superintendent; Donna Coonan, Director of Business Services/Operations.

The Board reviewed the Executive Summary provided by Board Counsel regarding the recently negotiated contact agreement between the Woodbridge Board of Education and the UE Local 222 #80 (United Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers of America).

MOTION #2 – RETURN TO PUBLIC SESSION

Move that we return to Public Session (6:56 PM).

Mr. Lawrence

Second by Dr. Strambler

UNANIMOUS

CALL TO ORDER: Ms. Lynn Piascyk, Chair, called the public session to back to order (7:03 PM).

BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT: Lynn Piascyk, Chair; Dr. Jay Dahya, Sarah Beth Del Prete, Secretary; Dr. Laura Francese; Brooke Hopkins; Jeff Hughes; Steven Lawrence, Vice Chair; Dr. Michael Strambler and Erin Williamson.

STAFF: Vonda Tencza, Superintendent; Analisa Sherman, Principal; Jimmy Sapia, Assistant Principal; Donna Coonan, Director of Business Services/ Operations and Marsha DeGennaro, Clerk of the Board.

It was noted that the October 21 regular Board meeting will be held in the South Assembly Room at BRS due to early voting occurring in the Main Meeting Room at Town Hall.

MISSION / VISION – Chair Piascyk recounted the Board Mission and Vision statements that will now appear on all regular Board meeting agendas and read aloud each September.

CORRESPONDENCE – Ms. Del Prete acknowledged receipt of several emails from parents all of which are available in BoardBook.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Katie Furino expressed concerns regarding the large class sizes in Grade 1 and the disservice being done to students with 23 students per class. Grade 1 is a developmentally critical foundational year with reading and math requirements and there is substantial research in support of smaller class sizes. Teachers will be unable to meet the needs of students and the vision and mission statement will not be fulfilled. The focus should not be on finances nor school layout and there should be six sections not five Kindergarten sections.

Tara Buckman shared concerns regarding the large class sizes in Grade 1 and the physical space required to teach the number of students currently assigned to each classroom which also prevents student mobility. In addition, with the implementation of a new phonics program students will receive less attention because of the large number of students in each class.

Jennifer Kennedy-Holmes acknowledged her growing concern with the overcrowding and insufficient space in Grade 1 which will impede future academic success and growth for these students. Students are crammed into tiny spaces with no room for small collaborative group work. Grade 1 students deserve better instruction areas that support personalized and effective instruction that is conducive to cooperative learning and fosters student academic growth.

Megan O'Grady did not feel that the physical dimensions of the classrooms could accommodate 22-23 students per class. Rooms are overcrowded which has a direct impact on student learning and engagement. Further, noise levels are amplified which could result in less effective teaching / instructional strategies as well as logistical challenges. These limitations will hinder critical social development and limit activities and collaborative interaction among peers. It is crucial that we find alternative learning spaces to maintain the quality of education these students deserve.

Steve Sholtis noted the tight cramped spaces these students are occupying with 22-23 students per class. The Kindergarten classrooms are quite spacious and perhaps these rooms could be switched. It is imperative that students have stable learning environments and the Board should have planned for the future to avoid having to make changes while the school year is in already in progress.

Jackie Cappiello felt the current classroom space was inadequate given the number of students assigned. Further, the social emotional skill development that these students require is at risk. There is no doubt additional students will be forthcoming over the next 170+ days and we are already exceeding maximum capacity. This same group of students will be here next year and it is important we start to plan what that will also look like. Given current numbers it would be best to bring on another teacher now even though finding additional classroom space is also an issue. Utilizing TA's for additional adult support in the classrooms would also be helpful.

Cindy Kruger was disappointed with the removal of technology from the sixth grade curriculum without community input nor communication. Given the fast-paced world we live in, technology is critical in today's world, and we need to continue to teach students at the level they are at. There is so much more to learn about this subject especially with the evolvement of AI, threats on the internet, phishing scams etc. Technology should be reinstated in the 6th grade curriculum. The Board is responsible for ensuring the school has the resources it needs. Library was cut for 5th and 6th grade last year without discussion in the community and this year technology was cut with no articulated reason. Technology is key to learning and the 6th grade curriculum is worth a discussion. We need to be a better Beecher community and please reinstate it to our learning.

Christopher Hughes did not believe that it was necessary to have a superintendent for one school when there is a small district option in this state that allows a district to utilize a "close by" superintendent. The money being wasted on a superintendent could be spent on more teachers. If the country club property is sold and/or developed for housing, there is no way the school system could support all the housing that could be built. The Board needs to develop a long-term plan and part of that plan should be merging superintendents with the Amity system.

CONSENT AGENDA

MOTION #3 – CONSENT AGENDA

Move that we approve the consent agenda as presented.

Mr. Lawrence

Second by Ms. Del Prete

UNANIMOUS

Superintendent Report – Superintendent Tencza recognized teachers who attained tenure in June of 2024, present were Lexi Fonda and Ken Caldwell. Also recognized was the new and recently hired STEAM teacher, Tiffany Bucko. Superintendent Tencza provided a brief update on enrollment and reviewed the class size ranges predicated on current space constraints and budget implications in light of Grade 1 concerns. Students will make academic progress in learning as well as social collaboration as BRS has high quality teachers. Education research is mixed regarding class sizes, however, it is clear that the greatest impact on student learning is the teacher. Administration has numerous strategies in place including the addition of a dedicated grade level para, daily intervention support with strong specialists in literacy and math as well as other highly qualified specialists and increased para support. Adjustments will continue to be monitored and made as needed with ongoing teacher input.

Also reviewed were the first weeks of school which entailed the visiting of classrooms, the Ice Cream Social, purchasing of classroom supplies to defray parent cost, asbestos abatement and installation of new flooring in various areas. The North parking lot has been repaved with additional grounds, drainage and sidewalk work to continue once the company returns from providing assistance to Oxford at the request of the Governor. The expenditures associated with this project were under budget, thus requiring, less Town funding.

Ms. Williamson requested an addition to the agenda in light of the concerns expressed during Public Comment relative to Grade 1 class sizes, and the changes in Grade 6 curriculum regarding technology and Spanish.

MOTION #4 – MODIFY AGENDA

Move that we amend the agenda to add under New Business discussion of Grade 1 class size and enrollment concerns shared during Public Comment.

Ms. Williamson

Second by Dr. Dahya

UNANIMOUS

PTO – Ms. Kruger provided an overview of projects and activities slated for the 2024/25 school year, introduced new Board members elected in May 2024 and shared the goals identified for the year inclusive of *Build community; Be inclusive; Be a welcoming and connecting presence for kids parents teachers; and Make all the kids feel loved.*

BRS Update – Principal Sherman highlighted implementation of the HMH literacy resource in Grades K-3, math intervention with specialists, reigniting of CARES assemblies, staff professional development / PTO sponsored lunch / treats, open houses including an outline of curriculum overviews / classroom expectations, completion of the first fire drill, Hispanic heritage month, paraeducator staffing, implementation of the communication tool *Class DoJo*, and recent school-wide activities of international dot day, summer reading celebration and the school-wide walk.

Questions were raised regarding the HMH implementation and reading assessment changes and teacher feedback on professional development activities. HMH is very adaptable to our style of teaching. We will continue to utilize Dibbles in K-3, Star in 4-6, TC Assessments and Running Records. It was noted that BRS has a Professional Development Committee that continuously reviews feedback received.

BRS Infrastructure Upgrade Building Committee Update – It was noted this Committee has been meeting monthly to examine possible expansion concepts, explore various avenues for community decisions and assess the viability options / gathering of pertinent data. It is anticipated there will be a TriBoard (BOS/BOF/BOE) meeting in November to discuss next year's budget, the growing student population and how best to balance funding within the competing needs of the Town.

Facilities Committee – Mr. Hughes noted completion of various summer projects---asbestos abatement, upgrades to both the telephone and PA systems and the overall readiness of the building for the return of students.

Finance Committee – Mr. Lawrence noted that based on current expenditures, out-of-district changes, staff changes and HVAC savings, it is anticipated there is potential of a projected surplus even with the additional increase of four (4) sped paras added at the last meeting.

CABE Liaison Report – Board members were urged to register for the CABE/CAPSS Convention on November 15 and 16 and to register for the School Finance Webinar Series – *How the Budget is Developed, Adopted and the Board's Oversight* on September 24 and the October 18 Webinar on *Being a Stellar Board Member*.

Upcoming Meeting Presentations – The regular October 12 meeting will include a report on SBAC and NGSS Assessments and will be held in the South Assembly Room at BRS. Committee meeting schedule: Curriculum on October 2 at 4:00 PM, Policy on October 7 at 4:30 PM and Finance October 15 at 4:30 PM

NEW BUSINESS

Superintendent Tencza presented the collective bargaining agreement with the CILU, which governs custodial, clerical and cafeteria workers, for ratification by the Board.

MOTION #5 – UE LOCAL 222 #80 CONTRACT 2024 – 2027

Move that we approve the Agreement between the Woodbridge Board of Education and the UE Local 222 #80 (United Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers of America), effective July 1, 2024 through June 30, 2027.

Mr. Lawrence

Second by Mr. Hughes

UNANIMOUS

Class Size Discussion – Ms. Williamson voiced concern regarding the lack of discussion among administration in the hiring of an additional teacher for Grade 1 given current enrollment / class sizes. It is obvious that if we are pulling resources from other areas, while trying to implement a new literacy curriculum, there is already a problem and the Board should have been apprised.

It was noted that the strategies outlined earlier are appropriate and that there have “hot spots” in nearly every year over the last 10 years. Administration has been monitoring this situation this mid-August. We are only 2.5 weeks into the school year with several students trickling in after the start of school. Classroom set-ups depicted at Open Houses have been altered and desks are aligned differently to garner maximum spacing. Further, securing additional classroom space as well as supplying a Grade 1 classroom at this date are large challenges. This process will also take 1-2 months and by that time, student friendships, classroom harmony and other student collaboration factors will be in place and starting to solidify. Also, adding a teacher at this stage will also ensure that a specialist will now be on a cart. Given the current timing, it may also prove difficult to find a quality teacher at this time of year.

There was general consensus among Board members that adding an additional Grade 1 section / teacher made the most sense as given this number of students, if numbers increased, we would have to add one anyway. In order to have the least amount of disruption, moving a teacher from Kindergarten to Grade 1 did not appear to be an appropriate option. Regardless of what is done, there are going to be different challenges and parents, students and staff will not be pleased. It was suggested that parents be surveyed prior to their individual child being moved to a different classroom. It was suggested that administration be given time to obtain additional information on available space, staffing etc. before the Board took a vote.

MOTION #6 – ADDITIONAL STAFFING

Move that we authorize the Superintendent to add another full-time elementary teaching position in Grade 1 for 2024/25.

Ms. Williamson

Second by Dr. Dahya

UNANIMOUS

PUBLIC COMMENT – Ms. Dorsey thanked the Board for listening to parent concerns and adding an additional Grade 1 classroom teacher.

MOTION TO ADJOURN: (9:21 PM)

Ms. Hopkins

Second by Mr. Lawrence

UNANIMOUS

Recorded by Marsha DeGennaro, Clerk of the Board.