

MINUTES OF THE REGULAR WOODBRIDGE BOARD OF EDUCATION MEETING

Monday, March 18, 2019
Stella Library Media Center

CALL TO ORDER: Ms. Hamilton, Chair called the meeting to order (7:06 PM).

BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT: Ms. Margaret Hamilton, Chair; Dr. Steve Fleischman, Vice Chair; Ms. Maegan Genovese, Secretary; Ms. Claire Coleman, Dr. Todd Jokl, Mr. Garrett Luciani, Ms. Lynn Piascyk, and Ms. Joyce Shavers.

STAFF: Mr. Robert Gilbert, Superintendent; Cheryl Mammen, Special Services Director; Al Pullo, Director of Business Services/Operations; Analisa Sherman, Assistant Principal; and Marsha DeGennaro, Clerk of the Board.

MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC: Beth Heller, First Selectman; George Kurtyka, CABA; Doreen Merrill, WEA; Barbara Ahern, Carson Echeverry, Kim Franklin, Joanne Giaquinto, Louise Golden, Cheri Guerra, Elizabeth Heagney, Maureen Krawec, Kris Hart-Rooney, Katie McCollom, Kevin McHugh, Nancy Smerekanicz, Shannon Wyman, Cathy Zdrowski, Teachers; Jill Brostrom and Kate Pagnatro, Teacher Assistants; and Juliette, Giovanni and Marcello Bonazzoli, Asi and Nina Carmeli, Mary Child, Michelle Ditzian, Mary D'Ostilio, Shawn Flynn, Pua Ford, Shane Franklin, Michael Haas, James Hubbard, Sudhir Karunakaran, Annabelle and Michelle Kline, Marissa Kogan, Mena McShan, Qing Liu, Jeffrey Townsend, Alice, Anna, David and Nera Youtz, Guldeniz Yucelec, Myra Zhang, Channel 8 news reporter/cameraman community.

BOARD MEMBER APPRECIATION – Ms. Heller presented a proclamation naming March 18, 2019 as Board Member Appreciation Day in Woodbridge. Board members were also acknowledged with a small token of appreciation.

CORRESPONDENCE – Ms. Genovese noted two emails had been received one from a staff member and one from the community both on the same topic of FMLA.

Ms. Hamilton outlined the process for Public Comment.

PUBLIC COMMENT –

Nina Carmeli spoke in support of MAG and how the program shaped who she is today, generating an interest in science, music and drama through hands-on learning, community service and cultivation of friendships.

Asi Carmeli expressed concern regarding upcoming staffing changes and the potential impact on MAG. It is imperative the right person is selected that will complement, sustain and strengthen the team and financial decisions should not be the driving force.

Juliette Bonazzoli noted that MAG staff should be involved in the hiring process, the individual hired should be of similar caliber to “Mr. B” and information on the process should be shared with parents. MAG is dynamic, unique and functions with a coalesce of energy with teachers operating in unison to create hands-on learning experiences under a shared philosophy that allows for adults and students to interact and grow from each other. She also spoke on behalf of Ms. Franklin and believed that broadening the definition of “maternity” was required and that mothers adopting are deserving of equal maternity leave. Maternity leave should be about the bonding process not whether or not the child came from the birthing process.

Kim Franklin a Grade 6 teacher at BRS for four years never anticipated that her request for six weeks paid leave to adopt a 7 year old child from Viet Nam would be treated differently and inequitably compared to a teacher giving birth to a child. Defining family differently based on how a child is conceived is inequitable and discriminatory. Hiding behind contract language of “disability” is deceptive and Woodbridge should not choose to be passive because of what is in or not in the contract as the contract is flawed. Also cited were contract language changes for New York that allow for paid family leave to “bond with a newly born, adopted or fostered child”. She implored the Board to honor her request for six weeks paid leave. Board members were presented with letters from the adoption agency as well as parents, faculty and community members who supported her position and/or adopted.

Annabel Kline, Kim Franklin's step-mother, was surprised that the contract does not have language for paid leave for adoption purposes. To be forced to use only two weeks-time versus six weeks-time is unfair as biological parents do not have this worry. Far greater effort is required to create, develop, nurture and bond with an adopted child. The child needs to feel safe and comfortable in their new environment especially if the child does not speak English. She urged the Board to reconsider their policy. She also hoped that MAG, which supports family diversity and focuses on community as a whole, would be funded appropriately.

Jill Brostrom deferred her time allocation as her comments had already been stated by others.

James Hubbard fully supported the MAG program, its philosophy and the opportunities that tap the distinct and unique talent of each child. This program plants seeds of innovation, provides opportunities to contribute to society, teaches respect for ideas, generates projects to raise environmental awareness, creates student leaders and prepares young minds for success. Children can and do make a difference in this program. They are given the opportunity daily to express their opinions, work collaboratively together, share ideas and participate fully in problem-solving. MAG is a strong component of education in this community. Its tradition deserves to be preserved and this position should be maintained. He also believed that adoptive parents should be afforded the opportunity to have adequate time to bond with their child.

Jeffrey Townsend recounted his childhood days in a family that offered opportunities to children participating in the Fresh Air Fund during the summer months. He hoped Beecher would be a district that thinks in a forward way and treat adoption, pregnancy and childbirth on an even scale. Pregnancy is not equivalent to illness, it is taking care of a child and this case should be supported like any other case of a child entering a family. Treat everyone fairly and that decision will benefit the teacher, morale and the child.

Mary D'Ostilio, mother of an adopted child and licensed social worker at Yale, who would be hard pressed to find that two weeks would be sufficient time to bond with a baby and hoped that district would afford the extra weeks to ensure the child bonds properly with the parent. If she were forced to return to work two weeks after adopting a baby, she would be unable to perform her job properly and could not imagine a teacher being effective to her students after only two weeks of time to bond.

Myra Zhang noted that MAG is a unique project-based flexible learning program that meets the needs of students at all levels, builds life-long critical skills, collaboration and teamwork and that the teachers always go the "extra mile". She urged that the process be allowed to continue and that the person selected have the same passion and beliefs of "Mr. B" and share the philosophy of the program.

Michele Ditzian is a mother of adopted children and that all parents should be treated equally under BOE policies. No matter how families come together, there is a positive impact if we foster bonding and communicate to children that their families are legitimate.

Shane Franklin, husband of Kim Franklin, urged Board members to think about their own children, family members and the protection, support, feelings and emotions they provide those children with. Beecher should be a community that opens doors not one that puts their head down, ignores other people's problems and says discrimination is ok. The Board's actions today will define what they want and prove why you as individuals want to be on this board. Choose to support every adopted child in this community, don't put your head down and look away.

Ms. Hamilton apprised the audience that the Board would not be taking any action this evening on the topics raised this evening as they were both personnel matters.

CONSENT AGENDA

MOTION #1 – CONSENT AGENDA

Move that we approve the consent agenda as presented.

Dr. Fleischman

Second by Ms. Piascyk

UNANIMOUS

REPORTS

Amity Shared Services – Ms. Hamilton and Dr. Fleischman provided an overview of the February 26 meeting held at Amity on shared services among the BOWA districts. Primarily, discussions centered on regionalization, how to obtain information on the process, what is involved and what the process might look like should BOWA choose to regionalize as a K-12 district. Amity would need to initiate the process by contacting the CSDE and request a change of grades from 7-12 to K-12. A consultant would then be assigned who would outline the process, identify steps and determine the components required and the impact on each district. It was noted that contacting the CSDE to initiate this process does not commit any district to saying yes to K-12 regionalization it is simply the process by which information is obtained. Since similar discussions are being held at the state, there was general consensus that BOWA should explore alternate options to obtain information that could guide an informed decision should that become necessary. It is anticipated that the cost to initiate this process would be approximately \$7,000 and would be borne by Amity.

MOTION #2 – SHARED SERVICES

Move that we support and continue the shared services conversation and process initiated by the Amity Regional 5 School District.

Dr. Fleischman
Second by Ms. Piascyk
UNANIMOUS

PTO Update – Ms. Prud'homme noted the spring Book Fair on April 1-4, the Superintendent's Open Forum on April 9 at 6:00 PM, the BRS Book Swap on April 29th, funding of all classrooms with empathy/diversity books for Kindness month; the BRS owls fun run on May 2 and the Boosterthon rollout tomorrow at the faculty meeting.

CABE Communications Award – Mr. Kurtyka presented the Communication Awards for the BRS School Calendar and the Student/Parent Handbook.

Ms. Hamilton called a brief recess (8:21 PM) and called the meeting back to order (8:24 PM).

Superintendent Report – Superintendent Gilbert highlighted the Grade 3 team presentation on enrichment clusters to the state-wide IGNITE Conference, the Read Across America/Empathy event, three non-certified staff retirements – Gaye Mastrianna, Kathy Holowienko and Robert Anderson, the March 20 CABE Day on the Hill, completion of the Ad Hoc Building Committee report, the March 21 BOF meeting on the \$1.5 million reduction to the town budget and the invitation to the Amity play on April 11. A suggestion was made to have another presentation of “A Day in the Life of a BRS teacher” given the lack of board member attendance.

BRS Report – Ms. Sherman noted the community building event of family yoga night, the professional learning day for teachers on March 15, the school-wide book reading of *The Day You Begin* for BKindness Month and the peaceful bus initiative.

School-Wide Enrichment Update – Superintendent Gilbert presented an overview on various innovative projects across grade levels. The primary goal is to serve all students, not just a few, and explore opportunities to improve our program to provide student centered personalized learning. Enrichment clusters commence in Grade 3 and are a natural progression of curriculum integration from grade to grade with an increase in rigor with both staff and students vested in the process. It was suggested that topic selections appeared to be in the genre of arts and crafts and/or hobbies and that students are not being challenged enough. Perhaps more substantive offerings/projects that incorporate math and science could enhance the student learning experience.

School Performance Index – Ms. Sherman and Ms. Mammen provided an overview of 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 students. All districts are required to have a 95% student participation rate in testing, inclusive of high need students. Overall, our results mirrored the state, with slight decreases in math 76.5% from 77.5% last year and

language arts 81.1% from 82% and a major increase in physical fitness 75.3% from 59.7% last year. Chronic Absenteeism rose this year to 5.5% from 3.3% last year. Our school classification remained a Category 2.

Efforts have been made to expose students to question format, use and location of tools on the iPad and formulation and understanding of questions. In addition, internal student intervention and data driven processes have been adjusted and targeted to specific standards and assessments for both Language Arts and Math to help guide instruction. It is important that students have the necessary skills and understand how to take the test. Suggestions were made for comparing out results to other institutions to access if similar curves exist, what we can change to do it differently or if a larger academic concern exists. It was also noted that Math continues to be a challenge as students can be moved forward without grasping a specific skill or strand. Assessments have been increased and implemented in Grades 1 and 2 and the rigor is being increased in Kindergarten to build stronger skill level foundations.

Upcoming Meeting Presentations – Communication – what are we doing well, not doing well, what are the expectations for staff, how can we improve, what are the various forms of communications for parents, teachers, principals, etc., consistency, inconsistency, frequency and substance of communications used. Board Self-Evaluation is April 29.

Facilities Committee – Ms. Coleman reviewed the March 13 meeting which received an update on the Town Ad Hoc Building Committee, capital budget, building/maintenance issues prioritized by year and energy management issues going forward. The next meeting is April 10.

Finance Committee – Dr. Fleischman presented the 2019/20 program budgets reviewed at the Finance Committee meeting for adoption inclusive of Summer Enrichment, Cafeteria and Extended Day as well as an increase in PreK tuition.

MOTION #3 – 2019 SUMMER ENRICHMENT PROGRAM

Move that we approve the 2019 budget for the Summer Enrichment Program as presented.

Dr. Fleischman
Second by Ms. Piascyk
UNANIMOUS

MOTION #4 – 2019/20 EXTENDED DAY BUDGET

Move that we approve the 2019/20 budget for the Extended Day program as presented.

Dr. Fleischman
Second by Ms. Piascyk
UNANIMOUS

MOTION #5 – 2019/20 CAFETERIA BUDGET

Move that we approve the 2019/20 Cafeteria Budget as presented.

Dr. Fleischman
Second by Ms. Piascyk
UNANIMOUS

MOTION #6 – 2019/20 PREK TUITION

Move that we increase PreK tuition to \$2,000 per student for the 2019/20 school year.

Dr. Fleischman
Second by Ms. Piascyk
UNANIMOUS

Curriculum Committee – Ms. Piascyk noted the committee met on March 14 to receive a presentation on Technology. The April 11 meeting will review programming for Special Education, SRBI, IEP's and students-at-risk.

Policy Committee Overview – Ms. Genovese noted that 217 policies were reviewed by CABA with 85% considered appropriate as written and 79 new policies were suggested, five of which have been brought to Board level.

Policy Committee – Ms. Genovese indicated the committee met on February 28 and reviewed the three policies submitted for 30-day review under the consent agenda and presented three policies for adoption. The next meeting is April 4. It was suggested the Policy Committee develop a policy on FMLA given the comments received this evening.

MOTION #7 – POLICIES FOR ADOPTION

Move that we adopt Policies 3542.22 Food Service Personnel-Code of Conduct, 3542.43 Lunch Charging and 5125.11 HIPPA as submitted.

Dr. Fleischman
Second by Ms. Genovese
UNANIMOUS

CABE Liaison – Ms. Genovese noted the availability of the Governor’s budget on a webinar and the lobbying 101 video on YouTube. Ms. Shavers attended the Leadership Conference and the minority/diversity recruitment database created by the CSDE to promote certified minority candidates. It was suggested that we develop hard and specific goals rather than aspirational messages within the context of the minority recruitment policy.

NEW BUSINESS – None

PUBLIC COMMENT – None

The Board entered Executive Session to discuss two certified staff personnel issues.

MOTION #7 – EXECUTIVE SESSION

Move that we enter Executive Session (10:22 PM).

Dr. Fleischman
Second by Mr. Luciani
UNANIMOUS

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STAFF: Mr. Robert Gilbert, Superintendent; Al Pullo, Director of Business Services/Operations

MOTION #8 – PUBLIC SESSION

Move that we return to Public Session (10:32 PM).

Dr. Fleischman
Second by Ms. Genovese
UNANIMOUS

MOTION TO ADJOURN: (10:33PM)
Ms. Hamilton
Second by Mr. Luciani
UNANIMOUS

Recorded by Marsha DeGennaro, Clerk of the Board