

MINUTES OF THE REGULAR WOODBRIDGE BOARD OF EDUCATION MEETING

Tuesday, April 21, 2020

Via WebEx Video

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

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: Sandy Stein, BOS Liaison; Tom Kenefick, BOF Liaison; Joi Prud'homme, PTO; James Crawford, Larissa Crocco, Kristin DeManche, Carson Echeverry, Kim Franklin, Stephanie Goldberg, Kris Hart-Rooney, Emily Jacober, Melissa Labbe, Aimee Meacham, Teresa Nakouzi, Elisa Rosner, Sue Simoniello, Nancy Smerekanicz, Mary Vincitorio, and Cathy Zdrowski, Teachers; Wendy Glynn, CSEA; Pua Ford and Erin Williamson, community.

CORRESPONDENCE – Ms. Genovese noted that an email had been received from a community member regarding the social emotional health and well-being of students.

PUBLIC COMMENT – Dr. Fleischman advised everyone that if a letter was sent in for Public Comment, it was not necessary to read it verbally as it was available and viewable in eMeeting by Board members as well as the general public. Everyone was asked to limit their comments to three minutes and reminded that in accordance with policy the Board would not address individual comments.

Ms. Prud'homme inquired whether Board members had received copies of the 32 letters sent to members of the Board of Finance as those letters do not appear readily available to the public-at-large. Families were upset that their voices were not heard. It was agreed that the request would be made for all the letters sent to the Board of Finance to be shared with each member of the Board of Education.

CONSENT AGENDA

MOTION #1 – CONSENT AGENDA

Move that we approve the consent agenda as presented.

Ms. Piascyk

Second by Mr. Cowan

UNANIMOUS

REPORTS

Leadership Plan – Superintendent Gilbert presented the district contingency plan for as mandated by the CSDE during the Covid-19 pandemic. Each Superintendent is required to identify coverage for any time spent out of district. This plan also outlines back-up coverage should an administrator experience a short-term illness. 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 for a more broadly detailed succession plan and process that allows for the Board to identify the criteria, speak with candidates and individually select the candidates. It was also suggested that shared services among the BOWA districts be explored as well as documentation supplied for what other districts are doing. It was noted that this is a short-term plan that allows for daily back-up and that if long-term coverage was required, i.e. 3-6 months or more, a different set of options and process would be utilized. The Board requested detailed staffing information to be shared and indicated further discussion would occur at the next meeting.

Superintendent Report – Superintendent Gilbert apprised the Board on implementation of Distance Learning, Board of Finance action to reduce the 2020/21 budget proposal by approximately \$115,000, communication from the First Selectman requesting all boards and commissions to conduct only meetings deemed essential to business, receipt of a \$64,700 technology grant, the BOWA food service program, finalization of the new Owner/Operator Transportation

Contract as well as a \$16,000 credit for this school year, deferment on the search for an assistant principal until next spring, commencement of summer program online registrations and the start of the hiring process for several positions - .5 psychologist, .5 speech/language pathologist, two elementary classroom teachers as well as a special education resource teacher. Several Board members expressed discontent at the prospect of not conducting business as usual and urged holding board and committee meetings. As elected officials they have an obligation to conduct the business of education and whether that is through the use of web technology platforms or another format, they should not be neglectful of their duty. It was agreed that it would be the prerogative of committee chairs to determine if it was necessary to convene their committees.

Survey Update – Superintendent Gilbert recommended deferment of the parent/staff/student survey for this year given the stressors associated with Covid-19 and the possibility of skewing historical data. Suggestions were made for designing an in-house survey comprised of 5-6 questions that could provide feedback on distance learning which could then guide decisions for improvement in the future. It would be helpful to know what is and is not working and what types of challenges exist. It was also noted that Panorama has developed a mini-survey focused on social emotional adjustments and distance learning and it may be possible to use this as a template instead of creating one.

BRS Update – Ms. Sherman noted the first remotely held faculty meeting, teacher/parent collaboration for daily remote instruction, consistent and regular communication with parents, parent/principal virtual meetings and the donation by our Technology Department of 600 3d mask extenders to CT Hospice, St. Francis and Yale Hospitals. Ms. Merrill noted the car/bus parade on April 2 and Ms. Mammen provided an update on schedule coordination with families to ensure that individual student needs are being met.

Communication Plan – Superintendent Gilbert presented an update on the internal and external communications with staff, parents and the community-at-large. Noted changes from the prior year include web site enhancement, on-line registration, change-over to the Swift K12 alert system, social media initiation via Instagram and creation of monthly parent/principal conversations.

Assistant Principal Search – Superintendent Gilbert recommended retention of Ms. Merrill as Assistant Principal for another year and postponing the search for an Assistant Principal to the spring of 2021. Given the uncertainty for the return of Covid-19 and what the new norm may be continuity of seasoned staff is critical at this juncture.

MOTION #2 – ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF APPOINTMENT (MERRILL)

Move that we ratify the appointment of Doreen Merrill as Assistant Principal for one year only effective July 1, 2020 through June 30, 2021 at a salary of \$132,057 for the 2020/21 school year.

Ms. Piascyk

Second by Dr. Townsend

UNANIMOUS

MOTION #3 – SEARCH FOR ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL

Move that we authorize the Superintendent to conduct a search for a building assistant principal in the spring of 2021.

Ms. Piascyk

Second by Dr. Townsend

UNANIMOUS

Upcoming Meeting Presentation – CAPSS Superintendent/Student Award is presented annually to a student from each Grade 6 class. The presentation occurs 30 minutes prior to commencement of the regular session at the May meeting.

Finance Committee – Ms. Shavers noted the attendance of 45 participants at the Town Preliminary Budget Hearing and acknowledged letters and various testimony directed at the Town Board of Finance for reducing the 2020/21 operating budget by \$115K. While the Board of Finance does not have line item control and merely establishes the budget figure with the Board of Education determining the specific allocation of those funds, it is important that the Board of Finance understand the impact this reduction will have on staffing and programming. Further, the town has no control over the Amity budget only Beecher. It was noted that while the number of houses remain fairly steady, the BRS student population has increased 7-8% each year over the last 3-4 years. The 0.76% budget increase is accurate based on current need. The reduction made by the Board of Finance was predicated by the belief that a SRO is not a necessity and leaves the Board in a very comfortable position. It was also clarified that while the Board of Education budget includes fringe

benefits (fica, medicare, retirement etc.), all other town department budgets do not and are funded by a separate line item in the Town budget of approximately \$3M. Also, it is unknown what we may encounter next year given Covid 19 and what additional or unanticipated expenses may be incurred.

Shared Services – A suggestion was made to explore the sharing of legal services among the BOWA districts as well as the possibility of engaging an in-house attorney. It was pointed out that generally school districts retain a law firm as they are able to provide guidance on education law as well as special education and it is highly unlikely that one attorney has expertise in both areas. There are four to six firms state-wide that handle the bulk of school districts across the state. Our legal fees are usually in the range of \$30,000-35,000. This year was an anomaly with an additional \$75,000 directly attributed to teacher arbitration costs. It was agreed the BOWA districts would be contacted to ascertain interest in the sharing legal services. Both Ms. Shavers and Mr. Cowan expressed a desire to personally investigate this issue and report back to the Board at the May meeting.

Facilities Committee – No Report

Policy Committee – Ms. Genovese presented the policies reviewed at the March 10 committee meeting for adoption.

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
WITHDRAWN

Concern was expressed regarding adoption of language in Policy 5000 and it was felt that adequate time had not been provided to adequately prepare, articulate and defend the concerns. It was requested that all of the policies be deferred for adoption to the May meeting to allow for ample preparation time.

CABE Liaison Report – Ms. Genovese highlighted the webinar on emotional intelligence and leadership.

PUBLIC COMMENT – A request was made to discuss public comments pertaining to the elimination of the social worker position. It was noted that public comments are not debated by the Board and this discussion should occur at the next Finance Committee meeting as it affects the 2020/21 budget.

NEW BUSINESS

Superintendent Gilbert presented the certified staff resignation of a teacher currently on leave.

MOTION #5 – CERTIFIED STAFF RESIGNATION (MARROQUIN)

Move that we accept the resignation of Nadia Collado-Marroquin effective June 30, 2020 with regret.

Ms. Piascyk
Second by Ms. Genovese
UNANIMOUS

Superintendent Gilbert presented a leave of absence request by a certified staff member for the 2020/21 school year.

MOTION #6 – CERTIFIED STAFF LEAVE OF ABSENCE (WAGNER)

Move that we grant a leave of absence to Ashley Wagner for the 2020/21 school year.

Ms. Piascyk
Second by Ms. Genovese
UNANIMOUS

MOTION TO ADJOURN: (9:06 PM)

Ms. Piascyk
Second by Mr. Cowan
UNANIMOUS

Recorded by Marsha DeGennaro, Clerk of the Board