

Regular Board of Education Meeting – Approved Minutes
Wednesday, February 16, 2022, 7:00 p.m.
Town Hall Meeting Room

Present Board Members: Kristina Gilton, Monica Logan, Donna Nolan, David Peling, Whitney Sanzo, Sarah Thrall (via Zoom), Rosemarie Weber, and Tess Bajek and Jacob Scotto (Student Reps).

Absent Board Members: None

Rosemarie Weber called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

I. Administrative Reports

I.A. Chairman's Corner

Rosemarie Weber, Vice Board Chair, welcomed our guests tonight especially State Representative Mark Anderson as well as Senators John Kissel and Kevin Witkos who are joining virtually.

I.B. Superintendent's Announcements

- Dr. Grossman welcomed those in attendance and virtually and also welcomed State Senators John Kissel and Kevin Witkos as well as State Representative Mark Anderson who are present this evening to discuss legislative issues with the Board.
- Congratulations to Senior Class President, Maeve Dingley, for receiving a Congressional Citation from the office of United States Representative John Larson for her service and dedication.
- Kelly Lane and Wells Road are running their annual Kids Heart Challenge event this week and have raised over \$10K thus far.
- Attended the middle school play yesterday, *Murder at the Art Show*, which was a terrific performance by the drama club.
- Wells Road had an amazing band and chorus concert last week which was very well attended.
- Had an opportunity today to attend a unified sports basketball game against Rockville and it was great to see this program back up and running this year.
- Online Kindergarten registration began on February 1st and 63 students have registered thus far.
- A Superintendent's Community Conversation will be held on February 24th at 5 p.m. via Zoom. Another one will be held in April to discuss the budget.
- There will be no school on Monday and Tuesday next week for a short February break.
- A CREC/CABE/HASA Legislative Forum will be held tomorrow morning at 9:00 a.m. Let Linda know if you would like to attend
- The next regularly scheduled Board Meeting will be held on March 2nd when the FY23 Administrative Budget will be presented to the Board.
- Dr. Grossman shared later on in the agenda, Mrs. Parsons will present the Stronger Together Plan as well as review communication sent out of his office yesterday regarding optional masking.

Rosemarie Weber stated she would be remiss if she did not also welcome First Selectman, Mark Fiorentino, and Town Manager, Erica Robertson, also present this evening to present to the Board.

I.C. Student Representative Reports

- Tess Bajek gave a sports report as follows: Girls' basketball won the NCCC tournament first time ever at GMHS and will be getting the first girls' basketball banner in the gym; boys' basketball is still in their NCCC tournament; both teams will be going to states and both senior nights successful; there was a swim meet and boys' lacrosse meeting today; indoor track has come to an end except Kevin Jones will continue on with states; and, spring sports on their way.
- Singing valentines were a huge success. The choir sold 98 in-person and 12 online valentines.
- Some DECA members took the DECA exam last week and will be getting scores back soon.
- Granby is hosting a smaller music festival in lieu of Northern Regionals on March 26th from 9 am-2 pm.

- NHS is running Random Acts of Kindness this week at the high school. Jacob stated this is actually Tess's service project for NHS. Tess stated students were all given heart shaped kisses and something special was also done for teachers and teaching assistants.
- The NHS fundraiser Empty Bowls will be held in the High School Commons on March 18th at 5 p.m. with live music. Proceeds will benefit the Granby and Hartland Food Banks.

I.D. Town of Granby Strategic Plan Discussion

Erica Robertson, Town Manager, and Mark Fiorentino, First Selectman, discussed the strategic plan process for the Town of Granby with the Board. Mr. Fiorentino stated he is aware that the BOE has developed a strategic plan of their own and would like the BOE to participate in the town's strategic plan /strategic goals. He would like to develop a set of goals for all stakeholder groups and asked for 1 or 2 goals from the BOE. This document would help to guide the town's decisions especially budget decisions about how resources are allocated. Mr. Fiorentino stated it is very valuable to have these regular discussions on how we can work together to coordinate our efforts and that the process is not perfect; however, he expects there will be much learning along the way. The BOE should focus on how the BOS can assist the BOE. Once proposals are gathered, workshops will be held with Q&A and discussions. A draft set of goals (between 10-15 goals) will be adopted and circulated to all Boards and Commissions. Once fully adopted, the plan will be distributed town-wide. Proposed goals should be submitted to Mark Fiorentino and Erica Robertson by May 1, 2022. Erica Robertson stated she has been in Granby 5 months and is very happy with the relationship she has formed with the Board of Education. She asked the Board to consider when writing their goals what the BOE can do to assist with goals relating to students and learning. These goals can extend to town departments such as Parks & Recreation and Youth Services.

I.E. Guest Legislators

Senators John Kissel and Kevin Witkos as well as State Representative Mark Anderson discussed legislative issues with the Board. Senator Kissel stated it is so nice to hear from young people as it reaffirms optimism for the future. Results of the special session for a vote to extend the emergency in place until the end of June 30th (he voted no). He stated he spoke to Ms. Thrall last week and knows Granby is prepared for this transition. Senator Kissel also stated it is an election year so it will be a good year for funding and tax cuts and that he sees good policies in place with a spending cap and bonding cap and sees no cuts coming to towns. Additionally, he mentioned the Universal PreK program which may be fully funded by the state.

Kevin Witkos congratulated the girls' basketball team stating it is very uplifting as well as hearing about the singing valentines. He stated he had a private meeting with the Commissioner of Public Health and she does not see anything that would change the deliverance of authority to Boards of Education regarding face masks. He shared the deadline for bill submission has passed and most committees are figuring out what to pass. With regard to a bill before Education Committee, a bill from last year to provide education grants, there could be a public hearing and a change to the first student grant (magnet, voag, tech) into one pot which may change formulas if the legislature decides to take it up. Financially, the state of Connecticut is doing quite well and paying down long-term obligations. He also spoke of the shortage in teacher staffing with a loss of 750 educators in public school education and was curious if Granby has suffered the loss of many teachers.

Mark Anderson stated he feels discretionary unmasking is great and he voted for parental choice. He stated he noticed there were only 9 construction grants approved in the state this year and Granby is one of them. He stated he also looked at pending legislation and Senate Bill 47 looks interesting with a possible increase in special education funding which can have a big effect on Granby's budget if it passes. Kevin Witkos added regarding school construction grants that HVAC systems can now be standalone projects for school district.

Dr. Grossman shared that Senator Witkos announced he will not be running for State Senator and thanked him for his service. With regard to Senator Witkos's question about teacher retention, Granby is struggling as teachers are going to other towns that pay more money. He stated it is not easy being a teacher right now; however, mitigation strategies are starting to go away making it easier for teachers and students. Dr. Grossman thanked Mark Anderson for bringing up the news about Granby's construction grant stating this is something that the BOE and town worked on together. With regard to the special education Excess Cost Grant, Granby budgets 72% but he would be remiss if he didn't ask for 100%. Dr. Grossman also stated he will follow the funding on HVAC systems.

Questions were opened up to the Board. David Peling inquired if virtual learning will occur in the fall of 2022. John Kissel stated in-person learning is better for teachers and students. He stated the mask policy is very hindering for younger students for learning as well as socially. He stated we should strive to maintain classrooms and he is hoping we have turned a corner and on our way out of this pandemic.

Monica Logan inquired about Senate Bill 47 related to special education funding, specifically, if any of the legislators support funding for the social/emotional support for students who may have been impacted due to the pandemic. Kevin Witkos stated this is one of the focuses of the legislature at this time and that many bills have to do with mental health for students not only K-12 but also for higher level learning. John Kissel stated Senate Bill #1 has many provisions regarding mental health; however, it is difficult to find personnel who are highly trained and qualified. The pandemic put a lot of pressure on school children for a variety of reasons so putting more resources into the system would be great. Additionally, he stated funding should be adequate for these resources. Mark Anderson stated he agrees with the senators and the pandemic has put a strain on mental health and that a counselor available for students would be very valuable.

Dr. Grossman requested for the legislators to stay for the next discussion regarding Granby's Stronger Together Plan. Rosemarie Weber thanked the legislators for attending.

I.F. Assistant Superintendent's Report

Ms. Jennifer Parsons, Assistant Superintendent, provided an update on the Stronger Together Plan and stated work began on the plan in May of 2020 with a Reopening Taskforce who came together and created the plan. After a successful year last year with a total of 106 cases, the Taskforce reconvened last summer and reposted a plan in June. The plan evolved around mitigation strategies and one of the key strategies has been masking. Granby will be required to follow the Executive Order and will follow the DPH and FVHD for any recommendations if the Executive Order expires acknowledging to go to a mask optional scenario. With masks not being recommended or mandated, Granby will be able to go to a mask optional setting. The district will continue to encourage handwashing, sanitizing and attention to ventilation systems. Additionally, new options are screening and testing with at home COVID tests available on an as-needed basis. Ms. Parsons also mentioned the partnership with FVHD to facilitate vaccination clinics in order to get the best possible vaccination rate for our staff and students.

Ms. Parsons shared where the district is now. The Stronger Together Plan was reposted in December and the district recently received notice anticipating guidance from the DPH and CSDE on recommendations moving forward on when masks will not be mandated. Cases have slowly declined since the December/January months. Farmington Valley rates are tending favorably in the state. CDC makes recommendations for the entire country and their recommendations are based on trends. The state continues to trend more favorably than the country and the Farmington Valley tends to trend favorably over the state.

Dr. Grossman stated the Governor held a press conference and recommended to legislators to end the mask mandate on February 28th. The district waited a few days until House voted that the mandate would end on February 28th and proceeded to email the community to let the community know. The executive powers are in the Commissioner's hands until February 28th and on February 28th this becomes a local decision. On February 28th according to our plan, with no Executive Order and support from the DPH and FVHD that the Granby Public Schools will go mask optional on February 28th recognizing there will be people who will and will not wear masks. Rosemarie Weber shared she was on the Reopening Taskforce Committee and felt the product the Committee came up with was extremely comprehensive and addressed all concerns to the best of their ability. In keeping with that plan, Granby has done amazing things. Our administration has always been steadfast in following this plan, of course with the guidance of medical professionals, and will end up in a good place for our staff and students. Kristina Gilton stated that she was also on the Committee and agreed Granby should continue to follow the plan and with the partnership we have, the plan is flexible to make sure the right decisions are made. Dr. Grossman summarized by stating we will follow the plan and there will be no vote tonight. The plan is clear. If there is no Executive Order and we have backing by the DPH and FVHD, Granby will be mask optional. This will most likely be communicated to the community again next week once more guidance is obtained.

I. Public Comment

Michelle Courser, West Granby, inquired about the retention of teachers and if there is any consideration around a retention bonus. Dr. Grossman stated there is nothing in the contract but he will contact her to discuss this. She also inquired if some consideration will be given whether students are vaccinated or not regarding mask wearing and Dr. Grossman stated masks are optional regardless of vaccination status.

Nicholas D'Amato, 3 Rickwood Lane, Granby. He stated he is happy to hear masks will be optional on the 28th but is sorry it took so long. He shared a Cease and Desist Notice which he had for the Board regarding mask wearing and potential mandates for vaccines in the future. He stated mitigation for COVID should not violate constitutional rights. He also wanted to share his submission of a FOIA request for the district's limited liability policy and also how the two ESSER grant installments were spent.

Tim Ruwet, North Granby stated one of the major reasons he moved here was for the school system and is looking forward to his 3 children attending Granby Public Schools. He stated he is hopeful that masks are gone on March 1st and informed the Board they are not making a blind decision and there is a very logical reason to avoid masks from here on out. He asked the Board to put the power back to the parents for their children.

Mike Guglielmono, North Granby stated he has noticed a change in his student's appetite for attending school due to having to wear masks at all times. He also shared his 5-year-old has never known a "normal day of school". He stated he appreciates the efforts taken to have in-person learning and that it was very hard for his family during remote learning.

Dana Lowes Hobson, Round Hill Road, commented she is concerned about some of the special activities taking away from the core education in town especially with math scores for 5th grade at Wells Road being very low. She expressed her concern about what Granby is doing to address core learning issues for reading, writing and mathematics and stated she is not seeing the extra time to support mathematics. She would appreciate it the elementary level would spend more time on core education subjects.

Jennifer Anderson, Greenwoods Road, North Granby, stated she applauds the mask option as it has been a hard two years. Going forward, she inquired if the vaccine becomes an issue, if natural immunity can also be addressed in the future.

Oleg Ivanov, North Granby Road, Granby stated he has a very strong opinion against masking. At the last graduation students wore masks outside which was pretty silly. He stated masks should have been optional since September and that he appreciates the time given to him by Dr. Grossman and to be heard and he looks forward to students removing their masks soon.

II. Consent Agenda

III.A. Minutes

A motion was made by Donna Nolan and seconded by David Peling that the Granby Board of Education adopt the consent agenda. This motion passed unanimously at 8:21 p.m.

III. Old Business

IV.A. Business Manager's Report

Ms. Anna Robbins, Business Manager, presented the January statement of accounts stating 5 months of school are complete and things are starting to wind down. This month's forecast is \$104K positive which is \$49K lower than last month. Overall special education expenditures are projected to be over-budget which is worse than last month by \$134K. The special education forecast is negatively affected by the elimination of the Rideshare Program run by CREC due to driver shortages and fuel prices. This has contributed to increased loss; however, the district looking to make collaborative transportation efforts where available and CREC has been very cooperative in pulling this together. Regular education is \$210K which is better by \$86K. The driver for positive forecast has been savings in regular education by consolidating bus routes. The Q&D Fund balance is favorable due to carryover of a favorable fund balance from previous years. Revenue to the town is better than budgeted. Rosemarie Weber stated the Finance Subcommittee reviewed and accepted the statement of accounts this evening.

IV.B. FY23 Budget Update

Dr. Grossman provided an update to the Board on the FY23 Budget stating the BOF met last night and established budget guidelines. The BOE guideline is a 3.78%. The Plus One Budget was 4.26%. He will be working with the administrative team and will present the budget at the next BOE meeting on March 2nd.

IV. New Business

V.A. Graduation Date

Dr. Grossman discussed setting the date for the high school graduation and stated this year he asked students to be involved in this decision and they came back with a great idea presented this evening. The current last day of school is Friday, June 10th. A motion was made by David Peling and seconded by Donna Nolan that the Granby Board of Education approve the date for the high school graduation ceremony to be Thursday, June 9, 2022 with a rain date on Friday, June 10, 2022 (held indoors if it rains).

V. Miscellaneous

VI.A. Board Standing Committee Reports

VI.A.1. Curriculum/Policy/Technology/Communication

This subcommittee has not met.

VI.A.2. Finance/Personnel/Facilities

Rosemarie Weber stated this subcommittee met this evening to discuss the following: January Statement of Accounts; Indoor Air Quality Report for each of the schools with very favorable feedback and some areas to be looked into; bus contract which will be presented to the full Board on March 2nd; fuel bid update; and, received a building committee update including upcoming meetings with the State Department prior to bid.

VI.B. Other Board-Related Reports

VI.B.1. CREC/CABE

There was nothing to report this evening.

VI.B.2. Granby Education Foundation

Whitney Sanzo reported the next GEF Meeting will be held on February 23rd and the GranBee will be held on April 22nd.

VI.C. Calendar of Events

Calendar of events was as reported.

VI.D. Board Member Announcements

There were no Board member announcements this evening.

VI.E. Action Items

1) Mark Fiorentino requested proposed goals from the BOE be sent to him by May 1st.

VI. Executive Session/Non-Meeting

There was no need to enter into an Executive Session this evening. A motion was made by David Peling and seconded by Kristina Gilton to adjourn the meeting. This motion passed unanimously at 8:36 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Donna Nolan
Board Secretary