

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

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

MINUTES – March 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, Middle School Assistant Principal Cheryl Milo, Meeting House Hill School Principal James Mandracchia, Meeting House Hill School Assistant Principal Allyson Story, Consolidated School Principal Rob Spino, Director of Curriculum Alyce Misuraca, Special Education Supervisor Melissa Busnel, Athletic Director Mark Ottusch and State Senator Julie Kushner

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. February 18, 2021- Regular meeting - approved by consensus

IV. APPROVAL OF AGENDA - approved by consensus

V. OPEN CHOICE

Superintendent of Schools Dr. Pat Cosentino gave a brief presentation about the Open Choice program in Connecticut. This program has been in Connecticut since 1997 and the purpose is to improve academic performance, reduce racial, ethnic and economic isolation and to provide a choice of educational programs. This program is strictly voluntary and would be determined by a vote of the Board of Education. If decided, students would come to New Fairfield from Danbury beginning in the 2022-2023 school year. There are no direct costs to the district, and the district would receive \$3,000 in grant funding for each student that it accepts.

State Senator Julie Kushner spoke of the Open Choice Program and noted that any students accepted must be allowed to stay throughout their entire school year. She spoke of the possible interest in other surrounding school districts such as Ridgefield and Sherman and the possibility of sending Danbury students to surrounding districts. She noted that this program is strictly voluntary for the families.

There was a brief discussion of the Board members regarding the Open Choice Program and specifically, Special Education. It was noted that the sending district would pay for all Special Education expenses. There were some questions about the timeline for decisions for this program. Senator Kushner will look into a timeline for this and get back to the Board in the near future.

VI. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Amy Tarnowski spoke of the Fine Arts and the need for a Fine Arts Director for Grades K-12. She asked the Board of carefully consider funding this position and make sure that a qualified candidate is hired.

Nick Thiel-Hudson asked about the Open Choice program and how will it foster academic achievement and diversity, and if there will be an extra burden to the taxpayers. He asked for data from other schools that engaged in this program.

Liz Marriott spoke of her concerns about the possible reduction to the ELC program.

VII. BOARD AND ADMINISTRATIVE COMMUNICATIONS

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

- The BOE will present its budget to the BOF this Saturday, March 6 at 10:45 a.m. Board members are encouraged to attend.

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

- Congratulated the Academic Decathlon Team for winning State Championships.
- Congratulated Katherine Matz for receiving 10 free days of Professional Development coaching in Special Education through the Connecticut Association of Schools.
- Thanked Selectman Khris Hall, John McCartney and everyone involved in the New Fairfield/Sherman COVID-19 vaccination clinic for all their hard work.
- The budget will be presented to the BOF on Saturday, March 6th. The proposed budget has an increase of 2.48% over last year's budget.
- Encouraged everyone to continue to practice COVID safety precautions due to an uptick in cases in New Fairfield.
- High School Principal James D'Amico made the following announcements:
 - The Valedictorian for this year is Anna Kozloski.
 - The Salutatorian for this year is Nicholas Thiel-Hudson.
 - Cayden Walker has been elected the President of the National Honor Society.
- Assistant Superintendent Julie Luby explained the schedules for remote learning and specifically, the differences between PreK-5th grades and 6th -12th grades. New Fairfield teachers will give a presentation about virtual learning at the March 18th BOE meeting.

C. Student Representatives' Report

Junior Representative Cayden Walker reported on the following:

- Congratulated the Academic Decathlon team for winning State Championships.
- Congratulated many New Fairfield High School students for being accepted in the Western Regional Music Festival.
- Congratulated the Math Team.
- Noted that the SEE project panels will start next week. The total number of internship hours have been reduced in order to allow for more online projects.

Senior Representative Nick Thiel-Hudson noted that:

- All Juniors will participate in SAT Boot Camp on March 10th and take the SATs on March 24th.
- All choirs at NFHS will work with Conductor Z. Randall Stroope via Zoom.

D. Committee Reports

1. Curriculum - Dominic Cipollone noted that this subcommittee met on February 22nd and discussed:

- SAT Boot Camp and test taking strategies.
- The possibility of on-line assessments for Grades 3-8.
- Having the high school and middle school on the same schedule that will allow for more flexibility.
- Spoke of Parent/Teacher conferences.

E. Liaison Reports

1. Safety Committee - Ed Sbordone noted that this committee met on February 25th and discussed:

- Bus service;
- Tools for Schools Update;
- Food service was reviewed and all is well;
- Over 400 people have been registered for the COVID-19 vaccine clinic at the Senior Center.

2. School Security and Safety Committee - Samantha Mannion noted that the last meeting was cancelled. This will be rescheduled sometime in the near future. An Executive Session of the BOE will be held in the near future to get an update of School Security.

VII. INFORMATION ITEMS

A. ELC Update - Pupil Personnel Director Katherine Matz gave a presentation of the ELC program and reminded everyone that this is a Special Education Program for preschool age students. Typical students attend this program in order to give students time with non-disabled peers. This program cannot have more than 50% of its students with IEPs (Individual Education Plan). She spoke of the benefits for inclusion for both typical and special needs students.

There was a discussion of the current enrollment and it was noted that there are currently six sessions with 14 students each. Currently 32% of the students have IEPs. Projected numbers for next year were discussed as well as the budget impact of adding back an ELC teacher and whether or not it is a priority in the district.

B. Virtual Enrichment Update - Julie Luby spoke of the many virtual enrichment opportunities and thanked the many teachers that agreed to teach these classes. These classes began last spring. Examples of classes include yoga, photography, cooking, baking, work outs, financial planning and SAT prep. There is no cost for these classes to the families as they are funded through the Derx Foundation.

C. Board of Education Policies (First Reading)

1. Bylaw 9260 - Board Member Protection
2. Bylaw 9310 - Development, Distribution and Maintenance of Manual of Policies, Regulations, Bylaws
3. Bylaw 9311 - Formulation, Adoption, Amendment of Policies
4. Bylaw 9312 - Formulation, Adoption, Amendment of Bylaws
5. Bylaw 9313 - Formulation, Adoption, Amendment of Administrative Regulations

6. Bylaw 9314 - Suspension of Policies, Bylaws, Regulations
7. Bylaw 9320 - Board of Education Meeting
8. Bylaw 9321 - Time, Place, Notification of Meetings, Quorum
9. Bylaw 9321.21 - Board of Education Organizational Meeting
10. Bylaw 9322 - Public and Executive Sessions
11. Bylaw 9323 - Construction of the Agenda/Actions by the Board

Policy 6146 and Bylaw 9324 will go back to the subcommittee for further review.

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

Dr. Rich Sanzo gave an update on the high school and Consolidated School building projects. There have been two Public Hearings with the Zoning Commission regarding the high school project and Meeting House Hill School. The Zoning Commission Public Hearing for Consolidated will be on Monday, March 8th at 7:30 pm via Zoom. He encouraged Board members to attend.

Dr. Sanzo spoke of misconceptions with the lot at the old Consolidated School. He noted that this will be a bus lot and will not be visible from the road.

VIII. ACTION ITEMS

A. Personnel Report

MOTION: Kathy Baker made a motion to approve the Personnel Report as of February 25, 2021, as recommended by the administration. Ed Sbordone 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. New Course Proposals

MOTION: Kathy Baker made a motion to recommend to the full Board the approval of the Exploring Sports and Outdoor Literature course, The Power of Language: Ethics, Persuasion, and Manipulation course, Film as Literature course and Exploring Justice and Injustice course as presented by the administration. 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

C. Retirement Settlement

MOTION: Kimberly LaTourette made a motion to recommend to the full Board approval to award the retirement settlement bonus per Article 48 for those eligible teachers who, by Thursday, April 1, 2021, tender their resignation to be effective at the end of this school year. 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

D. Continuation of Health Benefits

MOTION: Kimberly LaTourette made a motion to recommend to the full Board approval to authorize the Superintendent to offer continuation of health insurance benefits for teachers who notify the intent to resign by Friday, April 30, 2021. 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

IX. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Amy Howley spoke of the ELC program and referenced the January 5th BOE meeting regarding class sizes and enrollment for the program.

X. FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS - None

XI. BOARD MEMBER COMMENTS

Greg Flanagan asked for more information on the Open Choice program.

Dominic Cipollone congratulated students on many awards.

Samantha Mannion thanked High School Principal James D'Amico and high school teachers for online conferences and noted that they were extremely well run and suggested this format for the future.

Ed Sbordone encouraged everyone to attend the budget presentations this Saturday, March 6th. The BOS will present at 9:00 a.m. and the BOE will present at 10:45 a.m.

Kimberly LaTourette congratulated students that have won awards. She spoke of her concerns with the possibility of having the Athletic Director head the Fine Arts Department.

Rick Regan spoke of the misconceptions with the ELC program and spoke of the possibility of the district doing a better job communicating the purpose of ELC.

Peggy Katkocin thanked everyone that presented tonight and encouraged everyone to attend the budget presentations.

XII. ADJOURNMENT

MOTION: Peggy Katkocin made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 8:59 p.m. 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

Respectfully submitted,
Suzanne Kloos