

**(Please note: these minutes are in draft form and not yet approved by the Board of Education)**

A Meeting of the Regional School District 14 Board of Education was held on Monday, October 4, 2010, at 7:30 p.m. in the Nonnewaug High School Library, 5 Minortown Road, Woodbury, Connecticut.

Present: Superintendent Robert D. Cronin, Ph.D.; Board Chair Stephen Sordi, Board members Scott Baider, George Bauer, Linda Bulvanoski, Deborah Corsico, Charles Cosgriff, Gary Suslavich and Pamela Zmek; and Director of Finance and Operations Jay Hubelbank

Audience members included: BES Principal Melinda McKenna; WMS Principal Alice Jones and Assistant Principal Eric Bergeron, Mitchell Elementary School Principal MaryLou Torre; Region 14 teachers and staff Nancy Ayre, Vinita Chapman, Tricia Dannenhoffer, Don Marsh and Helen Stewart; two members of the press and approximately twenty-five members of the community.

I. Call to Order

Mr. Sordi called the meeting to order at 7:32 p.m.

II. Pledge of Allegiance

Mr. Sordi led the Pledge of Allegiance

III. Recognition

Dr. Cronin recognized, in turn, retiring teachers Pat Gage and Alex Thomson. Ms. Gage had retired this past June after 24 years with Region 14, her entire teaching career; and, likewise, Mr. Thomson left teaching this past spring after devoting his entire 30 career to Region 14 students. Each was given a remembrance gift and Mr. Thomson addressed the audience briefly.

IV. Introduction

Dr. Cronin introduced this year's President of the senior class at Nonnewaug High School, Joe Pistritto who introduced the other members of the class council: Steve Aleandri, Vice President; Jenny Dressel, Treasurer; and Chelsea Gough, Secretary. Joe updated the board on events at his school, including a recent blood drive and an all day retreat for students who will participate in the 10/7 "What's Up with Our Kids" program. He gave dates for school play auditions, a Team Beta Tech Fest (10/9), Eighth Grade Open House (10/14), Fall pep rally (10/22), Trick or Treat Street (10/23), Homecoming Dance (10/29), and FFA Hunter Pace (10/31). He explained that he and the other student council reps will alternate appearances at future board meetings. Mary Harrison was also introduced. She had competed for a spot as a student representative to the State Board of Education; and, although she was among the five finalists for two positions, she was chosen instead to be part of the state's student advisory council.

V. Review of Minutes (Action Anticipated)

Mr. Sordi requested a *motion to approve the minutes from the regular board meeting of September 20, 2010*. Motion entered by: Mr. Baider. Second: Mr. Suslavich. **Motion carried 7-0-1** with Mr. Cosgriff abstaining, not having been present at that meeting.

**VI. Reconfiguration**

Dr. Cronin made a statement concerning the background and current status of reconfiguration, pleading with the Board to resolve the issue as soon as possible, within the next two months, for the sake of all involved but particularly the students.

Mr. Sordi presented a draft of a letter to parents and asked the board to review it.

Ms. Corsico noted that the rescheduling of the planning committee meeting on barely 24 hours notice would make it impossible for her to attend. Mr. Baider explained the rescheduling as due to the rescheduling of NHS open house.

Ms. Zmek noted that the Public/Community Relation committee had met this evening and reviewed a draft outline of the report format.

Mr. Suslavich reported that the Finance committee had met last week and is waiting for the outcomes of the other committees. Staffing levels and the general process was discussed. He stressed that these are working meetings and urged waiting for answers in the final report as some information from the meetings is no longer valid.

Mr. Baider said that the Planning committee met on 9/23; reviewed a host of information they are tasked to address; put answers together for most issues; and that CMT scores will be reviewed at tomorrow's meeting. Asked by Ms. Corsico whether a teacher survey will be addressed at that meeting, Mr. Baider responded that it would.

Mr. Bauer's Facilities committee, at its last meeting, looked at Mitchell Elementary School and the use of that facility from an historical perspective, as well as information on projected enrollment. The boundary line was discussed, as well as an expanded line, along with teacher requirements for each, and recommended class sizes and classroom assignments. Their next meeting will be on 10/13.

Dr. Cronin asked whether the new boundary line will be known prior to referendum.

Mr. Sordi replied that this is an administration issue but that it will be addressed. Judge Pickard had spoken of adjustments to the line, which has not always followed the town line. The language of the plan is not violated by setting the boundary line and has always been left up to the schools, he said.

Mr. Hubelbank said that he can identify where the students live, and that the current system can pinpoint where they live now, but the question is whether a line would be clearly determined for longer term use.

Mr. Sordi responded that future boards will need flexibility to adjust it; and, doing so every year is unreasonable but that the line would be set to create equity.

Mr. Hubelbank noted that whereas the old line would not, a new line would make both schools about equal in terms of current population.

Mr. Bauer felt that a set boundary could equalize enrollment pretty well.

Dr. Cronin asked again whether the board will be explicit about the line prior to referendum. Both Mr. Sordi and Mr. Baider said it would.

Dr. Cronin commented that the questions that keep coming up among the public are where the line will be and what the referendum question will be. He asked if both will be clear before the vote.

Mr. Sordi said the question will have to be clear for the 10-47(c). Ms. Corsico asked if there is a reason for waiting on the formation of the question. Mr. Sordi said they have been overwhelmed with meetings. She asked wouldn't counsel be writing it, to which he replied that he will contact counsel.

Ms. Corsico asked about correspondence previously referenced by Mr. Sordi. If it was addressed to the full board, she asked that the response to it be copied to the full board.

**VII. Correspondence**

Mr. Sordi noted correspondence from ASAP about the upcoming program on 10/7, "What's Up with Our Kids?" at 6:30 pm on that night. Dr. Cronin added that students from WMS and NHS will be involved, and urged attendance.

Mr. Sordi followed up on the email that was called into question at the last meeting. He had forwarded the request for email addresses of the new board members to Ericka Barber and Pam Gengenbach just to see if the person sending the request was a person who had endorsed them. The email contained no confidential school information. He is not part of a PAC, but one of the people who signed a petition against reconfiguration. He has friends who oppose it as well as those who are in favor of it.

#### VIII. Report from Chairperson

Mr. Sordi requested a *motion to add, under New Business, discussion/possible action on appointment of board counsel*. Motion entered by Mr. Suslavich. Second: Mr. Baider. **Motion carried 8-0.**

Mr. Sordi noted the registration deadline for the CABA convention, asking members to let him know if they would be interested in attending.

#### IX. Report from Superintendent

Dr. Cronin updated the board on the implementation of Scientific Research Based Instruction (SRBI) in all schools. The district level Student Consultation Team (SCT) is gaining as much information as possible to develop a framework on how to look at interventions to be sure they are consistently performed. They will identify a universal screener and come back with information. Some of this work is happening already, with literacy specialists and tutors, and with the math specialists.

#### X. Privilege of the Floor

**Maria Duncan**, Woodbury, appreciated what Mr. Suslavich said about not using the information from committee meetings until the final report is written. She asked, however, how busing 40 additional students, to create a group of 108-112 total, to the other town is somehow preferable to the current process. In this scenario, 112 students will also be taken away from their "hometown school" and she wondered if those who wrote the original plan would have planned, or been pleased with, this.

**Bob Kolesnik, Jr.**, Woodbury, said that commitment to the region and its children is what motivated those who have been involved for 4 years. He is against reconfiguration but understands others are for it. While the lawsuit he argued is over and it would have been easier to write a letter to Atty. Sommaruga, he came in person to explain that we are laboring under a court order to restore the K-5s and cannot vote not to follow that order. Even if a referendum passes, the order must be followed and the statute, which he read, is not ambiguous. He spoke at great length about how, if 5 board members don't favor an amendment to the plan, don't find it advisable, then the board hasn't met the first element of the statute. He said the 2006 board mistakenly believed Atwood protected them from having to hold a 10-47(c). The unanimous R12 decision requires this board to hold one but Judge Pickard's decision was not subject to referendum. He claimed people in the two towns became divided because the law was not followed; and, he added, if this board proceeds with a referendum, it will draw a lawsuit that it cannot win.

Ms. Corsico responded that the board did follow the law – the precedent at the time was subsequently shredded. Mr. Kolesnik represented the plaintiff, and our best interest would be to follow the legal counsel of the board. She did not realize that legal arguments were going to be heard tonight; if she had, she would have suggested perhaps Atty. Sommaruga should be present, as well. She would hope the board would pursue its own counsel on the matter.

**Brent Bette**, Woodbury, an NHS grad and secondary History teacher, lives in north Woodbury and recalled boarding the school bus at 7:50 am and arriving at school at 8:45 am to attend Bethlehem Elementary. He was in the difficult position of playing Bethlehem baseball but having Woodbury friends. He feels North

Woodbury is consistently the pawn in this struggle and it is not fair for those students to have to be bused to the other town because of a "not in my backyard" mindset. In the midst of this, he wonders where the talk is regarding education. The ship is sinking, he said, and we are rearranging the deck chairs. We are losing momentum and property values, and neighboring R15 is kicking our butt. He is proud to be from Woodbury, very sorry to see Dr. Cronin leaving, but asked that we get back to basics. Woodbury/Bethlehem, he said, is a community.

**Kurt Lavaway**, Woodbury, attended the Facilities committee meeting last week. He asked then, and again here, what is the board's objective in changing the schools back to K-5s? Any plan needs an objective, that is what you start with, and then goals are set from there. He does not know the personal reasons of those who brought the suit, but feels education has certainly changed since 1968. Dr. Cronin has put forth a solution to the towns' problem to deal with their elementary school buildings. His motivation was to take the problem and solve it, which he did, and saved money doing it. There are many benefits and Dr. Cronin has articulated them. Mr. Lavaway asked, again, what the board's goal is, then, in returning to K-5s? Is it because of the lawsuit, he asked? Is the goal to educate students the best you can with the resources you have, or to cram kids into a system that did not work? Dr. Cronin's system works. He would like to hear the board's objective in bringing back the K-5 system.

**Lynne Frederick**, Woodbury, said there was an increase in busing costs since 2006 in the amount of about \$250,000, and time taken off the NHS day to accommodate busing. She asked if teachers are paid for the 15 minutes/day students are not in class.

Mr. Hubelbank said the extra tier of busing costs \$34,000 and teachers work the same hours as prior to reconfiguration; they are contracted for the same amount of time.

**Pam Gengenbach**, Woodbury, agreed with the analogy of the deck chairs; not only CAPt but also CMT scores are disappointing. The spike in enrollment is not holding and we have 200 less students now. This gives a false advantage to a K-2/3-5 configuration though the enrollment spike was somewhat present in the first year of reconfiguration when gym was held in the cafeteria. The overcrowding was shifted to the smaller school. The population is split between 2 unequal sized schools. The board received projections after it reconfigured. Also, scores are the only measurable data against other schools. She was hugely disappointed with the test scores of her son's class.

**Ted Martland**, Woodbury, asked why hire an attorney from Hartford, when they are much more expensive than the ones in Waterbury.

#### **XI. Report from Director of Finance and Operations**

Mr. Hubelbank reported on green cleaning and notification to parents. The region began complying with the green cleaning initiative 2 years ago.

He also passed out copies of a newsletter detailing the savings from Energy Education.

He also spoke of the difficulty in securing substitutes on the rare occasions when one of the 4 R14 nurses is absent. The region compensates sub nurses at a rate considerably lower than neighboring districts, and loses out on subs for that reason. He requested that the board consider increasing the daily rate to \$140.

Ms. Corsico entered a *motion to increase compensation for substitute nurses to \$140/day*. Second by Mr. Cosgriff. **Motion carried 8-0.**

#### **XII. Old Business**

None.

**XIII. New Business (Action Anticipated)**

Ms. Corsico entered a *motion to approve the WMS world language trip to Quebec*. Second by Mr. Baider. **Motion carried 8-0.**

Ms. Corsico entered a *motion to approve the NHS agriscience trip to Toronto*. Second by Mr. Bauer. **Motion carried 8-0.**

Ms. Corsico entered a *motion to approve the cheerleaders' trip to Fairfax, VA*. Second by Mr. Cosgriff. **Motion carried 8-0.**

Ms. Corsico entered a *motion to approve the appointment of Tina Rhodes, 0.5 OT*. Second by Mr. Cosgriff. **Motion carried 8-0.**

Ms. Corsico entered a *motion to approve the extra duty appointments of Barbara Losee, Bus/Technology Dept. Chair NHS; Melissa Colby, Team Leader, BES; Dina Kayser, Team Leader, MES; and Susan McNally, Yearbook Advisor, NHS*. Second by Mr. Cosgriff. **Motion carried 8-0.**

Mr. Suslavich entered a *motion to approve the appointment of Sullivan, Schoen, Campane and Connon, LLC, as board counsel for 2010-2011*. Second by Mr. Baider. **Motion carried 8-0.**

**XIV. Announcements**

Ms. Zmek thanked Debbie Kavanaugh, Preschool director, for allowing her to spend time at the STAR preschool recently. The smallest learners, she said, are doing some big learning.

**XV. Privilege of the Floor**

Maryanne VanAken, Woodbury, and chairperson for ASAP, thanked the board for the plug for Thursday night's event. She strongly urged public attendance to see how many of the assets the kids have. She participated in the all day retreat and said the kids were great. Eight were needed as presenters for Thursday and 17 of them volunteered.

**XVI. Executive Session**

None.

**XVII. Adjournment**

Mr. Suslavich entered a *motion to adjourn*. Second by Ms. Bulvanoski. **Motion carried 8-0.**  
The meeting adjourned at 9:13 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

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Pamela Zmek, Secretary  
Regional School District 14 Board of Education