

The Regular Meeting of the Regional School District 14 Board of Education was held on Monday, August 19, 2013 at Nonnewaug High School, 5 Minortown Road, Woodbury, Connecticut.

Present: Superintendent Jody Ian Goeler; Board members George Bauer, Carol Ann Brown, John Chapman, Charles Cosgriff, Janet Morgan, John Swendsen, and Maryanne Van Aken; Director of Finance and Operations Wayne McAllister; Principals Alice Jones, MaryLou Torre, Andrew O'Brien and Susan Ruddock; Director of Instruction Susan Domanico; and Board Clerk Deb Carlton

Absent: Board member Sophieazane Bartlett

Audience members included: Bethlehem Board of Finance member Mike Devine, one member of the press, and about eight additional members of the community

I. Call to Order

Mr. Chapman called the meeting to order at 7:34 pm and led the Pledge of Allegiance.

II. Presentation

Mr. Goeler introduced the building principals, who reported to the Board on the school climate survey recently taken by students, parents and staff. The results will inform school improvement plans, he said, and will be a method by which administrators will hold themselves accountable.

Ms. Torre described the work of the Safe School Climate Committee, which includes a parent component; explained the steps for addressing "meanness," including attention to the person inflicting the act to see what is going on there, as well as consideration of the role of bystanders; spoke of employee training, periodic assessment of school climate and ways to educate students; and informed the Board about "responsive classroom" strategies.

Mr. O'Brien spoke of a focus on safety at the high school, including lock down drills, and noted that survey results show that students know what to do in these scenarios. He talked about grant funded work being done with the PBIS team and that five behaviors will be stressed. The data collection piece will be around those behaviors. He also noted better communication with parents was identified through the survey as a need.

Ms. Jones noted that, although teachers responded that they felt they are challenging students, students report not feeling challenged. She recognizes that students need to have the steps for reporting explicitly explained to them, repeatedly. Advisory, counseling, and SRO support will all be resources used to strengthen and amp up discussion about who students can go to for help, so everyone will know.

Mr. O'Brien will increase advisory to once per week to help open communication so students will become more comfortable talking about issues. The flexible scheduling in advisory will allow for this type of communication. He noted that staff members are mandatory reporters. Ms. Jones added that staff needs to look with a crisper lens to see things like isolation. Asked whether parents sign off that they have read and understand how to report, she and Mr. O'Brien indicated that the information is in the student handbook and is signed off on.

At the elementary level, Ms. Ruddock indicated there is much talk about what meanness "looks and feels like." Speaking about survey results, she was pleased to see that 83% of staff feel successful, 95% feel respected, and 82% felt instruction is not interrupted by mean behavior. Parent communication needs to be improved, she noted, and will be through coffees, and regular newsletters from administration and teachers. She noted that 50% of staff does not feel supported with regard to state mandates and there will be efforts to increase support for them. She offered samples of a brochure created for parents by the leadership team, showed a sample action plan used by administrators, and invited the Board to the annual hot dog roast at her school.

Ms. Morgan asked if questions and responses can be organized on an excel spreadsheet so that, over time, changes in behavior can be seen. She was told they could.

Ms. Van Aken asked whether significant disputes between students are communicated to the next building, and was told they are through tools such as Powerschool and SWIS. Teachers are also in this loop, and information often originates with them. Ms. Jones noted that teachers are informed with care not to bias; mostly it is behavior not conducive to learning that is identified.

Mr. Bauer asked for further explanation of "responsive classroom." Ms. Torre explained the philosophy as one designed to build a sense of community within the classroom, through activities such as morning meeting, to create a sense of connectedness which, studies show, reduces meanness.

Asked whether information about students is communicated when they transfer in or out of a school system, principals indicated generally not, just academic information, and that reading between the lines is necessary to discern behavioral issues.

Principals will report again to the Board in January or February. School Improvement Plans will be shared, hopefully, during the second meeting in November.

III. Review of Minutes

Mr. Chapman requested a *motion to approve the minutes of the Regular Meeting of July 15, 2013*. Entered by Mr. Swendsen and seconded by Mr. Cosgriff, the **motion carried 6-0-1**, with Mr. Chapman abstaining.

IV. Correspondence

None.

V. Report from the Chairman

Mr. Chapman proposed possible changes to the construction of board agendas and provided handouts with examples of a first and second meeting of the month agenda. He asked board members to consider the idea and plan to discuss further at the board retreat. His aim is to make meeting content more rich and efficient. He asked Mr. Swendsen to check with Attorney Scott to be sure they meet statutory requirements.

Ms. Van Aken would like to see Region 14's Finest continue.

Mr. Chapman also distributed copies of new committee assignments. There was discussion and agreement on combining the two negotiations committees into one.

Mr. Chapman read the following statement regarding legal action against the district:

"The Region 14 Board of Education is currently named in two separate suits pertaining to the NHS building project referendum, one pending in Litchfield Superior Court and the other in Waterbury Superior Court. The Litchfield court case is a suit brought by the towns of Woodbury and Bethlehem against Region 14, and is a challenge to the referendum (as provided by State law). The Region 14 response to this claim has been filed, and our understanding is that the pleadings will be closed shortly, allowing a court date to be set - hopefully by mid-September.

In the Waterbury Court suit, the plaintiffs are a group of five residents within Region 14. This lawsuit is being brought against Region 14, the Towns, and various Town and District/Board officials, and raises broad constitutional claims against the parties, making it a much more time consuming and costly process for the Region to legally defend. A status conference for this case will take place in Waterbury Superior Court in early September at which time we will find out more regarding next steps.

The Board will provide updates regarding these cases in the future as circumstances warrant, and in the meantime, while the Building Committee is continuing to hold meetings in order to organize and be prepared for whatever decision is ultimately made by the courts, the Region has not and will not commit resources or funds to the NHS building project until the matter has been fully resolved."

Ms. Morgan asked for clarification on how the error happened – whose responsibility was it to make sure the legal notice ran and how can we be sure it doesn't happen again, and was told that internal and external controls are needed. Ms. Morgan also felt the Board should have discussed the matter when it first happened.

Mr. Chapman asked about potential board retreat dates. After discussion, October 19th was selected.

VI. Report from the Superintendent

Mr. Goeler began by welcoming Sue Domanico, the district's new Director of Instruction. He indicated that 12 new faculty members will participate in new teacher orientation over two days, on 8/23 and 8/26. He announced that Kathryn Scruggs has been appointed K-5 Math Specialist. He informed that board that the leadership team participated in a retreat this summer and the work of the District Management Council has begun. Grants received for technology and safety will be well utilized. Opening convocation will be held on 8/29.

Ms. Domanico has had the opportunity to meet with each of the principals; has been reviewing the math program, reading/writing workshop model, documents and budget information; was involved in the selection of the math specialist and has provided her with resources; is reviewing State assessment data newly released; assisted in planning new teacher orientation; is reviewing the website and working to make resources and information more accessible; met with the agriscience department regarding curriculum concerns; is looking at student performance data; and has provided resource packets to the principals.

VII. Privilege of the Floor (agenda specific)

Eileen Budrewicz, Woodbury, is happy to hear of updates to the website particularly with the goal to inform and include parents. She would like a more detailed explanation of responsive classroom so she can reinforce the ideas at home. She would like to see the climate survey results, too. She asked whether policies, when revised and adopted, will then be signed off on by parents so they will know what the district policies are. She also asked and received confirmation that the second lawsuit, brought by the private citizens, will be costly to defend.

Adele Taylor, Woodbury, would like to see more community involvement and attendance at board meetings. Tonight, she found the administrators very interesting to hear from. She feels tonight's agenda is daunting and a lot to get through in one night. She would like names of board members listed on the agenda with the town each represents, and would also like to know which members are assigned to which committees. She reminded the board and district staff that community members don't know the meaning of the many acronyms used in reports given. She urged the district to engage in more publicity about what is going on in the schools.

Tom Arras, Woodbury, agreed that the board should make more effort to get more people to come to board meetings; more community involvement is needed and people are not aware of all the things going on in the schools.

Katie Yocis, Woodbury, asked the name of the new math program and was told it is My Math, by Glencoe and McGraw Hill. There is a grade 6-8 companion set; also textbooks and online text, assessment packages and other teaching materials. Ms. Domanico indicated that some manipulatives did not need to be purchased because materials already here can be repurposed and used with this program.

Gary Suslavich, Woodbury, congratulated new board members. He suggested to Mr. Chapman that the new agendas be made as general as possible and did not suggest having a standing agenda item for the building project. He implored the board not to increase parking fees, not to penalize just the kids who drive.

VIII. Report from Director of Finance and Operations

Mr. McAllister provided several financial summaries showing final updates on surplus and expenditures by location. All will be added to the website.

IX. Committee Reports

For **Planning**, Ms. Van Aken reported having met on 8/12. The committee received information and supported the idea of increased advisory at NHS. Definitions of student absences have been cleaned up, and a proposal regarding parking fees will be brought to the board tonight. Discussions were begun regarding leveling classes.

For **Building**, Mr. Bauer reported that this committee met on 7/29; however, no action will be taken until litigation is settled. RFPs were discussed and will be prepared for when they can be used. Next meeting is 8/27 at 6:30 pm

For **Ad hoc Safety**, Ms. Van Aken reported having met on 8/14 and discussed access controls, and developing timelines and checklists.

Mr. Chapman urged all committee chairs to develop a yearlong schedule of meetings if possible.

X. Old Business

Mr. Swendsen reminded the board of the eight policies given at the last meeting for first read. He requested they be approved tonight.

Ms. Van Aken requested a motion to approve the following policies:

4005 EEO

4085A FMLA Regulation

4110 Unlawful Harassment Personnel

4110A Unlawful Harassment Personnel Regulation

5000 EEO Students

5000A EEO Students Admin. Regulation

5145.15 Educational Records

5145.15 Educational Records Admin. Regulation

Entered by Cosgriff and seconded by Mr. Bauer, the **motion carried 7-0**.

Ms. Morgan asked about two items raised at the last meeting: the issue of the play at NHS and the auditors' recommendation about additional funds. Mr. Goeler indicated he was working out the play concerns, and was told the financial matter was resolved.

XI. New Business

Mr. McAllister required board action to allow him to serve as a signatory, along with the superintendent, for the pension plan. Mr. Cosgriff entered a *motion to name Wayne McAllister as a signatory for the Regional School District 14 Pension Plan*. Seconded by Ms. Van Aken, the **motion carried 7-0**.

Mr. McAllister explained the need to approve the addendum to the secretaries' contract due to the re-opening of it. Mr. Chapman requested a *motion to approve the addendum to the contract between Regional School District 14 and the Nonnewaug Secretarial Association for 7/1/13-6/30/15*. Entered by Ms. Van Aken and seconded by Mr. Cosgriff, the **motion carried 7-0**.

Mr. Bauer entered a motion to approve the following out-of-state/overnight field trips:

- i. NHS Agriscience Students to Harrisburg, PA, 9/8-9/10/13, for 2 students and one faculty chaperone, via Ag Truck, financed by students' families
- ii. NHS Agriscience Students to Madison, WI, 9/28-10/2/13, for 2 students and one faculty chaperone, via air transportation, financed by students' families

Seconded by Mr. Cosgriff, the **motion carried 7-0**.

Mr. O'Brien provided the board with information related to his proposal to increase parking fees at NHS in order to hire a parking lot monitor.

For purposes of discussion, Ms. Van Aken entered a *motion to increase student parking fees at Nonnewaug High School from \$5 to \$60 annually*. Mr. Cosgriff seconded the motion. Discussion followed.

Mr. Swendsen felt the increase was substantial and asked if there were no other ways to generate funds.

Mr. Bauer agreed, and felt needs like this were typically budgeted. He wondered how this strategy might fit in with the work of the ad hoc safety committee.

Mr. O'Brien felt that, in lieu of cameras, this plan could begin immediately.
Mr. Chapman wondered if the right person could be found for \$10/hr. and worried it could become more of a nuisance. The fee jump is big, and he asked what the lack of an attendant causes in terms of problems.
Mr. O'Brien described a number of vehicle tampering problems in the past year, as well as unauthorized departures by students with other students in their cars. He felt the number and type of issues was significant.
Mr. Cosgriff favored tying this issue in with ad hoc safety. Ms. Morgan asked the function in budgeting for a salary like this. Mr. McAllister indicated it would be its own line item.
Ms. Van Aken hoped that, if the motion did not pass tonight, another way to reopen the senior circle could be found.
Mr. Goeler suggested the senior circle matter also go to ad hoc safety.
The motion previously entered and seconded failed 0-7.

On the topic of school lunches, Mr. McAllister provided documentation showing that price increases in 2012-13 resulted in a corresponding drop in participation (15%). Mr. Chapman suggested evaluating options for the future. Mr. Goeler agreed, adding that everyone be aware we are still operating in a deficit mode in the lunch program.

Lastly, Mr. McAllister provided information on out-of-district tuition rates.

XII. Board Announcements

None.

XIII. Privilege of the Floor

Pat DiSarro, Woodbury, is in favor of re-opening the senior circle and hoped that could happen. He reminded the board that students who drive do so because of work, sports or other activities. He felt cameras would be more effective than one set of eyes.

Mr. Suslavich requested that, in the future, when the board receives handouts that enough be available for the audience.

Ms. Budrewicz revisited the idea of communication, the website as a tool for that, and also asked about whether committee minutes would be regularly done and posted on the website. Mr. Chapman said they would. She also noted that many school supplies are required to be purchased by parents and asked if this would be ongoing. She was told it would be, though Mr. Goeler said there is the effort and consideration to identify only those items students must have for school.

XIV. Adjournment

Mr. Chapman requested a *motion to adjourn*, entered by Ms. Van Aken and seconded by Mr. Swendsen.
The motion carried 7-0.

The meeting of the Board of Education adjourned at 10:33 pm.

Respectfully Submitted,

Carol Ann Brown, Secretary
Regional School District #14 Board of Education

Recorded and filed subject to Board of Education approval by: Debra W. Carlton, Board Clerk, 8/21/13