

March 15, 2010

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

The Regular Meeting of the Regional School District 14 Board of Education was held on Monday, March 15, 2010, at 7:00 p.m. in the Nonnewaug High School Library, 5 Minortown Road, Woodbury, Connecticut.

Present: Superintendent Robert D. Cronin, Ph.D.; Board Chair Monica Gati, Board members Scott Baider, Deborah Corsico, Charles Cosgriff, Carla Juhas, Stephen Paluskas and Stephen Sordi; Director of Finance and Operations Jay Hubelbank; Data Administrator Jeff Turner; student members of the Bethlehem Elementary School Math Team and their mentor, Candace Fernandes; student members of the Bethlehem Elementary School Odyssey of the Mind Team and their mentor Arlene Campbell

Absent: Board member Linda Bulvanoski

Audience members included: Director of Special Services Christopher Quirk; Principals Alice Jones, Dawn Hochsprung and Melinda McKenna; Assistant Principal Eric Bergeron; Technology Director Paul Ciotti; Language Arts Coordinator Stacey Calo; two members of the press and about four community members

I. Call to Order

Ms. Gati called the meeting to order at 7:01 p.m.

II. Pledge of Allegiance

Ms. Gati led the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag.

III. Presentations

Ms. Fernandes introduced the BES Math Team consisting of fifteen second grade students who compete as part of the Continental Math League. The team has participated in 3 meets so far, along with 259 other schools, 19 of which are in Connecticut. The team tied for 9th place at a recent meet. Ms. Fernandes explained that her goals for the students are individual and team improvement over time. The team provided the Board with examples of the math problems they must complete during the timed competitions. Ms. Fernandes thanked Ms. McKenna, Sandy Eberts, Kate Bergeron and Anne Uberti for their assistance and support of the team.

Ms. Campbell informed the Board that Odyssey of the Mind is an international competition for grades K-12. She introduced her team of first and second grade students who will perform along with 10 other schools. In competitions, students are given two problems – one spontaneous and one long term – and she described the long term problem given to her team: to create a skit involving a character, throwing a surprise party, including three gifts, and noisemakers. The students then demonstrated their skit to the delight of the Board and audience.

Mr. Turner had the unenviable task of following the previous presentations with an update on his improvement plan for data administration. He spoke of his plans, within the Board and district goals, of creating, using and teaching technology. His goals are in areas of collection and use of data, communication, and technology training. He offered details in each of these areas regarding efforts to make data more accessible to teachers, more easily stored, and in a format more conducive to reporting. He spoke of teachers' development of web pages, his involvement in team and department meetings, and plans for PD surrounding technology. He outlined strategies by which he will measure progress and goals for continuous improvement. He answered questions from Dr. Cronin and the Board regarding web pages, including the Region's, and about cataloging and licensing. Asked about setting up protocols for the collection and storing of data as well as training on interpreting it, Mr. Turner said he was currently following Mr. Ciotti's lead and that he looks to the Powerschool program as a way to draw out specific data.

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IV. Review of Minutes

Mr. Sordi entered a *motion to accept the minutes of the regular meeting of 3/1/2010*, seconded by Mr. Paluskas. **Motion carried 7-0.**

V. Correspondence

Ms. Gati would reference correspondence regarding social workers during Superintendent's report.

VI. Report from Chairperson

None.

VII. Report from Superintendent

Prior to adopting the proposed 2010-2011 budget, Dr. Cronin led the Board in a lengthy discussion of options that would allow adding back previously cut social worker positions. Ms. Gati asked him to review the differing roles of school psychologist, school counselor and school social worker.

Dr. Cronin explained that psychologists evaluate and plan programs, counsel individually and in small groups, often chair planning and placement team meetings and are primarily responsible for the autism spectrum population. Counselors handle three domains: social/emotional, career, and education. They each have identified caseloads, dividing up the total school population, and also provide in-class lessons. Mr. Quirk was asked to estimate how much of the counselors' time is devoted to these in-class lessons and it was very difficult for him to estimate. He guessed about 5-10% of their time is spent in class. Social workers, Dr. Cronin continued, provide individual and small group counseling to those students with counseling as part of their IEP, and refer students and families to agencies for support.

Ms. Corsico stated that if all these services are sufficiently utilized, she supports them; if not, she favors the cuts originally proposed.

Mr. Baider felt these are tough times for families and was not sure it was the time to cut services.

Ms. Corsico replied that all cuts are painful, and that no one said a thing about the 7 teachers being cut.

Dr. Cronin commented that part of the consideration for reducing social workers was around the number of IEPs that include social work to assist students with matters getting in the way of their educations.

Mr. Quirk was asked how many these numbered, to which he replied about 4-6 per school.

Mr. Sordi felt the reductions in teachers mirrored reduction in enrollment. His concern was about the addition of administrators and felt the Board should "come to the center" for a compromise.

Dr. Cronin reminded Mr. Sordi that the dean of students position is not new and is simply being moved into the administrators' unit. Last year, stimulus money could be used to fund that position because it was new.

Mr. Baider proposed keeping all four social workers and then, if special education costs are off next year, cuts could be considered then.

Ms. Corsico reminded Mr. Baider that reimbursements numbers would not be known until late in the year.

Regarding the dean of students position as an administrative one, she felt that the Region secured a high school assistant principal the caliber of Jose Martinez because he will not be preoccupied with discipline issues. This benefits all students, she said, as the high school is not limited to one instructional leader.

Ms. Gati suggested the Board members send questions regarding the counseling program to Dr. Cronin so he could research answers and provide them with data to help in their decision making. A goal of having answers by this Friday was suggested, if not by the Thursday meeting with the Boards of Selectmen and Finance. Dr. Cronin requested that questions be framed to reflect what success would look like – how would it be known that we are making the best use of our resources?

Ms. Juhas pointed out that, because the towns offer no social work services to their residents, 25% of the towns' population are the only ones with access to social workers.

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VII. Superintendent's Report (cont)

Mr. Baidier felt that both social worker positions could be covered by higher excess cost reimbursement. Ms. Corsico believed that would be gambling and could result in cutting them mid-year if reimbursement does not materialize.

Mr. Sordi commented that health care costs have been low, but Ms. Corsico replied they often come in high. She suggested perhaps reducing the number of school counselors.

Mr. Hubelbank distributed a chart indicating that the Region's most current claims are higher than claims Anthem used in the renewal.

Dr. Cronin commented that counselors deliver curriculum and that there is more flexibility with social workers and their role.

Mr. Paluskas preferred to have them all in to start, and cut toward the end of next year if that became unavoidable.

The option of keeping all four social workers, but reducing their FTEs to 0.75 each, for a total FTE of 3.0, was offered. Ms. Juhas felt she could support that, with the elimination of the three capital projects that would make this possible. Dr. Cronin felt this was a conversation to have with the Selectmen, as well.

Ms. Gati felt an option might be to add one social worker and a Kindergarten teacher; then, if the need for the Kindergarten teacher is not there, adding back the other social worker at that point.

Dr. Cronin asked if the Board could move forward with the 0.47% increase and determine later, once the early retirement and other pending factors like Kindergarten enrollment are resolved, whether or not sufficient savings have been made.

As agreement was reached on this idea, Ms. Gati requested a *motion to adopt a budget of \$29,894,785 for the 2010-2011 school year, representing a 0.47% increase, to be brought to a public hearing.* This motion was entered by Mr. Paluskas, seconded by Mr. Cosgriff. Mr. Sordi requested more conversation about the social workers as well as capital projects that might be accomplished with money left over.

The motion carried 7-0.

VIII. Privilege of the Floor

Pam Gengenbach asked about the cuts of 7 teachers and was told one was a retiring grade 4 teacher who would not be replaced, a kindergarten teacher, and five special education teachers. She asked if reduction in SPED staff is due to reduction in services and was told, no, it is in response to a change in regulation to the way services are to be delivered. She noted a \$300,000 budget shortfall that Dr. Cronin explained is in the hands of counsel and that on 3/23 there would be a meeting about that. Ms. Corsico added that this is not a shortfall but rather a reimbursement issue. Ms. Gengenbach asked the total number of coordinators and was given that information. She asked how many of them perform their coordinator functions as a full time position and was told 2, the K-6 Math Coordinator and the K-6 LA Coordinator. Lastly, she asked about raises last year and this for Dr. Cronin and Mr. Hubelbank and asked where that number would come from this year once a budget is passed. Mr. Hubelbank reviewed that there is a small group of employees for whom raises are not determined until after a budget is passed; in addition, two unions are currently negotiating new contracts. He said he uses the same percentage for all raises and did not want to publicly state that number as that would jeopardize negotiations.

Jeanne Hawley thanked the Board for reconsidering the issue of social workers. She understands the tough economic times but said it is hard to put a price tag on a child at risk. All middle and high school students are at risk in one way or another, in her opinion, with or without an IEP.

Maryanne VanAken also thanked the Board for reviewing the social worker issue, noting that no other services are available to this community, nor does she foresee them. She is able to support the budget with

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VIII. Privilege of the Floor (cont)

four, 0.75 social workers included and feels this is a good compromise. She has experience with them through her work with the prevention council, and believes these are positions the Region does not want to lose.

Susan Scherf acknowledged the "tremendous amount of work" the Board does. She attends meetings because she is a parent and this is public education, but noted how few others do attend. She held up a sheet of paper which she said is the only document about reconfiguration and she had to go to a meeting to get it. To Dr. Cronin she said it is not fair to throw parents under the bus, asked what reconfiguration is, and answered that it is, in her opinion, a transportation model that cuts 20 minutes off the student's day. She said no one wanted a lawsuit; the Region has spent \$100,000 on legal fees; Dr. Cronin has never written a plan to show how it works; there is not a coordinated curriculum; bus rides exceed 45 minutes; and that Dr. Cronin said he would not reverse it unless a court ordered him to and, now that it has, he still has not.

IX. Report from Director of Finance and Operations

Mr. Hubelbank reported that Energy Education is progressing and that cooperation in all buildings has been very good.

X. Committee Reports

For the Facilities/Transportation Committee, Mr. Sordi reported that they had met on 3/8, reviewed First Student's hiring practices and eligibility requirements, driver manuals, etc., as well as ages of buses. They reviewed capital budget and this year's accomplishments. There was discussion with the Board about the BES sidewalks, leading to the following motion requested by Mr. Sordi, made by Mr. Baider: *motion to authorize the Facilities Committee to begin utilizing the recurring capital account to solicit bids for design of the BES sidewalks*. Seconded by Mr. Paluskas, **the motion carried 7-0**.

For the Finance Committee, Mr. Baider said this committee had also met, reviewed budget transfers and budget to date, and discussed the budget process. Also, he, Mr. Hubelbank and Mr. Cosgriff met with Webster Bank and are looking to put policy in place on how pension accounts are managed.

Ms. Gati requested to motions for additions to the agenda. She asked for a *motion to add to item XIV Executive Session: Personnel Matter – Discussion of Recommended Teacher Contract Non-renewals*. Mr. Paluskas entered the motion, second by Mr. Cosgriff. **Motion carried 7-0**.

Ms. Gati requested a *motion to further add the following agenda item between items XIV and XV: Non-renewal of Teacher Contracts (action anticipated)*

Mr. Paluskas entered the motion, second by Mr. Cosgriff. **Motion carried 7-0**.

XI. Old Business - Policies

1. There was discussion regarding Policy 5136.6 Drug/Alcohol/Tobacco and questions raised about consequences for smoking, disclosure, and actions required when students are found in possession of drugs. It was ultimately decided to send the policy back to the Policy Committee for advice from counsel.

Having previously reviewed the policy on Criminal Records Checks, # 4030, Ms. Corsico entered a *motion to approve policy 4030*, second by Mr. Paluskas. **The motion carried 7-0**.

2. Mr. Paluskas entered a *motion to approve the Energy Conservation policy*, second by Mr. Cosgriff. **Motion carried 7-0**.

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XII. New Business

Personnel

1. Approval of Resignation

Allison Washington, Grade 5 Teacher, Mitchell Elementary School, effective June 30, 2010 (currently on family medical/maternity leave)

Mr. Paluskas entered a *motion to approve this resignation*, seconded by Mr. Baider. **Motion carried 7-0.**

2. Approval of Appointment

Bruce Beeman, formerly Night Custodian, appointed to Head Custodian, Bethlehem Elementary School, effective March 5, 2010

Mr. Paluskas entered a *motion to approve this appointment*, seconded by Mr. Baider. **Motion carried 7-0.**

XIII. Board Announcements

None.

XIV. Executive Session

Ms. Gati requested a *motion to enter executive session for the purpose of discussing recommendations to non-renew employment contracts of certain non-tenured teachers, and to invite Dr. Cronin into the session for the purpose of assisting the Board*. Mr. Paluskas entered the motion, second by Mr. Baider and the **motion carried 7-0.**

(Ms. Juhas was unable to stay for the session; Mr. Sordi recused himself from it due to the topic)

Following the session, Ms. Gati requested a *motion to decline to renew the contract of the employee discussed during executive session*. The motion was entered by Mr. Paluskas, seconded by Mr. Cosgriff and the **motion carried 5-0.**

XV. Adjournment

Ms. Corsico entered a *motion to adjourn*, seconded by Mr. Baider, and the **motion carried 5-0.** The meeting adjourned at approximately 10:00 pm.

Respectfully Submitted,

Stephen Sordi, Assistant Secretary/Treasurer
Regional School District #14 Board of Education