

FAIRFIELD BOARD OF EDUCATION
MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE BOARD OF EDUCATION
Tuesday, December 13, 2011

Minutes of the Regular Meeting of the Board of Education held Tuesday, December 13, 2011, at 501 Kings Highway East, 2nd Floor Board Conference Room.

1. Chairman Ms. Pamela Iacono called the Regular Meeting of the Board of Education to order at 7:30 p.m. Other Board members present were: Mrs. Sue Brand, Mr. John Convertito, Mr. Philip Dwyer, Mrs. Jessica Gerber, Mr. Tim Kery, Mr. Perry Liu, Mrs. Jennifer Maxon Kennelly and Mr. Paul Fattibene (arrived 7:32 p.m.). Also in attendance were Superintendent Dr. David Title, Fairfield Warde High School Student Representative Stephanie Teixeira and members of the administrative staff. Approximately 80 people comprised the remainder of the audience.
2. Ms. Iacono led the Board and audience in the Pledge of Allegiance.
3. Presentation
 - A. Safe School Climate

Dr. Title stated that Ms. Leonardi has taken the lead on this and worked with a broad-based committee to draft the Safe School Climate Plan, which needs to be submitted to the State by January 1st. This is a discussion item with no action tonight. Written notification was received from the State that it is permissible to submit the draft and then submit a revised version when it is approved by the Board.

Ms. Leonardi stated that this is the beginning of what she hopes will go on indefinitely to address positive school climates at each of our buildings and at the district level. She gave a brief overview of the proposed Safe School Climate Plan. The sections that are underlined throughout the document are sections where Fairfield went beyond what the law requires. The Plan begins with the Mission and Beliefs of the Fairfield Public Schools. The District School Climate Coordinator will be Ms. Leonardi. There will also be a District School Climate Team which will be made up of all building School Climate Specialists, community members, parents and students. Each building principal will identify a School Climate Specialist who will provide leadership at the building level around school climate initiatives and help all staff to understand the role adults play in creating a positive school climate. These specialists will lead small teams at the building level in collecting and reviewing the data that is created, not only bullying but any kind of discriminatory or mean spirited behavior, and how reports are being addressed. Adults in the schools will be trained to recognize and understand what this behavior looks like, what its impact is on students and their obligation to intervene and to report. Ms. Leonardi commented on the Assessment section that begins on page 7. The Legislation requires that the State provide each district with a survey for staff, students and parents every other year. She recommends that the Fairfield Public Schools survey annually and that the survey meet the criteria as set forth on page 7: that it be reliable and valid, that it recognize the voice of parents and students and that it be aligned between those two groups. It should result in a detailed report at the building and district level and should provide data within 2-3 weeks of the close of the survey so it can be published and assist each school climate committee as to how the data might be used. The survey should help drive improvement and give a direction to go in. Should the Board choose to support this, part of the RFP would be that the company also provide ongoing support for ways to make improvements in areas that are identified at both the school and district level. The next part of the Plan is what to do if bullying or alleged bullying is reported, when it must be reported, by whom it must be reported and what happens next. When the investigation concludes that a verified act of bullying or behavior that meets the statutory definition of bullying has in fact taken place, there is a safety plan and an intervention plan in place. All school employees are mandated reporters of suspected child abuse and neglect; and this legislation adds a new mandated reporting when and if behavior that happens at school reaches the bounds of potential criminality. We will now be

required to report to law enforcement any behavior that we believe may constitute a crime. We are not responsible to investigate criminal behavior; we report to the police who will then investigate. There is currently a team of about 20 people, comprised of staff and community members, who are reading the Plan and providing input.

Board comments, questions and suggestions followed regarding defining mean spirited behavior, clarifying the role of administration, timelines for reporting and adding more clarity to that section, creating a flow chart for the chain of comment, defining the number of students, parents and community members to be on the District Team, and adding more information to the prevention section.

Dr. Title commented that there are staffing costs but at this point he is not sure what they will be and is not in a position to advocate for until the plan has been in effect for a year to see exactly what the burdens are. The State says it is an unfunded mandate; it is not. If we are going to commit to doing a survey on an annual basis, there will be a cost which is unknown right now. He doesn't know if the Board wants to commit to a number now and then in May if the budget is squeezed have to make a decision between the survey or a teaching position. Dr. Title asked anyone who is interested in providing feedback to email Ms. Leonardi.

4. Approval of Minutes

- A. Mrs. Brand moved seconded by Mrs. Gerber that the Board of Education approve the Minutes of the Special Meeting of November 17, 2011.

Motion carried: 4:0:5. Mrs. Brand, Mr. Kery, Mr. Fattibene and Ms. Iacono voted in favor. Mr. Dwyer, Mrs. Gerber, Mr. Liu, Mr. Convertito, and Mrs. Kennelly abstained.

- B. Mr. Dwyer moved seconded by Mrs. Kennelly that the Board of Education approve the Minutes of the Regular/Organizational Meeting of November 22, 2011.

Motion carried: 9:0:0.

- C. Mrs. Brand moved, seconded by Mr. Convertito that the Board of Education approve the Minutes of the Special Meeting of December 1, 2011.

Motion carried: 8:0:1. Mrs. Brand, Mr. Convertito, Mr. Dwyer, Mrs. Gerber, Ms. Iacono, Mrs. Kennelly, Mr. Kery and Mr. Liu voted in favor. Mr. Fattibene abstained.

5 Student/Committee/Liaison Reports

- ◆ Stephanie Teixeira reported that the Carillon Concert is on Thursday and Friday; 33 members of band, orchestra and chorus were selected to the Western Regional High School Festival; the math team finished second in the Fairfield County Math League; the Mock Trial Team competed in the regionals contest and did very well; and the fashion boutique has opened for holiday shopping. The Warde Football Team beat Ludlowe on Thanksgiving Day and Devon Lofton a senior on the football team was recognized as the fifth leading rusher in the State.
- ◆ Mrs. Brand reported that the Board of Health met last night and the Health Department Director, Mr. Sans Cleary, reported that there was an initial test done by AMC at Fairfield Ludlowe High School as part of the window project and PCBs were found. It was the consensus of those in the room, two of whom are pediatricians, that there are no over concerns about this issue. It was also reported that there are not a lot of people getting flu shots.
- ◆ Mr. Convertito reported that the Special Projects Standing Building Committee's main project is the Sherman renovation. Shovels are in the ground, foundation has been dug, and the central office has been moved to the media center. There is a proposal to swap some of the HVAC equipment for different HVAC equipment to gain a savings and that has been sent to the engineer to see if it is practical. Board members received the environmental report that was done at

Sherman. Some contaminants were found, and the building committee and general contractor will be addressing those at the next meeting.

- ◆ Mr. Dwyer reported that CES does not meet in December. The next meeting is in January.
- ◆ Mr. Fattibene reported the Stratfield Building Committee met, and they are trying to wind down that project. They discussed adding some lock down hardware for the doors, relocating a valve from one of the furnaces, there was some concern about towel dispensers not being uniform and causing a problem in ordering supplies, there was some concern about a master clock so all of the rooms would have the same time, and there was some concern about sound in the main hall and trying to alleviate that. The problem the committee is running into is that there are no real funds remaining for some of this work and they are trying to figure out how it will get done. The biggest issue was a discussion of the final shared savings, which is going to be referred back to the purchasing agent to further discuss and see how it would be resolved.
- ◆ Mrs. Gerber reported that Parks & Rec meets tomorrow.
- ◆ Ms. Iacono reported that the RTM is in the process of working through the committee system on the roof warranties and the teacher and administrator contracts.
- ◆ Mrs. Kennelly reported that SEPTA will meet in January. Their cookie walk fundraiser will be next Wednesday at Central Office, and they are looking for people to bake.
- ◆ Mr. Kery reported that PTA Council met on December 7, and there were quite a few questions and comments on both the school calendar and the bullying policy. There was an agreement to ask Ms. Leonardi to present to PTA Council at some point. Board members received the previous minutes in their Friday Packet. He stated that he was unable to attend the Board of Finance meeting but understands that it was ended prematurely by a fire alarm. A future topic he will be reporting on is the discussion of workmen's compensation which seems to be this year's concern for the Board of Finance.
- ◆ Mr. Liu – No report.

6. Superintendent's Report

A. 2012-2013 Budget Timeline-

Dr. Title reported that this year the budget timelines have been changed so the Board will have more time with the budget. As the last item on the January 10, 2012 Board meeting agenda, the Superintendent's recommended budget will be distributed, and there will be an overview and explanation of it. The Board and the public will then have a full week to digest the budget before the January 17 Special Budget Meeting at which there will be no further explanation in terms of presentation; the Board will get right into discussion. The Board will have two full meetings to review and discuss the budget before it is approved at the January 24th meeting. The dates for the Board of Selectmen/Board of Finance, RTM subcommittees and the full RTM are listed on Enclosure No. 5.

Mrs. Brand asked if Dr. Title has any specific priorities that are of particular concern. She also stated that she sent Dr. Title some of her thoughts. Dr. Title stated that he is going to try to continue with all of the initiatives that were started this year and at the same time be as fiscally responsible as possible. It is too early to commit to any specific initiative.

Mrs. Kennelly commented on the possibility of communicating with the other Town bodies earlier. Dr. Title stated that if Board members have ideas about communicating with the other Town bodies in advance of their hearing it, he is in favor of that. The more communication with the other Town bodies the better.

7. Old Business

- A. Mr. Kery moved, seconded by Mrs. Gerber that the Board of Education postpone approval of the Understanding on Health Insurance to the next Board Meeting, January 10, 2012.

Ms. Iacono stated that this is just procedural; it is not a discussion about the MOU. This item was held over from a prior meeting.

Mr. Liu asked if this pertains to the side agreement.

Dr. Title stated that he had been working through the Memorandum on Health Insurance with Board of Finance Chair and the First Selectman, and when it was brought forward to the Board of Ed for the third time, the First Selectman came to the meeting, expressed some concerns and asked the Board to postpone action on it. The Board then made a motion to postpone to this item to the next meeting. Since then he has had one meeting with the First Selectman, and the concerns are still not resolved. Since this item was postponed to this meeting, it was put it on the agenda. Dr. Title stated that he does believe he will have an agreement by January.

Board comments and concerns followed regarding this item coinciding with the budget and being imbedded in the budget. Dr. Title stated that there is actually little disagreement with the Board of Finance Chair and the First Selectman on how the Board should budget for its health insurance for next year. That is not in dispute among the parties at this moment. There are other parts that are in dispute so Dr. Title suggested that the First Selectman send him a letter to that affect so when we go forward with our budget at least that part is clear. The issues are around the timelines, the length of the agreement and some of the legal language. The lawyer for the Town is reviewing it now.

Mrs. Brand asked for a financial report on this account before the January 10th meeting..

Motion carried: 9:0:0.

- B. Mr. Convertito moved, seconded by Mrs. Brand that the Board of Education approve the Music Curriculum, Grades K-5.

Mrs. Kennelly expressed concerns about the issue of space. Teachers are being assessed on the curriculum they deliver and according to the Facilities Plan, 8 of the 11 elementary schools have inadequate space, specifically with regard to music. All of the schools are being given this curriculum, are expected to follow it, teachers assessed based on the curriculum and yet it is clearly not equitable. She also expressed concern that there is nothing specific regarding content area connections in the curriculum.

Mr. Dwyer asked if going forward there could be a paragraph attached to each curriculum document that states what the potential fiscal impact is, not a full cost analysis but just an overview.

Motion carried: 9:0:0.

- C. Mr. Kery moved, seconded by Mrs. Brand that the Board of Education approve the Educational Specifications for Riverfield Elementary School Extension/Alterations.

Mrs. Brand moved, seconded by Mr. Liu to amend the educational specifications to include a cover letter with an explanation that this is a very rough estimate, no site work has been done.

Board questions and comments followed regarding a written estimate and the ed specs.

Mr. Convertito respectfully requested the amendment be withdrawn.

Mrs. Brand withdrew the amendment.

Mrs. Brand moved, seconded by Mr. Liu to amend the educational specifications to set priorities within the document.

Board comments followed.

Motion failed: 1:8:0. Mrs. Brand voted in favor. Mrs. Kennelly, Mr. Convertito, Mr. Liu, Mrs. Gerber, Ms. Iacono, Mr. Dwyer, Mr. Fattibene and Mr. Kery voted in opposition.

Mrs. Brand moved, seconded by Mrs. Kennelly to amend the educational specifications and to change the wording on Page 11, under the heading Code, third bullet to read: "abate any hazardous materials in accordance with State and Federal Regulations"

Board questions, comments and discussion followed.

Mrs. Brand withdrew the amendment.

Mr. Fattibene moved, seconded by Mr. Dwyer to amend the educational specifications on Page 6 under Homeroom Classrooms for Grades K-5 (24 Classroom Model) fifth bullet, water fountains be deleted.

Board comments and questions followed.

Motion carried: 9:0:0.

Mr. Convertito moved, seconded by Mrs. Kennelly to amend the educational specifications on Page 7 under Music to strike the third bullet, small practice space and lockable office space for teaching staff, and replace it with "provide adequate lockable storage space for instruments."

Comments, questions and discussion followed on this amendment.

Motion failed: 2:7:0. Mr. Convertito and Mrs. Kennelly voted in favor. Mrs. Brand, Mr. Dwyer, Mr. Fattibene, Mrs. Gerber, Mr. Kery, Ms. Iacono and Mr. Liu voted in opposition.

Mrs. Kennelly questioned the need for a science prep room and 7 special ed rooms.

Back to Main Motion as amended.

Public Comment-

Suzanne Miska, Ryegate Road, spoke against the ed specs and cautioned throwing wish lists out.

Vote on Main Motion as amended carried: 9:0:0

- D. Mr. Convertito moved, seconded by Mrs. Gerber that the Board of Education approve the 2012-2013 Student Calendar as proposed.

Mr. Convertito moved, seconded by Mrs. Kennelly to amend the calendar to eliminate November 12, 2012, observance of Veterans' Day.

Board discussion followed.

Selectman Walsh stated that he is opposed to this amendment and spoke against taking away this holiday.

Board comments continued on this amendment.

Selectman Walsh stated that this district has man and women who upon graduation are going into the military service to serve overseas and giving one day to honor them is the least we can do.

Public Comment-

Tom Quinn, Commander of American Legion Post #143 at Owen Fish, stated that the veterans in the American Legion are in favor of keeping the holiday.

Tina DeJarnette, Quaker Lane, spoke in favor of keeping Veterans' Day.

J. Alfred Dunn commented that the subject is simple and complex and has two faces to it.

Ed Kuryluk, BOE Liaison from Holland Hill, spoke against eliminating Veterans' Day.

Board comments continued.

Mr. Convertito called the question, seconded by Mr. Kery.

Motion to call the question carried: 9:0:0.

Vote on amendment failed: 2:7:0. Mr. Convertito and Mrs. Kennelly voted in favor. Mr. Liu, Mrs. Gerber, Ms. Iacono, Mr. Dwyer, Mr. Fattibene, Mr. Kery and Mrs. Brand voted in opposition.

Mr. Convertito moved, seconded by Mrs. Brand to amend the calendar and eliminate February break; keep February 18, Presidents' Day, as a day off; have school in session on February 19, 20, 21, 22; eliminate the Professional Day on January 18 and have a Professional Development Day on February 15.

Board questions, comments and discussion followed.

Selectman Walsh asked if there is any educational benefit to having the February break or if there is any benefit in taking it away? Why do the professional development days need to happen during the school year and take away from educational time? How many schools in Fairfield don't have a break until April? Is there any research that CMT scores went up when February break was eliminated? Have you spoken to districts that have taken away the February break and then gone back to it and what the reasons they have gone back to it are?

Board comments and questions continued.

Public Comment-

Tina DeJarnette, Quaker Lane, questioned what happens if the snow days go over, will days still be taken away from April break. She commented that most of the towns in Connecticut that have over the 180 mandated days, which Fairfield does, take those days first and do not make them up. Why is Fairfield not even considering the days that are over the 180 that do not have to be made up as snow days?

Jay Wolk, Stratfield Road, spoke against taking away February break.

Anne Pasco, FEA President, stated that she has been in Fairfield more than four decades and there was a March break with no February or April break and it was a disaster. Parents took the kids out in February and in April because that is what they were accustomed to and the same pattern will hold true. Families that go away in February will take their children out and go away. There is always a snow day during that week in February and it often has been the week where the flu has struck. She does not know how much education will go on with some or many of the kids not there.

Sue Dow, Pickwick Street, spoke against eliminating the February break.

Christine Vitale, BOE rep for Dwight, stated that last week their PTA Executive Board voted in favor of eliminating the February vacation and preserving April vacation. An email was sent out to the school community and no one really complained about the motion.

Matt Hutzelmann, Pansy Road, stated that he sees no reason to change the calendar.

Mark Patten, 503 Valley Road and RTM member district 7, spoke in support of this amendment.

Dorene Herron, Forest Avenue, stated that not all of the schools have air conditioning, and anything that can be done to not have school in late June is educationally beneficial to our students.

Julie Gottlieb, Applegate Road, spoke on behalf of working parents and stated she would prefer her child be in school in February as would the 8-9 people she spoke with.

Board comments continued.

Vote on the amendment to the main motion: “to eliminate February break; keep February 18, Presidents’ Day, as a day off; eliminate the Professional Day on January 18 and have a Professional Development Day on February 15.

Motion carried: 5:3:1. Mr. Convertito, Mrs. Gerber, Mr. Fattibene, Mr. Kery and Mrs. Brand voted in favor. Mr. Liu, Mrs. Kennelly and Mr. Dwyer voted in opposition. Ms. Iacono abstained.

The last day of school will move back four days to June 12.

Vote on calendar as amended carried: 9:0:0.

8. New Business

- A. Mr. Convertito moved, seconded by Mr. Kery that the Board of Education endorse ‘A Parents Guide for the Prevention of Alcohol, Tobacco and Other Drug Use’ booklet.

Ms. Iacono stated that she received this from a community member who was reaching out on behalf of the Alcohol Task Force. They are looking for Board of Ed endorsement to put our name on the front of the booklet which is given to parents and students at the high schools.

Board comments and questions followed.

Public Comment-

Wendy Bentivegna, a member of the Fairfield Cares Town Task Force on Alcohol and Health and Co-chair of the Freshmen Forum at Fairfield Ludlowe High School, stated that the “Community of Concern” booklet is customized to Fairfield and is a great resource for parents. She encouraged the Board to support the booklet; it shows a commitment in partnering to keep our youth safe and healthy.

Catherine Giff, Eleven O’Clock Road, encouraged the Board to endorse the “Community of Concern” booklet. An endorsement implies no money. The Task Force has the money and the sponsorship and would appreciate the Board’s endorsement.

Board questions and comments continued.

Motion carried: 9:0:0.

- B. Discussion of a Board of Education Member Guide-

Ms. Iacono stated that she put this on the agenda because during the discussion of the Bylaws there has often been a discussion that some things are good but don’t necessarily belong in the Bylaws, and Mr. Dwyer offered the idea of putting together a Board handbook.

Mr. Dwyer stated that during the orientation session with Dr. Title certain expectations, protocols, assumptions and administrative issues were mentioned. Mr. Dwyer thought it would be helpful if there was a handbook of the mutual understandings. He suggested the Board take the next month to gather ideas on what to put in such a handbook, discuss it at the last Board meeting in January and try to get an approved document by the end of February. Mr. Convertito will be working on this with Mr. Dwyer.

Board comments and questions followed. It was the sense of the Board to move forward with this.

9. Mr. Liu moved, seconded by Mrs. Brand that the four Bylaw items tabled from the December 1, 2011 Special Board of Education Meeting be put back on the table.

Motion carried: 5:2:2. Mrs. Kennelly, Mr. Convertito, Mr. Liu, Mr. Dwyer and Mrs. Brand voted in favor. Mrs. Gerber and Ms. Iacono voted in opposition. Mr. Fattibene and Mr. Kery abstained.

Mr. Liu moved seconded by Mr. Kery to postpone this item to the next meeting, January 10, 2012.

Motion carried: 9:0:0.

10. Public Comments and Petitions – None

11. Open Board Comment – None

12. Mr. Convertito moved, seconded by Mr. Kery that this meeting of the Board of Education adjourn at 10:42 p.m.

Motion carried: 9:0:0.

Jessica Gerber
Secretary