



COLCHESTER BOARD OF EDUCATION
Colchester, CT

REGULAR BOARD MEETING

Tuesday, April 25, 2023

5:00 PM

The Commons (Black Box Theater)

William J. Johnston Middle School

360 Norwich Avenue, Colchester

HYBRID

BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT: Chair Alexander Oliphant, Vice Chair Mary Tomasi, Secretary Margo Gignac, Donna Antonacci, Rosemary Gignac, Michelle Millington, Christopher Rivers

ADMINISTRATION PRESENT: Superintendent Daniel P. Sullivan, III, Assistant Superintendent Dr. Charles E. Hewes, Bacon Academy Principal Amy Beguè, Bacon Academy Assistant Principal Michael Mal, Bacon Academy Assistant Principal Melissa Cyr, Colchester Elementary School Principal Judy O'Meara, William J. Johnston Middle School Principal Christopher Bennett, Jack Jackter Intermediate School Principal Elise Butson, Director of Pupil Services and Special Education Amy Emory, Assistant Director of Pupil Services and Special Education Elisa Fabiszak

OTHERS PRESENT: Business Director Rachel Linkkila, Director of Digital Learning and Innovation Darren Smith, Executive Assistant to the Superintendent/Board Clerk Heather Petit

1. **MEETING OPENING**

1.1 Call to Order

Chair Oliphant called the meeting to order at 5:03 PM

1.2 Roll Call

Chair Oliphant conducted a roll call of the Board

1.3 Pledge of Allegiance

Motion by: M.Gignac

Motion to add item 6.6 to the agenda for discussion and possible action on the competitive school readiness grant application including quality enhancement funds.

Second: C.Rivers

Roll call: All in Favor

Vote: Motion carried

2. STUDENT BOARD MEMBERS REPORT

2.1 Student Board Member Report

Ryan Moores and Brooke Dean gave a student board member report. Mr. Moores stated that the National Honor Society and Peer Advocacy League were a part of JJIS Learning Night. On March 31, 2022, Bacon Academy held a Be Well Day for sophomores and there was a lot of positive feedback about the event. Ms. Dean said that students and teachers are going to be donating used clothing for purchase during lunch and any clothing leftover will be donated to a local charity. Ms. Dean stated they have also been working on care boxes for women in need.

Ms. Tomasi thanked the BA Student Council for the pizza this evening.

3. PUBLIC COMMENT

3.1 For Public Comments, Please See Bylaw on Meeting Conduct

Thomas Kessler, Silver Meadow Dr.

Mr. Kessler stated that he is the Band Director at Bacon Academy. Mr. Kessler spoke about the importance of band for students and education and said it would be tragic for this program to end or fade away. Mr. Kessler said he hopes that the elimination of band will be reconsidered. He thanked the Board and wished them well this budget season.

Erin Shuman, Prospect Hill Rd.

Ms. Shuman spoke in support of the band program at Bacon Academy. Ms. Schuman stated that music benefitted her child in school and eliminating band at the younger levels would essentially end the program entirely. Ms. Schuman said that the District would not find a better middle school band director. She asked that the Board reconsider any cuts to music.

4. REPORT FROM SUPERINTENDENT

4.1 Recognition of Bacon Academy Class of 2023 Valedictorian Ryan Moores & Salutatorian Grace Gorreck

Superintendent Sullivan recognized Ryan Moores as the Bacon Academy Valedictorian for 2023 and Grace Gorreck as the Bacon Academy 2023 Salutatorian.

4.2 CT-SEDS Presentation

Elisa Fabiszak, Assistant Director of Pupil Services and Special Education, gave a presentation on the Connecticut Education Data System (CT-SEDS). Ms. Fabiszak said there was frustration throughout the state when the system went live on July 1, 2022

without any training provided for school districts from the state. The full presentation can be found as part of the Board packet.

Amy Emory recognized Ms. Fabiszak for all of her hard work and the effort she put into creating a manual on the new CT-SEDS system for staff. Ms. Emory also thanked the staff and administrators for all their work at CT-SEDS as well.

5. ***CONSENT AGENDA**

Donna Antonacci asked that a revision be made to the Board of Education Regular Meeting Minutes of March 14, 2023 to show her vote in favor of Bacon Academy credit requirement change as she did not mean to abstain.

Motion by: M.Tomasi

To approve the consent agenda as presented with the exception of 5.1

Second: M.Gignac

Roll call: All in favor

Vote: Motion carried

5.1 *Board of Education Regular Meeting Minutes of March 14, 2023

Motion by: M.Tomasi

To approve item 5.1 as amended.

Second: M.Gignac

Roll call: All in favor

Vote: Motion carried

5.1 *Board of Education Emergency Meeting Minutes of March 15, 2023

5.2 *Board of Education Special Meeting: Community Forum Minutes of March 28, 2023

5.3 *Board of Finance and Board of Education Joint Meeting Minutes of April 4, 2023

5.4 *JJIS Material Removal Request of Worn, Damaged, and Soiled Library Books

6. ***PRIORITY DISCUSSION/ACTION ITEMS**

Motion by: M.Tomasi

To approve 6.1, 6.2 and 6.3 and thanked donors for their support

Second: R.Gignac

Roll call: All in favor

Vote: Motion carried

- 6.1 *Spirit of Service Scholarship Donation of \$2,500 by Mr. & Mrs. Hathaway
- 6.2 *Cody Camp Memorial Scholarship Donation of \$1,500 by Patricia and Donald Camp
- 6.3 *Robotics Team Donation of \$1,000 by Ronald Goldstein
- 6.4 *Donation of Bathroom Vape Detectors from Colchester Youth Services
Donna Antonacci asked if the vape detectors had been installed yet at Bacon Academy.
Principal Begué stated they had not.

Motion by: M.Millington

To approve the donation of bathroom vape detectors for Bacon Academy from Colchester Youth Services

Second: R.Gignac

Roll call: All in favor

Vote: Motion carried

- 6.5 *Response to the Board of Finance Budget Reduction Request

Motion by: M.Gignac

To table 6.5 until after the completion of item 8.4

Second: R.Gignac

Roll call: All in favor

Vote: Motion carried

- 6.6 Discussion and Possible Action on the Competitive School Readiness Grant application including Quality Enhancement funds.

Judy O'Meara explained that the School Readiness Grant (approximately \$96,000) can be used for salaries, supplies and other preschool items.

Motion by: M.Gignac

To approve the 2023-2024 Competitive School Readiness Grant application and for the Superintendent to sign the application.

Second: M.Tomasi

Roll call: All in favor

Vote: Motion carried.

7. REPORTS FROM BOARD LIAISONS / COMMITTEES

- 7.1 Reports from Board Liaisons

Board of Selectmen: none

Board of Finance: none

P&R Commission: none

PTO Collaborative: Margo Gignac said the next meeting will be in May

C3 Collaborative: None

Commission on Aging: None

Youth & Social Services: Michelle Millington said at the last meeting discussion was had on the vape detectors for Bacon Academy which the Board voted on this evening.

7.2 Reports from Board Committees

Budget Finance Committee

Mr. Rivers stated that going forward there will be a cut off date for purchases which will help ensure knowing where the Board is at for the end of year. Mr. Rivers spoke to the February Monthly Budget Report. Mr. Rivers stated that the reason pupil services line item shows a large percent used is due to excess cost reimbursement changes to the district. Rachel Linkkila said that it is the tradition that the town will make the line whole with excess cost reimbursement and any remaining funds will go to the town.

Mr. Rivers spoke to budget transfers less than \$5,000. Mr. Rivers stated there is an item for desks at Bacon Academy under the principal furniture line. Mr. Rivers said he wanted to make clear that these desks are not for the principal but are chemical safe desks for students. He said the only reason it is under the principal furniture is because that is the name of the line item where funds for these items are kept.

Policy Committee

Has not met.

Curriculum Committee

Donna Antonacci stated that at the meeting the Committee discussed the music curriculum. Dr. Hewes said they asked for a special request for music curriculum including purchasing instruments as they wanted to make sure they had the instruments in hand.

Ms. Antonacci said they also discussed the ELA power unit. Dr. Hewes said teachers wanted to make revisions to the unit about understanding powers and how characters respond to identifiable differences between one character and the next. Dr. Hewes said that teachers wanted to make sure the texts provided a safe learning environment for students so teachers are going to scale some texts back.

Dr. Hewes said the committee is also reviewing the social emotional learning (SEL) curriculum, Second Step, for the district about working together, building strong relationships, etc. Dr. Hewes said the District SEL committee reviewed five programs before they recommended Second Step to the Board.

Communications Committee

Michelle Millington said the Committee met on April 18, 2023, and crafted a letter to the community to thank them for their support and let them know of upcoming meetings.

Facilities Committee

Margo Gignac stated the facilities committee will meet after the budget season.

8. BOARD ANNOUNCEMENTS AND INFORMATION ITEMS

8.1 Next Meetings

Curriculum Committee Meeting: Monday, May 1, 2023

Budget Finance Committee Meeting: Wednesday, May 3, 2023

BOE Regular Meeting: Tuesday, May 9, 2023

8.2 Enrollment Report

April enrollment is 2,247

8.3 Personnel Report

Superintendent Sullivan spoke to the hires, resignations and retirements.

8.4 Notices of Retirement/Resignation

Mario Hurtado

Santos Figueroa

Jessica Kilguss

Kristina Segura

David Fitzgerald

Mary Beth Dufresne

8.5 (previously 6.5) *Response to the Board of Finance Budget Reduction Request

Superintendent Sullivan discussed the Board of Finance request for budget reductions.

Mr. Sullivan stated that before bringing requested reductions to the Board of Finance he wanted to present them to the Board of Education for members' input. Mr. Sullivan and Ms. Linkkila presented budget worksheets in regard to potential reductions; one totaling \$1,476,155.12 in reductions and another in the amount of \$1,026,117.62. Mr. Sullivan stated these were being presented in response to Board of Finance Members' requests for reductions of \$1,300,000 and \$750,000 respectively.

Mr. Sullivan stated the amounts presented are slightly higher than the Board of Finance requests as he wanted to give the Board options of where they wanted to make potential reductions before responding to the Board of Finance at their next meeting.

Superintendent Sullivan spoke about other possible revenue options including an increase to Pay-to-Play. Mr. Sullivan stated however, that currently Bacon Academy charges \$180 a season which is larger than most districts who at most charge \$125. Mr. Sullivan said

other potential revenue options include \$180 per semester for instruments in pull out instruction.

Mr. Rivers asked for clarification on the different accounts and definitions. Mr. Rivers stated that it would be beneficial to have an infographic on these accounts. Dr. Hewes presented a draft document to help explain the different accounts.

Dr. Hewes stated that the Capital Reserve Fund (also known as Capital Outlay) is last year funds that were unexpended. These funds then go into an account at the end of the year and can be used to pay off expenses.

Dr. Hewes stated that the Unassigned Fund Balance represents available financial resources of the town that have not been designated for a specific purpose. The Assigned Fund Balance is for items brought forward to the Board of Finance that are approved by them for a specific project for an exact amount.

Dr. Hewes showed the policies on the Town website under the Board of Finance section in regard to these funds. Ms. Millington stated her concern that the town audit still has not been completed for last fiscal year so the actual total is not known. Superintendent Sullivan said there are past funds in the accounts that could be utilized but agreed that the specific amount for the past fiscal year is not yet complete due to the town audit.

Superintendent Sullivan took a straw poll of the Board who all agreed to the movement of the items recommended by the Board of Finance to capital reserve, unassigned and assigned funds. All Board members agreed.

Discussion was had on potential cuts in regard to the Board of Finance request of a \$1,300,000 reduction.

The Board agreed to potential cuts that would not impact the education to students including the health reserve account, legal services and transportation. Board members all expressed their opposition to moving to half-day kindergarten, reducing preschool, and eliminating world language at the middle school.

Mr. Rivers said the faculty and staff in the district are amazing and these potential cuts are soul crushing. Mary Tomasi stated that the town has to fund education and she was heartbroken that the Board had to look at half-day kindergarten, the preschool program, and middle school world language. Ms. Tomasi said once services are cut, they never come back. Ms. Gignac stated she did not agree with charging students for parking or increasing pay-to-play. Ms. Gignac stated that cutting services and programs does not make the town marketable to other districts looking to send their students here or for people in town.

Mr. Sullivan thanked the Board for their feedback and expressed concern that if they did not bring forth potential cuts, it may delay the process even further. Mr. Sullivan stated that in addition, it might cause teachers to look for positions in other districts.

The Board discussed school security and safety. The board as a whole agreed that safety and security is crucial and agreed with keeping it in the budget.

9. PUBLIC COMMENT

9.1 For Public Comments, Please See Bylaw on Meeting Conduct

Karen Belding, Deer Run Dr.

Ms. Belding said she was thankful that the Board was going to show the proposal with the reductions that do not affect educational programming. Ms. Belding recommended that the document explain the impact (number of students, etc.) that potential cuts would have so that the Board of Finance can see it.

Sarah Manfre, Starwood Trail

Ms. Manfre asked if the Board thought about the possibility of having half day kindergarten for free and for parents to pay tuition for the other half. Ms. Manfre said many parents would need to find something for their children for the other half of the day and this may be a solution. Ms. Manfre asked about the possibility of reducing an Assistant Principal to 10-months instead of a full year which might help identify cost savings.

Nicole McKenzie, Bull Hill Rd.

Ms. McKenzie said she liked that the Board is putting items in ranking order to what are priorities. Ms. McKenzie said if the district treats instrumental music like pay-to-play, she does not see it being sustainable. Ms. McKenzie said that half day kindergarten cannot happen. Ms. McKenzie said she is okay with parking fees for students if necessary.

Tiffany Moroch, Bull Hill Rd.

Ms. Moroch if there would still be a peer program for preschool if they reduced it to just those that require it. She asked if there was any discussion in regard to reducing prior items (i.e. custodians) that were recommended previously but are not listed now. Ms. Moroch said that the data and impact on children is important to show the Board of Finance. Ms. Moroch stated that reducing world language is moving backward from district goals.

Beth Tiezzi, New London Rd.

Ms. Tiezzi thanked the Board for all of their hard work. Ms. Tiezzi asked why all the reductions are coming from CES when their enrollment is higher than other schools.

The Board took a five minute recess at 8:10 PM.

The Board reconvened at 8:18PM

10. EXECUTIVE SESSION

10.1 Discussion Regarding a Security Concern (proposed for executive session)

Motion by: M.Gignac

Motion to move into executive session at 8:19 PM for a security concern inviting Superintendent Daniel Sullivan, Assistant Superintendent Dr. Charles Hewes, Executive Assistant to the Superintendent Heather Petit, and Business Director Rachel Linkkila.

Second: C.Rivers

Roll call: All in favor.

Vote: Motion carried.

Returned to public session at 8:51 PM

11. ADJOURNMENT

Motion by: M.Gignac

To adjourn the meeting at 8:52 PM

Second: D.Antonacci

Roll call: All in favor

Vote: Carried

Respectfully submitted,

Heather R. Petit

Executive Assistant to the Superintendent/Board Clerk