



COLCHESTER BOARD OF EDUCATION
Colchester, CT

REGULAR BOARD MEETING

Tuesday, May 9, 2023

6:00 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 (virtually)

ADMINISTRATION PRESENT: Superintendent Daniel P. Sullivan, III, Assistant Superintendent Dr. Charles E. Hewes, Bacon Academy Principal Amy Begué, 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

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 6:07PM

1.2 Roll Call

Chair Oliphant conducted a roll call of the Board

1.3 Pledge of Allegiance

2. ***ADDITIONS/CHANGES TO THE AGENDA**

2.1 *New Agenda Items

None

3. **STUDENT BOARD MEMBERS REPORT**

3.1 Student Board Member Report

None

4. PUBLIC COMMENT

4.1 For Public Comments, Please See Bylaw on Meeting Conduct

Tiffany Moroch, Bull Hill Rd.

Ms. Moroch stated she supports the Board of Education and thanked them for all of their work and said she hopes everyone keeps the kids in the forefront.

Jennifer Sevigny, Berry Lane

Ms. Sevigny said that she believes the Board wants what is best for students and knows that the Board has the best ideas at heart.

5. REPORT FROM SUPERINTENDENT

5.1 Staff Appreciation Week

Superintendent Sullivan stated that he sent a communication home to families in regard to staff appreciation. Mr. Sullivan said that all staff members play a critical role to students in the District. Mr. Sullivan stated that the Board and administration took time to recognize staff with lunch last week and they are very grateful for the hardworking staff in Colchester.

6. *CONSENT AGENDA

6.1 *Board of Education Regular Meeting Minutes of April 25, 2023

6.2 *Bacon Academy Material Removal Request of Outdated Textbooks

6.3 *AGParts Chromebook Buyback

Motion by: M.Gignac

To approve the consent agenda as presented

Second: R.Gignac

Roll call: All in favor

Vote: Motion carried

7. *PRIORITY DISCUSSION/ACTION ITEMS

7.1 *Discussion and Possible Action on the K-5 Social Emotional Learning Curriculum: Second Step

Donna Antonacci said the Second Step curriculum was discussed at the Curriculum Committee Meeting and all members agreed with the program. Ms. Antonacci stated that the Committee also agreed to purchase the program (3 year sets) using this year's funds.

Dr. Hewes said the full amount of the materials and licensing would be paid out of the Esser II grant at a total cost of \$32,314.

Dr. Hewes presented the curriculum and said the vision of Social Emotional Learning at Colchester Public Schools is for students to feel connected, accepted and ready to learn. The Second Step curriculum will include the following units:

- Unit 1: Growth Mindset & Goal-Setting
- Unit 2: Emotion Management
- Unit 3: Empathy and Kindness
- Unit 4: Problem-Solving

At Colchester Elementary School they will have one 15 minute lesson each week. At Jack Jackter Intermediate School they will have one 25 minute lesson each week.

Motion by: M.Gignac

To approve the K-5 Social Emotional Learning Curriculum: Second Step

Second: R.Gignac

Roll call: All in favor

Vote: Motion carried

7.2 Discussion on the 2023-2024 Budget

Superintendent Sullivan distributed a Budget Reduction Proposal handout in regard to the Board of Finance's reduction to the Board of Education at their May 2, 2023, meeting of \$1,571,175 in total. Mr. Sullivan and Board members discussed the reduction considerations.

Mary Tomasi stated that she agrees that funding for education is the priority; however, reducing capital expenditures puts our buildings at risk as the needs continue to grow. Michelle Millington stated she is concerned about the roof not getting done.

Margo Gignac asked about the language offerings in the high school and class size if world language in Grade 7 is eliminated. Mr. Sullivan said that next year one of the top items in the Superintendent's proposed budget would be to restore world language at William J. Johnston Middle School. Dr. Hewes said that there are currently 23 students in the District that achieved the Seal of Biliteracy. Dr. Hewes stated that if world language is not offered earlier on, it will affect students in the current program.

Christopher Rivers stated that the Board would not make any final decisions until after the referendum and/or until there is an approved budget voted on by the Colchester community. Mr. Sullivan said delaying a decision affects staff members and employees who are wondering if they will have a job. In addition, Mr. Sullivan said that kindergarten registration and orientation is this Thursday and parents will need to know if it will be a half day or full day.

Mr. Rivers said he certainly understands that and he begrudgingly agrees to delay the capital projects as educational programming comes first. Mr. Rivers asked that the flyer be updated to clearly outline how the Board will get to the \$1,571,175 reduction.

Motion by: C.Rivers

To add an action item to agenda for 2023-2024 Board of Education budget

Second: M.Gignac

Roll call: All in favor

Vote: Motion carried.

Ms. Antonacci read the following statement:

I promised a homily for Dan tonight. So, I hope I don't bore you all. In case you haven't been able to tell from some of my comments tonight, I am disgusted.

Two years ago, I sat in Art Schilosky's garage and was interviewed by the nominating committee for BOE. Art asked me, "do you understand being fiscally conservative?" He explained that it is recognizing needs versus wants, and making the hard decisions balancing needs of BOE with the town's ability to pay. I replied, "yes."

For a long time, I joked about being on the BOE because I was Margo'd. For any of you who know Margo, you know what that means. The truth is that I saw this as an opportunity to make a difference in this community. I was elected as a Republican, but I represent everyone in Colchester to the best of my ability.

Up until now I have been very respectful of my Republican counterparts on other town Boards, while they have not done this for me or my fellow BOE members. I have reached an impasse. I can no longer swallow the insults, and still have respect for myself. Last night, the BOE members were told again that they have not done their due diligence. Last night there was smirking and outright laughing as the public asked to be heard. They said they were listening but were clearly not. Last night our superintendent was called out as a liar. Last night I watched as Art was disrespectfully ignored and cajoled into an abstention on a vote that should have been set aside until clarity was gained. It was borderline elder abuse. I have great respect for Art, and it was disgusting. Let's be clear on that tonight: The BOF monetary cut, not reduction, is \$1,571,175 because the BOF chair arbitrarily took the capital plan off the table. Madam chair does not have line-item authority to make such decisions. She ignored the numbers and decided that she was asking for a \$1.3 million dollar cut, when the reality states differently. If it was a \$1.3, we may have had a chance.

In going back to Art's original ask of me: Yes, I understand being fiscally conservative and this budget fits that bill. There isn't much in this budget that is "fun" or a "want." It is virtually all "needs" based.

Without getting into too much detail, the needs of the schools are high in regards to special ed. Our Board has worked towards fixing the special ed department and there is much more work needed. We have corrected a lot of things wrong with the district, not the least of which was hiring a competent superintendent. Maybe I haven't said this in public enough, but I fully support and trust Dan Sullivan. He has brought honesty and transparency to the budget process. Documents have been available and easy to find for everyone including Art. I love what he has done this budget year, and hope he continues to have the same enthusiasm for projects going forward.

Motion by: C.Rivers

To begrudgingly accept the proposed reductions to the 2023-2024 budget.

Second: D.Antonacci

Roll Call: All in favor

Vote: Motion carried

Mr. Sullivan thanked parents, families, community members, and administrators for all of their support and time during this budget season. Mr. Sullivan said these are extremely hard decisions. Mr. Sullivan stated that he hopes we can continue to build community trust built on common goals and have a better path forward. Mr. Sullivan thanked so many people for their diligence this budget season including Dr. Hewes, Rachel Linkkila, and Heather Petit for all of their hard work.

Ms. Tomasi said it is up to the community now to come out and vote. Ms. Tomasi said that the community's support is needed to pass the budget.

8. REPORTS FROM BOARD LIAISONS / COMMITTEES

8.1 Reports from Board Liaisons

Board of Selectmen

Ms. Antonacci gave an update on the last Board of Selectmen meeting. Ms. Antonacci said they did not discuss the water and sewer employee hearing due to Mr. Bisbikos stating that some Board of Selectmen members had a conflict. Ms. Antonacci stated that citizens gave comments at the meeting on the Board of Education budget. She said both a gazebo (\$51,800 and partially funded by a grant) and fire apparatus were approved by the Board of Selectmen.

Board of Finance

None

P&R Commission

Margo Gign said that the meetings are held on the first Monday of each month which is a conflict for her but she hopes to be able to attend soon.

PTO Collaborative

Ms. Gignac said the PTO did a phenomenal job last week with a unified event regarding what the PTO does and different ways to get involved. Superintendent Sullivan was a guest speaker at the event.

C3 Collaborative

Rosemary Gignac stated that the Board of Education budget was discussed at the last C3 Collaborative meeting. Mr. Sullivan attended as well and answered questions in regard to the budget for members.

Commission on Aging

Ms. Tomasi said the Senior Center will be having a Meet & Greet event next Monday.

Youth & Social Services

Ms. Millington said the vape detectors have been installed at Bacon Academy and were purchased through a grant by Youth and Social Services. Ms. Millington said the detectors are just waiting to be wired.

8.2 Reports from Board Committees

Budget Finance Committee

Mr. Rivers stated that there will be transfers to review and vote upon at the next Board of Education meeting.

Policy Committee

Ms. Antonacci stated that a meeting will be scheduled soon and has been delayed due to budget. Ms. Antonacci said that Heather Petit worked on an analysis and the next meeting will be to work on an overall review of all Board policies.

Curriculum Committee

Ms. Antonacci and Dr. Hewes stated that a unit is going to be temporarily taken out of ELA in grade 8 so that the committee can review texts further.

Communications Committee

Ms. Millington stated that at the last Communications Committee meeting they discussed sending a communication to the community in regard to an update on the budget process.

Facilities Committee

None

9. BOARD ANNOUNCEMENTS AND INFORMATION ITEMS

9.1 Next Meetings

Curriculum Committee Meeting: Monday, May 22, 2023

BOE Regular Meeting: Tuesday, May 23, 2023

Budget Finance Committee Meeting: Wednesday, June 7, 2023

9.2 Notices of Retirement/Resignation

Tricia McCourt

Motion by: D.Antonacci

To move item 11.1 Public Comment to 9.3

Second: M.Gignac

Roll call: All in favor

Vote: Motion carried

9.3. Public Comment (formerly 11.1)

Michael Egan, Lebanon Avenue

Mr. Egan said he is speaking as a citizen and also a Board of Finance member. Mr. Egan stated that he has been involved in the community for a long time. He really appreciates what the seven board members do and all of their hard work. Mr. Egan said we are still going to fight, work, and do what is right for the district. Mr. Egan thanked the teachers, staff, and board for all they do for kids and the community.

Beth Tiezzi, New London Road

Ms. Tiezzi said it was so refreshing to hear the Board discuss and make decisions in the way that they did. Ms. Tiezzi said the parents and community are still here to support the Board and that she is sorry they had to make these decisions.

Joanne Rose, Reservoir Road

Ms. Rose thanked everyone for all their advocacy for the students and school district. Ms. Rose said that the early start in band is so important and feeds into the high school. She said that she knows the Board does not want it to be interrupted by a fee and is thankful they cut the fee in half. Ms. Rose asked that it not be precedent-setting and that the Superintendent reinstate it in full next budget season.

Jim Shuman, Prospect Hill Road

Mr. Shuman thanked everyone for the tone of the meeting and all of their hard work. Mr. Shuman would like the Board to work with the community to find creative ways to help cover the cost of band for students.

Carrie Barthel, Harbor Road

Ms. Barthel thanked the Board for their tone at the meeting. Ms. Barthel stated that the information sharing has been outstanding and parents really appreciate that. She stated that she wanted the Board to know that the kids are also fighting for the budget too.

Krista Kardys, Hi Lea Farm Road

Ms. Kardys thanked the Board for its conduct, thoughtfulness and collaboration. Ms. Kardys said she is proud of the Board and thanked Ms. Antonacci for her words.

Erin Kaiser, Carriage Drive

Ms. Kaiser thanked everyone for their encouragement throughout this budget season and for keeping students, family and staff at the top of their priority list. Ms. Kaiser thanked the Board for restoring her faith in local politics.

Ashley LaParre, McDonald Road

Ms. LaParre thanked everyone for all of their hard work and for being transparent. Ms. LaParre stated that her children are also aware and fighting for what is important to them. Ms. LaParre said she hopes everyone can continue to be problem solvers in regard to raising additional funding including funding from grants.

Mallory Breitmaier, Farm Gate Road

Ms. Breitmaier thanked the Board for all of their hard work and stated that she is so appreciative of all that they do.

Sean Gillespie, Cambridge Court

Mr. Gillespie said that Colchester needs to be an attractive place for children and the town needs to fully fund programs. Mr. Gillespie stated that what parents need to do as citizens is to get out and vote and support the Board for all of their efforts this budget season.

Ashley Zaugg, Usher Swamp Road

Ms. Zaugg thanked the Board and said Board members have been nothing but class acts throughout the entire process; even when others were baiting them. Ms. Zaugg said that when they went low, the Board went high. Ms. Zaugg said that Mr. Sullivan has brought more transparency to the district than in the past. Ms. Zaugg said she doesn't want anyone to say that Mr. Sullivan used kindergarten as a scare tactic; rather, he heard from the constituents that it was not a possibility. Ms. Zaugg thanked him for listening to people.

10. ***EXECUTIVE SESSION**

10.1 *Discussion and Possible Action on the Superintendent's Annual Evaluation
(discussion proposed for executive session)

10.2 *Discussion and Possible Action on an Employee Request for Leave of Absence
(discussion proposed for executive session)

Motion by: M.Gignac

Motion to move into executive session at 8:05PM for discussion regarding the superintendent's evaluation and an employee request for leave of absence inviting Superintendent Dan Sullivan for portions of the session.

Second: D.Antonacci

Roll call: All in favor

Vote: Motion carried.

Returned to public session at 9:31PM

Motion by: A.Oliphant

To extend the employment contract of Daniel P. Sullivan, III through and including June 30, 2026, and further that the board chairperson and vice chairperson be authorized to finalize and execute the employment contract with Mr. Sullivan.

Second: D.Antonacci

Roll call: All in favor

Vote: Motion carried

Motion by: M.Tomasi

To approve the employee request for leave of absence

Second: M.Gignac

Roll call: All in favor

Vote: Motion carried

11. PUBLIC COMMENT

11.1 For Public Comments, Please See Bylaw on Meeting Conduct

Moved to item 9.3

12. ADJOURNMENT

Motion by: M. Gignac

To adjourn the meeting at 9:33 PM

Second: M.Millington

Roll call: All in favor

Vote: Motion carried

Respectfully submitted,

Heather R. Petit

Executive Assistant to the Superintendent/Board Clerk