

ANSONIA PUBLIC SCHOOLS BOARD OF EDUCATION MINUTES

PLACE: DTL Conference Room, Central Office **DATE:** 15 October 2018 **TIME:** 6:00 P.M.
MEETING CALLED TO ORDER BY: William Nimons, president

- I. **OPENING**
- A. **Pledge of Allegiance**
- B. **Roll Call – Mr. William Nimons, called a quorum.**

MEMBERS OF THE BOARD	PRESENT	ABSENT	LATE
MRS. TRACEY DELIBERO	X		
MS. FRAN DIGIORGI	X		
MR. JOHN IZZO	X		
MR. JOE JEANETTE	X		
MR. WILLIAM NIMONS, president	X		
MR. CHRISTOPHER PHIPPS		X	
MR. VINCENT SCARLATA	X		
TOTAL	6	1	0

II. The State of Ansonia Public Schools–

Superintendent Carol Merlone stated she wanted to address the Board of Ed as well as the public on the reality of our schools at this time. She said she wrote a letter to the Board about a week ago asking to hold a public meeting for all to come out and share, as well as learn the state of our schools. Superintendent Merlone said it is her belief that in the court or public opinion, if she or Dr. Joe DiBacco were to say anything, it would be held against them. She asked some faculty members to give their facts and feelings about the schools. Superintendent Merlone said she also would like the public to speak regarding their experience. She said she is asking the public for ideas and suggestions to help our children. Superintendent Merlone challenged the public, parents, Board of Ed members, Board of Aldermen and the mayor to go and spend time in the schools to see exactly what is happening on a daily basis in each of our buildings. She said in her 12 years as superintendent, she has never had to experience anything like this.

III. Public Forum-

Mrs. Karen Rzasa, Ansonia High School Special Education Teacher, Mrs. Allison Wynus, Ansonia High School Special Education Teacher, and Mrs. Sandra Small, Special Education Teacher all spoke on behalf of the Special Education Department. Mrs. Rzasa began (ATTACHMENT #1) by saying she has been a teacher in Ansonia for 18 years. She said her heart is in Ansonia, there are amazing teachers here and she would rather pay for her seventh grader to come here than attend her hometown school. Mrs. Rzasa began to read her factual data (ATTACHMENT #2). Mr. Allison Wynus came up to speak. She told the forum she has been teaching in Ansonia for 16 years. (ATTACHMENT#3).

Mrs. Jessica Rogers, Mead School, Second Grade Teacher.(ATTACHMENT #4) Mrs. Rogers began by saying she has a student attending Prendergast School, she has been teaching for 17 years in Ansonia and she is also a product of the Ansonia School System herself. Mrs. Rogers said she has always thought of herself as a good teacher, able to handle all of the changes that each year would bring. She said this also included all of the cuts that have been happening for the past few years. Mrs. Rogers said she has never felt as unprepared as she does now, trying to teach twenty-seven seven year olds. She said this number is way too many for one classroom. Mrs. Rogers said she is not able to teach or get to know these needy children.

Mrs. Guadino, Prendergast School First Grade Teacher. Mrs. Guadino said she has been teaching for 16 years. She said she is one of the lucky ones who only has 25 six-year-old students in her room. She said like all the other teachers, she is not able to do her job effectively. Mrs. Guadino said she believes she speaks for most; she is spread thin and not doing her job well. Instead she said they are merely covering basics, touching base and just trying to do the best they could. Mrs. Guadino said unfortunately with students coming to school less prepared, it is impossible to do her job to the best of her ability when so much time is taken away from instruction. She said the interventionist should be coming into the classroom and there is no room. Mrs. Guadino said her personal life is suffering and her own children are being neglected when she comes home exhausted and overworked. She said in only the second month of school they are tired.

Ms. Nicole Dlugis, Prendergast School Teacher came up to speak. Ms. Dlugis said she has been teaching in Ansonia for 14 years. She said she was one of the displaced teachers and had to move to the uncomfortable task of trying to teach sixth graders. She said this year has been a more than difficult year to have to move from a happy place where she belongs to teach, into a position that is a struggle. She said her colleagues are suffering as well, since her old grade level is now down a classroom. She said the behavior is very difficult to handle. Ms. Delugis said she has sat through Board meetings and heard over and over how the Board is here for the students. She said the only member she has ever seen in any building is Mr. Scarlatta. Ms. Dlugis said she wanted to thank him for coming into the building to see how crowded the rooms are. She said year after year they are given concessions and year after year they are given less and less. She said they are beaten and they have no more left to give. Ms. Delugis said she did five years of a pay freeze to help her fellow teachers. She said she has nothing left to give and the children do not deserve this. She said there are no supplies such as copy paper. She said they do not have the necessary tools to educate the students.

Mr. Vinny Scarlatta said the crowded room we are in now is a good comparison to what the classrooms are like. He said it is daunting to look at. Mr. Scarlatta said mayhem is going to break out once the students get comfortable because there is just too many students in one room. He said he would hear some things from his children and didn't really pay much attention until he had a conversation with Mr. Mat Hough. He said it is time to address this crisis and the teachers are regular folks trying to do a job.

Mrs. Allison Wynus read a note written from Ms. Maria Tangredi, Ansonia High School Music Coordinator and Teacher (ATTACHMENT#5).

Mr. Mat Hough, Ansonia Middle School Music Teacher approached to speak. He said he wanted to talk about the Middle School. Mr. Hough said bad behaviors and issues on a daily basis make it impossible to teach. He said the teachers are required to teach both seventh and eighth grade students, which is next to impossible. He gave several examples of the unruly classrooms and bad behavior. Mr. Hough thanked all who came out.

Mrs. Bridget Calabrese, President of the Administration Union read a letter on behalf of the Administrators. (ATTACHMENT #6)

Ms. Kathie Gabrielson, Director Special Services said due to the cuts in her department, including the part time assistant for her position, she is not able to assist her staff. She said her newly hired faculty throughout the buildings require guidance and she is not able to give that because she has to be in meetings on or off site every day. She said her staff needs support and she is not able to give it at this time.

Superintendent Merlone said we are all here for our kids and they deserve better. She said the parents need to know because their children deserve better and they need to see what is happening in the schools on a daily basis. She said she will not give up, and would like ideas from anyone that may be willing to help. She said she never thought this would be happening to Ansonia schools. She said positions are not being filled because no one wants to work in this district. She said instead of placing blame, she would like suggestions and any ideas that may help.

Ms. Lisa Glazer, concerned parent, said she tried to get volunteers and wants to be able to send something out to all parents for the volunteer program.

Mr. Joe Jeanette, Board of Ed member, asked to speak. He said he wanted to apologize for not going out to see the schools. He said at this time he is very busy but does care. He said members of the Board know what is going on and keep in touch with Superintendent Merlone. He said we have to get out there and go to the individuals who are running the city and set the budgets and fund the education. Mr. Jeanette said when it comes time to vote, see who cares about the children and the education of our children. He said it doesn't matter what party they are affiliated with if they support our education. Mr. Jeanette said spread the

word and get people to vote. He said we need to get someone in this city who is going to support education. He said we have to go for the people who support our schools.

Mr. John Izzo, Board of Education member, asked if we should speak on the situation regarding Delta T that was mentioned earlier. He asked if time is being spent babysitting the Delta T staff. He said he is wondering if we need to improve the quality of Delta T staff in the schools. Superintendent Merlone answered saying that was not the comment that was made, she said it was that staffing was cut and the support is not there like it used to be. She said it all came down to lack of funds when the Delta T staff was hired. She said the decision to place Delta T staff was due to budget cuts and saving money. She said that is a good suggestion if there would be cost savings.

Ms. Fran DiGiorgi, Board of Ed member, said she believes residents should look into which candidates supported education as which selectmen voted against the education budget. She said those that did not we need to get out of office.

Mrs. Jen Fasciano, 16 Michael Street. She said she has a daughter in middle school and although she comes home saying she feels safe, she tells some stories that do not sound very good at all. Mrs. Fasciano said she understands the stories are from a child, but is beginning to wonder if the school is safe and what may be happening during the day. She said she does not know if there is a serious discipline problem, but is thinking maybe there can be some contact with the police department. Mrs. Fasciano said if an officer was present and spoke with students, it may help. Superintendent Merlone said it is a great idea and she will give Chief Hale a call tomorrow.

Mrs. Monica Fasciano, 14 Michael Street. Mrs. Fasciano said she has a child going to the middle school next year and is also a teacher at the high school. She said at the high school when incidents happen, the student involved will receive a fine from an Ansonia Police Officer. She said community service or a fine as a form a punishment may teach them a lesson. Superintendent Merlone said she likes this idea.

Mr. William Nimons, president of the Board of Education, asked Superintendent Merlone to ask any other individuals to give their suggestions and ideas and have someone in the Board Office create a list.

Superintendent Merlone thanked everyone to come out and for all the support.

IV. ADJOURNMENT

MOTION: To adjourn the meeting at 7:12 p.m.

	MOTION	YES	NO	ABSTAIN
MRS. TRACEY DELIBERO		X		
MS. FRAN DIGIORGI	1	X		
MR. JOHN IZZO		X		
MR. JOE JEANETTE		X		
MR. WILLIAM NIMONS, president		X		
MR. CHRISTOPHER PHIPPS				
MR. VINCENT SCARLATA	2	X		
TOTAL		6	0	

Respectfully submitted,



Cassie Venson
Date 10/18/2018

Special Education Impacts on Education at High School 2018-2019

At the end of last year, 2 days before school ended, a special education teaching position was cut from the high school.

This teacher had the responsibility of providing academic support to students with IEP's in 8 freshmen inclusion classes over 4 periods. This teacher also, taught 2 resource room periods a day.

Last year, the total number of students with IEP's at the high school was 130 students divided among 6 special education teachers with the responsibility of case manager.

The average number of students on each teacher's caseload was 21.7.

This year the total number of students with IEP's at the high school is 132 students divided among 5 special education teachers.

The average number of students on each teacher's caseload is 26.4, with 29 being the most on 2 teacher's caseload.

This is an average of 21.6% increase of students per special education teacher.

Special education teachers are teaching an overload this year, teaching 6 classes.

The special education department does not have a collaboration period built into their schedule, leaving meeting time for the department during monthly meetings and the lunch period for 4 teachers.

On average for the 2017-2018 school year, the total number of students in a resource room was 8, split among 12 resources classes.



This year the average number of students in a resource room is 10, split among 11 classes.

This is an increase of 25% of students in a resource room.

With budget cuts, the special education department had to change to a new IEP program. Though we received training and understand how to use the program, the amount of time spent writing one IEP has doubled.

Special education teachers are spending more time attending PPT's, doing paperwork, testing, writing reports, and collecting data. This results in not enough planning time to adequately plan for the 3 self-contained academic classes we teach.

The responsibility of handling Delta T aides has been given to 2 teachers. One teacher is responsible for the aides assigned to students in life skills, while the other is responsible for the aides assigned to students in the inclusion setting.

We believe that a major factor in the increase of students with IEP's being written up and/or disciplined is due to the lack of support our students are receiving in the general ed setting and the less contact time they have with their case manager. Approximately 50% of all high school students who are given administration referrals (write-ups) are students with IEP's.

Due to the cut of the 6th teacher who had the responsibility of servicing 9th graders in their academic classes, there is now one paraprofessional covering 9 inclusion classes over 4 periods.

Our paraprofessionals, who service students in the inclusion setting, now have more classes to cover. They are spending less time in the classes, leaving students with little to no extra support.

Our paraprofessionals are split among several classes per period, with the most being one paraprofessional splitting among 5 classes in one period. The average number of classes per period a paraprofessional is splitting their time is between 3 classes.

Paraprofessionals are also pulled from their assigned classes to sub for teachers during meetings or if there are teachers out and there are no subs. This has occurred 20 times since the beginning of the school year. This is due to the lack of substitutes willing to come to Ansonia High school. Students lose services within the classroom when this happens.

Also, due to lack of substitutes, the special education teachers have combined classes on multiple occasions and have covered each other's classes. When this happens, our students lose out on instructional hours needed as required in their IEP.

The impact this has on students and general education teachers is lack of services and supports provided to students in their classes. Because the paraprofessionals split their time among the classes based on what day it is in the rotation, students can have 3 days of classes with no special education support in their classes.

When tests/quizzes are given on the same day, the paraprofessionals can not pull students and provide them with their accommodations as stated in their IEP's such as orally read tests, alternative setting, extra time etc. This results in special education students taking tests/quizzes without support as their classes may occur during a time when the paraprofessional is not scheduled to be there or is giving

another test. The students often ask to see their case manager during testing when support is not available, but often this will occur when special education teachers are teaching a class, in a meeting or on their prep.

Not only have all of these issues been negative for the students but also on us as the teachers. This extra work has taken an emotional toll on us all. We love Ansonia but these past few months have made us rethink our passion to teach. Our personal lives have also been effected. It is difficult to leave the problems here at work. We go home at night and worry about the next day and all of the work that needs to get done and the little bit of time that we have to do it. Teachers are spending additional hours than in previous years at home trying to keep up with the paperwork required for PPT meetings which is taking away from valuable family time. This has never been an issue in the combined 47 years that we have spent in this district. The level of stress we are experiencing this year has negatively impacted the students as well.

We as special education teachers at the high school, feel our students are not getting adequate support due to the lack of contact time with us, lack of support in general education classes, and the overload of paperwork we are expected to do and meetings we must attend.

④
Jessica Roger

- I am a product of the Ansonia school system. One of my children is a 4th grader at Pgst and receives many SPED services
- I have worked in the Ansonia school district the past 17 yrs and consider myself a veteran. This year, however, I do not feel like a veteran teacher this yr. In the past several years there have been many changes in the Ansonia school system, including losing Intervention, having half year Specials, and classroom teachers teaching Intervention, but none of these have made me struggle as a Veteran teacher, as this year.
- This yr is very difficult bc of the large class sizes. I currently have 27 7-yr olds that I am solely responsible for their education in a very important yr. If you are not familiar with primary education K-2, those are the most important yrs as children are learning how to read and how to be a student. This is impossible to do this year.
- We start testing the students immediately in Sept to get accurate reading and math levels so we can better instruct and form small groups to work with the children. We just finished testing the students. However, at this point we should have already been instructing and working in small groups and ready to progress monitor to assess their progress. But, we haven't even been able to meet in small groups because we are still testing.
- Learning in small groups is essential for all our students for both literacy and math. This is impossible after teaching a whole group lesson. Pulling 4-5 kids and still having 21 work independently isn't reaching students. Plus throughout the week even if we pull small groups of 4-5 students, we will not see all our students in one week. The SPED students also get lost in a whole group lesson, there are too many distractions during a 20 minute lesson.
- Getting to know my students. At this point, I do not know my students as well as I normally would. It is crucial to know your students, their learning styles and personalities. It is so imperative to know your students so you can reach them. It is impossible to know 27 children.
- Classroom space. Some students have diagnosed sensory issues and some just do not like noise and chaos. Adults are like this too!!! 27 7 yr-olds make a lot of noise. It's just a lot of extra noise for some children to handle. They shut down because there is too much chaos. There is also, no physical space to move about with 26 other children. This doesn't include myself, a SPED aide, SPED para. At some points in the day, there can be 30 bodies in my classroom. If a child needs a quiet space, there is no corner not being used.
- I invite any of you to come spend one day in my classroom and see how unsuccessful teaching 27 7 yr-old is.

Dear Respected Members of the Ansonia Community.

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My name is Maria Tangredi and I have served as the music teacher at Ansonia High School for 22 years; directing both the band, chorus, Vocal Vibes after school chorus, and keyboarding courses. It is with great humility and with great appreciation for the difficult financial decisions being made that I write to you today. I will speak on my own day-to-day challenges as well as on a more global level in terms of potential future ramifications.

Like most recent years, I teach an overload this year, which is 6 classes versus the traditional 5. In my particular situation, this is generally a "good problem" to have on the surface. It allows students, especially higher academic performers who tend to have very demanding schedules, more flexibility to explore the performing arts, though not often until they are upperclassmen. On the flip side, our offering of electives is somewhat limited as a school, so there are students who need elective credit who are put into the ensemble classes whose interests do not lie in the performing arts. Behaviorally, this becomes a challenge that I liken to going grocery shopping where 3 wheels on the cart want to shop and the 4th wheel wants to go to the parking lot. While some of these students eventually come around, there are some who will be behavior problems in class all year, and will be absent from performances and rehearsals, making these events difficult on the other students.

My biggest challenge however is and has almost always been, our lack of a feeder program to the high school from the middle school in terms of ensembles. At one time, there were 5 music positions in Ansonia and now we are down to 3; making the teacher student ratio about 750 to 1. In our band, this is especially a challenge because learning an instrument is a long-term commitment and it is hard to convince teenagers to begin learning an instrument at a time in their lives when they are the most self-conscious. While we have a core group of wonderful students that defy the odds (I call them the bravest kids in the school), they come in with a great deal of enthusiasm and very little background knowledge. These students are the outliers, whereas we have many more that could have been reached if they began instrumental music sooner. The repertoire that we have to select is not at a high school level in terms of difficulty, so if they decide to continue performing in college, they struggle and spend a lot of time playing "catch up". This is of course, assuming they don't give up entirely. Imagine taking a college English class without ever having read Shakespeare and only being familiar with Dr. Seuss; no matter how intelligent you are in terms of aptitude, you're coming in at a deficit. This deficit transfers to limited performance opportunities (Regionals and All-State) and being underqualified for scholarship opportunities that require auditions. The likelihood of our students having access to being music majors-performance or education, is minimal unless they have access to private lessons because a music theory exam and entrance audition are standard prerequisites to admission.

In the chorus, the lack of feeder from the middle school also means that we perform music that is not quite at high school difficulty level. Students (especially males) often lack an understanding of how to use their voices in a musical way. Not singing through the changes of puberty during middle school oftentimes leads to not being able to match pitch at all or not match pitch in the correct range during high school. Therefore, a lot of remedial intervention is needed to produce respectable performances; assuming the students don't silence their voices due to frustration. Much like with the band students, the lack of exposure to appropriate repertoire for their age level leaves them unprepared for other opportunities.

Our best music students in terms of commitment are our athletes because they have learned the values of teamwork, having a strong work ethic, and setting long term goals during their time growing up in youth sports. Unfortunately, not every student wants to be an athlete, and these valuable life lessons become lost when they don't have other opportunities afforded to them at a young age to experience these benefits. While I do my best to hold students to high standards, last year it was especially challenging to promote the idea of the importance of being present (or at least accounted for) and participating at our performances, for example. When people don't feel fully invested and do not appreciate the gravity of the expectations set before them, they often fall short.

I have the unique experience of working with students from other high schools and I can say unequivocally that the deficits between our students' skill sets and theirs stem directly from a lack of opportunity and not from a lack of potential. Our kids are just as bright, talented, and creative, but it is their inexperience holding them back from reaching that potential. The best schools in the United States across the board, are the ones with the strongest arts programs. These high quality programs are not necessarily exclusive to demographically wealthy communities either. Though an endless supply of funds and personnel would of course make success easier to come by, if we take a closer look at our Naugatucks, Norwalks, Stamfords, and Meridens, we see strong arts programs in these systems. Having programs to be proud of are a wonderful way to garner community and alumni support for the entire school. While we do as much as we can in meeting students where they are and cultivating a growth mindset, we must "plant the seeds" earlier to have a truly abundant harvest.

Humbly and Respectfully,

Maria Tangredi, Educator
Instrumental and Vocal Music, Ansonia High School

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The Ansonia Administrator Team would like to take this time to thank all of our teachers and support staff for their hard work and dedication to Ansonia students. Your hard work does not go unnoticed. We would like to acknowledge our BOE for their continued support in these tough economic times and to Dr. Merlone and Dr. DiBacco for their guidance. Lastly, we would want to let our families know that we appreciate their trust and confidence - knowing we are doing everything we can to ensure their children have a safe and supportive learning environment.

This year is not without its challenges: less teachers, less support staff, larger class sizes, increased credit demands, more rigorous state learning targets, and increasing needs of staff and students –

Currently:

- Prendergast has 9 classes of 29 or higher. In addition, there are 3 classes of 25 or higher
- Mead has 7 classrooms that are 28 or higher and 8 that are 25 or higher
- Middle school has 10 out of the 12 core classrooms of students that are 27 or higher
- 17 out of 30 teachers are teaching an overage class at the high school so that students can meet their graduation requirements.
- With the cuts to all departments at all levels including administration, safety and supervision of our students remain a concern. Safety needs to be a priority.
- Each special education teachers caseload is now 20-25 district wide where the state average is 15
- Average number of students in a resource room across the district is 8, which is over double the state average.
- The social emotional issues are at an all time high in all buildings.

However, even with these tremendous daily obstacles we have dedicated teachers and staff doing amazing things everyday for our students. Our district attendance rate average is 95% to date.

The demands are widespread BUT we are here as an Administrative Team to let everyone know we are and will continue to do our best to support our students and teachers. Our sole purpose is not to make excuses but rather to reassure everyone that we have made a collective decision to make every day incredible for our students and staff because that is what they deserve. We will continue to advocate for the needs of our students, staff, departments, and buildings. Our conviction and allegiance to Ansonia Public Schools is undeniable - please know we will continue to work together to find new and innovative ways to support Ansonia students.