



Monthly Meeting
Avon Board of Education
34 Simsbury Road, Avon, Connecticut

Mission Statement

Our mission is to inspire in each student a joy and passion for learning and a commitment to excellence, personal integrity, and social responsibility.

Tuesday, November 19, 2019, 7:00 pm

Avon High School, Community Room

Minutes

Attendance

Members Present: Jackie Blea, David Cavanaugh, Debra Chute, Jeffrey S. Fleischman, Jason Indomenico, Houston Putnam Lowry, Bogdan Oprica, Jay Spivak, Laura Young

Member(s) Absent: none

Administration Present: Dr. Bridget Heston Carnemolla, Superintendent of Schools; Roberto Medic, Director of Human Resources; Heather Michaud, Director of Fiscal Affairs; Dr. Donna Nestler-Rusack, Assistant Superintendent

I. Call to Order

The November 19, 2019 Board of Education Regular Monthly meeting was called to order at 7:10 pm by Chair Chute.

II. Pledge of Allegiance

III. Presentations

A. Avon Achiever

Kim Birge; Christiana Cabrera; Jenny Gavrillen; and Lisa Transue (TBS staff) – in recognition of being positive and supportive of TBS students and families and staff. As the TBS kitchen team they each lead by modeling genuine compassion and encouragement. As a result, the entire team works extremely well together and is recognized by all.

B. Stop Hunger Presentation by First Lego League Robotics Team

The students from the First Lego League presented to the Board a skit they created on ways to reduce food waste at school such as collecting uneaten food and providing a way for students to take it for a later snack as well as composting food items. The students also explained how the Meal Connect app helps food banks and stores across America provide food to the people who need it. The team concluded their presentation by introducing the robot the team created to complete the various missions of competitions.

IV. Approval of Minutes

A. Board of Education Regular Monthly Meeting, October 15, 2019

Ms. Blea moved, Ms. Young seconded, to approve the October 15, 2019 minutes of the Regular Monthly Meeting as presented.

The motion carried 8-0-1 (yay – Blea, Cavanaugh, Chute, Fleischman, Lowry, Oprica, Spivak, Young; nay – none; abstain – Indomenico).

B. Board of Education Special Meeting, October 28, 2019

Mr. Indomenico moved, Ms. Blea seconded, to approve the October 28, 2019 minutes of the Special Meeting as presented.

The motion carried 9-0-0.

V. Communication from Public

Dr. Catherine Lewis, Avon resident and parent expressed her continued concerns as a non-partisan, expert witness in regards to the safety of Avon schools. Dr. Lewis' stated that her concerns are of exposing children to inappropriate material and that the use of controversial material in the curriculum were not approved. Dr. Lewis stated her appreciation of the Superintendent for being receptive of these concerns and reminded the Board of her activism when social workers were previously cut in 2015. Dr. Lewis stated her concern about a book being taught that centered on a Me Too narrative on date rape and to make people experience complex post-traumatic stress disorder; Dr. Lewis first brought her concerns to the Curriculum & Professional Practices Committee back in September. As an expert psychiatrist on rape trauma, Dr. Lewis did not think it was a good idea to use this book and stated that this book is not listed on any curriculum list; neither does *Thug, The Hate You Give*. Dr. Lewis commented that it seemed the controversial material was willfully concealed. Dr. Lewis also stated that *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, which is an R rated movie was also shown, as well as *Speak*, which depicts date rape while no parental approval was sought. Dr. Lewis showed the Board a consent form for things that already occurred in the classroom. Dr. Lewis also addressed the climate of the school stating that there is an issue of students feeling safe. Dr. Lewis felt that after voicing her concerns, her husband was disparaged, her child was targeted and she was ignored. Dr. Lewis was also gravely concerned about the use of certain young adult fiction when there are better alternatives available. Dr. Lewis also questioned why there needed to be a political agenda in an English class. Dr. Lewis clarified that she is not for book banning but not to have controversial material mandated and there seemed to be a problem with systems. Dr. Lewis reiterated that this was not partisan but wanted everyone to succeed and is grateful for her children's education.

Daniel Jobe, Avon parent of two Avon High School students, spoke on behalf of FAME (Friends of Avon Music Education) parents' concerns. Mr. Jobe asked the Board to consider during this budget season to consider the needs of the band program. With over 210 students and no band director parents feel students are missing individual and small group instruction. Mr. Jobe informed the Board that Mr. Culbertson splits his time between AMS and AHS, which limits his accessibility. There has also been a decline in the offering of extra music classes at the high school. Mr. Jobe passed out data comparing to similar size schools in the Farmington Valley that showed Avon to have only one band staff for grades 7-12 with a student body of approximately 1,500 students, with Mr. Culbertson teaching over 210 students. Mr. Jobe felt Avon Public Schools should be included in the NAM 2019 Best Communities for Music Education Award given how good the music program is in Avon. Mr. Jobe implored the Board to find the money in the budget and consider the music program.

Jim Walsh, Avon resident with three children, stated that he and his wife are happy with the schools. However, Mr. Walsh expressed his concern that his 6th grader watches news daily in school and wondered where media fits in education curriculum and whether the facts are presented in a way that promoted critical thinking. Mr. Walsh was concerned that regardless of what news media outlet is used, the facts are slanted in some way. Mr. Walsh questioned what value is being presented to the students on a daily basis.

VI. Items of Information and Proposals

A. Student Representative Report – Alvin Guo, & Addisen Ganiats, AHS Student Representatives
Ms. Ganiats stated that quarter one has ended in November and quarter two was off to a great start and the Girls' Volleyball was competing in the semi-finals. Ms. Ganiats felt the students were going above and beyond at the high school with the holiday fundraisers. Mr. Guo added that parent teacher conferences were recently held and various fundraiser were held in conjunction including Vie for the Kids, Student Government's Turkey Trot as well as a fundraiser having teachers shave their beards. A faculty versus student basketball game is also planned.

B. Financial Report – Heather Michaud, Director of Fiscal Affairs

Ms. Michaud reported that the unencumbered balance fell approximately \$975,000 or 1.66 change from the month prior with the most notable items were in the 400 and 500 object codes which are property services and other purchase services. The change mostly represented the maintenance actual payments as well as from tuition and transportation payments for students who are outplaced.

VII. Committees & Liaison Reports

A. Committee Reports

1. Curriculum & Professional Practices – Jackie Blea, Chair

Ms. Blea shared that the high school ID were created with the help of Ms. Shawn George and community group, Mental Health Matters, to now show support resources. Ms. Blea reported that course enrollments showed 70 more students this year are taking AP courses and the new add/drop period was also discussed. Course proposal recommendations were also talked about as well as an enrichment update. Ms. Blea stated that she would like to discuss the issue of parental consent, the process and systems at the next meeting. The next meeting is February 3rd.

2. Finance – Jay Spivak, Chair

Mr. Spivak stated that items that were discussed would be discussed at tonight's meeting. The next meeting is Dec. 10th at 6:00 pm

3. Negotiations – Jason Indomenico, Chair

Mr. Indomenico reported that negotiations were recently started with food service workers.

4. Policy – Laura Young, Chair

Ms. Young reported that the Policy Committee did not meet in November, however, it was requested that Policy 6121 – Nondiscrimination in the Instructional Program be added to the agenda. The next meeting is Dec. 3rd.

Mr. Young moved, Mr. Cavanaugh seconded, to add the approval of Policy 6121 – Nondiscrimination in the Instructional Program to the Consent Calendar. The motion carried 9-0-0.

B. Liaison Reports

1. Board Representative to Curriculum Professional Development Council – Bogdan Oprica and Deb Chute, Board Rep.
Ms. Chute shared that she had attended the Council meeting, which focused on the Blueprint for Excellence with staff weighing in on aspects of the Blueprint. There was a guest speaker to address the Portrait of the Graduate and discussed what the District concept of the graduate would be even beginning in PreK. Ms. Chute also explained how ThoughtExchange would help gather community wide perspectives on what students should have before they graduate. Next meeting will be in January.
2. Board Representative to Avon Board of Finance – David Cavanaugh, Board Rep.
Mr. Cavanaugh was not able to attend but the main agenda item was a discussion of the next budget year. Mr. Cavanaugh will work with the Board Chair to come up with a message regarding the Board of Ed's budget to bring back to the Board of Finance.
3. Board Representative to Avon Town Council – Jason Indomenico, Board Rep.
4. Mr. Indomenico reported that the final meeting of the Artificial Turf Building Committee was Oct. 30 and there are just a few more items to complete. Maintenance of the field and proper use of the field was also discussed. Mainly, the District will coordinate with the Town as to its use. Town Council also approved a \$52,000 supplement appropriation for Fisher Meadow and appointed a student representative to the Clean Energy Committee. They may expand the appointment of student representatives to other committees as well.
5. Board Representative to Capital Region Education Council – Jackie Blea, Board Rep.
Meeting is tomorrow; Ms. Blea cannot attend and opened attending the meeting to other Board members.

VIII. Chair's Report – Debra Chute, Board Chair

A. Board Chair Update

Chair Chute acknowledged the importance of having school on Veterans' Day to allow for the assemblies at each of the schools. Ms. Chute was very impressed that each school did something unique for the veterans and how it was more meaningful for the students to have these programs at school than to have the day off. Chair Chute also reported on the Turf ribbon cutting ceremony and reminded the Board how she and the Superintendent meet with the Parent Leaders in the District once every month as another opportunity to have open communication.

IX. Superintendent's Report – Dr. B. Heston Carnemolla

A. Hiring Report

Dr. Carnemolla reported that a safety and security specialist and several para-educators were hired; there were also two resignations. Dr. Carnemolla also introduced Kristina Wallace, Avon Middle School Assistant Principal.

B. Enrollment Reports

Dr. Carnemolla explained that the enrollment report show little difference from the previous month. The Superintendent shared that she is keeping track of students who have left the District to attend private schools and will contact the families to follow-up as an exit interview.

C. Strategic Plan Update

The Superintendent reminded the Board members that the goals were discussed at the Board Retreat and the faculty and staff have been hard at work reviewing the Plan. The administrative team has been calibrating the District's practice on the definition of rigorous teaching and learning and the statewide teacher evaluation rubric and will continue the discussion in the months to come.

D. Updates

Dr. Carnemolla thanked Dr. Lewis for speaking with her about her concerns. Discussion was also had with Dr. Rusack, Mr. Renkawitz and Mr. Medic regarding these concerns. Some things tie back to specific personnel and cannot be addressed publically. In regards to curriculum posted online, Dr. Carnemolla clarified that not all approved curriculum is posted on the website. Policies and procedures are constantly being reviewed. The Superintendent and Dr. Rusack agree that the website needs to be more current to reflect additions. The English Language Arts books being utilized that are listed in the curriculum is not an all-inclusive list of what may be taught. The Superintendent explained that some books were grandfathered before the current policy existed for approval through the C&PP. Moving forward the District needs to revisit the curriculum list online for accuracy; the items on the list have Board approval; the list that teachers can draw from is accurate and accessible; and that the teachers are sending home notice of any potential controversial material. The District will be looking at the text being taught as a whole, mostly at the high school. The issue of consent is also being addressed. At the C&PP meeting discussion was had related to consent of books. However, the form being used is not in agreement with the most current policies and is now being corrected at the high school to notify parents after first notifying the principal and getting the proper approval. The Superintendent thanked Mr. Renkawitz for rectifying this issue at the high school. Dr. Carnemolla also clarified that the policy regarding controversial issues speaks more to this concern than the policy regarding nondiscrimination in the instructional program. The Superintendent also reminded the Board that the consent form, which talks about film and not books, is part of the regulations, which does not need Board consent but will bring it to the Policy Committee's attention so the Board is aware. There may be an update at the next Board meeting, and it may be brought up at next C&PP as well. The Board requested that an appropriate alternative lesson plan be available that has the same learning objective that does not isolate students that opt out of controversial materials. Dr. Carnemolla stated that the District needs to look at the core course materials as a whole to ensure they are developmentally appropriate to the vast majority of students; to differentiate as necessary; to look at the basics of what the District is teaching and ensuring that they are promoting what is in our curriculum. Dr. Carnemolla also stated that the minutes are correct in regards to *The Kite Runner*, as that was how it was portrayed at the meeting.

Dr. Carnemolla also addressed the comment made regarding the budget related to music. The District is looking at staffing and whether changes can be made internally, looking at data as to what music courses students are enrolling in and working hard not to add any positions if possible. The Superintendent will also follow up with Mr. Walsh as she acknowledged that their concern has been heard. The Board asked about the issues at the pep rally, Dr. Carnemolla explained that the Board was notified at the time and there was not actually a threat but was looked at and has been resolved but cannot divulge more due to student confidentiality.

Due to change in legislation, the graduation date can now be set ahead of time. After discussion with Mr. Renkawitz, the Superintendent is recommending to go back to the polo

grounds, due to proximity to town, with a graduation date of Wednesday, June 17, 2020. The State is allowing this so students do not miss graduation due to military or college obligations. The Board discussed the possible logistical issues having an earlier graduation might present. The Superintendent stated that Project Graduation already has logistical issues but having an earlier graduation day prohibits that Project Graduation be held at the middle school as school would still be in session the following day.

The Superintendent informed the Board that a comparison was done with three local PreK programs that offer full day for 3 and 4 year olds and the comparison showed that all three are more expensive than the District's PreK program.

X. Consent Calendar

A. 19-20/19 Approval of Budget Transfers

B. 19-20/20 Approval of PGS Donation from PGS PTO for Maker Space estimated at \$18,000

C. 19-20/16 Approval of Policy 6121 – Nondiscrimination in the Instructional Program

Mr. Lowry moved, Mr. Cavanaugh seconded, to approve the Consent Calendar as presented. The motion carried 9-0-0.

Chair Chute acknowledged the PGS PTO's Maker Space donation and remarked how inspiring the space is for students.

XI. New Business

A. 19-20/21 Avon High School Course Proposal Recommendations – Dr. Donna Nestler- Rusack, Assistant Superintendent

Dr. Rusack reviewed for the Board the courses being recommended for approval which includes Social Studies Civil Rights Movement, an elective on African American studies and is required by State requirements; World Language Spanish VI as requested by students; and Music Percussion Ensemble, to give opportunity for interested students opportunities to perform and also as a feeder program to the marching band.

Also being recommended are three additional English ECE courses – ECE Writing about the Unspeakable: True Crime Then and Now; ECE Writing Through Humor: Satire and Comedy; and ECE Writing Through Our Times: Post 9/11 American Culture. Dr. Rusack explained that not all ECE course would be offered every semester but will be run according to student interest.

Additional courses being recommended include an ECE American Studies course that will be co-taught by English/Social Studies teachers; AP/ECE European History, ECE Human Rights that will be offered as an extension of human rights issues; and two course proposals for Theater, which include Improvisation for the Real World and Intro to Theater.

Ms. Blea mentioned that C&PP reviewed the courses and recommends the courses and has gone through the process at CPDC.

The Board asked Dr. Rusack to explain how the ECE courses are run. Dr. Rusack explained that three different ECE courses are usually run per semester based on enrollment; six sections are currently running but courses are rotated to offer more choices. If the enrollment does not support the course, it is not run, whether it is ECE or any other course stated Dr. Rusack. Dr. Rusack also explained that there is not an ECE Social Studies course currently, the ECE American Studies

would add to the AP course. The Superintendent further explained that any course that is approved would be added to the Course of Studies regardless of whether it was running or not. Dr. Rusack also stated that there are no ECE Social Studies courses but would like to add the ECE courses to the AP courses being offered, which students have indicated interest.

***Mr. Lowry moved, Mr. Indomenico seconded, to approve Avon High School Course Proposal Recommendations as presented.
The motion carried 9-0-0.***

Dr. Rusack also stated that the C&PP has opened the 30-day public review process on books, which are available at the Central Office.

- B. 19-20/22 Mission Statement and District Goals – Dr. Bridget H. Carnemolla, Superintendent
Dr. Carnemolla presented the Blueprint for Excellence Mission Statement and asked that it be readopted with the revisions to help the District and the Board move ahead together with the same goals. The Mission Statement now contains a new section to address student related results to ensure that before a student graduates “every APS student is consistently challenged and empowered to communicate effectively and work collaboratively; think critically and creatively to solve challenging problems and advance their own academic and personal goals; and to be self-directed, self-regulated, and resilient as they live, learn, earn, and navigate their own pathway to success.”

The Superintendent reviewed each of the four focus areas within the Blueprint for Excellence: Student Learning; Personal Growth & Relationships; Communication & Partnerships and Systems. The Blueprint, which was first adopted and started in 2018, is being extended to take the focus and goals of the District to 2023. Dr. Carnemolla explained there would be a follow-up social emotional learning meeting to review a draft on resiliency and collaboration and how to integrate it into curriculum. To guide the work from PreK to 12, a letter was sent out seeking input from community, Board, faculty, and staff for the work on the Portrait of the Graduate. This will be used to guide the District’s work and give a common understanding of where the District is heading on the path to graduation, put things perspective and help show what the journey looks like as a whole. Dr. Carnemolla talked about the college and university partnership with UConn (ECE courses) and now working on a partnership with Tunxis Community College on career and technical education. Under Systems, the District has been looking at a 5 year technology/digital learning plan – how to better integrate the use of Chromebooks; how to better utilize virtual high school experience. Long-range management plan includes Professional Development Evaluation Committee (PDEC) to help staff meet their needs and goals. Talent management plan with Teach CT provides an online presence to recruit minority and underrepresented. Dr. Carnemolla added that the District would continue to review district policies, processes and procedures. Dr. Carnemolla stated that in order to enact all that is necessary the systems, processes, procedures and how resources are utilized must be constantly revisited. The deployment of all District resources must be addressed with the four focus areas and the goals inherent in them. Dr. Carnemolla concluded by saying that school administrators have done a tremendous job in helping put this together ensuring that work was captured correctly and to roll it out to staff in the entire District. The district plan needs to be broad enough to incorporate all the individual and school goals. The Superintendent expressed her appreciation to the Board members for their working collaboratively with her to complete this important work.

The Board had a discussion regarding the Mission Statement including questions on the technology plan; understanding the meaning of data and appreciation of the work done to develop the Mission Statement and Blueprint for Excellence.

Mr. Lowry moved, Ms. Young seconded, to approve the Mission Statement and District Goals as presented.

The motion carried 9-0-0.

- C. 19-20/23 Graduation Date for 2020 – Dr. Bridget H. Carnemolla, Superintendent
Chair Chute reviewed the discussion regarding the proposed date of June 17th for graduation.
Mr. Lowry moved, Ms. Blea seconded, to approve the graduation date of June 17, 2020 for Avon High School.
The motion carried 9-0-0.

XII. Communication from Avon Board of Education Members

Mr. Cavanaugh commented regarding the need for personal electronic devices in conjunction with assignments and keep track of due dates. Mr. Cavanaugh suggested the use of electronic devices be reviewed and the policy should be revisited. The Superintendent clarified that the District did not enact a policy stating students could not have their phones. The District needs to look at the way they are used and ask that devices not be out to distract students. Teachers are expected to use discretion as to how phones are used in their classrooms. Ms. Young shared that the discussion during the Policy Committee was regarding personal devices, including apple watches, and the issue is not unique to Avon but a national conversation.

Mr. Lowry inquired on foreign data protection and enrichment for Gifted & Talented (G&T) students and asked for a report at the next meeting as to what enrichment is available for G&T identified students. Mr. Lowry asked for the specifics of plans for identified students and to look at what works for other towns. Mr. Oprica also asked for clarification on the plans for identified G&T students. Dr. Carnemolla stated that the issue was discussed at C&PP, during the Board Retreat and earlier tonight during the budget meeting. The Superintendent also stated that an actual proposal needs to start at C&PP. Dr. Carnemolla explained that the plan at the current moment is to properly identify G&T students and notify parents and teachers. The District will also review how the enrichment specialist is being utilized.

Mr. Lowry also asked about the status of Chinese courses. The Superintendent informed the Board that a Memorandum of Understanding has been agreed with the teachers' union but still needs a formalized agreement with outside organization used to bring in Chinese teachers. The Superintendent stated that the discussion would continue at the next budget conversation. Mr. Fleischman also expressed concern about how the Chinese program continues to be lessened since its inception. Currently there is only one teacher, but determination must be made as to whether more teachers will be requested, though it has been incredibly difficult to recruit teachers to come to the US stated Dr. Carnemolla.

Mr. Indomenico acknowledged all the things being addressed and appreciation of the students' presentation from the Lego League on the topic of wasting food. Mr. Indomenico stated that policies should be followed and if things are not being done correctly, policy should be set and implemented.

Student representative, Alvin Guo asked about G&T for high school students beyond calculus. Mr. Guo asked if the District will seek partnerships with post-secondary institutions and asked about dual enrollment for math. The Superintendent replied that ECE are dual enrollment but the District will continue to look for others, including math.

Mr. Oprica stated that the Board member's role is to help with the District vision and needs to reflect constituents' values. Mr. Oprica encouraged Board members to move beyond the narrow lens of a narrow mindset, which also incorporates the climate. Mr. Oprica asked for suggestions of what steps the Board members can take.

Jackie Blea suggested that the issue of school climate be considered thoughtfully as there are varying opinions as to climate. Ms. Blea expressed appreciation for the dedicated work of the teachers and staff for setting what she and her children have found to be a warm and accepting climate. Mr. Oprica asked that the Board members keep the issue of climate in their minds and to strive for a climate that is inclusive of everyone and does not exclude anyone.

Communication from the Public

Carol Shabinski, co-president of AHS PTO, clarified that previously, four or five years ago, Project Graduation was held at AMS even when school was still in session and there did not seem to be an issue. Ms. Shabinski asked that administration leaders keep an open mind and that flexibility is needed with the early graduation date.

Dr. Lewis thanked Mr. Oprica and mentioned a previous vote of no confidence. Dr. Lewis asked the Board to strongly consider its constituents and their issues. Dr. Lewis questioned why there seemed to be a dumbing down of curriculum, including use of news media, and use of controversial materials that contain profanity and date rape. Dr. Lewis reminded the Board of children's rights to hold their own beliefs. Dr. Lewis challenged that teachers be empowered to teach their subjects and to teach it well and suggested that every student and parent be asked anonymously open ended question about their experience with discrimination and harassment. Dr. Lewis stated that policy is not being enforced as it is written. Dr. Lewis was adamant as to the shaming and bullying when a student faces when opting out of controversial material. Dr. Lewis suggested having students opt in in regards to controversial/provocative material but should not be used as mainstream curriculum.

Chair Chute invited into Executive Session, Dr. Carnemolla, Mr. Medic and Ms. Michaud to discuss collective bargaining strategies.

Mr. Lowry motioned, Mr. Cavanaugh seconded, at 9:43 pm to leave Public Session and enter Executive Session after a 5 minute recess.

XIII. Executive Session

A. Collective Bargaining Strategies

The Board entered into Executive Session at 9:48 pm.

XIV. Adjournment

***The Board left Executive Session and returned to public session at 10:29 pm.
The Board adjourned by unanimous consent at 10:30 pm.***

Minutes prepared by Shirley Moy, Board Recording Secretary

Minutes respectfully submitted by Jeffrey S. Fleischman, Board Secretary

Jeffrey S. Fleischman, November 29, 2019

Board minutes are approved at the next regular monthly Board meeting, and any corrections to the minutes, if needed, will be made at that time.