

**REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT NO. 17**  
**BOARD OF EDUCATION MEETING**  
**February 5, 2019**

*A meeting of the Regional School District No. 17 Board of Education was held on February 5, 2019 at the Central Office Board Room. Board of Education Chair, Joanne Nesti, called the meeting to order at 7:00 PM.*

***Members Present:** Eric Couture, Peter Sonski, Sue Williams, Eileen Blewett, Brenda Buzzi, Gerry Matthews, Maura Wallin, Kathleen Zandi, Joel D'Angelo and Joanne Nesti*

***Members Absent:** Suzanne Sack*

***Also Present:** Superintendent of Schools, Howard Thiery, Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction, Dr. Holly Hageman, Director of Finance, Martha Vaughn, Principal of Haddam-Killingworth High School, Donna Hayward, Vice President of HK Education Association, Robin Duffield, Student Representative, Lauren Miller, Seward & Monde, Michele Loso, and Board Clerk, Jamie Sciascia*

***Visitors:** Approximately 30*

**Call to Order/Opening of Meeting:**

*Board of Education Chair, Joanne Nesti, called the meeting to order at 7:00 PM. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.*

**Public Comment:**

**Joanne spoke on the Public Comment process for those who were new in attendance.**

*Jennifer Petrillo of Haddam addressed the Board. She spoke on Attorney Paul Gearaty's letter being retained from the group of "Friends of HES", which he is reviewing the actions of Board and its decision to close HES. It further states that he is also reviewing the financial costs of keeping the school open versus the financial impact of closing the school. Attorney Gearaty strongly encourages the Board to reconsider the closure of HES and to reverse its decision. He further sited that there has been lack of transparency in the process and no professional analysis has been conducted. Lastly, it states that the "Friends of HES" is reviewing all legal steps including injunction relief and asks that the Board rescind its motion accordingly.*

*Liz Bazazi of Higganum addressed the Board. She spoke about how she spoke with a Board member about the reason Burr was chosen to stay open over HES and stated that the reason given was there was greater risk of drive by shootings on the HES playground. She researched it and couldn't find any data to support it. She further spoke on academic articles regarding school violence. She also stated that bringing younger kids to an older school campus increases the risk.*

*Marcel Couture of Killingworth addressed the Board. He thanked the Board for their hard work and gave his support for the conclusion of HES closure.*

*Pam Crum of Higganum addressed the Board. She thanked the Board for its reconsideration of the District Restructuring Plan that was placed on the agenda. She asked for a pause in the process to begin again,*

starting with a professional consultant group to go over all data, confirm enrollment projections, and be transparent with communication to the Community.

Gerry Matthews **MOVED** and Eric Couture **SECONDED** a motion to move up Item 9A, Fiscal Year 2018 Audit Presentation by Michele Loso of Seward & Monde set forth under New Business:

Motion was **WITHDRAWN** by Gerry Matthews.

Approval of Minutes for the following Board Meetings:

- A. Approval of Minutes for the December 18, 2018 Board of Education – Education Session Meeting
- B. Approval of Minutes for the January 8, 2019 Board of Education Meeting

Eric Couture **MOVED** and Kathleen Zandi **SECONDED** a motion to approve the Minutes A-B as presented:

Motion passed unanimously 10-0-0 by the following show of hands:

Suzanne Sack	Absent	Joel D’ Angelo	YES <u>✓</u>	NO <u>   </u>	A <u>   </u>
Peter Sonski	YES <u>✓</u>	Eileen Blewett	YES <u>✓</u>	NO <u>   </u>	A <u>   </u>
Maura Wallin	YES <u>✓</u>	Brenda Buzzi	YES <u>✓</u>	NO <u>   </u>	A <u>   </u>
Eric Couture	YES <u>✓</u>	Gerry Matthews	YES <u>✓</u>	NO <u>   </u>	A <u>   </u>
Sue Williams	YES <u>✓</u>	Kathleen Zandi	YES <u>✓</u>	NO <u>   </u>	A <u>   </u>
		Joanne Nesti	YES <u>✓</u>	NO <u>   </u>	A <u>   </u>

**Report from Student Representatives:**

Student Representatives, Lauren Miller, updated the Board. She spoke about the High School Mr. HK event scheduled for this Friday at 7p.m. and stated that Nolan Serbent will be in the contest. Lauren spoke about the 8<sup>th</sup> Grade Parent Night is scheduled for January 28<sup>th</sup> and the What Is Life play written and directed by seniors. Lastly, Lauren spoke about the Boys Indoor Track won shorelines.

Principal Donna Hayward, and Student Representative, Nicole Miller, left the meeting at approximately 7:25 p.m.

Brenda Buzzi **MOVED** and Eric Couture **SECONDED** a motion to move up Item 9A, Fiscal Year 2018 Audit Presentation by Michele Loso of Seward & Monde set forth under New Business:

Motion passed unanimously 10-0-0 by the following show of hands:

Suzanne Sack	Absent	Joel D’ Angelo	YES <u>✓</u>	NO <u>   </u>	A <u>   </u>
Peter Sonski	YES <u>✓</u>	Eileen Blewett	YES <u>✓</u>	NO <u>   </u>	A <u>   </u>
Maura Wallin	YES <u>✓</u>	Brenda Buzzi	YES <u>✓</u>	NO <u>   </u>	A <u>   </u>
Eric Couture	YES <u>✓</u>	Gerry Matthews	YES <u>✓</u>	NO <u>   </u>	A <u>   </u>
Sue Williams	YES <u>✓</u>	Kathleen Zandi	YES <u>✓</u>	NO <u>   </u>	A <u>   </u>
		Joanne Nesti	YES <u>✓</u>	NO <u>   </u>	A <u>   </u>

**New Business:**

**A. Fiscal Year 2018 Audit Presentation by Michele Loso of Seward & Monde**

Michele Loso updated the Board. She spoke about how there are no significant deficits or material weaknesses that need to be reported to the Board. She went over the Audit with the Finance

*Subcommittee and stated how there was implementation of near general eight standards, mainly health insurance, major change this year. Superintendent Thiery stated this will be posted on the RSD17 for further viewing.*

#### **Board Committee Reports and Future Meetings:**

##### **A. Facilities Subcommittee**

*Eric Couture updated the Board. The Committee met last month and discussed the Capital plan moving forward. He also stated that Director of Facilities, Michael Distefano, and Superintendent Thiery will be finalizing the priorities for the coming year. Eric also gave a brief update on the oil tank replacements at HES and KES and the renovation projects for the High School. Facilities Subcommittee are scheduled for meet the first Monday of every month except for Labor Day.*

##### **B. Finance Subcommittee**

*Eileen Blewett updated the Board. She spoke about how the Committee met, reviewed the audit in great length. She thanked Martha for her hard work, and keeping all funds/accounting in great shape. She spoke about making the Budget Process more user friendly.*

##### **C. Policy Subcommittee**

*No Report.*

##### **D. Communications Subcommittee**

*Gerry Matthews updated the Board. He stated that the Committee met and discussed how there is a Communications problem they are seeing within the Community. They discussed the Board of Education Facebook page and the Board of Education Mission Statement. Gerry asked that the Board distribute to the Committee on a monthly basis information about what they are doing and the events in the District as a form of communication to the Community. He spoke briefly about how the vaping problem is getting worse. Lastly, Gerry spoke briefly on the Future of HES facility, Special Needs, Security and Project Management.*

##### **E. Personnel and Evaluation Subcommittee**

*Sue Williams updated the Board. She spoke about how the Committee met and talked about Superintendent's Evaluation.*

#### **Board Liaison Reports:**

##### **A. Healthy Communities – Healthy Kids Council**

*Gerry Matthews updated the Board. He spoke about how the Committee met and spoke about making blankets for the drug takeback program at Saybrook at Haddam. Also, spoke about the possibility of Y&FS coming to a Board meeting regarding Vaping Awareness. Superintendent Thiery Come stated that they are putting together a Vaping Detection Kit to show the Board and donate to the schools within the District.*

##### **B. LEARN**

*No Report.*

##### **C. Park & Recreation**

*No Report.*

##### **D. Haddam Board of Selectmen**

*Brenda Buzzi updated the Board. She spoke about how she attended the BOS meeting few Mondays back, and how there is a lot of Town support including the Board of Selectmen for not closing HES, taking a pause for the year and getting a professional stud done. She further*

addressed the presentation by the "Friends of HES", and the economic impact it will have on the center on the town. She spoke about the Motions made by Selectwoman, Melissa Schlag, to request a stop in the closure process and also read a second letter from Selectwoman Schlag dated February 2<sup>nd</sup> that urges the Board to pause the process and complete a professional study and release a detailed financial savings if the school was closed. From that meeting, the Town of Haddam P&Z meeting took place, and spoke on the presentation that was given regarding the development of Haddam Center.

**E. Killingworth Board of Selectmen**

Eric Couture updated the Board. He spoke about how the BOS met and he gave the status of HKHS school renovation projects, and expected timelines are.

**Old Business:**

**A. High School Energy and Facilities Upgrade**

**a) Report from Public Building Committee**

No Report.

**B. Report of the Strategic Capital Planning Committee**

No Report.

**Consent Agenda:**

The donations on the Consent Agenda are made to the school system as a whole, and the Superintendent may direct any monies to specific schools or programs at his discretion.

- A. Acceptance of a donation in the amount of \$31.58 from Lathrop Vending, Inc. to be deposited in the Principal's Discretionary Fund Account. Submitted by Donna L. Hayward, Principal of Haddam-Killingworth High School.
- B. Acceptance of a donation in the amount of \$368.60 from General Mills for the collection of Box Tops by the PTO. Submitted by Brienne Whidden, Principal at Haddam Elementary School.
- C. Acceptance of a donation in the amount of \$59.93 from Coca-Cola vending machine sales to be deposited in the Student Activity Account – Principal Account. Submitted by Dennis J. Reed, Principal of Killingworth Elementary School.

Kathleen Zandi **MOVED** and Sue Williams **SECONDED** a motion to accept Items A-C listed on the Consent Agenda with great appreciation.

Motion passed unanimously 10-0-0 by the following show of hands:

Suzanne Sack	Absent	Joel D' Angelo	YES <u>√</u>	NO <u>  </u>	A <u>  </u>
Peter Sonski	YES <u>√</u>	Eileen Blewett	YES <u>√</u>	NO <u>  </u>	A <u>  </u>
Maura Wallin	YES <u>√</u>	Brenda Buzzi	YES <u>√</u>	NO <u>  </u>	A <u>  </u>
Eric Couture	YES <u>√</u>	Gerry Matthews	YES <u>√</u>	NO <u>  </u>	A <u>  </u>
Sue Williams	YES <u>√</u>	Kathleen Zandi	YES <u>√</u>	NO <u>  </u>	A <u>  </u>
		Joanne Nesti	YES <u>√</u>	NO <u>  </u>	A <u>  </u>

Brenda Buzzi **MOVED** and Maura Wallin **SECONDED** a motion to move up Item 9C, Reconsideration of District Restructuring Plan set forth under New Business.

Motion passed unanimously 10-0-0 by the following show of hands:

Suzanne Sack Absent  
 Peter Sonski YES  NO  A   
 Maura Wallin YES  NO  A   
 Eric Couture YES  NO  A   
 Sue Williams YES  NO  A

Joel D'Angelo YES  NO  A   
 Eileen Blewett YES  NO  A   
 Brenda Buzzi YES  NO  A   
 Gerry Matthews YES  NO  A   
 Kathleen Zandi YES  NO  A   
 Joanne Nesti YES  NO  A

**New Business:**

**C. Reconsideration of District Restructuring Plan**

*Board Members, Maura Wallin, and Brenda Buzzi, spoke about their concerns with the HES Closure. Maura said she is listening to the Community, and inquired about the number of bids as of yet to which Superintendent Thiery spoke about the RFP process. The Board had discussions about repurposing the Building, Next Steps if there were no bids given and the cost to maintain an empty building which included heat/electric, custodial, maintenance outside which came to roughly \$70,000. Further, Maura spoke about the enrollment numbers, possible growth in the future and their plan if that happens. Board Member, Eileen Blewett, addressed capacity, with restructuring at the Middle School and Elementary Levels. Also, Superintendent Thiery spoke on class sizes standards at the Elementary and Middle School Levels more sections of a grade level. He also spoke about the Pre-K housing. Further, Maura spoke about the approximately \$1M in savings for HES closure. Lastly, Superintendent Thiery spoke about MBR under State Statute, the Budget for Regional Schools and why we aren't allowed to reduce the Budget if enrollment was declining in previous years.*

*Board Member, Brenda Buzzi, spoke on the Mission Statement of RSD17. She believes that HES should stay open. She also read a letter into the record from Chairman of Haddam Planning and Zoning Board, Jamin Laurenza, which addressed the 155 acres' land that HES sits on, the statutory responsibilities of the Commission, the Town of Haddam's investment to the property, the Town's small town character and believes that the local school stands out in the center, bringing new families in are the most important resources in Higganum. The letter addressed the Higganum Village, spoke on HES playgrounds which could be used by the Community when school is not in session and the use of Swan Hill. Further, Jamin spoke about the sale of the HES property, how the Commission is evaluating it to assure that the zoning is appropriate for the development implementation of the POCD. There was Board discussion about Community Input a year ago, and Superintendent Thiery clarified that the amount of nursing staff is in process and aren't in the final stages. Board discussion about pausing the closure, and hiring a professional demographer, the possible bid and the possibility of something good coming out of it took place. Board Member, Maura Wallin, would like to revisit this discussion after the State Budget comes out for a possible pause in the closure of HES.*

**New Business:**

**B. 2018-2019 School Calendar Change**

*Superintendent Thiery updated the Board. He thanked the District Leadership Team for the restructuring, both their input and concerns. He spoke on how there is a concern about moving, packing, organizing, and are looking for a way to support the teachers. He stated that by statute that students have to be in school 180 out of 182 days and in the past we have used the last two days for earlier graduation and/or snow days. This year he would like to use those two days for the moving process. The teachers are contractual required to be in School 185 days. He also spoke about how the Graduation date can't be set under State statute before April 1<sup>st</sup>. Board Members embraced this suggestion and made a motion thereafter.*

Maura Wallin **MOVED** and Gerry Matthews **SECONDED** a motion to reduce the statutory requirement of School Calendar days to 180.

Motion passed unanimously 10-0-0 by the following votes:

Suzanne Sack	Absent	Joel D' Angelo	YES <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	NO <input type="checkbox"/>	A <input type="checkbox"/>		
Peter Sonski	YES <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	NO <input type="checkbox"/>	A <input type="checkbox"/>	Eileen Blewett	YES <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	NO <input type="checkbox"/>	A <input type="checkbox"/>
Maura Wallin	YES <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	NO <input type="checkbox"/>	A <input type="checkbox"/>	Brenda Buzzi	YES <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	NO <input type="checkbox"/>	A <input type="checkbox"/>
Eric Couture	YES <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	NO <input type="checkbox"/>	A <input type="checkbox"/>	Gerry Matthews	YES <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	NO <input type="checkbox"/>	A <input type="checkbox"/>
Sue Williams	YES <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	NO <input type="checkbox"/>	A <input type="checkbox"/>	Kathleen Zandi	YES <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	NO <input type="checkbox"/>	A <input type="checkbox"/>
		Joanne Nesti	YES <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	NO <input type="checkbox"/>	A <input type="checkbox"/>		

From the Superintendent:

**A. Legislative Update**

Superintendent Thiery updated the Board. He spoke about continuing to work with CT Public Association of Schools and Board of Education to track the work, record year of new legislators. He also briefly spoke regarding the draft proposed bill on K enrollment date and age, and another bill around school's budget MBR. He briefly touched on regionalization of school districts.

**B. Personnel Report**

Superintendent Thiery advised that the Personnel Report has been provided in the BOE Packet. He stated if anyone had any questions on the report, please feel free to contact him directly.

**C. Enrollment Report**

Superintendent Thiery advised that the Enrollment Report has been provided in the BOE Packet. He stated if anyone had any questions on the report, please feel free to contact him directly. Also, the monthly Enrollment Report is available on the RSD17 Website for public viewing.

From the Director of Fiscal Operations:

**A. Budget Transfers**

Martha Vaughn updated the Board. She spoke about moving funds regarding staffing from building to building or position to position.

Gerry Matthews **MOVED** and Eric Couture **SECONDED** a motion to accept the Budget Transfers as presented.

Motion passed unanimously 10-0-0 by the following show of hands:

Suzanne Sack	Absent	Joel D' Angelo	YES <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	NO <input type="checkbox"/>	A <input type="checkbox"/>		
Peter Sonski	YES <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	NO <input type="checkbox"/>	A <input type="checkbox"/>	Eileen Blewett	YES <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	NO <input type="checkbox"/>	A <input type="checkbox"/>
Maura Wallin	YES <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	NO <input type="checkbox"/>	A <input type="checkbox"/>	Brenda Buzzi	YES <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	NO <input type="checkbox"/>	A <input type="checkbox"/>
Eric Couture	YES <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	NO <input type="checkbox"/>	A <input type="checkbox"/>	Gerry Matthews	YES <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	NO <input type="checkbox"/>	A <input type="checkbox"/>
Sue Williams	YES <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	NO <input type="checkbox"/>	A <input type="checkbox"/>	Kathleen Zandi	YES <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	NO <input type="checkbox"/>	A <input type="checkbox"/>
		Joanne Nesti	YES <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	NO <input type="checkbox"/>	A <input type="checkbox"/>		

**Board Discussion/News/Suggestions:** Board Member, Gerry Matthews, spoke about the Communications Monthly Newsletter. He really encouraged the Board members to provide input on a Monthly basis for the Committee to roll up into a newsletter. Susan Dean, who served on the Board and retired last November 2018, put together a nice monthly flyer with important information for the Community. Superintendent Thiery stated that it went to both Town Libraries, Senior Centers as well as electronic copies to parents and



put on the RSD17 Website as well as the First Selectman in the Towns of Haddam and Killingworth. Board Members embraced this and Board Chair, Nesti, asked for the first copy to be submitted to the Board for review before submitted to Community, etc.

**Public Comment:**

Shawna Goldfarb of Higganum addressed the Board. She spoke about she has been in contact with Town Leadership, how she reviewed the budget from years' prior, spoke about capital funding and capital plan, and certain contracts being up next year. Further, she addressed the Regionalization bill that was put in place at the State Level, adding additional paras for Special Education. Lastly, she spoke about getting support from the older and younger generations of the town.

Sally Jordan of Higganum addressed the Board. She spoke about the Board of Education Members, when their term started and ends. She pointed out a few discrepancies on the RS17 Website that need to be fixed next to Board Members term length. Also, she stated how closing HES is the Heart and Soul of her town and doesn't want it to close.

Jessica Eason of Haddam addressed the Board. She spoke about how she moved to Haddam over a year ago, and the biggest draw to her family choosing a house was being so close to HES. She stated that her concerns are now a longer commute to BES and HES being such a huge asset to the town that it will impact it.

Katie Packtor of Higganum addressed the Board. She apologized to the Board for speaking when the Board was in discussion. She spoke about how she feels the Board should be thinking about this holistically and sustainably on a larger level and feels that the Board and Community have an opportunity to see what is going to happen with state, and would like the Board to take more time to make sure the data is accurate before making such a big decision. Encouraged everyone to work together, and how she doesn't want a division between the two towns. She spoke on the budget and urged the Board to think about the long term effects of closing HES will have on the town.

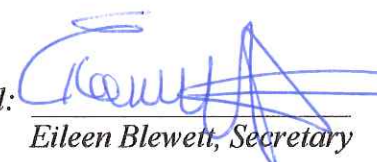
Gina Block of Higganum addressed the Board. She spoke about how the process to considering the closure of HES should have involved field experts, demographer professional, examining the impact it will have on Higganum Center. She feels that it will be an economic loss, business will suffer and asked that that Board reconsider, pause for a year, and involved the Community in the decision process.

**Adjournment:**

Board Chair, Joanne Nesti, called for the meeting to adjourn at 9:30 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

  
Jamie Sciascia  
Board Clerk

Approval:  Date: 5/7/19  
Eileen Blewett, Secretary