

REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT NO. 17
BOARD OF EDUCATION – EDUCATION SESSION
November 18, 2014

A meeting of the Regional School District No. 17 Board of Education was held on November 18, 2014 in the Haddam-Killingworth Middle School Media Center. Board of Education Chair, Sue Twachtman, called the meeting to order at 7:30 PM.

Members Present: *Susan Dean, Becky Valenti, Dan Chase, Brian Gamache, Kathy Brown, Amy Jacques-Purdy, and Sue Twachtman*

Members Absent: *Joel D'Angelo, Jeannie Young, Michele Amendola, and Karen Perry*

Also Present: *Superintendent of Schools, Howard Thiery and Board Clerk, Larissa Johnson*

Visitors: *7*

Call to Order/Opening of Meeting

Board of Education Chair, Sue Twachtman called the meeting to order at 7:30 PM. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

Audience of Citizens

None

Board Liaison Reports

A. Curriculum Council Update

Susan Dean updated the Board. She reported that the Curriculum Council discussed two new courses sponsored by Project Lead the Way. The first is a course in Computer Science and Software Engineering, and the second is Biological Engineering. Both are designed to help with student preparedness in STEM areas. The Curriculum Council also heard reports from the schools, Pupil Services and the Superintendent. They also talked about how veterans were celebrated in the District in recognition of Veteran's Day. Superintendent Thiery added that the two new proposed courses will have to be reviewed by the Curriculum Subcommittee.

B. Curriculum Subcommittee

No update.

Board Chair Information

Board Chair Sue Twachtman stated that the business meeting scheduled for December 2, 2014 is cancelled due to a scheduled mediation session with the teachers' union.

The Board Chair then stated that she wanted to address the 'Haddam Bulletin' article which was published in the latest issue regarding the school district. She stated that the article contained some

erroneous information and that she felt it is important to share the correct information with the community. She said that the following email was sent to the Regional School District No. 17 community and read the email into the record:

The November issue of the *Haddam Bulletin* included an article titled Haddam ACTS Identifies Opportunities that contained inaccurate information. It is important to note that the School Administration and Board of Education had no knowledge of this article, and was not consulted to verify the accuracy of information presented in the article. Strong community partnerships are built on open and honest communication. Therefore, in our pursuit to provide accurate information, it is important to clarify the facts in the article for members of our community.

1) The article states that the transportation contract for RSD 17 expires in April 2015, which is during the school year. This is not accurate. The contract expires on June 30, 2015. The meeting minutes from April 1, 2014 reflect that action item. The Board of Education is currently working with the Administration to conduct a competitive bid process to ensure no disruption and competitive pricing of these services.

2) The article states that RSD 17 per pupil expenditures are over \$18,000 per year and out of line with surrounding towns. The article is wrong on both counts. The net current expenditure per pupil (NCEP) for Regional School District 17 for 2013-14 (the last available completed year) is \$15,160.03. The NCEP is published by the State of Connecticut each year and is calculated as defined in CT General Statutes Section 10-261(a)(3). The NCEP is considered to be the most accurate figure for comparing district spending on an apples-to-apples basis because it excludes costs that regional school districts are forced to carry, such as property and debt services that are covered in town operating budgets of municipal school districts. RSD 17's NCEP of \$15,160.03 is below these surrounding districts: Lyme-Old Lyme (\$18,107), Essex-Deep-River-Chester (\$15,912), Middlefield-Durham (\$17,176), Westbrook (\$19,206), Old Saybrook (\$17,140), East Haddam (\$15,638) and Guilford (\$15,352). The article goes on to mention that, as a result, the budget increases are unsustainable. It should be noted that over the past 3 years, the school budget has increased on average by 1.05%, while at the same time the general rate of inflation has been 2.02%.

3) The article questioned the need for the new parking lot at Haddam Elementary School (HES). The new parking lot was the last of several steps taken to address a safety issue for our HES families. The amount of traffic at arrival and dismissal times was creating an unsafe situation for children and families. The existing driveway and parking lot was insufficient to handle the traffic flow. Prior to adding the new lot the district added traffic signs and worked with police to monitor, educate and change parking practices. While all of these steps had positive affects, none of them sufficiently addressed the safety concerns. The new parking lot allows staff to park away from the pick-up and drop-off area and frees up the parking spaces for parents, and provides necessary parking spaces for families during school activities. In fact, the HES parking lots are completely full during school events. As always, the safety of our students is of utmost importance. Although HES still has fewer parking spaces than the other elementary schools, the new lot has made the school environment much safer.

4) The article states, "Each meeting, the BOE goes into executive session with the superintendent excluding the public for much of the meeting." This is untrue. A review of our meeting minutes and our broadcasted monthly meetings confirm that the vast

majority of the meetings are conducted in public session. By law, the BOE can only enter into executive session for personnel matters, student matters, legal matters or contract negotiations. The BOE is currently very busy on the personnel front. We recently had 7 administrative positions turn over, which we are replacing with 6 new hires (representing a reduction to the District of one administrator). We are also involved in negotiating with four unions. Therefore, this has led to portions of the meeting being held in executive session.

Transparent, open communication is essential in building collaborative relationships with our entire community. In the last two months, Haddam ACTS has met with BOE members and the Superintendent to clarify several topics other than those in the recent article. As always, we encourage Haddam ACTS and any members of our community to reach out to us with questions, concerns or to clarify information.

Sincerely,
Regional School District 17 Board of Education

The Board Chair further emphasized that the Board of Education has made it a priority to communicate with the community in the past three years, including issuing a monthly Board Update, placing updates on Facebook and encouraging community participation. Becky Valenti also pointed out that membership in the Board of Education is a volunteer position, which requires a lot of time and dedication. Susan Dean also added that the Board only has discussion regarding legally confidential matters during Executive Session and that no decisions are rendered during Executive Session. The Board returns from Executive Session to a public session to make any decisions or pass any motions. Kathy Brown also inquired about the Haddam Elementary School basketball courts, clarifying with the Superintendent that these courts are still open to the public, even though they have been relocated a small distance from their original location.

New Business

A. HKHS Awards and Recognitions Display Plan

Haddam-Killingworth High School Principal Donna Hayward and Haddam-Killingworth High School Athletic Director Lynne Flint presented a plan to display honors and awards presented to the high school, including previously earned awards. Ms. Hayward explained that an Awards Committee was formed to develop a set of guiding principles and a plans for the display of academic, athletic and fine arts awards. Academic awards will displayed to the left of the main office and will include a "Wall of Recognition." Athletic Awards will be displayed at the end of the hallway to the right of the main office and at the end of the cat walk by the boys' locker room. This area will be made into an "Athletic Hall of Fame." These two areas will contain athletic awards older than one year. Awards won in the most recent year will be displayed in a case in the pool/gymnasium lobby. The area outside the auxiliary gym and girls' locker room will be used for a Hall of Fame for coaches to honor HK's many of our coaches who have served the district for over thirty years, including Dennis O'Rourke, Patsy Kamercia, Mark Brookes, Richard Langer, Richard Dupuis, and Sy Soobitsky. Fine arts awards will be displayed in the foyer of the Auditorium. In order to create these spaces, the Awards Committee recommended that some areas be repainted, new trophy display cases be purchased and some additional lighting be added. The Awards Committee also made a plan for sustainability and for how awards may be returned to their recipients if they need to be retired or how they will be rotated as new awards are earned.

Old Business

A. 2015-2016 Calendar Draft

The Board briefly discussed the proposed 2015-2016 calendar. The first day of school would be scheduled for August 26, 2015 and the last day would be scheduled for June 13, 2016. Make up days beyond June 20th would be deducted from the Spring vacation, up to five days. The Board compared the calendars of some surrounding towns to see whether the inclusion of both a February and April vacation impacted the last day of school. The Board felt that the exclusion of either of the vacations did not greatly impact when the last day of school would be scheduled for. The Board talked about how having a February break can be difficult for parents but also positive for teachers and students, in terms of giving students a break to rest when colds and other minor illnesses tend to be at their peak. The Board also noted that a three or four-day weekend might still be scheduled during the February break due to President’s Day, which means that District only gains a few days, rather than a full week. Also, it was noted that although Board members and administrators receive some feedback that February vacation should be eliminated, they also hear equally that April vacation should be eliminated or both vacations should remain in place. They did not make any changes to the proposed calendar.

*Amy Jacques-Purdy **MOVED** and Susan Dean **SECONDED** a motion to approve the 2015-2016 Calendar as presented. Motion passed 7-0-0 by the following votes:*

Michele Amendola	Absent	Amy Jacques-Purdy	YES <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/> A <input type="checkbox"/>
Kathy Brown	YES <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/> A <input type="checkbox"/>	Karen Perry	Absent
Dan Chase	YES <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/> A <input type="checkbox"/>	Becky Valenti	YES <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/> A <input type="checkbox"/>
Joel D’Angelo	Absent	Jeannie Young	Absent
Susan Dean	YES <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/> A <input type="checkbox"/>	Sue Twachtman	YES <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/> A <input type="checkbox"/>
Brian Gamache	YES <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/> A <input type="checkbox"/>		

Adjournment

Board Chair Twachtman called for the meeting to adjourn at 8:32 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Larissa B. Johnson
Board Clerk

Approval: _____ Date: _____
Becky Valenti, Secretary