

**APPROVED
MINUTES
BOARD OF EDUCATION
AUGUST 25, 2015**

PLACE:

Darien Board of Education
Meeting Room
7:30 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Ms. Hagerty-Ross, Chair; Mesdames Stein, Zuro, McNamara, and Sullivan; and Messrs. Harman, Burke, Martens, and Dineen.

ADMINISTRATION PRESENT:

Dr. Dan Brenner, Superintendent of Schools; Dr. Susie DaSilva, Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction; Ms. Shirley Klein, Assistant Superintendent of Special Education and Student Services; Mr. Michael Feeney, Director of Finance and Operations; and Ms. Marjorie Cion, Director of Human Resources.

VISITORS:

Approximately 40

CALL TO ORDER

Ms. Hagerty-Ross called the meeting to order at 7:50 p.m. and wished everyone the best of luck for the upcoming school opening.

SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT

PRESENTATION FROM SUMMER SCHOOL THEATER CLASS

Dr. Brenner said he was excited about the upcoming school year and also delighted to have viewed a performance by a summer school drama class held at Tokeneke Elementary School. He invited the students to perform for the Board of Education. A group of students who had been part of the summer class gave a rousing performance of two songs.

CHAIRPERSON'S REPORT

Ms. Hagerty-Ross remarked how wonderful it was for the Board to see what Darien students were doing. She thanked the students for their performance and indicated how such a performance served as a reminder that the focus of the Board's efforts is always about students.

PUBLIC COMMENT

There was no public comment at this time.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- ** MR. BURKE MOVED TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE SPECIAL MEETING AND EXECUTIVE SESSION OF JULY 28, 2015.
- ** MR. HARMAN SECONDED THE MOTION.
- ** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.

- ** MS. SULLIVAN MOVED TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE REGULAR MEETING OF JULY 28, 2015.
- ** MS. STEIN SECONDED THE MOTION.
- ** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.

BOARD COMMITTEE REPORTS

There were no committee reports at this time.

PRESENTATIONS/DISCUSSIONS:

A. FURTHER DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE ACTION ON 2015-2016 BOARD GOALS AND OBJECTIVES (FILE #2391)

Ms. Hagerty-Ross noted these goals had been developed at the off-site Board meeting, and had been thoroughly discussed at the July 28th meeting.

- ** MS. SULLIVAN MOVED TO APPROVE THE 2015-2016 BOARD GOALS AND OBJECTIVES.
- ** MR. BURKE SECONDED THE MOTION.
- ** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.

B. FURTHER DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE ACTION ON 2015-2016 DISTRICT GOALS AND OBJECTIVES (FILE #2392)

Dr. Brenner said he had made the changes discussed at the meeting of July 28, 2015 and highlighted them in red on the document.

Board Questions/Discussion and Administration's responses:

a) **With regard to the literacy curriculum is it now noted it applies to K-8?** (Dr. Brenner replied, yes, K-8 was now indicated in Section #3.) b) **What about the use of the word "procedures" as it applies to Special Ed. and 504?** (Dr. Brenner replied the word "procedures" had been left in as an oversight and would be struck from the final document.)

- ** MS. SULLIVAN MOVED TO APPROVE THE 2015-2016 DISTRICT GOALS AND OBJECTIVES AS AMENDED.
- ** MS. MCNAMARA SECONDED THE MOTION.
- ** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.

C. UPDATE ON HIGH SCHOOL SPECIAL EDUCATION RESTRUCTURING (FILE #2393)

Ms. Klein presented a PowerPoint update on High School Special Education restructuring. She said these initiatives were just the first step in addressing Special Education needs and approaches to Special Education would continue to develop toward the best program possible.

The presentation started by clarifying and defining the 3-Tier SRBI system, describing which approaches applied to each Tier. She explained the goal of the system was to allow students to learn as independently as possible while still receiving any necessary services.

She said there had clearly been a breach of trust in the system, and the feeling of some parents was that their children were not being cared for. She said communication was a crucial part of rebuilding this trust as well as actions in the interest of each particular child and unwavering commitment to the child's success. In order to achieve these goals, she outlined several new initiatives. Students in High School and Middle School will now have an assigned case manager as well as a mentor. These assignments will be communicated to parents by letter before the beginning of the school year. Parents will also receive a joint call from the case manager and the mentors within the first two weeks of school and every week thereafter to discuss their child. Case managers are expected to handle about 10 students each. Furthermore, every teacher will be briefed on the special needs students in their classrooms and every teacher will be instructed on IEP guidelines and sign off on a form indicating acceptance and understanding of IEPs.

Board Questions/Discussion and Administration's responses:

a) I have heard from some parents who have received packets from the school, but no information on case managers or special education assignments. (Ms. Klein replied that not all letters were able to go out in the original school packet, but if parents had not yet received a letter they would shortly. Dr. Brenner said there would also be follow-up calls within two weeks too as a safeguard.) **b) Will parents be informed if it appears their child needs special education services, before SRBI interventions?** (Ms. Klein answered parents should be aware and informed of every step of the SRBI process.) **c) As communication is critical is there a way all of these SRBI initiatives can be presented to parents now, perhaps on the website?** (Dr. Brenner said he agreed communication was critical, but as the redevelopment of the SRBI program was in its initial stages, and the process was fluid, it was too early to document a concrete program in a completely intelligible way. He said the plan would be to have a full system in place by the end of the year.) **d) In terms of SRBI, what happens when students are making gains but through the progression of the year the gap is not closing?** (Dr. DaSilva answered the rate of progress for each individual student was indeed different and would be monitored to find the best approach.) **e) Is there a fast track to PPT?** (Dr. DaSilva said this was possible and a team would be in place to look at each case on an individual basis.) **f) If parents have not received a call within the first few weeks of the school year or find their accommodations are not being met who do they**

call? On the elementary school level in particular as there are not case managers? (Dr. Brenner answered in the case of elementary school, as the student generally only has one teacher (and not the 4 or more they may have in middle school or high school requiring a case manager), they can contact the child's teacher or the Special Education facilitator. A response should be expected within 24 hours. Dr. Brenner said he was hopeful with the high school and middle school, a trusting relationship would be developed with the case managers to make them the "go to" person for any problems, followed by the SESS facilitator or mentor.) **g) In the language of the PowerPoint it refers to supplying the child with the "least amount of services" necessary. This language may prove problematic for many parents.** (Dr. Brenner answered following Federal mandate the goal of the Special Education program is to develop independent learners. The idea is to allow students to develop in the "least restrictive" environment to ensure this independence.) **h) With this new model of communication and the parents receiving phone calls, given the fact these initial phone calls may take a long time, perhaps hours, is it realistic to assume all parents will receive calls within the first two weeks of school?** (Dr. Brenner said the phone calls would all happen within the time frame and would be structured conversations with specific goals to allow for time constraints.)

Dr. Brenner continued by discussing the new 200, 300, 400 level initiatives at the High School. He emphasized that these programs were not specifically Special Education programs but designed to benefit the student body as a whole. He said in many cases, students are capable of learning on a higher level, but may need some extra attention. He said students rise to the challenges they are given and the bar should stay high. To that end, he said the High School would now be piloting two new programs. First, would be a co-teaching pilot. Two sophomore English 300 level classes will now be co-taught with two regular English teachers in each classroom. This has proven to be a successful strategy for students at all levels to get the necessary attention and help differentiate the curriculum. Second, a lab class pilot will be offered for students offering additional help to students who may need it. This lab section would be taught by the same teacher and offer an opportunity for pre-teaching and extra assistance. He said he had implemented a similar program in his previous school district and it had been successful.

Board Questions/Discussion and Administration's responses:

a) Do you anticipate any problems as this program rolls out? For example students who might not do as well at a higher level class may get lower grades. (Dr. Brenner answered colleges often look not just at grades but take into account the rigor of the course load of the student and whether or not they took challenging classes.) **b) Does the new "lab" program have any space implications?** (Dr. Brenner answered the facilities were well able to handle the lab classes but that student scheduling, in particular electives, might be impacted to make time for the lab classes.) **c) Will this be a full year pilot? Will progress be reported on during the course of the year?** (Dr. Brenner said the pilot would be full year with results reported at the end of the year.) **d) Is the program just limited to the sophomore classes? Will special education students be part of these classes?** (Ms. Klein said yes, they would in proportional numbers. Dr. Brenner answered the initial pilot was small by design. He added he imagined it would be popular. He said the lab classes offer an opportunity for additional help.) **e) How will parents find out their child is in a pilot program? It seems important that this is communicated and sold to the parents and to the PTO. It is really a great opportunity for the students and the parents should know.** (Dr. Brenner said a letter would go out to parents and the program could also be explained on the website.)

D. PRESENTATION ON ROLLOUT OF PAVILION PLAN (FILE #2394)

Dr. Brenner shared a PowerPoint presentation outlining the Pavilion Plan. Aspects included a full RFP, letters from the P&Z as well as scheduling and custodial recommendations. He said all potential vendors would be fully vetted with background checks. He said he had spoken to one resident who lived near the high school who had voiced her concerns about the concessions. She said she was afraid of additional traffic and disturbance as well as trash and smells coming from the facility. He said the BOE and Town Counsel had conferred and determined it was unnecessary for the Board to gain additional approvals before accepting the gift of Kitchen Equipment from the DAF.

Board Questions/Discussion and Administration's responses:

a) In the RFP it indicates the vendor would be responsible for the custodial requirements, what have been some of the experiences at similar facilities in Greenwich and New Canaan? (Dr. Brenner replied the Greenwich concession was primarily parent driven and neither the Greenwich or New Canaan facilities were full blown concessions as may have been originally planned.) **b) Will the facility serve home varsity contests only? Have you looked at the schedule? It could be quite busy.** (Dr. Brenner said the 6 largest events were claimed by the Cheerleaders and Marching Band fundraising efforts. He said the facility could be open on weekends to facilitate Darien Youth Sports. He said it would be fluid process that might be changed as it went along depending on outcomes.) **c) Does the RFP process indicate that it would be an initial one year contract with the vendor?** (Dr. Brenner indicated it did. He said also that the DAF had volunteered to hire an additional security guard for weekend activities and thought it might be wise for the school to provide additional security as well for large turnout events.) **d) It is good the hours end at 5 p.m. so it does not become a "dinner" destination.** **e) Can you emphasize the garbage collection aspect of the concession. In other locations it has become a problem with neighbors having to pick up collected garbage.** **f) Has the equipment been vetted?** (Dr. Brenner replied the equipment in the original plan had been approved by Planning and Zoning, and could be accepted by the BOE and then immediately ordered by the DAF and then shown to any prospective vendors.) **g) Who would be responsible for the maintenance of the equipment?** (Dr. Brenner replied it would be the responsibility of the vendor who won the contract. In the case of there being no vendor, the school, and most probably the parent users of the facility, would be responsible. However it would be unlikely any parent driven activities would use any equipment, like deep fryers, requiring out of the ordinary cleaning or maintenance.) **h) The next step then is to accept the DAF gift and then issue the RFP? This does not have to go through the BOE Donation Committee?** (Dr. Brenner said yes. Ms. Hagerty-Ross suggested that a vote on the acceptance of the kitchen equipment take place at the September 8th meeting. Dr. Brenner added he had lost sight of his original offer to visit the high school "neighbors" and let them know what was happening but that he still intended to do so.)

E. DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE ACTION ON PROPOSED MUSIC DEPARTMENT FIELD TRIP (FILE #2395)

Ms. Minnis spoke of the prospective High School Orchestra trip to Orlando, Florida with both performance and workshop opportunities for students. The cost of the optional trip is \$1,300, with some funds provided through fund raising efforts. The trip takes place over spring break and has been a regular occurrence for many years.

The Orchestra and Band take turns - traveling on alternate years. She said there were favorable air travel rates available through JetBlue pending the trip's initial approval by the Board.

- ** **MR. MARTENS MOVED TO APPROVE THE PROPOSED ORCHESTRA FIELD TRIP TO ORLANDO, FLORIDA FOR SPRING BREAK OF 2016.**
- ** **MS. ZURO SECONDED THE MOTION.**
- ** **MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

F. UPDATE ON FIELDS

Dr. Brenner reported the center oval was open and spectacular. He said the Upper Field would be done in mid-October ahead of schedule. He said signs would be posted on construction fences to keep students, who might be tempted to chase stray balls and others away from the site.

Board Questions/Discussion and Administration's responses:

- a) There seems to be a sloped area at the back of the oval, all the other sides are level? Any reason for this sloped side?** (Dr. Brenner said he would look into it.)
- b) There is a large pile of dirt on the lower field Mr. Gesualdi had promised would be gone by school start. Can you look into it and see it gets removed? We do not want trucks barreling through when school is in session.** (Dr. Brenner said he would look into the issue.)
- c) Will construction on the upper field still be going on when students are using the lower oval?** (Dr. Brenner said construction usually ended around 3:30-4:00 p.m., in general when practice was just getting started.)
- d) When will the bleachers be installed?** (Dr. Brenner said the bleachers were up for approval at the next Planning and Zoning meeting. He said there would be further updates on the space.)

G. FIRST READING OF BOARD MASTER AGENDA FOR JULY 2015-JANUARY 2016 (FILE #2396)

Dr. Brenner indicated he had copied last year's Master Agenda and used it as the basis for the current year's Master Agenda. He said the Master Agenda would certainly change as the year developed. He said, for example, the SBAC test scores would be released shortly and would doubtless be discussed at a future meeting.

Board Questions/Discussion and Administration's responses:

- a) Curriculum revisions should be discussed.** (Dr. Brenner agreed.)
- b) Every year the BOF requires a "head count" of students and five year enrollment projections for their October meeting. Is it possible Mr. Feeney could put together those numbers?** (Dr. Brenner said he thought projected enrollment would be discussed under the broader umbrella of the facilities study.)
- c) The BOF for some reason does need those specific numbers.** (Mr. Feeney said he could get them done by the September 22nd meeting.)
- d) In terms of teacher evaluations, can we add a discussion of how student input in evaluations might be improved?** (Dr. Brenner said a re-vamp of teacher evaluations was underway and student participation could be part of the Master Agenda.)

ACTION ITEMS

A. PERSONNEL ITEMS (FILE #2397)

**Teacher/Administrator Appointments
Resignations**

Dr. Brenner noted that 58 new teachers had been hired in the past 12 weeks, in part due to last minute resignations. He said the hiring issues were being faced across district, with many vacancies to be filled.

- ** MS. SULLIVAN MOVED THAT THE TEACHER/ADMINISTRATOR APPOINTMENTS AND RESIGNATIONS BE APPROVED AS PRESENTED.**
- ** MR. MARTENS SECONDED THE MOTION.**
- ** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

PUBLIC COMMENT

Ms. Catherine Piekowski, Old Kings Highway, said it would be important to publicize and reach out to parents in regular education regarding co-taught classes, emphasizing the benefits of co-teaching.

Ms. Courtney Darby, Old Parish Road, thought the new initiatives for Special Education and pilot classes were all terrific, and felt regret for kids not included in pilot programs. However, she expressed concern about the terminology “least amount of services” as presented saying it was problematic language for a community who had felt underserved.

ADJOURNMENT

- ** MR. HARMAN MOVED TO ADJOURN.**
- ** MS. SULLIVAN SECONDED THE MOTION.**
- ** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

The meeting adjourned at 10:18 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Sarah Schneider Zuro
Secretary