

Minutes

Board of Education – Regular Meeting

Tuesday, February 16, 2021 07:00 PM

Zoom Meeting

<https://ctreg14-org.zoom.us/j/93045683476>

Meeting ID: 930 4568 3476

Phone: (646) 558-8656

Present:

George Bauer, Chairman
Carol Ann Brown
Michael Devine
Jonathan Kapstein
Tikva Rose
James Crocker

Absent:

N/A

Also Present:

Dr. Joseph Olzacki, Superintendent
Tina Tanguay, Director of Finance and Operations
Attorney Mark Sommaruga
Mark Harutunian, Covid 19 Liaison
Wendy Yatsenick, Principal, Bethlehem Elementary School
Andrew Komar, Principal, Mitchell Elementary School
Patricia Paige, Board Clerk
Patrick DiSarro, Communications Specialist

1. Call to Order

Board Chairman, George Bauer, called the meeting to order at 7:03 p.m.

2. Introductions

Members of the board introduced themselves

3. Statements on Board of Education resignations and District Meeting for election of vacancies; discussion and possible action on election/vacancy process.

Chairman Bauer noted receipt of, and read, letters of resignations from fellow Board of Education members, Janet Morgan and Pamela Zmek both effective February 5, 2021. He shared a few parting words in honor of their service and dedication to the Board of Education, students, staff, and communities of Region 14.

To fill these vacancies, per district policy, the board must hold a district meeting within 30 days to elect new board members to satisfy the balance of the unexpired term of each member. The target date is Friday, March 5th. Ms. Zmek's (Bethlehem) term expires June 30, 2023 and Ms. Morgan's (Woodbury) June 30, 2022.

Some of the challenges Mr. Bauer noted the board was faced with were having to take into consideration the Covid 19 health crisis and various executive orders governing the gathering of people and voting. Mr. Bauer and attorney for the board, Mark Sommaruga, put together a plan to tackle the district meeting and shared the details with the entire board. Discussions ensued regarding zoom, hybrid and/or in-person participation scenarios. The consensus of the board was to hold a hybrid model meeting. Specific details to follow and will be outlined on the legal notice. Chairman Bauer will reach out to the registrars in both towns.

4. Approval of Minutes

A. Special Meeting of the Board of Education dated Wednesday, February 3, 2021

A motion was made by Tikva Rose and seconded by Michael Devine to accept/approve the minutes as presented; all in favor; none opposed; motion carried unanimously.

5. Superintendent's Report

Dr. Olzacki opened his report by stating that the administrative team is focusing on bringing the students back full-time, which translates to a normal school day (pre-Covid) schedule, as soon as the high school's cafeteria social distancing restrictions are resolved.

Elementary and middle school students will be taking the NWEA math assessment, which is used to measure the students' academic growth in math during the school year. Teachers can use the results to personalize learning for students by creating individualized plans or goals.

BES/MES Update: Principal Wendy Yatsenick and Principal Andrew Komar

Bethlehem Elementary School

Ms. Yatsenick from Bethlehem Elementary was first up to offer a summary of events occurring at the school. She showcased a newsletter, "In Case You Missed It", which highlighted some of the recent and on-going events including a Super Bowl Food Drive sponsored by the student council; Jump Rope for Heart; and Coffee with the Principal, an interactive meeting with parents and the principal to be held via zoom.

Students wore red on Friday to support the leukemia and lymphoma initiative and are collecting money for Caring for Bethlehem Foodbank in March. Ms. Yatsenick publicly thanked the PTO for the pre-dawn Valentine's Day decoration in front of the school and lastly, spoke about the new plant robot, a garden tower provided through a 4H grant and Mr. Bill Davenport.

Mitchell Elementary School

Mr. Komar, Principal at Mitchell Elementary School, announced his Coffee with the Principal scheduled for Tuesday morning; he is looking forward to the opportunity to interact with parents.

There are several reading events scheduled at the school including Future Farmers of America, who will read to students on Friday via a Google Meet format. Read Across American is slated for March 2nd; community members have been invited to read to students in person. The primary focus is Black History Month with a focus on empathy and an understanding of history.

A RULER webinar is available to parents in both communities. The objective is to familiarize parents with what students are learning about emotionally.

Spirit week, sponsored by the student council, was held last week, as well as a Red Out, the efforts of which raised \$600 for the cause.

Principal Komar highlighted several science and math programs and publicly thanked the 4H for the hydroponic robot. He also thanked the PTO for their Valentine's Day contributions.

Covid Update

Mark Harutunian, the district's Covid 19 Liaison, spoke regarding the Region 14 Covid-19 Dashboard which is located on the district's homepage. The dashboard provides statistical information as it relates to the number of staff and students with confirmed cases and the number of those in quarantine by school. Under normal circumstances, the page is updated daily by three o'clock.

6. Committee Reports

Public Relations Committee Chair, Carol Ann Brown, highlighted a few points of interest including:

- The Red Out initiative was a big success for students who participated in the cancer drive;
- Grip and Grin will be held tomorrow;
- Plugged the live streaming of basketball games from the gym and stated that they are very well done;
- The Athlete of the week, Ashley Hennessey, is a member of the Nonnewaug girls basketball team;
- Board members Tikva Rose and Carol Ann Brown will participate in Read Across American
- Jonathan Kapstein introduced his BoE handbook which will be distributed to all board members.

7. **Board Chair's Comments.....Mr. George Bauer**
Chairman Bauer offered and explained several modalities for public participation under Privilege of the Floor.
8. **Privilege of the floor**
Communications will speak to four topics; Superintendent, Covid 19 Vaccinations, Budget, and Basketball.

Letter Topic: Superintendent

David Schultz

Letter in support of Dr. Olzacki; totally appropriate to decrease staff; commended for his dedication; quality education at affordable cost to tax payers

Brian Baker

350 signatures on a signed petition of no confidence for Mark Harutunian and Dr. Olzacki; board not held him accountable, suspend the superintendent and Covid officer until investigation is complete; it's about accountability

Ed De Cortin

Expressed support for Dr. Olzacki; represents the region's values; need to establish protocols and access to the facts

Lisa Amatruda

Supports Region 14 Superintendent Dr. Olzacki; well thought out and sound vision; revolving door of superintendents is not good for towns

Letter Topic: Covid-19 Vaccinations

Deborah Shultz

Writing in support of Dr. Olzacki in advancing teaching and learning for teachers and students while being fiscally responsible; current attack on Dr. Olzacki unfounded

Mr. Deakin

Kids need to be back in the building; need to remind Mr. York and union that they work for the taxpayers

Dave Lampart

Supports Board of Education and administration; appalled by accusations from the teachers union

Letter Topic: Budget

Mike Cunningham

Sat with Dr. Olzacki and Wayne McAllister; both strive to have an open and transparent approach to the budget process; sound, solid and fiscally responsible budget given the mandates from the state; have done an incredible job navigating in this time of crisis

Letter Topic: Basketball

Jodie D'Alexander

Hard stopping time of 5:00 rushes varsity, not enough time for JV; must squeeze in modified game; what is the science behind this and who made this decision

No requests for verbal statements

New privilege of the floor format with raised hand feature in Zoom

Tricia Dannenhoffer

Asked Board of Ed to reconsider allowing parents to watch their student athletes in person; shortened season; last year for seniors

Todd Hennessey

Did not have the joy to watch his daughter because the district does not allow for spectators; asked the board to reconsider

Sylvia Ouellette

Spoke to district leadership and Region 14; systemic issues; all her communications addressed lack of communication, transparency and honesty; led to a vote of no confidence; community is watching and hoping for an honorable resolution

David Butkus

Requested that the board not make any motions regarding current events until the two new members are on the board

Chris Leone

His student attends Woodbury Middle School; will not see 900 hours of instructional time; other districts have found a way to teach; urged board to seek the truth

Jodie D'Alexander

Stressed how important it is for home basketball games and for parents to attend; custodians should be able to get their work done without the hard stopping time of 5:00 p.m.; asked the board to reconsider

Michael Burke

Read a prepared statement; superintendent contradictory; pattern of deception and mistrust; hiring of superintendent in 2018 has resulted in the departure of dozens of qualified and dedicated staff; hold position accountable.

9. Old Business

There was no Old Business

10. New Business

A. Discussion regarding Board communications to the public – newsletter

The purpose of the newsletter is to disseminate information more quickly to the communities. Board members Tikva Rose and Jonathan Kapstein volunteered to create the newsletter.

A motion was made by Jim Crocker and seconded by Jonathan Kapstein that the Region 14 Board of Education improve their communication with their constituents by producing an informal newsletter on a regular basis.

Discussion:

If the opinion of the board is out to communities, then all members should be aware of what is being presented, should act as one unit. Concerns were expressed regarding the turn-around time; timely information. Asked for a circular review within a specific time period.

Chairman Bauer stated that there was no need for a motion to disseminate a newsletter; it is enabled already through the chairperson as spokesperson.

Motion withdrawn by Jim Crocker

A motion was made by Jim Crocker that the Region 14 Board of Education appoint a board member to draft and publish timely responses to critical issues and implement immediately

Chairman Bauer noted that the motion is not needed if they agree as a board with the compilation of a newsletter, and as a board to review and respond within 24 hours of receiving it.

Motion withdrawn by Jim Crocker

A motion was made by Jim Crocker to add an agenda item to include discussion of including the district senior administrative team in monthly updates to the board; seconded by Jonathan Kapstein; all in favor; none opposed; motion carried unanimously.

George Bauer **moved** that the Board of Education work with the administrative team to pose at the first monthly Board of Education meeting, with a rotating schedule, the principal and assistant principal of each school to report on the state of their school and at the second monthly meeting, directors of other specific functions report on status and concerns to the Board of Education; seconded by Tikva Rose; all in favor; none opposed; motion carried unanimously.

With the departure of the vice chair, Jonathan Kapstein asked if it was appropriate to elect a new vice chair. After consulting with Attorney Sommaruga who offered few scenarios;

Jonathan Kapstein **moved** to add to the agenda the nomination, appointment, and election of a vice chair; seconded by Jim Crocker; all in favor; none opposed; motion carried unanimously.

Jonathan Kapstein **moved** to nominate Jim Crocker as interim vice chairman; seconded by Tikva Rose; George Bauer and Carol Ann Brown abstained; Michael Devine voted no; Jim Crocker; Tikva Rose; Jonathan Kapstein were ayes; (3) aye; (1) no; (2) abstentions; motion carried.

B. Discussion and possible action on performance evaluation of the superintendent. (Executive session anticipated)

A motion was made by Jonathan Kapstein and seconded by Jim Crocker to enter into executive session at 9:16 p.m; all in favor; none opposed; motion carried unanimously. The board invited the following persons into executive session when called upon, Attorney Mark Sommaruga, and possibly Attorney Eric Brown (attorney for the administrators) and Dr. Olzacki, Superintendent. For the record, Dr. Olzacki was not called upon to enter executive session.

Public Session

The board returned to public session at 11:15 p.m.

Motion

There was no motion

The board will reconvene on Thursday, February 18, 2021 at 6:00 p.m.

11. Other Business

The was no Other Business

12. Adjournment

A motion was made by Carol Ann Brown and seconded by Jim Crocker to adjourn the meeting at 11:17 p.m.; all in favor; none opposed; motion carried unanimously.

Respectfully Submitted,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Patricia Paige". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "P" and a long, sweeping underline.

*Patricia Paige
Board Clerk*

Recorded and filed subject to Board of Education approval by: Patricia Paige, Board Clerk