

The Regular Meeting of the Regional School District 14 Board of Education was held Monday, July 7, 2014 at Bethlehem Elementary School, 92 East Street, Bethlehem, Connecticut.

Present: Interim Superintendent Frank Sippy, Ph.D.; Board members Georg Bauer, Carol Ann Brown, John Chapman, Charles Cosgriff, Michael Devine, Janet Morgan, Maryanne Van Aken and Pamela Zmek; Director of Finance and Operations Wayne McAllister; Director of Instruction Sue Domanico; Principals Susan Ruddock and Andrew O'Brien; Technology Director Paul Ciotti and Data Administrator Jeff Turner; Board Legal Counsel Mark Sommaruga, Esq., Board Clerk Deb Carlton; one member of the press and approximately 10 community members

I. Call to Order

Dr. Sippy called the meeting to order at 7:37 pm. and led the Pledge of Allegiance. He introduced himself to the audience, noting his service as Region 14's Superintendent from 1998-2001, said he would be with us for a short time and hopes to pave the way for the next superintendent.

II. Election of Board Chairperson

Dr. Sippy requested nominations for Chairman of the Board of Education
Ms. Brown nominated Mr. Bauer, and Mr. Devine seconded the nomination.
Mr. Cosgriff nominated Mr. Chapman, and Ms. Van Aken seconded the nomination. Hearing no further nominations, Dr. Sippy asked for a show of hands in favor of Mr. Bauer. Mr. Devine, Ms. Brown, Mr. Bauer, Ms. Zmek, Mr. Chapman, Ms. Morgan, and Ms. Van Aken voted in favor of his nomination. Mr. Cosgriff voted for Mr. Chapman when a show of hands was requested for him. Mr. Bauer was elected Chairperson by majority vote.

III. Election of Officers

Mr. Bauer requested nominations for Vice Chair. Ms. Morgan nominated Mr. Chapman, and Ms. Zmek seconded the nomination. Hearing no further nominations, a show of hands confirmed Mr. Chapman's unanimous election.

Mr. Bauer requested nominations for Secretary. Ms. Van Aken nominated Ms. Brown, and Ms. Morgan seconded the nomination. Hearing no further nominations, a show of hands confirmed Ms. Brown's unanimous election.

Mr. Bauer requested nominations for Treasurer. Mr. Chapman nominated Mr. Devine, and Ms. Morgan seconded the nomination. Hearing no further nominations, a show of hands confirmed Mr. Devine's unanimous election.

Mr. Bauer requested nominations for Assistant Secretary/Treasurer. Ms. Zmek nominated Mr. Cosgriff, and Ms. Van Aken seconded the nomination. Hearing no further nominations, a show of hands confirmed Mr. Cosgriff's unanimous election.

Mr. Bauer requested a *motion to add to the agenda, under presentations to the board, an update from the Board's legal counsel on board members' responsibilities and an update on the Waterbury case (Arras, Miller, Miller, Murphy, and Suslavich v. Region 14)*. Entered by Ms. Morgan and seconded by Ms. Zmek, the **motion carried 8-0**.

IV. Board Appointments

Mr. Bauer requested a *motion to appoint Pullman and Comley, LLC, as Board legal counsel*. Entered by Mr. Cosgriff and seconded by Mr. Chapman, the **motion carried 8-0**.

Mr. Bauer requested a *motion to appoint Debra Carlton as Board Clerk*. Entered by Ms. Van Aken and seconded by Mr. Cosgriff, the **motion carried 8-0**.

Mr. Bauer requested a *motion to appoint Andrea Needleman, M.D., as Health Director and School Physician for MES, BES and WMS; and to appoint Charles McNair, M.D., as School Physician for NHS.* Entered by Mr. Cosgriff and seconded by Ms. Van Aken, the **motion carried 8-0**.

Mr. Bauer requested a *motion to appoint James Bauer, D.M.D., as School Dentist.* Entered by Ms. Van Aken and seconded by Mr. Cosgriff, the **motion carried 8-0**.

V. Review of the Minutes

Mr. Bauer requested a *motion to approve the regular meeting minutes of June 16, 2014.* Entered by Ms. Van Aken and seconded by Ms. Morgan, the **motion carried 6-0-2** with new members Ms. Zmek and Mr. Devine abstaining.

VI. Presentations/Reports to the Board

Dr. Sippy gave an update on the internet access issue. He stressed that the schools should encourage students to bring issues of concern to their teachers, and administrators, with the expectation the turnaround time will be a quick as is reasonable. He said our mission, as a public education entity, is to foster enlightened students and we do that by encouraging students to seek multiple perspectives; we fall short even if we unintentionally restrict the flow of knowledge. He commented that the challenge for any K-12 district in the digital environment is balancing our legal obligation to safeguard students while simultaneously advocating and encouraging their use of these tools; a one size fits all approach does not meet the needs of every student. As dependency on digital media grows, public education agencies will encounter more issues around access which is why it is important we have a revised systems practice, with a reasonable refresh loop, to most efficiently and responsibly respond to new concerns.

He said while it is standard K-12 school practice to block websites categorized as pornographic, hate/racism, and adult/mature, some are more debatable as to their appropriateness, such as shopping, society and lifestyle, and religion. The Not Rated classification is a clearing house classification where new sites, unfamiliar sites, or sites infrequently visited reside until we learn more about the site, and that by that very function this category should be blocked until further action is required. In our case, the Not Rated classification was unblocked while political/advocacy and religious sites were blocked creating imbalances in material access. This issue will be addressed this summer.

As to next steps, and because new URL's are created daily, the issue of balancing custodial responsibility with instructional mission will require regular discourse and communication. This issue signals the need for a systems review of our current practices and protocols as relates to website filtering and use of digital appliances. He recommends the district engage an outside, third party vendor, expert in educational website maintenance issues, to conduct a digital systems audit. His expectation is the work will be completed in three weeks and that a formal presentation on the findings as well as action plan recommendations will be presented to the Board in August.

Board members also had questions about the internet filtering system. Ms. Morgan asked and found out the district has been with SonicWALL since 2008, using the same settings and with minimal changes in categories. She learned all students sign an acceptable use form that explains procedures for requesting the unblocking of sites. She also learned that approximately 25-35 forms were filled out in 2014. Mr. Bauer asked and received confirmation that new sites are assigned to categories by SonicWALL, and Ms. Brown learned that 30-40% of schools use this same appliance. Mr. Chapman sees setting policy as important, to sort out issues with technology that is never perfect, and to vet our system to be sure it functions properly.

Dr. Sippy commented that it is not important whether students are able to circumvent the process to get to desired sites, but rather that the filtration system deals with all sites the same way, and that the process is solid and aligned with best practice to serve students better. The audit, he said, will allow for this. Ms. Van Aken added that internet images are another issue and Mr. Chapman agreed this is another area where appropriate images can be blocked while inappropriate ones can get through. Mr. Devine felt if we are used SonicWall in the same way other schools do, the state should be offering guidance on how to set it up. Mr. Bauer concluded that by blocking Non Rated sites, we are now erring on the side of conservative practice.

Attorney Sommaruga spoke of the Child Protection Act as the reason for internet filtering in schools and agreed that policy is needed for dealing with inappropriate sites. He reminded the board that the district's computer system is not an open forum and the district has the right to determine access but must do so in a neutral way. In this case, there was no evidence of deliberate bias; once the issue was called to our attention, we acted quickly.

Attorney Sommaruga provided materials and a brief new board member orientation. He also updated the Board on the Arras, Miller, Miller, Murphy, and Suslavich law suit which continues in Waterbury Court. Within a few weeks he hopes for a summary judgment on what remains of that case. We're getting close; however, he cannot control what filings the other side makes. Also, as the Board voted to approve, we will reserve the right to file for attorney's fees.

To initiate conversation about the systems audit, Mr. Bauer requested a motion to approve the proposal of the Trifection Group to do a systemic audit of Region 14's practices and protocols related to content filtering. Ms. Van Aken entered the motion, seconded by Mr. Cosgriff. Discussion followed. Dr. Sippy provided copies of the proposal, noting item #1 speaks to what we have, and #2-5 are what it could/should be. Ms. Brown asked where the money will come from and was told the budget will be reviewed to see changes between budgeted and actual salaries. There is no line item for this. Dr. Sippy commented that, though his is a fiscal conservative, sometimes financial outlays make strategic sense, and this is one of those times. He chose this firm based on referrals and positive feedback from those who have used the company. He will find out how large the company is and, to the suggestion we seek some of the services from the State or CABE, he stressed the need to have something in place for the start of school. Ms. Brown asked what Dell's responsibility in all this is and was told none. The implications to them, Dr. Sippy said, may become evident after the report is received and moving forward. Our contract with them is year to year. Mr. Chapman urged less time on development of specs for an RFP, and more on comparing to industry standards, best practice, how schools decide on categories, and how often this is reviewed.

The motion carried 8-0.

VII. Strategic Plan Status and Update

Ms. Domanico shared that curriculum writing workshops begin this week – 7/9 and 7/14 for ELA and 7/10 for Career and Tech Ed. Products will be aligned to the CT standards and created in a common format in digital form to be viewed and shared more easily. She shared ratings for Region 14 teachers and said data was reported to the CSDE by the 6/30 deadline. She reported that all schools completed the Smarter Balanced Field test in grades 3-8 and 11. All schools completed the spring administration of the MAP test in grades 1,3,5,6,7, and 9. In the fall, we will use this assessment K-12, she said.

VIII. Privilege of the Floor

Andrew Lampart, Woodbury, asked whether students can fill out the unblock request form and was told teachers do this on their behalf. He asked how students would know this and was referred to the Acceptable Use Policy, which students sign, and which contains the request form. He asked if blocked/unblocked site lists are K-12 and was told they are. He disagrees with this and thinks older students should have greater access. He asked how long it will take to resolve the issue and was told the Board anticipates Trifection's results within a few weeks. He commented that by blocking Not Rated sites, the district is effectively blocking 99% of all sites and this is not good. He said he knows it was not the intent of the school board to be biased, but along the way the system failed. He is willing to work with the schools on this, he said.

IX. Facilities, Finance and Operations Update

Mr. McAllister reported \$84,727 spent on the Arras, Miller, Miller, Murphy and Suslavich case through May, with June bills outstanding, as compared to \$19,864 spent for the Litchfield case. In total, approximately \$104,600 has been spent on both, well beyond the \$95,000 budgeted. Summer projects needing attention include boilers at NHS, previously estimated at \$100,000 but with bids coming in 40% higher; WMS roof work, where we need to decide which sections to do; and MES asbestos abatement within the amount budgeted for that.

X. Safety Update

Ms. Van Aken reported having met on 6/20; background checks were up and running 7/1; discussion included bids for fence work at BES; and discussion about swapping rooms to afford a street view for the SRO was had. She thanked Ms. Ruddock for her willingness to accommodate that request.

XI. Other Business

Mr. Bauer will soon make committee assignments and urged board members to send requests based on interest in serving.

Ms. Van Aken asked about Kindergarten class sizes. Dr. Sippy said he would soon meet with Ms. Torre and the probability is that another section will be added, maybe as a one year assignment. In that event, and will classes of 17 at BES, Ms. Van Aken would look for savings by reducing the number of paras.

XII. Adjournment

Mr. Bauer requested a *motion to adjourn*.

Entered by Ms. Van Aken and seconded by Mr. Chapman, the **motion carried 8-0**.
The meeting adjourned at 9:20 pm.

Respectfully Submitted,

Carol Ann Brown, Secretary
Regional School District #14 Board of Education

Recorded and filed subject to Board of Education approval by: Debra W. Carlton, Board Clerk, 7/11/2014