

MINUTES OF THE PUBLIC/COMMUNITY RELATIONS COMMITTEE

A meeting of the Region 14 Public/Community Relations Committee was held on Monday, September 16, 2013 at Bethlehem Elementary School, 92 East Street, Bethlehem, CT.

The following members were present: Committee Chair Carol Ann Brown, committee members Maryanne Van Aken, Janet Morgan, Sophieane Bartlett; also, community members Adele Taylor, Patti Knowlton, Eileen Budrewicz, Pam Zmek, and Deb DeSorbo; Superintendent Jody Goeler, DF/O Wayne McAllister, Director of Instruction Sue Domanico, and clerk Deb Carlton.

The meeting came to order at 6:32 pm.

Superintendent Advisory Board

Mr. Goeler explained the purpose of this group as gathering community members on a quarterly basis with agendas planned by him, and to find out about what is going on in the schools, to listen to the community and what they would like to see, and to make connections with the community. The initiatives before us are complex, he said, and involving the community is helpful in meeting them. The committee is currently comprised of Donna Dreska, Nancy Grasing, Sue March, Eileen Budrewicz, Reverend Pelletier, Sheldon Smith, Bill Joyce and Paula Paolino.

Topics for Superintendent's Forum

There has been one forum to date, in a roundtable format, last spring when the 4 principals participated in a discussion of strategic planning. There was discussion of airing that forum even now, since its content is not dated. There was considerable discussion about the need for a program schedule on NEAT TV and for the station to get back to actually airing programming and not just the scrolling school info as it does now. NEAT TV schedules could also be included in principals' newsletters.

Ms. Taylor suggested a BoE monthly newsletter that would go to the general community, perhaps with copies in the library and/or senior center, to keep them up-to-date on issues in the schools. Ms. Budrewicz suggested linking the newsletter to the town website, too. Utilizing the Patch for this was also mentioned. Ms. DeSorbo offered to send BoE and/or Superintendent newsletters to the Patch herself. She noted that, unlike the main page of the Patch, the R14 section does not receive negative comments, only positive.

Parent Groups

Ms. Brown reported having visited all schools but NHS and has been impressed with the good parent groups. She could see that the security measures are working and are non-threatening. There is a good atmosphere at BES and MES, and the officers are helpful in creating a safe climate. The kids are assisting Officer Craig with a D.A.R.E. mural, she said. She has been working with the State on historical emphasis in the schools, and BES 4th grade students will visit the Historical Society and Bellamy-Ferriday Hours on 10/15-17 from 9-11:30 am. MES will have a similar activity.

Ms. Taylor addressed community concerns about security in the schools and suggested maybe filming an interview with the officers and some students, a natural human interest story, to reassure the public that the SRO program is a good one. Ms. Budrewicz added that Officer Craig spoke with 2nd grade students this week about good citizenship, which would have been a perfect opportunity to showcase what they're doing. Ms. Van Aken suggested a Superintendent's forum with the 4 officers, and Officer D'Elia and Sgt. Roden to discuss what they are doing in the schools and then to broadcast that on NEAT TV, along with pictures of them with the kids. Ms. Zmek added that a monthly "what the SROs are up to" would be a good topic for a newsletter.

Ms. Budrewicz also noted that even the traffic flow is better at the schools with the participation of the officers, and the kids are happy to head into the building knowing they are there. Ms. Van Aken agreed with Ms. Taylor that informing the general public of the good work of the SROs, well ahead of budget season, will be key to keeping them. Ms. Budrewicz suggested doing more to send the message, throughout the year, that parent groups are there and that there are opportunities for parents to volunteer. Ms. DeSorbo would like to see the senior (citizen) readers program reinstated in the elementary schools. Mary Lou Czarnecki would be able to give information on that program. Ms. Budrewicz agreed, and suggested sign-up sheets at the senior center, or through Park and Rec. Ms. Van Aken suggested to Ms. Domanico that she contact Loryn Ray at the Senior Center. Ms. Domanico said that training and commitment is important to a program like this, and helps to put the right person in the right place. Ms. Brown suggested it not be too regimented, too prescribed, as that would scare the seniors away.

Liaisons

Ms. Brown suggested inviting representatives from parent groups to committee meetings to help get parents involved and to find out what they want the BoE to do for them. Ms. Budrewicz saw value in surveying them. Mr. Goeler noted that NHS needs a PTO, and suggested concentrating on one school at a time. He will invite Andy O'Brien to the next meeting. Ms. Van Aken recalled a thriving PTO at NHS not long ago, when activities such as International Night with the jazz band playing and a silent auction brought in a lot of parents for a nice night. There was also Sleepytime Story Hours at MES and pasta dinners as fundraisers. Instead of selling merchandise as fundraisers, these were events that brought people into the schools, and made money. Ms. Brown noted that the best PTOs involve both parents. Ms. Van Aken recalled PTO meetings where the principal would come and talk to the parents about issues of importance to that school which gave parents a feeling of having an "inside track" if they attended. Ms. Taylor added that it gives parents pride in their school, is motivating, and makes them feel as though they have an advisory role and are not wasting their time.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:27 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Carol Ann Brown

Carol Ann Brown, Chair
Public/Community Relations Committee