

The Regular Meeting of the Regional School District 14 Board of Education was held on Tuesday, January 17, 2012 in the Nonnewaug High School Library, 5 Minortown Road, Woodbury, Connecticut.

Present: Superintendent Jody Ian Goeler; Board members Sophieazane Bartlett, George Bauer, John Chapman, Charles Cosgriff, Gary Suslavich, Maryanne Van Aken, and Pamela Zmek; Director of Finance/Operations James Reese; Director of Special Services Kimberly Culkin; Mitchell Elementary School Principal MaryLou Torre; Region 14 faculty members Amy Perras, Joanna Gaffney, Charles Von Hollen and Walter Culup; Region 14 students Shannon Rugar, Gemma Bauer, Ricky Robinson, Erin Start and Taylor Losure; Board Clerk Debra Carlton

Absent: Board member John Swendsen

Audience members included: Region 14 faculty members Janet Hampton and Katie Yocis; retired Region 14 faculty members Lynne Kearney and Bill Geddes; about 5 members of the community and one member of the press

I. Call to Order

Mr. Cosgriff called the meeting to order at 7:35 p.m. and led the Pledge of Allegiance.

II. Presentation – The Role of Arts/Humanities Education in Region 14 Schools

Mr. Goeler thanked the Board for requesting the night's presentation, as it shows their understanding of the importance of arts and humanities courses for our students. The most important voices to be heard tonight, he said, will be those of the students, who will be explaining how these classes help them and how they can evolve in the future.

He offered prepared remarks and thoughts from educators and thinkers on the idea that the arts are not only applicable to academics, but also prepare students for life's challenges in ways that an exclusively academic education could not. He turned the program over to the teachers and students who came to speak, beginning with Ms. Perras.

Ms. Perras, who teaches music at both elementary schools, showed the inter-relationships between music and academic subjects. She said she often sees the "Ah-ha" moment from students unable to grasp concepts in academic classes. She showed how math is utilized in musical note values, how manipulation of sound has a science component, and how students who participate in performing groups learn important concepts of commitment, teamwork, self-discipline, responsibility and self-confidence.

Grade 5 student Shannon Rugar read an enthusiastic and well thought out report about her experiences in the music program, and how she learned about rhythm and patterns by playing different instruments as a younger student, our country's history through slave songs, responsibility by bringing her recorder home and back, teamwork and confidence by playing an instrument in performances in front of others, and supporting her classmates by participating in musicals with them.

Ms. Gaffney, a social studies teacher at Woodbury Middle School, spoke of the interdisciplinary nature of her work with students, which includes map skills and current events, but also, in terms of global education, a virtual international discussion program with CT and Chicago students. Utilizing an internet chat forum, students engage in international negotiations on issues such as pollution and climate change.

Mr. Von Hollen, technology teacher at the middle school, thanked the Board for the invitation to attend this meeting and for its recognition of the importance of arts and humanities classes for students. He outlined the skills and projects different age groups work on in his classes, stressing the real world application for the students.

Student Gemma Bauer outlined benefits of all the "specials" offered at the middle school. Creative skills are honed in art class, she said, and in media she has learned to plot and plan trips on spreadsheets and prepare powerpoint presentations. Music helps with listening skills, rhythm, science, and math, and exposes her to many different types of music. In Tech Ed, she has learned creative thinking and how to use cameras, jigsaws, and to build and launch rockets. Gym and health classes are important, too, she said, for helping students stay active and be healthy.

Student Ricky Robinson stressed that technology is everywhere in students' lives and he values the technology education he receives in school. However, he noted that more updated programs are needed, because he uses Microsoft 2003 at school, and the 2011 version at home.

Mr. Culup, music teacher and band and choral director at NHS, also thanked the Board for the opportunity to attend the meeting. He described students of fine arts as the "doers." Students gain confidence, get tasks done, think outside the box and develop leadership skills. At the high school, band, chorus, musical theatre and music technology are currently offered. He introduced 2 of his students, beginning with Erin Start.

Erin spoke of her fear as a freshman in music theatre but that a great advantage of this program is that it brings all 4 grades together. She was helped by older students and is now stage manager, responsible for technical aspects of production, as well as helping with lines, sets, and overall organization. She has learned leadership skills and communication skills. She would like to see more than one section of music theatre and other music offerings.

Student Taylor Losure spoke of limited availability for spots in the music technology course at NHS. Using skills learning in that class, he has launched his own audio company which has proven successful and profitable for him. He is thankful for the music courses but feels improvements and more opportunities are needed.

Mr. Goeler echoed Taylor's sentiment that expanded access to arts courses is needed. Through electives, he said, we are not seeking to create "potters," but rather students who can apply pottery skills, including repetitive revision and reflection, to other disciplines. He said we know what exists now and why, but asked what more we need to do, and how to expand.

Mr. Culup referred to classes at NHS as "singletons," as only 1 section of each is offered. Especially for incoming freshmen, if band or chorus doesn't fit their schedules, those students are often lost to the department for the rest of their high school careers.

Mr. Chapman noted that students try to do it all, but something eventually drops out, be it music, art or sports. He asked where we stand with the arts, how do our students rate; are there benchmarks for assessment.

Mr. Culup referenced the fine arts credit that will soon be a graduation requirement as a measure of achievement.

Taylor felt that numbers of students involved in these programs is a measure of success.

Mr. Goeler felt a strength of arts courses is that while they build on skills from year to year, no one is turned away based on lack of skills. All are welcome.

Mr. Bauer thanked the student participants and noted that the upcoming fine arts requirement is being planned for through Student Success Plans. Music and art can be incorporated into these plans.

Audience member Mr. Geddes pointed out that arts education informs every aspect of everyone's life, whether they realize it or not. Music is in the background of every experience, and there's a picture to go with it.

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Ms. Zmek thanked Mr. Geddes for planting a seed that is now beginning to bloom.

Asked about the current numbers in the strings program in the elementary schools, Mr. Geddes estimated 90 students now participate.

Ms. Bartlett commented how wonderful it was to hear from students tonight, but is concerned about the "mandatory" arts requirement. She sees a problem with encouraging these creative outlets, but then making that participation mandatory.

Mr. Goeler agreed, but felt the key was access and choices, as well as a mindset among teachers to try new things.

Audience member Ms. Hampton agreed, but noted that music is "mandatory" for elementary students, some of whom do not want to be there. The goal is to reach all students. Since music is pleasing to everyone, the goal is to find what pleases each student musically.

III. Executive Session

Ms. Van Aken entered a *motion to go to Executive Session for the purpose of reviewing attorney/client privileged information, and to include Ms. Culkin, Mr. Goeler and Mr. Reese in the session.* Seconded by Mr. Bauer, the **motion carried 7-0.**

Following the session, Ms. Van Aken entered a *motion to authorize Atty. Rebecca Santiago to proceed with the investigation of special education expenditures.* Seconded by Mr. Cosgriff, the **motion carried 6-1**, with Mr. Suslavich casting the no vote.

IV. Adjournment

Mr. Suslavich entered a *motion to adjourn*, seconded by Mr. Bauer. The **motion carried 7-0.**
The meeting adjourned at 10:20 pm

Respectfully Submitted,

John Chapman, Secretary
Regional School District #14 Board of Education

Recorded and filed subject to Board of Education approval: Debra W. Carlton, Board Clerk, 1/23/12