

(Please note: these minutes are in draft form and not yet approved by the Board of Education)

The Regular Meeting of the Regional School District 14 Board of Education was held on Monday, September 20, 2010, at 7:30 p.m. in the Nonnewaug High School Library, 5 Minortown Road, Woodbury, Connecticut.

Present: Superintendent Robert D. Cronin, Ph.D.; Board Chair Stephen Sordi, Board members Scott Baider, George Bauer, Linda Bulvanoski, Deborah Corsico, Gary Suslavich and Pamela Zmek; and Director of Finance and Operations Jay Hubelbank

Audience members included: BES Principal Melinda McKenna; WMS Principal Alice Jones and Assistant Principal Eric Bergeron; NHS Assistant Principal Jose Martinez; Director of Special Services Kimberly Culkini; Region 14 teachers and staff Arlene Campbell, Vinita Chapman and Helen Stewart; Region 14 Music Foundation representatives Marc Kroll, William Geddes, Sue Piel and Catherine Bauer; three members of the press and approximately fifteen members of the community.

Absent: Board member Charles Cosgriff

I. Call to Order

Mr. Sordi called the meeting to order at 7:31 p.m.

II. Pledge of Allegiance

Mr. Sordi led the Pledge of Allegiance

III. Presentation

Mr. Kroll said that, five years ago, Mr. Geddes had a dream that Region 14 could have an orchestral program in its schools, and this year it has begun. He presented Mr. Hubelbank with the "first installment" of his group's financial support, a check in the amount of \$5,000 which Mr. Hubelbank gratefully accepted. Mr. Kroll noted that the strings program begins tomorrow, and that 43 students in grades 3-5 are enrolled.

IV. Review of Minutes (Action Anticipated)

Mr. Sordi requested a *motion to accept the minutes of the September 7, 2010 board meeting*, entered by Mr. Baider, seconded by Mr. Suslavich. **The motion carried 7-0.**

V. Correspondence

Mr. Sordi reported correspondence from both registrars of voters concerned about the proposed date for the referendum. He said he would work with them and that the date was tentative, and that it looks like the timeline will be pushed out as we fit in all the committee meetings. He will contact each town's registrar to set a suitable date for a referendum.

Ms. Bulvanoski reported correspondence, by phone, from a member of Bethlehem's Board of Finance on September 16th regarding their September 13th meeting at which the First Selectman gave a "heads up" that the Superintendent had resigned due to poor state test scores.

At this point, Mr. Sordi suggested to Ms. Bulvanoski that this correspondence should go through the board chair. Mr. Baider asked when the correspondence was received and she repeated that she was contacted on 9/16. She asked to be allowed to continue with her statement. Mr. Sordi responded that he would table the matter for now and asked that she forward it to him. She responded that, as a member of the board, correspondence received by her that pertains to the board should be allowed. Mr. Sordi said he is the voice of the board and that she should go through the chair with correspondence in the future.

VI. Report from Chairperson

Mr. Sordi reported that, at Dr. Cronin's suggestion, he had reached out to CABA for guidance on a superintendent search. Bob Radar is the CABA contact and he gave Mr. Sordi guides for the search and can also do a presentation/workshop on 10/6, 10/12 or 10/21 at 6 pm. Mr. Sordi asked that board members let him know which dates work for them. CABA has outside consultants who assist with searches. Mr. Sordi also reported on the CABA convention on 11/19-20 that members may attend. Further, Patrice McCarthy, also of CABA, can do new board member orientation on 9/27, 9/29, 9/30, 10/12, 10/18, 10/20, or 10/21 at 6:30 pm. and board members should let Mr. Sordi know which dates work. Mr. Sordi also noted a policy conflict with board committee assignments. All members of Public/Community Relations are from Bethlehem and all members of Negotiations are from Woodbury. He said he has spoken with Ms. Bulvanoski who agreed to come off public relations and to join negotiations, and he would ask Mr. Cosgriff to switch from negotiations to public relations.

VII. Report from Superintendent

Dr. Cronin presented the board with a draft version of his District Improvement Plan. He asked that they review the document and call with any questions, with the hope of adopting it at the 10/4 meeting. He reviewed the various sections of the report and areas of focus for the year, all in service to having 85% of students at or above goal on standardized tests.

Dr. Cronin also spoke of the upcoming presentation, "What's Up with Our Kids?" at 6:30 p.m. on October 7th at NHS. He reminded the board that students in grades 7-12 participated in a survey in spring of 2009, the results of which will be rolled out on 10/7. The group producing the survey identifies 40 developmental assets which, if acquired by young people, lead to them becoming more productive members of society. For the 10/7 program, the district has worked closely with Jennifer DeWitt of the local substance abuse prevention/regional action council. He has encouraged the faculty to attend and urged the community to come and bring their families.

VIII. Privilege of the Floor

David Deakin, Bethlehem, and member of the Board of Finance, recalled a joint meeting in March with the Board of Education, and Boards of Selectmen and Finance from each town, during which each First Selectman was adamant about the school district delivering a flat budget. The school budget presented was ultimately below 0%, and actually a decrease for Bethlehem taxpayers, for which Mr. Deakin congratulated Dr. Cronin and Mr. Hubelbank, knowing this to be a very difficult task. He found it ironic, then, when both of the towns' chief executives presented town budgets with substantial increases after requesting a 0% budget from the schools. Through Dr. Cronin's and Mr. Hubelbank's leadership, reconfiguring the elementary schools, he said, has resulted in the elimination of 27 full time positions and huge savings. He knows Dr. Cronin to be a man of integrity with a wealth of knowledge and educational experience. He is distraught to know that he is leaving. He feels that what is being accomplished by Dr. Cronin and the board financially is overlooked by the loud conversation about reconfiguration. He hopes the committees of the board will take involvement from the towns. He agrees that a referendum is needed but has said, tongue in cheek, that if he had his way, only 4-10 year olds could vote. He urged listening to them.

Maria Duncan, Woodbury, apologized to Dr. Cronin for the constant negativity and for the way he has been treated. She is sorry that he is leaving and wishes he would change his mind. He had a vision, she said, but not everyone liked it. Reconfiguration works better for the region, though change is difficult. She said he fought a good fight, but it seems like he's dropping out of the marathon at mile 25. She said the board will change hands in June and that hopefully members will be elected who respect the leadership of the Superintendent. She assured Dr. Cronin that, although he does not have the support of 5 board members, the community backs him.

John Howard, Bethlehem, thanked Dr. Cronin. He served 4 terms on the board with superintendents who tried to do things differently, but Dr. Cronin actually got something done. Now, he said, we are looking at the Region 14 student and not the Bethlehem or Woodbury student. He questioned Mr. Baider about Finance Committee minutes from last year when he chaired that committee. They are noticeably missing from the website. Mr. Baider apologized, saying he had to find out where they were. He said the superintendent's assistant has them now and will scan and post them on the website. Mr. Sordi suggested to Mr. Howard that this is not the place to critique board members. Mr. Howard reported having emailed Mr. Suslavich on a number of occasions regarding a policy issue and seeks a resolution on that. Mr. Sordi said it is being worked on. Mr. Howard confirmed that there is a conflict of interest policy in place and that he saw it on the website. Mr. Suslavich explained that he has been out of town on business for a week and a half and had no time to respond to Mr. Howard's emails. Mr. Howard reviewed that, in 1968 when the regionalization plan was created, Woodbury students went to the Woodbury school and Bethlehem students went to Bethlehem. There was no vote to move the bus line, but it was done to equalize class sizes. The upcoming vote, he said, should include the location of the line. If no bus line is identified, it will appear that the board is picking and choosing what in the plan they are going to follow and what they are not.

Jeanne Hawley, Woodbury, had concerns about the upcoming reconfiguration referendum. She has spoken with teachers who are wondering if their opinions will be solicited or considered on this matter. She wondered if the board would consider a survey in the 4 schools, since the teachers have lived it for 3-4 years. It could be as simple as, "Do you support it?" and "Do you believe it has educational/academic merit?" with perhaps a section for comments. She said that candidates spoke of respect for teachers, and she'd like to see them express that by asking them about this. It is her opinion that it is a mistake not to bring in an impartial 3rd party to evaluate the data, and unfair for people with obvious predispositions to prepare the report. This must be counteracted for it to be impartial. The candidates ran on open, honest, "transparent" communication and she would like for them to deliver on that.

Susan Scherf, Bethlehem, said this has been a 4 year journey that started due to inequity at MES, which had not been renovated in 30 years and led to the community feeling that Bethlehem students were getting a better education. The board held a public hearing, took a "stretch break" and made a decision. She has stood up at meetings for 4 years and believes reconfiguration to be a transportation model. School is starting late, buses are under-filled, students lose 90 days of education over the course of 6-12 grades, and the new board came in for accountability. There has been no report as yet, she said, that defines the benefits of reconfiguration. All day kindergarten could still be done with two K-5 schools, she believes.

Ms. Corsico commented that volumes have been written by Dr. Cronin on the benefits of reconfiguration.

Eileen Budrewicz, Woodbury, is deeply saddened that Dr. Cronin is leaving. He always led with the students' best interests at heart and was unwavering in his leadership, she said. We must continue to move forward and she appreciates the committees' work. She suggested that, based on the material she received at a committee meeting, we are short five classrooms at MES for a K-5 and would need an additional \$140,000 in teacher salaries.

Pam Gengenbach, Woodbury, attended the meeting just mentioned and feels a lot of data "flew out at everyone" that she is not sure has been verified. 459 students were projected for MES in the first year of reconfiguration and 460 are proposed for next year. She urged checking to be sure the information can be validated. The current board inherited a mess, she said, and there is a different set of people who now feel they are not listened to. The previous board could have allowed a vote and avoided a law suit. People should stop throwing darts and stop the hypocrisy. A drop in student enrollment impacted the budget substantially and the information being provided has been wanted for years.

Michelle Ecsedy, Woodbury, is concerned that the board is not using an outside source for the audit of reconfiguration study. At the Special Education Committee meeting recently, Mr. Sordi discussed the benefits of hiring an independent group to audit the Special Education program. Ms. Zmek had agreed, saying that districts do this routinely. Yet, for the most important question facing the region, somehow the board feels it can do an audit itself; she does not consider that to be impartial. She also quoted from the Board by-laws/code of ethics, #11, "I will acknowledge that the Board represents the entire school community, and will refuse to surrender my independent judgment to special interest or partisan political groups. I will never use my position on the Board for gain of myself or my friends." She referenced the "Save Region 14 Elementary" website homepage which lists a chairperson and secretary. Mr. Sordi, she said, forwarded an email to those two people to ask whether "we know this person" (the one who wrote the email he was forwarding). She asked for an explanation for this, but Mr. Sordi did not know of the email to which she was referring. She said she believed Mr. Sordi was honest, but now is not sure, and she is losing respect for him. She asked why he would forward a board of education email to an outside group. Mr. Baider said she was making accusations and that they should discuss this. She said she would love to.

Ms. Budrewicz asked about a previous comment about verifying data from last week's meeting. It was presented by Mr. Hubelbank, she said, so how would that be verified? Doesn't he have the actual numbers? Also, the transportation contract is for the next 2 years so it, likewise, does not need to be verified. There is plenty of work for the committees to do, she said, so at what point will we trust the numbers we are given? Mr. Sordi suggested that some of the data is subjective, but they agreed that the transportation contract is not.

Mr. Howard stated that over the past several years people have questioned with what authority the board did what it did when the schools were reconfigured. The 1968 plan contains the recommendations of a temporary committee. He read from the original report: "The programs and facilities discussed in this report are the recommendations of the Bethlehem-Woodbury Temporary Regional School Study Committee. Should a region be established, the Regional Board of Education would determine the exact programs and facilities for the district. The Regional Board of Education is bound only by the broad provisions outlined in the referendum proposed on page 1 of this report." He read the referendum question from 1968, "Shall the town of Bethlehem join with the following named town, Woodbury, in the establishment of a regional school district with the schools located in the towns of Bethlehem and Woodbury for the purpose of providing the necessary facilities and administering grades kindergarten through twelve of the public schools?" The question, he said, was worded to provide flexibility, knowing that down the line things change and changes would need to occur.

John Chapman, Woodbury, having worked with him on the building committee, expressed his gratitude to Dr. Cronin for all he's done and said that the word "trust" comes to mind when describing him. He delivered for us in a straightforward way and had no agendas. He had vision, and led the district in a difficult direction but is now like a CEO without his board behind him so he can see why he would be leaving. He said we would all like to be able to trust those in leadership positions, and he always trusted Dr. Cronin.

IX. Report from Director of Finance and Operations

Mr. Hubelbank reported that there are three places on the website to locate calendar information. Because the website is in a new format this year, those who have saved it as a "favorite" might get an error message, need to refresh, or type in the web address, www.ctreg14.org to reach the new website.

He reported that the region has 3 outstanding bonds, the last of which will be paid off in 2015. Last year, Webster Bank had suggested refinancing, but the rates changed before we could act. Now, refinancing

would be a good option. He provided debt analysis documentation and a copy of the proposed resolution before requesting a motion to pursue refinancing.

Mr. Suslavich entered a *motion to accept the resolution as prepared by bond counsel to refinance the region's current debt service*. Ms. Corsico seconded the motion and the **motion carried 7-0**.

X. Committee Reports

For Planning, Mr. Baider reported that this committee met and covered CMT scores, instructional time and a framework for the work to be done and what would go on at subsequent meetings. The next meeting will be next Wednesday.

Mr. Bauer reported for Facilities and provided a summary page of topics his committee will focus on, including enrollment, north Woodbury going to BES and the boundary line, class sizes, number of available classrooms, staffing, scheduling, and busing. His next meeting will be rescheduled for 9/27.

Mr. Baider reported for Mr. Suslavich regarding Finance. The committee met on 9/13, covered transfers, budget, bond refinancing, heard an update on grants, and discussed reconfiguration issues related to the Finance committee.

Ms. Zmek met with the Public/Community Relations committee for the first time this evening. They discussed the report format, power point presentation and materials needed for public hearings.

She also reported for the Special Education committee which met on 9/7, along with a member of SEPTA, and discussed professional development and auditing the department. The minutes are on the website.

Ms. Corsico entered a *motion to add the reconfiguration process to the agenda under Old Business*.

Ms. Bulvanoski seconded the motion and the **motion carried 7-0**.

XI. Old Business

Ms. Corsico considers the number of committee meetings burdensome, to the extent that several committee chairs have already been unable to attend their own meetings. It is becoming a full time job. She also wondered if all board members will be receiving all documentation from all committee meetings because she would like to be receiving everything. Minutes are also important, she said, so the public can read them if unable to attend meetings and minutes should be somewhat detailed. During privilege of the floor there was a comment that full day kindergarten would be possible and she is not so sure about that. This is an important issue for parents. She asked who would write the referendum question. It seems to her that this would be written first and then work backwards from it. In addition, she asked what the current configuration is being compared to - what is was or what we could do with new times, etc? She sees all of this as a full board issue. Based on the information received at the last facilities meeting, there is not room at MES and the line would need to be moved.

Mr. Sordi said that this is an ongoing process; facilities will address these concerns and determine the line.

Mr. Corsico asked if this will be determined before the vote.

Mr. Sordi replied that, in fairness to Mr. Hubelbank who would be working with the bus company, he couldn't identify that right now.

Ms. Corsico asked if he meant identify the process or the line.

Mr. Sordi said this would be discussed, as would the movement of the line.

She asked who would write the question, and he replied that the attorney would.

She asked who would say what the question will look like, and he replied that the board would.

She expressed concern over what exactly reconfiguration is being compared to, as that has become a "moving target." At a committee meeting recently, she recalled Mr. Baider had said he was not sure.

Mr. Baider corrected her. What he had said was we are not comparing to pre-reconfiguration because enrollment and number of teachers is different. We are comparing it to what we can do with the facilities

and budget that we have. Data will be looked at as a reference point and historically, but we are not putting it back exactly as it was.

Ms. Corsico asked, then, are we not going to say what the result would be, for instance, if the 23 minutes are added back. Mr. Sordi said that it would be up to the administrators what to do with that time.

So, Ms. Corsico asked, we would be comparing it to what it *could* be.

Mr. Baider said we would look to Dr. Cronin for his recommendations.

Ms. Corsico clarified, then, not to what it was but what it could be to maximize all of that.

As best we can, sure, replied Mr. Baider. He said, as committees do the work, they will identify important issues. The difficulty will be in identifying things that do matter. The information is not being created by the board, and there is no bias, he said, since it is what Dr. Cronin and Mr. Hubelbank give them.

Ms. Corsico said then, if we are living off the data, it is what it is. At some point we need to trust what the administrators give us. She also considers deciding what data will be included to be important.

Mr. Baider replied that she sits on a committee and he would expect her input.

She finds it interesting what is considered "subjective" and that what Mr. Hubelbank presents now has to be "verified and checked" since we said we are going on what they provide.

Mr. Baider felt they would not be doing their jobs if they didn't look at the data, modifications to buildings, use of rooms and how they would be used if we changed back, to use them most effectively. If the space is insufficient then the line would need to move and people would need to know this.

Ms. Corsico repeated that there is incredible bias here, hers and the other board members'. The report is being prepared by committee members who do not favor reconfiguration. Discussion on what to include or not to is subjective.

Mr. Baider said it is a difficult task to bring this to a vote and input is important. He asked her to recognize that this is a lawsuit issue and the ruling is to turn the schools back. They are trying to bring a vote and do it most effectively. People have certain concerns and do not need to be at every meeting, or at any since they will be getting the information out to help people when they vote.

Ms. Bulvanoski said, for the record, she had not agreed to be switched to a different committee, but had asked to be taken off of Public/Community Relations.

XII. New Business (Action Anticipated)

1. Personnel

a. Faculty Appointments to Extra Duty Positions

- i. Maureen Marshall, Lead Teacher, Mitchell Elementary School
- ii. Christopher McGrath, Ski Club, Woodbury Middle School
- iii. Kathleen Peterson, Homework Club, Woodbury Middle School (replaces Maude Chasse)
- iv. Deborah Kavanaugh, PPT Coordinator, STAR Preschool
- v. Jessica McLean, Debate Club Advisor (creates a three-way split), NHS
- vi. Roger Parkhouse, TV Technician, NHS
- vii. Roger Parkhouse, Event Taping (15 events)
- viii. Paul Ciotti, Event Taping (Board of Education)

Dr. Cronin requested a *motion to approve the above listed extra duty positions*, entered by Ms. Corsico, seconded by Mr. Baider. **The motion carried 7-0.**

b. Faculty Requesting Child Rearing/Maternity Leaves of Absence

- i. Katie Bossolt, Special Education Teacher, Bethlehem Elementary School, beginning approximately November 5, 2010
- ii. Katherine Bergeron, Grade 2 Teacher, Bethlehem Elementary School, beginning approximately November 20, 2010

Dr. Cronin requested a *motion to approve the above listed leaves of absence*, entered by Ms. Corsico, seconded by Mr. Suslavich. **The motion carried 7-0.**

XI. Board Announcements

Ms. Corsico acknowledged the excellence of all R14 sports teams; however, she wanted to note that the football team won their recent game, playing their freshmen, sophomores and several juniors and having a good time. She hopes the community gets behind the team. These are Pop Warner kids who have come up through the system and she urged supporting them.

XI. Privilege of the Floor

Mr. Chapman found Ms. Corsico's discussion interesting as to what reconfiguration is being compared to. We have learned, he said, that attorneys can argue anything and, if we're going to go by the book, he would like to look at two K-5 buildings with no movement of the line – with all Woodbury students going to MES and all Bethlehem students to BES – and to see what that looks like.

Mr. Bauer said Mr. Hubelbank had presented that scenario and showed room and staffing needs.

Ms. Budrewicz said that some people can't make all the meetings and it would be good to leave data in locations for pick up. Mr. Hubelbank offered the Central Office for that purpose. She also noted that Mr. Bauer's facilities topic sheet does not specifically include full day kindergarten and that this has not yet been discussed. Mr. Sordi explained that it will be, and will need to "dovetail" with facilities.

Ms. Duncan was interested to hear the wording of the 1968 plan, noting gray area. Mr. Sordi said there is data available and reiterated that the ruling was for two K-5s. Ms. Duncan pointed out that this is a 42 year old document, and things change. She wondered if there anything else in the plan that needs to be known to prevent additional referenda every few months.

Ms. Scherf thought we should be grateful for months of preparation instead of a hearing and stretch break.

Amy Primini, Woodbury, asked, for those who can't travel to central office for data, maybe an article in Voices or the Republican American would be informative. It was news to her, for instance, that the students may not fit at MES as a K-5. Mr. Bauer said that the hearings will provide everything. Ms. Zmek added that Public Relations had discussed having copies of the report at town offices and the senior center. Ms. Primini felt grade 3 CMT scores should be looked at and compared to those of students who did not experience reconfiguration to see if any gains were realized. She also thanked Dr. Cronin for his vision. Her kindergarten daughter is "over the moon" and would love to be at BES for 2 more years.

Ms. Budrewicz noted that grade 3 CMT data would not be available until after the report is written and vote taken. We would need another measurement for success for these students and cannot use CMTs.

Ms. Hawley asked when the referendum would be and Mr. Sordi replied that the target is early December but as committees accomplish their work he will have a better idea. She felt this was awfully soon, but he said he needs to be fair to administrators. The courts order is to return to two K-5s and the schools will need to make provisions for next year.

Candace Fernandes, Woodbury, felt it was not clear whether Mr. Sordi will give information on the line prior to the vote. He said that would be discussed. She asked if that was a "yes" or a "no" and he said yes. She thanked him for that. He said he cannot speak for Mr. Hubelbank on how it will be determined, however.

Mr. Hubelbank explained that he has already done work on this, based on where the students currently are, by street. He's met with the bus company but, since there are only 72 students to work with where the old line is, he has identified areas in north Woodbury, in the Middle Road Turnpike area, that could be sent to BES to balance enrollment. The committees, he said, can look at that information. Ms. Fernandes said that, as a parent, she would want to know where that line is when she votes. Mr. Bauer said that, when they provide data, they will work with the presiding assumption of where the existing line was prior to reconfiguration and look at current projections of enrollment to determine a line.

Mr. Chapman pointed out that if there are K-5s in each town next year, he assumes the facilities as they are now are what they will be in the next school year. If MES requires facility changes, even if that passes in a referendum, it cannot be done by next year. There needs to be time for alterations, as he learned by serving on the building committee for several years, and this would be a "heavy lift" to get it done for next year. The box we have, he said, is the box we have to work with. If Woodbury students must all fit in MES, that cannot happen next year, and so a line will need to be drawn.

Ms. Gengenbach asked if anyone has looked at the number of classrooms needed, and Mr. Hubelbank replied that he had. She commented that he handed out a bunch of sheets and that information was being thrown at them. Mr. Sordi said her concerns would be better expressed at committee meetings. She also noted earlier accusations about email. She had sent and asked others to send encouraging emails to the new board members, but knows nothing of the email referred to earlier.

Ms. Budrewicz had data from last week's meeting showing the need for 32 classrooms at MES.

XII. Executive Session
None.

XIII. Adjournment

Mr. Suslavich entered a *motion to adjourn*, second by Ms. Corsico. **Motion carried 7-0** and the meeting adjourned at 9:17 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Pamela Zmek, Secretary
Regional School District 14 Board of Education