

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

A Meeting of the Regional School District 14 Board of Education was held on Monday, November 1, 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, Deborah Corsico, Charles Cosgriff, Gary Suslavich, and Pamela Zmek

Audience members included: Region 14 teachers Vinita Chapman and Tricia Dannenhoffer, two members of the press and approximately ten members of the community.

Absent: Linda Bulvanoski

I. Call to Order

Mr. Sordi called the meeting to order at 7:32 p.m.

II. Pledge of Allegiance

Mr. Sordi led the Pledge of Allegiance

III. Report from Student Representative

Stephen Aleandri updated the board on events at his school, including the recent Robotics competition at Lyme/Old Lyme, at which the team was a semifinalist, and Team Beta's successful tech fest; NHS and agriscience open houses; PSATs at NHS during which 194 students sat for the test; Trick or Treat Street; Homecoming Dance and games under the lights; the upcoming agriscience college and career fair (11/16), Fall Sports Banquet (11/23) and Financial aid night (11/30). He also distributed copies of a brochure about the Tech Fest and the agriscience career event.

IV. Review of Minutes

Mr. Sordi voiced concern about approving minutes in the absence of Ms. Bulvanoski, but recognized that they could backlog while waiting for her return. Therefore, he requested a *motion to approve the minutes from the regular board meeting of October 4, 2010*. Motion entered by: Mr. Baider. Second: Mr. Suslavich. **The motion carried 7-0.**

Mr. Sordi requested a *motion to table approval of the minutes of the regular board meeting of October 18, 2010*. Motion entered by Mr. Bauer. Second: Mr. Baider. **The motion carried 7-0.**

V. Reconfiguration

Mr. Sordi distributed information from the board's attorney, Mark Sommaruga, with possible wordings of the question the board could consider. Ms. Corsico confirmed that he was waiving attorney/client privilege. Mr. Sordi felt option 1 seemed like what they are looking for. Mr. Bauer noted that the questions, 1-5, become less specific and more broad, as Mr. Sommaruga had stated in his correspondence. Mr. Cosgriff favored the broader ones so that, in the future, decisions could be made based on need. Facilities are provided, and less specificity leaves open possibilities of land becoming available, town lines, etc. Mr. Sordi felt they could continue to discuss this and, when Ms. Bulvanoski returns, vote on the question and move forward. Ms. Corsico did not favor waiting that long – wanting Ms. Bulvanoski's input, but pointing out that with the 30 day waiting period once a referendum is set we are into January for a vote. Mr. Sordi felt a vote could be done at the 11/15 meeting. Mr. Suslavich thought either Mr. Sordi or Ms. Corsico could reach out to Ms. Bulvanoski in the meantime. When asked, Ms. Zmek said she thought some of the questions were too

specific, some too broad, and the ones in the middle too confusing. She is not happy with any of them. She asked if the question has to include pre-k. Mr. Sordi noted that pre-k is not in the current plan. Mr. Suslavich said it could be added in here.

Mr. Baidier favored not being too broad or too specific. When the board changes, he wouldn't want to see it move in a whole new direction. It needs to be a legal question that everyone can vote on.

Ms. Corsico noted that option 5 gives the board authority to handle situations such as facilities. She wondered if it is possible to spell out the language instead of using numbers; for instance, an attachment that shows how the amendment to the plan would be worded. She also felt they should be talking about the issues, and asked what people are thinking.

Mr. Sordi felt the question should pertain to the K-2/3-5 or K-5 question and whether a process is in place if future amendments are needed. Ms. Corsico felt that ties the board's hands in the event of space issues.

Mr. Suslavich asked what level of future authority the board should have as this would influence specific v. general language. He spoke of the appropriate roles of the public and the board and that if the board presents a general question and the public votes yes, it gives a great deal of authority to future boards.

Mr. Cosgriff felt that situation would be quite similar to a city or town school board. Ms. Corsico noted that, with 5 votes at this table, in a way it doesn't really matter what Ms. Bulvanoski thinks. She urged moving forward and putting it behind us.

Ms. Zmek didn't know where that came from as there is no consensus among the board. Mr. Sordi urged thinking through each option with the goal of voting at the 11/15 meeting. Mr. Cosgriff urged checking in with the state on the question.

Ms. Zmek wanted to revisit Mr. Suslavich's comments. Their decision could take away the voting rights of the public, the whole crux of democracy. If the question is too broad, the board will be saying to voters, "we're taking away your right to vote." It would be arrogant to take away the voice of future voters.

Ms. Corsico noted that we live in a republic and tomorrow we will vote for representation. In a community like ours, she said, the minority town can shut down the majority's viewpoint. Budgets are shot down, and building projects don't pass. She favors relying on the board and the expertise of the superintendent. When we can't get a budget passed, facilities remain inadequate and our hands are tied by the minority town. The reality is we don't ask the people to vote on every issue, but rather rely on elected officials.

Ms. Zmek responded that sometimes elected officials lose their way and do not act on behalf of voters.

Ms. Corsico said they sometimes act on behalf of the kids, even if they endorse unpopular ideas.

To both, Mr. Sordi noted that this is why option 5 could be troublesome. Ms. Corsico is not in favor of option 5, she said.

Speaking to the items listed within Atty. Sommaruga's correspondence, Mr. Bauer noted that option 5 is not good because items 1 and 2 define the middle school grades and he likes that language.

Mr. Baidier noted that whatever they decide about the flexibility of the board in the future, how this is perceived by voters is crucial; he recommended talking with Mr. Sommaruga about reshaping the questions from the standpoint of the voters' perspective, for a sense of how that would read. Ms. Corsico felt that what creates confusion needs to be there and the key is to find out what layout we can have that explains it to the voters, so they can vote on what is being deleted or added. Mr. Suslavich reworded that to say that the goal would be allowing the voters to vote on an entire paragraph without having to figure out what's been added or deleted.

Committee chairs reported on their progress. Ms. Zmek awaits the question, and some history work being done with Dr. Cronin. Mr. Suslavich met last week; potential costs are still outstanding on 2 tier v. 3 tier busing. He added that, in 2012-13, a K-2 BES might require more facility space, possibly portables.

Mr. Baidier's work is mostly completed; outstanding is the teachers' survey for which Dr. Cronin may have some resources. Mr. Bauer continues to consolidate information from committee meetings.

Ms. Corsico urged setting a timeline. Mr. Sordi said this is hard without Mr. Hubelbank, as he and Mr. Suslavich need to iron out the transportation issues which have ramifications on costs. A timeline now, he

felt, would confuse the public if dates then needed to be postponed. Ms. Corsico saw potential trouble if no deadline is set – it would be impossible to prepare 2 different budgets, for example, if these delays continue. If they are sincere in their plan, they must set an outer limit, hold hearings, and put it to a vote. Mr. Sordi assured her that they are sincere but need to put out honest dates, not set them and then move them out. Ms. Corsico urged him to set dates and then keep them. Mr. Sordi replied that schedules change, people take vacations – currently we are at a standstill since Mr. Hubelbank is away. Mr. Suslavich understood that Ms. Corsico was suggesting they set dates to have reports done, hearings set, financial information in; but, for instance, Mr. Hubelbank needs to go higher than the local bus company reps for answers. Ms. Corsico noted that, in business, timelines are set and the job gets done. Ms. Zmek replied that we want to get the job done right. Ms. Corsico reminded the board that the original deadline for the report was October 12<sup>th</sup>, and now no end is in sight. If Jay is not here, she said, someone else can step up and get the work done. Dr. Cronin can call the bus company. It's already budget season. The suit was pulled in July and we're still grinding along.

**VI. Correspondence**  
None.

**VII. Report from Chairperson**

Mr. Sordi reported that he is contacting two groups regarding the superintendent search who will come and explain that process.

**VIII. Report from Superintendent**

Dr. Cronin reported that science benchmark assessments have been completed for grades 5-8; grades 7-8 have been scored and analyzed; information on grades 5-6 will be in soon. Data will be transferred from excel into the database to be called up individually. Also, walkthroughs have begun; the administrative council met at NHS last week for this purpose. In order to build capacity, lead teachers, team leaders and some department chairs will participate this year. The objective is to expand this group to make practices transparent to everyone in the region. Ms. Corsico wondered if walkthroughs might become an evaluation model. Dr. Cronin replied that the evaluation document needs to be rewritten and that he would consider this. He noted that the second professional development day is tomorrow. Each administrator will present at her building on best practices with regard to lesson initiation/content. Kim Culkin will also do PD with paraprofessionals at BES on Special Education law, their responsibilities, and autism spectrum disorders. Mr. Baider asked how MaryLou Torre is settling in at MES. Dr. Cronin said that his observation is that she's doing well, leading PD with her staff and spending a lot of time in classrooms.

**IX. Privilege of the Floor**

**Erica Crumb**, moved to Woodbury 1 ½ years ago and had questions about reconfiguration. Her oldest starts kindergarten this September and she has questions about the line. If it is a K-5 configuration, where is the line showing students who would go to BES? She is concerned that her child will have different friends in school than in town, and different day care, church and activities. As to how that line is drawn, she said, it puts a minority of people over the line but, at the end of the day, she wonders why she is not asked where she wants her child to go. Mr. Sordi explained that the administration is not prohibited from setting that line; it's been in place for years and a 10-47c has brought the question of whether to move the line. Ms. Crumb noted that the new (extended Woodbury) line adds her street.

Mr. Sordi said that Mr. Hubelbank created the line for equity with much thought so that it doesn't need to be moved year to year.

Ms. Crumb asked and received confirmation that she has no choice in the matter if her child must go to BES.

Mr. Bauer said the idea is not to have a line specifically in place. Mr. Baider added that we want the administration to have flexibility regarding it. Mr. Cosgriff stated that people want to know where the line is. Ms. Corsico felt the board needs to vote on the location of the line. Mr. Baider agreed there must be clarity on what is being proposed, but street names will not be part of the referendum. Ms. Corsico responded that, if they do not let that be known, they will be putting forth information that the board does not necessarily support. Mr. Sordi concluded that it will not be part of the recommendation, but there will be clarity on the proposal.

**Pam Gengenbach**, Woodbury, looked at several houses near the line when she moved here and based her decision on which one to buy on its location, which was not near the line. She noted a switch – those who wanted to delay now want to move forward. It is fair to make sure people know which parts of the regional plan are being deleted and added. The latest message is, "Oh my God we might need six teachers" while the 3<sup>rd</sup> tier of buses added a line item though we've been told it was a nominal fee. She disputed Mr. Hubelbank's numbers of teachers needed. She felt an organizational chart including salaries would be valuable for the new superintendent to evaluate.

Ms. Corsico noted much innuendo about not trusting those who work for us and wondered how the chair continues to allow this. First the bus numbers are not to be believed; now, a dig at the superintendent.

**Lynne Frederick**, Woodbury, again offered numbers of minutes lost and salaries paid to teachers when no students are present which she feels Mr. Hubelbank did not argue. She hopes people get these numbers before the referendum. She also believes we take something away from kids if we don't allow them to merge together in middle school. She feels they will be less successful in college if they have never experienced meeting new people.

Ms. Corsico noted that Ms. Frederick's assertions were addressed at a facilities meeting and increased instructional time was shown. Mr. Sordi said it is a fact that minutes are lost. Ms. Corsico didn't dispute that, but felt there are different ways to interpret it. Mr. Sordi felt it was potential instructional time. Mr. Suslavich concurred that teachers are paid for time not with students, and the day is shortened. These are facts. The contract was not adjusted and minutes are not available for use. Ms. Corsico did not feel it could be spoken of as lost time or lost funds.

**David LaManna**, Woodbury, said reconfiguration is a sensitive issue and emotionally charged. He appreciates Mr. Sordi's leadership. He could have picked up his marbles after the appeal was pulled and switched back to K-5. Instead, he's taking time to get it right. Legal rights should be protected and he doesn't agree that there should not be the right to vote when 70% of taxes go to the school budget. He appreciates the transparency the board has brought back.

**Vinita Chapman**, Woodbury, parent, taxpayer, and Region 14 teacher has heard much talk about a survey of teachers. Her comments are her own, but many of her colleagues have expressed fear of retribution if they spoke openly about reconfiguration and so have not come forward. She uses a book in her class, based on Tolstoy's work, called "The Three Questions" which asks when is the right time is, who is the most important one, and what is the right thing to do. She said the right time to vote on an equitable and common educational experience for all children is now. Based on the outcome, arrangements may need to be made for extra costs, staff, facility modifications, materials to be ordered, moving logistics and expenses, and a budget presented. In addition, a superintendent needs to be hired, all before June 2011. The most

important ones, she said, are the students and no one group can exclusively claim their best interests. Input from teachers, staff and children should be included in deciding on the best interests of all children. The right thing to do, she said, is to evaluate the educational benefits of each model to ensure every student receives a common and equitable educational experience, and to maintain daily PD with coordinators and specialists, support BEST teaching, and create curriculum geared to standards and rigor without redundancy and added cost. The book's last line states, "it is why we are here," and she feels taking care of this issue and doing our best for our students is why we are here. The decision goes beyond squeezing class sizes to make it fit. She is most proud of watching the boys and girls choosing to blend together and growing to create strong bonds between the two communities.

Eileen Budrewicz, Woodbury, having been at every committee meeting, believes Mr. Hubelbank has clarified all his data. It is a waste of time to continue to go back and forth on the same issues. She also asked whether there is a timetable on how long someone should have to wait for a response from a board member. Mr. Sordi said there is no protocol on that. Ms. Budrewicz said she has not received responses to emails sent, and asked then if email can go unanswered and that is ok? Mr. Sordi said he didn't know what specifically she was speaking about, but repeated that there is no protocol for board members responding to emails from community members.

**X. Report from Director of Finance and Operations**

None.

**X. Committee Reports**

Under Finance, Mr. Suslavich explained renewal of the liability contract. In Mr. Hubelbank's absence, he explained that, should we renew early, the increase would be less than 2%. He entered a *motion to authorize renewal of the liability contract with the understanding that the increase will be 2% or less, and authorizing Mr. Hubelbank to enter into the contract.* Second: Mr. Cosgriff. **The motion carried 7-0.**

Under Personnel, Ms. Corsico asked if the committee will meet again regarding the AD/Dean of Students position, since the current AD leaves in January. Mr. Sordi said he met with Dr. Cronin about it, and Mr. Cosgriff asked if it will be posted. Ms. Corsico felt Planning should handle it at this point, and Mr. Cosgriff cited conflict of interest regarding Mr. Sordi's involvement with a position that potentially interacts in an evaluative way with his wife. Mr. Sordi disagreed.

For Public Relations and Special Education, Ms. Zmek noted that meeting minutes are on the website, and that she and Dr. Cronin will work on history aspects of reconfiguration as she awaits the work of the committees, and the question.

**XI. Old Business**

None.

**XII. New Business**

Dr. Cronin requested a *motion to accept the resignation of James Parker*, entered by Mr. Suslavich, seconded by Mr. Baider. **Motion carried 7-0.** Dr. Cronin noted that Mr. Parker would go to Brookfield to a position that is an upward move for him.

Dr. Cronin requested a *motion to accept the resignation of Lucy Ventresca*, entered by Mr. Suslavich, seconded by Mr. Baider. **Motion carried 7-0.** Ms. Zmek praised the professional performance of Ms. Ventresca.

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Dr. Cronin requested a *motion to approve the appointment of Brenda Cleary-Williams, English Dept. Chair, NHS*, entered by Ms. Corsico, second by Mr. Baider. **Motion carried 7-0.**

**XIII. Announcements**

Ms. Corsico attended the Berkshire Music Festival and was amazed to hear the students play together so well. She noted that Region 14 is in line to host this event soon, and our auditorium is definitely not close to those of other districts' in terms of quality or condition.

Ms. Zmek thanked Dr. Cronin and Ms. Culkin for inviting her to attend a recent PD on Special Education legal issues, conducted by Atty. Santiago.

**XV. Privilege of the Floor**

None.

**XVI. Executive Session**

None.

**XVII. Adjournment**

Mr. Suslavich entered a *motion to adjourn*. Second by Mr. Baider. **Motion carried 7-0.**  
The meeting adjourned at 9:10 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

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Pamela Zmek, Secretary  
Regional School District #14 Board of Education