

(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, January 3, 2011, 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, Charles Cosgriff, Gary Suslavich, and Pamela Zmek; also, Director of Finance/Operations Jay Hubelbank

Audience members included: Region 14 administrators Alice Jones, Kimberly Culkin, Melinda McKenna and MaryLou Torre, three members of the press and approximately ten members of the community.

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. Review of the Minutes

The minutes of the November 23, 2010 special meeting continued to be tabled.

Mr. Suslavich entered a *motion to accept the minutes of the December 20, 2010 regular meeting as presented*, second by Ms. Bulvanoski. **Motion carried 8-0.**

IV. Reconfiguration

Mr. Sordi began discussion of the 10-47c report by thanking the administration, board, and community for valuable input in compiling it. He gave an overview of the report and explained that, at referendum, a "yes" vote will be to keep the configuration of the schools as they currently are and a "no" vote will be to restore two K-5 schools. He highlighted areas of the report and its conclusions that no construction project is needed for either configuration, all day Kindergarten is unaffected, cost factors, affect on learning, busing, class sizes and length of day. To initiate discussion, he requested a motion to approve the report. Mr. Suslavich entered a *motion that the Board of Education accept the report as drafted and with modifications suggested by Atty. Sommaruga*. Second by Mr. Baider. Discussion followed.

After reading the report, Ms. Corsico said she was more convinced than ever that an outside source should have been brought in to compile it. She found it misleading and asked to review it page by page.

Ms. Bulvanoski requested her name not be included as a contributor to the report, and Mr. Cosgriff also expressed objection to it.

On page 1, Ms. Corsico felt the history lacked anything pertaining to the reasoning behind reconfiguring the schools, such as multiple failed referendums and overcrowding, and that it had been done on the recommendation of the Superintendent. Mr. Sordi agreed to add that. Mr. Baider said if there was data on the reasoning for it, he had never seen it.

Ms. Corsico also supplied Mr. Sordi with additional statements related to the proper court history surrounding the issue.

Ms. Corsico saw a lack of information on renovation/moving costs, as well as any detail on how programming like the strings program could be affected. Ms. Zmek commented that this type of "minutia" would be for the administration to deal with and was not the board's responsibility. Ms. Bulvanoski asked how much input the administration actually had in the report, and Mr. Sordi said Dr. Cronin and Mr. Hubelbank met for many hours with him.

On page 5 it was agreed to change "border" to "near" Bethlehem, as students who may attend that school will live quite a distance from the border. Ms. Corsico was concerned about whether the board was committed to the streets listed in the report as those that would be assigned to BES. She thought the board should vote on this, but Mr. Baider saw no sense in that prior to the vote. Mr. Sordi said that ultimately the administration would recommend the streets and the board would vote on that recommendation.

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It was agreed that, on page 7, it would be added that teachers receive professional development daily. Also on that page, Ms. Bulvanoski stressed that Dr. Cronin had stated that he felt the K-2/3-5 model offered the best educational opportunity, but Mr. Sordi did not recall that. Ms. Zmek said the report was meant to be objective, measurable data and not what certain people think. Ms. Corsico found many things in the report to be far from objective. Mr. Sordi suggested, then, that she vote no on it. Ms. Corsico asked Dr. Cronin for his stand on which model is best, and he responded that he has said all along that, for this Region, the K-2/3-5 model offers the best opportunity for success. Ms. Corsico felt much of what is in the report was not seen or discussed in committee meetings— may have been provided by administration, but that is not the same as “agreeing” with it. Mr. Baidier disagreed and felt it is much different than what was done when the schools were reconfigured; also, he said, many experts would say that the K-2 model is not necessarily best.

Mr. Suslavich did not think it an improper statement to say that both configurations can work, but Ms. Corsico felt that was not “collectively determined.”

On page 8, Mr. Sordi agreed to clarify that teachers continue to work per their contractual agreement. On length of day, Mr. Suslavich contended that there is a lost opportunity cost associated with the shortened day. Ms. Corsico considered it misleading to suggest teachers are not working during that time and wasn't sure lost opportunity could be argued. Ms. Bulvanoski felt length of day could be compensated for in a number of ways. Ms. Corsico asked when price/hour was ever discussed in committee, adding that this misleads taxpayers to think that actual dollars are saved or lost. Mr. Suslavich said the idea was first introduced by a community member and then looked at by committee.

Page 9 – neither Ms. Corsico nor Ms. Bulvanoski felt test scores are relevant, and the report states it is difficult to inform statistical analysis using them, and so should not be included. Where the suggestion is made that Region 14 scores fall below average, Ms. Bulvanoski asked where they fell prior to reconfiguration, as that is not included, nor are scores for MES v. BES in the prior configuration.

Mr. Baidier responded that, relative to this data, it is what Dr. Cronin supplied to the committee; if they don't like it, he said, they should talk to him. Ms. Corsico reiterated that the data is not relevant if there is nothing prior to reconfiguration to compare it to.

Page 11 – Dr. Prowda's projections are not reliable, Ms. Bulvanoski contended. Mr. Bauer cited his projections of live births, but Ms. Corsico noted that he is off on those, too. Mr. Suslavich countered that his numbers, then, would be off for either configuration but give a point of reference. Mr. Cosgriff added that if local preschools had been polled, it would show that Prowda's numbers are not there.

Page 13 – Ms. Corsico found the chart misleading; further, it is unrealistic to think any administrator would allow 18 in a grade 4 class at BES and 25 in a class at MES. Mr. Sordi said a consistent model needed to be created.

Ms. Corsico stressed that, if being honest, 4.6 teachers would be required in a K-5 model. She would argue that if it is being suggested that reverting back to K-5's would not cost anything in the next budget year, that is not so, and the numbers in the report do not show that. Ms. Zmek explained that the report is a guide, there is no crystal ball, the numbers are fluid but within the recommended class sizes.

Page 15 – Ms. Corsico found those charts to be misleading, and they show average class sizes for the K-5 model.

Page 19 – Ms. Corsico thought it ridiculous to argue lack of space in either configuration.

Pages 20-21 – Ms. Corsico did not feel the transportation part should be in the report. The consultant who was brought in was never approved by the full board, was never brought up at committee meetings, and was not within the authority of an individual board member to seek out. Considerable discussion on the appropriateness of Mr. Dufour's involvement followed, but Mr. Sordi was not persuaded to think there was anything wrong with him using him as a “busing expert,” and he was not paid anything. Further, he said, needed information was not provided by the Region's transportation provider. Ms. Corsico felt that since Mr. Sordi did not go through the proper channels in bringing a consultant in, his information should not be part of the report. There is no data to suggest busing costs will go up, only what Mr. Dufour thinks or what the committee is guessing.

Both Ms. Corsico and Ms. Bulvanoski wondered where the statement that it is “generally accepted that bus rides are longer” came from. Mr. Suslavich noted longer physical distance traveled. Mr. Sordi agreed to flip the last paragraph on page 28 around to make it more clear.

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Mr. Suslavich modified his earlier motion. He entered a *motion to accept the report as presented, including changes by Atty. Sommaruga and changes discussed tonight, to be revised with a joint effort between Chairman Sordi and Dr. Cronin.* Second by Mr. Baider.

Ms. Corsico requested that her name, too, be removed from the report, which she considers incredibly misleading to taxpayers. Mr. Sordi had agreed that if he and Dr. Cronin could not reach agreement on the report, an outside source would be brought in; yet, that was not done. Ms. Bulvanoski felt listing "faculty and staff" as contributing to the report was untrue. Ms. Corsico stated the report was produced by committee chairs and data was compiled after the fact. Mr. Baider contended that Dr. Cronin was involved in every aspect of the report. Ms. Corsico asked Dr. Cronin if he stands by the report – does he support it?

Dr. Cronin stated that he suggested changes to Mr. Sordi and that Mr. Sordi was open to them. He said that the board, with all due respect, has put him and Mr. Hubelbank in a difficult spot. He has fought the reconfiguration battle to 5 years, thinks it is best for Region 14, has stood by it, resigned because of it, and to suggest now that he would support something else is misrepresenting him. However, there were no surprises in the report. He believes the district could be making a very bad mistake, depending upon how the vote may turn out. But, he said, the board chooses not to listen to that, and the community chooses not to listen to that. He wishes us well, but does not think the district will be as good as it is now, and has told this to Mr. Sordi and anyone else who will listen. For some reason, he said, his opinion does not matter in Region 14, though the opinions of everyone else do. He said 5 years ago that the district is significantly behind the times and there was much work to do, and the work is not yet done. Dr. Martland helped to structure the agreement in 1968. It is now 2011. He suggested that we are saying, in essence, that any decisions we make at this point are permanent. He considers that to be a terrible mistake.

The motion previously made and seconded carried 5-3, with Mr. Baider, Mr. Bauer, Mr. Sordi, Mr. Suslavich and Ms. Zmek voting yes, and Ms. Bulvanoski, Ms. Corsico and Mr. Cosgriff voting no.

V. Correspondence

There was no correspondence.

VI. Report from Chairman

There was no Chairman's report

VII. Report from Superintendent

There was no report from the Superintendent.

VIII. Privilege of the Floor

Susan Scherf, Bethlehem
Theodore Martland, Woodbury
Pam Gengenbach, Woodbury

IX. Report from Director of Finance and Operations

Mr. Hubelbank reported receipt of a draft copy of the audit. Mr. Suslavich would be posting a Finance Committee meeting for 1/19/11 at which the audit would be reviewed with Charles Heaven, who would subsequently report to the full board.

He also noted issues with NEAT TV, particularly with sound, and assured the board and viewing audience that this is being worked on.

X. Committee Reports

There were no committee reports.

XI. Old Business

Ms. Zmek entered a *motion to add to the agenda discussion of alternating meetings*. Second by Mr. Bauer. **Motion carried 8-0**. She renewed her concern that meetings should be held in locations in both towns and discussion followed on this idea. Mr. Hubelbank suggested seeing how it works when the public hearing is filmed at Memorial Hall next week, to see all that is involved.

XII. New Business

Ms. Zmek entered a *motion to add (under IV. Reconfiguration but, for the purposes of this report, where it chronologically occurred) setting dates for public hearings to the agenda*, second by Mr. Suslavich.

Motion carried 8-0.

Ms. Zmek entered a *motion to schedule public hearings on January 12, 2011 at Memorial Hall in Bethlehem at 7:00 pm, and on January 13, 2011 at Nonnewaug High School in Woodbury at 7:00 pm to present the 10-47c report to the public and (on a subsequent modification) to include the date of January 14, 2011 as a reschedule date in case of inclement weather*. Second by Mr. Suslavich. **Motion carried 8-0.**

Mr. Baider entered a *motion to approve the out of state WMS field trip to Washington, D.C., June 1-3, 2011*. Second by Mr. Suslavich. **Motion carried 8-0.**

Mr. Bauer entered a *motion to add advertising prior to the referendum to the agenda*. Second by Mr. Suslavich. **Motion carried 8-0.**

Mr. Bauer saw value in producing a flyer or utilizing newspaper advertising to promote the public hearings and referendum vote, with a summary of information, where information can be gotten, and when and where the vote will take place. After Mr. Hubelbank explained the legal parameters the board would need to follow in order to do this, Mr. Bauer entered a *motion to authorize the chair to create a public information flyer for distribution to both towns to include information on the public hearings and referendum vote, (then amended) to include both the chair and Dr. Cronin in the development of that flyer*. Second by Mr. Suslavich. Ms. Corsico was not in favor of approving a flyer that she would be unable to see first. **Motion carried 7-1**, with Ms. Corsico voting no.

XIII. Announcements

There were no board announcements

XV. Privilege of the Floor

Eileen Budrewicz, Woodbury
Pam Gengenbach, Woodbury

XVI. Adjournment

Mr. Suslavich entered a *motion to adjourn*. Second by Mr. Baider. **Motion carried 8-0**.
The meeting adjourned at 10:15 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

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