

Coventry Board of Education
Coventry, Connecticut

Regular Board of Education Meeting

Approved Minutes of April 08, 2021

Remote/Electronic

Board Members Present:

Jennifer Beausoleil, Chairman

William Oros, Vice Chairman

Eugene Marchand, Secretary

Mary Kortmann

Michael Sobol

Christina Williams

Robert Williams

Also Present: Emma Murphy, Student Board of Education Representative

Administrators Present:

Dr. David J. Petrone, Superintendent of Schools

Robert Carroll, Director of Finance and Operations

Audience Members Present: William Trudelle, Director of Physical Plant and Facilities; Cathie Drury, Director of Educational Technology; Ronda Carrie, CGS Principal; Michele Mullaly, Director of Teaching and Learning; Jennifer DeRagon, GHR Principal; Joseph Blake, CHS Principal; Dena DeJulius, CNH Principal; Beth Giller, PSSS Director; Laura Hipp, CEP Teacher; Jeff Beebe, Network Administrator Systems Specialist; Lyle Evans, Senior Technician - Systems Support; and Kamil Sutkowski, Technology Technician

I. Call to Order

J. Beausoleil called the meeting to order at 7:01 p.m.

II. Salute to the Flag

J. Beausoleil led the salute to the flag.

III. Audience of Citizens

M. Kortmann read an email from Michael Petteruto. J. Beausoleil asked the Superintendent to address this student as we do not reply to audience of citizens. [It was later discovered that this student did not attend Coventry High School in Connecticut, but in Coventry Rhode Island instead.]

IV. Report of Superintendent

Dr. Petrone informed the Board of the many meetings that have taken place. He updated the Board on the search for a new Assistant Principal at Coventry High School; the

recognition received by the 18-21 year old program; and the very positive 5 year NEASC report.

The Board discussed various items in brief including bus tracking, the budget discussion with parents and students in quarantine.

A. Recognition: Laura Hipp, CEP Teacher - Presentations at the New England League of Middle Schools (NELMS) March Conference

Dr. Petrone recognized Ms. Hipp for the three presentations she shared at the New England League of Middle Schools Conference.

Ms. DeJulius added words of commendation. Ms. Hipp said that she had a good time presenting and really enjoys helping other teachers. She thanked the board for recognizing her.

J. Beausoleil said that she is really excited to see how the program has grown through the years, along with the ways it morphs and adapts, and to see it integrated into the classroom again is awesome.

B. Recognition: Technology Staff for their Outstanding Work - Cathie Drury, Educational Technology Director; Jeff Beebe, Network Administrator Systems Specialist; Lyle Evans, Senior Technician - Systems Support; and Kamil Sutkowski, Technology Technician

Dr. Petrone introduced the technology staff being recognized. He said these individuals deserve recognition as they have been the heroes in this challenging time. He specifically noted a recent situation when the team worked all weekend, night and day.

J. Beausoleil added that she asked Dr. Petrone to bring these individuals to the meeting because we hear a lot about our teachers and nurses and the amazing staff in our district, but there are so many things we have managed in COVID-19 that would not have been possible without these staff members' efforts. She added that their dedication is just outstanding and she wanted the Board to have the chance to recognize these different kind of heroes.

C. Information: Student Board of Education Representative Report

Emma Murphy updated the Board including her participation in the assistant principal interview process. Dr. Petrone added that Emma and another student did a fantastic job on the interview committee as the student representation of the high school.

M. Sobol said, as a parent who watches the Board meetings, Emma has filled the student representative role very well and we appreciate everything you are doing for students.

V. Report of Chairman

J. Beausoleil began by officially welcoming M. Sobol back to Board.

She reminded Board members that the meetings will be in person for Board members starting on April 29; the audience of citizens will remain remote and through email.

J. Beausoleil reviewed items that will be talked about later in the agenda and highlighted the subcommittee assignment updates and asked if there were any questions on minor changes to committee assignments.

VI. Communications

VII. VOTE: Approval of Minutes

A. Approve Minutes of March 25, 2021

MOTION: Motion to approve minutes of March 25, 2021

By: C. Williams

Seconded: E. Marchand

Discussion: R. Williams said during the meeting he talked about the importance of delivering a statement to the Asian community within Coventry and this was not included in the minutes. J. Beausoleil said in general, the minutes are not a transcription. She said a statement or sentence could be added that you requested information on a statement to the Asian community based on recent current events and asked R. Williams to clarify. R. Williams said he requested a statement on behalf of the Coventry school system to support the Asian community due to the recent events be added.

Result: Motion to approve the minutes as modified passes unanimously

VIII. Old Business

A. Information: Facilities Projects Update

B. Trudelle updated the Board members on the facilities projects including: the Fire Doors; heating units in the CNH gym; LED project at GHR/CGS; the Walls Committee; the HVAC project; the Microgrid project; and the roofing project, which will be delayed.

C. Williams asked with pushing the roofing project off is there any risk to leaks or further damage by delaying project? Mr. Trudelle responded that there is no risk and minor leaks we have had, we monitor and seal.

E. Marchand asked if the sprinkler system is operational and are we using them? Mr. Trudelle responded that as soon as we are past freezing temperatures at night, the system will be connected to the pump and be ready to go.

M. Sobol asked how the fields look now. Mr. Trudelle responded that with dry weather, we cannot assess how the drainage is working yet.

C. Williams asked if we have replaced the fire alarms that were on the bond from last year in the complex. Mr. Trudelle responded that we have not. He continued to explain that we are working with different contractors on this. He said that the devices are still good but the panels need to be replaced; the goal is summer.

B. Information: COVID-19 Update

Dr. Petrone informed the board that the second vaccine clinic will be on April 9. He also highlighted that the bus ridership is up at CGS (6%) and GHR (10%). He continued

highlighting that remote student numbers are continuing to go down as students are coming back to in-person learning.

G. Marchand asked how staff and faculty have responded to the vaccination clinic. Dr. Petrone said, overall, very well, with some choosing to take their own path to get vaccinated.

C. Williams said that overtime the state has modified its guidelines to quarantining, will we do the same. Dr. Petrone explained that he will talk with the Eastern Highlands Health District in regards to quarantine

C. Williams asked Dr. Petrone if looking ahead, does he have a plan of what next year will look like for in-person learning, will we still be cohorting? Dr. Petrone responded that it is difficult to say, and that his guess is that we will likely see kids still in masks next year, while quarantine guidelines may lighten up a bit.

Dr. Petrone added that remote learning is an unfair obstacle to put on schools and his hope is that the state will take this responsibility.

R. Williams asked about new vaccine eligibility for students 16 and older of which we have students eligible and will their guidelines of quarantine change. Dr. Petrone responded that he has not seen any information on changes to quarantines for student who have been vaccinated but his guess is that it will be the same as adults who have been vaccinated.

C. Williams asked if Senior Prom and Graduation have been confirmed and what that would look like. Dr. Petrone responded that we are definitely having a prom, we are just determining the challenges for this event, such as eating. He added, we are going to have a graduation ceremony and we expect to get guidance from the state on this soon.

C. Information and Possible VOTE: FY22 Budget

J. Beausoleil informed the Board that the new bottom line that has been voted on by Town Council to be sent as part of the budget package to the annual town meeting is now \$28,305,819 which constitutes an increase 1.58% over the fiscal year of the 2020-2021 budget; this is a \$125,000 reduction of the appropriation request we sent to Council. We need to make some decision regarding this reduction tonight so folks can prepare the information needed for the upcoming town meeting.

J. Beausoleil noted that Dr. Petrone has provided some reduction possibilities we can discuss.

The items listed for potential reductions were as follows:

Upgrade to stage lighting

Shade structure at GHR

Fencing

Seesaw

Training

Pupil Services Costs

Instructional Supplies

Instructional Supplies - Program Improvement

Other Supplies - Special Ed

Vacancy Savings Teacher Retirement
Keyboarding Without Tears
General Instruction Supplies
Classroom Libraries
Improvement of Instructional Services
MobyMax
Math Intervention Instructional Supplies
Grades 3-5 Print and Digital Resources
NOETIC- Challenge and Enrichment Resource
Library books and resources
Improvement of Instructional Services
National Junior Honor Society
Author Visit
Vacancy Savings Teacher Retirement
General Instructional Supplies
Miscellaneous Textbooks
Library Books
LMC Digital Signage/Monitor
Tech Ed Camcorder Kit

E. Marchand asked what the Town Council recommended as areas that could be cut since we provided a no frills budget. J. Beausoleil responded, the suggestion was that we buy things in advance with this year's money, which is not our recommended policy. She added, we can do this if it is something we can use this year and next year. She said, there was also another recommendation to take the profit Food Services made through the federal money received from the USDA as revenue replacement. J. Beausoleil continued, however, the Fiscal Committee discussed this is "one-time" money and should not be counted next year to plan our budget.

C. Williams expressed, as a parent, she is not happy with these cut suggestions provided by the administration, as most are enrichment programs and supplies and she values these things the most. J. Beausoleil responded that these are just suggestions, but we do have to make cuts somewhere with specific items and dollar amounts.

Dr. Petrone added that we have to take into perspective that this list is a fine tuning of prices, specifically for supplies and software from when they were originally quoted a few months back. He also said that our hope is, we can use the additional monies coming from the American Rescue Plan (ARP) funds to help reinstate programs and items that may need to be significantly cut, as the Board approves.

R. Williams said he agrees with C. William on this one and that most of the money is being allocated towards technology and we are decreasing physically, in-person, hands-on stuff.

Dr. Petrone responded that the cut suggestions are not eliminated any programs. Dr. Petrone continued to explain that we took a hard look at line items and tightened up some of the quotes on supplies and software. He said that he doesn't want anyone to think any programs are being cut completely. R. Williams thanked Dr. Petrone for clarifying and he appreciates what everyone is doing to make this work.

There was discussion about technology costs and where there may be cuts applied in that area.

Dr. Petrone said we always make more with less and so he asked administrators to get creative with sources from outside areas that would help reduce the budget. He also said that we do not want to hurt any programs, none of this is good, but we have to make a decision which is why we are coming to you with amounts from different areas that add up to the reduction needed.

E. Marchand said, at the end of the day, he trusts Dr. Petrone and the administrative team to make these kinds of decisions. He said we have a fantastic group of professionals and he has an issue with second guessing the kind of technology our professionals are using.

J. Beausoleil added that we have had a number of technology cuts in our Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) over the years. She said, we used to buy our desktops and student devices through the CIP, which we have had to put back in our operational budget.

C. Williams said that NEWSELA is not security software or part of our everyday curriculum; so this is just one area we can consider for reduction. She said, we are looking at where to meet the town's reduction; she is looking at how to keep engaged students and have less screen time; Newsela is not required for learning.

J. Beausoleil asked if the Newsela software is in the budget or was it put in ESSER. Dr. Petrone responded, it is in the ESSER II plan that the Board has approved.

M. Sobol said that budget cuts have to be made, we all have our opinions about what should be cut and what shouldn't. He stated, his opinion is, he trusts Dr. Petrone and his administrators; he fully supports what they have brought forward for reductions.

Dr. Petrone said his goal is to form the budget and create a guide to help the Board make their decisions and to adjust as they see fit.

M. Kortmann said that she agrees with M. Sobol; Dr. Petrone and his staff have proven that you go through the budget and try to make cuts that have the least impact and she has full faith that this is what was done again. She added, the technology device replacement plan, and software that is identified by staff as critical, deserves our support.

MOTION: To modify the FY22 operating budget by the line items listed in the attachment *Potential Budget Reductions* dated April 8, 2021

By: M. Sobol

Seconded: E. Marchand

Result: Motion passes 5-2 (C. Williams and R. Williams against)

IX. New Business

A. Information and VOTE: Annual Non-Renewal of Listed Teachers

J. Beausoleil explained the annual procedure. Dr. Petrone noted the additional rationale that was added for this year.

MOTION: The contract of employment of teachers, named on the provided list, not be renewed for the following school year upon its expiration at the end of the

current 2020-2021 school year, and that the Superintendent of Schools is directed to advise such persons in writing of this action

By: W. Oros

Seconded: M. Sobol

Result: Motion passes unanimously

B. Information and Possible VOTE: Class of 2021 Graduation Rain Date

J. Beausoleil explained that due to COVID-19 and gathering restrictions, an inside ceremony is not practical. Dr. Petrone said a rain date of Sunday, June 13, 2021 was discussed and, if approved, Mr. Blake will send out notice to the parent community.

MOTION: To approve Sunday, June 13 as an official rain date for graduation 2021

By: C. Williams

Seconded: R. Williams

Result: Motion passes unanimously

MOTION: To add a conversation about Asian-American violence to the agenda

By: R. Williams

Seconded: C. Williams

Result: Motion passes 6-1 (J. Beausoleil opposed)

J. Beausoleil said this item would be added after the Fiscal Committee report.

X. Report of Board Members

A. Information: Fiscal Committee Report, Meeting of April 8, 2021

W. Oros warned everyone about the severe consequences that can be seen from drastic reductions such as has been made in the CIP. W. Oros continued and reviewed information shared at the Fiscal Committee meeting including the reductions to the CIP; the \$383,000 spent on COVID-19; the tuition account; the cafeteria fund; and when the Board might access the 1% account for the network expense.

B. Conversation About Asian-American Violence

J. Beausoleil asked R. Williams if his question on this agenda item is about the artifacts that Dr. Petrone provided representing what we have done for diversity in our schools.

R. Williams responded that he asked last time that a statement be developed on behalf of the Board. He added that UCONN and Manchester Public Schools produced a statement and he would like to see a statement of solidarity from Coventry.

R. Williams said he would like to make a motion that a statement be made on behalf of the Board. He added that, he believes it has been far too long since the incident, as a statement of support should be made right after. R. Williams said a lot of factors have been leading to this and at the end of the day, a statement is not enough, but it is a good start.

J. Beausoleil asked when is the granularity for when the Board is going to make a statement on current events that have happened. She said the Board has not made many statements in the past and what escalates this request to that level.

R. Williams responded that it is a matter of the right thing to do. He added that there is not a lot of diversity on the Board and that may support why there hasn't been statements in

the past. He said from his perspective he is the only person of color and he is only half and he would like to see this community supported.

J. Beausoleil said what escalates this when we have not done this for other diversity groups or interest groups. J. Beausoleil said there are a lot of interest groups out there and we would want to be consistent to not leave anyone out.

C. Williams said she disagrees with J. Beausoleil, that we have done a significant amount of things in support of minorities in town. She said the Open Choice is an example of Board level actions. She added that she does not believe what R. Williams is asking is out of alignment.

J. Beausoleil disagreed, noting that C. Williams is talking about support programs and inclusion programs, not a political statement of support for a minority group.

R. Williams said we have the voice and platform to show our support in the community. J. Beausoleil said that the Town Council represents the community and has that voice.

M. Kortmann said she agrees with J. Beausoleil, saying if we are going to start making statements, what criteria are we going to set to make future statements? She said this is a general problem in the United States and I don't know how you filter that down to a need to make a Board statement.

J. Beausoleil restated that this falls within the realm of the Town Council. She added that we provide support systems for our students including social and emotional support, diversity training and inclusion, to prevent future events like this. She said Dr. Petrone showed evidence that we are doing that. She added that we can always up our game on that by adding future goals and adding additional support. She said a political statement does not provide support our students.

R. Williams continued to discuss his views regarding supporting the Asian community. He said he is appalled that there isn't support here.

C. Williams said this conversation has to be disheartening to those listening; we have opened our doors to people who are not a part of our community. She said we should set the tone for our incoming kindergarteners who are part of the Open Choice program.

E. Marchand stated we did not specifically make a statement regarding George Floyd or Breonna Taylor. He said he thinks we have made a statement with joining the Open Choice program. He said he totally supports this program. He said he has concerns on statements on individual situations. He reiterated we have made a powerful statement as a Board in supporting the Open Choice program.

J. Beausoleil stopped the conversation. She said there are a number of people on this Board who have been bullied and diminished throughout their lifetimes. She added this is a very emotional topic and it is very important to all Board members at a variety of levels. She said if we are going to start making statements, we would need to have a set practice. She said if it is a general statement, she does not have a problem with that; she has a problem with picking one group over another. She said she appreciates R. Williams' perspective, but it is not the only perspective that could be brought up for the Board to make a statement about. She reiterated a general statement could be made.

R. Williams said he disagrees and believes a statement should be made to support out Asian –American community. He would still like to make a motion for a statement.

MOTION: That Dr. Petrone and his staff will write a statement of solidarity to support the Asian community within our school system to acknowledge the anti-Asian hate that has been happening and to acknowledge that it is wrong and to recognize the students in our community and to state that we stand with them with the problems that they are facing.

By: R. Williams

Seconded: C. Williams

Result: Motion fails 2-5 (J. Beausoleil, W. Oros, E. Marchand, M. Kortmann, M. Sobol against)

XI. Possible VOTE: Executive Session (Security Update; Superintendent Evaluation and Contract)

MOTION: Pursuant to CGS-1-200(c)(6)(A), the Board of Education will go into Executive Session for discussions related to Security Update and the Superintendent's Evaluation and Contract Discussions with the Educational Technology Director, the Network Administrator Systems Specialist, Director of Finance and Operations, and the Superintendent present at 9:20 pm.

By: E. Marchand

Seconded: M. Kortmann

Result: Motion passes unanimously

XII. Open Session

XIII. Adjournment

MOTION: To adjourn the meeting at 10:45 p.m.

By: C. Williams

Seconded: M. Kortmann

Result: Motion passes unanimously

Respectfully submitted,

Christina Small
Central Office Secretary

Approved: April 29, 2021