

**Coventry Board of Education**  
Coventry, Connecticut

**Regular Board of Education Meeting**  
Approved Minutes of November 12, 2020  
Remote/Electronic

Board Members Present:

Jennifer Beausoleil, Chairman  
William Oros, Vice Chairman  
Eugene Marchand, Secretary  
Mary Kortmann  
Barbara Paré  
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  
Cathie Drury, Director of Educational Technology

**I. Call to Order**

J. Beausoleil called the meeting to order at 7:38 p.m.

**II. Salute to the Flag**

J. Beausoleil led the salute to the flag.

**III. Audience of Citizens**

J. Beausoleil read a letter from student Justin Foran which is attached to these minutes.

**MOTION: To Move the Report of Chairman to next on the agenda.**

**By: E. Marchand. Seconded: M. Kortmann**

**Result: Motion passes unanimously**

**IV. Report of Chairman**

J. Beausoleil introduced Coventry's retired Superintendent Dr. Donna Bernard as a special guest speaker to honor Dr. Petrone's 20th anniversary in Coventry. Dr. Bernard spoke about her time in Coventry and how well she worked with Dr. Petrone.

J. Beausoleil presented Dr. Petrone with a token of celebration from the Board in honor of his 20 years.

## **V. Report of Superintendent**

Dr. Petrone reviewed various items that have taken place over the past few weeks. He talked about the work being done with CREC and the Open Choice program. He noted his Parent Q & A session held this evening. He informed the Board that Congressman Joe Courtney visited the G. H. Robertson School in honor of the National Blue Ribbon School Award.

Dr. Petrone added that all of the funding is there to repair the issues with the athletic field, which includes the irrigation portion; this project is scheduled to take place.

## **A. Information: Student Board of Education Representative Report**

Emma Murphy said not much has transpired since the last Board meeting. She noted the end of the fall sport season.

C. Williams asked how the transition to remote learning for one day went. Emma said it went really well and really smoothly.

## **B. Information: Technology Department Status Update**

Ms. Drury shared a presentation with the Board on the state of the technology department.

J. Beausoleil said a lot of work went into supporting the learning models; this presentation shows that. She thanked Ms. Drury and her team.

E. Marchand asked about the new access points. Ms. Drury explained that new points were installed to improve connectivity for students using their devices in an anticipation of increased traffic.

M. Kortmann talked about the help/ticket program and asked what information the department has gained. Ms. Drury said when all information was entered there was over 900 tickets, which was a huge increase over the previous year. She added that it helps with the communication aspect and to pinpoint common issues.

B. Paré thanked Ms. Drury for her presentation. She said the development is amazing, as tasks were completed that were unexpected and also that the department continued with usual business as well.

Dr. Petrone recognized Ms. Drury and her department and the great job they did and continue to do.

R. Williams asked if the Technology Department is overwhelmed and if they have enough staff. Ms. Drury said she commends her staff for their hard work and they do have a new added technician, which will help. She noted the entire staff is very supportive as well.

R. Williams asked if the department needs anything else. Ms. Drury said they evaluate this all of the time.

A discussion ensued regarding the number of devices in district and computer carts.

C. Williams talked about the additional Chromebooks that were talked about at the beginning of the year. Dr. Petrone said the ones received were distributed.

## **VI. Communications**

### **VII. VOTE: Approval of Minutes**

#### **A. Approve Minutes of October 29, 2020**

**MOTION: To approve the minutes of October 29, 2020**

**By: E. Marchand**

**Seconded: C. Williams**

**Result: Motion passes unanimously**

### **VIII. Report of Board Members**

#### **A. Information: Fiscal Committee Report, Meeting of November 12, 2020**

W. Oros reported on the Joint meeting held with the Town Finance Committee. He noted the primary focus was the pandemic and the financial impact to the school district.

W. Oros reviewed the discussions in the regular Fiscal Committee meeting; the primary focus was the Capital Improvement Plan. He said the plan needs to be approved to be forwarded to the Town Manager.

##### **1. Possible VOTE: Approve the CIP FY2022-2026**

**MOTION: To approve the CIP FY2022-2026 as presented to be submitted to the Town Manager**

**By: M. Kortmann**

**Seconded: E. Marchand**

Discussion: J. Beausoleil explained the CIP process.

C. Williams asked about the ventilation items and if they need to be revisited due to COVID. Dr. Petrone and M. Kortmann explained that these are for specific areas and have reached end of life. M. Kortmann said we would like to purchase these properly by going out to bid; not under emergency conditions.

C. Williams asked about the CHS kitchen refrigeration and if it was done during the renovation. Dr. Petrone said no, that was just the serving area.

C. Williams asked about asbestos work under number 20. M. Kortmann said there are 18 classrooms that need to be done.

C. Williams asked about the maintenance truck and if it was the same as the utility vehicle. Dr. Petrone explained no, it is a work pick-up truck that needs to be replaced.

C. Williams noted the fireproof file cabinets and how far out it is; can anything be done in the meantime electronically. Dr. Petrone explained that hard copies do have to be kept of some documents. M. Kortmann said they are hoping other options come up, that is why it is so far out.

C. Williams asked about item 1 and how much has been done. Dr. Petrone said it is part of the three year tech plan; it is exactly what we believe we need.

B. Paré asked about the asbestos abatement for the classrooms and why would we disturb it if it isn't an issue. Dr. Petrone said the flooring will start to fail and it needs to be addressed before it becomes an issue.

## **Result: Motion passes unanimously**

### **IX. Old Business**

#### **A. Information: COVID-19 Update**

Dr. Petrone said the numbers of remote learners continue to decrease. He added it is still a struggle to support remote learners; he has put a practice in place where staff will reach out to those families.

The Board discussed remote learning and associated challenges.

Dr. Petrone noted a memo from the SDE regarding schools closing after holiday breaks. He said the State has made it clear that in-person instruction is best for students. The memo also stated the virus is not primarily spreading in the schools. Dr. Petrone said he does not plan to change what the district is doing at this time.

E. Marchand said he trusts the system we have in place.

C. Williams said Dr. Petrone has her full support to hang in there with full in-person instruction as long as possible.

Dr. Petrone talked about the State rolling back to 2.1 and the uptick in cases, and the many professionals still working remotely. He said his recommendation is for the Board to go back to remote meetings, based on all he has been told.

J. Beausoleil said she asked Dr. Petrone to speak with the EHHD. She said the recommendation is for the Board to meet remotely, but it is up to the Board.

C. Williams said she will support whatever the consensus is; but if we are saying it is safe for students, we should set an example. Dr. Petrone said the point was made that students being in school is essential, but Boards and such working this way is not. He added that most workers at the SDE are still working remotely; it is not essential that Board meetings are held in person.

E. Marchand said he is comfortable going remote.

W. Oros said he doesn't have much of a choice; he will be remote.

R. Williams said in-person is more effective, but at the same time you have to be respectful of the current situation. He said he agrees with C. Williams but will go with consensus of the Board.

B. Paré said she is all for remote right now to show there is a serious situation that hasn't come to an end yet.

M. Kortmann said she is in support of remote with the case counts going up.

J. Beausoleil recommended the December meeting and the first meeting in January be remote and then we can see what the case counts look like at that time. There were no objections.

Emma Murphy said it doesn't matter to her, but she believes online is safest and sends the right message. She said she does not believe there will be big reaction from her peers.

C. Williams said she doesn't want this to push us into remote learning and she fully believes in the plan for students that the district has in place.

J. Beausoleil thanked members for their comments.

## **X. New Business**

### **A. Information: Weather Related Closures - Remote Learning Days**

Dr. Petrone said he is looking for consensus from the Board. He met with the teachers union who supports having Remote Learning Days on Snow Days. He continued and the district would like to pilot this, this year and have remote learning days on weather related closures.

E. Marchand said the technology is in place.

Dr. Petrone said they will figure out a schedule that will work for all grades. He added, if there are widespread electricity outages, that would need to be taken into consideration.

B. Paré said it is a great idea and she is all for it.

M. Kortmann agreed, noting the frustration on those days when school could have been in session, but the timing of the storm was right during transportation time.

E. Marchand asked how families would be notified. Dr. Petrone said parents will be notified by usual district avenues, probably not through the media.

There was consensus for Dr. Petrone to move forward with Remote Learning Days on weather related closure days.

### **B. Review and VOTE: Approve the Board of Education Regular Meeting Dates for 2021**

There was clarification that all meetings are scheduled for Thursdays.

**MOTION: To approve the Board of Education Regular Meeting Dates for 2021 as presented**

**By: C. Williams**

**Seconded: B. Pare**

**Result: Motion passes unanimously**

**C. Information and Discussion: Policies** (To be warned for a VOTE at a future Board meeting)

#### **1. Policies for Revision**

**a. 4116.2 - Sex Discrimination and Sexual Harassment**

**b. 5131 - Sex Discrimination and Sexual Harassment**

**c. 5132 - Student Dress**

**d. 5146 - Physical Activity and Student Discipline**

**e. 9140 - ByLaw Committees**

**f. 9150 - ByLaw Chairperson**

#### **2. Policy for Deletion**

**a. 2111 - Superintendent Duties**

#### **3. New Policies for Adoption**

**a. 4112 - Hiring of Certified Staff**

**b. 4112.1 - Hiring of Non Certified Staff**

**c. 5130.1 – Home Instruction and Participation in School Activities by Non-Students**

**d. 9111.3 – ByLaw Social Media for Board Members**

W. Oros briefly summarized the policies on the agenda. J. Beausoleil asked for any questions for Board members.

C. Williams asked about 5146 and the "undirected play." J. Beausoleil said it is a terminology, it is not additional time. Dr. Petrone said it is a term used to be sure that no one works around the law.

E. Marchand said the Committee reviewed these documents thoroughly.

B. Paré said she did not think all of the items were moved forward with consensus. J. Beausoleil disagreed noting there was consensus for each item, except one (9150).

R. Williams talked about 5146, and asked what allows additional time to be given. Dr. Petrone said the language is now in line with the state law and any time that is added is covered.

C. Williams questioned 9150. J. Beausoleil explained that this is to streamline communications with staff; and to be sure Board members are not requesting work from staff directly.

B. Paré said she believes the language is a little too vague, she is not sure how it would be enforced, and does not believe it needs to be there.

C. Williams asked if the words "outside of a Board meeting" would help. B. Paré said yes, but she does not like the spirit of the language.

C. Williams said we have to look at this as general practice. She said it prevents bad behavior in the future and she understands how that could happen.

B. Paré said she disagrees with the language.

It was agreed that "outside of a Board meeting" be added to item 8 on the policy.

C. Williams asked about deleting 2111 and what is going in its place. Dr. Petrone said Shipman and Goodwin said it is antiquated; the Superintendent's roles and responsibilities are imbedded in law and other policies. He added that two policies regarding hiring staff are being proposed.

E. Marchand said it makes sense to get rid of an antiquated policy.

J. Beausoleil reviewed the ByLaw on Committees. She said this updates old language. She provided examples of some of the new language.

C. Williams noted the hiring of staff policies, specifically the hiring of certified staff. She said the policy notes only the Superintendent hires certified staff and was that accurate. Dr. Petrone said it is correct; they all go through him.

E. Marchand said for future administration we may want to add a designee in the policy for hiring certified staff. M. Kortmann said we could wait so we know if there is a change. J. Beausoleil agreed with M. Kortmann.

C. Williams noted 5130 and said she did not notice much difference since the last time it was brought forward. She would like to see these homeschooled students included.

E. Marchand noted the CIAC has definitively said these children cannot participate in sanctioned sports.

Dr. Petrone talked about the many administrative challenges associated with managing having homeschooled students participate. J. Beausoleil said discipline and liability are some of the issues. M. Kortmann said the discipline issue is real.

B. Paré said she expressed how she felt the first time around; she respects the Superintendent's comments about managing these students. She said she is apt to change her mind based on the Superintendent's concerns, however, she wants our school to be welcoming to all residents. She said she gets leery when we turn away a family that wants to participate.

R. Williams thinks it is a disservice to the homeschooled kids who cannot partake in the school community.

J. Beausoleil reminded the Board that this is current practice, we are just making it policy. She said because the budgets are lean there are limited seats in many activities and this could take away from those who are enrolled in our schools. She said our obligation is to students enrolled in our schools. R. Williams agreed to disagree.

J. Beausoleil noted 9111.3 and said this was completely rewritten. C. Williams said there will be a time when I don't agree with a district decision. She said she feels she should be able to vent her frustration. J. Beausoleil said Board members can express their opinions as citizens.

E. Marchand said the Policy Committee had a lengthy conversation and talked about who makes the interpretation.

B. Paré said at first she did not think this needed to be a policy. She said her concerns are who will interpret it and who will enforce it. She said she is concerned it will cause conflict rather than solve it. She is concerned about making a policy on what people can and can't do; she does not see it as enforceable.

E. Marchand said this is for extreme circumstances and the words, disrupts, interferes, undermines explain it. He said it empowers the Board to do something about it.

J. Beausoleil noted that for many ByLaws there is no penalty that can be applied legally. She said the most the Board can do is censure a Board member. She said we cannot fire anyone. She said these are guidelines for you as you are representing yourself as a Board member.

B. Paré said censuring someone or removing someone from a committee are very serious actions.

J. Beausoleil gave examples of how serious it would have to be. She continued and talked about the need to have language in place to guide Board members.

## **XI. Adjournment**

**MOTION: To adjourn the meeting at 10:28 p.m.**

**By: C. Williams**

**Seconded: M. Kortmann**

**Result: Motion passes unanimously**

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Respectfully submitted,

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Kimberlee Arey Delorme  
Board Clerk

Approved: December 10, 2020



**Justin Foran**

2nd November 2020

**Jennifer Beausoleil**

Chairman, Coventry Board of Education  
1700 Main St  
Coventry, CT 06238

Dear Ms. Beausoleil,

My name is Justin Foran and I am a sophomore at Coventry High School as well as the goalkeeper for the high school boys varsity soccer team. I am writing to discuss the conditions of the high school's athletic fields which as you know are deplorable. It embarrasses me, and should also embarrass you, the impression being given by our main playing field. Many towns around us have beautiful athletic fields, but when other schools come to play here and we as players hear from the other team, "Coach why do we have to play on this field?" and "Coach we can't play here again, this field is terrible." It is embarrassing. Most of the grass on the fields, namely the back stadium field, is dead. If the field was more enjoyable to play on, the number of students interested in sports might go up.

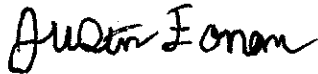
This is important because sports have been shown to benefit students' mental health as well as their academics. Sports are a large part of how people deal with their mental health. In a book written in 2017, *Youth Mental Health*, Justin Healy explained that "... many people cope with stress by getting involved with sports..." Activities to benefit mental health are extremely important to students, especially in this time of uncertainty. Sports have even been linked to better performance in school. In 2016, the book *History and Evidence Show School Sports Help Students Win*, expressed the idea that school sports benefit athletes in the classroom and stated, "...student-athletes perform better than their peers. Specifically, researchers have found that student-athletes are significantly more likely to go to college, score higher on standardized achievement tests...and are more likely to report having positive relationships with school personnel." These ideas are things every student, the school, and the town could benefit from. Coventry can do better!

As you may know, an irrigation system was installed last year, in 2019, in the main stadium field. The irrigation system, which would have tremendously improved the field condition, has a problem with the water tanks. This problem has prevented the sprinkler from ever being used. Mr. Cox, Coventry High School's Athletic Director, and Mr. Trudelle, the district Director of Facilities, have been battling back and forth with the contractor of the sprinkler system for the past year to get the tanks fixed. I am proposing that the Board of Education allocates the money immediately required to fix the sprinkler

system so that the money originally allocated for the sprinkler system doesn't sit dormant in the ground, and gets put to good use. From there the battle with the contractor can continue for the money, but most importantly the students/athletes will have a nice field to play on.

Please share this letter with the rest of the Board of Education members. I hope to hear from you, and that these concerns will be taken up at a future board meeting. If needed I would also be willing to speak at the Audience of Citizens.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Justin Foran". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized "J" and "F".

Justin Foran