

Coventry Board of Education
Coventry, Connecticut

Board of Education Regular Meeting
Approved Minutes of Thursday, March 10, 2022
Coventry High School Lecture Hall

Board Members Present:

Jennifer Beausoleil, Chairperson
Eugene Marchand, Vice Chairperson
Mary Kortmann, Secretary
Peter DePaola
Emma Eaton
Courtney Rossignol
Christina Williams

Administrators Present:

Dr. David J. Petrone, Superintendent
Robert Carroll, Director of Finance and Operations

Audience: There were several community members present.

I. Call to Order

J. Beausoleil called the meeting to order at 8:45 p.m.

II. Salute to the Flag

J. Beausoleil led the salute to the flag.

III. Audience of Citizens

Kathleen Breitenwischer, 61 Barbara Drive, was present to voice her concern regarding the actions of Board member Christina Williams at the previous Board meeting. The statement she provided is attached to these minutes.

Robyn Gallagher, 984 Main Street, was present to voice her concern regarding the actions of Board member Christina Williams at the previous Board meeting.

Caroline Dowd, 302 Pine Lake Drive, was present to voice her concern regarding the actions of Board member Christina Williams at the previous Board meeting. The statement she provided is attached to these minutes.

Christina Williams, 436 Ripley Hill Road, was present to talk about the value of parents' choice.

Lisa Thomas, 255 Geraldine Drive, was present to voice her concern regarding the actions of Board member Christina Williams.

IV. Report of the Superintendent

Dr. Petrone talked about various happenings taking place around the district, region, and state.

V. VOTE: Consent Agenda

E. Eaton asked to have the retirement of Jeffrey Joslyn removed from the consent agenda.

V.A. Accept the Retirement of Jeffrey Joslyn, Custodian

MOTION: To accept the retirement of Jeffery Joslyn

By: E. Eaton

Seconded: E. Marchand

Discussion: E. Eaton thanked Mr. Joslyn for his work during his tenure at Coventry Public Schools.

Result: Motion passes unanimously

VI. Report of the Chairman

J. Beausoleil reported on upcoming events in the district/community. She thanked teacher Christine Kendall, who has created an initiative to send supplies to Poland to support refugees from Ukraine.

VIII. VOTE: Approval of Minutes

VIII.A. Approve Minutes of Special 5:30 p.m. Meeting of February 24, 2022

MOTION: To approve the special 5:30 p.m. meeting minutes of February 24, 2022.

By: E. Marchand

Seconded: M. Kortmann

Result: Motion passes unanimously

VIII. B. Approve Minutes of Regular Meeting of February 24, 2022

MOTION: To approve the minutes of the regular meeting of February 24, 2022

By: E. Marchand

Seconded: M. Kortmann

Discussion: C. Williams asked that the second be added to the amendment. J. Beausoleil said the second could be added to the first motion for an amendment. Besides that, she asked that the tape be reviewed for clarity and that the minutes be brought back.

P. DePaola asked that, on page 3, the spelling of his name be corrected. P. DePaola asked that, also on page 3, his commentary be adjusted to "we **cannot** just change on a dime."

E. Eaton asked for a spelling correction on page 3 to the word unanimously.

J. Beausoleil asked that it be noted on the minutes when community members could be heard outside making a disturbance.

Result: The minutes were tabled.

IX. Old Business

IX.A. Information and Possible VOTE: Solar Panels at Coventry High School

Mr. Sadler updated the Board on the plan for new solar panels to be added to the new roof at CHS, rather than a carport. He noted the savings for this would be approximately \$52,806 vs the original \$17,000. He said the rate would be \$.074 for 25 years.

P. DePaola confirmed the price is set. Mr. Sadler said it is a fixed rate for 25 years.

P. DePaola noted his concern for any affect on what will be the new the roof.

Dr. Petrone said that Mr. Trudelle had concerns about any damage to the roof membrane from the current solar panels. Mr. Sadler said after his review, it seemed that any concerns took place during the installation, but no penetrations to the roof were found. He continued that he and Mr. Trudelle said they would be sure that track pads would be laid on the roof for protection during this next round of installation.

M. Kortmann talked about the timing aspect. Mr. Sadler says the ZREC will be extended for 12 months beyond April 2022. He said the solar installation will be immediately following the completion of the new roof.

Mr. Carroll spoke to his communication with Mr. Trudelle and noted that he is now comfortable with the plan for roof installation.

The Board discussed further details regarding the specifics of the project.

MOTION: To accept the modifications to the solar plan

By: E. Eaton

Seconded: M. Kortmann

Result: Motion passes unanimously

IX. B. Information: FY23 Budget

Dr. Petrone reviewed the changes to the budget since the Board voted: heating oil and diesel were locked in and the custodial contract was finalized.

C. Rossignol asked if the funds in the reserve fund (2% account) could be used to offset costs, repairs, or purchases. J. Beausoleli explained that those funds are specific to items on the CIP or emergency repairs.

M. Kortmann noted that the building use fund should pick up again, now that we can begin renting the buildings, and we may be able to use those funds for something like the auditorium curtains.

C. Williams said we update the CIP annually and we could begin grouping items and pay for them through the reserve fund. M. Kortmann said we cannot group unlike items together.

J. Beausoleil said it is premature to take any action before we know the final number we will be given by the Town Council.

IX.C. Discussion and Possible VOTE(s): Approve Policies

1. New: 3542.4 Food Service Charging Policy

2. Revision: 4118.5 Employee Use of the Districts Computer Systems

3. Revision: 5125 Confidentiality and Access to Education Records (FERPA)

4. Revision: 5131.2 Student Use of the District's Computer Systems and Internet Safety

than a different drug. J. Beausoleil said discipline for CBD has to be the same as for alcohol according to state statute. Dr. Petrone said the discipline for CBD cannot be more severe than it is for alcohol. Dr. Petrone said a harder narcotic could be brought forward for expulsion.

Result: Motion passes unanimously

IX.D. Information: COVID-19 Update

Dr. Petrone reviewed the up-to-date information that was released since the last Board meeting. He reviewed changes at the district level, which includes going back to as close to pre-pandemic as possible. He noted that some changes will take place over the summer due to staffing and to limit the disruption level at the schools. He added that cleaning protocols will remain in place for the foreseeable future.

M. Kortmann asked if there has been any bullying due to mask wearing or not. Dr. Petrone said he has viewed some peer pressure. He added that right after masks were lifted, it was about 50/50, but it has dwindled to about 5-10% of students now wearing masks. If there is an issue, he suggested the parent reach out to the teacher; if it is more severe, the parent should reach out to the administrator. He explained the bullying investigation process.

P. DePaola asked if there has been a noticeable change in attendance. Dr. Petrone said the attendance was very good last week, but was a little higher this week.

The Board discussed restoring classrooms to pre-pandemic conditions; restoring lunch and PE; how the staff are fairing; and the UCONN air filters.

IX.D.1. Discussion and Possible VOTE: Review of Mask Mandate Requirements at Coventry Public Schools

J. Beausoleil explained this item was being revisited at the request of a Board member. She continued that the attorney has provided the legal opinion. She said a procedural error was made during the last meeting, regarding an amendment to a motion, but because the point was not raised during the meeting, the action stands. She added that the responsibilities of the Superintendent in regard to emergency preparedness have been reviewed and are available as attachments.

E. Marchand noted that the COVID-19 metrics were released the day after the 2/24 Board meeting.

MOTION: To rescind the decision that masks are required in Coventry Public Schools whenever the average COVID-19 case per 100,000 is in the Red category in the Town of Coventry as reported by the State Department of Public Health (DPH) and authorize the Superintendent to use Board policies, State Department of Education guidelines, and DPH information, to make decisions regarding masks in Coventry Public Schools.

By: E. Marchand

Seconded: M. Kortmann

Discussion: P. DePaola said he disagrees and we are going backward instead of forward. He said he disagrees with the motion and we should lift the mask

mandate and leave it as an option for students and teachers. He said this is absolutely unacceptable. He said this burden should not be left to the superintendent.

E. Eaton said COVID-19 has taught us that no one can see the future and things can change quickly. She said this motion allows for flexibilities and follows procedures and policies we already have in place where the superintendent already has the authority.

C. Williams said we were elected to make these decisions and she was infuriated at the state level when the decision was taken away from the legislators. She said she agrees with P. DePaola.

P. DePaola said that we would not want to put that burden on Dr. Petrone when it is the Board's decision. He said we should take away the mask mandate and allow for mask choice, and we have procedures in place for emergency meetings, if needed.

M. Kortmann said we had Dr. Petrone handle the pandemic from the beginning on many levels and that state statute gives the authorization to the superintendent regardless. She said the situation is very fluid and we have to give Dr. Petrone the ability to maneuver when things change.

P. DePaola said this is the Board's responsibility and that passing this on to the superintendent is an unacceptable option. He added that the mask mandate has been lifted on so many fronts. He wants people to have the choice. He said this is a policy decision by the Board.

J. Beausoleil said the majority of towns in the State of Connecticut are letting the superintendent make this decision. She continued that he made significantly more controversial decisions during the reopening. She said he is the person who can balance the staff and student needs. She said, by letting the Superintendent act, it takes the politics out of it. She said he is willing to do it and it is within his given responsibilities.

E. Marchand said, with this motion, we are dropping the mask mandate. He added that we are providing an option if things spike again.

J. Beausoleil said the policy does enable the superintendent to do whatever is appropriate to develop procedures for this type of situation; he already has the ability to do this under the given policies and state statute.

C. Rossignol asked that the motion be re-read, which E. Marchand did.

C. Rossignol said Dr. Petrone has done an amazing job at keeping the schools open. She said she is worried about shifting more on the plate of the superintendent and how it could silence the parents. She asked Dr. Petrone what he believed his plans are going forward regarding masks.

Dr. Petrone said if the state gets to a point where they need to mandate masks, then he won't have a choice. He said this is how he has been conducting business and this is how he will continue. He said, at this moment, he would

have masks as optional, unless there is direction from the state or the DPH. He added, if an extreme situation happened, he would bring the topic back to the Board and not act in isolation. He added, parents are never silenced - audience of citizens is always on the Board's agenda and we continually survey parents.

E. Eaton noted the number of comments that were received as part of the survey. She said the Board has given a valid amount of time to one view on this topic. She believes Dr. Petrone will make the decisions as appropriate and she believes he will not bring back mandated masks. She said this decision makes more sense than the motion that was made a few weeks ago.

C. Williams said the motion excludes community input by way of audience of citizens prior to a vote.

J. Beausoleil said she disagrees and that parents are always surveyed by the superintendent prior to major decisions. She said those surveys are a better feel for parent opinion than audience of citizens. She added that community members can come to any meeting and speak at audience of citizens. She continued, the majority of school districts have gone the route of letting the superintendent make these decisions.

P. DePaola said this motion is not about Dr. Petrone, but about the Board taking responsibly for making decisions related to policy. He continued and noted all of the protections now in place regarding COVID-19. He said his strongest objection to the language of the motion is that we are not letting the parents make that decision for their children. J. Beausoleil asked if he had an amendment.

MOTION to AMEND: That the mask mandate be lifted for Coventry Public Schools

By: P. DePaola

J. Beausoleil said there is no mask mandate. E. Marchand reiterated that.

MOTION to AMEND: That masks are optional in the schools

By: P. DePaola Seconded: C. Rossignol

Results: The motion for the amendment fails 3-4 (J. Beausoleil, E. Eaton, M. Kortmann, E. Marchand against)

Result (for the original motion): Motion passes 4-3 (P. DePaola, C. Rossignol, C. Williams against)

X. Report of Board Members

X.A. Information: Fiscal Committee Report, Meeting of March 10, 2022

M. Kortmann reviewed the Fiscal Committee meeting of that same evening. She noted that we are not in as good of shape as we were a month ago, but we are still in the positive.

XI. Possible VOTE: Executive Session (Superintendent's Evaluation and District Security)

Kathleen Breitenwischer – 61 Barbara Dr

The mask debate has brought out a great deal of passion in many of us and sadly, brought out the worst in many as well for the behaviors that have been exhibited. I watched the meeting live from home with my 8th grade son. About the only positive that came out of the meeting was a teachable moment for my son on how not to behave in a public forum or any environment for that matter. Outbursts, no matter how much you disagree with someone, are not acceptable behavior in a civilized society. I was extremely disappointed to see the actions and behaviors of BOE member Christina Williams during the last meeting. Standing up to walk out of meeting and interrupting the discussion before leaving is the equivalent of a temper tantrum that usually is seen in young children. Going after someone else's child is the lowest of the low. The fact that this came from someone who is also a mother is even worse. To use Christina's own words from the last meeting, 'SHAME ON YOU!' Show some morals, show some empathy, be a good human being. Simply put, be kind. Singling out any child is never okay. Given the fact that she is a member of our Board of Education makes me wonder if she has any ethical standards whatsoever. A decent and moral human being would recognize that they crossed the line in attacking a child. I truly hope that Christina Williams recognizes that and apologizes to the mother and child she singled out. I am ashamed that Christina Williams is a member of our Board of Education as this is not the first time she has singled out a child of a BOE member. A pattern has now be established. Christina must learn to get along with others, regardless of her disagreeing with them on some topics. The BOE is not about being a Democrat or a Republican. It is about making decisions that are in the best interest of our children, our teachers and our staff. Do better. Be a better person.

Subject:

March 10 comments

----- Original message -----

From: Caroline Davis <carolinedavis04@gmail.com>

Date: 3/10/22 8:49 PM (GMT-05:00)

Subject: [EXTERNAL] March 10 comments

As elected members of the Board of Education, your job is to respect and support the needs of every single student in the Coventry Public Schools. I don't even know why I need to get up here and say that out loud. It's absolutely absurd. The well-being of this town's students are in your hands and how you treat and talk about them matters.

As a member of this community, I find it incredibly alarming that board member Christina Williams has refused, on at least FOUR separate occasions, to apologize for her total disregard for the privacy of one of those students.

As a teacher, I am appalled by her public display of unabashed indifference towards students whose pathways to success rely on the acceptance of and respect for their need for accommodations.

As a student who thrived under accommodations in school, I am heartbroken.

And as a woman who hopes to become a mother, I worry that my children will attend a school system with a board member who does not seem to truly grasp the importance of accommodations.

While I unfortunately don't expect it to happen, given that you have stood by your outburst at least four times since that day, I still ask that you apologize to your fellow council member, Emma Eaton, and to her family, for dragging her young child into a public discussion. You had no right to do that. Show your town that you can acknowledge when you've made a mistake, swallow your pride, and apologize.