

Coventry Board of Education
Coventry, Connecticut

Board of Education Regular Meeting
Approved Minutes of Thursday, March 31, 2022
Administration Building Conference Room

Board Members Present:

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

Board Members Absent:

Jennifer Beausoleil, Chairperson

Also Present: Celia Delvecchio, Student Board of Education Representative

Administrators Present:

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

Audience: members of the CNH Girls Basketball Team and their parents; CHS students; Dena DeJulius, CNH Principal; Michele Mullaly, Director of Teaching and Learning; and several citizens.

I. Call to Order

E. Marchand called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

II. Salute to the Flag

E. Marchand led the salute to the flag.

III. Audience of Citizens

Courtney Rossignol, 73 Brenda Lane, was present to speak about her concerns regarding bullying at Coventry Public Schools. She shared several communications she noted were from parents and students claiming there is a bullying problem in the schools. The statement she provided is attached to these minutes.

Nikki McLaughlin, 195 Hopper Road, was present to speak about her concerns regarding a bullying problem at Coventry Public Schools. Additionally, she shared comments on behalf of a student who did not feel safe to come and speak on their own about their experience. The statement she provided is attached to these minutes.

IV. Report of the Superintendent

Dr. Petrone reviewed various activities and meetings taking place locally, regionally, and at the state level.

IV.A. Recognition: CNH Girls Basketball Team Northeast Middle School Athletic Conference Champions

Dr. Petrone extended congratulations to the CNH Girls Basketball team for winning the conference championship. Ms. DeJulius said a few words and introduced Coach Jennifer Rodgers, who thanked everyone.

E. Marchand spoke about the importance of sports to students in the schools.

The Board discussed Senior Portfolio night. C. Williams asked for access to more of the senior portfolios. Dr. Petrone said he would accommodate.

IV.B. Information: Recognition of the Board of Education

Dr. Petrone said March is Board Appreciation Month. There were high school art students in attendance to present the gifts (student-made pottery) to the Board members. Dr. Petrone extended thanks to the Board for volunteering their time.

IV.C. Information: Board of Education Student Representative Report

Miss Delvecchio talked about the activities and happenings taking place at the high school, which included an update on the proms, the senior picnic, spring sports, and graduation.

IV.D. Information: Superintendent Goal Achievement Report 2021-2022

Dr. Petrone reviewed his Goal Achievement presentation for the 2021-22 school year, which is available on the district's website.

V. VOTE: Consent Agenda

E. Eaton asked that Mrs. Rood's retirement be removed from the Consent Agenda.

E. Eaton want to thank Ms. Rood for her years of service.

The Board discussed this trip for the Future Problem Solvers group, if they move on to the International Competition.

P. DePaola reviewed the form and asked how the costs are funded. Ms. DeJulius noted it is mostly fundraising and parent support.

Miss Delvecchio reviewed her experience when she was able to go, when in 6th grade.

V.A. Approve the CNH June Field Experience to Amherst, MA

MOTION: To approve the Field Experience to Amherst, MA.

By: C. Rossignol

Seconded: M. Kortmann

Result: Motion passes unanimously

V.B. Accept the Retirement of Melissa Rood, CHS Teacher

MOTION: To accept the retirement of Melissa Rood

By: E. Eaton

Seconded: M. Kortmann

Result: Motion passes unanimously

VI. Report of the Chairman

E. Marchand talked about how positive the Portfolio Night experience is.

VIII. VOTE: Approval of Minutes

VIII.A. Approve Updated Minutes of February 24, 2022

MOTION: To approve the updated minutes of February 24, 2022

By: P. DePaola

Seconded: M. Kortmann

Result: Motion passes unanimously

VIII.B. Approve Minutes of March 10, 2022

MOTION: To approve the minutes of March 10, 2022

By: E. Eaton

Seconded: M. Kortmann

Discussion: E. Eaton asked that on page 4 under the discussion of policy 5131.4 the word obsessively [intrusive] be changed to excessively [intrusive].

C. Williams asked that on page 6, the second full paragraph, the last sentence be finished.

Result: The minutes were tabled to be brought back with these adjustments

IX. Old Business

IX.A. Information: FY23 Budget

Dr. Petrone reviewed the updates, which included the oil and diesel prices being locked in and the custodial contract being settled. He said more will be reviewed at the special meeting on April 7.

X. New Business

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

Dr. Petrone reviewed the procedure. P. DePaola questioned the timing of the notifications. Dr. Petrone explained the legal requirements as they relate to the Town Referendum.

MOTION: That 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 2021-2022 school year, and that the Superintendent of Schools is directed to advise such persons in writing of this action

By: E. Eaton

Seconded: M. Kortmann

Result: The motion passed unanimously, with regret.

MOTION: To add bullying survey to the agenda under new business

By: C. Williams

Seconded: C. Rossignol

Result: Motion fails 3-3 (E. Marchand, M. Kortmann, E. Eaton against)

MOTION: To add Board curriculum review for CGS ELA and social emotional learning for discussion on the agenda

By: C. Rossignol

Seconded: C. Williams

Result: Motion fails 3-3 (E. Marchand, M. Kortmann, E. Eaton against)

C. Williams said there was not a chance for discussion on those motions.

M. Kortmann said she doesn't believe there is discussion for adding to an agenda.

C. Rossignol called for a Point of Order: there was not a chance for discussion.

E. Marchand allowed for a brief discussion at this point.

C. Williams said she wanted to know why there has to be a curriculum request to go on an agenda and why it just can't be opened up for review. Dr. Petrone said the usual curriculum review will happen in the summer and we are in the process of providing access to the curriculum for folks, which should be available in the very near future.

XI. Report of Board Members

XI.A. Information: Transportation Committee Report, Meeting of March 17, 2022

E. Marchand reviewed the Transportation Committee meeting of March 17. [The minutes are attached to BoardBook for review.]

P. DePaola noted most of the other bus companies are in the same situation with the lack of drivers.

XI.B. Information: School Building Committee Meeting of March 22, 2022

M. Kortmann reported and talked about the roof project. She noted the issues at the state level, which have caused a delay. Mr. Carroll added that more is needed even after the plan is approved by the Commissioner.

Dr. Petrone said it is doubtful the project will be ready for the summer, which in turn will delay the solar project.

M. Kortmann continued and talked about the HVAC improvements and how they are designed for a new roof. She noted that this project would not happen this summer.

M. Kortmann also spoke about new discussions surrounding a "renovate as new" project. She said the project is still being reviewed before it can be presented for a decision. There was a conversation about the details of the plan.

XI.C. Information: CHS Athletic Advisory Meeting Report

E. Marchand noted the meeting was postponed.

XII. Adjournment

MOTION: To adjourn the meeting at 9:02 p.m.

By: C. Williams

Seconded: M. Kortmann

Result: Motion passes unanimously

Respectfully submitted:

Kimberlee Arey Delorme
Board Clerk

Approved: April 28, 2022

Courtney Rossignol
73 Brenda Lane

Coventry Board of Education. I stand here tonight in solidarity with our neighbors because their children pleaded with them to not come here tonight in fear of the retaliation they may face in the coming days behind the 4 walls that we, as parents, are supposed to trust with our children's safety. I grew up in Coventry, I went to school in Coventry, and I'll tell you, bullying was a problem then, and sadly it seems to continue to be a problem now. Middle school is hard, it's awkward, it's confusing, and it's uncomfortable. But there is no space, no matter where you align, for bullying to happen, or for our children to be in fear of going to school. Below are 4 letters, 2 from students of CNHMS, and 2 from parents. I will do my best to paraphrase for the sake of time.

#1:

To the Coventry Board of Education,

We are failing. We are failing to properly protect our students from the serious offense of bullying. I have been in the mental health field in some capacity for most of my professional life. I have seen the devastating effects of bullying and what it can lead to. I have seen students who are bullied turn to drugs, attempt suicide, fail in school, and even end their own life. This has to be taken more seriously than it currently is.

My child has been the victim of bullying for several years, both at GHR and at CNHS. Oftentimes teachers and staff brush off these comments or actions. They are sometimes referred to as "typical teenage behaviors for middle schoolers". Instead of following state-mandated guidelines, teachers and staff have chosen in the past to "fix" these problems on their own. This includes moving students desks, changing seats, and things of that nature. This is done intentionally to bypass reporting requirements and minimize the victim, which should never be done.

My child has been bullied so badly that they have had to enroll in therapy, have constant breakdowns, and consider a school change. This is unacceptable.

I believe all of you on the Board are parents. We have all completed grade/middle school and have likely all been bullied at one point or another in your lives. The notion that bullying or making fun of a classmate is just normal, character-building behavior is no longer acceptable in 2022. There needs to be a zero tolerance stance on bullying, and students need to know the consequences should they choose to ignore these rules. This is not being done.

Several students have confided in my wife and I, and the offenders names are usually the same. Several parents have filed complaints with the school and seen nothing done but a brush off. The same "problem" students continue their abusive actions on a DAILY basis, not fearing any disciplinary action.

I urge the school board to take a serious look at school bullying and come up with a better plan of action, because this one isn't working. Perhaps an anonymous survey of students will educate you all on just how out of control the issue really is. I yield to you as to how to properly address this going forward, as you are the qualified elected officials that we voted into office. Just do something. Our kids need to know that they can arrive at school without the fear of being threatened, put down, or even assaulted. Middle school is hard enough for students during the awkward transition into adulthood...being bullied shouldn't be on the front of their minds on a daily basis...especially when they know that the offenders have no fear of consequence.

#2:

I am a student at Capt. Nathan Hale Middle School. I have been dealing with bullying since first grade. I have also seen kids being bullied. When I see it I try to say something but then I just end up in trouble and told to mind my own business by the adults. When I have gone to the principals and counselors they don't listen to what I am actually saying. They tried to get me to think differently so that I'll change my story to what they want. Kids at the school have no discipline, they do whatever they want. They will laugh about how they lied and got away with it. Kids make verbal threats and put their hands on myself and other students. When I have complained about being hurt and threatened harm done to me I just get told "to go back to class, they didn't mean what they said, they were just joking". I don't think doing physical harm to me is a joke. I do not feel safe at school. There's no one to talk to that makes me feel actually heard and safe. I used to look forward to school and now I don't even want to wake up to go. I wish there was another option for middle school that I could go to. In first grade I was punched in the face and had a black eye and bloody nose. I was sent to the nurse and no one called my parents. I felt so embarrassed that kids saw that and adults and nothing. When I stepped off the bus my parents came running out to the bus because they could see my black eye from the window, it was that bad. My parents tried to have something done but they were just told it was just an accident. There recently was a fight in the cafeteria where kids were throwing punches and the teachers just stood there talking to each other not even breaking up the fight. I have been spit in the face that made me feel so low and not important to have someone violate my space. When I went to the office about it they called my mom to let her know what happened, they talked to us about how that was inappropriate and to use the talk it out method and go back to class. That made me feel like they didn't care how I was feeling like there was no consequence. Now that I'm in middle school it has only gotten worse. I feel like the adults don't believe that girls can be bullies too. There are a lot of girls who bully, say terrible things about hurting others and are physical with kids including me but again when I speak up it's just they aren't going to do anything. There needs to be more done at the school. No one else should have to go through what I have gone through. Other things have happened to me with physical harm but I'm not ready to open up with that in an open form I'm afraid of what people will say to me. I would feel more safe if people in the school cared more about me and other kids like me. I just want to learn in a safe environment with leaders who stop the negative mean bully comments and no longer make excuses for them. I might even feel better if the people in charge didn't come off so rude or feel like I'm a bother to them. When that happens I will no longer be scared to go to school.

Thank you

#3:

I have been bullied by kids from CNHMS. I have also been speaking to others from CNHMS who have been bullied or have witnessed bullying and these patterns seem very similar. Mental health in kids and teens around my age is very important. Bullying is not something people should add to these kids' plates, including mine. When this bullying issue started, I was afraid to report these bullies because I didn't want to be targeted or face repercussions. This is not okay, and will never be. One that I've gotten bullied, but two, that it was because of my appearance. This has impacted my mental health. My teacher recognized the bullying and asked them to stop but didn't really do anything beyond that. The buses have also been a problem. Bullying on the bus has sometimes been worse in the classroom. With comments on what I was wearing or my makeup. Sometimes I would end up in tears because of this. Over a period of time my parents reported this and minimal was done to stop it. We as a family have to ask for something to be done. Instead of the school reaching out to me and/or my parents about the issue after the school was told by me and my family. This school basically did nothing.

Statement provided by Nikki McLaughlin 3.31.22

Hello, I'm a student from Captain Nathan Hale Middle School and I'm writing this because I and others should be heard. I've faced many challenges with the school and them not doing enough to help me feel safe while being surrounded by a place I have to be forced to show up to everyday. I've not had only one, not two, but three incidents where I report a Bully situation and the school has not helped or corrected the situation to help change a thing. My opinion on this topic of bullying could go on for hours And you wouldn't be able to change my mind that it will never be okay in any case. Kids get picked on for easily doing nothing and try and get help and it's never taken to the heart. If anyone were to understand it the most it would be me, Do better.

The student that wrote this has come home from school with bruises on her body. She has been relentlessly bullied for years and nothing is being done. She is now leaving school early because she's afraid to be there. Her parents have called the school numerous times to be told it would be looked into. This is clearly impacting her mental health and right to a safe education

"The coventry board of education is committed to creating and maintaining an educational environment that is physically, emotionally and intellectually safe and thus free from bullying, dating violence, harassment and discrimination."

That is the first line in the student handbook under the bullying policy. I'm here to state how untrue that statement is. The bullying that happens in the Coventry school system is outright appalling. You have students who are afraid to come to school. They are afraid and you, as the board of ed have failed them. I personally pulled my oldest child from the Coventry school system because of how the middle school handles bullying situations. I know I am not the only one to do this and I know several more parents who have opted for alternative high schools because of this.

Are you guys aware of the fighting and bullying that is occurring in your school? I have kids who have sent me several videos on snapchat of kids being assaulted in the hallways. Do you know what all of these videos have in common? There is not a single teacher present in any of them. I'm not talking after school or on the bus, I'm talking about passing time in the hallways. Where are the teachers? Is it not their job to keep our children safe during school hours? Is the administration honestly unaware of this? I'm fully aware that parents can not be told about the disciplinary action of other students but the students can see it for themselves. When girls are being groped in the hallway and nothing is done, when childrens are coming home with concussions the the response the parent received is "well, nobody witnessed it so there's nothing we can do" When parents go as far as to call the cops to report an assault only to be told that the school has ultimate control about what happens. There needs to be consequences for these actions, actual consequences not just an ISS or a lunch detention. The safety of our children needs to matter.