



## East Greenwich School Committee Meeting

Tuesday, January 23, 2024  
6:00 pm

Hybrid Meeting: Cole Middle School & Via Zoom

### Minutes

#### Those in attendance

**School Committee:** Ms. Alyson Powell, Chair; Ms. Nicole Bucka, Vice-Chair; Ms. Clare Cecil-Karb (arrived at 6:08 pm); Mr. Kevin Murphy; Mr. Tim Munoz; Dr. Eugene Quinn

**Additional Attendees:** Dr. Brian Ricca, Superintendent; Mr. Michael Podraza, Assistant Superintendent; Mr. Neil Marcaccio, Director of Student Services; Mrs. Maggie Baker, Director of Administration; Mrs. Amy Healey, School Committee Clerk; Attorney Aubrey Lombardo

**Absent:** Mr. William Hangan

#### I. **Call to Order**

Ms. Powell called the meeting to order at 6:05 pm.

#### II. **Pledge of Allegiance**

- III. **Recess Open Session and Convene Executive Session** for discussion and/or action regarding those items of business exempt from open meetings under RIGL 42-26-4 and RIGL 42-46-5(a)(1) - Employee Job Performance, Individuals have been notified, including their right to have any discussion held in open session.

*On a motion by Dr. Quinn, seconded by Ms. Bucka, the Committee voted 5-0 to Recess Open Session and Convene Executive Session. Ms. Cecil-Karb was not present for the vote.*

#### IV. **Adjourn Executive Session and Reconvene Open Session**

*At 6:11 pm, on a motion by Dr. Quinn, seconded by Mr. Murphy, the Committee voted 6-0 to Adjourn Executive Session and Reconvene Open Session.*

**V. Seal Executive Session Minutes of January 23, 2024 and disclosure of Executive Session votes.**

*On a motion by Ms. Bucka, seconded by Mr. Murphy, the Committee voted 6-0 to Seal the Executive Session Minutes of January 23, 2024.*

Ms. Powell disclosed that no votes were taken in Executive Session.

**VI. Public Comment**

No public comment

**VII. Approval of Minutes of Previous Meetings**

A. January 9, 2024 Regular Session Minutes

*On a motion by Dr. Quinn, seconded by Ms. Cecil-Karb, the Committee voted 6-0 to approve the minutes of January 9, 2024.*

**VIII. Action Items**

A. School Committee Approval of Homeschool Request

*On a motion by Dr. Quinn, seconded by Mr. Munoz, the Committee voted 6-0 to approve the homeschool request.*

B. School Committee Approval of Non-Renewal of One-Year Only Teachers

*On a motion by Dr. Quinn, seconded by Ms. Bucka, the Committee voted 6-0 to approve the non-renewal of one-year only teachers.*

C. School Committee Approval of 2024 RI Student Survey

Dr. Ricca addressed some questions previously submitted by School Committee members.

- 1) The District will receive its data back in the form of a report once the data has been analyzed.
- 2) The District will qualify for funds or a RISAS counselor (Student Assistance Counselor) if funds become available.
- 3) The survey helps the community and students to understand substance use and mental health challenges and successes. The Kent Prevention Coalition and the late Bob Houghtaling used this data to understand local needs and access

federal grants to support prevention work. Programs include Mental Health First Aid Training, Drug Free Community grant, BEE Smart Program and PAWS.

Ms. Bucka said that she was pleased with the policy change that now shares the survey data with the District.

Attorney Lombardo explained that this is not a required survey. Parents need to be made aware of the survey, allowed to opt out their children and preview the survey. Students can opt out or skip questions.

Ms. Cecil-Karb said that it is important to have staff available to answer questions that students may have while completing the survey.

Mr. Munoz inquired as to who has access to the results and recommends programs. Dr. Ricca replied that this data will guide the work of the Kent Prevention Coalition and the District. Mr. Munoz said that it would be helpful for the School Committee to be updated on the continuation or programs that were being worked on by the late Mr. Houghtaling.

*On a motion by Ms. Cecil-Karb, seconded by Dr. Quinn, the Committee voted 6-0 to approve the Rhode Island Student Survey.*

#### D. School Committee Approval of the transfer of \$287,597 from Fund Balance for Special Education Settlement Agreements

Dr. Quinn said that while this is a large number, it is not out of line with other districts' special education expenses.

Mr. Munoz pointed out that this is a risk factor that the school budget faces every year. Special education costs are a variable that can not be predicted or forecast with accuracy. Monies need to be put aside for unexpected expenses such as this.

Dr. Quinn stated that there is a process for calculating these unexpected expenses.

Attorney Lombardo said that special education department is working very hard to avoid these types of situations going forward.

*On a motion by Dr. Quinn, seconded by Mr. Murphy, the Committee voted 6-0 to approve the transfer of \$287,597 from Fund Balance for the Special Education Settlement Agreements.*

#### E. School Committee Approval of 2024-2025 Program of Studies

Ms. Cecil-Karb made a motion to approve the Program of Studies. Dr. Quinn seconded the motion. The Committee discussed the program of studies.

Ms. Bucka thanked EGHS Principal Dr. Page for providing additional information about a small population of students. She said that she did not understand that tabling this item at the last meeting would prohibit discussion. Ms. Bucka said that the questions that she raised were helpful in improving the document.

Dr. Quinn stated that it is a bad precedent to hold up operations of the school department because of an outstanding question.

Dr. Ricca stated that budgets were due two weeks ago and that without an approved program of studies, the budget process could not be completed. The high school needs to begin scheduling.

Dr. Page said that the requested course descriptions can be incorporated into the program of studies.

Ms. Bucka said that the program of studies should be brought before the School Committee sooner. With the only change left is to provide additional details, she does not feel as though the program of studies has been held up.

Ms. Cecil-Karb said that it is not the Committee's intention to hold up operations; just to make certain that the most vulnerable learned are represented.

Mr. Munoz proposed an annual meeting earlier in the process in order to allow time for a discussion of curriculum and the program of studies.

*Ms. Bucka made a motion to amend the motion to approve the SY 2024-2025 Program of Studies contingent on two course descriptions for unified math being added. Ms. Cecil-Karb seconded the amended motion which was approved 5-1. Dr. Quinn opposed the amendment.*

*The motion as amended was approved 6-0 by the Committee.*

#### F. School Committee Appointment to Negotiating Team for Custodians & Maintenance Association / NEARI / NEA

Dr. Ricca had previously asked the School Committee members to let him know if they have an interest in serving on this team. Dr. Ricca said that the union would have 3 members on the negotiating team and suggested keeping the District's team around the same size. Dr. Quinn expressed his interest in serving.

Ms. Powell said that Ms. Bucka also expressed interest in serving on the negotiating team. Ms. Bucka stated that she had conflicts that precluded her from participating in the teacher and paraprofessional negotiations and would like to assist with this one. With advanced notice, she said that she would be available during the day when the meetings will be scheduled.

Ms. Bucka inquired about the timeline for settling this contract. Attorney Lombardo expressed optimism that the contract would not need major overhaul. The district team will meet to develop a proposal to present to the union. 3-4 negotiating meetings are likely to take place.

Ms. Powell appointed Dr. Quinn and Ms. Bucka to the negotiating team for the custodians and maintenance union.

## IX. Discussion

### A. Discussion of the Special Education Audit

Ms. Bucka began the discussion of the Special Education Audit with a presentation. The personnel portion of the audit had been delayed back in the Fall.

- Background
  - Federal Obligation to Fully Fund IDEA
  - State Obligation
  - Local Obligation
    - Recent Appropriation History
- Summary
  - Federal Obligation to Fully Fund IDEA: Federal commitment from IDEA's enactment (40% funding) has never been met by the U.S. Government; in fact, it was in a steady decrease until President Biden's tenure. This passes the gap to the state level.
  - State Obligation: The state of RI has no separate funding (or weight added to the core amount) for the education of students with disabilities. Most states (47) provide additional weight (and in some cases multiple additional weight) for this population. This passes the gap to the local level
  - Local Obligation: Also as a result of the state funding formula that allocates less state funding ratio for affluent communities (who can fund more of their own system through tax dollars), EGSD is - 90% funded by our local tax appropriation which over the last 16 years has had a shortfall of \$126 million affecting all aspects of operations
- Dynamics Post-COVID compounding impact:
  - Trouble Funding Staff +
  - Trouble Finding Staff +

- Trouble Training & Retaining Staff
- A focus on the Governance Role
  - Policy
  - Personnel
  - Health & Wellness
  - Finance
- Budget Recommendations
  - Experiment with staffing changes
  - Fund and diversity professional development approaches
  - Optimize paraprofessional roles
- General Recommendations
  - Invest in continuous professional development for special educators, etc
  - Clarify roles and responsibilities
  - Establish a staffing policy
  - Streamline teams and meetings
  - Incorporate periodic IEP Team meetings to review data and student progress
  - Hold educators accountable for fully implementing IEPs.

Ms. Bucka said that she was surprised by the information about caseloads. She requested that a staffing policy be developed. Ms. Powell said that a request for a new policy would require an action item on a future school committee agenda.

The Committee discussed bringing these staffing recommendations to the sub-committees.

Ms. Bucka asked for updates on the audit's recommendations. Mr. Marcaccio replied that a plan is being developed with prioritized goals.

## X. Policies

### A. Repeal of Policies (Second Read)

1. Policy # 5120 School Department Acknowledgement of Service
2. Policy # 5125 Staff Attendance
3. Policy # 5210 Teacher Evaluation Process

*On a motion by Mr. Munoz, seconded by Dr. Quinn, the Committee voted 6-0 to repeal Policy #5210, Policy # 5215 and Policy # 5210.*

## IX. Adjournment

*At 7:51 pm, Dr. Quinn on a motion by Dr. Quinn, seconded by Mr. Murphy, the Committee voted 6-0 to adjourn.*

Respectfully submitted,

Amy J. Healey  
School Committee Clerk

*Approved 2-27-24*