

The Business Meeting of the New London Board of Education was held on September 9, 2024 in the New London Public Schools' Welcome Center.

DRAFT

1. Call to Order

President Elaine Maynard-Adams called the meeting to order at 7:02 p.m.

Present for the Board of Education: President – Elaine Maynard-Adams
Vice-President – Bianca Alexis-Sylvain
Secretary – Nathan Caron

Board Members Present: Karen Bergin
Alisha Blake
Danni Cruz
Susan Hambey

Present for the administration: Dr. Cynthia Ritchie, Superintendent of Schools

2. Public Comment

Gabriela Gonzalez-Bonet, Ledyard – Ms. Gonzalez-Bonet shared that she made to come to this district from Ledyard with an out of district student, as she was in need of onsite after school programming that Ledyard could not provide. She stated that her son thrived and became a successful student. Now, her youngest daughter attends the school but school does not get out as late as it used to, including an early Wednesday dismissal. She added that after school programming cannot be an option for her and her child if they are no longer available. She stated that she is also an educator who has professional development on Wednesdays, and would like more after school programming options for her child. Ms. Gonzalez-Bonet also expressed her frustration of there no longer being a librarian at Winthrop, and that no longer being offered as a special. She reminded the Board that New London's are schools of choice and that to retain and recruit out of district students, New London needs to compete with what other hometown schools can offer.

Amy Tortoriello, Waterford – Ms. Tortoriello stated that her son goes to Great Neck and her daughter attends Winthrop. She stated she was present at the meeting to request funding for the librarian. A cornerstone of education is to develop a love and development of reading. She has kids who love reading and that is continued through the librarian in school, but some kids do not have parents who have the attention to foster the love of reading. She would like to request the funding for the librarian.

Katherine Trejo-Thorpe, New London – Ms. Trejo-Thorpe stated that she has been a parent of Winthrop students for 11 years, with her current student in attendance being in

2nd grade. She stated that in addition to being a parent she also works at the Mystic-Noank library and is here to address the cut of the Winthrop library position. She stated that as someone who works in a library, she knows firsthand the vital roles that a librarian plays in supporting students and teachers. They recommend books, collect materials, help select them, and help teachers select books for their classrooms. The library period is also used as essential prep and training time for teachers which is crucial for having quality instruction. In a district like New London, where we are Title I, and many families face economic challenges, these resources are more important than ever. With only 21% of New London elementary students testing at or above a proficient level in reading, our students need more support, not less. Librarians help develop literacy skills, research abilities and a love for reading that will benefit our students. Restoring this position is crucial. It is not just about books, it is about ensuring equitable educational opportunities and supporting our teachers. She urged the Board to prioritize reinstating the Winthrop library position.

Barbara Otero, New London – Ms. Otero stated that she is the events and programming planner with the Winthrop STEM PTO and her daughter is a 2nd grader there in the year-round program. She said that it has been brought to her attention that the librarian position has been eliminated due to budget cuts. She explained that her daughter loves to read and she cannot express enough the importance of the library position. There are a lot of benefits that a knowledgeable librarian can bring. She urged the Board to take this seriously and restore this position.

3. Reports and Communications

- Board Chairperson's Report

Ms. Maynard-Adams shared that she attended a presentation on the topic of Disengaged Youth hosted by the Connecticut Conference of Municipalities and the Dalio Foundation. The idea of this presentation and series of discussions on this topic was to develop strategies for these disengaged young people to be back involved with either their education or their career path. She expressed her disappointment of a comment made by the President of Connecticut Business Officials, who was present. The comment was that we are over educating our children. She thinks that the intent of the comment was that we are so focused on students going to college that the students are not as likely to apply for other openings that exist that do not require a college degree. She stated that she continues to be proud of the work that we do and is excited for the youth manufacturing pipeline here in district.

4. Information and Reports

- i. Superintendent's Report

- Summer School Overview Presentation

- Dr. Jennifer Hills-Papetti, Assistant Superintendent of Schools, gave a brief presentation and overview on the

Summer School Programming that occurred. The presentation included the following topics:

- Elementary Summer School
- ESY
- Secondary Summer School
- Weather theme across grades K-8

A copy of this presentation is available upon request.

5. Approval of the Minutes

- August 26, 2024 – Business Meeting

Motion by Ms. Blake, seconded by Ms. Hambey, to approve the August 26, 2024 Business Meeting Minutes.

Motion carried, 5-0-2

Abstaining: Mr. Cruz

Ms. Alexis-Sylvain

6. Approval of the Consent Agenda

Motion by Ms. Maynard-Adams, seconded by Mr. Caron, that the following items, as set forth on the Consent Agenda for the Business Meeting of September 9, 2024 be approved unless removed by a Board member or the Superintendent of Schools:

A. Superintendent's Written Report

- I. Student and Family Support Services
- II. Business and Finance
- III. Operations – Includes Magnet Pathways, Athletics, Facilities and Technology

B. Action Items

- I. Approve Policy 4112.112 – Sexual Harassment and Title IX (staff) for its Second and Final Reading
- II. Approve Policy 5145.5 – Sexual Harassment and Title IX (students) for its Second and Final Reading
- III. Approve Policy 5131.3 – Student use of Motor Vehicles for its Second and Final Reading
- IV. Approve Policy 5141 – Health Assessments – Screenings – Immunizations for its Second and Final Reading
- V. Rescind Policy Series 5000 – Immunizations for its Second and Final Reading

Motion carried, 7-0

7. Items Pulled from Consent Agenda

A. Superintendent's Written Report - Academics

Motion by Ms. Maynard-Adams, seconded by Mr. Caron, to receive the Academics Report.

Ms. Maynard-Adams stated that she understands that the after-school programs are full, and asked what can be done. Dr. Ritchie thanked the parents that came forward today to speak during the public comment portion of the meeting. She stated that after school programs are in place, but that they filled to capacity quite quickly. She stated that there are still some vacant staff positions, and once they are filled there can be additional slots that are opened up. She also noted that the district has applied for an additional grant for after school opportunities, but that there likely won't be word of a decision until later in September.

Motion carried, 7-0

B. Superintendent's Written Report – Human Resources

Motion by Ms. Maynard-Adams, seconded by Mr. Caron, to receive the Human Resources Report.

Ms. Maynard-Adams stated that she is concerned about the vacancy of the position of Principal at Jennings. Dr. Ritchie explained that it has been advertised through national searches for principals, Magnet Schools of America, as well as through postings on social media sites such as LinkedIn. She stated that there are a handful of applicants, and the team is getting ready to do interviews, but that there is a desire for a robust pool of applicants to interview.

Motion carried, 7-0

C. Approve Policy 5131.911 – Bullying & Safe School Climate Plan for its Second and Final Reading

Motion by Ms. Hambey, seconded by Ms. Blake, to approve Policy 5131.911 – Bullying & Safe School Climate Plan for its Second and Final Reading.

Ms. Hambey stated that she read that the term challenging behaviors is now included in the bullying policy. Ms. Rivera, Executive Director of School and Family Supports, stated that the term is being changed from bullying to challenging behavior by legislation. This is now a broader term for investigative purposes. She continued that the legislative changes do not go into effect until 2025, but that the district has opted to implement them early. All administrators have been trained and new procedures have been rolled out. All schools must also have a safe school climate specialist. Students are also trained on the procedures through Second Step.

Motion carried, 7-0**8. Board Comments, Questions**

Ms. Blake stated that this is her family's ninth year as a Jennings family, and wants to thank everyone for all that they do. The start of the school year has gone off without a hitch, and she stated that it is interesting being a parent and seeing the inner workings of a space where children are thriving. She added that she understands there is still work to do in the building, and whoever will lead in that space will do their due diligence, but Mr. Brown has been wonderful and she would like to thank all staff for a great first couple of weeks.

Mr. Cruz stated that he was not at the last meeting due to a health issue, so wanted to take a moment to welcome back the students, staff and administrators to a new school year. He hopes everyone has a great year and loves the theme of Ignite Learning! He believes that it represents New London and the diversity within the district.

Ms. Alexis-Sylvain stated that it is great to see everyone here and thanked all for the summer programming. It was nice to see students in the parks and at the schools. She knows the staff are motivated and excited for the school year. She thanked the parents for coming to speak as well, and invited them to continue to come back.

Ms. Bergin shared that she wanted to tell the parents that she remembers what it was like to come to the meetings, speak and not get a response. She stated that the Board appreciates hearing from them and does not want them to think that the Board does not hear and understand what they are saying. She added that the statements and comments might be worth being directed towards another public group that might not value what the cuts or impact mean to the schools. She thinks that the value and impact of what they have to say is meaningful.

Mr. Caron echoed his colleagues statements and thanked the parents for being at the meeting. He stated that there was a name mentioned in the backup information that was important to mention publicly, and that is Valerie Tamano. He stated that she has been devoted to the district for many years, and continues to do so, including hosting a bus tour for the newly hired staff.

Ms. Hambey stated she read a lot of Dr. Ritchie's emails and wanted to highlight our senior Crystal Christie who was a fellow with the O'Neill Theater, and congratulations to Cynthia who attended a presentation at Columbia University.

Dr. Ritchie shared that she wanted to make a shout out to our students. Convocation was an amazing event for the district. She stated she took a big risk and designed the program of unite learning to show what it looks like to learn together. Convocation was student led without even needing to practice. Staff learned how to say hello in multiple languages, the student MCs were from Winthrop, there was a lesson on cultural drumming, and a lesson on dancing. Additionally, there was a game show at the end with trivia. Students delivered flowers to Valerie Tamano, Barbara Timpkin, the Teacher of the Year and the

Paraprofessional of the Year. She expressed how proud she is of the incredible students and school community.

Ms. Maynard-Adams stated that to follow up on the public comment this evening, her understanding is that the library at Winthrop is not closed and that there has not been a true Library Media Specialist for some time. Dr. Ritchie confirmed that the library is not closed, and that teachers do have the ability to bring their students in, and students have the opportunity to use the books there. She noted that it was a Library Media Technician position, which was a part of the secretarial union, and that staff member had retired. She added that there were over 60 positions that were cut from the budget to start the school year, and these discussions began last January and continued through June. She stated that while it is not a part of the specials rotation, staff have the ability to utilize the space, and Principal Podeszwa would be communicating further plans with both the staff and parents.

9. Adjournment

Motion by Mr. Cruz, seconded by Ms. Blake, to adjourn the meeting.

Motion carried, 7-0

The meeting was adjourned at 7:57p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Nathan Caron
Secretary, Board of Education