

**West Valley Central School Board of Education
Official Minutes**

Regular Meeting August 25, 2020 via ZOOM meeting due to COVID restrictions

Members Present: Niesyty, Ploetz, Davis, Harmony, Frank

Absent: Klahn

Others Present: Amodeo, O'Brien, Ward, Boberg, Gugino, Bryan Hansen, Lindsey Drozd, Jordan Robbins, Orlando Perez, Meghan George-Baker, Kaley McCracken, Alex Fisher, John Zervas, Steve Wedvik, Mike Gerwitz, Mary Defoe, Jackie Mumbach, Leah Seltzer, Jenn Seltzer, Tom Seltzer, Christine Erascella, Steve Colf, Kevin Murray, Amanda Lawrence, Madison Lawrence, Nick Peters, Steve Kenworthy, Robert Conrad, Debbie Ehnes, Tina Smith, Jacob Coluci, Christine Fisher, Robert Green, Lisa Green, Jordan Seltzer, Brad Frank, Mike Harmony, Gary Niesyty, Dana Westfall, Katie Clouse, Angela Ghani, Nikki Hickey, Patti Kowalski, Rae Ann Lindberg

I. CALL TO ORDER

Regular Meeting called to order at 7pm with Ploetz presiding.

II. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE to the UNITED STATES FLAG

III. Moved by Harmony, seconded by Niesyty to ADOPT the amended AGENDA

Additions: Personnel item (C) Philip Drozd, item (F) Isabella Draine-Soto

Deletions: none

Changes: none

5 ayes, 0 nays, motion accepted

IV. Correspondence/BOE information

none

V. PUBLIC COMMENTS

The Board of Education invites you, the residents of our school community, to feel comfortable in sharing matters of interest or concern that you might have with us. The Board President will be happy to recognize those of you who wish to speak. Please indicate this on the sign in sheet and you will be called on in order, identify yourself with your name and address.

Those items brought to the attention of the Board during this time may be taken under consideration for future response or action. We ask that individual comments be limited to a few minutes in order to accomplish the evening's agenda.

We respectfully ask that issues related to specific school district personnel or students be brought to the attention of the Superintendent or Principal privately.

Orlando Perez stated first he wanted to thank the board of education for volunteering your precious time. It is a thankless job and you are under a lot of freshmen. The school has been saddled with eight years of inaction. Declining enrollment, deteriorating

facilities, increasing budgets, failed budgets, bus proposal voted down, multiple controllers, reports blasting the school for overtaxing and over budgeting. And finally, New York State deeming the school district as a target school - distressful. I am saddened to see faculty and staff and former board members spreading lies trying to stoke fear in parents and innocent children with half lies and straight out lies. I stood in disbelief that I saw a former board member, several former board members screaming at current board members. You should be ashamed of yourself, these members that they are yelling at, I include a former Marine, retired Navy petty officer, an active lieutenant colonel in the US National Guard. I am thinking who should be ashamed. All we have been asking for is a plan. A strategic plan that will ensure the children are getting the education they need, the facilities will be maintained, and taxpayers get good value for their investment and staff can have an honest assessment of where their district is. For years, we have had board presidents having secret meetings. We have had board members negotiating contracts that they personally benefit from; those days are over. We respectfully request this board, look at the facts, look at the data, put emotions aside and make a plan that we can all get behind.

Meghan George-Baker - Dear Board of Education members, thank you for allowing me to speak tonight and for allowing public comments. Upon reading recommendations from the New York State School Board Association. Of which you are all members and after reading through the West Valley board of education policies that you are accountable to; I'd like to point a few things out to you. The first is that all board members are required to abide by the district policies in the conduct of their duties as stated in board policy 5571. Secondly, I'd like to remind you that this book has come up with eight characteristics of effective school boards. As I read through these, I'd like you to self-reflect and ask yourself if you are doing everything you should be doing. Number one commit to a vision of high expectations and defined goals. Number two have shared beliefs and values that all students can learn. Number three collaboration and communication both internal and external for data use for continuous improvement. Number five align and sustain resources to meet district goals. Number six work as a team with the superintendent on the foundation of trust. Number seven accountability driven focused on policy to improve student achievement. And lastly, eight engage in team and professional development. So, I will ask, when is the last time this board has done a self-evaluation? Such as that is written in the policy 2340. When is the last time this board has done a board retreat with an independent facilitator? This book recommends that if your board is grappling with one or more of these issues; role confusion, lack of trust, communication issues, unrealistic expectations, hidden personal or political agendas, interpersonal conflict, district goals and priorities and feelings of isolation it is recommended to hold the board retreat with an independent facilitator. You have had two board members resign suddenly in the last month. It might be time to sit down with an NYSSBA representative and receive some guidance. NYSSBA also gives best practices for governments and they include serving the best interest of all students not just a narrow philosophy or specific agenda. Representing the entire community, developing open and honest communication, transparency and respect to

encourage trust and collaboration. And understanding your boards operating procedures and protocols. Upon evaluating the board policies, I discovered some that you might need to self-reflect on to make sure that you are in compliance. Take for instance boe policy 3220 and 1510, both of which state that the board encourages public expression at board meetings and the board will designate a specific portion of its meeting agenda for this participation. How about boe policy 3240 regarding school-based planning and shared decision making. When is the last time the board has created a district plan with stakeholders on a shared decision-making team according to your policy, the plan needs to be reviewed every two years. You should also reevaluate your boe policy on executive sessions 1730 in addition to open meetings law to make sure that you are not discussing items in private, that should be discussed during public session. Lastly, I'd like to point out boe policy 4260 in which the board must conduct an annual evaluation of the superintendent and such evaluation must be made available for review by any individual. I would like to see Eric Lawton's previous evaluations given to those who requested them for review. If for some reason that these cannot be provided. I would be left to assume that such evaluations, do not exist. And that would mean that the board pushed the former superintendent to resign his post a year before his retirement and the board had no ground to do so, based on potentially poor evaluations, Your job as an elected board member is to act as an advocate for the school district, it is time to stand with your community, the students and the staff and be loud and proud about being a West Valley Wildcat. Thank you

Kaley McCracken - Dear Board of Education, I know you have said that you guys do not intend to close down the West Valley Central School. What do you hope to accomplish during your time on the board to ensure that the school stays open?

Alex Fisher - I would like to thank the school board for giving us time to talk to them. So, I am kind of with Miss George – it feels like there is no way for us to know what is going on. No information is being provided to us and that is why there is misinformation being spread out in the community. If there were more transparency, then everybody might be able to work together better.

John Zerfas – I do not have a rehearsed speech to give. I guess I want to just thank the Board and Mark Ward for stepping up and all the new faces that have come onto the board has been a direct result of public vote, which is a good indication of how the public feels about what's been going on in school over these years. Changes are tough, I know you guys have some hard decisions ahead of you. I am a board member myself and I understand what tough changes are. It is going to get tough with all the changes that are happening with COVID 19. But I want to thank you guys for taking the time to be part of this. Yeah, I just want you to keep in mind that there has been a lot of budgets voted down and there has been a lot of current board members replaced because of inaction. So I think it is time that you take some action in looking at the facts and don't base everything on the people that are in this room, myself included, think about who is really voting for you people and what they represent. Thank you.

Steve Wedvik – I do not have anything prepared. I did want to express concern with the outcome of the most recent study. I think the desire of a lot of taxpayers who had recently in 2019 voted to approve the budget. That some actionable items were going to come from that study that was going to be a hard look at efficiencies within this building, within the educational structure and also an attempt to reduce the tax levy some more. I'm not quite sure what happened. I don't know why. You know there are multiple people that are for this school, for educational opportunities for students but also to make sure that taxpayers are getting a result for their investment. You should progress towards some additional information on that study. To create some actionable items to create a five-year plan and work toward that end state. Instead of hearing here say that we are going to close the school in two years and all this crazy stuff there has to be a plan and you have to act on that plan. If the plan doesn't work, then you reassess but you have to start a plan. We have been asking for that since I've been in this building since 2003 and I've never seen it. Historically, it fell on the superintendent's position. I know Mr. Ward is gracious enough to donate his time to us and retirement definitely appreciate it. It is a hard road and we are here to support him and I think you will find the majority of the tax base is here to support an action that this board does that is a plan for the future, whatever it may be. Thank you.

Mary Defoe – also does not have anything written down. When I was notified on the removal of Mr. Lawton as superintendent. My grandson and I were upset. Mr. Lawton has been a wonderful superintendent. He has brought the community together, the kids loved him, and I think parents did too. And I believe the teachers thought a lot of him. That was my opinion. That was what I understood was that he did not want to go. But for some reason, he was given no choice. The idea that we have him go by buying out his contract and then bringing in another superintendent does not save money. You've now doubled your expenditures for this year at least. Which makes me wonder what is going on. I do not want to see this school go away because the school makes this town. The school brings people together. These children bring back to us families and they brag about West Valley because West Valley is a school that cares for its students. I can't say that about the bigger schools. Our school has a caring situation here something other schools don't have, the teachers care. A merger would not work because we would still pay for our building, cost more money, transportation would be longer, and our kids would become one in a crowd. Here everyone knows everyone. I don't know what idea that the board has, I have not heard one board member give me an idea on what they want and why they want it. I do know that several people who have said, well, we should merge are people that have sent their kids to another school and pay to go. If that is what they want, then go. But I think most of our kids and most of our parents want the kids here. Thank you

Kevin Murray – It is good to see a lot of people out here. I know 5 or 6 years ago I started a little movement. We had a lot of people here but it's kind of died out because the board wasn't allowing public comment. They were not listening to what was being said and hoping you guys are listening now and a lot of things that are said tonight,

transparency, openness and the right thing to do for the district and for all the invested parties – taxpayers, kids, teachers, and staff. That is what is going to be the right thing to do here. That's all we asked for back then, but we got kind of shunned away, and pushed away. We just wanted opportunities and the tax rates to come down to make it a little bit more equitable for people to live here in this town. I guess that is still what we want to see today - is people to move to this town because it is equitable because we have a good education system whatever that might look like in the future. Thank you for at least listening.

Amanda Lawrence Thanks the board for giving her the opportunity to try again. And I am looking forward to sitting with you all, and I personally am for the school and the kids. And I am really hoping by the end of my little temporary term and possibly longer that we can accomplish what we need to accomplish and do something positive here for our children. That is all thanks.

Steve Kenworthy, WVTA president. This is the start of his 19th year of teaching here at West Valley. I sent this letter out to the board members today, I hope you all had a chance to read it. It is dated August 25th Dear BOE members for years, members of the WVTA have heard the words merger, annexation and tuition out hanging over our heads in the past, both communities of Ellicottville and West Valley voted down a merger study. In 2017 those same communities voted down the possibility of annexation by Ellicottville last year and efficiency study indicated that since the tax rates are now in line with surrounding communities. Tuition out is not a viable option for our district anymore. Now more than ever, we have the words tuition out hanging over our heads. This creates a situation of low morale among staff, students and parents and a high turnover rate among our talented young staff. Despite this challenge, we still deliver a high-quality education to our students. We would like to acknowledge Gary, Mike and Heather statement that they desire to keep the school open and its benefits. We would also like to thank the Board for returning to allow public comments for the August 25 meeting, However, this falls far short of what our expectations would be for rescinding our vote of no confidence. Like our community members of the WVTA is still concerned as to the reasons for replacement of our superintendent Eric Lawton. We still have not received any compelling reasons from the board as to why he was replaced in the middle of a pandemic and any cost to the district in terms of a buyout. And whether or not he was resigning required to sign a nondisclosure agreement. We have also not received any financial details including salary and benefits of Mr. Mark Ward's contract. We would also like an explanation of the statement by Mr. Tim Ploetz. Upon reflection and consideration, we felt in light of the upcoming changes ahead for our district, allowing Eric to spend more time with his family, now might provide the smoothest transition for all. What upcoming changes? Any delay in providing this information will only continue to erode the community's minimal confidence in your ability to make rational decisions moving forward. We would also like your assurance that any and all discussions regarding future plans for the district be done in public and that you refrain from small group discussion outside of public session. This would include the

interviewing and appointing any potential board members who are interested in filling a vacancy. Due to the resignation of current board members, since these prospective candidates are not considered school personnel they should not be interviewed in Executive session. This is a violation of open meetings law. As such, we expect a pro school member of the community to be appointed. At the very least the boe could put the position up for public vote. This would help address some of your lack of transparency issues. We would also like your assurance that public comments be allowed from August 25 moving forward. Even if meetings are closed to public attendance in the future and public comments should be allowed through some sort of virtual feature. At a recent meeting one of the boe members stated that they have always allowed public comment. We have found this to be laughable. Considering that the boe, only allowed Heather to publicly read one letter, given the others she stated were received. Finally, the WVTA and community members will be on the circle Tuesday evening and give another show of support for our school. We will have a banner outside saying we commit to our school, we put kids first and we expect each and every board member to sign this banner. Indicating that you support our school in its present PreK through 12th grade form. Eventually, we would like a unified statement of commitment from all seven boe members that you are committed to WV's existence in its prek through 12 form. And that there will be no further discussions of merger, annexation or tuition out. All of us members of the community, staff, students and boe members need to work toward bettering our school and not focusing on ways to destroy it. It is in the community's best interest.

Rae Ann Lindberg states that in Thursday paper – With finances battered by COVID 19 Cuomo withhold state aides to schools. He's withholding 20% of states aid. So, I guess in a time of pandemic when dollars are tight, and Cuomo is going to withhold some money. I don't understand how we can pay for two superintendents and how that decision was reached, without any input. But Steve Wedvik said that Mark was donating his time. So, is that true, Mr. Ward? Mr. Ward says no.

VI. BOARD COMMENTS

Within this section of the agenda, the Board of Education or Administration may take the opportunity to comment on matters of interest or concern.

Tim Ploetz reads the following statement; On behalf of the West Valley Board of Education I want to assure you that the Board has no intentions of making any drastic changes at our school. With the Covid-19 situation, our focus must be on the health and safety of our students and staff.

It will be important as a school district to focus on school accountability, clear and open communication while relying on data to make decisions.

VII. PRESENTATIONS

none

VIII. REPORTS

A. Interim Superintendent, Mark Ward thanks everyone for being here at the meeting. I understand your feelings and I truly do, and I want to assure you that I was not hired to come here to do anything. I'm hired to keep this district going between now in the transition to the next superintendent, and that's what I'll do. My door is always open and easy to get along with and look forward to getting to know all of you. Anybody here who wants to get to know me. And please don't hesitate to stop by. Just to kind of go over a few things that are going on. On the agenda is to appoint a special education teacher, and we went through a process and I was involved at the final part of it. And we've got some good people out there to look at, and we believe we have a great candidate coming forward. We are in the process of creating a room, sort of like an isolation room in the health office. It's something we would have to have if a student or staff member came down with COVID 19 or had symptoms that the nurse would feel would fall within that range we would isolate that student there. When you come in the front door there is a door to your left that is where the student can be picked up. Bill Sloand and his crew are building the wall in there. I did a building and grounds walk through with Bill and looking at some of the things and ideas that you have for the capital projects, there are needed upgrades. From my observation and I think some of those ideas that you have are going to be good to maintain the facility and upgraded so that it doesn't go backwards. It was good for me to learn the building, locate rooms and figure out who does what and when. I also spent a lot of time with Bob Harrington and learned about our transportation needs. Talked about our plans with respect to COVID 19. We can have 22 kids on a bus and could be a few more if they're of the same family. He feels we are in good shape. We have families driving their children to school, walkers and riding the bus. With the increase in families driving their students this will help the bus situation. The parking lot driveway out here needs a little patchwork and I've kind of got a call into the Town of Ashford to see if we can't work on a cooperative agreement. In past times I've done things like that and it seems to work out, maybe one hand washes the other. Reopening school is on everyone's mind and I've had to catch up on this. With Dan's leadership and the committee all working together they have put together a game plan. This is one time we're being small is the perfect formula and believe me most districts will not have the ability to do what we can do here in West Valley, because, as I see it, bringing everybody back is very obtainable and there's going to be challenges. We have our plan that meets the regulations, we have had zoom meetings with parents and faculty. We have received input and it will be an ever-changing plan. We did adjust the school calendar to start school with four superintendent days that are designed to really kick start our plan to make sure our staff from bus drivers to cleaners to secretaries to classroom teachers to teacher assistants and teacher aides to go over it and make sure everyone understands the importance and procedures. Which is really a great idea and I do not think anyone else in this area is doing it. As I said no plan is perfect, but we will make adjustments and changes as

needed to ensure the safety and keep the confidence that you have in us so that we protect everybody here at West Valley.

B. Principal, Daniel Amodeo stated that we are continuing to tweak our plan and work on our reopening plans to make sure we have everything the way it needs to be so we can have our students in a building 100% unless of course those families choose to utilize the remote option. We have a isolation slash quarantine separation room in the event that we have a student with a positive screen of a symptom of COVID 19 in our nurses office. This would be used for staff also. If someone has a fever do not come to school, we are working with various agencies and the health department to get specific clarification on the return to school protocol for staff and students. There is a couple of discrepancies between the NYS education departments plan and the DOH plan which hopefully will be cleared up soon. Once we have the clarification, we can be consistent with our communication to our families, staff and students about what that return to school protocol will be. We do have enough teachers willing to come back. For whether its staff or students, those that are at increased high risk, the district is prepared to provide for accommodations, so long as the district can. We feel confident that we will be ready to open on September 14 with our students. Filtration in our school, the filters in our ventilation systems are replaced every summer. We are looking to go back through and once we receive the new upgraded ones, switch them out. Efficiency of that filter is determined by the Merv rating and it will filter out x number of sized particles at a certain micrometer. And that is what we are looking to put into our ventilation systems, it is recommended in the NYS education department guidance. Having windows open and your doors open, but locked, so that they can easily be shut and quickly done in case of a lockdown or an emergency. This is also recommended to increase airflow and ventilation. All our ventilation systems in the classroom have a cold air return that cycles in fresh air from outside and then each classroom has an exhaust, where the stale air pushes out. Some of the vents in the classroom serve a dual purpose where they'll also bring in the fresh air. In addition to the ventilation unit that is already in the classroom and utilize that through a damper system. So we envision with the arrival of students on the school buses, is that, you know, they would come into the circle as they normally park. We would unload one bus at a time. Each student has their temperature taken on arrival.

C. Business Official, Ann O'Brien

School Buses

For the September 15th meeting we would like to add a couple of motions to scrap and surplus two buses. The first motion would be to scrap bus #91. The bus needs new liners/sleeves, pistons, and a head gasket. Parts to repair the bus would cost approximately \$3,000. In addition, Bob's labor would be about 50 hours. He would need to rent equipment to lift the engine and would likely need an assistant to help with the repair. Sending the bus out for repair would cost about \$6,500 to \$7,000. After repairs Bob believes we would only get around 1,000 miles out of it. Basically, the bus is

terminal, and nobody will take it as a trade in. Scrapping bus #91 downsizes the bus fleet by one as this bus would not be replaced. The second bus is #94, a Dodge Caravan with approximately 75,000 miles. We would like to surplus the vehicle and put it out to bid. We will need to replace bus #88 next year. Bus #88 is a 2008, 65 passenger bus with approximately 111,000 miles.

State Aid Update

Districts in NYS have been notified by the Division of Budget that they will begin deducting 20% from our state aid payments. As you may recall the State Legislature gave the Governor the flexibility to do this upon passage of the state budget. This is related to the state's budget deficit and additional expenses they have incurred due to COVID 19. Also, as you may know, the lack of federal action to provide relief to school districts is part of the reason for the aid reductions. When all is said at the end of the day there is no way of knowing how much state aid we will receive this year. The aid that is being impacted is our general aid, excess cost aid, and BOCES aid. I will keep you up to date as more information is known.

IX. CONSENT AGENDA

none

X. PERSONNEL

A. Moved by Harmony, seconded by Niesyty to accept the resignation of Board member Darla Kent, effective August 20, 2020. 5 ayes, 0 nays, motion accepted

B. Moved by Frank, seconded by Davis to approve the following substitute certified teachers for the 2020-21 school year: Phillip Gorlewski, *Christopher Enser, Kara Andrews, Reann Ehman, Bryan Clayback, Michelle Enser, Lynette Parker
5 ayes, 0 nays, motion accepted

C. Moved by Harmony, seconded by Frank to approve the following substitute uncertified teachers for the 2020-21 school year: Lori Smith, Erin Parish, Rebecca Messer, Kelsey Jeffs, Philip Drozd. 5 ayes, 0 nays, motion accepted

D. Moved by Frank, seconded by Niesyty to approve the following substitute teacher aides for the 2020-21 school year: Christopher Enser, Lori Smith, Donna McVaugh, Erin Parish, Rebecca Messer, Micaela Smith.
5 ayes, 0 nays, motion accepted

E. Moved by Harmony, seconded by Niesyty to approve the following substitute clerk for the 2020-21 school year: Christopher Enser, Bonnie Frank, Erin Parish
5 ayes, 0 nays, motion accepted

F. Moved by Frank, seconded by Harmony to approve the following substitute cleaners for 2020-21 school year: Adriana Roblee, Isabella Draine-Soto
5 ayes, 0 nays, motion accepted

G. Moved by Davis, seconded by Niesyty to approve the following substitute nurse for 2020-21 school year: Krystal George. 5 ayes, 0 nays, motion accepted

H. Moved by Frank, seconded by Harmony to appoint Kristen Collura, who holds the following Professional New York State Teaching Certificates in Elementary Education, Students with Disabilities Grades 1-6, Students with Disabilities Birth – Grade 2, Early Childhood Education Birth – Grade 2 permitting her to teach in the Special Education tenure area, is hereby conditionally appointed to the position of 1.0 FTE Special Education teacher for a probationary period of four (4) years, to commence on 9/1/20 and to end on 6/30/24. Eligibility for tenure at the end of the probationary period is dependent on Kristen Collura receiving APPR ratings of Effective or Highly Effective in 3 of 4 preceding years and no Ineffective composite or overall rating in the final year. The salary during the first year of this appointment will be paid in accordance with the salary schedule as outlined in the Teachers' Collective Bargaining Agreement. 5 ayes, 0 nays, motion accepted

I. Moved by Davis, seconded by Harmony to appoint Katherine Joslyn as a 1.0 FTE long term substitute, less than 10 weeks, in the area of music. Her status as a certified long-term substitute, less than 10 weeks, in the area of music is pending emergency COVID 10 certification verification, start date September 8, 2020. 5 ayes, 0 nays, motion accepted

J. Moved by Harmony, seconded by Frank to appoint Amanda Lawrence to fill the vacancy created by Darla Kent's resignation as a member of the board of education until the May 2021 election. 5 ayes, 0 nays, motion accepted

XI. OLD BUSINESS:

none

XII: NEW BUSINESS:

A. Moved by Davis, seconded by Frank to approve CSE recommendations. 5 ayes, 0 nays, motion accepted

XIII: Moved by Frank, seconded by Harmony to **ADJOURN** at 7:57pm. 5 ayes, 0 nays, motion accepted