

Coventry Board of Education
Coventry, Connecticut

Board of Education Regular Meeting
Approved Minutes of Thursday, January 30, 2025
Administration Building Conference Room

Board Members Present:

Jennifer Beausoleil, Chairperson
Mary Kortmann, Secretary
Joseph Cleary
Emma Eaton
Courtney Rossignol
Christina Williams (arrived at 7:25 p.m.)

Board Members Absent:

Eugene Marchand

Administrators Present:

Dr. David J. Petrone, Superintendent of Schools
Charmaine Bradshaw-Hill, Director of Finance and Operations

Also Present:

Lillian O'Neil, Student Board of Education Representative

I. Call to Order

J. Beausoleil called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

II. Salute to the Flag

J. Beausoleil led the salute to the flag.

III. Audience of Citizens

There were none

IV. Report of the Superintendent

Dr. Petrone provided several updates for the month, including attending the Grade 5 Informance performance, participating in a legislative committee meeting, and hosted an open-door meeting with few parents in attendance. He also hosted his PTO officers' meeting, met with Senator Gordon and our Board Chair regarding the legislative agenda, and met with Commissioner Bye from the Office of Early Childhood to discuss the next steps for universal preschool, including plans to put a cap on cost. The district currently receives Smart Start funding. Additionally, the Goodwin Mobile Lab visited the district.

Dr. Petrone reported that he has posted the position for a new principal at the grammar school, with hopes of filling the role by the fall. The final candidate will be presented to the Board on April 10th. J. Beausoleil stated that E. Eaton will serve as the Board representative on the paper review committee. Dr. Petrone reviewed the committees involved in the hiring process, noting that there will be a meet-and-greet with the final candidate on April 11th. Dr. Giller will transition her replacement before she retires. Additionally, the pause on federal funds has been rescinded.

IV. A. Information and VOTE: Nominate a Staff Member to sit on the American 250 / Coventry CT Committee

Dr. Petrone was notified by the Town Manager that an American 250 Committee is being formed for Coventry, and a school representative has been invited to sit on the committee. He is recommending Emily Kennedy, a Coventry resident, former student, and current teacher, for this role.

MOTION: Nominate Emily Kennedy to serve as the district's representative for the American 250 / Coventry CT Committee

By: E. Eaton

Seconded: C. Rossignol

Result: Motion carries unanimously

IV.B. Information: Board of Education Student Representative Report – Lillian O’Neil

Miss O’Neil provided an update on various high school activities, including the first full Music-a-Thon for the band and chorus as a fundraiser for an upcoming trip to Virginia Beach. Wrestling recently had a Senior Night, and both the girls’ and boys’ basketball teams are performing well. Juniors have met with their guidance counselors to discuss junior seminars.

IV.C. Information: Wit & Wisdom Professional Learning Update (Driver: Deeper Thinking & Learning)

Ms. Mullaly, Ms. Marques, and Ms. McNamar presented the Wit & Wisdom Professional Learning Implementation Plan, which is available on the district’s website via the BoardBook portal.

Ms. Mullaly shared that additional time for professional learning is needed. All other cost for materials have been covered, so there is no further need in that regard. Dr. Petrone stated that as the program progresses, they will provide updates to the Board. The professional development will need to continue for another year.

In regards to increasing professional development days, there was a suggestion to reducing the school year from 181 days to 180 to provide an additional opportunity for professional development. Dr. Petrone stated they are working on a proposal for a separate, one-year only calendar for grades K-5 to offer more professional development opportunities. Once completed, he will present the draft to the Board for review.

M. Kortmann asked if there was a specific reason why the focus is only on grades K-3. Ms. Mullaly responded that those grades are the only ones that the state is requiring. Dr. Petrone noted that the cost impact for expanding beyond those grades is quite high.

Ms. Mullaly added that the biggest challenge lies in grade 3. M. Kortmann then asked if students moving into 3rd grade will face difficulties. Ms. Mullaly responded that those students will need to learn new routines and will likely encounter challenges along the way. We will need dedicated time to ensure they fully understand the new routines.

V. Report of the Chairman

J. Beausoleil reported attending a PTO meeting where the CGS partnership with PTO officers was discussed, and the relationship was appreciated. She mentioned that several parents expressed gratitude for Dr. Giller stepping in asked if she was applying for the principal position, highlighting her dedication to the role. E. Eaton will serve on the principal search committee. Parents interested in participating should reach out to Dr. Petrone's office.

J. Beausoleil announced that the district has signed off on the audit and congratulated C. Bradshaw-Hill for her work. She met with Senator Gordon and discussed three key issues the district is advocating for: excess cost, increasing ECS base amount, special education funding, and HVAC improvements. Additionally, a joint meeting has been scheduled for the Fiscal and Transportation committees to prepare for the RFP for special education transportation.

VI. Communications

There were none.

VII. VOTE: Approval of Minutes

VII.A. Approve Minutes of January 23, 2025

Edits:

Amend page 2, V, seventh paragraph, strike "the outplacement worksheet will be received soon."

Amend page 2, V, last paragraph CGS, strike "cut due to legal obligations", replace "cut due to Special Education needs."

Amend page 3, Central Office, add sentences, "C. Bradshaw-Hill informed the board that she is working with the consultants to determine where and when the stop loss credits were applied that were generated last spring from correlating claims. This is all part of the current reconciliation efforts taking place now."

MOTION: To approve the Minutes of January 23, 2025, as amended

By: C. Rossignol

Seconded: M. Kortmann

Result: Motion carries, with two abstentions by J. Cleary and C. Williams.

VIII. Old Business

VIII. A. Information: Mid-Year Facilities Update – Mr. Trudelle

Mr. Trudelle reviewed a facilities update presentation, which is available on the district's website via the BoardBook portal. Highlights included ongoing projects such as HVAC

upgrades, the transformer timeline, estimated additional energy cost for the new system, the CHS roofing project, and grants in progress or submitted. The presentation also covered LED and energy use improvements throughout the district, as well as the district's vehicle inventory and replacement plan. Other district projects were also reviewed.

He explained the reasoning behind not having a fixed rate with Eversource, noting that while there is a fixed rate for purchasing, delivery charges are not fixed. Dr. Petrone reviewed how beneficial the LED project has been in terms of cost savings.

VIII.B. Information and Possible VOTE: FY2026 Budget

Dr. Petrone confirmed that the numbers are in the right range regarding special education transportation costs. He surveyed three districts that recently entered into new contracts and, based on their daily rates, we are in the right ballpark. It's a solid figure for budgeting, with all factors taken into consideration.

Charmaine reviewed the calculations requested by the Board regarding the transportation cost increase and the excess cost percentage reduction. J. Beausoleil stated that the amounts presented are helpful for decision-making. There was a discussion on the budget impacts of increasing the transportation percentage, as well as the effects of reducing the excess cost reimbursement percentage.

M. Kortmann inquired whether Dr. Petrone was comfortable with the budget assumptions. Dr. Petrone responded that, based on area surveys, there is always uncertainty. A 3% increase is considered safe, while a 4% increase is very comfortable. However, the real question is whether the difference is worth the gamble. Dr. Petrone added that other factors, such as the enrollment of a new student requiring transportation, could impact the budget later in the year.

C. Rossignol inquired if Dr. Petrone had any idea of what the percentage reimbursement rate would be. Dr. Petrone noted that other districts' reimbursement estimates for the first payment were lower than they had pessimistically expected. He added that it seems everyone is experiencing the significant impact funding has on their districts.

There was a discussion on whether to maintain the 73% reimbursement rate or to lower it. The consensus was to leave it as is.

C. Bradshaw-Hill provided an update regarding the net increase, noting that the page rationale was not consistent with assumptions. The update has been revised to reflect all assumptions on the assumptions page.

On page 92, the technology section was updated to remove the FCC grant that the district did not receive.

Increase in unemployment compensation – it was noted that we spent more this year than what the amount budgeted for next year. Dr. Petrone explained that the figure for next year takes into account that the cost will decrease by the end of the current year.

Supplies and Instructional –the budget has increased due to grants expiring that were previously funding programs, which will continue next year.

Custodial supplies –Mr. Trudelle explained that the lower budget estimate was due to an inventory of custodial supplies, which assessed current stock and estimated future usage. The same approach was applied to the maintenance line item. For HVAC, the plan is to perform more in-house services rather than contracting out whenever possible.

Social Security –an explanation was provided for the large 26% increase, which is directly correlated to the increase in salaries.

Other Equipment CHS– The cost increase is due to the purchase of the wrestling mats.

GHR – the lack of the vertical alignment of the science software across all schools was questioned. Ms. Mullaly explained that the science software is only applicable to certain grades and does not align to the middle school curriculum.

Page 37 – will revise the grade 5 error.

CGS – there was an increase in contracted services for regular programs, with two schools seeing an increase and two schools seeing a decrease. It was explained that copiers are based on usage, and adjustments are made accordingly for each school.

Captain Nathan Hale – regular programs and athletic and transportation line item– includes funding for band activities, special programs, as well as athletics that require travel. This is separate from class field trips.

Challenge and enrichment – The reduction is due to a new person in charge who has streamlined the budgeting process, focusing on fiscal responsibility while maintaining all current programs.

CHS – The increase in contracted services is due to the addition of the new fitness center, which requires a service contract to maintain the equipment. The rest of the increase is attributed to higher copier costs.

Travel regular program – the increase in contracted services is due to events like the Charter Oak Music Festival, which require travel, as well as the associated bus contract increase.

Hands-on science consumables – The decline is due to a fiscally conservative approach, as we currently have adequate supplies. All programs remain unchanged.

Dues and fees – the increase is due to changes in grants. This year, we received a \$5k grant specifically for professional development for paraeducators, on which we have relied on in the past. This funding is intended to support the development of staff. Dr. Petrone also mentioned that the increase is also related to the new program being implemented.

Page 73, line 1200 – there is an increase in FTE from 0 to 2 positions. One is for a Coordinator, and the other is for a Special Education teacher.

Warehouse – there is an error in the amount, will update this line by \$30k for the next meeting.

Vulcan security technology – this is for doors, cameras, hardware, and software.

Mop rentals – we rent the mops, and the service picks them up to clean and return them. We don't have the equipment or facilities to clean them in-house.

C. Williams raised the topic of adding an additional security person. Dr. Petrone responded that they are considering a proposal for \$36k per security person, which would cover 182 days during the school hours, in line with another district. Dr. Petrone plans to present this at the next meeting.

The addition of a bus was also discussed. The new vendor is performing significantly better than the previous one, but at \$86k per bus, we need to consider what the community is willing to pay, especially with the current budget increase at 5.32%. Dr. Petrone stated that he feels transportation has been somewhat stabilized.

J. Beausoleil stated that if board members are not ready to make a decision by the 13th, an additional special meeting will be scheduled beforehand. Any questions should be forwarded to Dr. Petrone prior to the next meeting.

IX. New Business

IX.A. Information and Possible VOTE: Approve the Coventry/Andover CT Grown for CT Kids Grant

C. Bradshaw-Hill explained that this is a comprehensive program with the Farm to School Coordinator working closely with our Food Service Director. We were awarded a \$75k grant to supplement the current program, and the grantor plans to execute it next month. The program will engage in activities for the next two years. We also carry the Andover contract, so they will be entering the program as well. Our district is currently implementing the CT Grown program.

MOTION: To approve the Coventry/Andover CT Grown for CT Kids Grant

By: C. Rossignol

Seconded: E. Eaton

Result: Motion passes unanimously

X. Possible VOTE: Executive Session (bargaining unit negotiations)

MOTION: Pursuant to CGS-1-200(c)(6)(A), the Board of Education will go into Executive Session for discussion related to bargaining unit negotiations with the Superintendent and Director of Finance and Operations present at 9:18 p.m.

By: C. Rossignol

Seconded: J. Cleary

Result: Motion carries unanimously

XI. Open Session

The Board of Education returned to Open Session at 9:26 p.m.

MOTION: To approve the Agreement between the Coventry Board of Education and the Coventry Educational Secretaries Union 2024-2027

By: J. Cleary

Seconded: C. Williams

Result: Motion carries unanimously

XII. Adjournment

MOTION: To adjourn the meeting at 9:27 p.m.

By: C. Williams

Seconded: E. Eaton

Result: Motion carries unanimously

Respectfully Submitted:

Tricia Dean
Board Clerk

Approved: February 13, 2025