

COPLEY-FAIRLAWN CITY BOARD OF EDUCATION

Special Meeting/Work Session

Copley High School Main Office Conference Room

March 11, 2024 4:00 p.m.

Jim Borchik, President, called the meeting to order at 4:00 p.m.

John Wheadon, Treasurer, called the roll and the following were present:

Jim Borchik
Trevor Chuna
Steve Doss
Beth Hertz
Paula Lynn

2024-20

A. Agenda

It was moved by Mrs. Lynn, seconded by Mrs. Hertz, to adopt the agenda for the March 11, 2024 special meeting/work session, as presented.

AYES: Lynn, Hertz, Doss, Chuna, Borchik

NAYS: None

B. Topics

1. Review of the Agenda for the March 19, 2024 Regular Board Meeting

A review and discussion of the Tuesday, March 19, 2024 regular meeting agenda occurred.

2. Construction Update

Mrs. Kirsch, Assistant Superintendent, gave a brief update on the construction projects.

The Summit County Engineer's office is still reviewing the middle school athletic complex. They requested two more changes to the original plans.

Fencing is being installed at the softball field and around the perimeter of the practice fields at the corner of Ridgewood and Cleveland-Massillon Road.

Concrete has been removed and new concrete is being installed in the softball dugouts.

A meeting was held with Infinity Construction today and work is scheduled to begin on April 1, 2024. The work includes renovations to restrooms at each building, commons and cafeteria/kitchen at the high school, cafeteria/kitchen at the middle school, entrance at the high school, Bistro 81, the auditorium, and all locker rooms at the high school and middle school. They will start with the entrance to the high school. The traffic patterns at the high school will be changed for the rest of the school year. The change in traffic will cause congestion and people are asked to be patient.

The Summit County Building Department noted issues with the bleachers that are being proposed for the high school stadium. The exit isles need to be 32 inches wider. The architect/engineer and Summit Construction are working on alternatives. There is room in front of the proposed bleacher site if the bleachers would need to be moved forward; however, foundations have been laid already so that will cause extra work and expenses to accommodate the adjustments being proposed.

The high school stadium project is going well. Walls of the field house have begun to be built. Grading for the bleachers and sewer construction is on-going. The weather has been cooperative which has allowed Summit Construction to work continuously on the project.

3. Parental Involvement/Transparency

Mr. Chuna had sent an email to Mr. Poe, Superintendent, on February 16, 2024 regarding multiple topics such as gender/ social transitions, guidance path, parental disclosure requirements when gender and/or sexuality is discussed in class, clubs, or other settings, approved materials and books, and bathroom use policy. Mr. Poe and his administrative team provided answers to Mr. Chuna; however, additional questions were raised after answers were provided which is one of the reasons for this work session. Mr. Chuna stated he is questioning the level of trust and transparency and views both as very important in the school district. He said there is a need for more transparency to establish trust. Mr. Chuna believes the school district allows social transitions without parental knowledge or consent. Mrs. Kirsch explained that she spoke with each school counselor and mental health therapist to verify if parental involvement occurred. Six students have spoken to counselors and mental health experts this school year regarding gender transition and in all six instances, parents were involved. Mr. Chuna indicated that there was an instance in 3rd grade that gender transition was discussed and the parents were not notified. He also indicated that gender ideology and “sex ed” was taught in 5th grade and parents were not aware they were going to be taught when they signed off on the parental consent form. Mr. Poe said that was a mistake by the teacher and it was addressed. Mr. Chuna said that there should be a written policy in place on this topic. Mr. Poe stated that it is never the district’s approach to leave a parent out of anything.

Mr. Borchik disagreed and stated that sometimes the parents could be the problem. Mr. Chuna then stated that parents have the right to know and the district should not be in the position to decide who is a fit parent and who is not. Other board members said it is the districts responsibility to keep the student safe and offer counselors and therapists to assist the students. A comment was made that if the student feels the counselor will be sharing information with parents then the student will stop talking to the counselors. Mr. Chuna said he feels there should be a written policy on this topic with clear written frame work. Mr. Williams said this is not a black and white issue and counselors have to use their best judgment in each case.

Mr. Chuna stated that the schools are not a spot to raise kids—the schools are a spot to educate the kids. The schools need to focus on education and allow the parents to be accountable for raising their kids appropriately. He feels the district has lost its focus on academics. Sixty percent of the students are still not at pre-COVID levels on proficiency tests. He feels the focus needs to be put back on academics instead of focusing on non-academic content.

There was a discussion about gender transitions and the use of the preferred pronouns. Mr. Chuna asked if there is a written policy requiring a parent to be notified if a student asks to use a different name or pronoun. The response was there is legal guidance provided to staff but no policy. It was also asked if there is a written policy that tells a teacher that he or she should use different names and pronouns when addressing a student but there is no requirement to tell a parent if this is occurring. So, during a conference the student's given name will be on documents discussed with parents. The counselors will meet with students that choose to go by different names and pronouns to let them know that will occur during a conference. The intention is always to keep the parents informed and for counselors to work with students to be able to share information with the parents.

Regarding counselors and disclosure, school counselors are required to keep information confidential unless information is provided to suggest the student may harm themselves or others. Consent is required for minor students to engage in ongoing therapeutic relationship with a mental health specialist. Non-therapeutic relationships do not require parent consent. Mr. Chuna feels each time a student talks to a counselor or mental health specialist that the parent should be called.

There was a question raised about the requirement for parental disclosure when discussions occur around gender and sexuality. In particular, there was a question raised about participation in co-curricular clubs such as IRIS and Spectrum. If a student is interested in getting involved in any club at the middle school they must get parental consent (permission slip signed). High School students do not need parental consent. Mr. Chuna believes parental consent should be required for

these types of clubs because he's aware that some students got involved and started questioning their sexuality and the parents were not aware.

Mr. Chuna requested an approved literature list. A teacher in the audience indicated it is on the district website. Mr. Chuna questioned why every book isn't reviewed instead of just Class I literature books. Mr. Williams, Assistant Superintendent, explained that Class I literature books are all reviewed prior to recommendation to the Superintendent and Board of Education for approval because all students are required to read those books. Books in the library and extra credit books are not reviewed and approved simply because there is not enough time or personnel. Professional judgment is exercised by the teachers to follow the board policy IIAB. Each classroom has books available for students that are age appropriate. Mr. Chuna explained that the extra credit books being offered at the high school English class all deal with racism and you wonder if a certain ideology is being pressed. He said the books should be ideologically neutral. He also stated that the mission of the districts is to create critical thinkers so both perspectives need presented. He feels this isn't creating critical thinkers but rather it's teaching students what to think from one perspective. He believes this is pushing more toward a critical race theory approach which Mr. Poe has stated is not taught in the schools. It was pointed out that there are trainings for the teachers on micro aggression and implicit bias versus cognitive biases which is more closely related to critical race theory that apparently others are comfortable with. There is an agenda and ideology that is being pushed in the schools in Mr. Chuna's opinion. This claim caused a disagreement from other board members and administrators.

Mr. Chuna asked who will be allowed to use which bathrooms. Specifically, who is allowed to use the family restrooms that are being constructed over the summer. He said there is a risk for students and a policy needs developed. He noted that no more than one person should be permitted inside the family restroom at a time. Mr. Poe stated he would get a legal opinion and look into a possible policy.

Mr. Chuna questioned the display of pride flags and religious symbols. He questioned whether a teacher is permitted to put anything on their door or classroom that they want to. Mr. Poe explained that is allowed as long as it's not a substantial disruption to the school environment and not a violation of anybody's first amendment right. Mr. Chuna's believes that nothing should be posted in the classrooms because it may not align with a family's belief. He further stated the pride type flags indicating a classroom is a safe space is not necessary because the entire district should be a safe space for all students. He asked why a generic block C couldn't be used instead to ensure the environment is free of any ideology and stays focused on academics. Mr. Poe said that the legal advice he received is in public education that you don't check your first amendment right at the door.

The last question was regarding the legislative and legal rulings that recently passed. Mr. Poe presented copies to each board member and said we were awaiting legal advice from our attorneys and the Ohio School Boards Association. House Bill 68 was mentioned by title only but no details were given. Mr. Chuna said there was a legal ruling in California where a student was socially transitioned and the parents were unaware and filed suit and eventually won. He asked Mr. Poe if he has asked legal counsel about that case and how it would apply to us. Mr. Poe said he has not spoken to legal counsel about the case.

4. Staff Appreciation

President Borchik indicated that the Board of Education would like to offer lunches for staff appreciation. Administration will look into this and set up dates and food.

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C. Executive Session

It was moved by Mrs. Hertz, seconded by Mr. Doss, to go into executive session pursuant to Ohio Revised Code Section 121.22(G)(1). The board shall consider the employment/evaluation of employees or officials of the school district at 5:20 p.m.

AYES: Hertz, Doss, Lynn, Chuna, Borchik

NAYS: None

The board returned to public session at 5:48 p.m.

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D. Adjournment

It was moved by Mrs. Lynn, seconded by Mrs. Hertz, to adjourn the meeting (5:48 p.m.)

AYES: Lynn, Hertz, Chuna, Doss, Borchik

NAYS: None

President

Treasurer