

DANBURY BOARD OF EDUCATION

WORKSHOP MEETING MINUTES

Thursday, January 3, 2013 – 7:00 p.m.
Broadview Middle School Auditorium
72 Hospital Avenue

Present: Eileen Alberts, Shirley Chilian, Gladys Cooper, Gary Falkenthal, Annrose Fluskey-Lattin, Richard Hawley, Richard Jannelli, Sandy Steichen, Robert Taborsak, Phyllis Tranzillo; Drs. William Glass and Sal Pascarella, Joseph Martino and Kim Thompson from Administration; Mayor Mark Boughton, Police Chief Al Baker, Paul Estefan, Director of Civil Preparedness, and City Council Members

Absent: Kathleen Molinaro

CALL TO ORDER

Chairperson Sandy Steichen called the meeting to order at 7:03 p.m. and those assembled recited the Pledge of Allegiance.

MOMENT OF SILENCE

Chairperson Steichen asked for a moment of silence to be observed for the victims of the Sandy Hook Elementary School tragedy on December 14.

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

Chairperson Steichen welcomed everyone for attending the meeting and introduced everyone on the dais. Chairperson Steichen announced that this evening's meeting will be focused on what we as a district can do to improve the safety at our schools and not dealing with broader political issues that are outside of the scope of our authority. This is a Board of Education Workshop. Therefore, the Board of Education members are encouraged to ask any questions throughout the evening. The public is encouraged to fill out the index cards, which have been distributed, with any questions or suggestions that might be relative to tonight's subject.

SCHOOL SAFETY

Dr. Pascarella said this workshop meeting was called in order to reflect on what has happened these past two weeks. Dr. Pascarella thanks the principals for their outstanding work. An audit has been performed recently so an update about what has been done and what we are thinking about doing is in place.

CITY SAFETY INITIATIVES

Mayor Boughton appreciates everyone being here. He said we have all been impacted from the tragedy in Sandy Hook, and all of the education systems generally mirror each other in a lot of the services that

we deliver. Mayor Boughton rescheduled the City Council meeting so that all the council members could be here tonight because this is a total city effort. It is about all of us working together to provide the most optimum safety network for our children. Mayor Boughton also thanked State Representative Jan Giegler for being here. She certainly can take back ideas and thoughts to the state legislation. Mayor Boughton also thanked Chief Baker and Danbury Police Department personnel for their work over the last couple of weeks. He also thanked Chief Herald from our fire department and also the Fire Marshal Jim Johnson for all the hard work that our EMTs and firefighters put in each and every day. Both of these departments were intimately involved in operations in Newtown in terms of being able to assist, along with our Public Works Department that deployed a lot of equipment that Newtown did not have.

Mayor Boughton feels we are ahead of the curve on a lot of what other towns and cities are doing since December 14. He said the key that you should take with you tonight is that we are trying to minimize risk as much as we possibly can so that children are not exposed to potential, dangerous or harmful situations.

Mayor Boughton talked about Columbine in 1999 when he was teaching at Danbury High School. He spent a lot of time with Mr. Bocaccio and others looking to see how to minimize that risk to our building. He said some important benchmarks were established from 1999 to 2001 in terms of security. In 2001, we had September 11, which caused us to think about mass incidences and terrorists attacks, and we again upgraded some of our security. At DHS, we have four police officers in the building, two inside the school, resource officers, and two outside to patrol the lot. We also have six safety advocates, who walk around on a daily basis checking hall passes and checking people and maintaining a vigilance in terms of security in the building.

He further said in each of the middle schools, we have a school resource officer posted on a full time basis. They connect with the kids, and it has been very successful. We also have a safety advocate posted in each building as well.

Our elementary schools operate on a buzzer system.

Each of our buildings have a plan that has been designed since 2006 to minimize risk. Mayor Boughton said we have lockdown procedures, and we were drilling lockdown procedures right after Columbine. At the high school, we have expanded that to every building. We also have a significant amount of drills that we conduct throughout the school year, about one every other month. At DHS, we have installed cameras pretty much everywhere. Chief Baker and the Mayor can log into the high school cameras, as well as our officers at the dispatch center and Mr. Bocaccio. That camera system came out of a 2006 study which we performed. We also have a radio system where each of our building principals has a radio that goes right into our dispatch center.

Since December 14, we posted a police officer at pretty much every elementary and parochial building as well. We did that because we wanted to send a message to any prospective person that might want

to perform a copycat crime but also to staff, parents and children to show our concern for their safety. Starting this week, January 2, we put in individual security officers at each elementary building. Those individuals are there to maintain security, to put security forefront, in order to manage the building and take some weight off the principal's shoulders and to be able to have a general overview of the situations within each building—closed doors, locked doors, closed windows that get propped open by staff—all of the things that make up a building that is not secure. We will extend that for at least this school year. In addition to that, we are going to try to eventually move those paid security guards out with our own safety advocates in each of the elementary schools. We will continue to do our roving patrols of our Police Department. We will bring in officers that will move from school to school, both public and parochial.

One thought the Mayor wants to leave with everyone is to continue to communicate. He said everything will be done to make sure that you have a secure environment and that we minimize the risk as much as possible for your children.

Chief Al Baker commented that Danbury is a safe community, and we communicate very well. He stated that on the morning of December 14, he received a call about 9:45 a.m. and by 10:00 a.m. he was speaking with Dr. Pascarella, Dr. Glass and the Mayor. There is a good partnership, and that is helping us confront this horrible tragedy. He would like to reassure everyone that Danbury has a very safe school system. He said all reasonable precautions are being taken, and he has a very dedicated staff that is very interested and involved in school safety. Since January 2, our communication supervisor went out and tested every school radio at all the school locations. They are doing some site reviews and will continue those with the school district staff. They are in the process of conducting lockdown drills first with the staff and then with the students. Chief Baker will support the efforts to bring safety advocates into the schools. He and his staff want to provide a safe learning environment for all of our children, and he is confident we can do that through communication with school system staff.

SCHOOL DISTRICT EMERGENCY PLANS AND UPDATES

Dr. Pascarella said that during the holiday recess, J. Martino, the Finance Director, and Rich Jalbert, the Director of Sites and Facilities, performed an audit and he introduces Mr. Martino to share some discoveries and items they are working on with the Board and with the public.

Mr. Martino said a review of each of the schools was performed by he and Mr. Jalbert checking lockdown areas, locks, camera systems, and radios and making checklists to address concerns and trying to put some cost estimates around what some of those things will be going forward.

Dr. Pascarella said that when you have a tragedy such as what happened in Sandy Hook, you begin to look at things that you never would have thought of in the past. Based on some of the interactions we have had, we have tried to look at internal security. With additional security personnel, that will give

us another pair of eyes making sure that they are mindful that their sole job is to observe anything that is out of the ordinary and then have means of communicating that to our local authority. The Chief has triangulated the City so that there can be an instant response. The security personnel will buy us some time as we make judgments and evaluate the situation.

Dr. Pascarella turned the meeting to Chairperson Steichen who took questions from the Board. Annrose Fluskey-Lattin commented that she feels the lock situation needs to be reviewed. Mr. Martino responded that Broadview and Rogers Park have the swipe cards for the outside doors. The classroom doors should have ideally what is known as a double-keyed lock at least as a beginning. Some of our newer buildings have that. Some of the buildings have the HID cards. Those doors are locked all the time and the kids actually knock to enter those rooms. We are definitely looking at the lock situation across all of our schools. Mayor Boughton said it is a good segue to general building and design and construction, and one of the things that Dr. Pascarella and the Mayor have spoken about is the need for a consultant to go through all of our buildings in terms of the equipment we have, how we deploy that equipment, and how best to get the maximum use out of it. Once we get an idea of what this would cost, the Council and the Mayor will talk about how this will be funded.

Kim Thompson said that one of the big questions that quite a few people asked about is the King Street campus because so many of those rooms are open classrooms. P. Estefan said that when the study was performed from 2004 to 2006, King Street Schools were looked at for security as well as all the others. This was a partnership grant meaning that the police chief, the fire chief, EMS, and P. Estefan had to sign onto this federal grant. The grant included an explanation of the work being done and what was being given to the community as far as information and assistance. The Police Department assigned a police officer to go through the schools with the contractor and additional information was sent out. P. Estefan said that information was considered and over a period of time, a good percentage of it was implemented—cameras, door locks, HID readers, etc. P. Estefan said the Mayor is correct that we are in front of the curve and we continue to be in front of it every day. A spokesman from the audience voiced a concern that King Street Primary is very open and any one can walk in. Dr. Pascarella said that will have to be stopped. He said the school was built as an open school. He said that in the school, there is no ability to lock down a sector. Dr. Pascarella said there were posts that were taken out of the building that need to be reinstalled, and by doing so, we will be able to close down sectors of that building. Dr. Pascarella said what we are looking to do is to figure out what adjustments we have to make and have someone come in to make recommendations. He also said that if we are letting people in, we need to stop. Dr. Pascarella assured the public that he will be diligent and the Board will have to make a decision because of the open school concept. Mayor Boughton feels everyone who tries to enter a school should be challenged.

Annrose Fluskey-Lattin said that some of the schools are more secure by the way they were designed. She would like to know if three or four safety advocates could be assigned to the building that has the open classroom concept. She feels parents would feel more comfortable with that.

R. Taborsak feels that each school needs to be dealt with individually. He would like to see more cameras in the middle schools. He feels the larger the school, the more opportunities for problems. Dr. Pascarella responded by saying that we are connected to Honeywell so we have a system, either door entry and/or cameras. They are located particularly at the high school and very few at the middle schools and the elementaries have only the entry area. Dr. Pascarella said we are going to have to look at the assessment, whether they are walls or interim steps of more security, and the cameras. Mr. Martino reported that he and Mr. Scails, together with Ms. Hislop, evaluated King Street Schools a few times. They did review the points, and he understands the design. He agrees with Mr. Taborsak's concern as well. There is basically a place for every child to go in case of emergency. Spokespersons from the audience asked specifically where these areas were. Ms. Hislop explained that their crisis team met and looked for places to go. At King Street Primary, their Media Center is in the center and all the classrooms are surrounding. Between the classrooms and the Media Center, there are huge work rooms and storage rooms and copier rooms, bathrooms, computer rooms, and a kindergarten room. Every single classroom has a place to go, and a drill was conducted today for the kids to go to their "safe zone." They did a beautiful job today, she reported. In the kindergarten rooms are very large storage rooms. It just took some cleaning up and the staff was very cooperative. Ms. Hislop had two police officers who watched the process, and they could not come up with a better plan.

G. Falkenthal asked Dr. Pascarella about one of the wings at DHS where the kids have to go outside to get back through the front door. There is a safety advocate there. He asks Dr. Pascarella if he is confident that the safety advocate would recognize someone who might not attend the school. Mr. Bocaccio said that was the case prior to this incident. Immediately thereafter, a corridor was opened in the back of the new wing of C building, and all students have been instructed not to go outside any longer. It is working quite effectively and students are not coming out front any longer.

Chairperson Steichen thanks Dr. Pascarella for all of the information he is providing this evening and all of the improvements that have been undertaken. She questioned the robotic voice that is used on the instant alerts, and she would have liked to see a faster reaction to the parents on what they needed to know. She has a high school student, and her concern is that information needs to be translated to the students prior to any of them being dismissed. Dr. Pascarella said the reason for the robotics is that it goes in multiple languages. Dr. Pascarella spoke to the concern about the time parents were notified. He said under these circumstances, there are no rule books. We were waiting for some confirmation of what we were going to do so we went to a soft lockdown, which means parents could come in. The principals knew this because we had a conference call, and that as long as the parent could be identified, the child could be dismissed from school. As far as recess and physical education, that was not allowed. Students were able to use the bathrooms and cafeterias. Once we made a determination about what the situation was, we received a call back through the Mayor and the Chief, and it was determined that nothing more was expected to happen. We were also concerned that if we dismissed early, we might not get the buses through. Once we got the information, we talked with the principals and started to make announcements. That was the sequence that happened the first day and how it unfolded for us. Mr. Bocaccio thanked Chairperson Steichen for her suggestion, which will be taken seriously and under advisement. One of the things that is very important for him at the high school

level is to be very transparent and very honest with kids. As the day was unfolding, there were so many rumors and so much going on that we did not know where the fact or fiction was. Not to mention that we were constantly convened in the central office with the administrative team and the safety advocates. Until he had some sense of what was happening and to what degree, he did not want to instill fear into the students, although we did advise teachers as to what was going on. Mr. Bocaccio went on the public address system once he was confident as to what was happening and advised the entire school that they were safe and secure and that a situation had happened in Sandy Hook. It was later in the day, and students do come and go all day long, so there was no particular time of the day that the announcement could have been made where he would have caught every single person. Mayor Boughton added that his notes indicated that Chief Baker called at 9:49 a.m. to report that there was a shooting at Newtown and they were deploying some officers to the hospital. At 9:52 a.m., the hospital called and said they were expecting mass casualties and they were going to need a lot of assistance. At about 10:03 a.m, Chief Baker called back and said it was a very serious incident and that there was an indication of a number of victims that were inside the building. Mayor Boughton said that no one was allowed to say anything. Mayor Boughton spoke to Dr. Pascarella at 10:10 a.m. Unfortunately, we had to let people leave without knowing the whole scenario because there was information that Chief Baker and the Mayor could not divulge. The Mayor said it was a tough situation and it needed to be played by ear.

Annrose Fluskey-Lattin brought up the timing of letting parents know. She understands that information could not be let out, but she would have liked to receive a phone call that the district was in control and her children were safe. She received a robo call between 12:15 and 12:35 p.m., which she felt was late. With today's social media, by that time, people knew information about what was happening whether it was correct or incorrect. She feels she should have received an immediate response and reiterated that she did not need details, just that the Danbury schools were on safe lockdown and the children were safe. She would like the district to look into it and how the message is delivered if there is a next time. Dr. Pascarella said that he made the judgment and he is sorry she feels this way and had that fear.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

The Board asked for comments and questions from the public and K. Thompson reviewed the questions and categorized them as follows:

Q. There are many questions about the decision to put unarmed safety advocates as opposed to deploying armed officers. Is that budget related? Should we have trained, active shooter police officers in the buildings?

A. Chief Baker feels that armed police officers might not be conducive to a learning environment for younger students. He feels reasonable precautions have been taken. Mayor Boughton feels there is a vast difference between high school and elementary students. The program that is in place at the high school is a nationally recognized program that is pretty much at every high school across the nation.

That program is more than a security program. It is to build rapport back and forth between the police, build connections, and it helps break down barriers between adolescents and the Police Department. He feels the issue is not whether we should have an armed guard in terms of philosophy. That is a discussion that the Board and the Superintendent need to have. It is the practicality of being able to do that. If we just took the elementary public schools into consideration, we would need to hire 25 to 30 new officers above and beyond what we have. In addition, we have the parochial schools and daycares that would also want coverage. It would take us three to four years just to staff up enough people to do this, assuming there are no retirements. There is not enough man power out there to do this and cover normal policing. It would cost \$4 million per year, not counting all the other policing and overtime that we have to do. Mayor Boughton said the practicality of it is that no one in Connecticut is going to do that. He added that unless there are significant changes in how you hire and who you hire and significant resources supplied by the state to be able to accommodate this massive amount of training, it will be very difficult. Chairperson Steichen said it will be an action item that the Board will look into to see if it is something that is viable. The Board will have to make a decision in the best interests of all the children.

Q. What are we doing for security for preschool and after school programs for public and non-public programs?

A. Mayor Boughton said that they have reached out to Dr. Dames, who is the Superintendent of the parochial school system. He added that the parochial system does not have one policy for the whole state. It is up to the individual parish to determine how they want to provide security for their schools. She was offered the option of piggybacking on with our program for training of the safety advocates. She is going to socialize that with each building principal and make a determination about what they would like to do. We also offered up our Police Department to do surveys with their buildings as well. They will continue to do that and update their management plans in terms of emergency situations.

The after school areas for the secondary schools have a police officer on board. Mayor Boughton has asked the Fire Marshall to work with our staff. After school, we basically have our own staff to supervise the students, and we will have to take another review of that. We have also asked our elementary and middle school outside programs to limit how long they stay in the building before we shut it down to inspect it.

Q. Are their violence prevention programs in place or plans to implement them, i.e., Rachel's Challenge created by a Columbine family proven to prevent school shootings? What types of support systems do we have in the classrooms to recognize students who may be at risk?

A. Dr. Pascarella said we are looking at intervention and thinks it is a key part. One of our individuals in charge is looking at some special assessments that are coming out now. For a number of years, we have been looking at student writing. As recent as today, we have been reviewing some literature put forth by students that we have concerns about. We have a system of referrals. We have a medical advisor that we work with, and we have psychiatrists that we invite in to work with us. We are

looking at future budgets in terms of how we can increase some of the social work programs. Dr. Glass said this is very personal for him. He and his family lost friends in the tragedy and that he is not taking this lightly in any possible way. He added that there are some things that we think we can help with that will give all of us more comfort and there are some that are just unrealistic. He said we are trying to be as vigilant as possible and as responsible as possible and this means a lot to everyone. We recognize that there has to be a reaction, but definitely the pro-activity is the key to this, in our opinion, and the mental health piece is another major key. As P. Estefan said, in 2006, there was a team that was put together, and we are not new to the table on this. We have very comprehensive safety and security plans and emergency preparedness plans. We have done training on this. We have flipbooks on this. We have a comprehensive program across the district for violence prevention, and he tells the public that we cannot turn our backs on this for a moment. We wear badges. We have our Crisis Intervention Teams that are mobilized in a minute. He added that Dr. Pascarella and he have no expertise when it comes to the kind of expertise that Chief Baker has or that Chief Herald has with the Fire Department or Mayor Boughton has in running the City of Danbury. Dr. Glass said they are all colleagues that recognize each other's expertise and this team came together in a heartbeat. Within minutes, the entire city had been mobilized. Dr. Pascarella and Dr. Glass had visited almost every classroom in this community in one day, checking on the teachers, staff and students. Ms. Hislop and Dr. Glass walked the King Street Primary campus with blueprints. Within about 1-1/2 hours, Dr. Pascarella and Mr. Martino were back up at the campus going through the same thing. The officers have in their vehicles the ability to play a CD that has a schematic of each building. If any of the cabinet members called down to Chief Baker about a potential problem in any of the buildings, within moments the police are in the building at the particular area in question. Dr. Glass also explained that he and Dr. Pascarella do a lot of training with teachers that want to become administrators. We do scenario planning with them. He gave some scenarios as examples that are reviewed over and over again since 2006 and even before that time.

Q. How do we keep the staff vigilant and what steps will we take to insure that people do not prop the doors and windows open, hold doors for each other, and keep all staff in this security-minded state?

A. Dr. Pascarella said at this time we are working through the plans. Dr. Pascarella said we are all cognizant of how we handled the situation and we all think about what we could have done better. Regarding the safety items, we have the principals reporting that they have performed a lockdown in their building on a monthly basis. We have asked all our staff to wear badges. We have procedures and policies in place that will have to be conducted more often. We will have to systemize it and make sure it is implemented. If we go the avenue of safety advocates, their job would be to walk through the building to make sure the doors are not propped open, windows are not broken, and access areas are safe. A spokesperson from the audience asked about opening windows and doors in the spring, and Dr. Pascarella responded that we will all have to be diligent to ensure the students' safety. Also, a question was raised that the HVAC system in the buildings be inspected for efficiency. Dr. Pascarella said this would be a long term item, but as for now we have to be diligent in making sure that all of us that work in this district are making sure the doors and windows are closed. Our head of Sites and

Facilities has performed an orientation with the custodians. They have a safety check every night and every morning.

A spokesperson from the audience asked about our staff being able to identify a potential problem based on a student's behavior. Dr. Glass responded that just today he received a call from a principal with regard to a problem. The Pupil Personnel Team came together with the school psychologist and examined the student's writing journal, and today the parents were brought in and the whole situation was reviewed with them and action has been taken. Dr. Glass's earlier point was the best way to deal with this is to be as proactive as possible. He said that in many ways, the research is showing us and common sense tells us this is a mental health issue.

Chairperson Steichen told the public that the Board has heard their concerns and it is their job to go to the professionals and make reasonable decisions to alleviate everyone's concerns.

Mayor Boughton said that we should take this as a time to reset and be more and more vigilant, not just now, but in June and next September and two years from now when this fades into memory.

Dr. Pascarella concluded by saying that the school's attendance rate has been high and he thanks the teachers for this because they exude confidence in the students and parents. This is the first time the Board has come together since December 14, and it is their task to pick up this information and to try to sort through what is best for kids through their eyes and communicate that through a resource. The Mayor has assisted us in terms of paying for these things with some set-aside funds, but these long strategic policy items will have to be debated.

Chairperson Steichen, in concluding the meeting, said that it is up to the Board now to review and to discuss everything that was said this evening. Dr. Pascarella said we will collect the questions and get them to the Board and the principals so they are aware of the parents' concerns, and we will try to get them on the website as soon as possible.

Chairperson Steichen encourages all to attend the Board meetings and thanked everyone for their participation this evening.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:49 p.m.

Richard Hawley, Secretary