

DANBURY BOARD OF EDUCATION MEETING
WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 22, 2017 – 7:00 PM
Administrative Center, 63 Beaver Brook Road

CALL TO ORDER

The chairperson, Ralph Pietrafesa, called the meeting to order at 7:03 pm and those assembled recited the Pledge of Allegiance led by the Danbury High School ROTC Cadets.

ROLL CALL

Present: Gladys Cooper, Frederick Karrat, David Metrena, Kathleen Molinaro,
Ralph Pietrafesa, Holly Robinson, Eileen Alberts, Michael Ferguson

Absent: Richard Hawley, Richard Jannelli, Patrick Johnston

Also Present: Dr. Bill Glass, Kelly Truchsess, Joe Martino, Kim Thompson, Dr. Sal Pascarella

RECOGNITIONS- none

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Christina Sweeney: Ms. Sweeney is a Danbury resident with two children in the Danbury Public School System. Ms. Sweeney stated that while she understands the current fiscal challenges, she urges caution when considering charter schools to provide fiscal relief. Ms. Sweeney is concerned that the decision could result in unintended consequences that have a grave impact on the quality of education provided to our students. Ms. Sweeney stated that while the state kicks in money for students attending charter schools, the district will still need to pay for special education services and transportation. Moreover, there is no guarantee that local districts will not be required to pay more for these services in the future, which happened in Rhode Island. Ms. Sweeney is concerned that charter schools do not have to follow the same rules as public schools, they are not accountable for community parents and taxpayers, they do not have to hire certified teachers, they can be discontinued at any time and that they do not have to serve all grade levels or provide the same services as public schools. Ms. Sweeney also went on to state that she is concerned that currently in Connecticut, charter schools serve a more advantaged population which means that they enroll less than 10% minority students and only 5% enrolled are ELL students. Ms. Sweeney fears that this type of charter school will only exacerbate inequalities in our schools and asked the board not to open the door to a potentially divisive and unproven approach to education.

Tracey Kelley: Ms. Kelley wanted to follow up on the charter school workshop. Ms. Kelley stated the following bullet points:

- Charter schools are public schools and can not charge tuition.
- A charter school's governing council must include a chairperson of the local or regional Board of Education in which the charter school is located, or a designee of such chairperson, provided the designee is a member of the Board of Education or the superintendent of schools for the district.
- Only Alliance Districts are eligible to have a charter school.
- Admission to a charter school is done by lottery.

CONSENT CALENDAR

MOTION - K. Molinaro moved, seconded by E. Alberts that the Board of Education approves the items on the Consent Calendar, Exhibits 17-24 through 17-28, as recommended:

A. MINUTES

2/1/17 Board Workshop
2/8/17 Sites & Facilities Committee
2/8/17 Board Workshop
2/8/17 Board Meeting

B. PERSONNEL REPORT

Accept Leave of Absence: Danielle Baiamonte
Accept Resignations: Jennifer Esposito, Ryki Pearce, Melina Urena
New Hires: See Exhibit 17-28

Motion passed at 7:13 pm.

EMPLOYEE REPRESENTATIVE- none

STUDENT REPRESENTATIVES

Deanna Hernandez from ACE presented to the Board. Ms. Hernandez stated the following bullet points:

- On February 2, 2017, 14 students from ACE participated in an Outdoor Education trip where students hiked three miles on the Appalachian Trail in Kent, CT. All students returned safely and with smiles on their faces. These hiking trips help students to recognize that there are healthy activities they can do that are free and enjoyable.
- ACE has accepted 21 new students to start in the second semester.
- On January 27, 2017, seven ACE students completed their graduation requirements and were celebrated in large guidance. Many of those students are planning on attending post secondary vocational and/or community college.
- Students at ACE are beginning their second round of Math and English intervention groups which are held on Tuesdays and Thursdays. The students use the IXL Learning Software Program.
- Students in Math and English are also using the Khan Academy to prepare for the upcoming SATs. All students are registered with the College Board and are being exposed to SAT-type questions for the April test.
- Ace students continue to not use their cell phones while in school. This helps keep students on task and focused during classes. Any student who violates this policy must serve a lunch detention with the Principal where they must do academic work and are reminded that cell phones distract from the learning process.

PRESENTATION- none

ACTION ITEMS

A. January 2017 Operating Results Analysis (General Fund)

MOTION: K. Molinaro moved, seconded by E. Alberts that the Board of Education accept the January 2017 Operating Results Analysis (General Fund).

Motion passed at 7:16 pm

B. January 2017 Operating Results Analysis (Grants/Projects)

MOTION: K. Molinaro moved, seconded by M. Ferguson that the Board of Education

Motion passed at 7:16 pm

SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT

A. State Budget Update -

Dr. Pascarella stated that he and J. Martino went to Hartford on February 21, 2017 and met with State Representative Bob Godfrey. Staff from the Family Resource Center and a DPS parent were also present to advocate for Danbury. Dr. Pascarella stated that Representative Godfrey was cautiously optimistic in terms of the budget being redefined but there are 131 towns that will substantially lose money. Mr. Martino stated that the Board will need to be prepared to discuss cuts at the first June meeting once the Mayor submits the budget. Dr. Pascarella stated that the graduation requirements were also discussed and that the district will have a difficult time paying for the additional four credits considering how difficult enough it is to pay for the current 21 credits in a comprehensive high school that is growing. Four more credits is quite expensive and it doesn't add value to the program. In fact, it cuts off values for our students who want to leave the high school and pursue other paths for vocations or avocations. Dr. Pascarella stated that they also discussed burden of proof in regards to special education and the provision of paying for the compliance attorney. Only four states currently provide that and Connecticut is one of them. Dr. Pascarella is not sure which direction it is heading but it does cost quite a bit of money. A proposal is in talks to gather a tribunal that would be the decision maker and save a lot of money while still giving the parent proper representation.

B. Free & Reduced School Lunch Balances & Collection Process -

J. Martino stated that one of the financial issues that we struggled with is negative lunch balances. He stated that every month the district sends out letters to parents if they have are negative \$5 or more. If a balance is negative \$25 the student gets a cheese sandwich. Dr. Pascarella stated that he does not want to penalize kids for negative balances and the Board agreed. Mr. Martino stated that we have some balances that are are \$300 - \$400 overdue. We do have circumstances where there are hardships or parents are unaware but we do also have some parents who have refused to work with the district on their balance. Mr. Martino stated that their is a company that can assist us in collecting some of these debts with a minimal cost per student and he would like an opinion from the Board on that. The district currently has about \$50,000 in total for outstanding negative accounts. E. Alberts asked if we could raise funds for the students to which Mr. Martino stated that some PTOs cover those expenses. There are however some parents who just refuse to pay and do not take responsibility for the overdue balances. Mr. Martino stated that we have made a lot of effort in reaching out to parents to assist in applying for free and reduced lunch and a new coordinator was just hired to help with that. K. Molinaro stated that some families are intimidated by the free and reduced lunch form and think that it may red flag them and report their financial information. Mr. Martino stated that next year maybe we can do an online registration process for the free and reduced lunch program. K. Truchsess said social work staff will be trained on how to help fill the free and reduced forms and help families feel less threatened. G. Copper suggested that someone at the school level reach out to the family before a collection letter is sent out. Dr. Pascarella stated many times a social worker will contact the family. Dr. Pascarella and Mr. Martino will go over the procedures on how to contact parents. Dr. Pascarella also stated that this has always been an issue for the district and in the past they used to just write a check and write it off but the district

can no longer do that.

C. Legislative Report

Dr. Pascarella stated he testified at the hearings and that many districts were present who weren't receiving money yet have more resources than we do and spoke about why it was unfair. Dr. Pascarella stated that he acknowledged that if you change the formula you have to acknowledge enrollment, special education and bilingual. The current proposal from the Governor does not include bilingual students in its calculations. Dr. Pascarella stated that currently the Board receives its Alliance money based on the Improvement Application. The State is proposing that the money come to the city in a lump sum and then the town gives the money to the Board. Dr. Pascarella stated that if that goes forward, he asked that it come back to the Board categorically as it has been. Dr. Pascarella stated that Danbury has been lucky in that the Mayor has not touched that money while other towns have not been so fortunate. Mr. Martino stated that we are the lowest funded school district in the state. M. Ferguson discussed the importance of how we don't need the bail out like some other towns have received, we just need our fair share. M. Ferguson stated that the Education Committee will be having their first public hearing on March 1, 2017. He is unsure if the graduation requirements will be brought up but the Governor's education bill will likely be discussed.

DISCUSSION

Antonio Iadarola, City Director Public Works: Update on high school project, black box and ACE study. Mr. Iadorola could not attend the meeting so Dr. Pascarella spoke on his behalf. Dr. Pascarella stated that final phase of the project should be completed by March 8, 2017 and the next phase should begin by April 1, 2017 which will be the black box theater and the study at ACE. Dr. Pascarella does not know what the study will encompass but that the expectation is that the architect will be interviewing teachers, faculty and administration on terms of needs. He did request a bulleted presentation of what the scope of the work will be for the next Board meeting. Dr. Pascarella reminded the Board that the original conversation was to give ACE their own high school. Dr. Pascarella stated that there are no buildings in Danbury available to make it a high school and is willing to look at modules to add on to ACE. The big issue of corrosion from leaking water, roof and windows have been taken care of at ACE. The footprint at ACE is very limited in space and if the study comes back that modules can not be added to the building, a decision needs to be made on what to do. Mr. Martino stated that there is no money in the bond for additional work to the building, only for the study of the building. M. Ferguson asked if there was a price to the study. Mr. Martino guessed \$25,000 to his own estimate from past work with architects. Mr. Martino also stated that there are two large septic lines where the currently volleyball courts is that may pose an issue. Dr. Pascarella stated that when the study is presented, if there is anything omitted from the study, the Board needs to ask for that to be looked at as well.

INFORMATION - none

BOARD CHAIRPERSON'S REPORT

R. Pietrafesa said he and M. Ferguson made visits to Pembroke, Ellsworth, ACE , Great Plain, and the FRC. He was very pleased to see how generally happy the staff was to show off what they are doing and each school is so unique with its own climate and vibe. R. Pietrafesa stated that he was impressed to see how FRC is a "one stop shop" and how you can come in not knowing anything about Danbury and leave with information on after school care, registration, and free and reduced lunch among a few of their programs. R. Pietrafesa also had a great visit with ACE and he is very anxious to

get some answers on what can be done moving forward for the school to expand the program. M. Ferguson agreed and added that he met the new principal at Pembroke and was welcomed very gracious.

BOARD REPORTS, COMMUNICATIONS AND COMMENTS

M. Ferguson stated that Danbury Day will be held at the Capitol at noon on April 6, 2017. He will have more details to come but asked members to save the date. M. Ferguson also stated that Ellen Meyst, who served as Assistant to the Program Director of DSABC has accepted the position formerly held by Mary Gregory and will begin on March 1, 2017. He is looking forward to working with her and her new chapter with DSABC.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

MOTION: K. Molinaro moved, seconded by M. Ferguson that the Board of Education convene in Executive Session for the purpose of discussing pending litigation pertaining to student travel.

Motion passed at 7:54 pm

Present: Gladys Cooper, Frederick Karrat, David Metrena, Kathleen Molinaro, Ralph Pietrafesa, Holly Robinson, Eileen Alberts, Michael Ferguson
Absent: Richard Hawley, Richard Jannelli, Patrick Johnston
Also Present: Attorney Tom Mooney, Dr. Bill Glass, Kelly Truchsess, Joe Martino, Kim Thompson, Dr. Sal Pascarella, Dan Donovan

R. Pietrafesa called the Executive Session to order at 8:05 pm and turned the meeting over to Mr. Mooney and Dr. Pascarella for a discussion on pending litigation pertaining to student travel.

PUBLIC SESSION

MOTION: K. Molinaro moved, seconded by H. Robinson, that the Board of Education return to Public Session.

Motion passed at 8:30 pm

ADJOURNMENT

M. Ferguson moved, seconded by H. Robinson, that the Board of Education adjourn its meeting of February 22, 2017. The motion passed and the meeting adjourned at 8:30 p.m.

Kathy Molinaro, Secretary

(Meeting was videotaped)