

# DANBURY BOARD OF EDUCATION MEETING MINUTES

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 23, 2011- 7:00 PM

Administrative Center - 63 Beaver Brook Road

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## *A G E N D A*

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Present: R. Austin-James, G. Cooper, M. Fazio, I. Fox, R. Jannelli, S. LeRoy, K. Molinaro, R. Taborsak; Drs. S. Pascarella and W. Glass, Ms. J. Emmett, Mr. E. Longo from Administration

Absent: E. Alberts, M. Fazio, K. Gailliard, J. Scozzafava; Ms. K. Thompson from Administration

### CALL TO ORDER

The Chairperson, Irving Fox, called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. and those assembled recited the Pledge of Allegiance.

### PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Sandy Steichen said there are a lot of contradictory things going on with regard to the midterm exam grades at Danbury High School. She also expresses her concern that science will be cut 30% by the beginning of the 2011-2012 school year. She is concerned about the students' education and the integrity of Danbury High School.

### CONSENT CALENDAR

**MOTION** - R. Jannelli moved, seconded by R. Taborsak that the Board of Education approve the items on the Consent Calendar, as recommended:

#### A. MINUTES

Board of Education Meeting Minutes, 2/9/11  
Special Board Meeting Minutes (Exp), 1/31/11  
Special Board Meeting Minutes (Exp), 2/7/11  
Special Board Meeting Minutes (Exp), 2/9/11

#### B. PERSONNEL

Accept Resignations: Hunter Friary Josiah Hills  
Gwen Killheffer Jessica Rosso  
Ian Strever  
Accept Retirement: Lisa Carkner

#### C. DONATION

Accept a donation from the Boehringer Ingelheim Cares Foundation to Morris Street School in the amount of \$900.

**The motion carried at 7:03 p.m.**

**EMPLOYEE REPRESENTATIVE – Cindy Mirochine**

Ms. Mirochine passed around a handout about NEA-Danbury's Reading Celebration Read Across America on March 2. She wants to thank Kim Thompson and Human Resources for their hard work with the elimination of the February break.

**STUDENT REPRESENTATIVES**

Danbury High School, Nadine Edwards, reports that the ROTC Military Ball will be on February 25 from 6 p.m. to 10 p.m. at the Amber Room and an ROTC drill meet on February 26. The Perry Awards will be presented on February 28 in the DHS Auditorium at 7 p.m., and there will be a fundraising dance called "A Night at the Matrix" held at the Matrix Center from 7 p.m. to 11 p.m. All proceeds will go to Dorothy Day House, and it will be held at the end of March.

Alternative Center - No representative

**PRESENTATION**

Superintendent Goal Update – Achievement Gap

Dr. Pascarella reports that since the date of presentation, there have been some questions about the gap, and he will turn this over to Dr. Glass to entertain any questions the Board might have. R. Taborsak is concerned that we are holding grades steady on the tests with maybe a 3% increase. He feels we are making no progress on closing the achievement gap. Dr. Glass refers to a document that he will copy and pass around to the Board members. He feels we have closed the gap over time in many of the sub-group populations, and if you look each year discreetly and then look over the trend data for a certain number of years, it shows that we made substantial progress in closing the gap in many identified areas. The concern that we want to raise to the Board tonight is that we are starting to go in the wrong direction, and that is the real issue. In looking at the staff cuts, this presents a daunting challenge. We have taken a dramatic cut and faculty members are working diligently to close the gaps. Another point is that the student mobility rate is almost 40%. Compounding that, is when we started in the 2002 – 2004 year bracket for NCLB, our CMT reading requirement was 57%. This year it is 89%. We have not changed anything to mitigate that huge jump; instead, we have actually gone back by cutting 17 reading specialists, and the mobility rate has increased, and compounding this, our poverty rate went from the low to mid 30s up to 46% this year. To answer R. Taborsak's question, Dr. Glass reports that research indicates that students from low income families come to kindergarten with 3,000 word vocabularies, moderate income with 5,000, and high income with 7,000 to 10,000 word vocabularies. The first day of the first year of the child's academic career, there is a huge achievement gap. There is an increase in gap that is coming in because of poverty, the mobility rate, the fact that we have cut staff, and the AYP numbers have gone up. Dr. Glass feels that is why we have been recognized for our work in closing the achievement gap over time because it goes contrary to common sense. R. Jannelli said that much to the credit of the teachers and personnel, he thinks we are going to see the effects of our cuts in coming years. We are asking our teachers to do more with less. Dr. Glass agrees. R. Taborsak asks what the reaction was from the State Committee. There will be a full TDEC committee meeting on February 24. The State indicates that they are going to ask us to do less. Dr. Glass shared that three hours was spent paring it down, and we will be sharing this with Administrative Council tomorrow morning and TDEC in the afternoon. R. Taborsak will attend the TDEC meeting tomorrow afternoon. K. Molinaro asks a

question on mobility. One school had very low mobility and yet they are the lowest performing. This does not correlate. She is assuming that there are BEST practices in place, and she agrees that we should pare back and get back to basics first and start over. Dr. Glass responded that the mobility rate is a challenging factor but it is not the only thing. Dr. Glass makes a comparison of other schools. He reports there are instructional challenges in that school: (1) They are going to have to undergo the Governor's Council legislation because of the previous year's performance, and (2) we have brought in a specially trained team with an instrument that was created based on that school's outcome achievement plan. What was revealed after visiting every classroom teacher in that building and spending time observing was that there are some fundamental instructional deficits that are so substantial that they require some long term interventions. We do not think the school is in a position where we cannot salvage it. We have some strong educators there and some strong instructional problems as well. R. Jannelli asks about the data that is collected by measuring the statistics as it seems to have a lot of variables, and the students are not given the same from year to year. What do you arrive at as a conclusion from putting this together? What assessments do you get from these tests? Is there a value in these tests? Dr. Glass feels there is a value to them. We use this information to form our planning, delivery, and our assessment strategies. I. Fox understands the hard work and effort that is going on with everyone in the district to make sure we can do as much as we can given the resources we have. I. Fox feels the big picture is that the targets on the page are not going to change any time soon. Dr. Pascarella feels we need to spend the time in the school. He is concerned that whatever we said we are going to do, we should do. He would like to find ways to extend the teachers' time to see whether that impacts the students' success rate. I. Fox said we still have to answer to the State, the public, the parents and to ourselves. He asks how we can address their concerns when we have numbers, for various reasons, that are not attainable. Dr. Glass said the focus is the concept of growth. If you look at our English language learners, it is the most challenging one. If you look at cities like us, we not only scored at the top of the chart, but we outscored every school system in our group dramatically. The second thing is that if you look at the kids who are with us from beginning to end, the kids score much higher. Lastly, Dr. Glass reiterated Dr. Pascarella by saying it was statistically proven to be impossible to attain the NCLB benchmarks by 2013/14. R. Jannelli responds to I. Fox's question on how we answer to the public with regard to scores; he feels we should talk about how the tests are made up, how difficult they are, how many variables are considered, so they can see the validity of both test scores and come to their own conclusion. It is more of an educational understanding to know what goes into making up these numbers so they can be evaluated. I. Fox said we cannot underestimate what the administrators are doing and what the professionals do during the day, but it is one-third of the students' experience, and if they do not have the support the other two-thirds of the time, you can have the best program on the planet, and you are not going to reach all kids or a significant number of them. I. Fox appreciates the efforts that everyone is making.

## **SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT**

### **A. AIS Magnet School Lottery Update**

The lottery was delayed but it has been completed. Handouts were given. We received 710 applications from Danbury, Brookfield, New Fairfield, Newtown, Redding and New Milford, the participating districts. Three years ago, a law became into effect that allows other towns to apply, and we received a total of 32 from non-participating districts. We filled 68 positions from our partner districts and 16 from non-participating districts for a total of 84 new students. That will keep us within the 60/40 split we have to stay in for our funding. From the sending districts, we are reimbursed

\$6,700 per child, and we receive \$3,000 per child for Danbury students. Mr. Longo reports that the original design called for an enrollment of approximately 388 students, and we are at 412. We are closer to a 55/45 split. As we look at our final number for the new school year budget, we will gain approximately \$130,000 of additional credit stemming from the AIS Magnet School as an offset to the burden of the General Fund. The STEM lottery will take place on March 25. I. Fox asks if we maintain the same teacher to student ratio at AIS as we do in our other elementary schools. Mr. Longo said we are closely aligned with our other schools. Dr. Pascarella reports that the original design that was submitted to the State before Danbury became involved as the supervising district was 1 to 19.

#### B. DHS Developmental Assets Survey

Dr. Pascarella reports this has been done in a number of communities. They look at the assets and make judgments based on those assets. Towns and schools look at the data and use it to see how they can capitalize on those assets. Ms. Emmett said we have a city-wide committee including school representation. It is called, Stand Together and Make a Difference. They are funded by the Housatonic Valley Coalition Against Substance Abuse. The Board was given an executive summary as part of their Board packet. In May of 2010, approximately 2,000 of our students participated in the voluntary survey. It gathers information and speaks to youngsters' internal and external assets, which are labeled developmental assets. They identified 40 assets, 20 of which are external and 20 being internal. Ms. Emmett explained the summary in detail. At a forum on February 15, where the community was invited to hear the results, they spoke a little about Danbury, and our data was very comparable to the national average and strikingly similar to Brookfield who underwent this survey one year before Danbury. Ms. Emmett gave the results of the survey and also spoke about some things we need to work on as a community: (1) The youngsters' perception that the community values youth; (2) Creative activities that are provided for our youngsters; and (3) positive role models. The community got the results and the next step is the Housatonic Valley will sponsor a series of workshops to provide training to interested adults on how to build assets in the community. R. Jannelli said that on Table II, Item 7, Danbury received the lowest score of 16%. Ms. Emmett said the national data is 22%, Brookfield's was 15%. We are in keeping with other communities. I. Fox asks what is done with this data. If this is a launching point of awareness, what happens next to improve the situation. Ms. Emmett attended one of Brookfield's meetings to see what they did, and one thing they did was commission a follow-up study to see if the data changed. They have monthly meetings, share the results with the public, and they participate in training sessions that Housatonic Valley Coalition does sponsor, and that would be the next step for Danbury, which is to bring together concerned people from the community and train adults on how to build assets in youngsters. I. Fox asked if these follow up committees have students on them, and Ms. Emmett said the committee meets at DHS once per month led by Stan Watkins, Crisis Counselor at DHS. There are students from DHS on the committee, also students from WCSU, as well as parents and agency representation.

#### C. State Budget

Dr. Pascarella wants to bring to the attention of the Board that one of the concerns was the ECS money. At this point, the city is planning that the money is not being reallocated from our own dollars but from the State. That will move our budget up 3%. Part of the Governor's budget is to shift a number of agencies. In that shift is reorganization of various departments. One of the things they talked about is the idea of wherever the local school district or regional district is located, if there is a technical school like Henry Abbott Technical School, would that transfer over to one of those entities. It looks like sometime next January we need to make a decision.

#### D. Meeting with Non-Public Principals

Dr. Pascarella states we are trying to do some cost avoidance and also more efficiency with our transportation. We are trying to increase the dismissal time between schools. We need time in the afternoon and suggested a timetable to the non-public schools that would help with that. Dr. Pascarella is unsure if we will be able to accomplish it. The law is clear. Everyone is participating, but we cannot make them change their bell times. Right now, we have asked them to submit times to us that would work for them and asked them to have the information to us by March 17. One of the solutions we have to make us more efficient is to add equipment. That is not an option for us, so we need to find other means or continue to be late. We are trying to move from a twenty-minute window to a thirty-minute window between dismissal times, if possible.

#### E. Facilities Update

Dr. Pascarella reports one of the biggest challenges is Pembroke School. The roof was installed in 1992, with a 20 -year warranty. As of last week, we started getting leaks. The City has been very active. The contractor was there. They think they discovered where the leak is and might have found it on the south side. They are going to be putting a process down so they could hopefully seal it. Mr. Iadarola has been doing all he can. Air quality samplings were taken, and we anticipate results as early as February 24. If air quality samples come back badly, Mr. Longo reports we would have to relocate students. Dr. Pascarella said that if we feel it is unsafe, we have to figure out what we are going to do. Dr. Pascarella said that the people that have been there do not feel it is an issue, but until we get the report, we will not know. Mr. Longo said that he has not received any communication with regard to the integrity of the roof. Ms. Molinaro asks if it is only on the south side. Dr. Pascarella said the focus of the work is on the south side, but that is not the only area that is leaking. The City and the inspectors have been there every day. The DHS problem has been resolved in the automotive area. A pipe kept backing up because some construction had fallen in the sewer pipe and it was damaged. The City repaired the pipe and put in a new boiler. Broadview and DHS have some leaks as well which the City was informed of and will have a crew out to assess the repairs that are required to make it water tight once again. The City has taken the lead on all of the water projects.

#### F. 2020 Task Force

Dr. Pascarella received a notice from the Mayor that the task force will reconvene. Board Workshop Building Utilization meeting will be April 6.

### **ACTION ITEMS**

#### A. January 2011 Operating Results Analysis (General Fund)

**MOTION -** R. Jannelli moved, seconded by S. LeRoy that the Board of Education accept the January 2011 Operating Results Analysis (General Fund).

Mr. Longo told the Board that for the month of January, 2011, the District expended \$12,436,803, resulting in a fiscal year-to-date expenditure value of \$55,232,069. The fiscal year-to-date expenditure represents 48.5% of the General Fund total budget. As of January 31, 2010, encumbrances totaled \$7,600,637 with combined expenditures for a YTD value of 55.2% as compared to the theoretical expenditure rate of 58%.

**The motion carried at 8:13 p.m.**

**B. January 2011 Operating Results Analysis (Grants/Projects)**

**MOTION -** R. Jannelli moved, seconded by S. LeRoy that the Board of Education accept the January 2011 Operating Results Analysis (Grants/Projects).

Mr. Longo told the Board that for the month of January, 2011, the District expended \$1,598,089, resulting in a fiscal year-to-date expenditure value of \$10,317,367. The fiscal year-to-date expenditure represents 39.5% of the reported federal and state grants/projects awards as compared to the theoretical expenditure rate of 58%.

I. Fox asks when the grant runs out on the Parent Literacy Center. Dr. Pascarella stated it would be the end of July. I. Fox asks if Dr. Heller is going to try to secure funding when the grant runs out. Dr. Pascarella said the effort is there but the funds are not. We are not getting money to pay for salaries. At this point, the expectation is that the job will not be there in August. Dr. Glass said that when a grant goes away, staff goes away, unless we have made accommodations. The team is looking aggressively. I. Fox asked what happened to the donation of books from Scholastic. Dr. Pascarella said it will remain with the operation but there will not be an administrator. He further stated we do not want to lose the momentum that we have, but we are trying to figure out what we could do. Congressman Murphy made it clear that this grant will not be repeated. Scholastic came to us and they want to continue to support us.

**The motion carried at 8:17 p.m.**

**C. February 23, 2011 Transfers**

**MOTION-** R. Jannelli moved, seconded by S. LeRoy by that the Board of Education approve the February 23, 2011 Transfer Request.

Mr. Longo went over the Items that were questioned by the Board members and explained the reasoning behind each transfer.

**The motion carried at 8:29 p.m.**

**DISCUSSIONS**

**A. DHS Mid-Year Grading**

Chairman Fox said at the last meeting there were questions raised by parents. Dr. Pascarella refers to an Exhibit in the Board's packet pertaining to DHS Mid-Year grading. He said the policy for the grading was followed, and there was no breach of policy. Dr. Pascarella said the question comes in as to what was done, why it was done, time issues, issues of validity, etc. For the Board's knowledge, we are under the supervision of the Commissioner of Education. Through Dr. Michael Wasta, the gentleman supervising the district, DHS is on that list for monitoring. Dr. Pascarella sent the information to the Commissioner and also sent it to Dr. Wasta for input and review. From their feedback, they saw no issues with what was done. The State does not get involved in local issues;

however, because we had the TDEC plan, he felt he would make a comment. There is some background information that Dr. Glass shared with the Board. Dr. Glass discusses how disruptive the winter has been. One issue that merits further discussion is what is the lowest score we gave, 0% or 50%. We communicated with the Commissioner of Education asking him for his statewide perspective. Danbury has a diverse population, and the criteria for moving students forward is to do the right thing for each student. In speaking with Dr. George Coleman, his conversation was around the concept of opportunities for recovery, to make sure that we give students as many opportunities to recover as possible. He stated that our job as educators is to teach the skills of independence. The vast majority of our students are not independently self-directed learners. The other piece that tends to be very controversial is that grading is subjective. Dr. Glass explained that grades given by teachers are not all the same because teachers' criteria are different. We want to do the right thing by our kids. The argument that Dr. Rossi and Dr. Glass has made is to advocate that a 50 should be the lowest grade we give, and the rationale behind it is that we need to give our students multiple opportunities even if they do not deserve them, because our job as educators is to help students get back on track and get it right. Dr. Glass turned the dialogue over to Dr. Pascarella to discuss the controversy over the weight of the exam. Dr. Pascarella said two things happened. Prior to the two days of the storm: (1) There was an announcement that they would have the finals, and they would be valued at 20%. The decision was made with the department head to give a final. After the two days of the storm, there was real trepidation of what the exams would cover. There is a management system there to turn in those grades, verify them, and get them out because there are youngsters looking at scholarships, etc. There was a discussion whether or not they should have exams at all or perhaps give exams in classrooms, etc. Because of certain items on the TDEC plan, the feeling was to give the exams, and then to not injure students, there was a long discussion about grading on a curve that would take in all the variables. After deliberation with math and science people, it would be difficult to collect all the grades, give the exam grade, bring them back and create a curve for every department, and get this done in a timely fashion. The decision was then made to have the exams count for 20 percent only if they would lift a student's grade, and if not, the average of the first two quarters would be reported as the midterm exam grade. Dr. Pascarella did not find there to be any unethical or unprofessional activities. Administration decided that it would be the least harm to the students. Ms. Emmett reported that Dr. Rossi involved a number of individuals of what the impact would have on students with disabilities. S. LeRoy said that grading is subjective and latitude is given and she is sorry that so many parents got upset. She thanked everyone at DHS especially Dr. Rossi. R. Austin-James does not support the decision made. R. Austin-James states that students should not be given a grade of 50 when they have earned a 0. She feels that a student should not be given credit for doing nothing. R. Taborsak supports the decision that was made and feels the student needs to be given a chance to pass. He feels even with a grade of 50, if a student improved, it would not be easy to get the average up to a 67. R. Taborsak asks if we reported the 20% to the State. Dr. Pascarella sent all the letters, newspaper articles, and the criticisms. Dr. Pascarella said students will fall behind if there is no way to succeed, and they will drop out. S. Molinaro commends DHS. She feels they did the best they could do under the circumstances. She feels the communication piece was handled very poorly. One mass communication going out would have been enough. She feels there was too much communication. I. Fox said that the communication was inconsistent, and it is important that everyone have a reasonable expectation of what was happening. He felt it is important that Dr. Pascarella reached out to get an independent observation of what actually took place and he is confident with that. S. LeRoy said that students are not put in remedial college classes because of a

50, it's because they lack a basic skill set. G. Cooper stated that we should make sure that we are being fair to all students.

## **INFORMATION**

### **CT Coalition for Justice in Education Funding**

Dr. Pascarella said the coalition wanted to have a presentation here. It looks as though Governor Malloy and Mayor Boughton co-chaired a committee. There is an interest to bring in a coalition from Yale to have a conversation with them. There may be an opportunity to get some other funding. There is a series of meetings that are happening. Dr. Pascarella wants to be sure the Board is kept in the loop and refers to a handout given to the Board.

## **BOARD CHAIRPERSON'S REPORT**

### **Board Workshop, Building Utilization, April 6, 2011, 7:00 p.m.**

G. Cooper wants to be sure there is ample time at the meeting and the committee come to the meeting with all the information necessary to discuss the purpose of its meeting. Dr. Pascarella would like to have information in the Board's hands no later than March 23. I. Fox said we need to have the information in sufficient time to read it and have intelligent questions to ask.

I. Fox advised the Board about a meeting at Rogers Park Middle School on Thursday, February 24, at 7:30 p.m. Several state legislators will be there and he encourages everyone to attend.

## **BOARD REPORTS, COMMUNICATIONS AND COMMENTS**

Operations/Policy: R. Taborsak would like to call attention to the recent CABE journal about electronic participation. We were asked as a committee to work on electronic communication among Board members and R. Taborsak did secure sample copies from CABE and asked if CABE had any samples with regard to advertising. His feeling is that having read it, the Board should have a meeting and make suggestions. A meeting was set for March 16 at 7 p.m. He will try to get the information to the committee members.

Dr. Pascarella said the next big thing we have is advertising. The State said we cannot advertise on buses. There are other ways to do some advertising at schools. Dr. Pascarella does not want to entertain it if the Board is not advocating it. The committee will put that on their agenda for the meeting.

City-Wide PTO: K. Molinaro reports a meeting scheduled for March 7.

## **ADJOURNMENT**

**MOTION:** K. Molinaro moved, seconded R. Taborsak that the Board of Education adjourn its February 23, 2011 meeting. **The motion carried at 9:22 p.m.**

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Kathleen M. Molinaro, Secretary