

**DANBURY BOARD OF EDUCATION MEETING MINUTES**  
**WEDNESDAY, APRIL 27, 2016**  
**Administrative Center, 63 Beaver Brook Road**

**CALL TO ORDER**

Eileen Alberts, Board chairperson, called the meeting to order at 7:04 pm and those assembled recited the Pledge of Allegiance.

**ROLL CALL**

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

Absent: Richard Jannelli, Richard Hawley

Also Present: Dr. Pascarella, Kim Thompson and Joe Martino

**RECOGNITIONS** - none

**PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

Terra Martin-Volpe, a New Fairfield resident with a child at the AIS spoke about the elimination of sibling preference at AIS and how it may impact Danbury families that have more than one child at the elementary level. Also how it can impact families that are either considered low income, single parent or have two parents that must work. She mentioned that the city's population encompasses large amounts of immigrants and minorities. She believes that this policy will effect heavily and broadly these groups. She said she came today to speak for the children who rely on afterschool, have fewer options and choices and for the parents who lead numerous obstacles in their day to day life. For these parents who have multiple elementary aged children at two different schools would be very stressful. This would add a message to the parents that "this school is no longer meant for you." T. Martin-Volpe mentioned that the BOE already acknowledges that there is a struggling population that deserve fewer learning obstacles and have as much access and opportunity as all other groups. This is seen through the Early College Opportunity program at the high school that decreases obstacles of low income families so their children could obtain an Associate's degree upon graduation. This decreases the financial burden of college tuition. With this she asks the Board if it has an interest in providing these opportunities to these families, why would you remove obstacles in the upper grades offering the ECO program. On the other hand at the elementary level, create more obstacles for these families by eliminating sibling preference. She respectfully asked the board to consider how much Eliminating sibling preference will impact these families and that the Board reinstitute sibling preference so that all families are on an equal footing when applying or accepting an offered spot at the school.

Mark Stanton, a resident of Danbury since 2006. He is an AIS parent of nine of the past ten years. He has a fourth grader at AIS and was a former AIS PTO treasurer. He also has a sixth grader in RPMS and eighth grader at Westside. He is a Math teacher in New York. He stated he is in favor of removing sibling preference. He remembers eight years ago how the PTO went to the Board to ask to expand the school from fifth to sixth grade because they thought it would be best. After assessments they came to the conclusion to leave it as it was. This was when he became more active in the PTO. He asked the Board to consider if sibling preference makes AIS a success or not. This is what he keeps asking himself. He doesn't think that Mrs. Nitowski would work any less hard, or the staff, or the custodial staff, or the parents if there were one child or several. They just do it because that's the thing to do. They

work hard. As a math teacher he says he looks at numbers and that when sibling's preference was removed, that you double the probability to get in that school. The probability is still small, about four percent, but doubled the chances with sibling preferences. M. Stanton finished by saying what the best thing is when your kids were at different schools: he got to see two middle school Musicals, The worse thing: 9 robo calls on a snow day or delay. He ended by asking the Board to weigh heavily the achievement gap verses the benefits.

Tricia Robinson, came to advocate on behalf of Danbury public education. She stated that she has had a great personal life in public education as well as with Dr. Nitowski at AIS. She said she wanted to remind the Board through her children; second grader and kindergartener why it makes such a difference for them to stay together. Her youngest walks in school very comfortably. She has an advantage as a kid to be able to go to where her sister is. She believes that sharing life experiences will be a positive impact in her child's life. She praised of the wonderful job Dr. Nitowski has done for the school. She just wants AIS to have the same opportunities as the other elementary schools which is keeping their kids together and families together, allowing kids to share life experiences and allowing them to grow together. She thanked the Board for taking their time to listen and appreciates the energy into this, that it is not easy to decide with multiple views coming forth to the Board, but does appreciate all that the Board does for them.

Kathy Keefe introduced herself as a parent with a child at Westside and two at the Magnet School and said that she has been very luck with the lottery. She then focused on an issue that was brought up about two years ago. She said that the kids at AIS have had six years of Spanish and will it be good for them when they get to Rogers Park or Broadview. Right now the six graders do not take Spanish at Broadview. Because she is at the Rogers Park district, her fifth grader will have that option. She does not know if her child will be put in an ESL class or in an elevated class. She asked the Board to consider this and thanked the Board for their time.

## **CONSENT CALENDAR**

**MOTION** - D. Metrena moved , seconded by R. Pietrafesa that the Board of Education approves the items on the Consent Calendar, Exhibits 16-61 through 16-65, as recommended:

**A. MINUTES**

3/23/16 Board Meeting (Revised)  
4/13/16 Sites & Facilities Committee Meeting  
4/13/16 Board Meeting

**B. PERSONNEL REPORT**

Accept Leave of Absence: Tyra Lohmann  
Accept Resignations: Jacy Bispo, Richard DuVivier, Serafina Greco,  
Kelli Iasiello (CRC Only), Donna Urban  
Accept Retirements: Mary Anne Ciccarone, 22 years  
Katherine Leone, 14 years  
Sharon O'Loughlin, 24 years  
Bahige Swanson, 11 years  
New Hires: See Exhibit 16-64

**C. DONATIONS**

Accept \$2,000 donation from IBM to help fund the after school classes at Morris Street School. Alberts wanted to take this time to thank IBM for their donation.

She also thanked the people that are retiring for their service.

**Motion carried at 7:25 pm**

**EMPLOYEE REPRESENTATIVE**

South Street School – Allison Hauser, third grade teacher, Rebecca Iwasaki, first grade teacher, Jen Smith, Speech therapist, Gwen Davidson, Kindergarten teacher, Pat Sealy, second grade teacher, Elizabeth Melendez, first grade teacher, Margie Jones, Media specialist and Carolyn Keenan, second grade teacher, are representing South Street School. A. Hauser spoke on behalf of the South Street School staff. She shared the good things that are happening at South Street School. She began with the Partnership with the Jericho project, which they are very grateful for them and the project. She mentioned that there are some upcoming summer things happening for the students that are really beneficial: Their fifth grade class will be attending a seven week summer camp at pathways, Monday through Friday, all expenses paid and its academics; Also about 20 students from grade K through 4 will also be in a summer camp; and 15 students coming into kindergarten will be participating in a Jumpstart program which is a six week program that consists of one hundred hours of intensive instruction before they start Kindergarten. Also with the Jericho project they have had a Breakfast book club where every morning, while they eat breakfast, they read books with volunteers. They had a renovated teachers room and outdoor classroom, which they will be using very soon. As far as parent involvement and student needs, they have a program which they call W.I.N. which is basically, What I Need. Every classroom has a time set aside to work on students' needs and strengthening their skills. They had an Invention Convention. All their teachers do a lot of parent nights. They want parents to come to the school for celebrations and more. Last night they had a Music and Art Show and coming up soon there will be a Kindergarten Art and Music show. They really like that parents are involved. She ended by thanking the Board.

K. Molinaro asked how are the children qualified to participate in the Kindergarten program. G. Davidson responded that there was a screening process when they register for Kindergarten.

E. Alberts asked A. Hauser to tell them a little more about their outdoor classroom. A. Hauser responded that there are three sections oval seating. They have a rotating schedule where teachers can do lessons outside. She says it's a neat concept of being outside and in a different setting. They are excited to use this with the students. G. Davidson added that it has benches with trees and plants surrounding. It was a wasted space behind the school. The Jericho project decided to give them an outdoor classroom. The students have planted seeds and soon will be planting them near the outside classroom.

E. Alberts thanked them for coming and talking about what is happening at their school. She mentioned that the reason why they have this at the Board meetings is to keep the Board informed and instead of transporting themselves from school to school, it would be easier to come to the meeting.

G. Davidson ended by saying that they have great Principal heading the school. E. Alberts thanked them for their time.

**STUDENT REPRESENTATIVES**

DHS: Caitlin Burke and Alec Moore introduced themselves to the Board stating that they are part of the Board of Governors Executive Council. They gave the Board the following upcoming events: On May 2 there will be the Band concert at 7:00 pm in the cafeteria; on May 5 through May 7 is the In the Heights Musical; on May 9 the National Junior Honor Society Induction ceremony in the auditorium; May 13 the Junior prom will be at the Portuguese Cultural Center; on May 20 there will be a Variety show that starts at 7:00 pm in the auditorium; May 23 will be the Choral concert also in the auditorium;

May 27 will be the Senior prom at the Amber Room and will start at 7:00 pm; June 3 the Band concert at 7:00 pm in the auditorium; June 4 Coda from 2:00 to 8:00 pm in the courtyard; June 6 Senior awards at 6:00 pm in the auditorium; June 8 department senior awards at 9:30 am in the Auditorium; and June 9 Graduation at 5:00 pm.

ACE: Stephanie Hottes gave the Board the following updates: during the month of March, students participated in a project based learning activity in their Career and Life Skills classes surrounding "Alternatives to School Lunch". Students researched national guidelines surrounding school lunch and advocated for some additional food opportunities at ACE including a more extensive salad bar, weekly subway/deli sandwiches and vending machine that provides healthy drinks; On Wednesday, April 6th, thirty students from Ace with some parents attended a chicken dinner at ACE at 5:30 pm followed by a bus ride to DHS to see and listen to Chris Herren presentation regarding substance abuse; Thursday March 31st, twenty five students participated in a field trip to the Connecticut Science Center in Hartford with Kyle Trocolla and John Webber where they attended an invention convention exhibit, an environmental ecology exhibit and a sports in motion exhibit; lastly, ACE students are preparing for a number of outdoor education trips that will be hosted in the spring. This includes overnight hiking trip on the Appalachian trail, a three day white water rafting trip and a final end of the year school-wide trip to Camp Herlich where students will participate in team building, low ropes activities, and high ropes zip lining.

State BOE Student Representative: Alexandra Prendergast began by saying that her year is coming to an end now. They have one or two months left and are preparing for their big Board meeting in June. She mentioned that she is staying on track with things they have been working on. She has been on a committee all year with some piers and has hopes of starting student advocacy groups around the state about the ECS funding formula problem. They plan on doing this by relying on their personal connections amongst students in cities that have been badly affected by the way the system works. She stated that it is a student movement and if they are able to get it off the ground, although they definitely appreciate all the hard work they do for them, ultimately they are the consumers of education and if the funding formulas are not working out, then they are the ones who will be affected and their futures are at risk. Therefore they are making it a priority to stand up to advocate a solution that will also work for them. They are trying to get enough student support statewide to call this issue up and bring more attention to it. She stated that the student state advisory council on education has a meeting with the state Board of Education and provide an update on the things that they have been working on over the course of the year, and she hopes to have some role in that update and then perhaps have a chance to talk about the work that they have done and how this issue does really affect many school districts throughout the state. A. Prendergast mentioned that this doesn't have Danbury and that they have a lobbyist working on this problem. What they want to do, and this would be entirely independent from the Danbury Board of Education, is to have a student initiative at the High School and possibly work with a faculty member there. They would like to get a student advocacy and if the Board see it may be appropriate for them to potentially talk to a lobbyist to see if they can get a student voice from Danbury's side. This would also be an advocacy for general educational issues and would not only engage students at a high school level as well as encourage them to speak out on issues that are really important to them. A. Prendergast also asked the Board if they had any suggestions on that how they could have a bigger role and a bigger voice.

**PRESENTATION** - none

## **ACTION ITEMS**

### A. March 2016 Operating Results Analysis (General Fund)

MOTION: D. Metrena moved, seconded by H. Robinson, that the Board of Education accept the March 2016 Operating Results Analysis (General Fund)

Joe Martino mentioned that the Health Insurance was being monitored and there were no major alarms

**Motion carried at 7:35 pm**

### B. March 2016 Operating Results Analysis (Grants/Projects)

MOTION: David Metrena moved, seconded by Gladys Cooper, that the Board of Education accept the March 2016 Operating Results Analysis (Grant/Projects)

Joe Martino mentioned that there is a drop on enrolment numbers. The state takes our numbers and then calculates funding accordingly.

**Motion carried at 7:36 pm**

### C. June Board of Education Meetings

MOTION: D. Metrena moved, seconded by P. Johnston, that the Board of Education change the June 2016 scheduled meeting dates from the second and fourth Wednesday (June 8 and June 22) to the first and third Wednesday (June 1 and June 15) due to graduation/moving up ceremonies the week of June 6-10. The revised meeting dates will be posted as Special Board Meetings.

K. Molinaro asked Joe Martino if they changed the dates of the Board meetings would it impact how they finish the year. J. Martino responded that the state and city budget will be set by May 4th. This will give him a good two months to get a sense of things. J. Martino also said that she could also call for a special meeting if needed.

**Motion carried at 7:39 pm**

## **SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT**

- A. Budget Update: Dr. Pascarella stated that he had sent out something about the state budget from our lobbyist. He also mentioned that the lobbyist will work with our student advocacy groups, but right now the work of advocacy is more of a one on one.
- B. Alliance/ECS Grant Update: The ECS budget money was to be frozen. The house republicans and governors did not approve the additional 850 thousand and another 900 thousand; however the Democrats have not yet submitted a budget to the governor. By Thursday there should be a recommendation by the democrats in terms of their budget which will not be signed by the Governor. If so this may extend reception in order to have safe budget. They have an existing budget but just can't fund it. It is 580 million dollars short. As for the Alliance grant they have asked for an

extension and it was given. Dr. Pascarella said that they were not playing nice up in Hartford and creates angst across the state. Danbury and a few other cities receive ECS money. All the other communities were cut and that's what's causing the problem. They have decided to equalize the funding. Districts have been receiving money and therefore now they are saying that they need to distribute the limited resources to those communities that are growing. As far as local, the town did uphold a 2.2 million dollar recommendation of the subcommittee of the town. We have asked for 5.2 so there is a 3 million plus short. That is why the Alliance money is important to us. They talked to the Mayor about some excess costs and he is open to rerouting some of those costs for reimbursement to us for resources for the Special Education program. Joe Martino added that next Tuesday will be the full city council meeting where the city budget is approved and set. Only after Tuesday will we have word.

C. Enrollment Study: Dr. Pascarella confirmed that they will have Enrollment consultants that will do an analysis. He said that they were a little costly but worth it. They will do analysis not only demographics as well as the neighborhood growth such as the condominiums. They have worked in surrounding towns and have good best practice of making estimates of how many students. Dr. Pascarella also asked them to look at ethnicity because it can be problematic with our OCR. If needed to redistrict they would have to move students based on ethnicity over presentation. They will also work on school buildings and do walk-throughs to see if any space can be utilized as classrooms. They will start in May, work through the summer and by September or October we should have something to report to the Board that will go into the next budget cycle. They are still planning and hoping for that module at Shelter Rock that will give four classrooms. Also Mr. Maloney is opening up another center and there may be room to rent which we may have to do to make some room for Hayestown. Joe Martino gave the name of the company: Milone & Macbroom. They have worked at Bethel, Stamford and Norwalk. They do a deeper study of enrollment.

G. Cooper asked that the city budget was 4.59 and it was said 5.2 and the city is only giving us 2.2. She wanted to know why the difference if we were asking 4.9 percent increase versus 5.2. Joe Martino responded that Dr. Pascarella said the current increase was 5.6 million and a 4.59 percent increase. That is a percent increase. J. Martino confirmed it would be approximately 3.4 million set back.

Dr. Pascarella explained that if needed the ECS money, strategically, the state was taking resource from municipalities. J. Martino confirmed that the city lost approximately 3 million dollars in sales tax revenue from the state, Governors fund.

J. Martino also said that there will be a 250 thousand dollar cut in health that might help.

Pat Johnston asked if this could affect next year's budget causing an even larger deficit for next year and possibly cutting the ECS funding Dr. Pascarella responded that they couldn't take it all away. They froze us and now reinstated, but they can still cut in half.

Future Construction will get a cut. There will be over a half a billion dollars of school construction amongst the states. This does not affect the High School project.

## **DISCUSSION**

Academy for International Studies (AIS) Sibling Preference: Dr. Helena Nitowski thanked the Board for letting her talk about the issue at hand. She wanted to clearly articulate the feelings and the thoughts of the staff of the school as well as herself on the issue of sibling preference. She believes that one of the things that is so important is that in any school, everyone works hard together to create a climate and a culture where kids feel safe and nurturing and where they can do their best. She says that school is an

extension of family. They have those students for six years and over six years, most families have more than one child. She said that they feel very strongly if eliminating sibling preference will impact the climate and the culture of the school. And this is because they get to know those parents and get to work with those kids during a long period of time. She said she understood the Board in making this kind of a challenging decision is difficult and realizes that the Board has the best interest in the children of Danbury. She also said that when making decisions they have to balance off our head and our heart, and look at the research has to say. When looking at this particular topic it is known that kids need to stay together which has been seen at other magnet schools, and in fact when they removed the sibling's preference, they end up going back in. Again she stated that she knew it was a difficult decision the Board needs to make, but was there so they knew what the staff felt and if there were any questions to ask her.

Dr. Pascarella supported the sibling policy change last year. He said he wanted to explain why he did: it was because of the advanced programs offered. He believed that it limited the opportunities of students to apply for these advanced programs. There were consequences that hit us: the disparity between the non Danbury residents getting much more advantages than our own residents. He said he spoke to the Superintendent of New Haven who ran the program for about four years and then declined the participation. He said he also spoke to the staff at AIS and they think that it doesn't give value to their school and is it fair for those students and the negative impact to their culture and climate. He said he was supporting to resetting that.

K. Molinaro spoke that it is not about the parents that spoke, but because of keeping siblings together. She believes that the school has soared and that we should emulate that and not tear it down.

**MOTION:** K. Molinaro moved, seconded by H. Robinson, to add an action item to the agenda. The motion passed unanimously.

**ACTION ITEM:**

Academy for International studies (AIS) Sibling Preference

**MOTION:** K. Molinaro moved, seconded by H. Robinson to add the sibling preference to the agenda for approval.

R. Pietrafesa asked if the siblings that are currently in the school are grandfathered into the sibling policy. Dr. Pascarella said yes and once the other sibling leaves the school then it's over. R. Pietrafesa then said that he believes that the school is a good school, not because of the siblings but because of the climate the principal creates as well as the staff.

H. Robinson also spoke. She agreed with R. Pietrafesa. When she came to the Board she had a different overview but now feels that if something is working we shouldn't break it. She doesn't believe that the 4% difference to allow opportunities to children is not legitimate interest to change policy. She says it seems more practical to have their children in one place instead of all around town.

F. Karrat was curious about the numbers that were presented to the Board for the 2015-2016 school year. There are a total of 231 Danbury students and 111 are siblings. Incoming Kindergarten, 44% sibling 33% not sibling. He asked if there was ever a year where the Kindergarten spots were all siblings or has it generally been about 50%. Dr. Nitowski says that it varies year to year, generally between 40 to 45%. F. Karrat also asked if there were ever discussion on capping the number of siblings. Dr. Pascarella responded that there was talk about different calculations, but because of the possibility of



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

P. Johnston brought up a concern of a parent about schools being open for voting while school is in session. Dr. Pascarella mentioned that there were 6 schools open for voting. We never closed schools during Primaries. We have asked the city to find another location but because of the statue they could not make a move to do that. Most of the issues were parking. We did have two people roam into a school, but nothing happened and they were escorted them out. This happened only because the way the school is structured; This was at two elementary schools. Maybe next year have some add more security in the buildings. P. Johnston also said he received thank you notes for Reading day from Mr. Young's class. He said it was a great day and they asked him to go back.

G. Cooper asked if there was a plan in place to recruit minority. K. Thompson responded that she and Dr. Pascarella participated in the Human Capital Cohort that is run by the Department of Education and their Project is to look at minority hiring initiatives. We are running ahead of the numbers that we see in the state, but we have a lot of ground to make up because our overall numbers of 800 plus teachers the ratio is not high enough. She said that she and Dr. Pascarella went to the Historical Black Colleges greeting session. It was a program funded by the State Department of Education. All of the colleges were represented and we connected with them and created a pipeline. Second piece is working with the Department of Education as a consultant as part of a minority hiring program where we would send 8 teachers to these group sessions where they talk about cultural competency, how to make the environment welcoming to minority candidates and minority hires. The NEA is willing to sponsor some cost so we can do that in the coming year. The third thing they have done is reached out to our local area. They will be educating more teachers and making them more aware. On May 17 they will have workshops for paraprofessionals and workshops for Administrators late June. She will be presenting to the Human Capital Cohort on Tuesday. She is also meeting Rob Pote about a pipeline with Westconn. If they have students with interest in becoming educators, they could have them intern. G. Cooper mentioned that she is content that something is being done. She just hopes that the doors are open and that we can have an environment that people can be comfortable in. R. Pietrafesa mentioned that he and Michael Ferguson will do some school visits on Monday and if anyone wanted to go to let them know. E. Alberts thanked Kim Thompson.

**EXECUTIVE SESSION** - None

**PUBLIC SESSION** - None

## **ADJOURNMENT**

D. Metrena moved, seconded by R. Pietrafesa, that the Board of Education adjourn its April 27, 2016 meeting and the meeting adjourned at 8:39 pm.

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Michael Ferguson, Secretary

(Meeting was video recorded)