

**APPROVED
MINUTES
BOARD OF EDUCATION
JULY 28, 2015**

PLACE:

Darien Board of Education
Meeting Room
7:30 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Ms. Hagerty-Ross, Chair; Mesdames Stein, Zuro, McNamara and Sullivan; and Messrs. Harman, Burke, Martens, and Dineen.

ADMINISTRATION PRESENT:

Dr. Dan Brenner, Superintendent; Dr. Susie DaSilva, Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction; Ms. Shirley Klein, Assistant Superintendent of Special Education and Student Services; Mr. Michael Feeney, Director of Finance and Operations; Ms. Marjorie Cion, Director of Human Resources.

VISITORS:

Approximately 40

CALL TO ORDER

Ms. Hagerty-Ross called the meeting to order at 7:38 p.m.

CHAIRPERSON'S REPORT

Ms. Hagerty-Ross noted the Board had now gone "paperless," and asked forbearance as the Board would be using digital copies on notebooks that evening. Ms. Hagerty-Ross welcomed the new administration to their first official Board meeting and noted how Dr. Brenner had already been busy visiting around the town.

PUBLIC COMMENT

There was no public comment at this time.

SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT

Dr. Brenner said he was thrilled with his new position and grateful he could surround himself with his own team. He said he knew there had been a lot written about how much work needed to be done on the schools, but he had been meeting many wonderful and gracious people and was looking forward to the work ahead.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- ** MS. SULLIVAN MOVED TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE REGULAR MEETING OF JUNE 23, 2015.**
- ** MS. MCNAMARA SECONDED THE MOTION.**
- ** MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY WITH ONE ABSTENTION (MR. DINEEN).**
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- ** MS. SULLIVAN MOVED TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE SPECIAL MEETING AND EXECUTIVE SESSION OF JUNE 23, 2015.**
- ** MS. STEIN SECONDED THE MOTION.**
- ** MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY WITH ONE ABSTENTION (MR. DINEEN).**
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- ** MR. BURKE MOVED TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE SPECIAL MEETING AND EXECUTIVE SESSION OF JUNE 23 2015.**
- ** MR. HARMAN SECONDED THE MOTION.**
- ** MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY WITH TWO ABSTENTIONS (MR. DINEEN AND MS. MCNAMARA).**
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- ** MS. SULLIVAN MOVED TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE SPECIAL MEETING OF JULY 9, 2015.**
- ** MS. ZURO SECONDED THE MOTION.**
- ** MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

BOARD COMMITTEE REPORTS

There were no Board Committee reports at this time.

PRESENTATIONS/ DISCUSSIONS

A) Presentation, Discussion and Possible Action on Proposed High School Athletic Field Trips (FILE #2382)

Dr. Brenner presented a list of six proposed High School field trips. He said he understood there was an October 15th deadline for additional trips to be added, and it was possible more trips would be added before the deadline.

- ** MR. MARTENS MOVED TO ACCEPT THE HIGH SCHOOL ATHLETIC FIELD TRIPS AS OUTLINED IN THE SUPPLIED MATERIALS (FILE #2382)**
- ** MR. BURKE SECONDED THE MOTION.**
- ** MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

B) Update on Summer School Enrollment (FILE #2383)

Dr. DaSilva said she had the pleasure of dropping into visit the Summer School programs. She said there are 2048 students enrolled in Darien Summer School. In terms of the ESY program, she said there were 323 students offered ESY and 261 enrolled.

Board Questions/Comments and Administration's responses:

a) Do we know if 2048 was the projected number for Summer School enrollment this year? (Dr. DaSilva said based on the previous year's projections of 2,000, Summer School enrollment was currently on target.) **b) In Special Education, is this 261 enrollment similar to last year?** (Dr. DaSilva replied it was similar.)

C) Report and Possible Action on Pre-K Through Grade 12 Enrollment Capacity (FILE #2384)

Mr. Feeney spoke to the memo dated July 21st, and noted enrollment was pretty much on target with projections done by both the Board and Milone and MacBroom. Of particular importance as they are right on the 26 class size breakpoint of having to create another class are: Ox Ridge 4th grade, with 2 students under limit; Tokeneke 3rd and 4th grades, 1 student under the limit.

Board Questions/Comments and Administration's responses:

a) With Tokeneke being so close in this district, have we reached out to Avalon rentals and been proactive to find out if there are additional students coming into the district? And if the sections break, do we have a plan in place? (Dr. Brenner said it was his understanding there was room in Tokeneke for one more class, not two. He said it was important to note that class sizes in the middle school and high school are less problematic and can usually absorb a delta on either side. He said the deltas in class sizes in elementary schools were problematic, in particular classes as large as 26, when caps at the high school are lower. He said a further problem was the classroom sizes of the elementary schools were relatively small. He said putting 26 kids in these small classrooms was educationally unwise. He said the class size issue would have to be revisited and would like to monitor the situation until the deadline of July 31st, and then possibly take action.) **b) If we open up two sections, how many would we have left that are budgeted for?** (Mr. Feeney said there would be 4 sections remaining in budget control.) **c) It should be noted ELP sections are also taking up space in elementary schools. It should be noted that the biggest discrepancy between budget and enrollment occurs in 10th grade. Any knowledge as to why?** (Dr. Brenner said they did not know why there was the large decrease in 10th grade enrollment but would monitor the situation.)

Ms. Hagerty-Ross said perhaps the best course of action would be to vote to allow Dr. Brenner to open up new classroom sections, if indeed the numbers broke, on or before July 31st.

- ** MS. SULLIVAN MOVED TO AUTHORIZE THE SUPERINTENDENT TO ADD A CLASSROOM SECTION IF ENROLMENT PUSHES ABOVE THE 26 PER CLASS STUDENT LIMIT ON OR BEFORE JULY 31st.**
- ** MR. MARTENS SECONDED THE MOTION.**
- ** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

D) First Reading of Proposed 2015-2016 Board Goals and Objectives (FILE #2385)

Ms. Hagerty-Ross said she had included in the package edits that had been completed at the recent retreat. She said that the Goals and Objectives would be voted on at the August meeting.

E) First Reading of Proposed 2015-2016 District Goals and Objectives (FILE #2386)

Dr. Brenner said the goals listed are in a new “easy to digest” format. He said the goals are a function of the work the Board and Administration did on the retreat. Dr. Brenner continued by reviewing each point (as in FILE #2386) and then the Board followed up with questions and comments:

Curriculum & Instruction

Dr. Brenner reviewed the goals as stated and noted in particular that he thought professional development was the backbone of schools. He said the school districts which invested in their teachers were the most successful at serving students. He said the goal of professional development was to provide consistency across the district, instead of the district simply relying on the many talents of individual teachers. Consistency is key in keeping up standards.

Board Questions/Comments and Administration’s responses:

a) Would the K-8 literacy initiative also apply to high school? (Dr. Brenner said the first tier program would be to focus on the elementary and middle schools, not leaving DHS out, but different initiatives might be more applicable at that level.) **b) As students’ grades moving into High School can fall behind, High School literacy goals should be acknowledged as district objectives.** (Dr. Brenner said the language of the literacy goals could be changed to include grades K-12.) **c) As we have a literacy goals page and a math goals page, is there an intention for High School literacy to include programs like accelerated English and writing? There seems to have been inconsistencies in High School programs.** (Dr. Brenner said High School literacy would definitely be addressed in discussion about the various levels and differentiated instruction. He said he wanted to caution against “biting off more than we can chew,” and losing focus.) **d) Do “procedures” cited for teachers and IEPs include goals for implementation as well as instruction on how to write IEPs?** (Dr. Brenner said meetings on the topic of IEPs were already being held, including goals for implementation.) **e) Perhaps the word “procedures” could be changed to something implying action? So it does not just seem to cover the writing of IEPs but actual implementation?** (Dr. Brenner acknowledged the request, and said that goals as stated are just goals. He said the intention was to achieve 100%, but it would not happen all at once. He said he was confident by the end of the year much would be accomplished.)

Business

Dr. Brenner said the District would continue to work toward efficiency in Health Benefits. He said he would make building managers each responsible for holding to budget of managed facilities.

Human Resources

Dr. Brenner said the district was a bit behind with the MUNIS reporting module but will soon get the system up and running at full potential. He said a new hiring process had already been started. He said hiring should begin earlier in the year in order to make sure to get the best candidates as there was nothing more important than to get the best teachers.

Community

Dr. Brenner said he had enjoyed being out and about in the community and it is important to have a presence in the town and make sure everyone is on the same page. A new website will be part of community outreach. The emergency response communication system is also being revamped, with talks to the PTO. A “feel good” story about what is going on around the schools will also be sent out as an email blast every Thursday.

Board Questions/Comments and Administration’s responses:

a) It would be great to see notable information on what teachers are accomplishing on the website, for example, writing books etc. (Dr. Brenner said the new website would have a scrolling feature and make it easy for users to read stories, and it could definitely include features on teachers.) **b) Going back to Human Resources—the hiring system Dr. Cicchetti put in place was quite helpful. How much of his process, if any, will be implemented?** (Dr. Brenner said he did not know what Dr. Cicchetti had done regarding hiring. He said he was implementing a new comprehensive system he had used successfully in the past. He said he would send the Board a comprehensive description of the process. He described the process as involving many levels of vetting and including a collaborative cross section of teachers, administrators, PTO members, parents and central office staff, chosen by their peers. He said if the correct candidate is not found, even after a comprehensive process, the process would begin again. The concept is never to settle - the best teachers make the best schools.)

Facilities

Dr. Brenner noted the number of security officers had been increased and emphasis has been put on parking safety and High School use on the weekends.

Board Questions/Comments and Administration’s responses:

a) With regard to the 3rd goal of analyzing building usage, should that include a wish list or projections for future goals like reducing class size and adding programs? (Dr. Brenner asked how the Board would like the 3rd goal to be phrased to include concepts of future plans.) **b) Perhaps “current and possible future.” Some of these topics are likely to come up as we go through the 1st goal.** (Dr. Brenner said this was starting to happen. He said when the 3rd goal is considered it is very important to talk to the people actually using the buildings as well as the architects. The people in the buildings should be the ones to drive the needs and not the architects. For example, answers on the use of portables. Sometimes the people using the facilities are also the ones who come up with the best and most cost effective solutions.) **c) One point that needs to be analyzed is the management of teams in the middle school. Are we managing our teams the right way? For example, in terms of numbers of classes in foreign language instruction, or English classes. We should include in our goals team analysis.** **d) Also, not all High School students play sports and we need to think of ways to grow opportunities for these students.** (Dr. Brenner agreed.)

Technology

Dr. Brenner said it was time to “stop and take a breath” as plans were being developed on how to handle technology. He said having a copy center, which would take some work to put together, was a very efficient and cost effective way to run a school district. He mentioned the environmental and efficiency benefits paperless initiative, which has already begun to be put in place.

Board Questions/Discussion and Administration’s responses:

a) It seems the development of a technology plan also relates to the concept of consistency, (Dr. Brenner said absolutely, noting some teachers may be more technologically savvy than others, and it was a matter of using instruction and getting all teachers to the same level.)

Special Education

Dr. Brenner said the administration and Ms. Klein had begun the hard work of comprehensively addressing special education structure. He said it was important to develop strong personal relationships within and follow-up with the building of real programs. He said the restructuring would not happen overnight but it would happen fast and there was an ultimatum to make things right.

Board Questions/Discussion and Administration’s responses:

a) ESY should also be added to the first goal, as it has been the “stepchild” of the special education program. (Dr. Brenner said he would add language to include ESY as part of the goals.) **b) The reporting of services that have been delivered and the ability to be transparent to the parents has been an issue. How can we articulate and make sure communication is a priority?** (Dr. Brenner said he would like to understand the reporting issue more thoroughly.) **c) One of the issues we have had is on how services rendered to students are reported back to the parents and the State. Our goal is to make this as transparent as possible.** (Dr. Brenner said this was an interesting dilemma and he was under the assumption that what was in the IEP was being followed. Any faults in communication should be the responsibility of the staff and ultimately administration. It is not a goal. It is just flat out management and we need to be held accountable. If parents are not getting satisfaction, I urge them to come straight to me.) **d) Can we use EasyTrac?** (Dr. Brenner said, definitely, EasyTrac could be used for high cost kids and beyond. He said the point was not simply to set up a system, but to fix a broken system and he was totally on board with utilizing all available tracking systems.)

Ms. Hagerty-Ross thanked Dr. Brenner for his review of the goals and noted they would be voted on at the August meeting.

F) Update on Pavilion

Dr. Brenner said he understood this was a Board priority and had met with P&Z, the DAF, the Booster Club and parents to address the issue. He said everyone was in agreement the kitchen should be opened. He said he had two letters from P&Z expressing their approval and allowing for the kitchen facility to also possibly be used

by non-High School teams on the weekends. He said it was determined the opening of the facility would not impact the overall number of the spectators at the pavilion. He said concerns about Band and Cheerleading fundraising had been addressed by perhaps profit sharing from the proceeds - allowing the groups 5 games where they could raise money with concessions. He said the facility would not be advertised as a restaurant but simply provide concessions to pavilion attendees. He said the DAF was prepared to buy the kitchen equipment and he was recommending moving forward.

Board Questions/Discussion and Administration's responses:

a) One concern that has been faced by the Selectmen and town at other town concessions is the issue of garbage - it definitely builds up. There is a sense of pride at the maintenance of the High School and we need to be careful that garbage does not become an issue. (Dr. Brenner said he understood but the way to address the issue would be to open and allow the facility to run for a year and then assess the situation. He said he had experience in Yorktown with issues of Gatorade and turf and eventually after much reinforcement of standards, the problem was solved. He said cleanliness would not be up to the vendor, although the vendor could use responsible serving supplies, but the whole community to make a priority.) **b) The key is we want the facility open for the football season. However, it will take time to get a fully vested proposal with an RFP to the RTM, so we will not get a vendor approved in time.** (Dr. Brenner said he was asking for permission from the Board to allow the DAF to purchase the kitchen equipment and get the process started.) **c) I don't think you can do that. We need you to provide a fully vested proposal with an RFP noting hours and usage, including whether the facility will be used for non-school events.** (Dr. Brenner said that P&Z had approved the use of the facility for non-school events.) **d) P&Z may have approved the usage for non-school events, but the problem is there was not a public hearing regarding this approval. This could become a sensitive issue.** (Dr. Brenner said he could put out an RFP but wanted to confirm usage with the Board, regarding equipment, etc.) **e) Do we know what equipment P&Z approved? The Board was left out of the loop on the equipment discussion with the DAF and never saw the final list.** (Dr. Brenner apologized and said he thought the Board had been aware of what was approved and said he would send everyone a list of the P&Z approved equipment.) **f) As we have the kitchen equipment approved and there are really no show stoppers here, can you, as Superintendent go ahead and put together a plan and an RFP for our approval? The proposal can then be sent to the RTM.** (Dr. Brenner said he would come back to the August meeting with a comprehensive plan and RFP. He asked if a Public Hearing could also be done at the same time.) **g) We should also make sure what the RTM and the Board of Finance (BOF) need to get this finalized.** (Dr. Brenner asked if he should reach out to the BOF.) **h) No, the BOE can reach out to the BOF.** (Dr. Brenner asked about the purpose of the public hearing, and said he was happy to knock on doors.) **i) There is a pretty large area of neighbors to be consulted. It is possible we only need a public hearing if we approve for non-high school use and fulfill the assumption here would be hot dogs and hamburgers for home games this fall. Perhaps we can approve the facility in two steps and start with just high school use. We want to make sure we do our due diligence as a Board.** **j) If this is for our August meeting can't we just hold the hearing then?** **k) Lots of people may still be away in August.** (Dr. Brenner said if the Board wanted an RFP it would be important for a vendor to know if the facility would be open on weekdays or weekends. It might not be worth it for the vendor just to serve High School groups.) **l) My inclination is to include usage by non-high school groups in the RFP, to allow the youth groups to use the facility.** **m) I don't disagree but we need to be careful how we proceed. We need copies of the P&Z letters to read ourselves.** (Dr. Brenner said he would send the letters now.) **n) We have about two months until September**

so as we go through with this process it seems plenty of time to go through this process and for the public not to be surprised. Also, as this will go to the RTM there will an opportunity for the public to weigh in then. o) Still technically, the BOE might need a Public Hearing before the proposal gets voted on.

Ms. Hagerty-Ross proposed the Board vote in a “show of hands,” to approve to get the proposal and RFP process started and include non-high school groups, without a public hearing. The show of hands counted 6 and supported a general consensus to go forward.

(Dr. Brenner said he was not opposed to going knocking on doors and speaking to neighbors face to face. He said it would show the District was putting an effort to include the community.) p) **I think as you go forward it would be important to talk to our counterparts. New Canaan runs a successful concession. It is frustrating we are talking about this issue more than real educational issues. There have been many articles about this process which seems to have dragged on unnecessarily. We have got to get this done.**

(Dr. Brenner said he had spoken to the DAF about the importance of following the proper procedures and including the whole community.) q) **We do need to make sure the facility can be open and functioning for the first football game.** (Dr. Brenner asked if he could have the authority to just give approval for the space to be open and then the Band/Cheerleading parents could provide concessions without the concession.). r) **Absolutely, the space can be opened.** (Dr. Brenner said he would do so.) t) **Can the DAF actually order the equipment now so it is in place? We don't have to accept it, but can they at least order it now?** (Dr. Brenner said they could order it but they could not store it at the facility. He said the truth is the facility was built for the long term and the kitchen should eventually open and be great. He said the key was to do it correctly.)

G) Update on DHS Field Renovations

Dr. Brenner said the good news was the renovation was ahead of schedule despite the fact of running into significant ledge. He said neighbors were patient with the thumping sound of the equipment needed to break the ledge. He said turf was being laid and the center oval would be ready by August 15th and the second field was a month ahead of schedule. He said walkways were being put around the fields, and the bleacher construction was being approved by P&Z.

Board Questions/Discussion and Administration's responses:

a) **Have you gotten complaints of work starting before 8 a.m?** (Dr. Brenner said construction did start at 7 a.m. but could be pushed to 8 a.m.) b) **It was discussed that if spectators could not view from the sides of the center oval due to construction, they could watch from behind the goal line. The issue has again been raised. It is against official regulations for spectators to view from behind goal lines and this is causing concerns.** (Mr. Lynch said he believed at this point the parents could view from the sides of the oval, and he was not aware of any sports association rules preventing viewing from behind the goal line. Dr. Brenner said the issue regarding viewing behind the goal line would be looked into.)

H) Update on DHS Special Education Restructuring

Dr. Brenner said he did not have much to report as the administration was still in the initial stages of a comprehensive long-term process. He said the most important aspect was to serve children properly. He said there would be a full report at the next meeting.

ACTION ITEMS

A) Approval of Schedule of 2015-2016 Regular Board of Education Meetings (FILE#2387)

- ** MR. BURKE MOVED TO APPROVE THE SCHEDULE OF THE REGULAR BOARD OF EDUCATION MEETINGS AS PROPOSED.**
- ** MR. DINEEN SECONDED.**
- ** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

B) Updated Facilities Use Fee (FILE #2388)

Mr. Feeney noted, in response to a BOE question, the amount of fees collected for facilities rented was \$10,776 in the past year.

- ** MR. HARMAN MOVED TO APPROVE THE UPDATED FACILITIES USE FEES AS OUTLINED IN THE MEMO DATED JULY 21, 2015.**
- ** MR. MARTENS SECONDED THE MOTION.**
- ** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

C) Personnel Items (FILE #2389)

- i. Teacher/Administrator Appointments**
- ii. Resignations**
- iii. Leaves of Absence**

Ms. Cion said some excellent candidates had been hired, there was still more work ahead, and presented a new document format for hires, retirements and regulations.

- ** MS. SULLIVAN MOVED TO APPROVE THE APPOINTMENTS AS PRESENTED IN THE SUPPLIED DOCUMENT DATED JULY 24, 2015.**
- ** MS. ZURO SECONDED THE MOTION.**
- ** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

- ** MR. HARMAN MOVED TO APPROVE THE RETIREMENTS AS PRESENTED IN THE SUPPLIED DOCUMENT DATED JULY 24, 2015.**
- ** MR. MARTENS SECONDED THE MOTION.**
- ** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

- ** MR. MARTENS MOVED TO APPROVE THE RESIGNATIONS AS PRESENTED IN THE SUPPLIED DOCUMENT DATED JULY 24, 2015.**

**** MR. DINEEN SECONDED THE MOTION.
** MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

D) Approval of Custodial Contract (FILE #2390)

Mr. Feeney said after negotiations with the Custodians' union a 2.95% pay increase was agreed upon.

**** MR. HARMAN MOVED TO APPROVE THE CUSTODIAL CONTRACT AS
PRESENTED.
** MS. STEIN SECONDED THE MOTION.
** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

PUBLIC COMMENT

Ms. Stacy Tie, Clocks Lane, asked if goals for 2015-2016 would also include goals for early learning initiatives.

Ms. Tara Ochman, Mansfield Ave., said that the issue of class size was crucial. She said for 5 years Ox Ridge had been at the limit of maximum class size. She said, perhaps unlike Tokeneke, she believed Ox Ridge did have enough space for additional classrooms. She said it was time for a Board policy change on class sizes.

Ms. Jill McCammon, Old Kings Highway South, said she was curious if any plans for the Universal Design for Learning were being considered, taking into account all learning modalities. She said she understood it was important to build trust with parents regarding special education and reiterated there definitely needed to be some sort of plan and technical resources to communicate student data fully to parents.

ADJOURNMENT

**** MR. BURKE MOVED TO ADJOURN.
** MS. ZURO SECONDED THE MOTION.
** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

The meeting adjourned at 9:39 p.m.

Respectfully submitted

Sarah Schneider Zuro
Secretary