

Joint Meeting of  
Easton, Redding and Region 9 Boards of Education  
October 24, 2017  
Minutes

Attendance:

Easton Board of Education: Bindelglass, Chieda, Parker, Reed, Shortt  
Redding Board of Education: Denny (7:43 pm), Gaspar (7:40 pm), Hoffman, Irwin, Miller (7:43 pm), Whaley  
Region 9 Board of Education: Coppinger, D'Agostino, Gombos, Hancock, Hocker, Johnston  
Administration: McMorrان, Pierson Ugol, Reiss  
Others: Seven members of the staff and community and the videographer

Mr. Hancock, the Region 9 Board of Education Chairman, chaired the meeting.

CALL TO ORDER

Region 9 Board of Education Chairman, Vance Hancock, called the meeting to order at 7:35 pm.  
Easton Board of Education Chairman, Jeff Parker, called the meeting to order at 7:35 pm.  
The Redding Board of Education did not have a quorum at this time.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Chris Parkin, Redding: Stated that Ridgefield School District is planning to change the start times of their schools in the fall of 2019 to address adolescence sleep concerns. He expressed his hope that start times of schools in ER9 will be considered as part of the RFP process for bus transportation.

Dr. Gaspar arrived during Public Comment.

Redding Board of Education Chair, Melinda Irwin, called the meeting to order at 7:40 pm.

Mrs. Denny and Mr. Miller arrived at 7:43 pm.

BOARD MEMBER COMMENT

Mrs. Whaley stated that she agreed it is time to look at the start times of the schools.

Mrs. Cheida congratulated the staff for a successful start of the school year.

Mr. Parker stated that Mrs. Bobroske has resigned from the Easton Board of Education and introduced Katherine (Katy) Reed as the new Board member.

Mr. Hancock stated there are no action items on the meeting this evening. It is an opportunity for the superintendent, Dr. McMorrان, to talk about his vision for Central Office staffing.

DISCUSSION: CENTRAL OFFICE STAFFING

Dr. McMorrان stated that Hartford has significantly increased the workload of local education authorities in the past two years through increases in mandated trainings, increases in curriculum expectations and changing curriculum frameworks, the student data privacy act, and more comprehensive background check procedures. ER9 is the only system in CT that is actually three separate school districts where its Central Office staff must do all state and federal reporting times three. He noted the current staffing for Central Office includes 12 people. There are three administrators, a human resources manager, a business manager, a payroll clerk, an accountant, an accounts payable clerk, a receptionist, and three secretarial support positions.

Dr. McMorran stated the human resources manager processes everything related to approximately 515 employees with the support of a payroll clerk. He is requesting the addition of a benefits specialist position to support this work. He also would like to change the accountant's title to budget manager and equalize her pay with that of the business manager in recognition of her increased responsibilities in managing the three budgets. Dr. McMorran also spoke of the need for a Director of Digital Learning. He proposed that the current position of Director of Technology at the high school be completely eliminated and the teaching assignments related to that position be absorbed by existing staff.

He stated that two secretaries have recently resigned from Central Office, one requesting to be transferred back to a school. Their replacements will come in at a lower salary. The savings will offset his current proposals:

- Addition of Director of Digital Learning
- Addition of benefits specialist
- 2.75% pay increase for the Central Office support staff in 2018-2019 equal to the average of support staff in the three school districts;
- 5.5% pay increase for the human resources manager in recognition that her performance and work expectations are greater than what is currently being reimbursed;
- Equalize the pay of the accountant to that of the business manager in recognition of her increased budget responsibilities.

The administrators' salaries will be negotiated in November with the Boards.

Mr. Hancock asked the Board members if they wished to comment on this part of the superintendent's presentation.

Mrs. Whaley asked for clarification on the Director of Digital Learning. Dr. Pierson Ugol explained it is a leadership role providing guidance for teaching and learning in technology.

Dr. Gaspar focused on the comparison of area school districts and the cost comparison of their central office. ER9's Central Office serves three boards, not one like the others. Running a school system is a fixed cost. Each of the ER9 boards pays one-third of the cost. He referenced the superintendent's PowerPoint - ER9's central office cost is \$300,000 less than Ridgefield's as an example. He stated ER9 is part of DRG A and has aspirations to be like Westport, Darien, New Canaan and Wilton, but "we are fooling ourselves if we think we are there." Administrative overhead is so crucial to making sure the system functions effectively and to making sure the teachers are getting the attention they need. He stated he is worried about the community's commitment to education. He stated it is hard to compete and is not sustainable as it is now. There were four or five superintendents during his twelve-year term on the Board. He hopes the three Boards will pull together and make it happen and support the superintendent's proposals. He has never seen the degree of confidence in the schools at such a low level. He feels it is the Boards' responsibility to change this.

Mr. Miller echoed Dr. Gaspar's comments. He stated he fully supports the superintendent's proposals and feels he should be provided with the resources he needs to run the schools.

Mr. Hoffman asked if the IT support personnel in the buildings would report to the Director of Digital Learning. Dr. McMorran said there would be a relationship between the two, but he/she would not supervise them.

Dr. Irwin asked if the Director of Digital Learning would be an educational coach similar to the STIC position in Redding. Dr. McMorran responded that professional training would be part of this position's responsibility.

Mrs. Shortt stated that she echoed Dr. Gaspar’s comments and appreciates the superintendent’s long-term vision to ensure that we meet all students’ needs.

Dr. Bindelglass said he echoed some of Dr. Gaspar’s comments, understanding the budget constraints under which everyone is operating. He stated he feels the superintendent is “under asking for what he needs” especially in the area of human resources. He stated we also need to look at the area of managing the health and wellness of our students.

Mr. Parker echoes everyone’s comments. He said Central Office staff has been at 12 people for 20 years now even with increased mandates by the state. We are asking the staff to do more than they can reasonably be expected to do and then make them a point of concern when they may not get it done as fast or as accurately as we would expect. He stated there is only so much you can do and be effective at it. He supports the superintendent’s staffing proposals.

Mr. Hancock stated that the superintendent did exactly what he was asked to do – to layout his vision. He felt the superintendent made a good case for what he needs.

Mrs. Gombos thanked the superintendent for laying out his vision and coming to the Boards early with it. She stated Region 9 has not discussed the reduction of the Director of Technology position and feels they need to have a broader discussion about it. She looks forward to seeing a job description for the position.

Mr. D’Agostino stated he would like to “fix this thing once and for all” rather than continuing the bandaid approach. He wondered if creating a position of Director of Human Resources might save on legal costs which would offset the increase in salary for that position. He also hoped the right protocol would be followed in creating the new position of Director of Digital Learning; that a search would be performed with all candidates properly vetted. He thanked the superintendent for his presentation.

Mr. Coppinger said he appreciated the superintendent’s work. He applauded Dr. Gaspar’s comments as well as those of Dr. Bindelglass. He stated a director of human resources would cost double what the current human resources manager is being paid, but perhaps that is the direction that should be taken. He thinks the technology position and the additional support position for human resources are good ideas. He feels the Boards needs to address the efficiency of Central Office.

Mr. Hocker said that he did not hear the superintendent say that this would fix everything, but that this is an incremental approach aimed at improving not fixing everything all at once. He supports the superintendent’s proposal and incremental approach given the budgetary pressures everyone is under.

Mr. Johnston supports the superintendent’s proposal and feels the Boards should act on it. He said he would like to see the job description for the position of Director of Digital Learning, which would answer the questions some Board members have about the position.

#### DISCUSSION: EVIDENCE-BASED BUDGETING

Dr. McMorran discussed evidence-based budgeting and referenced the works of Allan Odden and Lawrence Picus, including School Finance: A Policy Perspective, 5<sup>th</sup> Edition (2013). He cited page 64, Adequacy: “.the notion of adequacy involves the provision of a set of strategies, programs, curriculum, and instruction, with appropriate adjustments for special-needs students, districts, and schools, and the full financing, that is sufficient to provide all students an equal opportunity to learn to high performance standards.” From Odden’s Improving Student Learning When Budgets Are Tight (2012), Dr. McMorran cited: “Using the education dollar strategically ... is not accomplished simply by cutting budgets or increasing class sizes because it saves or frees up money ... is not accomplished simply by decentralizing decisions about spending to schools or changing the governance of the education system ... is not

accomplished by saying that the dollars will be used only for programs and services that benefit the students. A strategic approach ... to using the education dollar means aligning the use of resources to a solid, powerful, and comprehensive education-improvement strategy – a specific and delineated Plan of Action designed to boost student learning and proved as effective in doing so.” Dr. McMorran stated administration will do a better job of justifying what is being asked for in the next budget cycle and the positive result(s) expected.

#### DISCUSSION: TRANSPORTATION: BUS DEPOT

Mr. Coppinger, the chair of the ER9 Transportation Committee, reported that the committee recently met and discussed the bus depot situation. DATTCO’s current contract ends in 2019. A RFP is 90% done for the search for the next provider of transportation services. Some of the issues discussed were seatbelts, security cameras, having more smaller buses rather than empty larger buses and what the legal obligation might be in providing a seat for every student in the event of an emergency and whether that issue could be addressed by having agreements with surrounding towns to share their buses if needed in an emergency. The subject of school start times was also raised at the committee meeting.

Mr. Parker spoke of the work the town of Easton has done to consider building a bus depot near Samuel Staples Elementary School and wondered if that was discussed at the committee meeting. Mr. Coppinger stated there was concern that management of a depot built in Easton might add to the stress and burden on Central Office staff. Mr. Hancock acknowledge the work already done by Easton based on a vote of the tri-Board to explore building a depot there. Mr. D’Agostino stated he felt the numbers presented to do so were not hard numbers. Mr. Parker stated building the depot would not add any more expectations on Central Office to manage it then what already exists. He also stated to suggest it was not carefully vetted is inaccurate. Mrs. Denny stated that at that time there was a more urgent need to look for another location for the depot because Bethel had stated they would not extend the lease for the depot there after July 1, 2018. They have since extended the lease to 2019. This puts the Boards in a different position and gives more time and space to consider what will be done through the RFP process with the expectation that the bus company will manage the depot, not Central Office. Mr. Hancock thanked Mr. Parker for the work he has done to put forth the option of the Easton location and noted it is still a possibility through the RFP process to have the depot located there.

#### DISCUSSION: FOOD SERVICE FUNDING

Mr. Reiss shared a document summarizing the expenditures for equipment, supplies and services processed through the Food Service account. Mrs. Gombos asked about the approval process for work to be done and if a plan exists for replacement of equipment in future years. Mr. D’Agostino feels the revenue should be distributed proportionately. Dr. Bindelglass noted the strategy for spending is based on where the needs are; Food Service is unique because it is based on revenue of sales. Mr. Parker noted that Barlow generates more sales because it provides breakfast, lunch and after-school snacks where the other schools provide just lunch. Since the 2012 school year through last school year, expenditures have totaled: \$161,761.62 for Barlow; \$11,403.49 for HKMS; \$27,281.59 for SSES; \$57,713.79 for JRMS; and \$48,889.47 for RES. Mrs. Shortt stated that Easton/Redding schools are one community. Others on the Easton and Redding Boards stated they had no issues with how the funds are currently distributed.

#### PUBLIC COMMENT

Chris Parkin, Redding: Wondered if the school districts really want to get into the bus depot business and feels it is best handled through the RFP process.

#### BOARDMEMBER COMMENT:

Mr. Parker recognized Dr. Gaspar and Mr. Miller for their service on the Redding Board of Education and in particular Dr. Gaspar for sharing his insight to new Board members through the years.

ADJOURNMENT

**Motion: move that the Region 9 Board of Education adjourn the meeting. Gombos, Hocker.  
Approved. Unanimous.**

**Motion: move that the Redding Board of Education adjourn the meeting. Hoffman, Denny  
Approved. Unanimous.**

**Motion: move that the Easton Board of Education adjourn the meeting. Bindelglass, Shortt.  
Approved. Unanimous.**

The meeting was adjourned at 9:50 pm.

Submitted by Catherine Gombos, Secretary of Region 9 Board of Education

Recorded by Vicki Cram