

REDDING BOARD OF EDUCATION REGULAR MEETING WITH BUDGET WORKSHOP

February 2, 2021 – 7:30 p.m.

Held Remotely Pursuant to Executive Order No. 7B

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://zoom.us/j/99365201592?pwd=R:HhJMz1WFVDZU1mVW0yNSs2QT09>

On YouTube:

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCSJhKa9oQfe3lydov I-EvA>

Minutes

ATTENDANCE

Board members: Parkin, Whaley, Pilato, Hocker, Oulton, Reilly

Administration: Harrison, Pierson Ugol, Zachery, Del Conte

Others: 39 members of the staff and public, a Danbury New Times reporter, and the recording secretary.

CALL TO ORDER

C. Parkin called the Redding Board of Education Regular Meeting to order at 7:32 p.m.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Motion: move that the Redding Board of Education approve the minutes of the January 5, 2021 Regular Meeting, the January 7, 2021 Regular Meeting with Budget Presentation, and the January 14, 2021 Budget Workshop Meeting as submitted. (Reilly, Whaley). Deemed approved by unanimous consent.

PUBLIC COMMENT

None.

BOARD MEMBER COMMENT

H. Whaley thanked Dr. Harrison for all of his time and talent that went into his video, which went viral. She said that Dr. Harrison joined our school community in the middle of our most difficult year and he brings with him a much needed perspective and a skill set necessary to foster excellence in Redding schools.

C. Hocker said that he thought the video was great and that he had been hearing about it from colleagues and people from all over; he said it was the right time and the right place.

ASSISTANT SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT

Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction: Dr. Pierson Ugol reported that her eye continues to be on the curriculum and the needs of our students. She said that she wants everyone to keep in mind that the year is only half over, and while we've been cautiously optimistic about how our students were tracking, we are very aware that those needs continue to ebb and flow in terms of academic and social/emotional needs. Dr. Pierson Ugol said that they engage in weekly conversations about the students and how they are faring.

BUILDING ADMINISTRATIVE REPORTS

Redding Elementary School Principal, N. Hammond, reported on the excitement of both the staff and students on being back in the building. She said that learning is happening and that teachers are continuing to connect with students in all learning models. N. Hammond thanked families for being open and communicative with the school, and asked that families dress their students in the appropriate clothing so that they may go out in the snow for recess. She said that there's approximately 15% (70 students) of the student body in Cohort C.

John Read Middle School Interim Principal, Dr. Amori, first explained that the Board of Education report is put together by Assistant Principal D. Wallin and her assistant, S. Dorenbosch. She said that the school will be celebrating "Read Outloud Day" tomorrow and that most extracurricular activities have resumed. Dr. Amori and D. Wallin said that 17% of the student body is in Cohort C.

C. Pilato asked both N. Hammond and Dr. Amori if their staff are missing the Wednesday afternoon professional development time. Dr. Amori replied that it is a truism that teachers always want more time to meet and collaborate; she said she hasn't heard from 100% of her staff that they want the days back, but that she is sure they would welcome them back. N. Hammond replied that her staff greatly appreciated that time and it was tough to lose it; she said there are now limits on the time for teams and teachers to meet. Dr. Harrison replied that those Wednesdays were very valuable.

DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE ACTION: RECHARGING OF COMMITTEES

C. Parkin presented the proposed charges of the various sub committees of the BOE, which he said he had modeled after the existing Curriculum Committee and DEI Committee charges. It was decided to wait until the next BOE to approve the charge of the Facilities Committee since M. Hoffman, Redding BOE representative to this committee, was not present at the meeting.

Motion: move that the Redding Board of Education approve the Curriculum Committee charge as presented. (Whaley, Reilly). Approved. 6-0.

Motion: move that the Redding Board of Education approve the Policy Committee charge as presented. (Reilly, Hocker). Approved. 6-0.

Motion: move that the Redding Board of Education approve the Long Range Planning Committee charge as presented. (Whaley, Reilly). Approved. 6-0.

Motion: move that the Redding Board of Education approve the Structure and Ways of Working Committee charge as presented. (Whaley, Reilly). Approved. 6-0.

Motion: move that the Redding Board of Education approve the Communications Committee charge as presented. (Reilly, Whaley). Approved. 6-0.

DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE ACTION: PENDING LEGISLATION

C. Parkin explained that there has been legislation introduced to the Connecticut General Assembly on the following three topics, and on which the Board of Education and Superintendent could comment.

Motion: move that the Redding Board of Education formally supports legislation expanding the Open Choice program to include Danbury and authorizes the Superintendent and Chairperson to communicate this support to the Connecticut General Assembly. (Reilly, Whaley). Approved. 6-0.

Motion: move that the Redding Board of Education formally supports legislation reducing the excess cost reimbursement threshold and authorizes the Superintendent and Chairperson to communicate this support to the Connecticut General Assembly. (Whaley, Reilly). Approved. 6-0.

Motion: move that the Redding Board of Education formally supports legislation amending the Freedom of Information Act to make permanent the remote meeting options contained in Executive Order 7B and authorizes the Superintendent and Chairperson to communicate this support to the Connecticut General Assembly. (Reilly, Oulton). Approved. 6-0.

DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE ACTION: VACCINE STATUS

C. Parkin explained that the current timeline for COVID vaccinations in Connecticut is for people aged 65 and up to receive the vaccination and then essential workers; the essential workers category includes school employees. He urged people to lobby their elected officials to get school employees vaccinated.

DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE ACTION: 2021-2022 OPERATING AND CAPITAL BUDGETS

The discussion focused on an issues list that had been composed from discussions at prior budget meetings and workshops. These issues included: health insurance, Junior Bridges Program, and staffing changes.

C. Zachery shared the proposed 2021-2022 budget in its new format; he said that the budget is more transparent in this new form as to where the money is going. He shared two different health insurance scenarios, as prepared by Brown & Brown: one with a two-stop loss, which amounts to a 21.5% (\$590,054) increase; and, one with a one-stop loss, which amounts to a 15.13% (\$415,054) increase. C. Zachery said that the two-stop loss scenario had been put into the proposed budget calculation because it is the most conservative option.

C. Zachery presented budget information for a certified Special Services teacher and paraprofessional for the Junior Bridges Program, explaining that starting this program in Redding would result in a cost avoidance in future budgets. J. Del Conte concurred on this assessment of the program, saying that if students are participating in it then the District would be saving money in outplacement costs.

D. Wallin presented two scenarios of possible staffing levels and team structure for the 5th grade; one scenario with no additional 5th grade teacher, and one with an additional 5th grade teacher. She explained that the ILA and math time blocks are longer for the 5th grade and so this precludes a teacher of another grade from teaching them. D. Wallin further explained that pulling a teacher of another grade to teach science and/or social studies would then disallow that teacher from meeting with their respective grade-level teams. She said that keeping the existing 5th grade teachers and pulling no other teachers from another grade would result in 23 students per 5th grade class.

A lengthy discussion followed about: 5th grade staffing, 5th grade scheduling, 5th grade class size, reinstatement of a part-time music teacher, and the staffing and schedules of the custodians at RES and

JRMS. C. Parkin said that they would leave the discussion for this evening and revisit it during the upcoming Budget Workshop on Thursday, February 4.

DISTRICTS ADMINISTRATIVE REPORTS

Director of Special Services: J. Del Conte reported that the preschool lottery had been completed with parents notified, and that they had a waiting list of students. She said that they will hold a preschool Q & A for the parents over Zoom. J. Del Conte said this is the time of year when they start talking about transitions for the students. C. Pilato said that any extra effort toward communication and touching base with parents would be welcomed by the parents.

Director of Finance & Operations: C. Zachery reported that there was not a Budget Object Summary report for the meeting as the conversion to the new system was still taking place; he also said that there were no health insurance claims numbers as Brown & Brown has not gotten January numbers to him yet. C. Zachery explained the transfers as monies needed to be paid to the lawn care company per a contract with this company that was arranged before he was on staff at the District. Board of Education members had questions about the lawn care service contract and a final cost for the new math curriculum; C. Zachery said that he had spoken with Town of Redding officials about possibly combining the town's lawn care services with the District's lawn care services, and that a first year offer for the math curriculum had been made to the publisher and it was being finalized.

Superintendent of Schools, Dr. Harrison, gave a huge thank you to families and staff for jumping back into remote learning for the day. He said that the COVID numbers for Redding were good and that he was encouraged by them. Dr. Harrison also said that he was encouraged by our commitment to follow the mitigation strategies and watch community behaviors.

BOARD COMMITTEE REPORTS

Task Force on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion: H. Whaley reported that the Task Force is planning an assessment of our strengths and weaknesses, and they will be creating surveys that will go out to the larger community.

Facilities and Fields Committee: M. D'Agostino (Region 9 BOE member who was in attendance at this meeting) said that the Committee continues to look at the buildings and is working on a Capital Plan which will be presented shortly.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Sarah O'Dell, Blackrock Turnpike, Redding, said she really encourages the administrators to find time for small-group instruction for Cohort C. She said she also advocated for taking a look at what is going to be needed when we return to a slightly more normal school environment and small class size. S. O'Dell also said she thinks that there should be some kind of summer program for students finishing kindergarten and younger grades.

Carolyn Baker, Indian Hill Road, Redding, said that she thinks it would be a complete failure for our students and our town if we go for the large class sizes.

Angela Caes, Deer Hill Road, Redding, thanked Dr. Harrison for bringing a little joy with his video and thanked teachers and staff for today's remote learning, saying that it worked really well. She said we have to keep programs like Gifted & Talented and wondered if any of the COVID funding could be used for the staffing issues at JRMS.

Kristen Amsted, Whortleberry Road, Redding, said she was advocating for smaller class sizes and the Gifted & Talented Program. She said she hopes the BOE will be transparent about the pros and cons of the Open Choice Program.

Danielle Garavito, Ledgewood Road, Redding, said that there's been so many new families that have recently moved to Redding and that the Board really needs to come together to get the facts out there to people who may not be coming to these meetings so that they can truly understand what Redding is all about, which is representing our kids and doing the best for our kids.

Pina Jabbari, Wood Road, Redding, said thank you for all of your efforts as she knows that this is not an easy process. She said she is worried about the talk of condensing classroom teachers and increasing class sizes because she thinks we have so much to catch up on, from a learning perspective. P. Jabbari also said she wants people to think ahead because we are still going to be in this next year and she wants everyone to think of our students' health and safety in this decision-making process.

BOARD MEMBER COMMENT

None.

ADJOURNMENT

**Motion: move that the Redding Board of Education Regular meeting be adjourned. (Whaley, Reilly).
Approved. Deemed approved by unanimous consent.**

The meeting was adjourned at 9:52 p.m.

Submitted by Colleen Pilato
Secretary, Redding Board of Education

Recorded by Sarah Ota