

**THESE MINUTES ARE SUBJECT TO BOARD APPROVAL AT THE
April. 01, 2010 MEETING
Joint Board of Education Committee**

February 22, 2010

A regular meeting of the Joint Board of Education Committee was held on Monday, February 22, 2010 in the John Winthrop Middle School Library, with the following Board Members present:

CHESTER BOARD OF EDUCATION: Wendy King, Eileen Brower-Sypher, Carol Johnson, Ashley Marsh, Lianne Rutty, Marjorie Della Rocco, Amy Safran

DEEP RIVER BOARD OF EDUCATION: Christine Daniels, Gale Dilger, Dave Berardis, Kc Nelson-Oliveria, Arthur Robbins, Liz Tracy, Mark Malcarne, Lauri Ann Wichtowski, James Olson

ESSEX BOARD OF EDUCATION: Lon Seidman, Jeffrey Burzin, Mark Watson, Matthew Cooper (7:50 p.m. arrival)

REGION 4 BOARD OF EDUCATION: Linda Hall, Chris Riley, Richard Strauss, Pamela Christman, Jennifer Clark (9:00 p.m. departure)

Also in attendance: Dr. Ruth Levy, Superintendent, Garth Sawyer, Business Manager & Jennifer Bryan, Board Clerk.

Audience of Citizens: Mike Barile, CES Principal; Jack Pietrick, DRES Principal; Joanne Beekley, EES Principal; Deborah O'Donnell, EES Assistant Principal; David Russell, JWMS Principal; Rich Zuraw, JWMS Assistant Principal; Ian Neviaser, VRHS Principal; Kristina Martineau, VRHS Associate Principal; Diane Dugas, Assistant Superintendent; Heidi Degree, President of the Teacher's Union; Tom Marsh, Chester First Selectmen; Bruce Watrous, Chester resident; Rick Daniels, Deep River resident; other unknown citizens.

CALL TO ORDER

Supervision District Committee Chair Christine Daniels called the meeting to order at 7:13 p.m.

The Chairs of the Chester, Deep River, Essex, and Region 4 Boards of Education called their respective Boards to order at 7:13 p.m. All Boards had a quorum at the call to order except the Essex Board who did not have a quorum until approximately 7:50 p.m.

CONSENT AGENDA

On motion duly made and seconded, the Chester, Deep River, and Region 4 Boards of Education unanimously VOTED to approve the consent agenda consisting of the minutes of the December 03, 2009 regular meeting of the Joint Board with the following corrections: *Christine Daniels called the meeting to order (not Pamela Christman); and it was Region 4 who stayed in session*

at the end of the meeting (not Essex). Upon reaching a quorum at 7:50 p.m., the Essex Board of Education unanimously VOTED to approve the consent agenda as listed above.

PUBLIC COMMENT

No comments were made

On motion duly made and seconded, the Chester, Deep River, and Region 4 Boards approved moving the Region 4 audit review up to this point in the agenda.

Jeff Walsh, a representative from Carlin, Charron & Rosen (CCR), presented the Region 4 audit report for FY 2008-09 (year ending June 30, 2009). He completed a detailed review with the Joint BOE Committee and Region 4 Audit and Finance Committee at their meeting last week. He only presented a high level overview this evening. He explained that the responsibility of the firm was to go through Region 4 management's numbers and render an opinion. Region 4 received an unqualified opinion, the highest rating possible.

Three findings were noted, and were reoccurrences from previous years, due to the small size of the Central Office. The findings were with regards to the cash receipt process and segregation of duties. However, the business office is in the process of putting together a procedure manual to help address matters such as these. The third finding was with regards to the IDEA grant. There were two expenses tested for which the auditors were not able to find all supporting documentation. However, as the expenses amounted to approximately \$1300, it was not classified as deficiency or weakness, but was just noted.

There were three management recommendations, not deficiencies, made. The first two have already been resolved prior to the end of the Fiscal year, by policies that were adopted regarding budget transfers and funding for the cafeteria fund. Therefore the recommendations are considered to be resolved and concluded, and should no longer show up in subsequent audit reports.

The third recommendation regarding the Student Activities account remains unresolved and has been noted in previous years. However, the account is run similar to other districts in that they typically are not run through the business office with much oversight. The Region 4 Audit and Finance Committee is looking into addressing this recommendation.

Mr. Strauss discussed the medical self insurance fund which for a variety of reasons, including an increase in unanticipated claims that were not covered by money deposited in the self-insurance account, is at a deficit of over a million dollars. This deficit currently shows in Region 4, but it is in fact a liability shared by all boards. In working with Anthem, a three-year payment plan is in place to cover that deficit without any budgetary consequences moving forward. However, that deficit will be moved out of the Region 4 books and into the Supervision District books to more accurately reflect the ownership of that liability. That is the one of the purposes of the Supervision District, to be used for shared services, such as the health insurance account, and Region 4 should not be used as the financial clearinghouse for shared services.

On motion duly made and seconded, the Region 4 Board unanimously VOTED to accept the 2008-9 Region 4 audit report as presented for submittal to the State.

On motion duly made and seconded, the Region 4 Board unanimously VOTED to return to the participating towns of Regional School District No. 4 the end of year surplus for FY2008-09. The amount of the reimbursement is for \$16,129

Further, the district shall return the appropriations as follows according to FY 2008-09 ADM formula:

Town of Chester	\$4,045
Town of Deep River	\$5,421
Town of Essex	\$6,663
TOTAL	\$16,129

Christine Daniels asked the Board members present to please remember what Mr. Strauss discussed regarding the substantial move of health insurance to Supervision District next year as it does affect all of the Boards through their Supervision District portion of their budgets.

OTHER ITEMS

Why Unify Grades PK-6 with Region 4?

Superintendent Levy introduced Dr. Joseph Wood, a consultant on the unification of the elementary schools with Region 4 who was present to share his research, expertise and findings on the Chester, Deep River, Essex and Region 4 school districts.

Dr. Wood reported that he had looked at all relevant historical documents on past initiatives to bring about unification of PK-6 with Region 4. There have been many discussions and lots of interest without it happening. Which he said begs the question – why doesn't it just go away? He felt that those present would find some very good reasons upon reading his report. All present were given time to review Dr. Wood's written report. He then led an interactive discussion regarding the contents of the report.

He asked again, why does it keep coming back? In his opinion, those who work closely with the schools (Administrators and BOE member) realize the inability to exceed beyond certain boundaries with the constraints of the current organizational structure.

If the structure doesn't support that kind of complexity it won't be able to maintain quality and excellence. He talked about the known correlation between Superintendent and administrator longevity and student performance. He noted that for every complex problem there is not necessarily an answer, but there are answers here. He feels that there are compelling reasons to make this change.

Increased efficiency, streamlining the budget process, and reduction of meetings are some reasons that unification would benefit the districts. He reviewed the current year's meeting calendar and found that if you look at just board meetings, 64% of the evenings (discounting Fri-Sun) between October and May are scheduled with meetings for budgets. That does not even take into account the administrative time and meetings spent on budget creation during normal business hours. This creates problem for the boards as well as the Superintendent and her staff. He said it is a very tough way to develop a budget (5 budgets) and the administration cannot be expected to have the adequate time and energy to focus on instruction, children, and student achievement, the most important things, when so much time is devoted to the five budgets.

He noted that with the formation of the Supervision District, some financial savings have already been accomplished, however no time efficiencies have been realized, and in fact Supervision District creates an additional layer of complexity and adds additional time requirements to the mix.

Dr. Wood then reviewed the key points of his report including the following:

There is a clear sense now that grades 7-12 are a quality school system.

There is greater confidence now in fiduciary responsibility of Region 4

There is a perceived loss of fiscal control if unified – but it is in perception only, because weighted voting has never really been called into play, the Region 4 Board always ends up ruling by a majority vote.

There is a perceived loss of control over PK-6 education if unified – but again, it is in perception only, because there is still a Board of Education. The district also needs to clearly address community school concerns.

The biggest fiscal question to be answered is building ownership.

He noted that there are concrete ways to show the connection between student improvement in schools and increased efficiency of administrator(s) time. Test scores increase when building level plans and district level plans are developed and followed through on, but that takes time. There is a clear connection between time and effort of administrators on student achievement plans and the payoff to students. However, if no time is available for administrators to work on these plans because of budget requirements, that will cause a problem.

He recommended keeping town leaders (selectmen, boards of finance, including de facto leaders, etc...), informed on the process and contributing feedback. He noted that key communicators must be informed and involved.

He concluded the review of his report by noting that the good news is that the district has quality now, but the bad news is that it's not sustainable with the current structure, as turnover will occur again. In addition there are just so many hours of the day and so much energy to continue or build on recent successes for increased cohesion.

He noted that separate but equal does not exist – as hard as you try to give the same quality curriculum, and instruction, it cannot happen as long as the schools exist as separate entities.

Dr. Wood then held a question and answer session after which he asked everyone present to write down their thoughts, questions, and concerns regarding unification. The information will then be collated and shared with Board members to be used for deciding as a group, how to move forward and address the information gathered. Dr. Wood also offered to attend individual Board meetings if a need exists. He asked that board members let their board chair know if such an opportunity were desired.

REPORTS

District and Strategic Goals Update

Superintendent Levy stated that much had already been discussed at budget workshops or other recent individual meetings, so she planned to discuss just a couple of items this evening.

There were 132 people served at the H1N1 clinic held recently at VRHS. A second clinic will occur in early March to provide the second round of vaccinations for children who received their first nasal mist dose at the first clinic.

She also noted that Feb 24th is the opening of student art gallery in the Central Office. She thanked all school's art teachers who volunteered their time over winter recess last week to help complete the gallery. Director of Facilities, Bruce Glowac and his team have also worked incredibly hard and have transformed the office into a place that proudly represents work of students PK-12 and helps administrators to keep the focus on students. The grand opening will be held from 4:00-5:30 p.m. on the 24th. She has invited media and all students and parents. There will be live music provided by student performers, and she urged everyone to please attend.

Financial Status Update

Mr. Sawyer gave a brief, high level financial update for each district. More detail will be given at the individual board meetings in March. He noted that several district (3 out of 5) have been affected by unanticipated special education costs.

Feedback on dates for Spring Joint BOE Workshop

The Boards were reminded that their feedback on possible dates for the spring Joint BOE workshop for all board members was still needed. The date will be either April 24th or May 1st and the workshop will likely run from 9:00 a.m. to noon. The goal of the workshop will be to work on the strategic plan, to review, revise and renew the plan for the next 4-5 years, as well as a discussion on unification.

Proposed Supervision District Budget for 2010-11

Dr. Levy presented the proposed Supervision District budget for 2010-11.

She noted that the Supervision District Committee had approved carrying a budget with an increase of 3.98% to public hearing. After listening to comments at the public hearing, the administration looked into other places to effect a reduction without directly reducing programs involved with student performance. A reduction in the health insurance line item was realized. Dr. Levy also discussed other areas as well where a little more savings were to be found at the request of the Committee. Budgeted course reimbursements to teachers, based on past historical use by teachers, was reduced. Additional savings from the early retirement plan, reduced Professional Development requests and reduced curriculum writing costs all brought the currently proposed budget down to a 3.5% increase. The main budget driver is an increase in the cost of health benefits. The Supervision District Committee approved the presented budget earlier in the evening to bring to vote before the Joint Board Committee.

On motion duly made and seconded, the Chester, Deep River, and Essex Boards unanimously VOTED to approve the Supervision District Committee's recommendation to approve the proposed Supervision District Budget for 2010-11 in the amount of \$5,811,233 (five million, eight hundred eleven thousand, two hundred thirty three dollars) or 3.5% increase. The Region

4 Board lost their quorum at 9:00 p.m. and therefore will need to hold a vote on this matter at their March 4th individual Board meeting.

Committee Reports

School Calendars Update

Dr. Levy updated the boards on the 2010-11 & 2011-12 school calendars approved by the Supervision District earlier in the evening. She reported that the Joint BOE Calendar Committee had spent much time examining issues and citizen and board member input, regarding the Jewish holidays and other issues. Both Yom Kippur and Rosh Hashanah have been included as school holidays. For the two approved years, only 1 falls during the school week each year. The next calendars will have to address both holidays falling on weekdays and how best to handle their observance. She also noted that Dec 23rd has been returned to a ½ day because a full day the last few years has not been educationally conducive. The Committee worked hard to ensure that the calendars were commensurate with other district's professional development, vacation and holiday schedules.

Policies

A First Reading of Policies 2151 Recruitment and Selection of Administrative Employees and Policy 6141.311 Limited English Proficiency Program (ELL) was made. Both will be back before the Joint BOE Committee for a second reading and vote at the April 1, 2010 meeting. Any questions or comments on these policies should be submitted to a Board chair well in advance of that meeting so that the administration may properly address them prior to the scheduled second reading and vote.

A Second Reading of Policy 6172.3 Home Instruction was made. Dr. Levy reported that although she did look in the question raised at the first reading, that question was regarding the regulation, which the Board does not act on. However, she did discuss the issue with district's attorney and the Joint BOE Policy Committee and they were advised that both the policy and regulations are in line with the state recommendations. The proposed change in the policy does not impact any of the currently home schooled students.

On motion duly made and seconded, the Chester, Deep River, and Essex Boards of Education unanimously VOTED to approve the Joint BOE Policy Committee's recommendation to approve Policy 6172.3 as presented. The Region 4 Board lost their quorum at 9:00 p.m. and therefore will need to hold a vote on this matter at their March 4th individual Board meeting.

Other Committee Reports

Richard Strauss, Chair of the Joint BOE Finance Committee reported on their most recent meeting. The Committee reviewed the Supervision District and Region 4 audits in depth. They discussed the financial component of unification. Also discussed were the boards' experiences with the new budget document format and work continues to improve it. The business office procedure manual was also reviewed.

The Joint BOE Curriculum Committee met recently and discussed the new science curriculum, technology usage, and middle school curriculum.

Lon Seidman, Chair of the ad hoc Joint BOE Public Relations and Community Outreach reported that they will be working with the suggestions provided by Dr. Wood and the audience comments made earlier in the evening.

PUBLIC COMMENTS:

Chester resident Bruce Watrous, stated that although he doesn't agree with the recently approved Supervision District budget for 2010-11 he did want to thank everyone for their hard work on developing the budget.

Tom Marsh, Chester First Selectman, informed the Boards that the Chester Board of Selectmen had voted on a message they expected the 2010-11 budget to be in line with last year's budget growth.

FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS

1. Update on feasibility of the recommendation of the Full Day Kindergarten Study Committee (Apr.)
2. 2nd Reading and Vote on Policies 2151 Recruitment and Selection of Administrative Employees and Policy 6141.311 Limited English Proficiency Program (ELL)
3. Executive Session – Superintendent to present self-evaluation (Apr.)
4. Executive Session – Boards' evaluation of Superintendent (June)
5. 2nd Reading of Bylaws for Chester, Deep River, Essex & Region 4 and Vote (TBD)

ADJOURNMENT:

On Motion duly made and seconded, the Chester, Deep River, and Essex Boards of Education unanimously VOTED to adjourn at 9:14 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Jennifer Bryan, Clerk