



BOARD OF EDUCATION Columbia, Connecticut

The Columbia School District is a community of learners providing rigorous programs to ensure that each student can excel as an individual.

Michael Maziarz, Chair
Stephania Dawiczuk
Lauren Haberman
Leah Osborn
Rachel Riendeau
Christine Sposito, Vice Chair/Secretary
Paul Zator
Barbara Wilson, Interim Superintendent
Scott Leslie, Interim Asst Superintendent

BOARD OF EDUCATION Meeting Minutes Monday, December 4, 2023

Present: Paul Zator, Christine Sposito, Leah Osborn, Rachel Riendeau, Michael Maziarz, Stephania Dawiczuk

Absent: Lauren Haberman

Others Present: Barbara Wilson - Interim Superintendent, Scott Leslie - Interim Assistant Superintendent, Kara Levenduski - Principal, Jessica Delmastro, Justin Delmastro, Rylee Delmastro, Amara Delmastro, Mary Maziarz, Jessica Hall, Kristen Bacon, Kimberly Brown, Kristin Garrison, Amy Lapsis

I. Call to Order

Interim Superintendent Barbara Wilson called the meeting to order at 7:31 p.m.

II. Election of Officers

A. Election of Chairperson

Rachel Riendeau **Moved**, and Leah Osborn **Seconded**, to appoint Michael Maziarz as continuing Chairperson. **MOTION CARRIES 6:0.**

Chairman Michael Maziarz stated that it is an honor to serve as Chairman.

B. Election of Vice Chair/Secretary

Leah Osborn **Moved**, and Paul Zator **Seconded**, to nominate Christine Sposito as Vice Chairperson. **MOTION CARRIES 6:0.**

C. Committee Assignments

Chairman Michael Maziarz stated that there are currently four committees and asked if anyone would like to make a change. Rachel Riendeau mentioned that there is currently an open position on the Budget Committee, and Chairman Michael Maziarz stated that Stephania Dawiczuk has been added to the Budget Committee and that the subcommittees will be maintained as they appear.

III. Pledge of Allegiance

Chairman Michael Maziarz **Moved**, and Paul Zator **Seconded**, to move item V. to a new item IV., Special Recognition, followed by item V., Executive Session. **MOTION CARRIES 6:0.**

IV. Special Recognition

A. James Chakulski, Jr. - Served as a Board of Education Member from 2015-2023

Interim Superintendent Barbara Wilson expressed gratitude to James Chakulski, stating that he was elected to two terms and served on the Board of Education for eight years. She noted he was a Board member during long-range planning discussions and participated in numerous negotiation committees and subcommittees during that time.

James Chakulski stated that he became a Board member because he was willing to serve and volunteer. He said that he enjoyed his time on the Board, he found the work fulfilling, and he enjoyed working with everyone.

Chairman Michael Maziarz noted that James Chakulski exemplified what the Board represents. He stated that Jim was at the head of collegiality in the discussions, ensuring that the members did what was right for the community and that his unflagging belief in the Columbia community, in the kids, and in the school was consistently evident. He further expressed that Jim was highly skilled at working collaboratively, for which he is very grateful.

B. Special Recognition CAPSS Award Winners

1.) Rylee DelMastro

Interim Superintendent Barbara Wilson congratulated Rylee DelMastro, as one of the 2023 CAPSS Award Winners. Rylee is an 8th grade student who enjoys the arts, sings in the choir, plays in the band, plans charity events, reads to other students, and has participated in the peer mentoring program for the past two years. She is diligent and respectful to teachers and other staff members and is a member of the National Junior Honor Society and the National Junior Arts Honor Society.

2.) Alyssa Satkowski

Interim Superintendent Barbara Wilson congratulated Alyssa Satkowski. Alyssa is an 8th grade student and an active member of the Hartford County 4-H. She lives on a farm with her family where she grows vegetables and raises animals. She hopes to attend Lyman Memorial High School and is a member of the Junior Arts Honor Society and the Junior Arts Council.

Chairman Michael Maziarz congratulated Rylee Delmastro, Alyssa Satkowski, and James Chakulski for their achievements.

V. Executive Session

- A. Certified Teachers Association (CEA) Contract Negotiations Update
- B. Columbia Administrators Contract Negotiations Update

Chairman Michael Maziarz **MOVED**, and Rachel Riendeau **SECONDED**, to enter into executive session at 7:43 p.m. to discuss contract negotiation updates for the Certified Teachers Association (CEA) and the Columbia Administrators. **MOTION CARRIES 6:0.**

Chairman Michael Maziarz **MOVED**, and Rachel Riendeau **SECONDED**, to leave the executive session at 8:44 p.m. **MOTION CARRIES 6:0.**

VI. Comments from the Audience *(Please identify yourself by providing your name and address)*

Time allotted for public participation is twenty (20) minutes; time allotted for an individual speaker is three (3) minutes. Please identify yourself by providing your name and address. For public comments during the meeting, please stand and speak at the center. During this portion it is the role of the board to listen, allow voice to members of the audience, and make notes. We will then use that information together with any additional gathered information to appropriately respond at a later time. We now open

up for Audience of Citizens.

No comments were received.

VII. Action Items (Consent)

A consent agenda is presented by the Chairperson at the beginning of a meeting. Items may be removed from the consent agenda on the request of any one member. Items not removed may be adopted by general consent without debate. Removed items may be taken up either immediately after the consent agenda or placed later on the agenda at the discretion of the assembly.

- A. Approval of Minutes of [11/6/2023](#)
- B. [Payment of Bills](#)
- C. Motion to ratify the Agreement between the Columbia Board of Education and Columbia Teachers' Association 2024-2027
- D. Motion to ratify the Agreement between the Columbia Administrator's Union and the Board of Education 2024-2027

Rachel Riendeau **MOVED**, and Christine Sposito **SECONDED**, to approve Action Items A through D.
MOTION CARRIES 6:0.

Chairman Michael Maziarz expressed gratitude to the Negotiations Committee, to the teachers, and to the staff, stating that they are tremendously valued and supported by the Board members.

VIII. Discussion and Possible Action

- A. Approval of Contracting a Scheduling Consultant to Assist in Development of a PK-8 Schedule
Interim Superintendent Scott Leslie reported that they met with representatives from ABL. He noted hiring a scheduling consultant would assist with scheduling Pre-K through 8th grade school, which can be challenging. ABL proposed a one time fee of \$10,800. He said that the expectation would be to work with a consultant this year from December through March, who would interview staff, students, parents, and administration to determine scheduling needs. We anticipate a one year contract with consultation services in the future.

Christine Sposito inquired as to whether they shared the number of Pre-K through eighth grade schools for which they have been able to create a schedule, and Interim Superintendent Scott Leslie stated that they did not provide that information..

Chairman Michael Maziarz asked about the timeline for approval, and Interim Superintendent Scott Leslie said that if they obtained approval from tonight's meeting, they would be able to enter into an agreement with them and start immediately following the holidays through the month of March.

Chairman Michael Maziarz noted that they do not have to vote on it at this time. Stephania Dawiczuk said that she would like to understand why they need to hire a consultant and asked if there is too much intermingling between elementary and middle school students.

Principal Kara Levenduski said she is able to create a Pre-K through 8th grade schedule but noted it is challenging due to planning time and space for all staff and students. Scheduling across all grade levels is difficult. She anticipates enrollment will increase by 20 students in the middle school next year and she hopes that having a scheduler will help her to view it from a different perspective and allow for more creativity regarding the manner in which they rotate through their specials. Christine Sposito suggested having a scheduler visit school may be beneficial. She noted she has budgetary concerns.

Christine Sposito requested additional information be shared with the board prior to a final decision.

Rachel Riendeau asked if a timeline for completion of the schedule has been shared.

Scott Leslie said March is the verbal timeline for the completion of work.

Board member consensus was to request additional information and not take action at this time.

B. Continuation 2024/2025 Change of Kindergarten Start Date

Interim Superintendent Barbara Wilson stated that the Board requested that she create a survey for any families of children who turn five between September 1 and December 31. She met with the kindergarten teachers who are in favor of the change to move the start date to maintain consistency with the rest of the country. Some of the things that kindergarteners are currently being asked to do are challenging, such as the requirement to know one hundred thirty eight words. No action is needed at this time.

Substitute Teachers Rate of Pay (currently \$110/day)

Interim Superintendent Barbara Wilson said minimum wage will increase to \$15.69 per hour on 1/1/2024 and that the Board might want to increase the substitute teacher compensation to slightly above minimum wage.

Stephania Dawiczky inquired as to what other towns are doing, and Interim Superintendent Barbara Wilson mentioned that there is a list in the packet she provided.

Rachel Riendeau inquired about the requirements for substitute teaching at Porter and whether they require a Bachelor's degree.

Interim Superintendent Barbara Wilson confirmed teacher substitutes in Columbia are required to hold a bachelor degree.

Rachel Riendeau suggested increasing to the regional average.

Paul Zator stated that \$125.00 per day is the average.

Paul Zator **MOVED**, and Rachel Riendeau **SECONDED**, to increase the substitute teacher pay from \$110.00 per day to \$125.00 per day. **MOTION CARRIES 6:0.**

C. Approval of the HVAC Education Specification provided by Silver Petrucelli & Associates

Interim Superintendent Barbara Wilson stated that the specifications have been revised, according to Mike Sylvester's recommendation. She also mentioned that the referendum for the HVAC project will be held on December 12, and the Town will vote between 12:00 p.m. and midnight.

Christine Sposito **MOVED**, and Leah Osborn **SECONDED**, to approve the HVAC Education Specifications. **MOTION CARRIES 6:0.**

VII. Correspondence/Communication

A. [H.W. Porter Enrollment](#)

Interim Superintendent Barbara Wilson noted there are currently 475 students enrolled.

B. Letter from the [DelMastro Family](#)

Interim Superintendent Barbara Wilson shared that the productions are fabulous, and she would be delighted to have this idea move forward.

Chairman Michael Maziarz stated that the DelMastro family has the Board's support to name the stage after Janet Stice.

VIII. Reports of Subcommittees ([Subcommittee Meetings](#))

A. Communications

B. Teaching and Learning

C. Policy

Rachel Riendeau stated that they have four policies with language updates that will be ready for first reading at the January meeting.

D. Budget

Christine Sposito expressed that there are no updates.

IX. Board of Education Upcoming Meetings

A. Monday, January 8, 2024 Subcommittee Meetings, 6:30 PM Teaching & Learning, 7:00 PM Budget

B. Monday, January 8, 2023, 7:30 PM - BOE Regular Meeting H.W. Porter Cafetorium

X. Superintendent's Report

A. Superintendent's Update

Interim Superintendent Barbara Wilson reported there are no legislative updates to report. An HVAC presentation was provided by Silver Petrucelli & Associates at a recent HVAC meeting. She stated that many questions were posed, and it was an extremely positive meeting. The Town referendum will be held next week, on December 12, from 12:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. If it passes, they can move forward with the grant.

Interim Superintendent Barbara Wilson shared that Mrs. Polakowski worked with the Student Council to have the students create a wall of veteran photos, including the individual's name, branch of service, and a fun fact. She also mentioned that they had several food drives in an attempt to provide the less fortunate with a happy Thanksgiving. Assistant Principal Karen Caputo led Games of Gratitude prior to the Thanksgiving break.

Interim Superintendent Barbara Wilson stated that November was a difficult month at Porter. Counselors were put in place to meet with the staff. Ten therapy dogs visited Porter and were a highlight during a difficult time to both staff and students. Music teacher Kathy Caton also brought in her dog Harvey to comfort staff and students. She shared that the administration would like to continue therapy dog visits in the future.

XI. Comments for the Audience (Please identify yourself by providing your name and address)

Time allotted for public participation is twenty (20) minutes; time allotted for an individual speaker is three (3) minutes. Please identify yourself by providing your name and address. For public comments during the meeting, please stand and speak at the center. During this portion it is the role of the board to listen, allow voice to members of the audience, and make notes. We will then use that information together with any additional gathered information to appropriately respond at a later time. We now open up for Audience of Citizens.

XII. Columbia Board of Education Member Remarks

Rachel Riendeau congratulated the CAPPS Award winners, thanked James Chakulski, and expressed gratitude to Chairman Michael Maziarz for taking on the role of Board Chairman. She mentioned that her

child is anxious about attending school, but he really enjoyed Games of Gratitude and mentioned that he would be fine if the school allowed therapy dogs to visit on a daily basis. She further expressed that Drama Club starts next week, and she highly recommends that everyone support the arts.

Leah Osborn thanked James Chakulski for his service and stated that he was a great example. She expressed gratitude that Christine Sposito and Chairman Michael Maziarz will continue to remain on the Board, and she thanked the Negotiations Committee for working on the contract.

Christine Sposito shared she is grateful for the Games of Gratitude, stating that her son has not stopped mentioning it. She feels this type of activity is essential for student growth and allows for interaction with peers and staff in non-academic ways.

She welcomed and congratulated the students who earned CAPSS awards and expressed gratitude to James Chakulski and Chairman Michael Maziarz, stating that it is a thankless job for which most people do not understand the amount of work involved.

Paul Zator stated that he looks forward to the next four years. He welcomed Stephania Dawiczuk and thanked Chairman Michael Maziarz and Christine Sposito for remaining on the Board. He also expressed gratitude to everyone who worked on the committees.

Stephania Dawiczuk mentioned that she looks forward to working with everyone and doing her best to assist the students and teachers.

Chairman Michael Maziarz congratulated Rylee Delmastro and Alyssa Satkowski and expressed heartfelt gratitude to James Chakulski whom he described as a model Board member, stating that he cannot thank him enough for his time. He welcomed Stephania Dawiczuk and thanked the staff, stating that there is a huge teacher shortage that exists for a variety of reasons. He wants the staff to feel valued and appreciated and that he is impressed and thankful that they are uniting as a Columbia family. He stated that he is thankful for the Board members and that he considers them to be a great Board. He said Christine Sposito is an excellent Vice Chairperson/ Secretary and that he looks forward to continuing to be part of the Columbia family.

XIII. Proposed Executive Session Regarding the Interim Superintendent Contract

Rachel Riendeau **MOVED**, and Christine Sposito **SECONDED**, to enter into an Executive Session at 9:33 p.m. Rachel Riendeau **MOVED**, and Christine Sposito **SECONDED**, to end the Executive Session at 9:41 p.m. **MOTION CARRIES 6:0.**

XV. Possible Action Regarding the Interim Superintendent Contract

Chairman Michael Maziarz stated that they are tabling the contract and awaiting paperwork containing information with which to move forward soon. They will have a special meeting to discuss it.

XVI. Adjournment

Stephania Dawiczuk **MOVED**, and Rachel Riendeau **SECONDED**, to adjourn the meeting at 9:41 p.m. **MOTION CARRIES 6:0.**

Respectfully submitted,
Michele Cooke, Board Clerk