

Minutes
Board of Education Special Meeting
September 5, 2018
7:30 p.m.

Board Members Present: James Chakulski, Jr., Linette Dooley, Joanne Prague Doyle, Chairman Christopher Lent, Gary Littlefield and Kathy Tolsdorf

Board Member Absent: David Crim

Others Present: Lol Fearon-Superintendent of School, Alyssa Gwinnell-Principal, Barbara Wilson-Student Services Director, Jennifer Hill-Assistant Principal, Beverly Ciurylo-Finance Director, Maria Geryk-Superintendent of School-elect, and Karen Caputo

I. Call to Order – Chairman Lent called the meeting to order at 7:38 p.m.

II. Pledge of Allegiance

III. Appreciation and Recognition of Ms. Karin Vertefeuille for her dedicated service on the Columbia Board of Education from November 2013 to June 2018.

Ms. Vertefeuille was not present.

IV. Comments from the Audience (Bylaws of the Board #93000)

There are no comments from the audience.

V. Action Items (Consent)

Ms. Tolsdorf MOVED, Mr. Littlefield SECONDED to accept items a – g.
MOTION CARRIES 6:0

VI. Action Items (Discussion and Action)

a. Expenditure Report

Superintendent Fearon said discussion of the expenditure report will also incorporate the line item transfers as well as the 2017-18 surplus as they are all integrally related. As of today there is a surplus of \$279,052.10, due predominantly from lower than budgeted out-of-district costs. Superintendent Fearon reminded the Board that two students opted to take their diplomas rather than attend transition programs and a third student moved out of town. Tuition and transportation costs associated with these three placements would have totaled approximately \$285,000.

Mr. Littlefield MOVED, Mr. Chakulski, Jr. SECONDED to approve the expenditure report, 2017/2018.

Discussion:

Ms. Tolsdorf asked if we would have had a \$20,000 balance available without the out-of-district costs. Superintendent Fearon responded we would have come very close to a well balanced budget. Superintendent Fearon further stated the district was not adversely impacted by these placement costs. A fourth grade position was added last year as part of the budget, as an example of the growth and improvements made when the budget was originally developed and approved.

Superintendent Fearon stated the non-lapsing account has a current balance of approximately \$100,000. The current surplus is due to an additional appropriation needed to cover the aforementioned out-of-district costs. He believes it is a good faith step to return this surplus to the town, informing them it may be needed to address the unanticipated expenditures in 2018-19. Ms. Ciurylo confirmed the non-lapsing account will

not need to be utilized if we proceed the way Superintendent Fearon recommends. Mr. Littlefield stated that we have to appropriate, but do not have to spend.

MOTION CARRIES 6:0

- b. Approval of Line Item Transfers for the 2017-2018 School Year

Mr. Chakulski, Jr. MOVED, Ms. Tolsdorf SECONDED to approve the line item transfers for the 2017-2018 school year.

MOTION CARRIES 6:0

- c. Authorization to Return 2017-18 Surplus to the Town of Columbia

Mr. Littlefield MOVED, Ms. Prague Doyle SECONDED to approve authorization to return 2017-18 surplus, \$279,052.10, to the Town of Columbia.

Discussion:

Ms. Tolsdorf said that it was suggested at the last meeting that we transfer approximately \$79,000 of the projected surplus to the non-lapsing account. She believes we should put funds into the non-lapsing account at this time because we may not always have the opportunity to do so. Ms. Tolsdorf would like the Board to consider always putting a percentage of any surplus aside each year, even if it is only symbolic. She concluded by asking the Board to consider transferring \$20,000 or \$30,000 to that account.

Considerable discussion regarding the way the non-lapsing account may be accessed ensued. The funds must be requested by the BOE and approved by FiPAC.

Ms. Tolsdorf asked about using funds from the non-lapsing account for the potential MBR violation penalty. Chairman Lent said no, that is not possible. Superintendent Fearon that at the FIPAC meeting in August the consensus was to return the surplus knowing that the Board may request it at a later point in the year.

Ms. Tolsdorf expressed her desire to re-visit the terms of the non-lapsing account if possible. The philosophy behind this account was to set funds aside as funding allows, to help prevent a potential financial hardship to the town for unanticipated costs. Ms. Dooley said it is not written to allow us to fund a new track or new staff. Superintendent Fearon said that if the district needed to replace a boiler in an emergency, for example, the Board could request the needed funds from the non-lapsing account from FiPAC.

MOTION CARRIES 6:0

- d. Payment of Bills

Superintendent Fearon summarized the \$375,836.04 paid the month of August is due to initial start-up supplies and equipment, expenses normally expected at the beginning of the year, and tuition payments for summer programming.

Mr. Littlefield MOVED, Ms. Prague Doyle SECONDED, to approve payment of bills.

MOTION CARRIES 6:0

- e. Snow Plow Bid Award 2018-19 to Wrana Excavation LLC

Superintendent Fearon explained the bid process that was followed, starting with a Request for Proposals. Mike Sylvester spoke with several contractors and three submitted bids. Bids were opened on August 29. They were: Brookson Landscaping LLC. - \$19,500; Wrana Excavation LLC. - \$22,500; and Coastline Construction Corp. - \$52,000. Wrana is not the lowest bid, but is able to guarantee manpower to ensure the school is able to open safely by the time required, has the necessary equipment including snow removal with large axel dump truck. Superintendent Fearon recommends awarding the contract to Wrana.

Mr. Littlefield MOVED, Ms. Prague Doyle SECONDED, to award the snow plow bid for 2018-19 to Wrana Excavation LLC.
MOTION CARRIES 6:0

Chairman Lent stated he agrees with the process, realizing it is not always best to go with the lowest bid.

f. Approval of Superintendent's Evaluation 2017/18

Ms. Tolsdorf MOVED, Mr. Littlefield SECONDED, to approve the Superintendent's 2017-18 evaluation.

Discussion:

Chairman Lent said this was a longer process. This is the last one they will present Superintendent Fearon. Chairman Lent expressed his appreciation for the past five years. Chairman Lent summarized Superintendent Fearon's evaluation with the fact that Lol continues to exceed expectations in leading the school district. Positive changes include changes with the Middle School model, electives, broadening of the music and chorus program, SRBI revision, offering pilot French program and bringing Project Oceanology in.

Superintendent Fearon works collaboratively with other district superintendents and administrators to stay abreast of challenges and culture in other districts, ensuring curriculum is aligned with our current high school choices. He is a member and/or leader of several committees.

Board members included in the evaluation the fact that his poise, honesty and interpersonal skills make him approachable and trustworthy to the Board, parents, community members and leaders. His work on collaborative initiatives with the town benefit the town and school system, reducing costs to the overall town budget. This past budget process was particularly difficult due to the state's delayed budget approval, but Superintendent Fearon's expertise and knowledge were very helpful.

The Board did not achieve all of the Future Needs Committee Future Needs Committee milestones that were planned during the 2017-18 school year. It was a tougher than anticipated initiative to both plan and execute in a timely manner. Other priorities and a lack of time have been a major contributor to this being behind schedule. Superintendent Fearon did a great job organizing and facilitating the most recent Future Needs surveys and community groups, keeping the Board grounded throughout.

The Board thanks Superintendent Fearon for his patience, knowledge and experience during his tenure as the Superintendent of Schools. He is leaving the district in better shape than what he inherited. His agreement to continue as the interim Superintendent while the Board searched for the next Superintendent helps ensure a smooth transition. Superintendent Fearon will be missed and is wished well.

Ms. Tolsdorf again thanked the Superintendent for his work with the district and wishes him well. Ms. Dooley agreed, saying she is happy for him, but said he will be missed.

Superintendent Fearon said his success is reflective of the people he works with and works for. He said his job is to make sure people have what they need to follow through on initiatives they propose. Columbia has great people, teachers, and Board members. He thanks all for the past five years.

MOTION CARRIES 6:0

VII. Reports of Board Committees

Policy

Chairman Lent stated Shipman and Goodwin is all set to provide policies. Ms. Tolsdorf asked if Shipman and Goodwin knows what is recently updated and what is needed? Superintendent Fearon answered yes, it will start with new policies impacted by recent changes in the law. You can then request policies that need to be updated. Superintendent Geryk will be provided the contact information for Shipman and Goodwin.

Budget

Chairman Lent said budget development will be underway soon. As communicated at a previous meeting, there will continue to be opportunity for community members' input. Communication will be provided to enlist involvement.

Ad hoc Committee on Future Needs

This committee will meet again sometime in sometime in October. It will be a separate subcommittee meeting to be able to focus on that, with no time constraints. Superintendent Fearon stated he and Superintendent Geryk will talk on this and share information.

VIII. Correspondence/Communications

a. Board of Education "Thank You" from Grades 1 & 2

A thank you was received from both grades 1 and 2, expressing gratitude for the lunch provided to staff on the first day they returned.

b. Chronicle Article, "Columbia Readies for a New Year"

Chairman Lent said there is a nice article by Michelle Firestone. This article is in the August 23, 2018 edition.

IX. Board of Education Upcoming Meetings

October 1, 2018, Monday, 6:30 pm, BOE Budget Subcommittee Meeting
October 1, 2018, Monday, 7:30 pm, BOE Regular Meeting

Superintendent Fearon said there is also negotiations on September 26.

Chairman Lent suggested having an Ad Hoc Future Needs Future Needs Committee meeting with both Superintendents Fearon and Geryk in October. Superintendent Fearon agreed this is a good idea.

X. Superintendent's Report

a. Opening of School

Superintendent Fearon said the opening of school went very well. There was the usual bus schedules or last minute things. Teachers had a two days of professional development. The students were very positive.

There have already been two early dismissal days due to weather related issues. There will be another day tomorrow. Overall, this was a very good opening of school. New teachers integrated themselves very well. We have a welcoming school community.

b. Enrollment September 5, 2018

There is much to note. For various reasons we exceeded projections, having 434 students. Ms. Gwinnell shared that we have students returning from both magnet and private schools, and students from families who have moved to town. This is seen as a very positive trend. Ms. Tolsdorf asked how many children are in preschool. Superintendent Fearon said we usually project 30, but there are currently 37.

Superintendent Fearon said he wants to give the Board a heads-up that SBAC testing results for grades 3, 5 and 8 are disappointing and steps are already being taken to address this. We did not attain the improved results we sought. Ms. Prague Doyle asked if there would be a presentation, to which Ms. Hill answered yes. Ms. Gwinnell and Ms. Hill answered questions pertaining to the data obtained from this testing and how it may be used to address the shortfalls. Ms. Prague Doyle shared insight as both a parent and community member to administrators who will be preparing the presentation to parents. She asked that the report focus on steps to improve instructional strategies rather than just data. Ms. Hill thanked her for this recommendation.

Superintendent Fearon spoke of the free breakfast program that is now being offered to every student. A study showed that students eligible for the free and reduced lunch program did not participate in the breakfast program at the level one would expect. This may be due to potential stigma a child may experience. EASTCONN tried this as a pilot program in Scotland with great success. Students do not swipe their card for breakfast, but tracking numbers of students participating is going to start.

Superintendent Fearon provided a copy of a synopsis of the solar project underway with Greenskies. It is anticipated to start September 12 and will take approximately eight to twelve weeks. There will then be a punch list period of approximately two to three weeks. Work will be conducted 6:30 a.m. – 2:30 p.m., with deliveries happening 9:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m., all in an attempt to be as least disruptive to the school day as possible. There will be a shutdown of the electrical services for approximately six hours on a Saturday. This will not hinder the school programs, but may impact Parks and Rec activities on that particular day, yet to be scheduled. Contact information and general information about preventative maintenance and the effect on the roof warranty are included. This, and more information, will be provided to Ms. Geryk for her reference.

XI. Future Regular and Subcommittee Agenda Items

Ms. Tolsdorf asked about scheduling subcommittee meetings now, to ensure they meet more regularly. Ms. Dooley agreed setting up a meeting will be more effective. Chairman Lent suggested meeting with Ms. Tolsdorf prior to the October regular meeting to prepare a schedule to propose to the Board. Ms. Tolsdorf agreed, hoping to prevent last minute scheduling.

XII. Columbia Board of Education Member Remarks

Mr. Chakulski, Jr. said he would like to share his appreciation of Superintendent Fearon. He had the pleasure of attending a CABE meeting with Superintendent Fearon and saw how many other superintendents respected him. Mr. Chakulski, Jr. continued with saying he always admired how calm and prepared Superintendent Fearon was, no matter the situation. He concluded by thanking Superintendent Fearon for his years with the Columbia school district.

Ms. Tolsdorf raised the fact that she received an anonymous letter. Discussion ensued and it was agreed that the practice of not giving credibility to anonymous letters is the best way to proceed. Ms. Tolsdorf stressed her desire to have the minutes reflect the fact that anonymous communication cannot be followed up on.

Approved 10/1/2018

BOE MEETING MINUTES 9/5/2018

Page 6 of 6

Chairman Lent congratulated teacher of the year Lorraine McLeish and paraprofessional of the year Kristen Bacon. He also said that something will be set up as a goodbye function for Superintendent Fearon.

XIII. Adjournment

Mr. Littlefield MOVED, Ms. Prague Doyle SECONDED, to adjourn.
MOTION CARRIES 6:0

The Board adjourned at 9:04 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kathy Tolsdorf, Board Secretary