

Minutes
Board of Education Meeting
July 9, 2018
7:00 p.m.

Board Members Present: James Chakulski, Jr., David Crim, Linette Dooley, Chairman Christopher Lent, Gary Littlefield and Kathy Tolsdorf

Others Present: Lol Fearon-Superintendent, Alyssa Gwinnell-Principal, Barbara Wilson-Student Services Director, Beverly Ciurylo-Finance Director, Karen Caputo-School Social Worker and Kevin Quinn

I. Call to Order – Chairman Lent called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

Mr. Littlefield MOVED, Mr. Chakulski, Jr. SECONDED to add to Section VI Action Items (Discussion and Action) b) Approval of Superintendent Leadership Profile
MOTION CARRIES 6:0

Mr. Littlefield MOVED, Mr. Chakulski, Jr. SECONDED to move Approval of May 7, 2018 Board of Education Minutes from Section V Action Items (Consent) to Section VI Action Items (Discussion and Action).
MOTION CARRIES 6:0

Mr. Littlefield MOVED, Ms. Tolsdorf SECONDED to move Presentation – Superintendent Leadership Profile by Mary Broderick, CABE before Comments from the Audience (Bylaws of the Board #93000) to allow the audience an opportunity to comment on the presentation.
MOTION CARRIES 6:0

II. Pledge of Allegiance

III. Presentation – Superintendent Leadership Profile by Mary Broderick, CABE

Ms. Broderick of CABE presented the Superintendent of Schools Leadership Profile. Results are compiled from nine focus groups and interviews, multiple conversations, and an online survey conducted in spring, 2018. She spoke with parents, teachers, staff, administrators, board of education members, town officials and other residents. In addition, 119 Columbia residents and staff completed the survey posted by the school system. Ms. Broderick thanked Brenda Morey, Secretary to the Superintendent of Schools, for all the work she did on the survey and coordination of interviews.

Strengths were reviewed first. Columbia is a small, supportive community and school. Many participants spoke of the spirit of volunteerism among parents and the community. There is a real sense of the village raising the children.

Several reported that Columbia is a conservative, fiscally responsible, well-managed community. The town boasts collegial relationships among town officials, the Board of Education, and school leaders. People like that Porter is a small school that has small class sizes. Several described Porter as very warm and welcoming. A few felt size was a factor in allowing the school to quickly make systemic improvements.

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A number of people liked the fact that children attend the school from pre-kindergarten through grade 8, allowing them to be known by all staff who then provide attention to meet each child's needs. Several referenced keeping the kids together in the community until high school.

Participants placed Porter's staff high on their list of strengths in the community as being caring, loving teachers and supportive staff. Veteran staff are also known to be willing to try new things and committed to student success. Staff felt valued and respected to make the best decisions for students. Staff mentioned a collaborative leadership team who support families and professional growth. Students are considered a strength of the district. Middle school students collaborate with elementary students.

Flexible programming keeps the focus on the children and their success. Extracurricular and internal opportunities includes music, drama, visual arts, Project Oceanology, French, and a wealth of sports options. Many spoke of school-wide commitment to excellence. The district funds to serve special needs children. There is a culture of inclusivity and emphasis on kindness. Several spoke of a safe, secure learning environment. Porter graduates are considered capable and confident, well prepared for high school. People talked of liking graduates' high school choices of E.O. Smith and Bolton.

Challenges were reviewed. Small community and declining enrollment are a concern. Columbia is such a small town, which can lead to a sense of isolation. Since the school is the center of the community, declining enrollment (through leveling off) leads people to fear losing the school, families, and the town's identity. School choice and magnet options have exacerbated the decline.

A number of respondents identified Connecticut's fiscal status and budget issues every year as major concerns. Unexpected expenses or special education surprises are very impactful to Porter School, especially since high school tuition is a fixed, non-negotiable expense. Several spoke of unfunded state mandates as a concern.

The community has enjoyed a collaborative relationship with town bodies. The new superintendent will be working with a First Selectman who will also be new to the role. Building trusting, transparent relationships will be important.

Staff issues include lack of clarity about administrative roles. Teaching and learning was the area most often mentioned as suffering. People felt curriculum was a hodgepodge, lacking alignment. It is also hard to align what the school offers with the receiving high schools' curricula. Some felt they needed an administrative leader to guide committee work. Budget constraints to hire and retain high quality teachers and support staff, low morale and a lack of sense of cohesiveness between elementary and middle schools was reported. Scheduling changes mean less time for staff to collaborate. Some staff spoke of a lack of transparency and open communications school-wide.

Program challenges were mentioned, including how to offer a broad array of options to a very small student population. Some regretted recent cuts in the arts and felt offering science and social studies only half the year was problematic. Discipline was the greatest concern by some. Social and emotional health issues have been on the rise and students are feeling alienated. Many respondents mentioned bullying and felt students were not receiving appropriate direction or follow-through. Respondents felt the school needed successful, consistent behavior intervention strategies.

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The Board has been considering major issues. Should middle school be separated from Porter? The contracts with E.O. Smith and Bolton high schools expire in 2022. Does the town want to continue those relationships and opportunities for Porter graduates? These open issues are generating some anxiety among the school's stakeholders.

Clear and thoughtful decision-making is sought from the Board of Education. Townspeople would like the Board to develop and maintain a good working relationship and high level of respect for the new superintendent as well as improved planning and allocation of resources.

The report outlined the respondents' desired expertise, qualities and characteristics in a superintendent. Columbia seeks an experienced superintendent who understands the breadth and depth of running a school district, with expertise in curriculum and instruction. Another high priority amongst respondents is that the superintendent will build trusting relationships throughout the community. An excellent listener, unbiased, fair and straightforward individual with superb people skills will have a track record of building great relationships with the community, the administration, teachers, support staff, and the kids.

The new superintendent will develop a shared vision of excellence. The successful leader will hold a "long vision and balcony view" of education in Columbia, with the knowledge, experience, and expertise to inspire administrators and teachers to be the best they can be for the children of Columbia. Respondents want someone who communicates and collaborates effectively in the school and community, being active in the community. This leader will be open, honest, transparent, and forthcoming with the town, knowing how to generate effective two-way communications and share district priorities.

Because all budget and finance responsibilities fall on the superintendent, people seek someone with strong budget and finance knowledge and skills. They also want a superintendent who is motivated by a passion to do what is in the best interest of students as the number one priority. The successful candidate will be accessible, approachable, and visible in the schools and community. This individual will also be a decisive, confident and objective problem solver with good judgment and resiliency. A passion for the work and the students, a love for the job and inherent responsibilities are desirable qualities in the successful candidate.

Ms. Broderick concluded her presentation by stating some of the candidates who have submitted their application for consideration are either experienced superintendents or will be able to argue how their experience qualifies them to be considered experienced. Excellent candidates will be interviewed.

Chairman Lent opened discussion by stating there are contradictions by respondents. Some felt the programming was a strength and others felt it was a weakness. Reconciling such inconsistencies is going to be a challenge. Ms. Broderick said strengths and weaknesses are all dependent on respondents' individual experiences.

Chairman Lent expressed his surprise about discipline being a concern. He asked if Ms. Broderick could share if there were a lot of people with this concern, or a few. Ms. Broderick said there are some staff members who did not feel supported when addressing bullying issues. Some felt there was no follow through if they did address it. This was felt by some staff and some parents. This was from a number of respondents, one of the most consistent issues.

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Ms. Tolsdorf stated that she is surprised by the bullying concern since a strength is that Porter is a very supportive school. Additionally, there are policies to deal with bullying. How can there be a lack of follow through when the policy is so specific? Staff should be trained to ensure the policy is followed. Ms. Tolsdorf said identifying weaknesses and addressing them in a positive way will be productive.

Mr. Crim stated that he, and the Board as a whole, is getting a lot out of this report. Ms. Broderick said that was the purpose of this endeavor.

Mr. Chakulski, Jr. raised science and social studies. He said it is not just about the number of teaching minutes in a year, but also the fact that kids need to learn how to manage time. In high school you take classes all year, utilizing time management. This skill will not be learned with offering courses half-year.

There was discussion about arts. Performing arts, including band and chorus, is not supported. Ms. Tolsdorf questioned if this may be due to parents not knowing what is available. Also, if trying to improve STEM, we do not want to see a decline in the arts. We want to bolster the arts in the middle school and understand the vision of excellence.

Ms. Broderick stated that once the Board votes to accept the report she will share it with candidates. She also recommends posting this report. Superintendent Fearon said the last leadership profile was on the website also. Ms. Broderick said stakeholders heard that they would be able to access this report once accepted.

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

No comments from the audience.

V. Action Items (Consent)

Ms. Tolsdorf MOVED, Mr. Crim SECONDED to approve agenda items b, c, d, e, f, g and h.
MOTION CARRIES 6:0

VI. Action Items (Discussion and Action)

a. Superintendent's Annual Evaluation

Chairman Lent stated feedback is still being received. Mr. Chakulski, Jr., Mr. Crim and Ms. Dooley are still to provide feedback. Once received Chairman Lent will add to next month's agenda.

Mr. Littlefield MOVED, Mr. Chakulski, Jr. SECONDED to accept the Superintendent Leadership Profile by Mary Broderick, CABE.
MOTION CARRIES 6:0

b. Approval of May 7, 2018 Board of Education Minutes

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Mr. Littlefield MOVED, Mr. Chakulski, Jr. SECONDED to approve the May 7, 2018 Board of Education Minutes.

Discussion:

Chairman Lent said there was a question raised at the June meeting regarding Section VI Action Items (Discussion and Action). Ms. Vertefeuille did not recall being the Board member who moved to approve Artisenergy Solutions' Lighting Proposal, especially since she voted against it. Superintendent Fearon stated it was confirmed the minutes were correct as originally written. Ms. Vertefeuille made the motion so as to be able to start the discussion, even though she voted against the motion.

All agreed, but it was noted the motion in question carried 4:3. The second draft of these minutes has the motion passing 5:2. This will be corrected.

Mr. Littlefield MOVED, Mr. Chakulski, Jr. SECONDED to amend Section VI Action Items (Discussion and Action) to state "MOTION CARRIES 4:3. K. Tolsdorf, L. Dooley, J. Chakulski and G. Littlefield voted FOR THE MOTION. K. Vertefeuille, C. Lent and D. Crim voted AGAINST THE MOTION."

MOTION CARRIES 6:0

Mr. Chakulski, Jr. MOVED, Ms. Tolsdorf SECONDED to further amend Section XIII Adjournment to read, "*Mrs.* Dooley MOVED..." (Not Mr. Dooley ...")

MOTION CARRIES 6:0

Mr. Littlefield MOVED, Mr. Crim SECONDED to amend page 5, Section VI Action Items (Discussion and Action) item F to read, "Historical Preservation Grant."

MOTION CARRIES 6:0

Ms. Tolsdorf asked about Superintendent Fearon's answer to a question about homeschooling in Section XII.

Superintendent Fearon and Board members discussed using word "compulsion" vs. "requirement." It was agreed the wording should be changed.

Mr. Littlefield MOVED, Ms. Tolsdorf SECONDED to amend the second sentence of the second paragraph of Section XII Columbia Board of Education Member Remarks to read, "The expectation is for families to notify the Board if they homeschool their child but there is no requirement on their part to do so."

MOTION CARRIES 6:0

Mr. Littlefield MOVED, Mr. Crim SECONDED to accept the May 7, 2018 minutes as amended.

MOTION CARRIES 6:0

VII. Reports of Board Committees

Policy

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Superintendent Fearon stated we are in the process of turning over from CAFE to Shipman & Goodwin. This will be in place before school starts. We are still signed up with CAFE as a member district but without the policy service.

Budget

The Budget Subcommittee met earlier and discussed the 2017-18 expenditures as well as the upcoming school year.

Teaching and Learning

Superintendent Fearon stated the August subcommittee meeting will be to discuss Teaching and Learning. At that time they will review what curriculum writing has taken place and what is expected in 2018-19.

Principal Gwinnell presented on the Porter Curriculum Writing 5-Year Plan. The color-coded graph shows the programs that are to be updated due to new standards being in place. Examples include Social Studies, which adopted new standards and French is new next year.

Technology, Life Skills, Health, Art and Music need to be updated based on changes in scheduling as needed. Life Skills, Health and Music will be in ongoing revision after this coming year. Changing curriculum around was considered. All middle school students take these courses and it was successful. All students take chorus during music class and perform at Porter Pride. The curriculum is being reviewed to determine what standards are being met and what needs to be moved around. Updating curriculum looks more closely at teaching practices. Principal Gwinnell summarized the graph by stating Science/STEM, Social Studies/Geo & Current Events and Spanish G1-8 & French are currently being updated due to new standards. Technology (Art Integration), Life Skills, Health, Art and Music: Chorus, band, general music are being updated based on change in scheduling as needed. Math/Math Lab, Language Arts/LA Lab and Physical Education are ongoing revision.

Mr. Chakulski asked how the standards are changed and what is new. Much discussion followed, including the misconception some town residents have about art being reduced and/or eliminated in some cases. The opposite is true because art was ultimately increased because of Technology (Art Integration). This will be addressed more fully at the upcoming Teaching and Learning Subcommittee meeting in August.

Ad hoc Committee on Future Needs

On hold.

Search Committee Update

Chairman Lent stated he will reach out to Mary Broderick to establish dates for the initial interviews. The deadline for applications is July 20. First or second week of August is potentially when interviews will be conducted. Ms. Tolsdorf informed Chairman Lent she will be away August 12 for

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approximately two weeks. Mr. Littlefield is unavailable August 13, 14 and 15. Chairman Lent will attempt to accommodate their schedules. If that is not possible, Ms. Tolsdorf regrettably acknowledged she will not participate in the interview process since it had been previously decided members will participate in all of the interviews.

VIII. Correspondence/Communication

Resignation of Ms. Karin Vertefeuille, Board of Education Member

Chairman Lent stated he wishes Ms. Vertefeuille well as she and her family recently moved to Mansfield. She believes this move is in the best interest of her family. Her service on the Board is appreciated and she will be missed. Superintendent Fearon stated we typically invite a Board member back for a public thank you. Chairman Lent stated he will invite her to the August 6, 2018 meeting. Ms. Dooley asked if there has been any word from the Democratic committee yet for a replacement. Chairman Lent answered no, the party has 60 days and then someone gets appointed by the Board of Selectmen. Mr. Crim related his experience in this matter, stating the interview process was rather arduous.

Letter of Appreciation for Donation of Office-Supplies from Carl Swartz

Superintendent Fearon said Mr. Swartz stopped by with office supplies including copy paper. All Board members agreed it was very thoughtful and considerate of Mr. Swartz.

IX. Board of Education Upcoming Meetings

Future meeting dates:

July 30, 2018, Monday, 5:30 p.m., AFSME Negotiations, Library Media Center

August 6, 2018, Monday, 6:30 p.m., BOE Subcommittee Meetings, Teaching & Learning

August 6, 2018, Monday, 7:30 p.m., BOE Regular Meeting

X. Superintendent's Report

Update on Summer Projects

Superintendent Fearon provided two copies of the agreement for him to act as interim superintendent. Chairman Lent will sign on behalf of the Board. Superintendent Fearon also provided members with a copy of an update from Shipman & Goodwin regarding the recent Janus decision. This decision is impacting public sector employees and payment of union dues. It discusses how to communicate to the unions in terms of expectations for collecting dues. As an example, we may not ask if members still want to be part of a union as it would not be considered appropriate.

Solar project – The contract was revised based upon changes by Greenskies after the engineering study. It was approved by the Board of Selectmen. Permits are being secured through EverSource and town building officials. Work on the roof will be started this summer. While it will not be completed before the start of school, it will not be intrusive when school is in session.

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LED project – The project has been approved. The interest-free loan was approved. Everybody has been notified and it is scheduled to start the last week of July into the first two weeks of August.

Cabling – IP system installed last year, keeping to category 5 or 6. E rate application approved. 46% of the cost is being offset by E rate. Northeast Communications has been in and pulling the cable is almost complete. Black Rock Communications will be doing hard wire installation in the server room.

Painting project – E wing is almost 90% complete with classrooms, hallways, and rails done. Door frames and external doors are next.

Windows – Manchester Glass has been contracted to replace broken windows in A wing.

Cafeteria balcony – Mike has been working on this. Electrical runs are completed in the balcony. Banister and rails are on order. Treads on the stairs will be completed as well. The entire project is expected to be completed this summer.

Room changes are in progress. The gym floor will be stripped and refinished. These, Superintendent Fearon stated, are typical summer activities.

XI. Future Regular and Subcommittee Agenda Items

Next month there will be further discussion on the 5 year plan.

XII. Columbia Board of Education Member Remarks

Mr. Crim. stated again Ms. Vertefeuille will be missed.

In regards to a gift, Ms. Tolsdorf asked if the Board will be doing a donation to the foodbank as a group or individually. Chairman Lent said this is has not yet been decided and will be followed up in an e-mail.

Mr. Chakulski, Jr. shared he attended an awards ceremony at Bolton High School in June and Columbia was again represented very well. Multiple Columbia residents received awards. Ms. Tolsdorf said this information could go in the school newsletter.

Ms. Dooley said she received an e-mail from a parent of a child not yet old enough to attend school. The parent is asking how to become involved in our Future Planning Needs. Superintendent Fearon said this parent should provide their e-mail contact information to his office so this parent will be included on a distribution list when information is disseminated.

Discussion regarding the impact the Janus decision may have on unions in general ensued.

XIII. Motion to Move to Executive Session to Discuss Non-Certified Negotiations

Mr. Crim MOVED, Mr. Littlefield SECONDED to move to executive session to discuss non-certified negotiations and to include Superintendent Fearon in this discussion.

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MOTION CARRIES 6:0

Chairman Lent moved to executive session at 8:25 p.m.

Ms. Tolsdorf MOVED, Mr. Chakulski, Jr. SECONDED to exit from executive session.

MOTION CARRIES 6:0

The Board exited executive session at 9:07 p.m.

Mr. Littlefield MOVED, Mr. Crim SECONDED to adjourn.

MOTION CARRIES 6:0

The Board adjourned at 9:08 p.m.