

Approved 1/7/19

Minutes
Board of Education Meeting
December 3, 2018
7:00 p.m.

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

Others Present: Anderson, Tiffany; Bell, David; Bell, Nancy; Boardman, Tom; Boisvert, Heather; Boisvert, Tammy; Brooks, Tracy; Brown, Danielle; Buskey, Jeff; Butzgy, Karen; Capstick, Jen; Capstick, Tom; Caputo, Karen; Cook, David; Cook, Jackie; Cooke, Jenna; Couno, Marissa; Cranick, Alyson; Dani, Ian; DeForest, Marcus; Deidrich, Wayne; Doyle, Tom; Duda, Jr., John; Everett, Steven; Finnle, Lea; Fontaine, Melissa; Forkner, Patrica; Fortna, Scot; Foster, Ray; Franco, Tony; Gage, Geryk, Maria; Sherie; Gokin, Benjamin; Gordon, Ruth; Grabowski, Beth; Guilbeault, Jason; Henry, Tracy; Horning, Jessica; Hornwing, Kevin; Hues, Ann; Joppru, Kathleen; Kagerer, Joe; Kagerer, Marnie; Kenney, Faith; Kincaid, Rhonda; Larula, Jennifer; Lowney, Joanne; Magao, Kristine; Mather, Jenna; Mather, Santo; Maziorz, Megan; Maziorz, Mike; McDonald, Ryan; McGrath, Jean; McGrath, Kelly; McManus, Christa; Mercure, David; Mercure, Mona; Millette, Debra; Millette, Eric; Morgan, Linda; Morrison, Kate; Murdacht, John; Ortiz, Judy; Osmond, JoAnne; Paul, Bessie; Paul, David; Perrotti-Verboven, Lauren; Perry, Sarah; Pirer, Steve; Postemski, Erin; Prior, Darah; Ricardo, Evan; Riendeau, Rachel; Riergan, Nelisa; Rolden, Margaret; Roman, Kyle; Savino, Julie; Schatz, Fred; Schlessor, Deborah; Sherwood, R; Smith, Susan; Sposito, Christine; St. Louis, Stacy; Strong, Amanda; Sweetland, George; Swenson, Neil; Szegda, Dave; Tein, Jennifer; Tigeleiro, Jenn; Trotter, Ashley; Vance, Carmen; VanSkirer, Kristin; White, Amanda; Wiggins, Carol; Wilk, Kimberly; Wilkens, Peter; Wilt, Barbara; Wojak, Sandra; Woodward, Karen;

I. Call to Order

Superintendent Geryk called the meeting to order at 7:05 p.m. She explained she is performing this task tonight because the Board will be electing officers tonight. Once the Chairman is elected she will pass the gavel.

II. Pledge of Allegiance

III. Election of Officers

a. Election of Chairperson

Mr. Littlefield MOVED, Mr. Chakulski, Jr. SECONDED Mr. Lent as Chairperson.
MOTION CARRIES 6:0

b. Election of Vice Chair/Secretary

Ms. Tolsdorf MOVED, Mr. Chakulski, Jr. SECONDED Ms. Prague Doyle as Vice Chair/Secretary.
MOTION CARRIES 6:0

c. Committee Assignments

1. Policy – Mr. Crim, Ms. Dooley and Ms. Prague Doyle
2. Budget/Finance – Mr. Chakulski, Jr., Mr. Littlefield and Ms. Tolsdorf
3. Teaching and Learning – Mr. Crim, Ms. Dooley, Ms. Prague Doyle and Ms. Tolsdorf
4. Fiscal Policy Board Representatives – Chairman Lent and Ms. Prague Doyle

5. Community Engagement Representatives – Mr. Chakulski, Jr., Ms. Prague Doyle and Mr. Littlefield

IV. Presentation – Recognition of the CAPSS Award Winners 2018/2019

Elizabeth Morris and Luke Ruchalski

Superintendent Geryk said Ellie and Luke are two eighth graders being recognized for community service and service to others, academic prowess and leadership service to the school community. Because they are not available to attend tonight's meeting, they will ~~be presented their~~ awards recognized at a future event.

V. Special Recognition - National Special Education Day

Chairman Lent said yesterday was National Special Education Day. This is the anniversary of the first federal special education law signed by President Ford, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). This made education available to all American children. Chairman Lent expressed his gratitude for Mrs. Wilson, her staff, and all who actively support children.

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

Time allotted for public participation is twenty (20) minutes; time allotted for an individual speaker is three (3) minutes.

Chairman Lent opened this portion of the meeting by explaining the allotted time and the fact that audience members may speak regarding anything on tonight's agenda or any matter they would like to bring before the Board.

Steven Everett, 534 Route 87 was pleased with the great turnout to tonight's meeting. It is indicative of how important this issue is to parents, grandparents, and tax payers. He has been in town 30 years and does not believe he has seen a topic that gets as much involvement as our schools. When the town went through a similar process 25 years ago, people disrespected those with differing opinions on the matter. He likes the current pre-K – 8 and high school choices. He urges the Board to continue moving forward for the education of our children. The people of Columbia have two great options with Bolton and E.O. Smith high schools. One is better for the student who thrives in a smaller environment and the other is better for the student who excels in a more diverse school. If it is decided to fill our classrooms with students from other towns, he will work on it with the town.

David Paul, 18 Whitney Road has lived here for 40 years and says we have a fine school system. His two sons went through the school system and now two grandsons are in it. He would like to see them stay in this school and not be sent to another town.

Lauren Perrotti-Verboven, 135 West Street said she was on the Board when E.O. Smith was first chosen. It was a difficult process that involved a lot of work. Norwich Free Academy was what was originally sought. When E.O. became a consideration they started with an informal interview, review of grades and met with teachers. Lauren plans to retire in Columbia and says that she believes EO has done a great job. Everybody has found a friend. There is something of value in that statement. Teachers worked hard to make students from Columbia a part of the fabric there. Why go through the hard work to research another school, especially since EO has been so successful? She understands

the budgeting process for the Board may be more involved because of two separate schools, two separate special education budgets, but she believes it is worth it.

Megan Maziarz, 8 Fox Run said fifteen years ago, while working on her Masters program, she was placed here at Porter. It was such a special place that she wanted her own kids to experience it. She moved to town because it is a small school, it is a family school. She feels kids will be lost in the mix at a regional school. She and her husband chose this town because of this school and supports keeping it the way it is.

Chairman Lent said part of the reason these options are being considered is due to enrollment projections. Pre-k – 8 has stabilized and is much higher than projected. We now have 434 students pre-k – 8. Because of support from the town, we have been improving our curriculum, including French for seventh graders and an instrumental music program as examples.

A resident from Dilaj Drive said they grew up in Columbia and attended Porter School. She moved back here in 2010 because of the schools. She is glad we now have Bolton and E.O. as our high school options. One child currently attends Bolton and she feels her other child will attend E.O. because of their personalities.

Debbie Millette, 25 Pine Street has lived here for over thirty years. She says we live in a very intense world. Protecting our kids is important. The emotional health of our kids as they grow should be a priority. She supports maintaining Porter as it is, pre-K – 8.

A resident from West Street said her children graduated a while ago. She is most concerned about the middle school because last she heard, people were getting half-year science and half-year social studies. Is the middle school too small to give kids the education they deserve?

Ms. Tolsdorf said the schedule was revamped this past summer. Chairman Lent said that prior to that, kids were receiving the equivalent number of hours, but getting them within half-year courses.

Steve Piro, 22 Russman Trail said that he was asked to participate in the future needs study years ago. There was no financial gain. We have available to us the small community of Bolton and a large community of E.O. Last year there was a similar meeting and without exception people back up our current decision. A year later we are here again. When does this get put to bed?

Chairman Lent said on the agenda is discussion and potential action for making a vote on whether we should maintain pre-K – 8 and maintain high school choice after 2022. He wants to clarify that at this time we are not specifying to maintain the choice of Bolton and E.O. Once it is decided if we will maintain choice, then discussions and negotiations would need to be held to decide what those choices will be.

Peter Wilkens, 18 Cards Mill Road said he and his wife did a lot of research when searching for their home. They decided Columbia is a great choice for them because it is close to a lot of great things. There is a school on the town green amongst the town government. He would seriously consider moving elsewhere if this is lost.

John Murdacht, 35 Macht Road teaches in Glastonbury Public Schools, which is a very large district. What drew his family to this town is the small pre-K – 8 school and the community. He likes having pre-K – 8 in one building.

Wayne Deidrich, 444 Sleepy Hollow Road says he is interested in education. He worked 20 years as a teacher and 18 as an administrator and was very pleased to see such a showing of interest from the town's residents. He said you get good education when you do the hard work. There is no such thing as a perfect school. There are good and bad qualities in each. He agrees we should keep our elementary school as-is and look at high school choices.

Lisa Napolitano spoke of using technology as a way to get together with other communities. We do not have to use the same model. We may approach things from a different angle.

Carmen Vance, Beach Road said their concern is the middle school being separated off. She is concerned we have not been able to provide the kind of choices that we should be offering our kids. Should the kids go to a larger school? Scores in the paper recently were not good. We did not fare well and this will affect future families moving to town. Are we able to meet the needs in such a small school environment?

Christine Sposito, 62 Doubleday Road said it is not if we can meet the needs. We have to look at how we can meet their needs.

Michelle Barton said we all get really busy and have different ways of checking on things. She would like the Board to send out as many notifications as possible, including Facebook and mailings.

Chairman Lent said social media has been a little challenging because of the multiple Facebook pages for HWP. He said the Board is looking at how to communicate better with the community. This is the twenty-first century and people communicate in ways other than Town Hall. Superintendent Geryk said she appreciates the various suggestions received and will follow-up on them.

Erin Postemski, 81 Lake Road is a special education teacher of a classroom of students with issues such as anxiety and that it is possible to teach quality lessons in small groups.

VII. Action Items (Consent)

A consent agenda is presented by the Chairman 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 discussion of the assembly.

- a. Approval of October 1, 2018, Regular Board of Education Minutes
- b. Approval of November 5, 2018, Regular Board of Education Minutes
- c. Payment of Bills

Ms. Prague Doyle MOVED, Mr. Chakulski, Jr. SECONDED to move item b. Approval of November 5, 2018, Regular Board of Education Minutes to section VIII. Action Items (Discussion and Action)
MOTION CARRIES 7:0

Ms. Prague Doyle MOVED, Mr. Littlefield SECONDED to approve items a. Approval of October 1, 2018, Regular Board of Education Minutes and c. Payment of Bills.

MOTION CARRIES 7:0

VIII. Action Items (Discussion and Action)

a. Discussion & Action

1. Should Columbia Continue to Maintain a Pre-K to Grade 8 School?

Mr. Crim MOVED, Mr. Littlefield SECONDED Columbia should continue to maintain a pre-K to grade 8 school.

Discussion:

Ms. Tolsdorf was permitted to share her sentiments first. She is in favor of further study. Ms. Tolsdorf would like the Board to propose actual options at the March 2019 meeting and vote at the June 2019 meeting. She believes there is a lot of information that was not fully considered. She raised her concerns about the grade 5 – 8 projected population through 2022. Ms. Tolsdorf briefly reviewed results from two surveys and how they conflict with expressions by attendees at the April 2017 special meeting and tonight's meeting.

There was discussion regarding the fact that other area communities also have lower enrollment. Chairman Lent said it is the Board's responsibility to make a decision and they are doing so, using all information available.

Mr. Littlefield is in favor of maintaining Porter as a pre-K – 8 school.

Ms. Dooley thanked everybody for coming to tonight's meeting. There is not as much public participation in regular Board meetings and she hopes that will change. Regarding the question of maintaining a pre-K – 8 school, she said there is a lot of history. When this process started, we were at the point of laying teachers off because we could not maintain the school. Retirements happened. Other changes happened, including re-doing the middle school model, making changes to be proactive to not send our kids out. Ms. Dooley does not believe we need to present a middle school choice right now because the community spoke and she agrees.

Mr. Chakulski, Jr. said tonight we are making a decision based on the information available to date. He is in agreement with keeping it as it is, pre-K – grade 8. He believes our middle school program looks comparable to others. Improvements such as Project O and French for grade 7 are welcome and he wants to maintain what is underway.

Ms. Prague Doyle shared her experiences at Porter were as a student who graduated from here, a teacher, a principal, and now a Board member who meets here. She sees the positive changes that are being implemented. She encouraged folks to come to the events, communicate with the teachers, come to the Board meetings, provide information for the members to make change and maintain growth. Ms. Prague Doyle supports what the community is requesting, which is to maintain pre-K – 8 at Porter.

Ms. Tolsdorf said she heard all of what was said and acknowledges she is outnumbered. She will support HWP as that is what they are all here to do.

MOTION CARRIES 6 Yea (Chakulski, Jr., Crim, Dooley, Prague Doyle, Chairman Lent, Littlefield) : 1 No (Tolsdorf)

2. Should Columbia Maintain High School Choice after 2022?

Mr. Littlefield MOVED, Mr. Chakulski, Jr. SECONDED to maintain high school choice after 2022.

Discussion:

Mr. Littlefield said our current choices are good. He is in support of maintaining choice and says negotiations will have to be held regarding costs.

Mr. Chakulski, Jr. said he agrees with Mr. Littlefield. He knows the vote is about keeping choice, but he hopes we will be able to keep the current school choices. Negotiating will be less favorable if we prematurely establish our choices. Additionally, Mr. Chakulski stated the Board already considered transportation savings if only one high school were offered, but they were minimal.

Ms. Dooley says she believes people want choice. Cost and quality are important. She will be open-minded when determining which schools. She will vote to maintain a school choice.

Ms. Tolsdorf said she would want to keep the two current schools in the motion proposed because the town overwhelmingly loves these two schools and we should be specific. We have been successful with these two high school choices and will support maintaining choice.

Both Ms. Prague Doyle and Mr. Crim said they are in favor of maintaining choice.

Chairman Lent said a potential follow-up consideration would be that the Board could consider recommending negotiating with the current schools we have.

MOTION CARRIES 7:0

Discussion about next steps ensued. If we enter negotiations earlier than 2022, we will have time to explore another choice. Both of these schools are open to maintaining our students. Other terms would be worked out, including percentage of increase year after year, potential of being a part of the Boards that makes decisions affecting the high schools our students attend, etc.

b. Approval of November 5, 2018, Regular Board of Education Minutes

Mr. Chakulski MOVED, Mr. Littlefield SECONDED to approve the November 5, 2018, Regular Board of Education Minutes.

Discussion:

Two changes are to be made:

The first is in Section III. A Moment of Silence for a Member of our Community and Losses Across our Country. Edit the sentence, removing the word “to” to read: “Chairman Lent said this moment of silence is for the loss of a former student as well as others across our country.”

The second is to include the motion to adjourn the meeting. It is to read:

XV. Adjournment

Mr. Littlefield MOVED, Mr. Crim SECONDED to adjourn.
MOTION CARRIES 7:0

The Board adjourned at 9:05 p.m.

Ms. Prague Doyle MOVED, Mr. Chakulski, Jr. SECONDED, to approve the November 5, 2018, Regular Board of Education Minutes as amended.
MOTION CARRIES 7:0

IX. Reports of Board Committees

Policy

Ms. Dooley spoke of the fact that we now use Shipman & Goodwin for vetted policies. We have several that need to be updated and will be done based on Superintendent Geryk’s recommended priorities. Superintendent Geryk said the subcommittee looked at the policy regarding restraint and seclusion earlier tonight and will come back to the Board on this in January.

Budget

Superintendent Geryk said she looked at the five year updated capital plan. One large adjustment is from a safety grant she recently submitted. \$125,000 is requested with a \$57,000 reimbursement, resulting in a \$68,000 request.

Chairman Lent said we will be in the early stages of budget development in January.

Teaching and Learning

Chairman Lent said this subcommittee will meet in January. Superintendent Geryk said we are in a curriculum audit and looking at curriculum in place in all pre-k – 8 areas. She is getting a sense of work with instruction improvement. She is also gaining a sense of our direction in terms of short-term goals and innovative changes in the classroom. This will be part of the upcoming Superintendent’s report.

There was discussion about the Board establishing goals that work with the Superintendent’s. A retreat will be scheduled.

Ad hoc Committee on Future Needs

This will include community engagement. Communicating via social media and other means will be part of what is considered. It was agreed to request a person from the community participate.

X. Correspondence/Communications

a. Alumni Support Students' Career Development

Superintendent Geryk said she would like to start to share some articles for people who would like some light reading.

XI. Board of Education Upcoming Meetings

Future Meeting Dates:

Monday, January 7, 2019, 6:30 p.m., BOE Budget and Teaching & Learning Subcommittees

Monday, January 7, 2019, 7:30 p.m., BOE Regular Meeting

Tri-Board Meeting – Wednesday, December 12, 7:00, Yeomans Hall

The Tri-Board meeting is FIPAC, Board of Selectmen and Board of Education.

XII. Superintendent's Report

Solar

This project is moving along well. Panels are installed. Wiring may have been completed today. Eversource will test the system. When the system goes live in December the screen will be available for teachers to use for teaching purposes.

Cleaning

Classrooms in A wing have been cleaned as well as vents and heating units. A sink and countertop were repaired in one of the classrooms. We are getting rid of any possibilities of water damage. Air quality testing will occur in the next few weeks. Superintendent Geryk will be asking for some funds to do some other cleaning of the whole school.

A corroded pipe needs to be repaired in the boiler room. Needs to be done before there is an oil spill. This will be taken care of in the next few weeks.

Superintendent Geryk talked about her entry plan. She intends to put it up on the website. She will be talking with staff, parents, students and members of the community. September through December she will be listening and learning perspectives. Between January and March she will have a sense of strengths and challenge areas and establish goals moving forward.

Superintendent Geryk is looking at documents. Budget, bargaining agreements, documents specific to teaching and learning are the focus of her time and energy. Assessment of Tier 1, 2 and 3 and SRBI currently in place.

Superintendent Geryk enjoys being here and is having fun. HWP is already great. Where we will be in the next five years will be amazing and we have everything we need to do it.

XIII. Future Regular and Subcommittee Agenda Items

Board Self-Assessment in January

Policy Subcommittee in January

Future Needs Subcommittee in January
Community Engagement in February
Retreat in February

XIV. Columbia Board of Education Member Remarks

Mr. Crim commented on the process undertaken by the Board to make tonight's decisions regarding Porter and high school choice. He believes the amount of time taken allowed them to be thorough. A lot of people are impacted by these decisions.

Mr. Littlefield suggested parents talk with their kids about bus stop safety, in light of some incidents in the news lately.

Mr. Chakulski said he very much appreciates the non-partisan way tonight's vote happened. People were very respectful of each other.

Ms. Dooley said she's been invited to participate on a committee "Portrait of a Graduating Student" with the principal at EOS. She was asked because she has an eighth grader going to ninth grade. She will bring information back to the Board.

Superintendent Geryk said the same thing is being done for elementary level at Porter.

XV. Executive Session for the Purpose of Residency Request

Mr. Littlefield MOVED, Mr. Crim SECONDED to go into executive session for the purpose of discussing a residency request.
MOTION CARRIES 7:0

Board entered executive session at 9:22 p.m.

XVI. Action Item – Residency Request

Mr. Littlefield MOVED, Mr. Crim SECONDED to exit executive session and return to regular session
MOTION CARRIES 7:0

Board returned to regular session at 9:32 p.m.

Mr. Littlefield MOVED, Ms. Tolsdorf SECONDED to approve the Superintendent's recommendation related to a family's residency request.
MOTION CARRIES 7:0

XVII. Adjournment

Mr. Crim MOVED, Mr. Littlefield SECONDED to adjourn.
MOTION CARRIES 7:0

The Board adjourned at 9:34 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Joanne Prague Doyle, Board Secretary

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