

Minutes
Board of Education Meeting
February 4, 2019
7:30 p.m.

Board Members Present:, David Crim, Joanne Prague Doyle, Chairman Christopher Lent, Gary Littlefield and Kathy Tolsdorf
Linette Dooley arrived 8:00 p.m.

Board Members Absent: James Chakulski, Jr.

Others Present: Michele Barton, Karen Caputo, Tom Doyle, Superintendent Maria Geryk, Principal Alyssa Gwinnell, Assistant Principal Jennifer Hill, Christine Sposito, and Director of Student Services Barbara Wilson

I. Call to Order

Chairman Lent called the meeting to order at 7:35 p.m.

II. Pledge of Allegiance

III. Comments from the Audience (Bylaws of the Board #9300)

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 informing the audience this is an opportunity to hear comments from the public regarding budget, ask questions or offer feedback. He continued by saying there is a public hearing on February 25 to share what is being proposed before the Board votes on it.

Christine Sposito, 62 Doubleday Road, expressed a concern, asking to confirm there are to be operating cameras on every school bus. Superintendent Geryk responded that the contract does stipulate there will be working cameras on every bus. Because school staff could not retrieve a requested video, they have been working with the bus company to ensure this is up and running. Superintendent Geryk agrees we need to have cameras on the buses operational at all times. Ms. Hill shared that last year we were unable to secure a video of a bus run more than a month old. A brief conversation about double-checking the window of opportunity to retrieve a video ensued.

Ms. Sposito asked about continued use of Second Step. Her fourth grade son does not mention it as he did in earlier grades. Ms. Caputo agreed fourth grade has not done Second Step consistently in the past due to scheduling constraints. We are looking into different Social Emotional Learning programming to integrate into all grades. Superintendent Geryk said Social Emotional Learning will be in the schedule next year. Principal Gwinnell confirmed this is already under review with a consultant.

IV. Discussion and Update

a) Mr. Joseph Spurgeon Update Concerning Change in Medical Benefits Carrier

Mr. Spurgeon gave a brief overview of the process undertaken to negotiate better insurance rates for eligible employees from the school district and town. In March 2018 Columbia began working with the towns and boards of Bolton, Union, Brooklyn, Canterbury and Thompson to create a

collaborative similar to an existing regional collaborative called ECHIP, which represents larger towns and boards of education in our region. This will allow small towns and BOEs, such as Columbia, the ability to combine each participant's relatively small health pools into a larger combined pool.

Connecticut Collaborative Health Insurance Program (CT-CHIP) conducted an official Request for Proposal for health insurance providers and received responses from Anthem, CTCare and Cigna. CT-CHIP selected Cigna as the health insurance provider for the collaborative.

Cigna agreed to match or exceed all benefits currently offered to employees. Provider match is 96.5% of providers, 97% of members served and 97% of visits. Cigna will include Employee Assistant Program (EAP) services at no additional charge and provide a \$60,000 Wellness Fund to share amongst participating members. Each participant will retain control of their own plan designs and be responsible for their own premium tied to their enrollment and benefits.

Mr. Spurgeon concluded with very favorable financial information if Columbia were to opt for this proposal. Current 2018-19 Anthem premium is \$1,486,432. Projected 2019-20 Anthem Premium (Columbia standalone renewal) is an increase of 9.69%, to total \$1,630,401. Projected 2019-20 CT-CHIP Cigna Premium would be a decrease of 6.54% of current rates to total \$1,389,249.

All premiums are based on November enrollment. Final premium may change if enrollment changes. All premiums reflect Medical, prescription and vision. Dental is not included.

Superintendent Geryk provided the timeline for decisions about this potential change in our medical coverage provider. Tonight the Board would be able to ask questions and hopefully vote to support continuing membership in CT-CHIP and change from Anthem to Cigna. Next we have an obligation to notify union members of specific information, including a 30 day period for questions. The Town has to go through this same process. The Board of Selectmen will receive this same information tomorrow. This timeline is critical because our goal would be to transition fully by July 1 to the new insurance carrier.

Mr. Spurgeon answered Board members' questions regarding how Wellness funds may be utilized. He also answered questions about the process for people who are already receiving treatment and/or services. Mr. Spurgeon concluded his presentation by sharing the fact that the decision to transition to Cigna was unanimous amongst the CT-CHIP representatives.

b) Overview of New Mathematics Program Curriculum

Assistant Principal Jennifer Hill presented to the Board the very comprehensive K-8 program called Ready Mathematics. A committee consisting of herself, teachers from each grade level, math coach and math curriculum leader was developed to review options for a new math curriculum. She detailed the process they undertook, which included them reaching out to surrounding towns. They found Bridges and Ready Math to be the most comprehensive options available. However, Bridges is only for grades K-5. Ready Math is K-8 with a pre-k component as well.

Ready Math has a wealth of teacher resources. i-Ready Diagnostic would be administered three times a year, replacing the current STAR assessment. This would collect a broad spectrum of information on student ability to identify where students are struggling, measure growth across a student's career, and plan instructional paths with a single measurement tool. The i-Ready Standards Mastery tool provides targeted insight into student's mastery of individual, grade-level standards.

Whole class instruction is provided using Ready books and the online Teacher Toolbox. Small group differentiation is then provided, also using the Ready Online Teacher Toolbox. Personalized learning is achieved using i-Ready Instruction.

Ms. Hill answered Board members' questions and provided assurances staff would be provided all necessary training prior to fully implementing the program within the classrooms. Superintendent Geryk said a full-day is committed for math professional development, built into the proposed 2019-20 school calendar. Parent resources are part of this program.

Responding to questions, Ms. Hill said ReadyMath is Common Core aligned.

Superintendent Geryk said a six-year commitment includes updates, digital licensing, the diagnostic tool, consumable books and the teacher toolbox. The proposal is \$57,000 for this K-8 program. If we were to continue our current curriculum, consumable materials, based on our enrollment, will typically cost \$12,000-\$15,000 annually, which totals approximately \$72,000-\$90,000 in this same six-year period of time.

Superintendent Geryk and the Board extended appreciation to Ms. Hill and all the staff involved in this study.

V. Action Items (Consent)

- a) Approval of January 7, 2019 Regular Board of Education Minutes
- b) Approval of January 23, 2019 Special Board of Education Minutes
- c) Payment of Bills
- d) Approval of the 2019-2020 H.W. Porter School Calendar
- e) Approval of Mathematics Text/Curriculum Vote
- f) Save the Date Postcard Re: February 25th BOE Meeting
- g) Approval to Participate in Medical Benefits Carrier
- ~~h) Approval of Mathematics Text Program~~

Mr. Littlefield MOVED, Mr. Crim SECONDED to move items e. Approval of Mathematics Text/Curriculum Vote and g. Approval to Participate in Medical Benefits Carrier to section VI. Action Items (Discussion and Action)
MOTION CARRIES 6:0

Mr. Littlefield MOVED, Ms. Prague Doyle SECONDED to approve items a, b, c, d, and f and to remove and delete item h.
MOTION CARRIES 6:0

VI. Action Items (Discussion and Action)

a) Approval of Mathematics Text/Curriculum Vote

Mr. Crim MOVED, Mr. Littlefield SECONDED to adopt and purchase Ready Mathematics K-8 (including the assessment tool i-Ready) for up to \$60,000 for a six-year materials/license.

Discussion:

Ms. Hill answered questions about how the district may proceed if it turns out the program does not live up to expectations. Ms. Hill and Ms. Gwinnell answered that curriculum is a living and breathing document. There will always be changes being made due to what works and does not work to best meet the needs of the students. This program has so much documented potential to tailor instruction to each student's abilities.

This cost includes professional development, license and consumable books, and the digital toolbox.

Ms. Prague Doyle and others acknowledged the hard work and specialized knowledge of the committee. However, more notice than a presentation with a vote that same night would be requested and appreciated if such a recommended change in curriculum occurs. Superintendent Geryk and others agreed this is a reasonable request and will make every effort to comply.

MOTION CARRIES 5:0:1

D. Crim, L. Dooley, C. Lent, G. Littlefield, K. Tolsdorf voted FOR THE MOTION.

J. Prague Doyle ABSTAINED

b) Approval to Participate in Medical Benefits Carrier

Mr. Littlefield MOVED, Ms. Prague Doyle SECONDED to support membership in CT-CHIP insurance consortium and to change insurance carriers from Anthem to Cigna.

Discussion:

Superintendent Geryk and Mr. Spurgeon summarized the benefits of this proposal. The pool of insured individuals will be approximately 520 vs the current 76. Lower than current rates that will be in effect while matching current benefits. EAP is part of the cost, as is the Wellness fund.

MOTION CARRIES 6:0

c) Second Reading, Policy 5000 Series, Physical Restraint & Seclusion & Use of Exclusionary Time Out

Director of Student Services Barbara Wilson was present to answer questions.

Mr. Littlefield MOVED, Mr. Crim SECONDED to approve Policy 5000 Series, Physical Restraint & Seclusion and Use of Exclusionary Time Out.

MOTION CARRIES 6:0

VII. Reports of Board Committees

Policy

Currently our policy requires two reads to adopt revised and/or new policies. However, Attorney Ritter recommends the Board temporarily suspend the requirement that the policies be read twice before the formal adoption and then vote to accept the policies with the understanding the Board can revise where it deems necessary. This can all be done at a regularly scheduled meeting with a majority vote of those present and voting.

Chairman Lent said this will give the ability to comply immediately. All agreed this will be addressed March 4.

Budget

Chairman Lent said the Budget subcommittee met earlier tonight. Work is underway, including capital. We will meet again next week.

Teaching and Learning

No update since last meeting. Will meet in April.

Ad hoc Committee on Future Needs

The Save the Date for the February 25, 2019 meeting was shared. This will be mailed to residents to invite them to attend this meeting as we will discuss negotiating with our current high school options. This meeting will also conduct deliberations concerning the BOE 2019-2020 budget.

VIII. Correspondence/Communications

- a) 1/23/2019 Response from the State Department of Education Re: MBR
Kathy Demsey from the State Department of Education wrote regarding Columbia's Minimum Budget Requirement (MBR). We are currently in noncompliance with the MBR by \$215,193. Our options are for the town to appropriate this amount to our budget, or the district's Education Cost Sharing (ECS) will be reduced twice that amount, totaling \$430,386.
- b) Email Correspondence from Mr. David Kohn Re: Sub Pay
Superintendent Geryk and the Board are in agreement. Our sub pay is within the ballpark of surrounding towns. There was discussion regarding the recent increase of the daily substitute rate of pay and the anticipated negligible impact another \$5 per day would have on the pool of potential substitutes. Superintendent Geryk said the 2019-20 budget proposal includes a \$5 per day increase in substitute pay for the Board to consider. The impact is a minimal increase to that account.

IX. Board of Education Upcoming Meetings

- a) Future Meeting Dates
Monday, February 11, 2019, 5:00 p.m., BOE Special Meeting, Retreat
Monday, February 11, 2019, 7:00 p.m., Budget Subcommittee

Monday, February 25, 2019, 7:00 p.m., BOE Public Budget Hearing to Present the Budget and Receive Public Feedback

Monday, March 4, 2019, 6:30 p.m., BOE Budget & Policy Subcommittee Meeting

Monday, March 4, 2019, 7:30 p.m., BOE Regular Meeting

X. Superintendent's Report

Superintendent Geryk was pleased to share the air quality was retested in A wing. Results show significantly improved counts and are typical of normal seasonal conditions. Information was sent to staff. Superintendent Geryk hopes to have our capital plan approved, which includes HVAC cleaning throughout the building completed this summer. Window air conditioner units will be installed in the A wing rooms this spring.

Fifth graders in Mrs. Ekstrom's classes wrote poems showing how they could help make our community more accessible for veterans who use wheelchairs. Many opted to submit their poems to the 15th annual Veterans Day National Poem Contest sponsored by the Paralyzed Veterans of America. Matthew Cranick's poem was selected as the Grade 5-6 Category Winner. Michael Franco was announced as the Grand Prize Winner. As Grand Prize winner of the poem category, Michael has won a trip to the 2019 National Veterans Wheelchair Games in Louisville, KY. He will also have his winning entry featured on the Paralyzed Veterans of America's website and in PN magazine (Paraplegia News). Congratulations to Matthew, Michael, and all of the fifth graders for their outstanding effort to honor our American heroes!

Guys and Dolls will be performed at the E.O. Smith Auditorium on February 8 at 7:30 p.m., February 9 at 2:00 p.m. and 7:30 p.m., and February 10 at 2:00 p.m.

The Lions Club sponsors an annual international Peace Poster Contest for students 11-13 years old (grades 6-8). The theme this year was "Kindness Matters." Students were challenged to communicate the theme using visual imagery and art elements. Eighth grader Angelika Kingo and seventh grader Liana Hughes were selected as the first and second place winners in the contest. Their posters were on display at the town library and are now at the Beckett Senior Center. The remainder of the posters were on display for the past two months in the Porter Cafetorium

Scholarships applications are available to high school seniors. The Lions Club has two \$1,200 scholarships and the Columbia Volunteer Fire Department has four \$1,000 scholarships.

XI. Future Regular and Subcommittee Agenda Items

Teaching and Learning will be looked at, as will the communications subcommittee which was recently established. Superintendent Geryk said the district and town websites will be updated.

The Future Needs subcommittee will meet in April.

XII. Columbia Board of Education Member Remarks

Ms. Tolsdorf asked about Columbia's homeschooled children. Discussion about the district following state law occurred. Both Superintendent Geryk and Ms. Gwinnell also spoke of their contacts with parents who opt to homeschool their children.

XIII. Executive Session for the Purpose of Personnel Matters

Chairman Lent said executive session is not required.

XIV. Adjournment

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

The Board adjourned at 9:35 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Joanne Prague Doyle, Board Secretary