

Minutes
Board of Education Meeting
October 1, 2018
7:30 p.m.

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

Others Present: Tom Boardman, Karen Caputo, Tom Doyle, Steven Everett-First Selectman, Lol Fearon, Maria Geryk-Superintendent, Alyssa Gwinnell-Principal, Jennifer Hill-Assistant Principal, Steve Piro, Christine Sposito, Mark Walter-Town Administrator, and Barbara Wilson-Student Services Director

I. Call to Order – Chairman Lent called the meeting to order at 7:33 p.m.

II. Pledge of Allegiance

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

Before beginning, Chairman Lent stated he would like to add item e. Payment of Bills to section VI. Action Items (Consent).

Mr. Littlefield MOVED, Mr. Crim SECONDED to add item e. Payment of Bills to section VI. Action Items (Consent)

MOTION CARRIES 7:0

Ms. Sposito said she had some questions regarding the SBAC scores for third grade. District ELA score is 2403, which is Approaching Achievement Level. She raised concerns regarding her son's progress. The district score is low. Same with math. District score for math is 2410. Ms. Sposito expressed her concern as to how students are being pushed or enriched. She questions if current interventions are enough and the SRBI process. She received a letter stating her son will receive SRBI but services will be provided by a paraprofessional. This is concerning for her.

Superintendent Fearon said these questions will be addressed in the upcoming presentation. There will be opportunity to ask additional questions afterward.

Mr. Walter said he wants to welcome Maria to town. He hopes she has a long and effective career. He also wants to thank Lol for all his years with us.

Mr. Doyle said Ms. Ciurylo's name is misspelled throughout the minutes. Mr. Doyle also stated that he made comments at the August 29 special meeting. As co-president of the Teachers' Association he welcomed Maria Geryk and he wants to be sure he got the information corrected.

There was then discussion regarding preparation of minutes from meetings. Chairman Lent said the minutes may be amended.

Ms. Tolsdorf MOVED, Mr. Littlefield SECONDED to move a, b and c from section VI. Action Items (Consent) to section VII. Action Items (Discussion and Action).

MOTION CARRIES 7:0

Ms. Sposito said she would like more clarification on how meetings are recorded as this is how people in town can learn what is going on. Agendas are very broad. It is really important for the town

to be able to read what is talked about. To ensure something is in the minutes, does a participant say they want this on the record?

Ms. Tolsdorf said that a person may say this is for the record. She has had a discussion like this. Many organizations strictly record motions, seconds and actions. Others record every word. We don't know how much detail should be in it.

First Selectman Everett welcomed Superintendent Geryk. He said we have a fantastic town because people sit on boards and committees. Parents show up when they are concerned. He said that there will be a "how to run an effective meeting" presentation at Yeoman's Hall Wednesday at 6:00 p.m. This is in response to feedback he received from townspeople about the meetings he held. Superintendent Geryk thanked him, adding that Lol has been a great leader. First Selectman Everett agreed, saying last year Superintendent Fearon worked with him on the budget, making it clear his concern was for the children of Columbia. He concluded by again welcoming Superintendent Geryk.

IV. Celebration

October is National Principal's Month. Today we honor and thank our two school administrators, Principal Alyssa Gwinnell and Assistant Principal Jennifer Hill for their devotion to the students, families and staff of Horace W. Porter School.

Superintendent Fearon invited Ms. Gwinnell and Ms. Hill to join him up front. He said he has had the pleasure to work with Ms. Gwinnell for five years and Ms. Hill for almost two years. They make a great team, working well together. He presented a small token of appreciation on behalf of the Board.

V. Presentation

Review of SBAC Results

Superintendent Fearon introduced the presentation by stating that he mentioned at the last Board meeting the fact that SBAC scores were received and disappointing. He said that test scores are one measure of a student's success. It is a significant measure and these scores get reported to the community. He said that he takes responsibility when we have successes, which is often due to parents and staff, and he takes personal responsibility for these scores. Ms. Hill's upcoming presentation will also talk about the STAR assessment program used. Is STAR a good predictor? We know students have previously done well on STAR. Specific needs were identified, allowing us to place kids in appropriate programs. When SBAC was administered in the spring, it was with confidence based on STAR.

The scores will be presented. Focus will be on what actions we have already taken to begin to address them, plans put in place, and other adjustments we want to make. Some include reassigning staff or looking at resources used. He said comments are welcomed and asked that clarifying questions be posed as the presentation is made.

Ms. Hill opened the presentation by stating a lot of work needs to be done but she is excited by the changes rolled out because we want to improve student learning. She explained STAR was administered three times annually. It was used as a predictor for SBAC results. She outlined the components of SBAC.

Because third grade had 35 students, each student was the equivalent of approximately 3% of the total cohort. Comprehension and writing about reading are areas to be focused on for grades 3 through 8. Third grade scores show us this is not just a third grade problem. Curriculum, instruction, and resources in grades Pre-K through second grade need to be addressed to prepare for third grade.

Ms. Dooley asked about the numbers of students who take the test impacting results. Ms. Wilson said parents may “opt out” their student, which does not negatively impact our scores. Ms. Tolsdorf asked if the percentage that opt out penalizes the district. Ms. Wilson answered yes, depending on the school size. Ms. Tolsdorf said she does not want to encourage opting out. Ms. Wilson said she or Ms. Gwinnell contact parents who opt out to find out why they have chosen to do so, etc. Ms. Gwinnell stated that the number of students opted out impacts the district’s overall report card and how the school is viewed. Ms. Hill said we stayed at 92% participation for every grade level.

Ms. Hill continued her presentation, stating results show a lot of growth from third to fourth grades and fifth to sixth grades. There are areas not making as much growth in math across the board. We are looking at math curriculum and instruction practices, though students are improving. Results show that math core curriculum, Envisions, needs to be looked at. Envisions is used for grades k through 6. A pre-algebra curriculum is used for grades 7 and 8.

As grade 3 target areas were reviewed, Ms. Doyle-Prague stated teachers will not be able to prioritize and offer meaningful lessons without a firm finished curriculum that drives the writing program in grades pre-K through 8. Teachers need to know what has been taught the year before and what will be taught the next year to best serve the students. Ms. Hill responded that is our curriculum. What resources are available? Instructional techniques used? How to build upon what was taught in grade 2 ELA in grade 3. We are looking at the common core standards at each grade level to see what is needed, including resources to be used, to build in teacher capacity.

Discussion regarding curriculum being continually written followed. It is a living, breathing document, Ms. Hill said. A good curriculum should be re-evaluated frequently. We know curriculum needs work and we are committed to that, using a multi-pronged approach. Mr. Crim noted the Teaching and Learning subcommittee will be able to see what we will be doing differently. Ms. Gwinnell stated all curriculum is living and ever-changing based on feedback from this assessment and others.

Ms. Hill discussed Interim Assessment Blocks, which are used throughout the year. They are really small areas of SBAC. Instead of SBAC in ELA 4 claims and 27 targets, an IAB may be a brief assessment on opinion writing. It is very small and allows a teacher to assess if students fall below achievement level, approaching, or above, predicting information that aligns with Smarter Balance. Currently this information (IAB test results) are not sent home to parents, but the classroom teacher and Ms. Hill access it to address day-to-day instruction. An example of this being used is when review showed students were being taught fractions *later* in the year than the SBAC was administered. When the timing of this instruction was altered to be *before* the test, scores improved.

Two indicators are used to show understanding a goal. We give a pre-assessment to see how they do. Then they work on target areas through different professional development and different resources. Assessment given again mid-year to see growth. Adjustments are made, including is there a small

group that needs different form of instruction? Is one-on-one instruction needed? SRBI to be looked at? Assessment is given again in May to check overall growth.

Ms. Hill proceeded with her presentation. Responding to a question, Ms. Hill said curriculum is written by team leaders. Changes are made as needed in scope and sequences. Ms. Gwinnell stated teachers are given curriculum writing time when we have an identified area of need. When teachers work on curriculum writing they are provided substitute coverage for their classroom.

A writing prompt used to be in the CMT. SBAC shows a weakness in writing about reading. This is being addressed in the schedule changes that were implemented this year. For example, it was shown that young students are better able to learn and retain information early in the day. Most literacy and math instruction now takes place within the first 2/3 of the school day at the elementary level.

Focused professional development was discussed. When asked if middle school math teachers are doing professional development in that area, the answer is “not planned yet.” Not every area of weakness can be addressed at one time. We must be practical in our approach. Superintendent Fearon said professional development should not be a mile wide and an inch deep. It must be approached with fidelity to reap the best long-term effects. Ms. Hill stated a middle school teacher is piloting supplemental materials.

Continuing use of STAR as the screening tool was questioned. Smarter Balanced is incredibly challenging, impacting how teachers need to phrase their questions. IABs are a way for us to see if we are setting our kids up frequently enough in these types of questions.

Ms. Hill reached out to other districts to find out what they are doing. Ms. Gwinnell stated we are on the same path Bolton took. Bolton got a large jump in their scores over last year. They are doing a lot of what Ms. Hill talked about, i.e., modeling questions differently, etc. They have a similar model but have looked at hiring someone from CREC to assist with implementation. We are looking to have someone come in to implement the same kinds of changes in language arts. Bolton has seen some improvement. Superintendent Geryk asked if they shifted their assessment. Ms. Gwinnell answered yes, they no longer use STAR. They also are changing from Envisions, rolling out a new math program.

Ms. Tolsdorf asked about Andover and Mansfield Middle. Ms. Hill said there was a drastic percentage improvement from last year at Mansfield Middle. Ms. Tolsdorf said Andover always does exceptionally well on the CMTs and SBAC. Ms. Hill said they will continue reaching out, especially since the demographics are so similar to Columbia.

Ms. Hill explained some results are unavailable in certain towns/grade levels due to the numbers of students who took the test or number of special education students, making it too easy to identify students.

Ms. Hill said there is a lot of work ahead of us. Effective change takes time. The team will continue looking at curriculum, for where it is lacking and where we can build it up. We will continue to meet to improve student learning.

Discussion regarding this year's schedule change ensued. There are now greater uninterrupted blocks of instruction time. Minutes of instruction are in line with surrounding towns. More information will be sought, but it is more difficult now that strategic school profiles are not as readily available as they were previously. Additionally, the information contained within them is two years old. We currently exceed state mandated minutes of instruction.

Superintendent Geryk stated she is looking forward to diving into the model of intervention, how we monitor the program, who is providing the service, and what format, as well as the curriculum, content and instruction.

VI. Action Items (Consent)

Mr. Littlefield MOVED, Mr. Crim SECONDED to accept items d and e.
MOTION CARRIES 7:0

VII. Action Items (Discussion and Action)

a. Approval of August 29, 2018 Board of Education Minutes

Mr. Littlefield MOVED, Mr. Crim SECONDED approval of August 29, 2018 Board of Education Minutes.

Discussion:

Mr. Littlefield has two corrections:

1. Spelling of Ms. Ciurylo's name
2. Replace "There are no comments from the audience" with "Tom Doyle, co-president from the Teachers' Association, welcomed Maria Geryk."

Motion to revise August 29, 2018 minutes first to correct spelling of Beverly Ciurylo-Finance Director and second correction is to strike "There are no comments from the audience," substituting "Tom Doyle, co-president from the Teachers' Association, welcomed Ms. Geryk to the district on behalf of the Teacher's Association."

MOTION CARRIES 7:0

b. Approval of September 5, 2018 Board of Education Minutes

Mr. Littlefield MOVED, Ms. Doyle-Prague SECONDED approval of September 5, 2018 Board of Education Minutes.

Discussion:

These corrections are needed:

1. Correct spelling of Beverly Ciurylo's name within the body of the document
2. Hyphenate out-of-district in two locations in Section VI. Action Items (Discussion and Action) – first paragraph of Expenditure Report and first line of Discussion.
3. Add *Ms.* Hill on page five, last sentence of paragraph that starts, "Superintendent Fearon said he wants to give . . ."

Motion to approve September 5, 2018 Board of Education Minutes as revised

MOTION CARRIES 6 Yea (Chakulski, Jr., Dooley, Prague-Doyle, Lent, Littlefield, Tolsdorf): 1
Abstain (Crim)

- c. Approval of September 17, 2018 Board of Education Minutes

Ms. Tolsdorf MOVED, Mr. Chakulski, Jr. SECONDED approval of September 17, 2018 Board of Education Minutes

Discussion:

One correction:

1. Replace “J. Chakulski MOVED, K. Tolsdorf SECONDED to request from FiPAC . . .” with
“J. Chakulski MOVED, *G. Littlefield* SECONDED to request from FiPAC . . .”

Motion to approve September 17, 2018 Board of Education Minutes as revised

MOTION CARRIES 7:0

VIII. Reports of Board Committees

Policy

Shipman and Goodwin will provide model policies for Columbia. Once the policy subcommittee begins to meet you can decide which policies you want to start with. Superintendent Fearon recommends starting with statutory changes. All policies received from Shipman and Goodwin have been vetted. It was agreed the policy subcommittee will meet soon to start this process.

Budget

The budget subcommittee met earlier today to roll out assumptions the administrative team and teachers will look at. This will be on the agenda for next month.

Teaching and Learning

A meeting will be scheduled.

Ad hoc Committee on Future Needs

Will schedule with Superintendent Geryk.

Subcommittee membership was confirmed:

Policy – Crim, Dooley, Prague-Doyle

Budget – Chakulski, Littlefield, Tolsdorf

Teaching and Learning – Crim, Dooley, Tolsdorf

IX. Correspondence/Communications

- a. Chronicle Article, “Columbia Hires a New School Superintendent”

Chairman Lent said this is a nice article from Michelle Firestone.

- b. Chronicle Article, “Columbia School Board Cleared to Spend Surplus”

Chairman Lent stated this article is about the Non-Lapsing Account. Mr. Chakulski, Jr. said a title about returning the majority of the surplus to the town may have been more appropriate.

- c. Letter to Dianna Wentzell, Education Commissioner, State Department of Education

Chairman Lent said this is requesting a waiver from MBR requirements. The Commissioner will consider our request.

- d. Teacher of the Year & Paraprofessional of the Year Celebration Invitation

The venue is Lake View Restaurant. Chairman Lent hopes for nice weather so as to enjoy the patio. RSVP by Friday, October 12.

X. Board of Education Upcoming Meetings

November 5, 2018, Monday, 6:30 p.m., BOE Budget Subcommittee Meeting

November 5, 2018, Monday, 7:30 p.m., BOE Regular Meeting

XI. Superintendent’s Report

SBAC was the focus. Superintendent Geryk said this was a great first day. There was a wonderful reception by the Teachers’ Association today. It was nice to meet every one. It was a great day all around. She thanked Superintendent Fearon for his support during her transition.

XII. Future Regular and Subcommittee Agenda Items

Considerable discussion to schedule subcommittee meetings ensued. It was agreed to hold more than one subcommittee meeting prior to the November 5 regular BOE meeting:

6:00 – Policy

6:30 – Teaching and Learning

7:00 – Budget

Ms. Dooley asked if the new policies would be available to review prior to meeting on November 5. Chairman Lent said he would request them to be delivered to members’ homes.

Policy for minutes of meetings will be reviewed at the November 5 subcommittee meeting.

A Future Needs meeting was scheduled for October 15 at 6:00 p.m. in the LMC. An e-mail will be sent to everyone who indicated an interest in the Future Needs subcommittee.

XIII. Columbia Board of Education Member Remarks

Ms. Prague Doyle thanked Ms. Wilson and Ms. Gwinnell for tonight’s presentation on SBAC.

DRAFT (rev. 11/5/2018)

Approved 12/3/2018

BOE MEETING MINUTES 10/1/2018

Page 8 of 8

Mr. Crim agreed it was very well presented.

Ms. Tolsdorf said test scores are not where we want them to be, but the kids are happy and achieving while this is being addressed.

Mr. Chakulski, Jr. shared this sentiment, saying bad news was delivered but he looks forward to receiving Superintendent Geryk's feedback. Budget will also be worked on. Everyone is moving forward, looking ahead.

Mr. Littlefield said that in another town four BOE members resigned, leaving only one member from last November. This is a statement to the Columbia Board.

Ms. Dooley welcomed Superintendent Geryk to her first official meeting.

Superintendent Geryk said it was her pleasure and that day one was great.

Chairman Lent wants to welcome Mr. Charles Fariera, Jr., to Horace Porter and thank him for his service. Mr. Fariera, Jr. is a 22-year veteran in the United States Air Force and Reserves.

Superintendent Geryk closed with saying she looks forward to working with everyone.

XIV. Adjournment

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

The Board adjourned at 9:40 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kathy Tolsdorf,
Vice Chairperson/Secretary