

**THESE MINUTES ARE SUBJECT TO BOARD APPROVAL AT THE March 04, 2010 MEETING
REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT NO. 4 Board of Education**

January 07, 2010

A regular meeting of the Regional School District No. 4 Board of Education was held on Thursday January 07, 2010, in the John Winthrop Middle School Library, with the following Board members in attendance: Linda Hall, Richard Strauss, Mary-Beth Harrigan, Duane Gates, Chris Riley, Elaine Fitzgibbons , Laurie Ann Tomlinson, Jennifer Clark (9:10 p.m. departure) as well as Senior Student Representatives Erin Thomas and Paige Gregory & Junior Student Representatives Patrick Campbell and Shin-Yi Lee

Also in attendance:

Administrators: Superintendent Dr. Ruth I. Levy, Assistant Superintendent Diane Dugas, Business Manager Garth Sawyer; Valley Regional Principal Ian Neviaser; John Winthrop Middle School Principal Dave Russell, and Facilities Manager Bruce Glowac

Board Clerk: Jennifer Bryan

CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Linda Hall called the meeting to order at 7:08 p.m.

CONSENT AGENDA

On motion duly made and seconded the Board unanimously VOTED to approve the Consent Agenda consisting of the minutes from the regular meeting of November 05, 2009, and the Accounts Payable Report.

OTHER ITEMS

A first reading on Policy 6146 Graduation Requirements was held. Principal Neviaser explained that the requested revisions were in keeping with the district's charge to provide a rigorous education for all students. The two major revisions requested are as follows: requiring students to meet requirements on all four CAPT tests as opposed to the current requirement to pass only math or science. In addition the summer reading requirement would be changed to require passing four years of summer reading instead of only three. Any other language revisions merely align policy with current practice in the school.

Principal Neviaser also reviewed current practice with regards to course leveling and he summarized the Level Zero regulation. Currently there are three levels of credit offered. All electives are level two, which prevents many students from fully taking advantage of electives for fear of a negative impact on their GPA. The purpose of the Level Zero regulation is to remove barriers for students who would otherwise avoid the electives by allowing them to opt, at the beginning of a class only, to take the class as level zero (i.e. no affect on their GPA). Principal Neviaser stated that this regulation was developed after having many parents and students request such an opportunity.

Policy 6146 will come back before the Board for a second reading and vote at a special meeting preceding their January 25th budget workshop.

AUDIENCE OF CITIZENS

Eight citizens were in attendance. Henry Krempel voiced his support for the Level Zero Regulation.

REPORTS

Student Representatives

Senior Student Representative Erin Thomas reported on recent academic and athletic achievements by Valley students and coaches. She also voiced her support for the Level Zero option and spoke to the success of the pairing of teachers from different topics into one class e.g. History and English.

Senior Student Representative Paige Gregory updated the Board on the efforts to initiate a “March madness” countdown for CAPT testing in an effort to build enthusiasm and help with the preparation in anticipation of CAPT testing, as well as to build healthy competition as a motivation to students to outscore surrounding schools.

Junior Student Representative Patrick Campbell said that he wholeheartedly supports the Level Zero option that will allow students to diversify and become well-rounded students. He reported that many students support the option and plan to use it.

He also described the upcoming formation of a student leadership council, where student leaders from all of the councils, clubs, etc., will come together once a month to allow the student representatives to be more visible to the student body. It will also allow them to more effectively gather a wider range of student opinions and issues which they will be able to bring back to the Board.

Junior Student Representative Shin-Yi Lee informed the Board of the upcoming comedy night on January 30th, with an admission fee of \$5.00 to support the student scholarship fund. She also reported on the formation of an afterschool writing lab designed to help students with their writing assignments.

Committee Reports

Financial Status Update including Region 4 Audit and Finance Committee

Business Manager Garth Sawyer reviewed the financial status report making note of particular items which are currently under or over budget. He is currently projecting an approximate \$9,000 surplus for Region 4, barring any unanticipated special education costs.

On motion duly made and seconded the Region 4 Board of Education unanimously VOTED to receive the financial status report as presented.

Region 4 Audit and Finance Committee - Committee chair Richard Strauss reported that the Committee had just met earlier in the evening and discussed the proposed Region 4 budget for 2010-11. Also discussed was the closure of Region 4 building projects. The audits for both Region 4 and Supervision District should be completed during January. Special meetings will be held for presentation by the auditors and votes to accept the audit reports sometime before the end of January.

The Joint PK-12 Committees are all scheduled to meet again before the end of January.

Region 4 Foundation

Principal Neviasser discussed the Region 4 Foundation’s request for formal BOE support for the creation of the Valley Broadcast Technology program (Valley Television) prior to disbursing a grant for \$19,242.75 to the program. Principal Neviasser noted that they had recently begun broadcasting some school concerts and athletics events. The high school has now made a request to the Region 4 Foundation to provide support for more expensive video equipment. The Foundation will only disburse it once the Board gives support for the creation and ongoing maintenance of the program. Principal Neviasser reported he had made a Region 4 budget request of \$10,000 for next year, ½ of which is for equipment and the other half for facilities upgrades). The program is currently operating as a club now, but the hope is to make it part of the curriculum, working collaboratively with all departments in future years as a means of providing, developing, and refining students’ 21st century skills. Skills such as critical thinking, problem solving, collaboration, creativity, self-direction, leadership, adaptability, communication through various mediums, and responsibility.

There was a discussion during which Board member Chris Riley stated that he supports the idea, but wants to make sure that the timing is right. A more detailed discussion will be held at the first Region 4 budget workshop on January 25th. In response to other questions asked, Principal Neviasser stated that he understood that some years may not bring new equipment, but just as during the current budget, which provided a 0% increase in technology, students are still able to receive the educational benefits of the technology already in place.

Superintendent Levy asked for a good faith measure by the Board in order to release the start up funds from the Region 4 Foundation.

On motion duly made and seconded, the Board unanimously VOTED to approve the following Board Resolution:

The Region 4 Board of Education resolves to support the creation and ongoing maintenance of the VRHS Broadcast Technology Program (Valley Television) as long as it remains educationally and fiscally practical to do so.

Mr. Sawyer reported that he had recently received the final paperwork from the State regarding the Region 4 Building projects for John Winthrop and Valley Regional and they were now ready for a Board vote to close the projects.

On motion duly made and seconded, the Board unanimously VOTED to approve the Region 4 Building Committee's recommendation to accept the Region 4 Building Project (Valley Project Number 204-0013 and John Winthrop Middle School Project Number 204-0014) as complete.

Region 4 Photovoltaic Solar Building Committee

Committee Member and Directory of Facilities Bruce Glowac reviewed the history of the project and updated the Board on the recent rejection of the ED049 by the Bureau of School Facilities due to Board resolutions that were not building specific enough, although the intent was clear. This will set back the project one year. However, the Committee feels the project is still viable as the application is still pending at the State as incomplete. Mr. also reported that he has recently been told that the other funding from the CT Clean Energy Fund is now questionable as well. He said the Committee would be meeting and coming back to the Board in March with other possible sources for funding and action on clarifying the Board's prior resolutions for re-submission to the State.

Mr. Riley commended the Committee on their work thus far and he asked the Committee to consider pursuing federal funding. Mr. Strauss urged the Committee to investigate funding sources that may be available due to the fact that the Middle School is designated as an emergency shelter. Mr. Glowac stated that the Committee would be exploring all options.

Supervision District Committee Update

Linda Hall reported that the Supervision District Committee would be holding their 2nd budget workshop for the 2010-2011 budget. The numbers are still preliminary at this point, but she will update the Region 4 Board on future developments at their January 25th budget workshop for Region 4.

Assistant Superintendent's Report

Assistant Superintendent Dugas presented the Region 4 Strategic School Profiles for 2008-09. She reviewed the highlights of the data and discussed the action plan for utilizing data to provide for continued increases in student achievement.

Principals' Update

John Winthrop Middle School – Principal Russell updated the Board on the progression of the school action plan. A half-day professional development day focusing on Professional Learning Communities is scheduled.

He also reported on attending the National Middle School Conference as a guest of CAS to be recognized for John Winthrop receiving the Connecticut Middle School of the Year award. He also updated the Board on other school activities including the Winter Sports Club and the upcoming spring musical performance of Oklahoma.

Valley Regional High School – Principal Ian Neviasser, having already discussed the Level 0 regulation, graduation requirement policy and Valley Television earlier in the meeting, noted that it was 30 school days from the 1st day of CAPT testing. He also reported on other school activities including an upcoming 8th grade night for students and parents as well as the spring musical performance of the Sound of Music.

Superintendent's Report

Superintendent Levy reported on a recent meeting with Dr. Joe Wood, a consultant for the unification of the elementary schools with Region 4. Dr. Wood is analyzing past efforts and current challenges. He will prepare a critical events timeline for a future referendum and will be presenting his initial report at the Joint Board meeting in February. In addition, the school financial auditors will check and confirm the veracity of financial analysis assumptions to provide independent review.

Dr. Levy also reported on the status of H1N1 illness in the district. Absentee rates are currently normal. The Director of the Connecticut River Area Health District recently informed her that the vaccine is now available for staff and students. A date for a vaccine clinic at the high school will be chosen and information will be distributed closer to that time.

She reported on the soon-to-open Central Office Student Art and Academic Achievement Gallery. An open house will be held in February. The gallery will be filled with student work from the Essex, Deep River, Chester and Region 4 Schools.

Dr. Levy reported on the Race to the Top Federal Grant application process. She discussed the cost/benefit ratio of the time and personnel necessary to participate for the funds (at most be around \$18,000 and greatly restricted in their use and follow-up reporting). In addition, she noted that superintendents are not even being given all of the information from the State with regards to the application process, fund distribution, usage and tracking. Therefore, she was asking the Board to support her recommendation to decline applying for Race to the Top Funds at this time. The general consensus of the Board was that they were in agreement with the Superintendent's recommendation to not pursue this type of funds.

Dr. Levy gave an overview of the proposed Region 4 Budget for 2010-11, discussing major budget drivers, enrollment projections, mission and charge of the budget. She reminded the Board that it was very early in the budget process and more detail would be discussed at the first Region 4 budget workshop set for January 25th.

The initial proposed education budget of \$17,021,821 or an increase of 3.61%, is for improving and enhancing curriculum and instruction, supporting technology integration and protecting and preserving school buildings and grounds. The major budget drivers include increases in contractual salaries, supervision district, health benefits, utilities, supplies and textbooks and equipment maintenance. She reminded the Board that the replacement cycle for supplies, textbook and equipment was broken last year due to the extreme economic situation, but with the understanding for the need to inject funds this year to pick up where the cycle left off. Decreases in the budget include unemployment compensations and a decrease in student outplacements, with a caveat that there is currently no mechanism for budgeting for unanticipated special education costs.

No personnel at any level (administrative, paraprofessional, teaching, or staff) are being requested. Dr. Levy asked the Board members to please look at the budget and make notes between now and the January 25th budget workshop where a more detailed discussion will take place.

Dr. Levy reviewed the NEASC progress report recently received for VRHS. She stated that she was very proud of VRHS, the work of Principal Neviasser and his staff at receiving yet one more commendation for VRHS.

Dr. Levy next reviewed a potential retirement incentive plan. Mr. Sawyer reviewed the cost/savings analysis of the plan. Board treasurer Richard Strauss asked for clarification on a few language issues within the plan. He also raised concerns with the health insurance options and the cost unknowns, especially given the current state of the health care debate environment. In particular, he was concerned that the plan did not minimize Board risks if health costs were to rise beyond anticipated levels. Dr. Levy thanked the Board for their input and their concerns will be addressed and the plan brought back before the Board for a vote prior to their January 25th budget workshop.

Audience of Citizens

No comments were made

Board Chair Linda Hall asked the Board to submit any questions they may have on the graduation requirements policy to her prior to the January 25th vote date.

Future Agenda Items

1. VOTE to move Region 4 budget for proposed 2010-11 to Public hearing (Mar.)
2. Vote on staff non-renewals (Mar.)
3. Public Hearing for proposed Region 4 budget for 2010-11 (April 8th @ 7:00 p.m.)
4. Region 4 Annual Meeting (May 3rd @ 7:00 p.m.)
5. Referendum on Region 4 Budget for 2010-11 (May 4th noon – 8:00 p.m.)
6. Region 4 Regular BOE Meeting *May 6th @ 7:00 p.m.)
7. VOTE on Region 4 Building Committee's recommendation to accept that the Central Office Project Number 204-0015) is complete and that the Board of Education disband/dissolve the Building Committee (TBD)

On motion duly made and seconded the Board unanimously VOTED to adjourn at 10:00 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Pamela Christman, Secretary
Jennifer Bryan, Clerk