Regular Meeting Minutes
Fairfield BoE, October 18, 2016

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Call to Order of the Regular Meeting of the Board of Education and Roll Call

Chairman Philip Dwyer called the Regular meeting to order at 7:34PM. Present were members Eileen Liu-McCormack (arrived 7:50PM), Marc Patten (arrived 7:38PM), Donna Karnal (arrived 7:44PM), Jessica Gerber, Philip Dwyer, Anthony Calabrese, Trisha Pytko, Jennifer Maxon-Kennelly and John Llewellyn. Others present were Interim Superintendent Dr. Stephen Tracy, FLHS student representatives Catherine Behjati and Sean Oppenheimer; FWHS student representatives Ashley Agrello and Brittany Shuster; members of the central office leadership team, and approximately 25 members of the public.

Student Reports

Fairfield Warde High School students Ms. Agrello and Ms. Shuster reported: Orientation was very successful; Open House was held on September 8; Fridays in October are Senior Spirit Days; Homecoming is on Saturday. Over the summer, some students chose a research project over summer reading; Red Ribbon Week brought in various speakers; the seniors are working hard on college applications.

Fairfield Ludlowe High School students Ms. Behjati and Mr. Oppenheimer reported: During the PSAT administration to sophomores and juniors, seniors will be visiting counselors to get help with college applications and freshmen will be participating in the anti-defamation program; the upcoming High School 101 presentation will be helpful to freshman parents; Mr. Hatzis recently informed the Ludlowe parent community about MRSA precautionary measures currently underway and the rise in popularity of a new e-cigarette known as JUUL.

Mrs. Maxon-Kennelly asked the student representatives if any of them had attended the PTA-sponsored college admissions event; none were able to attend.

Presentations

Racial Imbalance Plan

Dr. Tracy provided some history on racial imbalance and said CT §10-226 requires that school districts see to it that the minority make-up of any particular school not deviate from the district-wide average by more than 25%. For the past 6 years, McKinley has fallen outside of that range. The Racial Imbalance Plan submitted in 2007 was amended in 2010, and the Board was again directed last year to amend the plan. The consulting firm Milone & MacBroom was hired last year to conduct a redistricting study as an option to deal with this issue. It was concluded that a comprehensive redistricting solution would not likely be practical until after the Holland Hill and Mill Hill construction projects were completed. The CT State Board of Education (CSBE) will address this issue at its January meeting, but the plan must be submitted before November 18.

There are 2 corrections to the Racial Imbalance Plan – the asterisk note under chart 1 should be disregarded – the chart is correct and includes all 11 elementary schools; and on page 6, the last paragraph should be 3%, not 6%.

The Plan outlines:

- The phase-out of the Dwight PK program, adding a new PK program at Stratfield and adding a 3rd PK program at Stratfield or Burr.
- Expansion of the Open Choice Program from 72 to 100 seats by the start of the 18/19 school year.
- The consideration of a modest magnet program at McKinley for approximately 50 students - if further steps are necessary.

The cost related to the PK expansion is staff salary and transportation of $105K, with additional one-time costs for playground, technology and furniture of $40K in year 1, off-set by revenue of $54K in PK tuition and $42K from Open Choice. Year 2 would cost $121K, against revenue of $38K in PK tuition and $42K from Open Choice.

Mr. Dwyer added that the CSBE has a longer lead time for agenda enclosures. The CSBE meeting will take place in January, but the plan needs to be submitted well in advance.
Mrs. Maxon-Kennelly asked for a repeat of the financial information; Dr. Tracy said he will provide this in writing.
Mr. Patten said a one-page financial summary would be helpful.
Mrs. Liu-McCormack asked:

- What are the assumptions of the per student cost for Open Choice? Dr. Tracy said new Open Choice students will be placed in early grades in empty seats where no new sections need to be added. CES confirmed that Special Education costs beyond the $3K are borne by the sending district.
- Are we assuming no cost for the additional 28 students? Dr. Tracy said not beyond things like supplies and texts.
- How is transportation paid for? Mr. Cummings said transportation costs are covered by the state and coordinated by CES.
- What if they qualify for Free Lunch? Mr. Cumming said that is covered by the Free Lunch Program.
- Who covers the Special Education costs over $3K? Mr. Cummings said special education services beyond what are normally provided are coordinated through our special education department and paid for by the sending district.
- So the only costs are the teacher's time, technology and that sort of thing? Mr. Cummings said much of the cost is in economies of scale; a relatively low cost per student. Mrs. Liu-McCormack said she is fully aware of the incremental, marginal, student-cost concept and said the cost of these students is not 0.

Ms. Pytko asked if a feeder pattern existed for PK, or can parents choose? Given that ECC is facing overcrowding, will special education services be provided at Stratfield? Dr. Tracy said the current program gives PK students the option to remain at the PK school and also invite siblings to join them as well; Stratfield, Burr and McKinley are all in the same feeder pattern for Tomlinson Middle School. Mr. Cummings added that under the current system, there is a PK feeder pattern for Burr and Dwight; anyone can attend ECC at Warde, and we will have to re-establish whether this will be replicated. Ms. Leonardi would guide us on special education services at Stratfield, but that is currently not part of the plan.
Ms. Karnal noted that a possible 50-student magnet program may add too many students at McKinley, given current enrollment numbers.
Mrs. Gerber said that McKinley projections show a lower enrollment in future years.
Ms. Karnal asked:

- What is the timeframe for the magnet school? Dr. Tracy said the idea is to wait and see how effective the first two options are.
- From the student's perspective, what is the cost to the teacher's time, not just the planning but the day-day? Mr. Cummings said the extra students will have a minimal impact. The goal is to remain under 25 students in grades 3,4, and 5 per Board policy.

Mr. Dwyer said 28 students will be spread over 220 sections. Mr. Cummings added that students will be added where there is a minimal impact.
Mrs. Karnal mentioned that Mill Hill was impacted by 2 students enrolling at the last minute and a new teacher had to be hired. Additionally, students will be spread over less than 220 sections - not every school will receive Open Choice students. Mr. Cummings said the number of new Open Choice students is an aspirational number – if slots can't be identified, then students won't be added.

Mrs. Liu-McCormack questioned this Open Choice solution, given that it will have minimal impact. If there truly is a problem, and the state will not accept that the McKinley population likes to be at McKinley, then a permanent solution is needed. We don't want to create other incidental issues that we then have to manage. The PK program was not fully enrolled and barely moved the needle at all. The only way to be efficient is to grow the Open Choice program to match the growth at McKinley; this is a band aid at best and the total cost of PK and Open Choice is more than $100K. Dr. Tracy said that even ½ point will make a big difference. Open Choice is more predictable than the PK program, given that all Open Choice students are minorities. Mrs. Liu-McCormack has to imagine there are more efficient solutions. We don't have a solution that's definitive.

Mr. Llewellyn asked:

- What is the state deadline? Mr. Dwyer said the CSBE extended the due date to November 18; action must be taken by this Board by November 15 to meet this deadline.
- Will the magnet program be offered to children outside the district? Dr. Tracy said it will be limited to Fairfield residents.
- Will busing be reimbursed? Mrs. Munsell said CES manages transportation costs through the state grant.
- How have these 2 solutions impacted us over the last 5 years? Please provide 3 additional columns to page 2 – actual numbers of students, absolute imbalance without the impact of PK students, and absolute imbalance without the impact of Open Choice students. It would be helpful to get these numbers well ahead of the next meeting.
- What are the numbers by grade level? Dr. Tracy said that was already provided as a handout.
- How many Open Choice students are in special education, is it similar to the district's number of 10% and are we reimbursed for every dollar? Mr. Dwyer said it was his understanding that costs over $3K were covered and Mrs. Munsell said it was dependent on the situation. Mr. Llewellyn said he hasn't seen anything in the budget book listed under "revenue."
- For PK, he is unclear on actual costs since revenue from Open Choice appears to be included in the numbers which is apples and oranges. Does opening PK guarantee a $175K loss? Dr. Tracy said it's $91K the first year and $83K the second year
- Are we getting reimbursed for the full amount – there have been many cuts at the state level and the increase in Open Choice students for this year is not noted in the budget book. He thought Dr. Title stated there was no increase to Open Choice. Mr. Cummings said 12 students were added in February - Open Choice is budgeted with previous year's numbers.
- Are there any litigation expenses, what are the total out-of-pocket expenses? Shouldn't frame this as an economic advantage to the town. The desire to increase PK and Open Choice programs doesn't address the racial imbalance. Rather, racial imbalance is being used to increase these programs; we have been questioning why schools are being built as 504 with declining enrollment and that is another concern, where are we headed. He has requested numbers and would like to see them well in advance of the next meeting.

Mrs. Gerber mentioned that not all schools are being built to 504.

Mr. Patten clarified with Mr. Cummings that student placement will not violate the enrollment policy in terms of the numbers of students at each grade level.

Mrs. Maxon-Kennelly, using the October 1 enrollment, noted that there are 13 sections of KDG and 21 sections of 1st grade that have 19 or fewer students – leaving 34 sections where students could be added. She mentioned that 4 elementary schools are not built to 504 and clarified that a magnet program is much smaller and more specific than a magnet school.

- The PK program is open to all Fairfield residents – could you speak to the idea of using race or socio-economic status as criteria for enrollment in PK? Mr. Dwyer said this is not allowed and Dr. Tracy said the program is difficult to fine-tune, as it is based on so many individual decisions.
- With Dwight being phased out, would remaining students still be able to opt-in at Dwight? Mr. Cummings said yes.

- What is the cost to maintain the program at Dwight? Mr. Cummings said there are currently eight 3-year-old students at Dwight – this would have to be part of the budget discussion going forward.
- Page 5b – wasn't priority initially given to those on free/reduced lunch? Mr. Cummings said the program is first-come first-served and the district looks for a balance – roughly ⅓ of students pay full tuition, ½ are free, and ⅙ pay a reduced rate.
- Is there a savings in transportation with moving the PK program to Stratfield? Dr. Tracy said he did not assume any savings.
- The cultural diversity task force, on which she served, considered many low cost options over several years. It appears that Mrs. Liu-McCormack wants redistricting as a permanent solution but the Board did not accept that, based on the Milone and MacBroom redistricting study. This has been covered and it is a disservice to the public to suggest otherwise.

Mrs. Liu-McCormack said she never used the word redistricting so perhaps that is what Mrs. Maxon-Kennelly thinks of as a permanent solution; what we are looking at does not help racial imbalance. She recommends asking the state for more time. It is not a good expenditure of funds in a tight budget year and she has yet to see data that will solve this problem. The incoming superintendent may have a different perspective. There may be creative solutions out there. It's very much not clear that expanding Open Choice and PK is a good use of funds in addressing racial imbalance.
Mrs. Gerber said this is not a new topic for the Board. She would like to see what new ideas Mrs. Liu-McCormack has now; if there are other options, they would have been presented. An extension has already been requested and the only accommodation is for additional time for the presentation but the plan is still due in one month. If Mrs. Liu-McCormack does not want redistricting, what does she want?
Mrs. Liu-McCormack said she had spoken to the interim superintendent, and that we have a new superintendent coming in should justify asking for an extension from the state. If someone else wants to redistrict that's up to them. Expanding Open Choice does not seem to solve the problem and has its own issues.
Mrs. Gerber clarified with Mr. Dwyer that he had spoken to the state. He confirmed her questions as to the fact that they are aware that we have a new superintendent starting in December but the only accommodation they will give us is extending the date of the presentation. We cannot delay the vote on November 15.
Mr. Patten asked what percent of Open Choice students remain through graduation? Do we choose the students? Why not adapt the plan each year? Dr. Tracy said the goal is for them to remain through graduation; if students move out of Bridgeport, they are out of the program. This plan only addresses 100 students district-wide, but the Board and the superintendent could expand it. The focus of the plan will be on KDG and 1st grades but upper elementary grades can also be considered. Mr. Cummings added that the district chooses the slots, not the students.
Mr. Llewellyn confirmed with Mr. Dwyer that a vote is needed at the next meeting. The Milone and MacBroom study did not make a recommendation; the committee did. The six Open Choice students in 1st grade at Dwight may have actually increased sections and therefore the addition of staff members and costs - perhaps this decision belongs in a referendum, it's more of a social concept rather than an educational one.
Mr. Dwyer said the Milone and MacBroom study presented several redistricting scenarios to solve racial imbalance; they were not asked to make a recommendation. The Board was not interested in spot redistricting.
Mrs. Maxon-Kennelly requested through the Chair that Mrs. Liu-McCormack, having adamantly denied that redistricting was her permanent solution, prepare her idea or ideas for a permanent solution for the Friday Packet well in advance of the next meeting. She said redistricting also has costs and asked Mr. Dwyer if all scenarios as presented by Milone and MacBroom violated the Redistricting Principles and he said yes; no scenario would work.
Mrs. Gerber noted that in the Milone and MacBroom study – only 2 scenarios were viable and only after renovations were completed at Holland Hill and Mill Hill. Both included enormous redistricting.
Mrs. Liu-McCormack said again that she never mentioned redistricting. However, the Board could choose to re-open the concept of redistricting. She has ideas on this but can't do this in isolation – she needs more time. There could be many many other options. We can continue to do more. Open Choice is basically redistricting kids from one town to another. Is loathe to spending more money to resolve this issue. People are happy at McKinley.
Mrs. Gerber said that the state is aware that McKinley families are happy but that is not a factor for this issue. She apologized for thinking that Mrs. Liu-McCormack wanted to redistrict. Mrs. Liu-McCormack said she may want to look at redistricting. Mrs. Gerber stated that she was now confused that Mrs. Liu-McCormack was saying she would consider

redistricting, but regardless, there is a deadline to get the report to the state. She would like to hear what Mrs. Liu-McCormack's many ideas were, whether they were redistricting or something else.
Mrs. Maxon-Kennelly said that Mrs. Liu-McCormack said she has lots of ideas so she would like to hear them. We are talking about state law so families being happy does not play into that.
Mr. Llewellyn asked what would happen in the event there is no agreed upon solution? The state hasn't managed their finances well. One solution may be to move several streets in the McKinley district to Riverfield. It may not be palatable but it's a possibility. Could also move a couple of streets from McKinley to Stratfield. Or there could be other options.
Mr. Dwyer said the original proposal to the state requested a spring 2017 submittal date to accommodate the incoming superintendent, but that was rejected. Rather than a forced redistricting, this is a voluntary approach; the Board had previously rejected spot redistricting. The purpose is to convince the state that we are making efforts; there can be no permanent solution until the two schools are renovated. The PK and Open Choice options are the least costly. Fairfield has the lowest Open Choice participation rate for a suburban district; there is a social purpose to expanding these opportunities to others. Other districts have gravitated towards magnet programs and redistricting to address racial imbalance. How long would it take to study and implement a magnet program? Mr. Cummings, while not familiar with the program in Greenwich, said his best guess was a minimum of two years to plan and budget.
Mr. Llewellyn questioned what percentage of Open Choice participation would Mr. Dwyer like to get to?
Mr. Dwyer said he would like to be in the middle of the list at about 1.7%.
Mr. Llewellyn said that would equal 170 students and asked why follow this path if other districts used redistricting and magnet programs – neither of which we are pursuing?
Mr. Dwyer said it is not in our best interest to not follow state law.
Mr. Llewellyn said it should not be up to nine people to determine social responsibility.
Ms. Karnal asked if the McKinley Opt-out option might be reconsidered. Dr. Tracy said that option was proven ineffective and was discontinued in 2013. Currently, the Opt-in program is also proving ineffective.

Old Business

Approval of the 2017-2018 School Calendar
Mrs. Gerber moved, Mrs. Maxon-Kennelly seconded that the Board of Education approve the 2017-2018 School Calendar.

Mrs. Parks addressed Mrs. Maxon-Kennelly's suggestion to have one district-wide early dismissal day in October. Several factors force 2 separate early dismissals and include Professional Development on extended meeting Tuesdays for the elementary level and the pre-set date of the PSAT administration at the high school level.

Mrs. Maxon-Kennelly appreciated the feedback.
Ms. Karnal asked about calendar days – given that one of the Jewish holidays falls on a weekend. Mrs. Parks said the number of school days appears in the upper right hand corner of each month.
Mr. Patten asked if there are contractual issues with PD over the summer. Mrs. Parks said teachers have a contractual number of days to work and this drives the calendar. Teachers are paid for summer work which includes training and curriculum writing.

Motion Passed: 9-0

Adoption of Policies 5111 – Students – Admission/Placement; and 5113 – Students – Attendance/Excuses/Dismissal

Mrs. Maxon-Kennelly moved, Mrs. Gerber seconded that the Board of Education adopt Policies 5111 and 5113.

Motion Passed: 9-0

New Business

Discussion of 2017-2018 Budget Ideas from BOE Members

Dr. Tracy said he has been working with Dr. Jones on preliminary budget discussions. The savings realized in the switch to the CT Partnership plan have been realized and are part of the budget. The surplus in the medical retention fund will cover the budget reduction of $740K in the health insurance account; however, the medical retention fund will be dissolved this year - meaning, we need to add $740K to the health budget just to make it even. Salary and health insurance adjustments in the budget for 17-18 already account for about a 3% increase, before any discussion regarding new programs. The Town is also experiencing a $4M reduction in state aid, including a reduction in the Education Cost Sharing grant. The obligation is to develop a budget proposal that responds to students, including steps to continue with the District Improvement Plan. The Board will receive the budget on January 10, Special Meetings will be held on January 17 and 24, and the vote will take place on January 26.

Mr. Dwyer encouraged Board members to discuss budget ideas without delving too much into the math.
Mr. Calabrese said he would like to see continued implementation of the District Improvement Plan, specifically the K-2 World Language Program; energy savings expansion; and the potential of combining IT services with the Town.
Mr. Patten will try to find offsets for two extra summer PD days to enhance/showcase new teaching strategies.
Mrs. Maxon-Kennelly would like the continued roll-out of the World Language Program, the purchase of the Social Studies texts, the continued focus on the District Improvement Plan; specifically 1-3, year 2 of embedding technology and associated PD; page 28, 1-20, PD by subject; and page 31, 4-17, enrichment opportunities for K-8.
Mr. Llewellyn is interested in the savings of consolidating the PK classroom from Dwight to Burr and the IT consolidation with the Town as mentioned by Mr. Calabrese. He may also be interested in looking at combining HR with the Town or outsourcing HR and the like.
Mr. Dwyer would also like to see the World Language Program continue. While the consolidation of administrative functions deserves review; department heads should be involved prior to the Board's discussion.
Mr. Llewellyn clarified with Mr. Dwyer that the $740K related to self-insurance was applied to current year premium expenses.
Mr. Dwyer agreed and said the $740K was in reserve to pay future claims; a member of the Board of Selectmen felt that was over-budgeting and reduced the 16/17 budget by that amount.

Approval of Minutes

Approval of the Minutes of the Special Meeting of October 4, 2016
Mrs. Gerber moved, Ms. Pytko seconded that the Board of Education approve the Minutes of the Special Meeting of October 4, 2016.

Motion Passed: 6-0-3
Favor: Mr. Patten, Mrs. Gerber, Mr. Dwyer, Mr. Calabrese, Ms. Pytko, Mr. Llewellyn
Abstain: Mrs. Liu-McCormack, Ms. Karnal, Mrs. Maxon-Kennelly

Approval of the Minutes of the Regular Meeting of October 4, 2016
Mrs. Gerber moved, Mrs. Maxon-Kennelly seconded that the Board of Education approve the Minutes of the Regular Meeting of October 4, 2016.

Mr. Llewellyn moved, Mrs. Liu-McCormack seconded to amend the minutes by changing the last sentence in bullet point 1 of Mr. Llewellyn's second set of remarks on page 3 to read "Mrs. Parks said the sample size is significantly smaller than the all student category**: 21 students in 2013-14, 14 students in 2015-16**." (new language in bold).

Mr. Llewellyn said this helps frame it in terms of the numbers.
Mr. Dwyer said he opposes this as it wasn't presented in advance so research could be done.
Mr. Llewellyn said he had only received the minutes Thursday night and didn't have a chance to look at them until Monday.

Motion Passed: 5-3-1
Favor: Mrs. Liu-McCormack, Mr. Patten, Ms. Karnal, Mrs. Gerber, Mr. Llewellyn
Oppose: Mr. Dwyer, Mr. Calabrese, Ms. Pytko
Abstain: Mrs. Maxon-Kennelly

The Original Motion as Amended Passed: 9-0

Superintendent's Report

Dr. Tracy reviewed the 2014-2015 School Profile and Performance District Report. The Connecticut Association of Boards of Education recognized 3 Fairfield publications with an Honorable Mention: District Budget, Budget Presentation and Social Studies Curriculum. He attended the recent 50-year anniversary celebration of the Mill River Wetland Committee which has benefitted thousands of Fairfield students.

Committee/Liaison Report

Mrs. Maxon-Kennelly said the PTAC held its first meeting and mentioned PTAC funding is available.
Mr. Llewellyn asked if the PTAC was creating videos. Mrs. Maxon-Kennelly said yes, they are taking advantage of FAIRTV for school events and community outreach.
Mr. Patten said the Board of Health reported on the MRSA infection at FLHS. Millie Sachs, a FWHS nurse, is retiring next month; $1200 was saved on Epi-pens; a new vaccination policy was approved.

Open Board Comment

Ms. Karnal said we are all here to do our job for the Town and the students; mutual respect should be shown.
Ms. Pytko said the Mill River is holding a fundraiser at the Bear and Grill.
Mr. Dwyer asked Board members to confirm attendance at the CABE convention if they have not already done so. RYASAP survey results will be shared at the December meeting. The Town Hall meeting will take place on 10/24.

Adjournment

Mrs. Gerber moved, Ms. Karnal seconded that this Regular Meeting of the Board of Education adjourn.

Motion Passed: 9-0

Meeting adjourned at 10:22PM

Respectfully submitted by
Jessica Gerber
Fairfield Board of Education
Secretary