

East Haddam Board of Education
Regular Meeting
Nathan Hale-Ray High School Cafeteria
December 9, 2008
7:00 P.M.

MEMBERS PRESENT: Deborah Fiala, Tracey Gionta, Everett Herden, Alan Hyla, Nick Iacovelli, Mary-Beth Mordecai, Bryan Perry, Kerri Willis

MEMBERS ABSENT: Thomas Miett

OTHERS PRESENT: Linda Dadona, Claire Iannelli, Rachel Johnson, Cynthia Mello, Jason Peacock, Chuck Rinaldi, Joshua Rivera, David Scata, Kevin Stahley, Ellen Solek, Mark Walter

I. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 7:00 p.m. by Chairman Nick Iacovelli.

II. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

III. REPORT OF THE BOARD CHAIR

A. Communications

Mr. Iacovelli spoke about possible State budget cuts. Governor Rell has announced that there will be a possible 10% cut in the Educational Cost Sharing Grant. While these times call for fiscally conservative decision-making the Board will continue its commitment to provide the best possible programs for the town's students.

B. Report from High School Student Council Representative

Kevin Staehly and Rachel Johnson were invited to report on activities at Nathan Hale-Ray High School. The Student Council has developed its own school calendar it is on the bulletin board by the office.

Spirit Week is being held the week of December 15. Each day will have its own theme (Monday: Crazy Hair/Hat Day; Tuesday: Twin Day; Wednesday: Pirate Day; Thursday: Mix and Match Day; Friday: Pajama Day, with a pep rally to be held). Students will be awarded participation points and on December 23 a "Spirit Trophy" will be awarded to the students (male and female) with the highest number of participation points. Each grade has different colors and will be decorating a hallway in the school. The winning grade will receive 300 points for their grade. Points are awarded by the Student Council.

III. REPORT OF THE BOARD CHAIR (CONTINUED)

C. Report from Middle School Student Council Representatives

Joshua Rivera and Claire Iannelli were invited to report on activities at Nathan Hale-Ray Middle School.

Winter sports are beginning. The first basketball games are scheduled for December 12 (the girls playing at 5 p.m. and the boys at 7 p.m.). There is a great deal of excitement about the games since they will be the first to be played in the new gymnasium.

There was a Book Fair, December 1 through 5.

Grades 4 through 8 will be putting on a musical production of A Christmas Carol. A public performance will be offered on December 16 and an in-school performance will be offered on December 23.

There is a school-wide food drive, as well as a toy drive (which has been going on for 14 years) and a coat drive. Joshua mentioned that approximately 120 families benefit from the toy drive.

Grade 4 is having a Holiday Brunch on the 23rd.

There was a sports banquet held on November 18, for the girls and boys soccer teams. Over 300 students and parents attended.

December 19 there will be a Karaoke dinner dance for grades 6 through 8.

D. Report from the First Selectman

Mr. Walter spoke at length about the economy. He attended a special session of the legislature. Governor Rell has made it clear that real cuts are coming.

The Connecticut Conference of Municipalities is attempting to influence the governor with regard to the proposed cuts. The CCM is asking for concerned citizens and Boards of Education to contact their legislators regarding cuts to educational funding. They say that legislators need to be made aware that educational costs are rising, despite the difficulties with the state budget. They need to understand that "flat funding" of education will only result in the tax burden being shifted from the state to local property tax. Fewer educational services will only shortchange Connecticut youth. Furthermore, the state needs to fully fund any changes in educational requirements.

Mr. Walter mentioned that on December 11, a forum will be held on drug identification.

There are two new animal control officers in town. At the training that was held for them, Mr. Walter learned that along with drug addiction, comes gambling often associated with dog fighting or cock fighting. These activities are moving out of the cities and into more rural areas.

III. REPORT OF THE BOARD CHAIR (CONTINUED)

D. Report from the First Selectman (continued)

Saturday, December 13, the East Haddam Police Department and Resident State Troopers are holding their annual "Stuff the Cruiser" toy drive.

Ms. Mordecai asked Mr. Walter is he knew when the cuts were coming or what the effect might be on Educational Cost Sharing grants.

Mr. Walter answered that the State Board of Education was forced to come up with recommended cuts. These possible cuts are included in a document Mr. Walter gave to Mr. Iacovelli.

Ms. Mordecai asked if the cuts were definite. Mr. Walter said that the cuts were suggested and that they will be sent to Governor Rell for her recommendations.

Mr. Hyla pointed out that there was an article in Monday's Hartford Courant covering Commissioner McQuillan speaking in Southington about ECS grants. Mr. Hyla quoted from the article "The state education board wants Rell to cut using a formula that gives some protection to large, poor cities, but eliminates ECS money altogether for the wealthiest suburbs."

Mr. Walter answered that there a several different formulas being considered. East Haddam's expected ECS grant is \$3.8 million, the proposed cuts could mean losing out on \$400,000. The Assessor's office has said that the grand list is not growing this year.

Mr. Hyla stated that the article ended with McQuillan suggesting that local Boards of Education develop contingency plans.

Mr. Walter said that at the Board of Finance meeting December 8, the Board decided to ask each board and commission in the town for suggestions as to how they might cut 5-10% of their respective budgets.

IV. ACTION ON THE MINUTES

Correction: Mrs. Willis abstained on the motion noted on the November 18, 2008 minutes to approve the minutes of the October 14, 2008 Regular Meeting and the Special Meeting of October 29.

MOTION: Perry, Fiala; to accept the minutes of the Regular Meeting of November 18, 2008, as corrected.

**FAVOR: ALL PRESENT
MOTION PASSED**

IV. ACTION ON THE MINUTES (CONTINUED)

Correction: Ms. Fiala voted “Opposed” to the second motion noted in the meeting minutes of December 2, 2008.

MOTION: Mordecai, Fiala; to accept the minutes of the Special Meeting of December 2, 2008, as corrected.

FAVOR (6): Fiala, Gionta, Herden, Mordecai, Perry, Willis

OPPOSED (0)

ABSENT (1): Miett

ABSTENTION (1): Hyla

MOTION PASSED

V. REPORT OF THE SCHOOL BUILDING COMMITTEES

A. 4-8 Middle School

Ms. Mordecai reported that the committee has not met since the last Board meeting. There is a meeting scheduled for December 10 to discuss a problem with the water.

Mr. Walter pointed out that the problem is not with the drinking water.

Ms. Willis said that the sub-committee will receive a full briefing from the water consultant at the meeting on December 10.

VI. REPORT OF THE SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS

A. Senior Class Trip Request

Dr. Solek introduced Mrs. Dadona and Mrs. Stevens to present a proposal for this year’s senior class trip to Williamsburg and Virginia Beach, Virginia. Two students accompanied them to the Board meeting as part of a civics class requirement.

The class decided to take a bus trip, as opposed to flying, to make it more affordable. 70 % of the seniors are expected to participate. The itinerary will include trips to amusement parks and a couple of nights in hotels. It will be a busy, interesting time for the students. Only two days of school will be missed.

Referring to the information included in the Board packets, Mr. Iacovelli asked how many paying participants were needed before the students could go on the trip and whether or not extra funding would be needed. Mrs. Dadona said that they had enough participation that extra funding would not be an issue.

Mrs. Dadona said that there is money available from class dues to help offset the cost of the trip for students who couldn’t afford the entire cost of the trip.

VI. REPORT OF THE SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS (CONTINUED)A. Senior Class Trip Request (continued)

Dr. Solek asked the two seniors in attendance what they were looking forward to the most and the answer was “chilling with friends.”

B. Strategic Plan Update (2006-08)

Dr. Solek addressed where the district is in terms of the current Strategic Plan. An outline of her presentation was included in the Board packet. Every facet of the 2006-2008 plan has been completed with the exception of the “action step” on page 6, of the report, which will be included in the revision of the Strategic Plan 2009-2012.

Dr. Solek introduced guidance counselors Stacy Clinton-Vogl and Nicole Yenter from Nathan Hale Ray-Middle School and Donna Shea and Wendy Gavan from Nathan Hale-Ray High School. The focus of their presentation was on a proposed Comprehensive School Counseling Program for the Middle and High Schools. An outline of the program was included in the Board packets.

C. Comprehensive School Counseling Program

Ms. Shea explained the background of traditional high school counseling, highlighting the fact that people currently being trained as guidance counselors for middle and high school students are being trained in different ways from the tradition that most parents, teachers and Board members are familiar with.

Ms. Shea and Ms. Gavin approached Ms. Dadona and offered to create a new counseling curriculum at the middle and high schools. During the last year and half, Pat Landers, a career school counselor, primarily working in the Newington school system, had been rewriting the counseling curriculum for the state of Connecticut, she met with the committee every two months as they were rewriting East Haddam’s curriculum, which meant that the proposed curriculum for east Haddam is completely in line with state and national standards.

The basic structure of the program is that each student has a counseling portfolio that stays with them throughout their middle and high school education. The main advantage is that all students benefit from guidance counseling and relationships develop between the students and their guidance counselors. The main difference between this model and the model most people are familiar with is that the relationships are proactive, as opposed to reactive. The relationships that develop between counselors, students, parents and teachers are invaluable in helping students develop an individual plan for themselves once they leave the high school.

While in the past guidance counselors were usually teachers with a couple of semesters of counseling education to their credit, the trend now is to educate professionals specifically for middle and high school counseling through a 60 credit Master’s level program. Today’s guidance counselors are trained and certified as such, which is why student services can and are being delivered in a new way.

VI. REPORT OF THE SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS (CONTINUED)C. Comprehensive School Counseling Program (continued)

Mr. Walter expressed his appreciation to the presenters expressed appreciation for the emphasis on individual achievement plans. He spoke first had about his own family situation and difference between his children. As a parent, he praised the individualized approach to guidance counseling.

Mr. Hyla, also speaking from personal experience, said he felt that guidance counseling was perhaps one of the most underrated pieces of the curriculum.

He asked about needs assessment and how that was accomplished.

Ms. Shea said that there are two different needs assessment, as the needs differ between the middle and high school students. Ms. Landers helped the two sets of guidance counselors develop appropriate needs assessments for each of the schools. Students were surveyed in order to ascertain what they know and what they need to know. After the first parents' night, parents were surveyed as well. The input of teachers is also a part of the individual needs assessment.

In an answer to inquiry from Ms. Mordecai, Ms. Shea explained how students would be tracked throughout their middle and high school years, stating that this year's incoming freshmen would be the first to be followed in this way throughout their high school education.

Ms. Mordecai asked about the differences between middle school and high school guidance services. Ms. Shea answered that, for the most part, barring extreme circumstances, middle school guidance was more group oriented, with one guidance counselor responsible for following a particular grade through their education in the middle school. Currently, there is a bit of an adjustment being made because of the addition of the fourth graders to the middle school.

Ms. Mordecai thanked the guidance counselors for their presentation.

Mr. Herden also expressed his appreciation for the explanation of "then vs. now" and the shift in emphasis of guidance counseling, as a whole. Noting that in the past many students never saw their guidance counselors unless there was a problem.

Ms. Shea responding to Mr. Herden agreed that in that past 80% of a guidance counselor's time was spent on 20% of the students. This approach represents a major paradigm shift.

Ms. Gionta asked about how parents could be more engaged and what the approach is when parents don't want to be as involved as they need to be.

VI. REPORT OF THE SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS (CONTINUED)C. Comprehensive School Counseling Program (continued)

Ms. Shea stated that most parents attend 9th grade orientation and that is when they make an appeal to the parents to be as involved as possible in their children's high school careers. Junior year there are parent meetings in which the future plans of the student are discussed. Parents are encouraged and welcome to meet with guidance counselors as much as they need or want to. Counseling has to be collaborative. So even when students don't want to meet with their parents and the guidance counselor, counselors can meet with students and parents separately as needed. These individual meetings have become even more important as sometimes divorce necessitates separated parents meeting with the guidance counselors to discuss their children's future. Parents can request as many meetings as they need.

Mr. Iacovelli asked whether there was any tension between the counseling and academic teachers; wondering if the dynamic has changed as the emphasis in counseling has shifted. Again, Ms. Shea mentioned the need for collaboration across the board. While there are scheduled times for guidance counseling, there is also awareness and an appreciation on the part of teachers for the part that guidance counseling plays in student academic achievement and success in life. It is a matter of cooperation and understanding that everything is done in the best interests of the student.

Mr. Iacovelli said that he read where 80% of college students change their majors at least once. He posited that perhaps with this new approach to guidance counseling, perhaps students would be more prepared and more focused once they get to college.

Dr. Solek thanked the guidance counselors for their presentation and noted the change in culture that has resulted in a greater appreciation for what guidance counselors do and their role in the academic and personal success of students.

D. Full-Day Kindergarten Program

Mrs. Mello and Mrs. Havens were invited by Dr. Solek to present a proposal for Full Day Kindergarten in the East Haddam School District. Information was included in the Board packets. Dr. Solek began by saying that there had been some difficult discussions early on in the school year, necessitated by the impending budget cuts to education. Dr. Solek said that in discussions with Mrs. Mello and the Board, she had been forced to consider the question as to whether or not there was ever a good year to take on a new program, especially in light of the proposed cut backs in educational funding. She concluded that, regardless of fiscal constraints, it is always a good time to talk about educational excellence and additions to the curriculum that will benefit the students of the district.

Mrs. Mello and Mrs. Havens presented an outline of a proposal for adopting full day kindergarten in East Haddam. It was noted that several surrounding districts offer full-day kindergarten.

VI. REPORT OF THE SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS (CONTINUED)D. Full-Day Kindergarten Program (continued)

Currently, there are four kindergarten teachers and in each of their classrooms there is a full time paraprofessional. Dr. Solek offered the beginning of a PowerPoint presentation outlining staffing requirements for various configurations of full-day kindergarten.

Adding one section of full-day kindergarten would require the hiring of .5 teachers and .5 paraprofessionals, at a cost of approximately \$47,000, per year. Adding 2 sections would necessitate the hiring of 1 teacher and 1 paraprofessional, at a cost of \$95,000. Incorporating 3 sections of full-time kindergarten would require 1.5 teachers, and 1.5 paraprofessionals at a cost to the district of \$142,000. Additional requirements of supplies and materials, lunch and transportation would be minimal.

There are several other local districts offering (pilot programs of) full-day kindergarten: Colchester, East Hampton, Hebron and Region 17 (now implementing two full-day sections). Each of the districts conducted preliminary surveys to determine the needs and interests of those residing in the districts. Each of the districts use a lottery system since demand for full-day kindergarten exceeds the number of available slots.

Mr. Iacovelli asked about the composition of the proposed program and Dr. Solek answered that it would consist of three half-days and one full day session. Currently, East Haddam has seven half-day sections and one full-day section (which is for a small number of special education students).

The results of several studies were included in the material available to the Board. Overall full-day kindergarten is good for the students as well as the district improving academic readiness and lessens the need for later remediation.

There is a possibility that at some point in time in the future full-day kindergarten will be mandated in Connecticut. This is another reason that Dr. Solek is encouraging the Board to seriously consider this proposal.

Mrs. Mello introduced members of the kindergarten team: Ms. Beaudry, Ms. Hall and Mrs. MacKenzie, reading specialist Ms. Liedke, as well as Vice Principal Mrs. Havens. She stated that the current kindergarten program is very successful and she is confident that a move toward full-day kindergarten, making high quality, early childhood education will be of great benefit to the district's children, parents and teachers.

The benefits of full day kindergarten are many. Such a program fosters greater communication between parents and teachers. It allows teachers instruction time and enables them time to teach in-depth subjects. This creates a more flexible learning environment where there is less stress on students and improves their social behavioral skills. Basic research also shows improved general learning skills such as math and writing. Overall, there are fewer referrals for special services for children who attend full-day kindergarten.

VI. REPORT OF THE SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS (CONTINUED)D. Full-Day Kindergarten Program (continued)

Each of the teachers present spoke in favor of full day kindergarten highlighting many of the points made by Dr. Solek and Mrs. Mello. They spoke about the difficulty of squeezing the current curriculum into a half-day. They are not looking to expand the current curriculum, simply spending more time teaching and allowing the children to master the skills that are the focus of the current curriculum. Ms. Liedke spoke about the advantage of more time with books and language development.

Ms. Willis asked the presenters how much time they are actually spending on curriculum. The teachers said that by the time they get the children settled, allowing for breaks and preparation to leave, they spend approximately two hours per day actually teaching.

Ms. Willis asked how many students come to kindergarten from full-day preschool. Mrs. Mello answered that currently, none of East Haddam's kindergarteners come from full-day preschool that includes full-time educational component.

Ms. Perry said that he was in favor of full-day kindergarten and asked whether or not there has been a survey of East Haddam parents regarding the proposed plan. Mrs. Mello answered that a survey has not yet been sent out. Dr. Solek added that she and Mrs. Mello wanted to present the idea to the Board of Education before going to parents.

Mr. Herden also spoke in support of the idea of full-day kindergarten. He recalled the day when there was a great deal of opposition to pre-k and thought that perhaps the same thing might happen with this idea, that is that once parents experience the success of full-day kindergarten it will become very popular.

Ms. Mordecai asked is there was room in the elementary school to accommodate full day kindergarten. Mrs. Mello responded that the school could handle up to three full-day sections. Ms. Mordecai asked whether the proposal would increase transportation costs. Dr. Solek answered that it would most likely be an even trade off.

Ms. Mordecai concluded by saying that she is a strong proponent of full-day kindergarten.

Dr. Solek remarking about the current kindergarten curriculum reminded the Board that what kindergarteners are learning today is what most of their parents learned in first grade, and today's children are learning the curriculum in a half day.

Ms. Willis responded to Mr. Herden's concern by stating that the demographics have changed enough that there would be less opposition to full-day kindergarten than there had been to implementing pre-k.

Dr. Solek reminded the Board that full-day kindergarten would be a flexible offering to parents, not forced upon them, as not all parents would want their children in school for a full day. Mrs. Gionta added that some five year olds are simply not ready to spend an entire day in school.

VII. COMMITTEE REPORTS

A. Long Range Planning

Mr. Hyla reported that the subcommittee met on December 2, 2008, minutes are contained in the Board packets. Three of the five items discussed at the meeting appear on the evening's consent agenda.

Mr. Peacock and Mr. Parker have proposed a Middle School Cross Country Club. The LPC came up with a list of concerns and expect to have responses to those questions at their January 8 meeting.

There is now a final draft of the Long Range School Facilities plan being presented to the Board this evening.

The 2009-10 school calendar is also on the consent agenda and included with the Board packets.

Mr. Parker and Mr. Ryczek are being invited to the subcommittee's January meeting to discuss East Haddam's ranking for sports in the shoreline area.

Dr. Solek attended the meeting of the Long Range Planning subcommittee to review goals and objectives for the subcommittee.

B. Finance

Ms. Mordecai said that the subcommittee had not met. She mentioned that with the expected budgetary constraints of next year they subcommittee will be looking for ways to keep the community well informed.

C. Policy

The subcommittee has not met.

D. Transportation

The subcommittee has not met.

E. Personnel and Negotiations

A request has been made for an executive session.

F. Ray Board Liaison

Mrs. Fiala reported that the Ray Board met on December 3. There was an excellent video presentation by Bruce Freeman, a tech teacher at the high school about the electric car competition.

VII. COMMITTEE REPORTS (CONTINUED)

F. Ray Board Liaison (continued)

There was a discussion about funding for the upcoming year. The operating budget is \$290,000 which is the same as last year. There is also \$20,000 for capital. They felt it was important to keep the funding. There will be significant reduction in grant funding.

There was a discussion of the old middle school and the Ray Board has authorized the transfer of the building back to the town.

G. LEARN Liaison

The committee is meeting December 11.

H. Curriculum Instruction and Assessment Council Liaison

Dr. Solek said that the subcommittee reviewed the pacing guides. Things are going very well.

They also discussed a possible revision in the teacher evaluation process. They will begin by conducting surveys with teachers and others in the buildings, getting their feedback on changes that they might like to see.

I. Open Space Liaison

No report.

J. Local Prevention Council Liaison

Mr. Hyla reported that the LPC met on November 19. Minutes were not available for the evening's meeting. Mr. Hyla said that he would email them to the Board.

He mentioned the low turn out at the last drug prevention program and encouraged the Board to get the word out about the upcoming December 11 program which Mr. Walter had spoken about earlier.

Ms. Mordecai asked if the program was suitable for youngsters. Mr. Hyla said that he thought the program was targeted for an adult audience.

VIII. COMMUNICATIONS AND AUDIENCE OF CITIZENS

None.

IX. OLD BUSINESS

None.

X. NEW BUSINESS

A. If there is an item on the Consent Agenda that Board members wish to discuss, it is necessary only to ask the Chair to remove it from the Consent Agenda.

Mr. Iacovelli asked for item 2 and Mr. Perry asked for item 7 to be removed from the consent agenda for discussion.

- 1) Warrant
 - a. To approve the warrant for 2007-08 in the amount of \$2,365,280.48.
 - b. To approve the warrant for 2008-09 in the amount of \$1,360,466.39.
- 3) To approve the senior class trip to Williamsburg, VA and Virginia Beach, VA from May 21, 2009 through May 24, 2009.
- 4) To approve the Comprehensive School Counseling Program as presented by the Developmental Guidance Committee.
- 5) To approve the revisions to the Long Range School Facilities Plan as presented by the Long Range Planning Committee.
- 6) To approve the Long Range Planning Committee's recommendation to begin the 2009-10 school year before Labor Day.

MOTION: Mordecai, Gionta; to approve Items 1, 3-6 of the Consent Agenda.

**FAVOR: ALL PRESENT
MOTION PASSED**

Mr. Perry raised a question regarding voting in the schools and asked about the disruption that it might cause. Mrs. Gionta said that all preparation and taking down of voting apparatus is done before and after school. Mr. Perry mentioned the tents remaining up after the past election. The tents are the responsibility of the political parties and not the town or the school system.

MOTION: Gionta, Mordecai; to approve the Town of East Haddam's use of the schools for future voting.

**FAVOR: ALL PRESENT
MOTION PASSED**

X. NEW BUSINESS (CONTINUED)

Mr. Iacovelli spoke about Mr. Rinaldi's letter of resignation and commended Mr. Rinaldi for a job well done.

MOTION: Perry, Fiala; to accept the resignations, with intent to retire, of Mr. Charles Rinaldi, Assistant Principal at Nathan Hale-Ray High School, effective June 30, 2009 and of Ms. Susan Hollister, Speech & Language Pathologist at East Haddam Elementary School and Nathan Hale-Ray Middle School, effective January 31, 2009.

**FAVOR: ALL PRESENT
MOTION PASSED**

MOTION: Mordecai, Fiala; to enter into an Executive Session at 9:30 p.m.

**FAVOR: ALL PRESENT
MOTION PASSED**

The Board returned to Regular Session at 9:41 p.m.

MOTION: Herden, Gionta; to adjourn at 9:42 p.m.

**FAVOR: ALL PRESENT
MOTION PASSED**

Respectfully submitted,

Everett Herden
Board Secretary