

East Haddam Board of Education
Regular Meeting Minutes
Nathan Hale-Ray High School Cafeteria
March 10, 2009
7:00 P.M.

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

OTHERS PRESENT: Robert Carroll, Linda Dadona, Mary Beth Havens, Claire Ianelli,
Cynthia Mello, Jason Peacock, Chuck Rinaldi, Joshua Rivera,
David Scata, Kevin Staehly, 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

Chairman Nick Iacovelli began the meeting by asking if anyone would be willing to serve as a Board of Education liaison to the Middle School Conversion Committee in place of Robert Mather who resigned from the Board of Education. The Committee meets on the second Monday of the month in the old Middle School library. Mr. Herden volunteered.

Mr. Iacovelli said that he and Dr. Solek and Mr. Carroll would be attending the next Board of Finance meeting, Monday, March 16, at the Nathan Hale-Ray High School cafeteria. He invited other interested Board members to come to the meeting. Mr. Iacovelli made note of the hard work involved by administrators in developing a budget under ordinary circumstances. He noted the extraordinary efforts of Mr. Carroll, Dr. Solek, the office staff and others in the development of the current proposed budget. He noted that everyone involved has been very responsive to the Board during the process.

B. Report from High School Student Council Representative

Kevin Staehly, representative of Nathan Hale-Ray High School Student Council, presented a report to the Board. He began by distributing the current calendar and notes several upcoming events at the high school. March 16-20, the Student Council and National Honor Society are co-sponsoring a food drive; for St. Patrick's Day the Multi-

III. REPORT OF THE BOARD CHAIR (CONTINUED)

B. Report from High School Student Council Representative (continued)

Cultural Club is sponsoring a "Wear Green Day;" Student-of-Month will begin soon; Connecticut Academic Performance Testing (CAPT) for sophomores ended March 10.

The seniors are finishing up their ISE Projects. In late March or early April there will be a blood drive. Friday, March 13, there will be an Ice Cream Social to benefit the freshman class. *Lil' Abner* is scheduled for April 3 and 4.

The Student Council selected Kaitlyn Hayes to represent them on the Assistant Principal Search Committee. They also developed a roster of students to escort potential candidates when they visit the school.

C. Report from Middle School Student Council Representatives

Claire Ianelli and Joshua Rivera reported on activities at Nathan Hale-Ray Middle School. There will be a blood drive sponsored by the sixth grade on March 25, from 1-7 p.m. Connecticut Mastery Testing took place the previous week and because of snow days they are being continued through March 16.

Eighteen students from the Middle School participated in the Eastern Regional Concert. The eighth graders are excited about their upcoming trip Washington, D.C. in April. Four fifth graders and three seventh graders are going to the state finals of Future Problem Solvers at E.O. Smith High School March 27 and 28. The play "Honk" will be presented on April 3. Forty-eight students will be going to the Invention Convention on March 31.

D. Report from the First Selectman

Mr. Iacovelli asked First Selectman Mark Walter for his report. The Board of Selectmen were able to present a 0% budget to the Board of Finance at their Monday, March 9, meeting.

Mr. Walter stated that local revenues are down \$570,000. Fees and permits are down because no one is buying, selling or building. Mr. Walter said that the town would be absorbing the \$570,000 shortfall in order to avoid a mil rate increase. In addition there will be cuts in state aid to the town.

Mr. Walter explained that the town needs to cut \$200,000 just to balance the current budget. Mr. Walter also said that as a further cost-cutting measure he will be the one signing off on any purchase orders over \$250.

Tentatively, he said, the three unions in town are considering foregoing wage increases for the 2009-2010 budget year.

III. REPORT OF THE BOARD CHAIR (CONTINUED)

D. Report from the First Selectman (continued)

The Board of Selectmen has suggested to the Board of Finance that the water supply system for the elementary school be done this year. The town will be eligible for up to 48% reimbursement from the state if the project is done before June. The Board of Selectmen is concerned that the state may run out of the funding for reimbursement which is why they want the project to go forward now. Mr. Walter said that the money can be taken out of Capital Reserves and the town can pay itself back when it does bonding for the new middle school. He will be working closely with Mr. Carroll.

Mr. Perry asked how the discussions with the unions had come about. Mr. Walter said that he and the town labor attorney contacted the labor representatives of each union and the union stewards. They met with the union representatives and told them that they would not engage in employee layoffs and furloughs in exchange for agreeing to give back wage increases for the year. In addition to the promise of no layoffs or furloughs, the town absorbed the planned 2% increase in health benefits for the unions (the town's total increase for health benefits increased to 4%).

The unions still have to vote on the proposal.

IV. ACTION ON THE MINUTES

Clarification, page 10, under the Ray Board report, Mrs. Fiala, noted that the request from Mary Jane Malavasi was that the "Ray Board" speed up the process, not the Board of Education.

Correction of names: High School representative: Teresa Govert, President of the High School Student Council; Middle School Representative: Claire Ianelli.

MOTION: Perry, Hyla; to accept the minutes of the Regular Meeting of February 10, 2009, as corrected.

**FAVOR: ALL PRESENT
MOTION PASSED**

MOTION: Perry, Mordecai; to accept the minutes of the Special Meeting of March 3, 2009.

**FAVOR: ALL PRESENT
MOTION PASSED**

V. REPORT OF THE SCHOOL BUILDING COMMITTEESA. 4-8 Middle School

The Committee has met and things are winding down. There are a couple of issues Mr. Peacock will address at their next meeting. Newfield continues to be responsive to concerns as they arise.

VI. REPORT OF THE SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLSA. 2009-10 School Budget Review

Dr. Solek began her remarks by commenting on the budget activity that had taken place over the last few weeks and the emotions involved in such a process when the economy is so uncertain. She equated it to maneuvering a large ship in heavy fog. She shared information she found on the Japanese Maritime Fleet website about how to navigate ships in heavy fog. The essentials are: reducing the speed of the ship (which she said was apropos to the thoughtful way in which budget deliberations were being made), allocating additional watchmen (the fact that so many boards and commissions and administrators were working together through the process), reporting to your “Master,” (in reference to keeping the board informed) making use of radar and weather reporting in attempt to navigate (making the most out of resources and expertise available), and reviewing the navigational plan (a reference to the district’s Strategic Plan).

Dr. Solek encouraged the Board to continue celebrating the successes of the district. NEASC has completed their two year report, they have recognized that the district is doing extremely well. There are many items listed on the student achievement portion of the webpage that are also worth noting. In addition to the current building newsletters that members of the Board receive, there will soon be a district-wide newsletter. She encouraged Board members and others in the audience to visit the district’s schools.

She concluded her opening remarks by encouraging the Board to feel a sense of hope, despite the current economic downturn and the gloomy outlook forecasted by the media. She noted an article written by Christina Romer, the Chairperson of the Council of Economic Advisors. The United States has survived nineteen major economic crises since the early nineteenth century.

Dr. Solek quoted from an address given March 9, 2009: *“Despite the devastating loss of wealth, chaos in our financial markets, and a loss of confidence so great that it nearly destroyed Americans’ fundamental faith in capitalism, the economy came back.”*

“This fact should give Americans hope. We are starting from a position far stronger than our parents and grandparents were in in 1933. ... there is every reason to believe that we will weather this trial and come through to the other side even stronger than before.”

VI. REPORT OF THE SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS (CONTINUED)A. 2009-10 School Budget Review (continued)

The Finance Sub-Committee, in discussion with the full Board, has generated four budget scenarios. Chronologically, Scenario 4 is the most recent, coming in at 1% over last year's budget. Items added back in include the 5 year technology replacement, field trips, stipend at 70% (and their associated FICA/Medicare expense), the Academic Awards Dinner, and the High School smart board.

Dr. Solek thanked the administrative team for all their hard work and their efforts to develop a budget that minimizes the need for reduction in personnel.

Mr. Iacovelli stated that at the last Board meeting there was consensus among the Board members that a 0% budget isn't possible. The charge to the Finance Sub Committee was to come to this evening's meeting with a budget which would include a 1% increase over last year's budget.

Mr. Iacovelli asked individual members for their comments. Mr. Herden felt it was important to decipher which of the four scenarios presented most reflects the mission statement of the Board of Education. Mr. Iacovelli responded saying that the original proposed budget of 4.75% over last year's budget would have been most reflective of the mission statement, but realized that it wasn't feasible during these extraordinary times. He said it was important to balance the needs of the district with the economic realities of the need to get a budget passed. Mr. Iacovelli believed the 1% budget, as presented, wasn't a great budget, but the best that we could probably do.

Mrs. Fiala thought the 1% budget was the budget to put forward to the Board of Finance. She cited the importance of putting the technology replacement line item back into the budget.

Ms. Mordecai agreed. She, too, felt the technology issue was very important.

Mr. Hyla said that while 0% would be ideal he, too, could support the 1% budget.

Dr. Miatt agreed that the best budget in the interest of the students was a budget that minimized need for any staff reduction. While technology is important, it is the relationship between students and teachers that "makes" a school. He felt that the 5 year technology replacement line item wasn't currently as important as it had been when it was first introduced to the budget.

Mr. Perry said that looking ahead, if the problems with the economy persist, the district will need help. He is unsure as to whether or not he can support the 1% budget increase when the Board of Finance has asked the town's Boards and Commissions to come in at 0% or below.

Mrs. Gionta said that working through all the numbers to get to 0 was more than could be done in a single meeting. She, too, is unsure about supporting the 1% budget.

VI. REPORT OF THE SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS (CONTINUED)A. 2009-10 School Budget Review (continued)

Ms. Willis spoke in favor of the 1% budget. She noted the impact of cutting stipends. She feels that smaller clubs and activities would suffer most from those cuts.

Mr. Hyla also spoke about the importance of the stipends.

Mr. Iacovelli stated that if the budget goes to the Board of Finance as is and comes back to the Board of Education, the Board will deal with it then. He felt it was important to send a budget forward.

MOTION: Mordecai, Fiala; to send Budget Scenario 4, which includes a 1% increase over the 2008-2009 budget, to the Board of Finance.

FAVOR (6): Fiala, Herden, Hyla, Mielt, Mordecai, Willis
OPPOSED (2): Gionta, Perry
MOTION PASSED

B. K-8 Implementation of SRBI

Mr. Scata made a presentation to the Board on SRBI, Scientifically Research Based Intervention, a statewide educational mandate. Mr. Scata distributed an Executive Summary, dated February 2008, to the Board.

Initially, RtI (Response to Intervention) was an outgrowth of federal legislation. An advisory panel convened by the Connecticut State Department of Education in November of 2006 decided to refer to the RtI process in Connecticut as SRBI *“to emphasize the central role of general education in the intervention process and the importance of educational practices that are scientifically-based.”*

Mr. Scata discussed the core principles of Response to Intervention and its core components:

- universal screening (administered school-wide three times a year, i.e. DIBELS (Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills))
- multi-tiered interventions (instruction which is differentiated to meet the needs of individual students)
- progress monitoring (scientifically-based assessment of student academic performance)
- fidelity of implementation (integrity of screening and monitoring procedures)

SRBI represents a major paradigm shift as it seeks to identify children at risk as early as possible, rather than waiting for children to fail. Ideally, SRBI lessens the need for special education, per se, by addressing student needs at an earlier age within a general

VI. REPORT OF THE SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS (CONTINUED)

B. K-8 Implementation of SRBI (continued)

educational setting. It has also been proven over time that most at-risk students do better if they are serviced in a general educational environment with their peers, as opposed to a special education setting.

East Haddam was chosen by the State Department of Education to receive in-depth training on Scientifically Research Based Intervention.

The East Haddam Consortium Team is comprised of: David Scata, Director of Pupil Services; Anne Johnson, Language Arts; Paul Lieberman, Special Education; Carol Rusch, School Psychologist; Mary Beth Havens, Assistant Principal; Constance Strazzo, Language Arts; Elizabeth Liedke, Reading Specialist; and classroom teachers Joan Foose, Celina Nelan and Rosemary Sweeney.

Mrs. Havens stated that the Consortium Team is meeting on a monthly basis and has participated in a number of presentations and trainings over the last several months. Specific topics provided in-depth study of each of the core components of SRBI with experts from across the country. Mrs. Havens responding to Dr. Solek's comments about hope said that the Consortium Team came away from each one of its trainings more energized and more hopeful than the one before. They were also encouraged that East Haddam is already doing so many things that fit well into the SRBI model such as the development of Pacing Guides.

At the Board of Education's next meeting in April, Mr. Scata will review the SRBI action plans and discuss the steps that have already been implemented at the Elementary and Middle Schools, and discuss next steps for the 2009-2010 school year.

Ms. Mordecai asked about funding for the coming school year. Mr. Scata responded that while this is an unfunded mandate, up to 15% of IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004) funds can be used. Discussion about funding is critical because the town is receiving reduced Title I funding. This will be discussed further in April.

C. Update on the Progress of the Assistant Principal Search

Dr. Solek updated the Board on the High School Assistant Principal search. Approximately 60 applications have been received, some of which are from highly qualified candidates, so the pool is more than sufficient. Mrs. Dadona and Dr. Solek are working closely with the search committee. There are ten members of the search committee including Mrs. Gionta and Mrs. Fiala who are serving as representatives of the Board of Education.

VI. REPORT OF THE SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS (CONTINUED)

C. Update on the Progress of the Assistant Principal Search (continued)

The committee met Monday, March 9, to develop a procedure for interviews. Monday and Wednesday, March 16 and 18, will begin the first round of interviews. Second interviews for semi-finalists will be scheduled with Dr. Solek the following week. She will then forward a minimum of two candidates to the Board of Education for their review.

D. Update on the Progress of the Strategic Plan Revision

Dr. Solek updated the Board on the progress of the Strategic Plan revision. The CIA and the Administrative Council have already had a preliminary look at the academic portion of the plan. The Technology Team is now looking at the technology portion of the plan. A copy of the Tech Plan will be presented to the Board at the April meeting. The CIA is meeting at the end of the month to finish the academic portion of the plan.

E. Overview of Standards-Based Report Cards

Mr. Peacock addressed the Board regarding standards-based report cards. There was a dialogue night with the Middle School PTO which resulted in good conversation around the idea of standards-based report cards.

Mr. Peacock shared a couple of handouts with the Board. He spoke about the history of academic letter grades which dates back to around 1897. Letter grades are familiar to everyone. Mr. Peacock used the example of an official saying “our current economy is a D minus” as an idiom that almost everyone would be familiar with.

Grades often get in the way of education as parents look at the letter grade as a mark of academic achievement, yet individual teachers have different ways of assigning letter grades to children.

The standards-based approach takes account of factors such as effort, preparedness and conduct into consideration. The younger a child is the more their grade is dependent upon those factors. As students get older those factors carry less weight in the grading process. Mr. Peacock stated that continuing to look at effort, preparedness and conduct, levels the playing field for students who perhaps work very hard, but for who academics are more of a struggle.

Mr. Peacock walked the Board through one of his handouts which was a questionnaire. He used the questionnaire to demonstrate how subjected letter-grading is.

The Middle School has recently developed a citizenship list which celebrates and acknowledges effort, preparedness and conduct with check plus, check, and check minus. Mr. Peacock feels that a student making the citizenship list should be celebrated

VI. REPORT OF THE SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS (CONTINUED)

E. Overview of Standards-Based Report Cards (continued)

every bit as much as a student making the honor roll. Some students will simply never make the honor roll, but are great kids nonetheless. This approach to grading facilitates acknowledging those students.

Mr. Peacock has been working with Nancy Alison utilizing the school's existing technology. She knows the grading software very well. As new ideas arise, she has been able to make necessary changes and reformat report cards. This is why, as Mr. Peacock mentioned at the beginning of his report, standards-based report cards are a budget-neutral proposal for the district.

Mr. Peacock presented three types of report cards. The second report card is the one which takes effort, preparedness and conduct into consideration, as well as a traditional letter grade. Mr. Peacock said that the process would take a long time to develop and implement, but that it was an approach well worth looking into for the future. The biggest challenge would be to identify which standards would be assessed in any one quarter.

Mrs. Fiala said she was skeptical that such a grading process would be successful. Ms. Mordecai wondered whether students would be as motivated by a P as an A.

Mr. Peacock acknowledged that it would take a good deal of effort to inform and re-educate parents and students, alike. He also stated that this type of grading was not meant for high school students, but would be most effective through the middle school years.

Mr. Hyla thought that such a system would be very valuable to parents.

Mr. Iacovelli said it would be interesting to get students' perspectives on this kind of grading system. He also said that the discussion itself proves that East Haddam is a progressive school district willing to investigate and try new things.

VII. COMMITTEE REPORTS

A. Long Range Planning

The Committee has not met.

B. Finance

No further report.

VII. COMMITTEE REPORTS (CONTINUED)

C. Policy

The Committee has not met.

D. Transportation

The Committee has not met.

E. Personnel and Negotiations

Mr. Perry reported that he, Mr. Carroll and Dr. Solek met on March 5, 2009, met with members of the East Haddam Administrators' Association and the East Haddam Education Association bargaining units for the purpose of seeking concession for fiscal year 2009-2010.

The Board of Education is currently negotiating with the United Public Service Employees Union, as a result the Board of Education cannot engage in any conversation with this bargaining unit.

The response from the East Haddam Administrators' Association and the East Haddam Education Association was that they were unable to enter into discussion regarding salaries and benefits without opening their contracts, per Connecticut Statute 10-153D, which states that once a contract is open for purposes of negotiation, it must go to the town hall and remain there for thirty (30) days. The town can then hold a referendum on whether or not to accept the contract. If the contract is denied by the town vote, it goes forward to arbitration. The groups believe that if such a scenario presented itself their contracts would be reduced substantially. The Administrators will continue to work with the Board doing whatever they can do, as long as the contract does not open up. In addition, the East Haddam Education Association will actively work with the Board to reduce costs.

Discussion with the bargaining units is concluded for the time being.

Mr. Perry made a request for an Executive Session.

Mr. Iacovelli asked Mr. Perry why teachers from other districts seem to be making concessions, as it is reported in the news. Mr. Perry said that in most towns where concessions are being made there is a clause in the contract allowing for reverse impact. It gives the Board of Education and the bargaining units the ability to open up negotiations without having to go to the town for a possible referendum. To date, there haven't been any concessions from towns lacking that clause in their contracts. So it remains in the best interests of the union not to open their contracts to negotiation.

Dr. Solek said that she spoke that afternoon with Attorney Connon. He explained that there is still the possibility of informal "discussion" (the word "negotiation" denotes opening the contract). There is a possibility of a side letter of agreement or

VII. COMMITTEE REPORTS (CONTINUED)E. Personnel and Negotiations (continued)

Memorandum of Agreement which might entail concessions, but both parties would have to be willing to enter into informal discussion. There aren't any other districts in the state that have engaged in such informal discussions, to date.

Mr. Iacovelli asked Mr. Perry and Dr. Solek to make overtures to each group to see if they might be willing to meet for informal discussion.

Mr. Hyla said that even if there is a side letter of agreement, the members of each association would have to vote to approve.

Ms. Willis asked if it might be possible to add the clause in the next contract with the Education Association and Administrators' Association so that if this situation presents itself again their contracts would not be put in jeopardy by opening up negotiations.

F. Ray Board Liaison

The Ray Board has not met.

G. LEARN Liaison

Mrs. Gionta reported that LEARN met on Thursday regarding the letter that went out from Commissioner McQuillan regarding the proposed Science Center. They will wait and see what happens at their next meeting.

H. Curriculum Instruction and Assessment Council Liaison

There is a meeting scheduled for March 30, 2009.

I. Open Space Liaison

Mrs. Willis reported that the Open Space Committee met on February 22. Much of what happens at their meetings happens in Executive Session. Emmett Lyman said that the Selectmen have drafted a proposal that would allow liaisons from Boards and Commissions to report back to their respective groups about discussions taking place in Executive Session that would be of particular interest to the groups they represent. Those reports would also be made in Executive Session.

J. Local Prevention Council Liaison

Mr. Hyla asked if just once his report might be the first one given at a meeting of the Board of Education. Mr. Iacovelli agreed, and asked that it be noted in the minutes that Mr. Hyla gets to go first in April.

VII. COMMITTEE REPORTS (CONTINUED)

J. Local Prevention Council Liaison (continued)

Mr. Hyla said the LPC met on February 18. There are good things going on in town with East Haddam Youth and Family Services. He noted Courageous Parenting was going well. The Juvenile Review Board has been quite busy. He mentioned an under-age drinking party that came to light as a result of the anonymous tip line. There is "Kick Butts Day" being planned for March 25 to raise awareness about the dangers of tobacco use. Teen Jam night included 35 middle and high school students.

There is an effort underway between East Haddam Youth and Family Services, Parks and Recreation and MPAC to develop low cost after school activities for middle school youth.

Students Against Destroyed Dreams will begin meeting soon. Mr. Hyla noted that the students developed their own acronym, as most people think of SADD as Students Against Drunk Driving.

VIII. COMMUNICATIONS AND AUDIENCE OF CITIZENS

None.

IX. OLD BUSINESS

None.

X. NEW BUSINESS

A. Warrant

- 1) To approve the warrant for 2008-09 in the amount of \$1,700,611.85.

MOTION: Gionta, Mordecai; to approve the Consent Agenda.

**FAVOR: ALL PRESENT
MOTION PASSED**

- B. **MOTION:** Herden, Hyla; to approve the Educational Specifications for a public water supply system replacement at the elementary school.

**FAVOR: ALL PRESENT
MOTION PASSED**

X. NEW BUSINESS (continued)

MOTION: Mordecai, Willis; to enter Executive Session at 9:40 p.m.

**FAVOR: ALL PRESENT
MOTION PASSED**

The Board returned to Regular Session at 10:02 p.m.

MOTION: Fiala, Gionta; to adjourn 10:03 p.m.

**FAVOR: ALL PRESENT
MOTION PASSED**

Respectfully submitted,

Everett Herden
Board Secretary