

**REGION 4 BOARD OF EDUCATION**

**Date:** August 10, 2021

**Special Meeting – REMOTE MEETING held**

*(To view a recording of this meeting, please visit our website [www.reg4.k12.ct.us](http://www.reg4.k12.ct.us) and select “Remote Meeting Recordings” under the BOARD OF EDUCATION Heading)*

<b>Attendance:</b>	<u>Region 4 BOE</u>		<u>Administration:</u>		<u>Other:</u>	
(√ = attended)	Kate Sandmann	√	Brian White	√	Matt Ritter	√
	Jane Cavanaugh	√	Sarah Brzozowy	√	Rusty Malik	√
	Lon Seidman	√	Bob Grissom	√		
	John Stack	√	Matt Espinosa	√		
	Jennifer Clark	√				
	(Present @ 6:00 p.m., but unable to voice presence during rollcall)					
	Kate Bergeron	√				
	Lori Ann Clymas	√				
	(joined @ 6:01 p.m.)					
	Rob Bibbiani	√				
	(joined @ 6:01 p.m.)					
	Rick Daniels	√				
	(joined @ 6:22 p.m.)					

Chair Sandmann called the meeting to order at: 6:00 p.m.

A verbal roll call was held.

There was a discussion regarding the scheduling of a district meeting / public hearing to discuss a proposed Security Project at John Winthrop Middle School on August 24<sup>th</sup> at 7:00 p.m. as well as the approval of a Legal Warning for said meeting.

On motion duly made and seconded the Board unanimously VOTED (all present at time of vote except R. Daniels) to schedule a District Meeting / Public Hearing for Tuesday August 24<sup>th</sup> at 7:00 p.m. and publish the legal warning as presented in the next available edition of the Valley Courier (see attached).

**Public Comments:**

Kim Stack of Chester shared portions of a statement she submitted to the Board for inclusion in the public record of this meeting re: concerns about comments made by other citizens at the June 03, 2021 Joint BOE meeting against the former volleyball coach, and a request for action by the District. (see attached)

Joe and Kathleen Bisson of Chester shared portions of their statements of support for the former volleyball coach submitted by both of them to the Board for inclusion in the public record of this meeting. (see attached)

Suzanne Fetter of Chester shared her support of comments made so far and stated her belief that the volleyball team and coach were subjected to bullying when comments were made by citizens at the June 03, 2021 Joint BOE meeting against the former volleyball coach. She also shared portions of a statement she submitted to the Board for inclusion in the public record of this meeting. (see attached)

Rodney Alston of Chester spoke about his concerns regarding accusations and unjustified personal attacks against the former volleyball coach made by other citizens at the June Board meeting. He also

shared that he hopes the Board is concerned with the behavior of all employees and would like to see all faculty members held to same standard of accountability.

Emma Counter of Chester shared a statement of support for the former volleyball coach that she submitted to the Board for inclusion in the public record of this meeting. (see attached)

Eva Counter of Chester shared her belief that comments made by citizens at the June Board meeting about the former volleyball coach are untrue and asked that the coach's contract be reinstated.

Audrey Counter of Chester spoke in support of the former volleyball coach and shared her personal observations made at volleyball games last season.

Claire Counter of Chester – (her sister Audrey read Ms. Counter's) statement of support for the former volleyball coach and asked that the coach's contract be renewed.

Kate Schuman of Chester expressed her support of the former volleyball coach and shared portions of a statement she submitted to the Board for inclusion in the public record of this meeting. (see attached)

Emi Bisson of Chester shared a statement of support for the former volleyball coach that she submitted to the Board for inclusion in the public record of this meeting. (see attached)

Ava Boyles of Ivoryton – (Emi Bisson read Ms. Boyles') statement of support for the former volleyball coach that had been submitted to the Board for inclusion in the public record of this meeting. (see attached)

Rob Counter of Chester stated he was proud of the community for speaking up tonight. He asked that comments made by citizens against the former volleyball coach at the June board meeting be stricken from the record and that the former volleyball coach be reinstated to her position.

Michael Brooks of Essex shared his statement of support for the former volleyball coach that he submitted to the Board for inclusion in the public record of this meeting. (see attached)

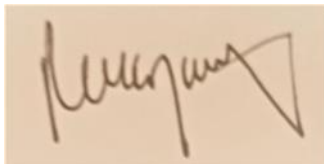
Jen Malaguti of Chester – (Board member Jane Cavanaugh read) a letter submitted by Ms. Malaguti in support of the former volleyball coach for inclusion in the public record of this evening. (see attached)

Tina Saunders of Chester was unable to attend but submitted a letter to the Board in support of the former volleyball coach for inclusion in the public record of this meeting. (see attached)

Sara Holmes of Chester was unable to attend but submitted a letter to the Board in support of the former volleyball coach for inclusion in the public record of this meeting. (see attached)

**ADJOURNMENT:** On motion duly made and seconded, the Board unanimously VOTED to adjourn at 6:52 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in dark ink on a light-colored rectangular background. The signature is cursive and appears to read 'Rick Daniels'.

Rick Daniels  
Secretary – Regional District #4 Board of Education

**WARNING**  
**DISTRICT MEETING - PUBLIC HEARING**  
**REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT NO. 4**  
**TOWNS OF CHESTER, DEEP RIVER AND ESSEX**  
**TUESDAY, AUGUST 24, 2021**

The electors and citizens qualified to vote in town meetings of the Towns of Chester, Deep River and Essex (the “Member Towns”) are hereby warned that a District Meeting of Regional School District No. 4 (the “District”) will be held REMOTELY Via Google Meet on Tuesday, August 24, 2021 at 7:00 P.M. (to listen and participate please dial (US) +1 (617) 675-4444 PIN: 211 351 184 1538#) for the purpose of conducting a public hearing on the following recommendation of the District Board of Education:

1. That \$952,053 be appropriated for the John Winthrop Middle School Security Project (the “Project”). The appropriation may be expended for design, construction, renovation and installation costs, engineering and professional fees, materials, equipment, purchase costs, legal fees, financing costs, interest expense on temporary borrowings, and other costs related to the Project. The appropriation shall include any federal, state or other grants-in-aid received for the Project. The John Winthrop Middle School Security Project Building Committee (the “Building Committee”), established by the District Board of Education as the building committee for the Project, shall be authorized to determine the scope and particulars of the Project, and may reduce or modify the scope of the Project as desirable, and the entire appropriation may be spent on the Project as so reduced or modified. The District anticipates receiving grants from the State of Connecticut for a portion of the eligible costs of the Project to defray in part the appropriation.

2. That \$952,053 of bonds, notes or temporary notes of the District be authorized to finance the appropriation. The amount of the bonds authorized shall be reduced by the amount of any grants received by the District for the Project.

3. That the Chair of the District Board of Education and the District Treasurer, be authorized to make representations and enter into written agreements for the benefit of holders of the bonds or notes to provide secondary market disclosure information.

4. That the Building Committee be authorized to contract with architects, engineers, contractors and others in the name and on behalf of the District with respect to the Project, to approve design and construction expenditures for the Project, and to exercise such others powers as are necessary or appropriate to complete the Project.

5. That the authorization of the issuance of bonds, notes or temporary notes shall be submitted to referendum vote by the electors and citizens qualified to vote in town meetings of the Member Towns of the District.

Dated at Deep River, Connecticut this 10<sup>th</sup> day of August 2021.

To: Region 4 Administration and the Joint Boards  
Date: August 10, 2021

My name is Kim Stack. I am a 14-yr resident of Chester and have 3 kids: two at Valley Regional and 1 at Chester Elementary. This is a follow-up email in support for Christine Miller. I sent some of you an email of support for Christine in June in response to the smear campaign made against her during public comment at the June Joint BOE meeting. At the time I was confident the district would see through the the Nevaizer's hidden agenda, do the right thing, and support Christine as the head coach of the Valley Regional volleyball team. I am concerned the district made the disappointing decision to non-renew Christine's coaching contract without acknowledging the facts.

Out of that concern, and on behalf of Christine Miller, allow me to counter Ian Nevaizer's accusations with facts.

**June 3, 2021 Joint BOE meeting  
Excerpts from the Public Comments, followed by facts.**

**Public commenter #1: Ian Neviasher (Essex) "This is matter of Public concern"**

**Ian claimed:** Christine said she was "*only* here for my daughter".

**In reality:** Ian was referring to Christine's statement to the team when she returned to coach 2 weeks after her son tragically died. Her first day back was HARD and she confessed she took that hard step for the sake of her daughter to demonstrate perseverance to her daughter, and the team. Her tone with the team was *nothing* of what Ian claimed it was.

Ian altered the tone of her statement to the team to promote his own agenda.

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**Ian claimed:** She "demoted, degraded & bullied other student athletes ... to promote her daughter."

**In reality:** Christine is a firm but fair coach. Respect and sportsmanship come first in a team sport. The opportunity to rise as team players was offered but was not well received by a few.

Ian publicly degraded Christine in retaliation for not promoting his daughter as a team captain, and Ian abused his position of power to bully Valley in to removing Christine as head volleyball coach.

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**Ian claimed:** She "falsified documents" for selecting team captains.

**In reality:** Ian is referring to the team vote for captains. As the new coach Christine clearly defined the leadership qualities that needed to be met in order to qualify as a team captain. There is no policy that states a team vote is the absolute process by which captains are selected. The team vote was at odds with the required leadership qualities. The ultimate decision lies with the head coach.

Ian made a false claim in order to promote his own agenda.

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**Ian claimed:** She "called girls names."

**In reality:** Ian likely is referring to the Spirit Animal gifts that were hand drawn and created by Christine for the team captains at the banquet. She connected spirit animals to the team captain's individual character and leadership style. The meaning of the spirit animal "The Elephant", was spun completely out of context after the banquet. The symbolic meaning is traditionally considered a symbol of good luck, wisdom, protection, loyalty, quiet courage and nurturing. She connected this animal with this

particular athlete additionally because in the previous season she shared an artistic connection around a piece of jewelry that the athlete had created in art class that happened to be an elephant necklace.

Ian made a false claim in order to promote his own agenda.

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**Ian claimed:** She was "unresponsive to the boosters."

**In reality:** Ian is referring to the planning of the end of season banquet. The season ended prematurely in November due to Covid-19 restrictions and therefore the banquet was delayed; it was later held in May. There is no policy for a coach to remain available after a season ends. Covid-19 delayed the banquet, not Christine. Christine did not answer her phone or check emails after the season ended because she retreated to continue grieving her son. Do you know when you when stop grieving the loss of a child? YOU DON'T. But eventually you learn to get through your day.

Ian dismissed her situation and her unbearable grief to promote his own agenda.

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**Ian claimed:** She "sometimes cried uncontrollably while addressing the team."

**In reality:** Again, Christine's son died mid-season. Christine is human, and she was coaching under more than one difficult circumstance. However, she returned to the team and coached a successful season. But that wasn't enough for Ian.

Ian dismissed her situation, her unbearable grief *and* the winning 9-1 season to promote his own agenda.

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**Ian claimed:** "Parents/athletes afraid to speak out ... afraid of retaliation due to her self-serving rampage."

**In reality:** Christine is a peaceful and inspiring person, and she is a firm but fair coach. Unfortunately, power does not respect "firm but fair". Which lens you're looking through says more about you than it does about Christine.

Ian went on his own self-serving rampage and used his position of power to promote his own agenda.

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**Ian claimed:** Her "coaching permit expired 9/22/20."

**In reality:** Christine's coaching permit application was hand delivered to Central Office on 9/8, ahead of the 9/22/20 deadline.

Ian made a false claim when throwing around CT State statutes to alarm you to promote his own agenda.

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**Ian demanded:** "I call to non-renew the invalid contract."

**In reality:** Valley Regional asked Christine to step in as head coach last year, and although Christine had reservations due to having a high-risk child at home whom she needed to protect from Covid-19, she stepped up because if she didn't there wouldn't have been a volleyball season. As head coach, Christine led the team to a winning 9-1 season. And that wasn't due to luck, Christine has 20+ years of coaching experience at the college and high school levels. Christine's contract with Valley Regional was valid until July 2021, when Ian's smear campaign caused her to lose her coaching job. Christine was informed on 7/7/21 that her head coach position was not renewed for the 2021/2022 season.

Ian dismissed Christine's tragic loss of her 14yr-old son mid-season and made multiple false claims because his daughter was threatening to quit if not named a team captain. Ian succeeded. Christine is

no longer a volleyball coach at Valley. And two days after Christine's non-renewal, a meeting was called for the team and parents to name Ian's daughter as a volleyball team captain.

Thank you for allowing me to speak on behalf of Christine Miller.

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On my own behalf, I would like to address Erin Neviasher's accusations:

**Public commenter #2: Erin Neviasher (Essex) "This is matter of Public concern."**

**Erin claimed:** Christine was a "Bully"; made players quit, cry daily, tell them they're not good enough, that they have bad attitudes. Players fear Christine, don't trust her; they are afraid of consequences. Christine was "tearing them down". "Emotional abuse just as harmful" as other abuses.

**In reality:** Erin abbreviated the false information put forth by Ian. Neither she or Ian expressed concerns to Christine directly or alerted the administration during the volleyball season with their concerns of the alleged bullying behavior, nor did the administration alert Christine of any parent concerns. The first time Christine heard of negative remarks about her was ONE day after the banquet in May, when the team captains had just been announced.

Erin and Ian are both educators. Ian is a superintendent in the Lyme/Old Lyme school district and Erin is a special education teacher at Chester Elementary School. Erin and Ian either willingly stated false claims to promote their own agenda, which was to remove Christine as head coach and get their daughter named as a captain of the volleyball team, or they failed to honor their responsibility as mandated reporters and report the alleged abusive behavior.

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The remaining two public commenters further abbreviated the false information put forth by Ian and Erin.

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The Nevaizer's had a hidden agenda and the facts have exposed it. With facts in hand, I call upon Valley Regional to reverse their decision to non-renew Christine Miller's coaching contract.

Regardless of who is volleyball coach this season, I am concerned the circus act the Nevsaiers performed will happen again if the district does not address the procedural holes that left the district open to being taken advantage of.

Out of concern for the Valley student athletes and coaches, I would like to make 3 calls to action:

1. It is unacceptable that Valley Regional questioned Christine Miller's certification 9 months after it was handed in to Central Office. Of the mountain of paper work the district has everyone filling out and submitting each year, we are left to trust you have it organized and accessible at all times. Never again give us the impression this district is unreliable on something as basic as paperwork. I call upon the administration to either establish, or review and enhance, a timely internal process of accounting for the certification status of all of Valley's coaches.
2. There is no "I" in "TEAM". Our student athletes are stressed watching teammates or over-zealous parents hijack what is supposed to be a team sport. Student athletes are also stressed that the school expects good sportsmanship of them but the athletes are not clear on who is responsible for addressing sportsmanship infractions when they occur. I call upon the administration to address the current vague code of conduct and expand it to an athlete and

parent code of conduct for all team sports, with student *and* parent sportsmanship expectations, infraction procedures and disciplinary actions clearly defined.

3. Division and poor sportsmanship existed in the volleyball program long before Christine became the head coach. I am concerned for the student athletes this upcoming season because the problems haven't been addressed. I call upon Valley Regional to monitor the dynamic this season between the student athletes, the parents, the boosters and the coaches to ensure all players feel safe, are included, and are protected from mental distress inflicted by the ongoing problems. And it is only firm but fair to address the problems on the sidelines: I call upon Valley Regional to ban Ian and Erin Nevasier's involvement in practices, games, meetings, and the Boosters for the 2021/2022 season for their blatant abuse of power. Send them back to the stands where they belong.

Out of concern for the students at Chester Elementary School, 1 call to action:

1. Erin Nevasier should be questioned for the abuse accusations she made on 6/3/21. Erin either overflated the alleged abuse to serve her own interests, or she failed to report the alleged abuse. I am concerned for the children she works with at Chester Elementary School. I call upon the administration to investigate these and any other inconsistencies Erin Nevasier's responsibilities as an educator and mandated reporter.

Thank for your time.

Sincerely,  
Kim Stack

To: Region 4 Administration and the Joint Board

Date: August 10, 2021

Statement that I will be making this evening on behalf of myself and my wife during public comment

Good evening. My name is Joe Bisson. My wife Kathleen and I are residents of Chester CT and we have two children, both who have attended the region 4 school system K-12. Our son recently graduated with the class of 2021, and our daughter will be graduating this upcoming school year with the class of 2022.

Kathleen has a psychotherapy practice in Essex Ct and has been working in the field of psychiatry for 32 years and I have been a hospital administrator for over 30 years.

*We are making a statement in support of Christine Miller, the most recent Head Volleyball coach at Valley Regional High School, in response to the unfortunate, well-orchestrated attack on her character by 3 families of players on the team, and a recently retired teacher during the June 3rd Joint Board of Education meeting.*

*The hijacking of the public comment section that evening to defame a well-respected coach and member of the community, whose 14 year old son tragically died not even 7 months prior, seems unfathomably cruel and demonstrates a level of self-absorption that is difficult to comprehend. The fact that the dispute was fundamentally centered on the passing-over of one of the family's daughters for the team captaincy made this issue all the more disturbing.*

*To be clear, we all love our kids, and most of us as parents will do anything to protect them, but the public nature of this attack, which centered on the theme that Coach Miller is a "bully, who demoted and degraded members of the team to promote the interests of her own daughter" is patently untrue, and frankly, a little unhinged. Defaming Coach Miller's character in public, with her not being present and unable to respond, would seem to us to be the epitome of bullying behavior.*



*Our daughter is one of those players named captain of this team. Her experience, and the experience of many other players and family members we have spoken to, refutes the commentary that Coach Miller is in any way a "bully" or emotionally abusive to these kids. Most of the families describe her as supportive, accessible, communicative, and tough but fair. In the Covid shortened season that she coached, her record was 9-1, with the team's only loss coming when she was not behind the bench due to her family's tragedy. To our knowledge, the parents involved in the BOE meeting on June 3rd had never once spoken directly with Coach Miller about their concerns. It is hard to understand why anyone would engage in a public witch hunt of this nature without first addressing the issue individually with the coach. If in fact they found it uncomfortable to speak with Christine directly because of the recent loss of her son, it is doubly incomprehensible that they would engage in a public character assassination.*

*Our daughter wrote a letter to the Administration at the time and was willing to give up her captaincy to the player in question. We are proud of her focus on the team ahead of herself, and her understanding that she did not need the title of captain to prove she is a leader. For the record, she is in the top 6 percent of her class, captain of the girls lacrosse team, a First Team All-Conference lacrosse selection, and 2nd team All State selection, a member of National Honor Society, a VRHS Scholar Athlete Award recipient and has well over 80 hours of community service. You decide if you would want this kid as a team captain. In our experience during the past four years with VRHS Varsity athletics, coaches have the final say in choosing the players they wish to have lead their teams. Period. Although the issues around the team captaincy have been resolved, the fact that this was a catalyst for this public attack on Coach Miller remains deeply disturbing.*

*In closing, we have always found the VRHS Administration and Board of Education to be swiftly responsive to the needs and well-being of the students entrusted to their care. We are calling to action that Christine Miller's valid coaching contract be renewed as the head volleyball coach of Valley Regional High School and that the decision to cancel it be reversed.*

*Thank you*

To: Region 4 Administration and the Joint Boards

Date: August 10, 2021

Written statement for Public record

My name is Kathleen Bisson, I have been a resident of Chester for 18 years. I am submitting this letter to the BOE because of the public bullying that was done by a member of our community toward one of our coaches whose contract was not renewed in part because of the public character defamation he displayed toward her and his demands to not renew her head Volleyball Coaching contract for the 2021/2022 season. As a result of this adult's behavior during the Joint Board of Education meeting on June 3rd, students on the volleyball team, including my daughter, have experienced extreme distress and ongoing bullying. Since the June 3rd Joint BOE meeting it has become clear that we need more oversight and policies put into place to protect our athletes/students. I am calling upon the board to review policies that address Code of Conduct, bullying by athletes and parents, and better oversight of Booster Clubs at Valley as I am concerned the current policies do not fully protect the the well being of the student athletes of Region 4. I am asking that this letter be included in the BOE meeting for public submission. It does not need to be read out loud at the August 10th BOE meeting but I ask that it be included for consideration as recommended policy changes by the BOE. There is no clearly defined oversight policy of Boosters by Valley Administration but I ask that these recommendations be directed to the appropriate personnel for immediate attention.

In order to better protect the well being of our student athletes I call to action that the governing policy for Code of Conduct for athletes and parents at Valley Regional High School be reviewed, updated, and a protocol be put into place that athletes and parents sign a Code of Conduct contract prior to each athletic season. The current handbook has very broad general expectations outlined. The use of illegal drugs and alcohol are the primary behaviors that are currently addressed in the student handbook with no specific mention of bullying behavior or poor parent conduct.

It is my suggestion that when athletes submit the "Red Form", Concussion, and Medical forms prior to the start of each season, there should be included a specific Code of Conduct form that is both signed by athletes and parents. Athletes should not be able to participate in any sports until that form is signed and submitted. This form would be in addition to the Student Handbook.

As part of the Code of Conduct policy there needs to be very clear consequences for bullying behaviors for both parents and athletes. There also should be clear consequences for player/parent behavior deemed as inappropriate by a coach when players or parents of players are out of line either on or off the competition arenas throughout the season as well as during team practices.

A pre-season team/parent meeting should be held by the coaches to specifically discuss the expectations and consequences stated in the Code of Conduct policy. This is an expectation set forth by CIAC. This is not a uniform practice across all sports at Valley Regional High School.

CIAC also highly encourages that the school form a student based council that will assist the athletic department in overseeing the adherence to the "Class Act" sportsmanship program. I understand we are a "Class Act" school but I am unaware of any ongoing student based council that meets regularly.

With regards to choosing captains, there is no standard policy in place at Valley Regional High School that states a coach must choose captains the same way across all the school offered sports. It is specifically stated by CIAC that a coach hold the final say for whom they wish to have as captains of their teams. The way a captain is chosen may vary from sport to sport. Ultimately, CIAC guidelines suggest that the final decision on team captaincy is up to each individual coach with the recommendation that each coach have a consistent selection process from season to season.

Finally, regarding Boosters, in an effort to eliminate a potential conflict of interest with booster officials, those officials that have been involved in causing team divisiveness of any kind should recuse themselves from fulfilling their role as an officer on that particular booster.

Such behaviors would include but not be limited to: public character defamation of a coach or any member of the VRHS community, public political affiliations within the family unit such as being a member of one of the tri-town BOEs, the purposeful exclusion of student athletes from team communication, behavior that causes reported mental distress to any participating athletes, the exclusion of athletes from team events, favoritism, misappropriation of funds, and booster officers who have not been voted to position without the majority vote of the entire booster club. A booster club consists of all stakeholders; that is any parent/guardian/player/organization, anyone who pays dues or money to the club.

It is unfortunate I find myself in a position to have to address these issues but the people who are most effected by loose guidelines are the students whose wellbeing is your number one priority. There have been too many complaints of distress from athletes including my own daughter since the

recent inappropriate outburst of parents during the public comment section of the June 3rd BOE meeting and it is imperative that we act swiftly in addressing these concerns.

It is my suggestion that a subcommittee be created to look into Code Of Conduct Policies in Region 4 including updated procedure on how we are addressing Bullying specifically related to athletes and parents in Region 4. And with the upcoming fall sports upon us I ask that current booster officers be advised of these complaints and that they respond accordingly where appropriate.

Thank you for your immediate attention to these matters,  
Kathleen Bisson

Statement from Suzanne R. Fetter, Chester, CT

To the R4 Board of Education:

I am here today both as a legal representative for Christine, and as a parent of a Valley Senior.

I have known Christine Miller for 20 years, and she was a dear friend to me when we had toddlers the same age. Christine is artistic, caring, compassionate and athletic, always with a positive attitude and taking part in numerous activities that benefit the Region. She volunteers, she shows up, and in contrast to the accusations made against her in a very public BOE meeting in early June, she used her expertise and experience to coach the Valley Girls' Volleyball team to a 9-1 winning season.

Christine didn't have to take on the role of coach. She was asked by the Administration to do so. Despite a pandemic and obvious challenges to training and communicating, the girls did not quit or cry, nor were they subjected to Christine's artful bullying....Christine is not a bully. All you need to read are the online testimonials from the Killingworth community after the tragic passing of her son, Boone last October. The Miller's are a caring, cooperative, compassionate and helpful family.

Despite Christine's grief, she was able to finish the season for her daughter, and the sake of the team. She did so successfully. Having been an athlete and a coach since her teens, she took the role seriously and moved past the challenges of grief to demonstrate to her team how a true coach and leader behaves. Sportsmanship, showing up, giving each event your best effort despite many obstacles placed before her, she proved a responsible, effective and impactful coach.

Rather, it seems to me that Christine has been subjected to bullying by several parents. She was provided no extension to apply for her State of CT coaching certification, and she has completed the requirements for that certification, despite allegations of an "unlawful contract".

It seems that despite understanding the concerns around confidentiality as a current School Administrator, Mr. Neviasser, the parent of one of the team volleyball players, came forward publicly and to his former direct report, Mike Barile; and Mike not only non-renewed Christine's contract, but immediately afterward arranged a team meeting to discuss selection of a new coach, where the Boosters (and Ian and Erin Naviasser) advised that they would assist in selecting a new coach. At this meeting, the Neviasser's daughter was selected as a new Captain. (Mike Barile advised Madison would be appointed Captain based on receiving 2<sup>nd</sup> highest number of votes.) Does the Captain role even matter? What is there to gain by using your power to engage a community into this type of action for your child? What are we demonstrating to our students when power is used to remove a coach that does not meet a parent's standard? We are demonstrating that teachers and coaches can be bullied, too.

The R4 BOE has an obligation to see that power is not mis-used by insuring privacy of those involved; by refusing to succumb to the "jockeying of power" behind the scenes for selfish gain. I don't believe the

girls on the Valley Volleyball team wanted to watch this drama unfold when their coach and teammate had just suffered unspeakable loss. I believe these girls were coached on what it means to be a team and to fight through adversity. Leadership is not gained by bullying and scheming. Leaders show up to win despite adversity and that is what Coach Miller did. She was a fantastic coach and the Administration should have rewarded her for her courage.

I recommend that the Administration and the Board review their policies on bullying.

- Notes from November 2011 at BOE meeting:  
"Joint PK-12 Policy Committee – W. King  
Policy reviewed five policies. Bullying is a focused topic. Acceptable student and employee use policy for internet technology is also being discussed. Dr. Levy noted that staff and student computers can be monitored at all times."
- Ten years later the Region offers forms online for parents and students to report suspected bullying by other students.

I urge the R4 Administrators to develop a more comprehensive policy on parental reporting of favoritism by a coach or teacher. Shouldn't an impartial panel review these matters before going public? Is there a safe, secure and confidential process by which students can report moral misconduct, or discrimination, to an impartial staff-member? If so, where does that information go? Are there consequences when a teacher or administrator is engaged in bullying or coercing a favorable result? What about a parent? I urge you to think about a policy that protects students from over-reaching parents that seem more than willing to inflict harm on the community for their own student's self-interest.

BOE meeting christine reinstated

My name is Emma Counter from Chester. I'm a graduated senior that has played for Valley Volleyball for four years. I played on the Varsity team and my two sisters were the team managers.

I would like to speak to some of the acquisitions that have been spoken out against Coach Christine Miller.

I never heard Coach Miller say "I am only here for my daughter." I also never heard any of the name-calling. And as far as crying uncontrollably, I only once saw her on the verge of tears. This was when she came back for senior night a mere one week after tragically losing her 14-year-old son, Boone.

As a captain of the volleyball team, I was a part of almost every interaction Coach had with the team. Coach had nothing but positive and encouraging words for us. She would consistently remind us that our mental health was a priority. We would even do yoga some days for practice with a yoga instructor to help clear our minds and ground us during the difficult times of anything that may have been happening in our own lives.

While on the bus to sports games is when players usually feel free to talk about anything while not being in the eyes of coaches. I sat in the back of the bus every time to volleyball games with the rest of the varsity players. I never once heard any of the comments being made about Coach Miller. If a comment was made about Coach Miller, it would only be "It's nice to finally have a Coach that doesn't make us feel like we aren't worthy."

Before the start of my senior season, my mental health was struggling. Covid had major effects on this and I hadn't been feeling like myself for a few months now. The season then starts. It was very difficult at first because we were not allowed to play volleyball yet because of Covid precautions. Coach still somehow managed to turn the situation into the best it could be. One day before practice I felt very down. It was hard for me to do the daily things people are used to doing. I was getting ready to leave for practice and I was balling my eyes out the whole time. For no particular reason, I just felt down. I couldn't pull myself together by the time I got to the school for practice. I decided to turn around and go home. Usually, in a situation like this I would tell the coach I was not feeling well or an emergency came up that I had to attend immediately. But with Coach Miller, I always felt safe. I texted her letting her know that I was not doing okay mentally. She responded immediately saying that I do not need to worry about missing practice and she told me that she wanted me to take the time to "be Emma." She then later sent me an encouraging text that night saying that she hoped I took the time to breathe and be myself. I've never had anyone in my life be this supportive. Coach somehow can say the perfect words of wisdom all the time.

I will read a text she sent out to the team before one of our games:

To the team, our girls. Our season has been about support; I giving and receiving, lifting each other up, being positive and together as a team we are strong. Salmi and I are sending our support to each of you and as a team. Keep your heads up, be strong, be confident and play as one. Hugs to all - coach miller

Coach was very on top of the behavior and attitude of the players. She would call out disrespectful behavior when she saw it. This helped the overall atmosphere of the team and made it feel like a safe space for my sisters and I.

This is NOT who we are as a region 4 community. To demean others and lie. This is setting a nasty example for the students at Valley on how a disagreement should be handled.

Without Coach Miller, the volleyball team wouldn't be anything. She coaches us to be the best players that we can be. She also teaches us how to be kind, respectful, and strong women. The wisdom that I was able to receive from her will forever carry with me as I pursue college and beyond. It would be an embarrassment to the region 4 community if Coach was no longer a part of the coaching staff. I am asking that her contract be renewed.

Thank you for your time





**To the team, our girls. Our season has been about support; giving and receiving, lifting each other up, being positive and together as a team we are strong. Salmi and I are sending our support to each of you and as a team. Keep your heads up, be strong, be confident and play as one. 💕 hugs to all Coach Miller**

To: Region 4 Administration and the Joint Board of Education

Date: 10 August 2021

My name is Kate Schumann. I have been a Chester resident for a little over five years and have one son who attends Chester Elementary School. The intent of this letter is to express my support of Christine Miller's character.

I have no vested interest in the Valley Regional High School volleyball team, who the head coach, assistant coach or team captains may be. I also understand that personnel matters are handled by the administration and not by the Region 4 Board of Education.

I have listened to the public comments portion of the 3 June 2021 Joint Board of Education meeting. What I heard expressed was shocking. Specifically, the comments that Coach Miller "demoted, degraded and bullied" players does not match anything, nothing at all, I know to be true about Christine Miller. Not as a mother, artist, art teacher, coach or human.

Christine Miller is one of a handful of parents with whom I can comfortably approach with any concern or question. Her replies and advice have always been thoughtful and without judgment.

The public comments of 3 June 2021 do not align with Christine Miller's character. It is our duty, as a community, to support one another and speak the truth. Self-promotion, at the demise of others, should never be tolerated.

I urge the Valley Regional administration to reverse their decision to non-renew Christine Miller's coaching contract.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Kate Schumann

Good evening, my name is Emi Bisson. I plan to speak during public comment. Attached is my statement for public record.

Thank you,  
Emi Bisson

To: Region 4 Administration and the Joint Boards  
Date: August 10, 2021

Statement that I will be making during public comment this evening.

Hello My name is Emi Bisson and I am a current senior at Valley Regional High School and a resident of Chester CT. I am here this evening to make a public comment. Following my comment I have been asked by Ava Boyles, a recently graduated student and former volleyball teammate from Ivoryton, CT, to read her statement for public record. She has also emailed her statement in to the board.

I am making this statement in support of Coach Christine Miller. I want the Public to hear what I think about what was done to Coach Miller during public comment at the last board of Ed meeting by Mr. Ian Neviaser.

I am speaking to respectfully share with you my astonishment at Mr Neviaser's behavior during the year-end June 3rd Board of Education meeting, and to tell you that it is unforgivable to me that Coach Miller has been relieved of her position as head volleyball coach partly as a result of Mr. Neviaser's public display of anger and false accusations. Coach Miller is one of the best coaches I have ever had, and I can tell you with certainty that most of my teammates feel the same way.

The fact that Coach Miller's character was demolished by Mr. Nevaizer and by other adults, and that she was ridiculed in front of the entire Board of Education and the general public without being there to defend herself, deeply disturbs me. Setting aside the real concern that much of what Mr. Nevaizer said about Coach Miller that night is completely untrue, it is actually his conduct that bothers me the most. He is in a position of great authority and influence as a school Superintendent, but he acted like a common schoolyard bully, shouting down the Board Chair and attacking someone who could not fight back. It is ironic that the central theme of his attack was that Coach Miller is a bully toward her players who adversely affected their mental health. I believe he should look in the mirror because he has definitely affected mine.

And, all of his anger was directed toward a woman who lost her 14 year old son not 7 months earlier. Is he out of his mind? The heartlessness which he displayed toward someone who had recently experienced an unthinkable tragedy is truly something I will never forget. He should be ashamed of himself. I hope the abundance of his satisfaction is equal to the abundance of hurt he provided to so many others.

I will close this statement by saying that our team is resilient and we are moving forward together to put this ugly period behind us. I hope the decision to not renew Coach Miller's contract can be changed so that she has the option to return as head volleyball coach if she so chooses. I am confident that with her leadership the Valley Regional High School Volleyball team could possibly see a shoreline conference championship this season.

I hope Mr. Neviasser spends some time thinking about what he did. He made a terrible year so much worse for all of us! The fact that I am actually here having to do this is inconceivable to me. This all could have been avoided had Mr. Neviasser addressed this situation directly with Coach Miller. This has been unnecessarily painful for all of my teammates no matter what side of the issue they are on. We should all be united as a team going into the season with the same goals to have fun together, support each other and do our best to represent Valley Regional High School. As I said before we will move forward because we have been told to by the administration but it will be very difficult due to the damage that has already been done by Mr. Neviasser! I ask that the board of Education and Administration never let this happen again to any team at Valley. I call upon the district to do better to protect student athletes and coaches from overly involved parents.

Thank you for your time!

Begin forwarded message:

**From:** Ava Boyles <[REDACTED]@reg4.k12.ct.us>

**Subject:** letter in support of coach miller for boe meeting 08/10

**Date:** August 8, 2021 at 5:00:19 PM EDT

**To:** Kate Sandmann <ksandmann@reg4.k12.ct.us>, Jane Cavanaugh <jcavanaugh@reg4.k12.ct.us>, Lon Seidman <lseidman@reg4.k12.ct.us>, Rick Daniels <rdaniels@reg4.k12.ct.us>, Rob Bibbiani <rbibbiani@reg4.k12.ct.us>, Jennifer Clark <jenclark@reg4.k12.ct.us>, John Stack <jstack@reg4.k12.ct.us>, Lori Clymas <lclymas@reg4.k12.ct.us>, David Fitzgibbons <dfitzgibbons@reg4.k12.ct.us>, Tom Englert <tenglert@reg4.k12.ct.us>, Rebecca Greenberg-Ellis <rgreenberg-ellis@reg4.k12.ct.us>, Kris Pollock <kpollock@reg4.k12.ct.us>, Maria Scherber <mscherber@reg4.k12.ct.us>, Charlene Fearon <cfearon@reg4.k12.ct.us>, Miriam Morrissey <miriammorrissey@reg4.k12.ct.us>, Betsy Scholfield <bscholfield@reg4.k12.ct.us>, Tracy Dickson <tdickson@reg4.k12.ct.us>, Scott Hallden <shallden@reg4.k12.ct.us>, Robert Ferretti <rferretti@reg4.k12.ct.us>, Marc Lewis <mlewis@reg4.k12.ct.us>, Mary Campbell <meCampbell@reg4.k12.ct.us>, Lenore Grunko <lgrunko@reg4.k12.ct.us>, Pat G Maikowski <pgmaikowski@reg4.k12.ct.us>, Mark Watson <mwatson@reg4.k12.ct.us>, Loretta McCluskey <lmcccluskey@reg4.k12.ct.us>, Cassandra Sweet <csweet@reg4.k12.ct.us>, Justin Pillion <jpillion@reg4.k12.ct.us>, Nancy Johnston <njohnston@reg4.k12.ct.us>, Mike Barile <mbarile@reg4.k12.ct.us>, Brian White <bwhite@reg4.k12.ct.us>

This is my letter I would like to share with you all during public comment.

Hello everyone,

I would like to first start by introducing myself, my name is Ava Boyles, I am from Ivoryton, and I am a part of the graduated class of 2021. I have been a part of the valley volleyball team for all four of my years at valley and I am playing volleyball at Wheaton College this coming year. I am a dedicated player with over 8 seasons of competitive volleyball experience at the highest levels Connecticut has to offer. I have had over a dozen coaches all with different styles, approaches, and perspectives. I think that lends me some credibility. I am here today to talk with all of you about my experience with Coach Christine Miller. Coach Miller is the epitome of a successful coach. She teaches with high intensity and constant motivation. Miller immediately earned the respect from nearly 40 disappointed athletes that trained

without volleyballs in parking spaces for almost five weeks. it took an incredible level of determination to keep the energy high when she was outnumbered by 3 teams worth of grouchy teens. she coached us to be strong, scary, intimidating players, but still with good morals. every single decision she made was for the good of the entire valley volleyball family, that was a point that she frequently stressed. even if it wasn't obvious to everyone at first, she had a calculated plan for everything. often, these were lessons that we had to learn on our own. i can recall a time in my junior season where coach miller sat me down and looked me in my eyes. she told me without hesitation, that if i continued to play with the awful attitude i had, that i would never see myself on a college court. she continued by telling me that i could be the best damn player that any college coach has seen, but with a terrible attitude, not one would recruit me. i sat there with tears in my eyes as this woman brought me back to reality. it was not something any previous coach had taken the step to do, but this was crucial to my success in the following season. i had no idea that our conversation would have impacted my future, but i am certain she did. this past season coach told me that she could tell from the moment we met that i was a college bound player and i thanked her for the talk we had in my junior season. i think about how she knew that even though i definitely didn't wanna hear it, it was imperative that i did. now, i'm committed to Wheaton to play volleyball. Through my recruiting process, i talked to around 20 coaches, and every single one of them said that they would never recruit a player with a poor attitude. without a doubt every time i heard that i thought of how she changed my future in one single conversation. at the time, she was an assistant, assistant coach with limited power and only a few moments to share her wisdom. but she was able to make the most of those times and made an incredible impact on my life. i think the microcosm here is incredible. imagine the effect that she will have on so many more athletes with the opportunity to continue to be a head coach. this past season was a unfortunate series of tragic events. i believe that her determination to push through truly was a show of her love for the team. she holds every single one of her players in her heart and she does want what is best for the entire valley volleyball family. she pushed me and the rest of our team this year and if we had the opportunity to compete in the championship games we would've come out number one once again. she not only allowed me to play my best season of volleyball, but showed me what it was like to be coached by a woman that would give anything for her team. that's not something you find often. i hope that you take this into consideration when making decisions moving forward.

Thank you,

Ava Boyles

Hi, my name is Michael Brooks, and I was a senior at Valley Regional Highschool through the 2020-2021 calendar year. I have not had a ton of interactions with Coach Miller, but the ones I did have were very meaningful. I can remember after soccer practice, I was heading to my car. Coach Miller then went out of her way to start a conversation with me, a conversation about how we believe our seasons will turn out. She was genuinely interested in what I had to say. We had never talked previously, and she was speaking to me as if I were a friend of hers. She made me feel like I had a voice to be heard. Even though these interactions were small, I will forever remember them. She made me realize the importance of having small interactions with people, interactions that can change the course of someone's day, interactions that people will remember forever. I will remember my interactions with Coach Miller. I wish I were as lucky as the girls volleyball team to have a great coach like Coach Miller. I am asking for her contract to be renewed.

Thank you for your time

August 10, 2021

Dear Region 4 School Board and Community Members,

I apologize for not being able to attend in person tonight due to a last minute family conflict. My name is Jen Malaguti. I am a resident of Chester, a parent of 3 children in the district, and an educator. I have degrees in Developmental Psychology, Chemical Dependency, and my M.ED in Curriculum and Instruction. I worked for a couple of years in the mental health field, providing respite for families dealing with, most often, some sort of abusive situation. For the last 17 years I have been teaching in public, private, and outdoor education. I am writing this letter in response to the public comments made about Christine Miller during the Region 4 Board of Education meeting this past June.

My relationship with Christine falls under many categories including employer, coworker, and friend. We have worked together for the last 4 years in an outdoor education setting where I have taught alongside her while also being her supervisor. It became abundantly clear to me right away that not only is working with children something that comes naturally to her, it is also a passion of hers. As a program teacher, she quickly rose to being our #1 educator to call in for any program, but teambuilding on our low and high ropes course in particular. Her ability to stay positive, even in the most difficult situations, is commendable. She is incredibly patient, supportive, and encouraging with students. She never, ever raises her voice toward children or adults alike. She is always praising children for their effort, regardless of how successful they have been in completing any task. She has this special way of highlighting the best in everyone she meets and often sees qualities in others that they themselves cannot see. She is one of the most supportive and encouraging people I have ever worked with in all of my years in education. The children are always her priority, their safety and learning environment are constantly at the forefront of her mind and planning. Of the hundreds of schools that visit our facility each year for field trips, not a single one has ever complained about Christine's approach with students. In fact, more often than not, I have teachers and chaperones seek me out at the end of a program to commend her on her ability to reach and engage each student, but especially the most difficult students. She is the most requested staff member by returning schools each year. She represents what our program is: educational, encouraging, supportive, accepting, fun, positive, and safe. She makes a huge, positive impact on those around her, whether her interaction is for 5 minutes or 5 hours.

This past year I opened a new private elementary school and hired Christine to be one of our teachers. After only a couple of classes that Christine led, a parent wrote to me, "I just wanted to give some feedback that I think Christine is wonderful. The boys are loving working with her and have made such cool things." At our picnic with families on the last day of school, each of the parents made a point to seek her out to thank her for the impact she had on their child's learning. When I shared that she would be returning to work with us next school year, the parents were thrilled to hear this, and for one family, it helped solidify their decision to re-enroll their child into our program. Christine has a powerfully positive impact on our youth.

Outside of our professional roles, Christine is also my friend. Our friendship grew through working together and our shared passion for education and developing strong, independent young people. I know that she chose to coach this fall because she knew that there may have been children who did not have someplace to go after school and who needed this opportunity to play for their own



mental health. This past year has been so difficult on our youth that is a reason she agreed to coach. To help give some balance and semblance of normalcy to the girls on her team. She is not out to harm children, as was claimed at the Board meeting. Christine does exactly the opposite of that in every action she takes every single day. Her goal is to nurture and raise up and empower young people. She is the prime example of who I want coaching my children. Tough but fair. Honest and trustworthy. Nurturing and supportive. She is the biggest cheerleader of our youth.

I have yet to meet someone who knows Christine and who doesn't smile just saying her name. She is the kind of person who radiates in positive energy. She builds people up. She brings the best out in others without even trying. She is honest, fair, kind, loving, and one of the best people I have ever known.

I strongly refute any claims made about Christine Miller in the Joint Board meeting on June 3, 2021. I have never, ever witnessed, or had any of my staff, her colleagues, report witnessing anything remotely like what was said about her. In fact, when I shared with staff what was said, each and every one of them had their jaw drop at the outlandish accusations. And every one of them said, "Those people clearly don't know Christine Miller," because that is not who she is. Christine is a stand-up citizen who has made our community better, kinder, and stronger through her work with children and adults alike. The Tri-town owes her a huge debt of gratitude, and the majority of the community knows this. I hope that the Region 4 Administration and Board of Education also recognizes this.

Thank you for your time and hearing my thoughts and experiences. I know that each of you volunteers your time to serve our community and I am grateful for that.

Sincerely,

*Jennifer Malaguti*

Jennifer Malaguti

Begin forwarded message:

**From:** Tina Saunders <[tinasaunders1@yahoo.com](mailto:tinasaunders1@yahoo.com)>  
**Subject:** Letter for R4 BOE 8/10 6pm Meeting  
**Date:** August 10, 2021 at 2:48:50 PM EDT  
**To:** "[ksandmann@reg4.k12.ct.us](mailto:ksandmann@reg4.k12.ct.us)" <[ksandmann@reg4.k12.ct.us](mailto:ksandmann@reg4.k12.ct.us)>

Hello R4 BOE and Superintendent White-

My name is Tina Saunders and I am a Chester resident of 8 years and wish this letter to be read into the record at the August 10, 2021 meeting @ 6:00pm. I'm writing this letter in support of Christine Miller. After watching/listening to the BOE meeting from 6/3/21 regarding Mrs. Miller I am appalled. It's so very disheartening that she has been forced out of a coaching job that she loves and was extremely successful in because of the agenda from Ian and Erin Neviasser. The perception with many in the community-right or wrong- is that a fellow superintendent and a district employee were able to use their influence to force a coach out when their daughter didn't make captain of the team. There are always 2 sides to a story. I am here to say I 2nd the calls to action made by Kim Stack.

Thank you all,  
Tina Saunders

S a r a H o l m e s  
7 S c h o o l L a n e  
Chester, CT 06412

August 9, 2021

Re: Support for Christine Miller

To Region 4 Administration and the Joint Boards,

I am writing in support of Christine Miller by way of a character testimony.

My name is Sara Holmes and I have lived in Chester with my husband for 14 years and I work in town as a licensed architect. Our 8-year-old son attends Chester Elementary School.

I know Ms. Miller through a mutual friend and her work at Bushy Hill Nature Center. My son has enjoyed her art classes at Bushy Hill – impressive considering he showed little interest in going, but also showed little interest in leaving by the time the class was over. I have watched her in this setting be fun, genuinely caring, and foster a creative spirit. I cannot imagine her has anything but supportive and dedicated to the children, and adults, she teaches.

The accusations made at the Joint Board of Education meeting on June 3, 2021 of Ms. Miller as calculating, bullying, lying, manipulative, and vindictive is unimaginable.

Please consider her exceptional character and take proactive steps to clear her name.

Thank you for the opportunity to share my views with you today. And thank you for the work you do on behalf of our Region 4 children. Our schools are top-notch thanks in no small part to your dedication.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sara Holmes', with the letters 'ARA' written below the first part of the signature.

Sara Holmes  
AIA, LEED AP BD+C, Certified Passive House Designer