

**THESE MINUTES ARE SUBJECT TO BOARD APPROVAL AT THE Sept. 03, 2013 MEETING
REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT NO. 4 Board of Education**

May 2nd, 2013

A regular meeting of the Regional School District No. 4 Board of Education was held on Thursday May 2nd, 2013 in the John Winthrop Middle School Library, with the following Board members in attendance:

Linda Hall, Mary-Beth Harrigan, Chris Riley, Elaine Fitzgibbons, Laurie Ann Tomlinson, Ann Monaghan, Jennifer Clark, and Mario Gioco (arrived at 7:05 p.m.), as well as Senior Student Representative Alex Belval and Junior Student Representatives Phoebe Petrovic and Emily LeGrand.

Also in attendance:

Administrators: Superintendent Dr. Ruth I. Levy,
Assistant Superintendent, Dr. Joanne Beekley
Business Manager Garth Sawyer;
Valley Regional Principal Kristina Martineau;
John Winthrop Principal William Duffy;
Director of Facilities Bruce Glowac;

Board Clerk: Jennifer Bryan

CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Linda Hall called the meeting to order at 7:02 p.m.

CONSENT AGENDA

On motion duly made and seconded, the Board unanimously VOTED to approve the consent agenda consisting of the minutes from the regular meeting of March 7, 2013, the minutes from the Region Public Hearing of April 01, 2013, minutes from the Special Meeting of April 01, 2013, and the Accounts Payable report.

AUDIENCE OF CITIZENS

9 citizens were present. No comments were made.

OTHER ITEMS

VRHS students, Phoebe Petrovic and Katie Mulligan were recognized for their recent win as State Debate Champions. Teacher Barbara Nidzgorski reported on their accomplishment, praising them for their hard work and impressive win. The students thanked Ms. Nidzgorski for being a great coach.

The Board recognized senior student Board representatives Alex Belval and Sarah Burzin with a small token of appreciation for their two years of service on the Board.

French students who participated in the recent trip to Paris gave a presentation on their educational experiences to the Board. Teacher Kate Wheaton introduced Sarah Castelli, Erin Hays and Emily LeGrand who participated in the trip of 33 students in February. They shared a slide show presentation of a few highlights of the trip. The students commented that it was their best week of the year. They enjoyed taking in the culture, food, and sights, while honing their French speaking skills. They said they woke up excited every day to explore the city and everyone had a great time. They felt that their French improved greatly, and that they are much better prepared for AP French next year.

The discussions regarding requests for approval for student trips to Spain, France and Quebec were moved up to this point in the agenda.

Ms. Wheaton presented the Board with a first reading of a request to approve a student trip to Quebec for February 6-9, 2014. She reviewed the details of the trip with the main objective being to improve students' French language skills through a variety of experiences and historical activities. She is hoping for approximately 20 students to participate.

Ms. Wheaton also presented the Board with a first reading of a request to approve a student trip to France for November 22nd – December 2nd, 2013. She reviewed the details of the trip which is a joint venture between the State of Connecticut, Yale, France and the city of Toulouse. This exchange program was first started in 2008. The trip is taken primarily over Thanksgiving break and students attend school every day and participate in classes.

Principal Martineau handed out information on the insurance carried by each trip provider as requested. Board member Chris Riley spoke in support of these experiences for students. Ann Monaghan requested more information on the liability of the district. She feels that insurance held by trip providers should be more than \$1 million. Mr. Sawyer reported that the district's umbrella policy covers up to \$11 million for these trips. Jennifer Clark asked how many school days would be missed by students participating in the trip to Quebec and Ms. Wheaton replied that it would be 3 to 3 ½ days.

On motion duly made and seconded the Board VOTED (8 yes, 1 no – Ann Monaghan = motion passed) to approve the student trip to Quebec as presented.

On motion duly made and seconded the Board VOTED (8 yes, 1 no – Ann Monaghan = motion passed) to approve the student trip to France as presented.

Meagan Sirimongkhoun presented the Board with a second reading of the proposal for a Spanish exchange trip to Salamanca, Spain to be run from November 22nd – December 1, 2013 resulting in 2 missed school days for participating students. She said that students had recently returned from a very positive experience in Costa Rica and the trip to Spain would really benefit the students in learning the language. They will be using methods already proven effective in matching students with appropriate hosts. They are hoping for approximately 20-30 students participating. The Board reviewed information regarding insurance offered to students and the liability of the Board. Chris Riley requested that students themselves make a presentation to the Board after all of these trips. Elaine Fitzgibbons asked if any scholarship money is provided to help defray costs for students? Ms. Sirimongkhoun replied that they will be holding fundraisers. Additionally, last year there was a generous donation from the Chris Belfoure Memorial Fund that helped to defray some of the costs for past language trips, and there may be some help from that fund again this year.

On motion duly made and seconded, the Board VOTED (8 yes, 1 no – Ann Monaghan = motion passed) to approve the student trip to Salamanca, Spain as presented.

Student Representatives

Middle school student leaders Nate Gagnon and Sabrina Cacace gave an end-of-year report. They both talked about recent student activities at JWMS such as spirit week, with a different theme for each day. Spirit week concluded with Color Wars, an activity to promote team leadership and inclusion of all students to come together as one. The variety show fundraiser to benefit both a local and national charity is coming up soon. They are looking to showcase all kinds of acts and encourage all students to participate in some way. Student Leader elections will be held soon for incoming 8th graders.

Senior Student Representative Alex Belval reported that Senior Student Representative Sarah Burzin was unable to attend due to participating in the Music trip to Chicago. He noted that Valley students are doing a lot of community service, and they also have a community service day coming up on June 7th to provide volunteer services around the tri-town area. Every student will be participating to enhance their communities. Mr. Belval also reported that all of the athletic teams are doing very well and he made a special mention of Maggie Calamari, who will be competing for Team Connecticut in the gymnastics national championships in a few weeks. On his behalf and Sarah's, he thanked the Board for allowing them the experience of serving as Board representatives over the last two years.

Junior Student Representative Phoebe Petrovic reported on recent forensics competitions, including the American Legion oratory competition, and 2 debate competitions, one parliamentary and the other policy, which is where Valley won as State Debate Champs. Barbara Nidzgorski mentioned that Ms. Petrovic came in 2nd in the State in the American Legion oratory competition.

Junior Student Representative Emily LeGrand reported on the junior prom held last weekend in Mystic. The Senior Reception dance will be held on June 7th at Water's Edge in Westbrook and everyone is very excited. She also reported that there were currently about 140 kids from Valley in Chicago for the Heritage Music Festival. She has already talked to friends who have been enjoying the first day of their trip so far.

Representatives from Grant Thornton, LLC, Scott Trenholm and Jeff Walsh, reviewed the 2011-12 Region 4 audit report. Unqualified "clean" opinions were issued for basic financial statements and compliance related to major programs, and also on internal control over compliance (federal programs). No material noncompliance was reported for internal control over financial reporting or compliance and other matters, but, as in past years, a significant deficiency was noted for lack of segregation of duties, which he noted was very common when you have a small staff, such as is found at Central Office. One partial solution he stated would be the adoption of business office procedure manual, but a perfect segregation of duties is not typically attainable, and certainly not when dealing with such a small office. The audit confirms an end of year surplus for FY2011-12 in the amount of \$67,875. A management letter was issued with regards to the student activity accounts – again he noted that is very common across school districts throughout the State because there usually is not a lot of oversight of student activity accounts through the business office, as those processes are occurring at the school office level. This matter too will be addressed by Mr. Sawyer's business office procedures and processes manual. However, Mr. Trenholm stated that enough documentation existed to show no irregularities in their test samples of the student activity accounts, even if full documentation may not have existed for some test transactions.

On motion duly made and seconded, the Board unanimously VOTED to accept the audit report as presented.

On motion duly made and seconded, the Board unanimously VOTED to approve the Superintendent's recommendation to return to the participating towns of Region No. 4 the end of year surplus for FY2011-12. The amount of reimbursement is for \$67,875 to be returned as follows according to FY2011-12 ADM formula:

Town of Chester \$18,734
Town of Deep River \$19,765
Town of Essex \$29,376

REPORTS

Financial Status Updates

Business Manager Garth Sawyer reviewed the financial status report and the cafeteria account report. He reported that the District is still in very good shape and that it has been doing really well with special education expenditures this year by building less costly programs in-district and returning students from more costly, out-of-district programs. He also noted that now that the State will allow districts to put surplus funds into a sinking fund, rather than returning it as surplus, the Board may want to discuss the possibility of investing some future surplus funds back into sinking funds (a re-occurring capital fund), if not all. The Board agreed that would be a good topic for a future discussion with input from the towns.

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

There was a discussion concerning the option to exercise a 1 year renewal on the current contract with Grant Thornton, LLP (formerly Carlin, Charron, & Rosen, LLP) to re-appoint them as auditors of the Region 4 Financial Statements for a 1 year period to audit the financial records for the 2012-13 school year. Mr. Sawyer reported that he was recently informed that Grant Thornton will no longer do governmental audits, instead transferring that portion of their company to Mahoney Sabol Company, LLC. Mahoney Sabol will honor existing Grant Thornton contracts and will keep the same fee structure as last year. Mr. Sawyer stated that he would therefore recommend that the Board reappoint Grant Thornton, with the understanding that the audit would be carried out by Mahoney Sabol. Although this will be a new division for Mahoney Sabol, Grant Thornton has transferred employees to Mahoney Sabol and their team will be using the same partner to oversee the audit, as the district would have been using through Grant Thornton next year. Chris Riley noted that the employees are familiar with the account and with Mr. Sawyer. Mr. Sawyer also

noted that he's very comfortable working with the group that would be doing this, as he has worked with them in the past on Region 4 audits.

On motion duly made and seconded, the Board unanimously VOTED to exercise their 1 year renewal option on their current contract with Grant Thornton, LLP, (with the understanding that the audit will be executed by Mahoney Sabol Company, LLC), to re-appoint them as auditors of the Region 4 Financial Statements for a 1 year period to audit the financial records for the 2012-13 school year.

Principals Update

Valley Regional Principal Kristina Martineau provided the Board with an update on the 2012-13 school year. For the third consecutive year Valley was recognized as one of the best schools in America. She also shared a DVD of commercials that Valley's graphic arts students created for a contest held by Grossman Chevrolet. The process challenged their marketing, photography, and graphic arts skills.

Principal Martineau also talked about the upcoming June 7th community service day, which is a high school initiative based on a student-generated request to pay back the communities that have supported them throughout the years. The day of service will run from 8:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m. , and all students will be participating in projects that were chosen based on community expressed needs.

John Winthrop Middle School Principal, William Duffy updated the Board on the 2012-13 school year. He reported that the students recently performed Thoroughly Modern Millie to two sold-out audiences, and all involved did an incredible job. He also discussed last Tuesday, when JWMS hosted 40 debate teams for a competition. One of the four teams selected to move on to the next round of competition was from JWMS.

Principal Duffy also reported on Wellness Day, held at JWMS earlier today, with different activities including speaker Ed Gerety, and community volunteers giving career advice. This day coincides with the High on Life week presentation by Tri-Town Youth Service Bureau. Sixth Grade orientation will be held on May 14th and other end-of-year activities are starting up. He said that the school is full of spirit and positive energy on the heels of spirit week. He said it really is amazing to see the social and student development in action.

Elaine Fitzgibbons asked if there is any interest in putting on plays at the high school, in addition to the yearly musical, in order to allow for students who may not be musically inclined, or just may be more inclined to participate in a play. There was a brief discussion about both having being done in the past, but with such a large amount of time being devoted to the production of the musical, other types of performances had been phased out. However, Principal Martineau said that she would definitely explore whether or not there is a student interest in plays, and perhaps lower production cost plays.

Committee Reports

Region 4 Audit and Finance Committee - Mr. Sawyer said he will be scheduling a Committee meeting for later this month.

The Joint BOE Finance Committee is scheduled to meet again on September 24th, 2013.

The Joint BOE Policy Committee is scheduled to meet again on May 21st, 2013.

The Joint BOE Curriculum Committees is scheduled to meet again on May 21st, 2013.

Supervision District Committee Update - nothing to report since last meeting

Assistant Superintendent's Report

Dr. Beekley gave a general update on activities within the districts including the status of the educator evaluation plan that had been submitted to the State as required. However, as of this date, she has not yet received any feedback from the State. Dr. Beekley noted that the last early release day to allow for professional development is scheduled for May

10th, and the yearly Data Fair will be held on June 6th during the regularly scheduled Joint BOE meeting; teachers at all of the schools are busy preparing for it.

Superintendent's Report

Dr. Levy updated the Board on the following district activities:

The Region 4 Security Advisory Committee (formerly known as the District Security Oversight Committee) will be meeting again in May. The Committee recently organized for all front office school secretaries to receive training in security matters, and it was a very productive 2 hours for all staff involved. The Committee will be conducting comprehensive indoor and outdoor walk-thrus at all of the schools soon to supplement information already gathered during the initial cursory walk-thrus done recently. Earlier today she met with ambulance and fire crews from all three towns to discuss school security issues. It was a very informative meeting, and the collaboration between these crews and the schools will continue.

The VRHS manufacturing program continues to be a great success. Dr. Levy will be meeting with administrative parties soon to review the inaugural year and begin planning for next year.

Dr. Levy noted that all of the schools and the Supervision District are now in the last third of the budget process. She reminded everyone to vote and to also encourage others to cast the vote of their choice, as years such as these, voter turnout is traditionally low.

Work on the Cooperative Agreement continues with Shipman and Goodwin. As the group tasked with overseeing this process, the Supervision District Committee will be meeting soon with attorney Anne Littlefield to hammer out more details.

Dr. Levy also commented on a recently aired NPR segment regarding the school nutrition program that was recorded at JWMS and included interviews with Thomas Peterlik, William Duffy and Dr. Levy.

Elaine Fitzgibbons enquired as to why the Region 4 budget cannot be done via town vote rather than by referendum. There was a brief discussion. Bruce Glowac was able to provide the history and rationale behind the decision and board vote made long ago by the Region 4 BOE to automatically move the Region 4 to referendum.

There was a discussion regarding the possible purchase of a portable aluminum bleacher system to be used at future graduation ceremonies and other events as needed. Mr. Glowac discussed how the expectation for the use of bleachers to seat graduates came about and stated that in the past, he has normally rented portable bleachers from New Haven's Park and Rec Department. However, this year Valley's graduation is scheduled for the same evening as a school in New Haven, so the bleachers will be unavailable for Valley's use. There was a discussion over the pros and cons of purchasing versus renting. Mr. Glowac noted that renting locally currently costs approximately \$1600 per use, and possibly twice that much if he needs to seek out another source for rental. The purchase of a comparable system currently costs approximately \$30,000. He envisions secondary uses within the schools, as well as free use by the towns if requested, with priority given to school events. The bleachers could also be rented out to other organizations when requested.

Mr. Sawyer noted that there is currently enough money in the Region 4 budget to cover the cost to purchase bleachers this year if the Board so desired. On a related note, he also noted that State statute allows the Board the options of transferring any end-of-year surplus to a sinking fund or to return it to the towns.

Mr. Glowac noted that he envisioned the possible purchase as a cooperative partnership with the towns. The Board was supportive of the possibility of purchasing the bleachers this year, if the towns were supportive of the purchase. Mr. Glowac stated that he would discuss the possibility with the First Selectmen from each town and report back to the Board at a special meeting date still to be determined.

AUDIENCE OF CITIZENS – none present

EXECUTIVE SESSION

On motion duly made and seconded, the Board unanimously VOTED to move into executive session at 8:54 p.m. to discuss the Superintendent's evaluation and the Board's self evaluation. The Board invited Dr. Levy, Dr. Beekley, and Principal Martineau to stay for executive session.

The Board moved out of executive session at 9:30 p.m.

FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS

1. Region 4 Annual Meeting (May 6th, 2013 @ 7:00 p.m.)
2. Referendum on Region 4 Budget for 2013-14 (May 7th, 2013 noon – 8:00 pm)
3. Review of 2011-12 Strategic School Profile (when available)
4. Insurance Policy Limits – (TBD)

ADJOURNMENT

On motion duly made and seconded the Board unanimously VOTED to adjourn at 9:30 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Jennifer Bryan, Clerk