

**DANBURY BOARD OF EDUCATION MEETING
TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 10, 2020 - 7:00 PM
VIRTUAL MEETING VIA ZOOM
LIVE STREAM**

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Chairperson, G. Cooper, called the meeting to order at 7:03 pm and those assembled recited the Pledge of Allegiance.

ROLL CALL

Present: Joseph Britton, Rachel Chaleski, Kate Conetta, Gladys Cooper, Joseph DaSilva, Kathryn Hodgdon, Richard Jannelli, Kathleen Molinaro, Albert Russo, Amy Spallino

Absent: Loren Daly

Also Present: Dr. Pascarella, Kelly Truchsess, Kevin Walston, Dr. Casimiro, Kim Thompson, Courtney Leborious

RECOGNITIONS

Carmen Vargas-Guevara, Principal, South Street School, **Exhibit**
20-112(pg.4)
Recipient of the 2020 Terrel H. Bell Award for Outstanding School Leadership

- Dr. Pascarella stated that when they were looking for a principal for South Street School, they were looking for someone who had the desire to make a difference. C. Vargas-Guevara has done that with her strong faculty.
- Principal Vargas-Guevara thanks The mayor, the Board and Dr. Pascarella for trusting her out of so many candidates. Couldn't be here tonight if it wasn't for her staff, students, families and colleagues. At South Street School, one of the biggest things that has made a huge difference is having a common vision and setting high expectations for all students. It's about the students, what they need and what staff need to do for them. It takes a big group of people to put this together. A lot of work to do and excited for the next step.
- Dr. Casimiro stated that it has been a pleasure working with Principal Vargas-Guevara over the last couple of years. Principal Vargas-Guevara always wants to try something new and different and that is testament to what a leader does, constantly pushing the envelope a little bit and challenging the status quo. Principal Vargas-Guevara often cites "my teachers were thinking this", always bringing that teacher leader perspective into the conversation and really honors that. It is what makes her so special and resonates with the staff when they know their voice is heard.
- K. Truchsess thanked Principal Vargas-Guevara and the South Street School staff. They are a highly dedicated team. Always advocating for what we can do for unique family situations and how to meet students with where they are at.
- K. Walston stated that every great principal is key to any great school. Great principals support their teachers and those great teachers in turn create a thriving school culture

where all kids can succeed. Congratulated Principal Vargas-Guevara, staff, students and families. Look forward to many more years ahead.

- Principal Vargas-Guevara sees this as a win for Danbury. Danbury is on the map!

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

- Cheryl Radacho
 - If Danbury is 100% Distance Learning, please explain why the normal school day hours/schedule are not being followed. Our kids are being deprived of a quality education and it is not acceptable.
- Megan Shaw
 - My son is a student at the Academy of International Studies. At this point we are in the middle of November and the children have not gone to school one day, one minute, one second since March. They left school one day in March with the promise of return in two weeks. Since then we have now looked to Danbury Public Schools as one broken promise after another. When will enough be enough? I would like to know why Brookfield and all the other towns are slowly moving toward full-time learning and Danbury is not open one day. When will you start to put the children first and the politics second? If we continue going in this downward spiral, the children will suffer for the rest of their lives. At this point it needs to be in the parent's hands. Parents should decide that the parents who want their children in school should have that option. Danbury needs to have some type of support system for parents who need to work. Some of us are a two income dependent family. The teachers are working from home and getting full pay and benefits while other parents have had to stop work and not be able to get their salary nor benefits. I don't understand how this is fair to working parents. Not all of us have the option to stay home with our children. Danbury needs to set up some type of a caregiving, no charge service, such as people coming to the home to help tutor with online learning, help care for the children in the home and other services needed by parents. The parents at home who are unable to work anymore have added stress which means stress to the children. We try our best to not let it affect them due to the stress Danbury is causing all the parents. It is time Danbury steps up and starts putting the children first. If you continue to not put the kids back in school due to Covid, they will not go back to school for years. My son is now asking why his teachers can teach from their homes, and I cannot do my job from home. Not to mention they are not working more than five hours a day. These questions come when due to the selfishness of Danbury public schools extras are not available to the children anymore. Bethel is next to Danbury, there are 83 people in Bethel (staff) that are quarantined but the superintendent refuses to close the schools.
- Katie Williams
 - Thank you for the meeting on 11/5/2020. It was nice to hear from the doctors on staff that are advising you. However, watching the Board Meetings, we are hearing from one side of the medical community, even though the overwhelming majority of the research shows that schools can open safely. That is never

discussed by our Board or our medical advisors. It is important to explore all sides of the medical research being conducted when making such big decisions.

Might I also suggest that one of these meetings be more interactive, with members of the parent community being invited to ask questions in real time to our medical advisors and the Board. It would be extremely beneficial to have the ability to be part of the dialogue. I also think that it might be helpful if our Board was having discussions with the Board members of our surrounding towns to get insight into how being back has been for their communities. It might also help to shed some light on how disruptive their families have found the temporary closures of cohorts, classes, or schools. Are their parents finding these closures to have a major negative impact on their children, or does the benefit of having them in the classroom outweigh the inconvenience of the closures?

- Melissa Tunno
 - In regards to the recent Title IX violation ruling against Danbury Public Schools (see attached letter), has this been addressed at a Board of Ed meeting? I am interested in hearing what the Board Of Ed's position is on this, as we stand a chance of losing our Title IX funds.
- Kathy Snow
 - I would like to provide some comments regarding the 11/5/2020 workshop. It is clear that some Board of Ed members are in favor of keeping students out of school until next year but I'm wondering when the Board of Ed is going to talk about what the parents who have chosen hybrid would like the district to do. And unless you are one of the few Board members that actually have students in the Danbury public schools, you cannot claim to know how it is because you do not. You do not know what it is like to have children at home, basically in isolation for going on seven months and you do not know what it is like to try to keep them motivated and mentally healthy. I also get that safety is a priority, but we are dealing with a double edged sword, because I feel the mental health of our students is in crisis as well. In the workshop, I heard the district has been reaching out to those in need about resources available, but I don't know how you decide who to reach out to. What about the average student who does not have food insecurities or issues with internet connectivity, but doesn't want to log on anymore, is frustrated beyond belief and about to give up on everything? How are they identified? Dr. Fong even said how important it is to address mental health and went so far as suggesting parents help children set up get-togethers, with children wearing masks. Yet in the beginning of the workshop he said he doesn't recommend students go back to school until the end of the year; this doesn't make sense. Students can get together wearing masks but they shouldn't be in school?
What about the report that K. O'Dowd discussed? That the transmission of Covid was not from being in school, but rather from community spread. Has anyone thought about the fact that the teenage numbers may be going up because they have nowhere else to go but to hang out in their community?
I would also like to request a review of the attendance numbers by grade level because I feel you are losing students at the high school level. I also formally

request that all grade levels be given the same consideration when determining when to go to school in the hybrid mode.

I would like to have the numbers of how many parents chose Distance Learning and the hybrid mode reviewed again because I recall it was over 50% of parents that wanted to go back to school in the hybrid mode. Those that chose the hybrid option are aware there would be cases of Covid and partial shut-downs, just as the Board of Ed knew there would be, and they still chose hybrid because there is a plan in place when there is a positive case.

Please consider the mental health of our students when making decisions as this is not only a covid pandemic; we are falling into a mental health crisis as well. Give the plan a chance and do not just throw in the towel!

CONSENT CALENDAR

MOTION: A. Spallino moved, seconded by K. Conetta that the Board of Education approves the items on the Consent Calendar, Exhibit 20-113 through Exhibit 115 as recommended:

MINUTES

10/27/20 Sites and Facilities Committee Meeting	20-113(pg.5)
10/28/20 Regular Board Meeting	20-114(pg.6)
11/5/20 Board Workshop	20-115(pg.19)

10 Votes Yes: Rachel Chaleski, Kate Conetta, Gladys Cooper, Joseph DaSilva, Albert Russo, Amy Spallino, Kathryn Hodgdon, Richard Jannelli, Kathleen Molinaro, Joseph Britton

1 was not present to vote: Loren Daly

Motion carried at 7:20 pm

STUDENT REPRESENTATIVES

DHS Representatives: Jake Goodwin

- This past month, the efforts of the BOG executive Council and Peer Leadership classes in our community project partnered with Do Something! resulted in the registration of dozens of new Danbury voters and allowed us to apply for a \$10,000 grant, which we'll find out if we won in the coming weeks.
- We hope to organize a virtual spirit week before Thanksgiving break, as well as a virtual club fair to allow student interest and involvement in clubs to continue.
- DHS converted our Distanced Learning live classes schedule to the Hybrid Learning schedule but with live classes. We now start school at 7:20am and end at 12pm.
- A congratulations is needed for the DHS Hosa for winning grant funding in the United States Design 4 Good Challenge with their pitch to improve student mental health at

DHS!

- The PTO commissioned “Awesome Senior” signs for distribution to families on 10/30/2020, and the past few weeks sports teams have been holding their Senior Nights.
- Seniors are also neck deep in college applications right now.

ACE Representatives: Chris Johnston, Nicole Quizphe

- ACE will be holding Parent Teacher conferences 11/16/2020 through 11/19/2020. Parents can sign up for meetings during the four afternoons and staff will be available for meetings from 5:30 pm to 7:30 pm on 11/18/2020. The purpose of the conferences is to address academic concerns and standing, as well as provide SEL support and strategies to our families.
- The ACE staff participated in a social emotional learning training run by Lion’s Quest in an effort to add tools and strategies to be employed during this difficult time for staff, students, and families. Each guidance teacher at ACE was given an S.E.L. tool box to be used during our Career and Life Skills course. The SEL kits include activities and lesson plans for staff.
- ACE would like to recognize and celebrate the students of the week for the last two weeks. ACE staff meets weekly to nominate, advocate for, and vote on each week's recipients, in an effort to recognize students who are demonstrating the five behavioral expectations at ACE. The award winners are Olivia Selino, Brianna Villani, Serena Som, and Kaylee Cotrell. Congratulations to all of you and remain ACE strong.

ACTION ITEMS

A. State Buildings Grant Program

MOTION: K. Conetta moved, seconded by J. DaSilva that the Board of Education approve the application for the State Buildings Grant Program in the amount of \$1,080,000 in accordance with 20-116(pg.20)

10 Votes Yes: Rachel Chaleski, Kate Conetta, Gladys Cooper, Joseph DaSilva, Albert Russo, Amy Spallino, Kathryn Hodgdon, Richard Jannelli, Kathleen Molinaro, Joseph Britton

1 was not present to vote: Loren Daly

Motion carried at 7:25 pm

SUPERINTENDENT’S REPORT

- COVID-19 Update
 - K. Prunty stated that 76 new cases were reported on 11/10/2020 which brought the 14 day rolling average to 46.4. Over the past two weeks, the positivity rate is just about 9%.
 - K. O’Dowd stated that she continues to track the positive cases that we know about, even on remote learning. Reports every day on positive staff and students to the State. In the last 14 days, there have been 40 positive cases in the schools.
 - Dr. Pascarella stated that there is a challenge of contact tracing.

- CIAC Update
 - C. Salvestrini stated that students were allowed to compete this past Fall with about 300 athletes and are still currently competing.
 - As far as the Winter season and CIAC, everything is in a flux. Based on reports from the DPH, the CIAC will have guidance from the State to give athletic directors on 11/17/2020. Thinking they will hear the movement of some sports to a new season and some sports potentially playing with masks. Not sure if sports will continue in the Winter. There has to be a lot of work with mitigation strategies and things from the CIAC to the school districts to make it work.
 - Staff meeting held on 11/10/2020, all winter coaches were informed on what to expect. Prepared in either direction it goes.
 - Penciled in to begin sports tentatively on 12/5/2020 with games to begin 12/17/2020. That is tentative and more info will be available after 11/17/2020
 - J. DaSilva stated that Meriden has had to cancel the rest of the sports season to the end of 2020. Are there any other schools doing that? C. Salvestrini stated that at this particular point, there are a lot of rumors out there but nothing factual. We do know that Norwalk and Stamford are waiting for guidance to come out from the State.
- C. Leborious stated that at the last Board meeting she had discussed the financial update but did realize it is actually for the next meeting. Also reached out to the R. Jannelli to schedule a Finance Committee meeting. Will be doing a report on current year financials, Covid-19 funding and looking at the impact for next year.

DISCUSSION

- Reopening of Schools
 - Dr. Pascarella stated that they have looked at the science part of this, examined the actual cases and looked at age groups.
 - Many surrounding towns are only now approaching what we have been experiencing in numbers all this time. A lot of schools are closing down due to contact tracing. A lot of episodic events that are happening in the school systems.
 - Our goal is to open but the numbers that were unforeseen caused us to not implement the Hybrid Model on 10/26/2020.
 - Numbers have now gone through the roof.
 - Looking at moving along and trying to make a decision to keep Distance Learning until at least Thanksgiving time and reassess then on coming back.
 - Will be looking at more mitigation strategies. Not only the cleanliness of the building but with stations at desks, social distancing and masks along with other options that some districts across the country are doing with testing options that we might have. The goal is to bring everybody back.
 - At this point, the numbers are much more severe than in a long time and to bring students back now would not be the right thing.
 - K. Prunty stated that we have been at this elevated level a lot longer than a lot of the other districts. The other districts are only now coming into the red zone, where we have had elevated cases since August.
 - If we were to start going into school now, with this high level of community transmission, we have not seen that happen before and just now seeing the effects

of what the high levels are in schooling with in-person learning. The levels now are creeping up to where they were in the Spring and we didn't have in-person then. We are learning from other districts how they are interacting with this high level of community transmission.

- K. O'Dowd stated that every surrounding school district has had closures. Can happen very quickly. Parents will often get notified mid day or at the end of the day that their child can not return to school in the next 14 days. Happening frequently in our surrounding districts and those are districts who are not seeing the numbers we are seeing right now.
- What we have been seeing in the last two weeks is a result of Halloween. We have upcoming holidays, people are still traveling domestically and internationally. Very concerning because we are seeing numbers we haven't seen in a long time.
- Also seeing other districts are now going full remote until January of 2021.
- K. Thompson stated that Milford, Trumbull and Shelton have all announced they are going full remote until the new year.
- Dr. Pascarella stated that if the numbers drastically changed the other way and went down, we would definitely go hybrid.
- Although it is difficult to leave students at home, we need to find a pathway back to safely start implementing our Hybrid Model.
- Dr. Casimiro stated that it is disappointing. Very concerned about students, their wellbeing and how instructional programs are serving in this environment. Everyone is doing an enormous and tremendous job in doing the best they can with the circumstances. We have a quality Distance Learning program in place and continuity of instruction. That is an important piece rather than riding out a rollercoaster that is happening in other districts. Will continue to find new ways of bringing high quality instruction to the students.
- K. Truchsess stated that for the majority of students, we are just working towards making the Distance Learning model as effective and supportive of all their different learning needs inclusive of SpEd students. Looking at a very small select group of students who have very significant disabilities that really is quite challenging for them to partake in the Distance Learning Model. Through collaboration with K. O'Dowd and K. Prunty, working on getting a small cohort of students into the building in very small pockets to provide direct instruction for them a handful of days a week. Most likely a two day a week model with the most significant SpEd self-contained programs and bring in half the class on Monday/Tuesday and the other half Thursday/Friday to be able to provide them with some in-person specialized instructions and related services while still keeping the health and safety protocol in place for staff and students. Looking to possibly roll out right after Thanksgiving break. SpEd services staff will be coming in during that time frame to provide support and services to the students. Wishes more students could be brought in but with the numbers, not appropriate to do at this time. Will keep the Board posted.
- Dr. Casimiro addressed the parent question during public participation. The question was in regards to why a school day is not the normal full school hours. When you eliminate recess, lunch, breaks, transitions and independent practice

from the school day, there is not a need to have students in from 8am to 3pm on a full day. When you are in school on a normal day, in an hour block of time a teacher can rotate through small group instruction with a group of students. The teacher can do three groups, 20 minutes at a time and the other two groups are in the classroom working on independent work and practice waiting for their turn. Those are just normal things that happen during the school day that may or may not be as transparent as they are now in this Distance Learning environment. The length of time, the school day and amount of instruction is appropriate. Everything takes longer in Distance Learning. It takes longer for teachers to develop the lessons. There is a lot of curriculum conversion right now. Lessons that would be done at the drop of a hat in a classroom have to be converted into a digital environment. A teacher has to plan how to capture, display and make information accessible to students. Time is embedded at the end of day for that as well as time to reach out to students who need additional help in this particular environment. The day is very complex, the lessons are complex and the work that the students are doing right now is appropriate to their needs.

- Dr. Pascarella stated that, in his view, students should be getting five days a week of continued instruction. The Hybrid Model is two days a week of that contact time. Breaking that cycle right now really does not sit well with instructional pacing of the curriculum. Particularly coming to the end of the marking period. All this comes into play.
- Dr. Pascarella stated that there is no political influence to say this is a political issue.
- Dr. Pascarella stated that districts around us are making decisions with so many students and he is not willing to take that risk. Somewhat conservative and believes medical advisors when they look him in the eye and say it is dangerous. Can not look the Board in the eye guaranteeing it is a safe environment. The risk and reward is not worth it at this point. Trying to give parents a lead time for planning. Will reevaluate around Thanksgiving to see what we can do for a return.
- K. Thompson stated that her team has been fielding questions and concerns. Starting process of peeling back in-person work from staff. Started the process on 11/9/2020 and will run through the rest of the week. Making adjustments for what next few weeks will look like in staffing.
- J. DaSilva wants parents to know we hear you, this isn't easy on anybody. The numbers aren't good and they are profoundly worse today than they were last week. If you look at the front webpage for Norwalk, Danbury and Hartford news, there are stories about schools being closed. Norwalk, Darien, Shelton, Wallingford, Manchester, Enfield, West Haven High School, Middletown, New Canaan, Hartford, Bethel, Brookfield and New Milford. They all have closures. These schools are coming in, going out and bouncing back and forth. The disruption that causes might actually be worse than being out, on top of risking the safety of staff and students. To send students back now with these numbers would be reckless. It is only a matter of time before more schools go in the Distance Learning direction.
- J. DaSilva asked K. O'Dowd how long schools are closing, cohorts or classrooms? K. O'Dowd stated that generally if it is a direct contact identified

case, they must quarantine for 14 days. Direct contact is defined as six feet of distance for 15 minutes or more. This is not one block of time. The 15 minutes can be over a 24 hour period. The majority of districts are closing an entire classroom or cohort. This would affect the school bus too, it expands beyond the classroom. Students on a bus are not necessarily from the same classroom so that would be an issue as well. Have seen that in non-public schools.

- R. Chaleski stated that she wishes we were one of the districts that flip flopped. Wished her kids could have just one day to make a connection with their new schools, new teachers and friends. In hindsight, we missed that opportunity in September and October.
- R. Chaleski stated that it is ironic that our students have been playing sports this whole time but K. O'Dowd stated the cases are from Halloween. She only had ten kids come to her house on Halloween. Yet sports leagues have been playing this whole time. Is there anything tied to sports? Even through the independent leagues, a lot of those kids are our students.
- Dr. Pascarella stated that he struggled with what students were missing out on. Surrounding towns were going in and we had the opportunity to let our students do something and not just take away everything which hurts everyone. In retrospect, we could have, but at that time we didn't think numbers were safe.
- K. Prunty stated that Halloween numbers are not necessarily from trick or treating but we are finding that there were small Halloween gatherings and finding, through contact tracing, that a lot of gatherings are from Halloween. Also, there are cases with sports as well.
- Dr. Pascarella asked if we are seeing transmission in schools that are in session.
- K. O'Dowd stated that in terms of non-public schools, they have not seen the spread in schools but they have seen frequent closures of a classroom or grade level. With numbers as they are now, it's only a matter of time. Seeing a spread in families now where all family members are testing positive.
- Dr. Pascarella stated that he will be sending a letter out to parents this week in regards to the closure through Thanksgiving and reevaluation after so they can plan.
- K. Hodgdon asked on all these levels of positive cases, are they symptomatic?
- K. O'Dowd stated that positive cases can be both asymptomatic and symptomatic but we are seeing confirmed cases of family spread, meaning the members have been tested and have tested positive.

INFORMATION

- CABE Professional Development Webinars November 16-18 20-117(pg.20)
 - G. Cooper reminded Board members to sign up for the convention with K. Pompano if interested.
- Annual Meeting, December 2 at 7:00 p.m.

BOARD CHAIRPERSON'S REPORT

- G. Cooper stated that the next Board meeting will be 11/24/2020 which is a Tuesday.

- G. Cooper would like to have a meeting with parents to have an open dialogue about reopening. More or less, with the information discussed at tonight's Board meeting and to allow questions from parents. Suggested the date of 12/9/2020 around 6:30 pm or 7pm based on convenience of Board members. G. Cooper stated it will not be mandatory for members to attend.
 - A. Russo said he will not argue with any medical opinion that we should stay closed but there have been comments on different medical opinions. Believes the team should gather medical information to speak intelligently with parents. We should be as well informed as possible. If there is a descending medical opinion on what to do, we should think about it or research it also.
 - K. Molinaro asked if the medical advisors would be available for this meeting? Dr. Pascarella stated we can ask Dr. Fong and Dr. Begg if they are available.
 - K. Molinaro stated that there will be questions about the vaccine and will the medical professionals be able to address that? K. Prunty stated that there is a mass vaccination planning now with constant communication with the partners and the State. They received a memo today to be prepared for a vaccine in December 2020. The vaccine will be very limited with priority to healthcare workers and hospital employees. There is a tiered approach to that. Deciding what the level would be for schools.
 - K. Thompson stated that her team was asked a couple of weeks ago to send numbers to the City so they can use those numbers in their planning to be ready with what they need when the plan is ready to go.

ADJOURNMENT

J. DaSilva moved, seconded by J. Britton, that the Board of Education adjourn its Meeting of November 10, 2020 and the meeting was adjourned at 8:12 pm.

Kathleen Molinaro, Secretary

(Meeting was videotaped)