

DANBURY BOARD OF EDUCATION MEETING MINUTES
TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 26, 2019- 7:00 PM
Administrative Center, 63 Beaver Brook Road

CALL TO ORDER

The Chairperson, Patrick Johnston, called the meeting to order at 7:00 pm and those assembled recited the Pledge of Allegiance.

ROLL CALL

Present: Joseph Britton, Kate Conetta, Gladys Cooper, Patrick Johnston, Frederick Karrat, David Metrena, Emanuela Palmares, and Amy Spallino

Absent: Ralph Pietrafesa, Rachel Chaleski and Richard Jannelli

Also Present: Dr. Pascarella, Kelly Truchsess, Kevin Walston and Kara Casimiro

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Mayor Mark Boughton, Police Chief Patrick Ridenhour, and Dan Donovan addressed the Board concerning the incidents that have been reported at Danbury High School over the last two weeks. The Mayor acknowledged two other Police Department staff that was in the audience; Deputy Chief Shaun McColgan and Detective Captain Mitchell Weston. The Mayor said the Chief and I wanted to stop by to review a little bit about some of the discussions that went through the community over the last week. There are students sharing stuff and pictures on social media regarding incidents of violence at DHS. And there is a lot of stuff out there that is not true, and I'll give you a couple of examples. I've seen posted on Facebook people saying that there were fifteen fights in the last week; there has been seven in less than two weeks. There was one text today from a student to a parent that was posted that there were five weapons involved. That is not true there were no weapons involved. I'm here tonight to say that we have faith in our administration and Board that they are united in reinforcing the zero-tolerance policy as it relates to any acts of violence within any of our buildings. There have been several arrests and we can't share the names as some are minors and protected under the law. There have been suspensions and movements for expulsion for those individuals. There is a responsibility that those students have to be educated, but it does not have to be at Danbury High School. We need to protect the rest of the students there. There are roughly two small groups of students that are trying to disrupt the educational process of 3,000 students and, we are not going to let that happen. I was in the building on Monday and I will be there again tomorrow. The Police Department is trying to work out the issues and disagreements, but I just want to assure people that we believe that the school is safe. The Mayor invited the Board to ask questions.

Chief Ridenhour thanked the Board for the opportunity to speak tonight. He said there is not much to add to what the Mayor just said. We reassure you that we are working closely with the Mayor and other school administrators. We have doubled the number of officers at the school to ten. He said there is always going to be a little pocket of problems in a high school environment. I think probably in the last couple of weeks there's been a little bit of an increase. Danbury Police have an additional presence inside the high school and the school's security staff is also on heightened alert. The students understand that we take their issues seriously. We have already taken action.

Kate Conetta asked about the exits and entrances to the school. The Mayor responded that post Sandy Hook we did an assessment in all our schools. Mr. Donovan said when the upgrades were done at DHS we took a look into consideration the single entrances and exits. Shatter glass was installed and the area near the cafeteria was fenced in which previously you were able to drive right up to. He said our staff is extra vigilant. The Mayor said the studies that were done on securing our school business are on file and we can review them.

Mayor Boughton said that Dr. Pascarella is leading a Task Force Committee comprised of Chief Ridenhour, parents, clergy and me to foster communications back and forth so that lines are always open to parents. The Mayor added if you 'see something, say something.' If you are out there and not saying something, that can be an issue.

Emanuela Palmares asked Dan Donovan his perspective on the incidents. He said it has been a tough week. The Mayor hit the highlights. A lot of students caused a lot of turmoil. Seven of the fights started in the community between some students last summer and they were still carrying them on. They are not the norm for Danbury High School. There is a lot that administrators have to figure out. We have to track a lot of stuff, snapchat and other media postings and what the students are saying when they type things. We have put a lot of students out of school; there have been arrests and expulsions. I can't share with you the kids' names. With our size, we can't have disruption from those students.

Dr. Pascarella said that last week was very unusual. The NEASC visit was from November 17-20. These are strangers who were walking DHS halls and the feedback of their visit was how respectful the students were. I heard none of the incidents. Breaking up these fights is not only between the kids, but it is also the families. There are other issues. Rumors were that guns were found - that was not true. I welcome parents to make an appointment at DHS and walked around the building. It is not a school problem.

Dan Donovan said we left DHS on Wednesday afternoon after NEASC's visit and were confident that their visit was very successful and that the process at DHS works well for the students. Then these fights happened and it just brought us down. I think the Mayor and the Chief were able to track the snapchat. It was a team effort. As far as notifying the parents, I did not want to put out false information, therefore the information the parents got was at 3:00-4:00 pm on Saturday.

Patrick Johnston thanked Mayor Boughton, Chief Ridenhour and Mr. Donovan for coming this evening and sharing their information.

Kara Casimiro said in regard to the NEASC visit, which Dr. Pascarella alluded to, we will discuss later. I briefly want to say that I also sat in during the discussion phase. As far as the report goes, I listened to the debriefing of the leader of that group. Some of the attributes fell in the lines of positive school climate, safe and secure home for students, creating a model for a widely diverse community. Then after a year, self-study interviewing work with teachers and students. So, these were their words and feelings about the school. I just wanted to make sure that this information doesn't get lost in some of the conversations.

Erin Daly, NEA Danbury spoke about the calendar. She said she spoke to the TDEC Committee about this yesterday. She has an area of concern on the draft calendar, it is the September 22 date scheduled for a 90 minute after school teacher evaluation. We consider this the most important professional development day. The concern is that we have an hour early release for the same type of work that needs to be done. Last year we had a half-day and years prior to that we had a half-day for teacher evaluation and professional development. We consider this a professional development day and the teachers consider this their most important professional development day because the teacher's work is the day we put our

goal plans together. And for those of you who don't know, our goal plans impact our evaluation, but it also impacts what we do for students for the whole year. It is when we are setting our plans in motion on how we are going to implement instructions and we have a SMOS and IAGES terms to use our student learning outcomes and our indicators of academic growth for our students. What we need to do is set these goals. We spend countless hours working with our colleagues from that data which is given to us when we are conducting an assessment in early September. When all of our students are pouring over prior data from years past and looking at the students in front of us saying what goals can we achieve for the year ahead. That takes collaborative work in schools where we have to meet with our colleagues, meet as departments, and our groups of teachers. It is not something you can do independently. It takes an inordinate amount of time for more than a half-day, but we are requesting that instead of what is currently on the calendar as a 90-minute school meeting we go back to what we had years ago and have a half-day. I understand the Board has been working the past couple of years to make sure we have continuous instruction days and make sure we have the most instructions in a month. I appreciate that and the teachers are completely for that on the calendar, but what we are concerned about is if we don't get this work done properly it will impact our instruction. We have to be able to have that time to critically look at the data and that is why we are requesting that to be a half-day. I don't know if any of you have any questions about that, but you can certainly send them to us if you have any ideas or concerns about how we could address this in a different way, and we would be able to continue a discussion. I know you are reviewing the calendar and Kara is counting days to see how we could arrange things.

Melinda Scott, a teacher at Stadley Rough School, told the Board that she would like to Kara Wanzer for coming to work with the 4th-grade teachers at Stadley Rough today. She is such a huge asset to this district as her depth of data knowledge is really unmatched. She helped us see very clearly today!

Next, I would like to address a few things that came up at the last board meeting, the first of which is the PD Day feedback. While I was happy to hear Mr. Walston report that overall the feedback on the October and November days was positive, antidotally, this is not the case. In many cases at the elementary level, this positive feeling was not so universal. Additionally, the way the evaluation forms have been rewritten now, it is difficult to accurately reflect on the day and give meaningful feedback. Also, because the evaluations are not anonymous, as they once were when they were paper and pencil, many people are less than honest.

Another topic that was addressed in the last meeting was the draft calendar, specifically the reduction in conference days. After hearing the discussion, I went back to my school for a little "data dive" of my own and found my calendars going back to the 2011-2012 school year. In each year, conferences were held over four days, not three as they were this year. The loss of a day reduced the options for parents to attend conferences as well as made for some pretty challenging days for the middle school staff trying to manage up to 100 conferences in just three days' time. My hope would be that you would consider reinstating the fourth day for next year.

My last point has to do with communication - a topic I have addressed in the past and is something I think we could all do a little better in. I appreciated Ms. Palmares' question on restorative practice. It is true that some elementary principals have been leading some different kinds of PD experiences, but... the roll-out, ... if there is really one, it has been varied and a bit unclear. My hope is that a clearer message can be shared with all staff as to how practices are changing around this.

German Sanchez, is resident of Danbury and parent of two children in the school district, one at South Street School and one at Danbury High School. He said he is an advocate for a charter school. He told the Board that his neighbors, who are in the school system, are open to a charter school. The overcrowding has affected our middle school as well. Our children and their education classroom sizes stretch the

teacher's time and they cannot help those students who need support. Teaching has been like an assembly line. Not enough desks, and faculty are not able to control students. I know the Mayor and Chief, due to the ratio to faculty, help to make the schools safe. In regard to bullying and vaping issues, how are they able to contain it? We have great teachers here and they don't have the tools to carry out their work. We feel the solution is a Danbury charter school. A charter school is cost-effective. I went to Brooklyn to visit a school and to talk to teachers. They have the type of schools we need here.

Stephany Fanning, parent of a Danbury High School junior told the Board that she doesn't panic easily. When her son got home from school she asked him how school went and he said "great". Then he said there were 11 fights. I dismissed it. I have great faith in the administration at Danbury High School. He felt safe to go back to school. I don't know if there is something in the school that brought this on. I know some time ago there was a tragedy. I actually called Level One Office and said they needed to get a message out to the parents. I got the community message but it said what went on at the mall on Saturday. All the parents began talking to each other. I was happy that Mr. Donovan was addressing it. As far as I'm concerned it is done. Please communicate with us. Even if you can only say we are on it and we need more time. That is all I ask.

The Mayor acknowledged Mr. Albert Russo, a newly elected Board of Education member who was in the audience. Mr. Russo just wanted to say hello.

RECOGNITIONS

Erik Savoyski, Danbury High School technology teacher, was awarded the Harrison Baker Award by the Connecticut Technology Education Association. Mr. Donovan told the Board that Erik has been with the Danbury district for 27 years. He has taught every class there is. But we are here tonight to recognize him for the highest award anyone can earn from the Connecticut Technology Engineering Education Association. He is known for his dedicated service to students. He has been in a robot competition with 61 different teams around the state, and always comes back with an update. To date, we have 7 robots. In addition to his role as technology education teacher, Erik is the advisor to Team 5150, the school's robotics team. The team has consistently earned awards and has several times earned a spot at the international level of competition. This is the second time a Danbury High School teacher was recognized. Last year Sterling Miller, another technology educator, was named teacher of the Year by this Association. (Standing ovation and applause)

CONSENT CALENDAR

MOTION - David Metrena moved, seconded by Kate Conetta, that the Board of Education approves the items on the Consent Calendar, Exhibits 19-149 through 19-151, as recommended:

MINUTES

11/6/19 Policy Committee Meeting

11/13/19 Board Meeting

DONATION

The Kiwanis Club of Greater Danbury made two donations of dozens of instruments to Danbury Public Schools. In October as part of its new initiative: "Kiwanis is INSTRUMENTAL in Children's Lives". The DPS Music Department will distribute these instruments among eight district schools.

Motion passed at 7:45 pm.

EMPLOYEE REPRESENTATIVE - None

STUDENT REPRESENTATIVES

Tamara Souza, ACE Representative, told the Board that she would like to thank them for allowing me to represent the Alternative Center for Excellence and share what is going on with our family.

- On Wednesday, November 27th, our ACE community service volunteers will sort and bag coats, hats, socks, backpacks, toiletries, and sleeping bags for our Thanksgiving Coat Drive, which will service those in need of support on Thanksgiving morning at 6 a.m. on the corner of Main Street and Elm Street. Food for the event is being donated by Nicos and clothing, backpacks, and toiletries have been donated by Marnie Durkin at Ellsworth, Carol Glitenkamp and the Key Club, Dallas Moore's 6th-grade students at Broadview Middle School, as well as many Danbury citizens.
- On December 4th Joanne Tolles and Daniela Esposito will be taking 21 students to view the performance of Les Miserables (Ley Miz).
- Lastly, ACE would like to conclude our day of Thanksgiving by saying thank you to Board Members, Central Administration, Danbury Public Schools staff, and the community members who support what we are doing at 26 Locust Avenue. Today we served 327 plates of Thanksgiving dinner as a gesture of thanks for all the love and support we receive.

May America always be above everything and God above everyone. Thank you all and have a wonderful holiday weekend.

Jake Goodwin, DHS Representative read Rebecca D'Ostilio message to the Board:

"I am sorry I could not join you today, but I am taking care of my brother tonight. First off, we would like to thank you all for your efforts last week at the high school, and all the proper steps that were taken in ensuring our safety. Last week was a tough one for DHS, and we would be lying if we said it was a painless week. My fellow officers and I were approached by multiple parents and students with concerns of their safety last week. As you can imagine, this was tough on us. As student representatives, we know a lot about our school, but we don't always have the answers. Students and teachers feel the tension of the halls as we walk them, not the administrators. The entire week, the student body seemed on edge or joking about what was happening. I did not find anything about this amusing. On Friday, I decided to take my brother home, he's a freshman with special needs. He told me he had seen three fights on Thursday and was scared there would be another. I couldn't help but feel scared for him as a big sister, and I still stand by my choice. It seemed to ease parents once a message was sent out, but some parents didn't know why it took so long, and why the school didn't go on lockdown until we figured out what was going on. There were a total of 10-14 fights that took place on school grounds last week, and as a student I would not like to see this again. Next time, we must do better. It is my/our responsibility to tell you how the students feel, and many were genuinely scared last week. There were rumors of a shooting threat (that were deemed false), but who can blame us for being scared of that, especially with the climate of our country right now. I stress to the Board

that we MUST take our student’s fears seriously next time before something like this escalates again. We are glad the students that participated have been reprimanded, and hope they find solace. Thank you to the Board for listening to our concerns and we wish you a lovely Thanksgiving”.

PRESENTATION

Career Clusters, Career Pathways, Sample Occupations, and Programs of Study
(Kara Casimiro/Melissa Nadeau)

Kara Casimiro said tonight there are two documents, one is “Today’s Skills, Tomorrow’s Careers” and the other is a document from the State of Connecticut describing some flexibilities pertaining to teacher certification. She started with “Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21 Century. The new Connecticut State Department of Education’s (CSDE) vision demands that all Connecticut’s students’ have access today to flexible CTE pathways that will position them to graduate tomorrow as innovators equipped with adaptable, transferable skills that will continue to the growth of Connecticut’s high-knowledge economy. In November we received the test packet that described the new career clusters that pathways have for the State of Connecticut. Basically, certified as having a high degree of potential and high degrees of demand and use a lot of regional economic settings to come up with these particular career clusters. I’m going to let Melissa talk to you about the difference between the career clusters of pathways and the programs of study.

Melissa Nadeau told the Board if you were excited about STEM last year, there are 16 national career clusters from various bureaus nationally. Connecticut has adopted 12 of them which fit into our labor markets. They worked with over 25 different organizations in Connecticut to identify where the labor market will focus on for our students for next 10 years. The 12 career clusters have a variety of career pathways in which eligible secondary and postsecondary recipients can create programs of study for students, leading to numerous related occupations:

- Agriculture, Food and National Resources
- Architecture and Construction
- Business Management and administration
- Education and Training
- Finance
- Health Science
- Hospitality and Tourism
- Information Technology
- Manufacturing
- Marketing
- Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM)
- Transportation, Distribution and Logistics

We currently have a program at DHS, Certified Nursing Assistant, that we are very proud of. Each year we graduate approximately 60 students in that program who receive a high school diploma and will also have their CNA certification. This program is in such high demand we get over 200 students that apply but we can’t accommodate 200 in our present course of study. What this allows us to do is to look, not only at what we do for nursing, but to expand it to any of the other 12 career clusters. Kara said in the back of the packet that was sent to you, you can see that there are a variety of industry-recognized credentials in a variety of the areas that correlate to the identified clusters. So, what we plan on doing is to put the organization momentum behind it right now because there is a sense of priority and after visiting some classes; CNA, computer-aided drafting, culinary art and some of the more technology processes at

DHS and seeing the engagement level of these classes, this is what we want for all our students. We feel we can start to move in this direction. She also mentioned that there are new graduation requirements for the class of 2022 and 2023. She told the Board that in the fall, the State Department of Education issued Updated Assignment Codes for Educator Data System (EDS) for the 2019-2020 school years, in an effort to provide districts with greater flexibility around teacher certification, and to support the implementation of the updated graduation requirements that are outlined in Connecticut General Statutes 10-221a. Melissa mentioned that coming up on January 16, 2020 there is a National Career for Colleges and Career Transitions Conference, “Designing College and Career Pathways” in Hartford. Kara showed a slide on the earning for the various job markets with a high school diploma and what salaries can be achieved with a bachelor’s degree. The last part of the presentation was “The Academics in Nashville, Tennessee.” She said if we can design something and make it look like this it would be a dream. Administration from Nashville spoke about the advanced course work and industry certification and the students spoke about the various certification programs they have at their school. Kara said we are hoping to visit Nashville. In closing she said that transforming learning environments for kids starts somewhere with willingness and leadership and we are passionate to bring that forward to this community. We need to start something different for the kids in terms of having a vision behind learning and, this is one of them. We wanted to present this tonight publicly to the Board because there are industry partners out there who are willing to help and back this vision. It may be the ultimate dream, but we want to focus and start to move in this direction. It could probably really be with some baby steps and some things already in-house. We just want to plant that thought and vision.

Dr. Pascarella said in relation to the presentation that was just viewed, “If you can’t dream, you can’t succeed.” He went on to tell the Board that when we sat at the NEASC meeting and they were asking you about curriculum, the point I am trying to make is at the Board level, you have a general idea. I’m going to ask the Board, this year, to look at a funding system that is going to help us do this. We’re going to drive the goal here. So, as I’m talking to folks to do their research, I’m doing mine. We figure out honestly what we can afford to do, and we have to stop doing what is not succeeding for our kids. To continue the way we are going, and unless we do it each year, we should really look to see if it’s paying off in terms of accountabilities. Are our kids really succeeding? We want this for all kids, not just a small group. Kara said there are 60 kids experiencing this. We want all the kids to do it. If we can step up, we have an equity policy and I said it last year. If you want to go down that road, you’ve got work. We have an action plan, an equity plan and there is an access plan. Are you really going to stand up and do something? Because, if you are, you are going to have to make some hard decisions with me. Everybody can’t have the same thing. We can’t get here on the resources we have. Kara said we don’t have the money; I say we have \$12.5 million dollars. What are we going to stop doing? What are we going to do to get there? We’ve got to do this for our kids, all our kids. I think we can do that with the right leadership, and I think we have that. We have the motivation and we also have sources to get more funds into the school system, if they are all lined up to the right purposes. There is a group that will go to Nashville both town folks and some Board members. Kara said she would like to get PJ from the Chamber of Commerce and she’d love to take the Mayor.

Patrick Johnston thanked Kara and Melissa for their very informative presentation.

Emanuela Palmares said she is very excited about this program and called out to the businesses in the area to help support the Nashville research trip.

The Superintendent said since we are on TV if there are any businesses out there who would like to contribute to our trip, just get in touch with me.

ACTION ITEMS

October 2019 Operating Results Analysis (General Fund & Grants)

MOTION: David Metrena moved, seconded by Joseph Britton that the Board of Education accept the October 2019 Operating Results Analysis (General Fund & Grants)

For the month of October, the district expended \$3,663,860 resulting in a fiscal year-to-date expenditure value of \$30,430,340 which represents 22.5% of the budget.

Motion passed at 8:19 pm.

SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT

NEASC VISIT (November 17th -20th) Feedback

Kara Casimiro told the Board that the report from NEASC, with our accreditation status, will be sent in April. Below are NEASC Preliminary Findings, as presented by Scott Leslie to the faculty:

- Positive climate
- Safe and secure “home” for students... creating a model for a widely diverse community
- Leadership team is effective and dedicated
- Teachers like students, and students like teachers
- Instructional practices informed by formative assessments
- Teachers are clear with students regarding what they need to do to be successful and utilize school-wide rubrics
- Differentiation is informed by data, regardless of large sizes and multiple learning needs
- Staff cares deeply and are committed
- Teachers get supplies creatively (own purchase, Donors Choose)

NEEDS:

Need adequate instructional supplies, lower caseloads for counselors, smaller class sizes, the wireless network that works, access to more technology, facilities with working heating/cooling and restrooms.

City Council Special Appropriation

Dr. Pascarella distributed an Enrollment Increased Costs for 2019-2020, which listed the Completed Items included buses, two FTE for ELL at Park Avenue and 1 FTE Bilingual at Rogers Park and 7 sections/overloads at DHS and 100 desks. The Anticipated portion which would be for the second semester included FTE's bilingual and bilingual/TESOL. In Special Education, the increased costs were listed at \$1,340,000 and requested from the City (special allocation on November 14th) \$1,250,000. With possible use of title funds in the amount of \$90,000. At the Council Meeting the question was, are we going to add counselors and social workers? We really need to, but we can't in the allocation. We just don't have the resources. This is not part of your allocation this is over and above the money you received from the City. As we move forward, this has to be the starting point. The Superintendent said he is going to send a copy of this to the Mayor tomorrow.

New Student Registration Process

Kevin Walston said there is good news for everyone. This summer we had hundreds and hundreds of new students entering our district to register for the Danbury Public Schools. For a couple of years, we have been considering school registration on-line. PowerSchool does have an on-line registration program. Our neighboring districts already have on-line registration. We are going to find this way to register to be more efficient as an organization. We are looking towards starting this in February and we are working with PowerSchool for that date.

Strategic Planning Update

Kevin Walston said last month, on October 24th we had a community strategic update. He said the initial community members that informed a portion of the mission statement, we circled back with that group and presented the strategic plan for last-minute feedback. We had multiple stakeholders in the room, many of the same representatives that were part of that initial day. In addition, we've also had students. A number of those students were here this evening. We had what we called expert groups. We had a table of five or six students, parents and five or six community members. Teachers and administrators and everyone were charged with responding to questions specific to the strategic plan and see if we landed on the right strategies and action steps to realize the vision. Frankly, it was a really powerful day. Students were really passionate. The feedback for us is to help move the district forward. Give the change and makeup of the Board we would like to ask this evening if it is okay to revisit the strategic plan after the new Board has been established.

2020-2021 Draft School Calendar

Kara Casimiro said nothing has changed. It is the same as at the last Board meeting. Haven't been any changes yet, still a work in progress. We have surveyed and talked to TDEC and to Erin about it and there are some things she would like to see. There is a fourth day in this version. We still have the 3 days for conferences for middle school and when I spoke with the Union, the President said she thought the 3 days were adequate, but a fourth is what is needed. But it is still a work in progress. The other things we want to do are the placement of conferences both in the fall and identify the district-wide conference week in the spring. so, parents are aware there is an option for spring. For the most part, the calendar will stay the same.

Emanuela Palmares asked, what is the challenge of transforming the 22nd into a half-day? Ms. Casimiro said we tried to reduce the early release days to less than last year. We had some complaints about the number of early release days and the impact on parents. So we tried to reduce the number to the greatest extent as possible, down to 6 from 11. We tried to stay away from the beginning of the school year. We want to get the students on a schedule to make sure there is no disruption in the first 5 or 6 weeks of school. There are really a lot of different opinions on how to minimize disruption.

Pilot Program Regarding Military Families

Kelly Truchsess said she and Kevin Walston have been working with Commissioner Thomas J. Saadi regarding registration information concerning our military families. He is interested in our proposal on getting additional training resources for children of military families. What we agreed to is a Pilot Program. He has offered to come in and train all of our people services staff to better educate them and give them some of the supports that are available to military families. So, if a family is in need they will have a greater bank of resources to help connect families. We're looking to do that for part of our main professional development. He will come in with some of his staff to do further training. In addition, we

want to put a military family identifier on the school registration forms. This will assist the delivery of their supportive services of students to military families who experience unique circumstances. We want to make sure the information is complete and that they are completing those information fields. Indicating ‘yes’ or ‘no, will allow us to identify families in the district who could benefit from these resources and then strategize on how we will get information for our currently enrolled students that were enrolled maybe ten years ago. This question wasn’t on our paperwork. Mr. Saadi said about five to ten percent of our families potentially will benefit from his resources.

Mr. Walston said it is not going to cost us any money. It’s certainly going to cost Kelley’s PPS time. I just want to thank Kelly ahead of time because her department is going to do the heavy lifting. Our takeaway immediately at the meeting with Mr. Saadi was it just makes sense since the resources are available from the State.

DISCUSSION

Proposed Legislation Agenda, Ryan Bingham, Senior Government Affairs Manager/Lobbyist

Ryan Bingham told the Board that this is a short session starting the first Wednesday in February. During the short sessions, there are all the committee bills so it is a little bit easier to track the massive bills that are going through. So when you see our report maybe it will be a little easier to follow the process along. Committee bills go through much quicker in the session and have much greater communication and go a little more rapidly so that’s kind of the really broad brushstroke. On what we’re getting into 2020, you’ve seen the legislative agenda draft. We’re going to use this kind of as a guidepost, not necessarily something that is set in stone, but all-encompassing. But these are very important issues. On Danbury’s priority issues, we are going to use it to inform how we look at bills that are coming through me in conversations with your delegation chairs, the education appropriations communities, to the extent they open up conversations on budget items. We also concurrently have a conversation on space which might be less of a legislative issue and more of an administrative issue with the Department of Education and the governor’s office as it relates to school use. I know there is a new group of Board members coming in so I can come back closer to the start of the session to educate those folks on the process. That would be a good time to talk about “Danbury Day”, which I don’t have the date for yet. This day is really important for the Board and community partners to talk to legislators to have them understand the unique needs of the Danbury Education system. I will be happy to answer any questions or any suggestions or additions you might have. He mentioned that it would be more of an impact if parents, teachers and Board members come up and testify when the issues come up.

The Chairperson, Patrick Johnston, thanked Brian for the update on the Legislative Agenda this evening.

INFORMATION - None

BOARD CHAIRPERSON’S REPORT

The Chairperson, Patrick Johnston reminded the Board that the Annual Meeting will be on December 4, 2019, at Beaver Brook Administration Center at 5:30 p.m.

Mr. Johnston said on a personal note, I just want everybody to know that it has been truly an honor working with all of you. This is my last meeting sitting here. I’ll be sitting over there in the audience. I wish all of you the best going forward for those people who were re-elected and the rest of us who are moving on to other stuff. Thank you so much. It was wonderful working with administration, the staff, teachers and PTO’s. It has been a great four years and I so appreciate all the advice I received along the way. It’s the

hardest job I never got paid for. It is a difficult job, but it is a rewarding job and a wonderful experience. It's nice to see how the other side of it works. The teachers, staff, and administration work so hard here. It's a great school district overcoming tremendous adversity along the way. I just wanted to say thank you to everybody – thanks so much.

BOARD REPORTS, COMMUNICATIONS AND COMMENTS

Emanuela Palmares read the following letter:

“Dear Board Members, Dr. Pascarella, Cabinet Members, Administrators, Teachers, Staff, Parents, and Students,

There are a few parting thoughts I would like to share with you today, my last meeting as a seated member.

About two years ago, (after running for this Board in 2015 and 2017 unsuccessfully) I came on by appointment, under extremely political circumstances.

I sat on the other side of this table and listened as leaders in our community, some elected officials today, others of the past, shared during the public comment section their disapproval of my appointment to the board of education.

I listened knowing full well that even some members of the board, Democrats and Republicans alike agreed.

I hope that my contributions have proved them wrong, that my personal experiences as a former free and reduced lunch ESL student in our district, as a special needs parent, as the editor of the only trilingual publication in our community, vice president of a foundation aimed to help immigrant students, and as a business owner have provided a different perspective on some of the issues discussed, raised different questions for all of us to ponder.

I hope I was able to shine a light on our district's “high needs students” (as they are not a “pet cause” for combined, they make up the majority of our student population), the importance of our early childhood education programs (where with early intervention our student's possibilities are endless), and the importance of our continuing adult education program (where dreams of a better life through education are possible regardless of your past). I believe all three need to be a much bigger part of OUR focus.

During my tenure on the board, I was told repeatedly that the board is not political - that it was a temporary period around November in odd years. I disagree.

It is political, very much so. But not necessarily as a constant force coming from individual board members, but through the very structure that the board comes to be. Parties choose candidates based on how they want to fill the ballot, or their plans for a political future, rather than a candidate with interest on our educational system or with valuable expertise.

Those who successfully get elected and happen to have a natural desire to serve our school district, cannot always easily or completely wash away the stains of the election process. Winning feels good and losing does not, believe me - I know. Both sides spend months pointing out every flaw on each other, and that is not easily forgotten – we are human.

It's a cycle. A period without elections, followed by elections – in other words, a period of tension, misguided and misunderstood actions...and then with time, another period of calm where it is indeed all about the children, followed by a period of tension.

So my hope, my parting wish for each of my colleagues that remain on the board is: Although you were elected, think as if you were appointed, for in fact, you were by the highest authority in our city- its voters.

Appointed boards of education, like in Philadelphia, for example, ensures representation that reflects our student population giving a voice to minority communities that are yet to carve out their place in the political structure, expertise from the business community to create a curriculum that will generate students ready to fulfill the job needs in our community and world, that there will be wisdom from retired teachers to give us insight into curriculum implementation, help break down data, that parents will have a voice throughout the process and a permanent seat at the table, and that students can be part of decisions that impact them the most (Just like our current State Board of Education is structured).

But if in our current local structure, ensuring that representation is not possible, it does not mean you can't seek it – as you research deeper into the issues before you, you can bring in that representation embedded in your decisions.

What began for me as a curse due to the negative reaction to my appointment, became a blessing. I am grateful to have been appointed and all that came with it, for it allowed me to serve this board free from political agendas, guided only by the desire to give back to a district that had literally given me a voice, and taught me to speak this language.

And to those who have kindly said that my leaving the board would be a loss... Firsthand life experiences are not required to care for and understand the rights and needs of our students and families that are MOST in need.

Each of you has the power to fill that role. Continue to raise questions, and see how your decisions affect them, dig deep during data presentations, and go be with them in their community events – they might return the favor, and come to a board meeting or two.

Remember, you are charged with the responsibility to hire and evaluate the superintendent, approve budgets, set spending priorities, approve textbooks and other curriculum materials, adopt the annual school calendar, make decisions regarding opening and closing schools, work closely with school and district leaders on school schedules, supplies, safety, discipline, classroom resources, facilities, and other issues.

Let our revised mission statement and our new equity policy be your guide, a compass as you navigate the challenges you will face in the future.

I thank all of you for the honor to serve with you, Dr. Sal for your service, the cabinet for your dedication, our administrators, teachers and support staff who I have the utmost respect for, and most importantly our parents and our students - you are this district.

I look forward to continuing my work in the community and have an impact on education, children, and families. I will always be available to anyone in our district.”

Respectfully,

Emanuela Palmares
emanuelapalmares@gmail.com

Joseph Britton said he just wants to thank Chairperson Johnston, Emanuela, Fred, David and Ralph, who is not here tonight, for their service to the Board. Maybe you know something I don't know and I should get off now. I have four more years on the Board, but I just wanted to say thank you.

Gladys Cooper said she is the veteran on the Board and she just wanted to say that it has been a pleasure working with each and every one of you. I know we didn't always agree, but we always came to the conclusion that we were here for all the children of the City. No matter what you are doing, it will be in the best interest of the children. We know that you will come back and visit us sometime. So, I say, come back and if we are doing wrong, please tell us and we'll move forward. It's been a pleasure. I don't see it as a loss, but sometimes we have to lose to slow down and move on to something else and then come back.

Frederick said thank you, everybody. It's been a pleasure, teachers, administrators, parents, and everyone. Thank you for the honor of serving on this Board.

EXECUTIVE SESSION - None

PUBLIC SESSION

ADJOURNMENT

Gladys Cooper moved, seconded by Frederick Karrat that the Board of Education adjourn its November 26, 2019 and the meeting adjourned at 8:55 pm.

Gladys Cooper, Secretary

(meeting was videotaped)