

FAIRFIELD PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Board of Education Special Meeting

Minutes - June 10, 2015

1. The meeting was called to order at 7:35pm. Present were members Mrs. Liu-McCormack (arrived 8:02PM), Mr. Patten (arrived 7:37PM), Ms. Karnal, Mrs. Gerber, Mr. Dwyer, Mr. Convertito, Mrs. Maxon-Kennelly and Mr. Llewellyn. Mr. Fattibene did not attend. Moderator Mr. Jeff Steele and approximately 40 members of the public also attended.
2. Mr. Steele moderated the discussion, which primarily centered around different aspects of the District Improvement Plan (DIP).
3. Matt Hutzelmann, OHS district, spoke to concerns about more stringent rules at his children's elementary school regarding parents being able to visit and have lunch, as well as the designation of a "birthday table" for children whose parents come in on their birthday. Asked if Board could create a policy allowing parents to have lunch with their children more often than their birthdays. Things have changed since his oldest child started school. Understands school security concerns but doesn't see how this impacts security. Mr. Patten responded that at his children's school there has always been a separate birthday table; said that the Board asked the police department for recommendations about school security and feels that the Board may not want to go against those recommendations. Ms. Karnal said that for students it's security first. Also need to consider that some parents cannot come to children's schools very often, so to have a policy allowing parents more access wouldn't be fair. Mr. Convertito said that some parents might not want other parents to come to school for lunch often. Mrs. Maxon-Kennelly said she agreed that something has been lost in restricting parent access, but Board could be viewed as irresponsible if it goes against police recommendation. Mr. Hutzelmann said that parents are now viewed as annoyances, thinks that a lot has been lost, thinks it's good for emotional well-being of children to allow parents to visit at lunch.
4. Gerry Kuroghlian, 246 Old Spring Road, Would like to commend whoever wrote the DIP. Asked about IReady, asked about F/R, was told it was "free & reduced lunch." Applauded "every student" being used, but said that from what he has heard there is not differentiation. Mr. Dwyer said there has been an attempt for more consistency, but said that different teachers and different classes may work at different speeds. Mrs. Maxon-Kennelly said that teachers have individual gifts and work differently, would hate to take away individuality. Mr. Kuroghlian has concerns as a teacher, is disturbed to hear that classes are expected to be at the same place at all times. Mr. Llewellyn said we do have different groups at different paces, and it becomes an issue as students move up, thinks we should add levels to help all students. Mr. Patten said that in the last three years he has spoken to science and math teachers in MS and HS who work to bring their students to the same place. New HS schedule will allow for more flexibility. Mr. Kuroghlian asked about research, said he was talking specifically about

elementary school; said math is problematic, it's sequential. He has no problems with the DIP, but is concerned with teaching to the middle.

5. Dawn Llewellyn, Fairfield resident, addressed the way math is taught in Dwight and Burr. Doesn't understand why district doesn't do this at every school. Has been asking for years. Greenwich looks at AP in middle school, why can't Fairfield. Questioned using free & reduced lunch as a group – how many actually fall into this category. Looking for metrics for advanced learners. Mrs. Liu-McCormack said she's asked the same questions, has investigated schools personally. A district our size should add more levels and create a huge amount of differentiation. It's a theological pedagogy. Inclusive is lovely, but depends on what it means. Need to have flexible movement. This Board should want to do this. Mr. Dwyer said that it's a valid argument whether or not level, it's an instructional methodology which he thinks should be left to the educational professionals. Ms. Karnal said there are many things the Board doesn't have input on. Would love to see leveling come back. Mr. Llewellyn said he has spoken to teaching staff and they believe leveling is the right thing. Board's purview should include such a high level issue. Board needs to have more say on what curriculum is and how it's delivered. Mr. Patten said that he has spoken to the superintendent and he was shown research that districts switch back and forth between leveling and non-leveling. No research showing that one way is better than another. Ms. Karnal said that she would love to be involved in more leveling; no two kids are alike. Need to work more individually with each kid. Board hasn't seen stats. Mrs. Liu-McCormack said that this could be a Board issue if the majority of the Board wished it to be so. Depends on who is on the Board. Said teachers told her that they want their levels back. Said there is no financial impact to add levels. There is some debate on this topic. This has been debated many years, but given the population in Fairfield there should be levels. It should depend on who gets voted into the seats and what the public wants. Mrs. Maxon-Kennelly questioned whether the Board, as amateurs in education, should be directing instruction. Perhaps more input or meetings with Dr. Title would be helpful. Issue is complicated. Board should not dictate how teachers teach. Constantly moving and switching students from one level to another would be educational chaos. Need to look at whole child, not metric on a test score. Mrs. Llewellyn said to look at data from Dwight and Burr regarding flexible grouping. Info needs to be public.
6. Carolyn Trabuco, 221 Sherwood Farm Road. Reviewed DIP, and three takeaways are 1) looking to embed technology; 2) executive leadership skills for students; 3) teacher training and resource development, fostering best practices. DIP is increasing transparency, hope it can result in efficiencies and effectiveness for the district. Has the Board discussed adding metrics as to how the manage the district. Mr. Dwyer said that the plan's primary focus is measuring student performance; are there additional criteria she can recommend. Mrs. Trabuco asked about points of empowerment and influence in the plan. Is excited about what plan says but has more questions. Mrs. Maxon-Kennelly said that there are also school improvement plans (SIPs); the focus of the DIP is the District. Mrs. Liu-McCormack said she had asked if school by school data would be included in DIP and was told "I don't know," hopes it will be included. Said that SIPs were not obviously available to the public, and that each school's plan dealt with something different. Not sure about action steps. Mrs. Gerber said that SIPs are found on all school websites. They are different because each school has different goals and needs. Ms. Karnal said that certain goals would have timelines, others

would be works in progress; some things can be addressed sooner than later. Hopes we can look at the data and reassess. Mrs. Maxon-Kennelly said that this will be looked at each year and goals will be assessed. It was explicit from CO that this is a living document that would be revisited and adjusted and considered. Mr. Llewellyn said that there are no interim measurements in the DIP. Wished SATs and SBACs were included.

7. Tricia Donovan, Fairfield resident. Doesn't seem like plan is fully developed. Asked about social studies and science standards, HS reform act, new algebra tests given state-wide. Need to consider SAT, perhaps GPA. Concerned about amount of testing in classrooms, especially in ES level. Where are STAR test results and reports. Doesn't think plan is ready to go. Plan does not read holistically, needs to be an integrated framework. Should have a meeting with stakeholders, a working session, to decide priorities. Who is responsible for prioritizing? Mr. Dwyer said that budget establishes priorities. Once the Board gets info from the state on standards and/or testing, they can better assess the costs. The plan is a dynamic document. Mrs. Donovan says that costs can be projected out. We have to look across the five years to see if it will fit. Mrs. Maxon-Kennelly said that parent input will play a role in the development of the DIP. Has huge issues with adding SAT and SBAC as a metric. Needs to ask what the purpose of tests are. Mr. Llewellyn says we don't have priorities. Need to be efficient with our time. Other plans have steps to delineate actions. SAT and SBAC allows us to compare ourselves to other districts in the state and country. Mrs. Gerber said that some costs are already included in this year's budget book for social studies and science. Mrs. Donovan asked if budget numbers are integrated into the plan so that we can prioritize them. Asked what tests are important. Children take a lot of tests, need to use ones that are necessary.
8. Trudi Durrell; 64 Woodcrest Road. Is disappointed that DIP doesn't have, related to page 26, item, 1-16, state-mandated testing for ELL students mentioned in the assessment section. Was this an oversight, or is ELL population so small that it just didn't happen; can it be rectified? Mr. Dwyer said he will make sure data team gets this info. Mr. Convertito said that this is a living, changeable document, can always add info, thanked her for input. Mr. Llewellyn said that we should add this testing since it is mandated. He asked the chair to get the Board all info submitted by the public. Mr. Dwyer said three people have made comments, he will get the Board the info. Mrs. Maxon-Kennelly said she's not sure the Board can vote on the DIP at the next regular meeting. Asked percentage of ELL students, was told 2.7%. Mrs. Liu-McCormack said she had asked about student cohorts that needed to be analyzed in more detail. Suggested the concept of having several student cohorts analyzed. It gives better transparency. Mr. Dwyer said that the DIP is already at over 200 data points, adding cohorts could make the DIP unwieldy. Mr. Llewellyn said we could outsource the job if the district can't do it. Need data on a granular level. Mr. Dwyer said question isn't can it be done or should it be done. Mrs. Liu-McCormack said we need to review all the metrics to see if we should focus more on external. Perhaps it behooves us to go through with a fine toothed comb. Mrs. Durrell said the ELL test she mentioned is the one test that is specific for students in that group.
9. Jan Reber, Fairfield. Addressed process. Questioned mentions of parent apathy – what was the cause. If we are amateurs how can we contribute to the plan? How can public comments

be incorporated into the plan. Stamford's strategic plan talks about meaningful public contributions; what is Fairfield doing. Mr. Convertito said that the outline of the metrics for the plan were put forth in September, and there have been many other meetings where public comment was welcomed. This meeting is a reflection of the Board looking for public comment because they haven't received many responses. If the Board isn't ready to vote in two weeks they won't. Mrs. Maxon-Kennelly clarified that her "educational amateurs" comment was specifically pertaining to Board members dictating teaching methods. The Board is focused on public input. Specific metrics have been taken off of the school climate survey. Post HS survey will allow for public input. Mr. Reber said that he spent time looking at other DIPs in other towns in CT; this one differs in negative ways. Many other towns have a process for involving the public through committees, involvement in data teams. Public input during the development of the plan has not taken place. DIP has ignored school climate study. He has ten pages of comments based on his analysis to contribute to the plan. This plan is not ready to go.

10. Kelly Jacobson, Fairfield. Spoke at BoE meeting in May with concerns about DIP. Believes that parents in elementary school get nothing shared about the performance of children. Nothing on IReady and STAR is shared proactively. She heard from a number of parents that teachers had IReady results but didn't share them in October. Was told there was an issue of calibration, but after three rounds of testing she doesn't think that any schools proactively share these results. Mentioned Burr and Dwight model. Board has power to demand to see test results. Can DIP include language that the district should be required to provide test results proactively to parents? Parents need to see data to see how they can help their children. Mrs. Maxon-Kennelly said that she would like to know what the hold up is on reporting the scores; we should find out. Doesn't know if putting such language into the DIP makes sense. There will be many things taking plan in the district not in the DIP. Mr. Llewellyn said that he has concern that IReady is not yet calibrated. Board members have asked for things following up on curriculum and haven't received them. He challenges the chair to provide a presentation on IReady at the next BoE meeting. Mrs. Liu-McCormack is concerned about statements that certain things are not within the purview of the Board. If the majority of the Board wants to make IReady results available they can. Same thing with leveling. It has to become a priority of the majority of the Board. Mr. Convertito said he didn't hear anyone say that it was not within the purview of the Board to ask for the IReady scores but he doesn't think requiring parents to receive info for it should be part of the DIP. Mrs. Liu-McCormack said she would like to see the IReady, STAR and SBAC scores. Sharing these scores could be part of the DIP. Mrs. Jacobson said parents should receive scores, and should get info on progress report rubrics. Apathy is the result of parents not getting any information.
11. Christine Vitale, 254 Verna Hill Road. Question regarding procedures – when the plan is adopted will it take the place of annual Board goals and district initiatives? Her impression of the plan is that Dr. Title doesn't want to put dates on every item, that plan needs to be revisited every year. What is Board's expectation on how they are using the DIP. Dr. Title used the PTA Presidents to help share info on DIP; BoE members came to PTAs to share info.

Doesn't see need to put dates on everything. Mr. Dwyer said that based on Dr. Title's discussion of timeframes he believes that there needs to be some flexibility with dates. Mission statement drives the DIP. School improvement plans develop from DIP. Dr. Title's district initiatives will continue. There are other measurement tools. Mr. Llewellyn disagrees with Mr. Dwyer's claim that only 10% of our budget is under our control. Board has ability to add levels or not add levels. Regarding no defined dates – it will be hard to define anything. We need to have goals and objectives and to prioritize. Mrs. Maxon-Kennelly said that we are not doing everything in the DIP simultaneously. We could ask for a sample of what year 1 priorities will be. But doesn't want a date on everything. Mrs. Vitale feels that yearly goals would play some role in the schedule of the DIP. How will everything be managed. Some districts use paid consultants. Do they all deliver on what they promise. Mr. Convertito views this as a five year document; he would like to see some pacing structure as it starts out. This is to him something in addition to what the Board is already doing. Mrs. Gerber said that some districts don't always use their plans -- the Greenwich Board Chair didn't even know there was a strategic plan on their district website. Mr. Patten said we need to get DIP in place by the Fall. This was a Board goal. Dr. Title has said that things can change as the DIP progresses. Asked public for input. Mrs. Liu-McCormack said that the process has not been clearly defined yet. There was an attempt in revising bylaws to put a process in place but the Board didn't vote for it. Unless there is a process that is clearly defined it will depend on who is on the Board and what the Board wants to do.

12. Suzanne Miska, 123 Ryegate Road. We did have a strategic plan that expired, don't know how it went. Hope the new plan will work. Concern about public input, how much parents are allowed to contribute or be involved in the processes of the district. Parents are kept from being heard. There should be more opportunities for the superintendent to engage parents in the repertoire. Concerned about budget implications, especially in regards to the alternative HS. Once Board approves something there is often no discussion on it. Why wasn't there more PTA involvement in feedback. Why didn't Board members and the superintendent come out to present the DIP. Parents feel that they have no way to give feedback. Mr. Patten said that there was discussion at PTA meetings in at least some schools. Mrs. Maxon-Kennelly said that a genuine effort was made, but perhaps using technology like Infinite Campus isn't the best route. She went out to multiple PTAs and presented info on DIP; other topics got more interest. Curriculum review groups often don't get big turnout. People are busy. Doesn't think that feasibility study for WFC is needed; a lot of what's in the plan we're already doing, like a lot of the tests. Mrs. Liu-McCormack said that there's room for better communication. Could do a better job of notifying parents and Board members in terms of curriculum and textbook reviews. It needs to be part of the process and culture, to be inclusive. A lot of people don't like criticism, we can't get better unless we are open to it; it will bring us to a better place. We continually acknowledge we need to communicate better but don't actually do it. The Board has the power to take action, if we have the majority of the Board to take action. We haven't had enough discussion on each bullet point. Communication amongst the Board needs to improve. Within each of these lines there's a lot of stuff. We need to prioritize. Mr. Llewellyn said lack of parent involvement happens because people are speaking but are not being heard; interested to see how many comments tonight are incorporated into the DIP. Feedback should be taken. Re: WFC feasibility study –

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he questioned the language, when it was changed he questioned it again and believes that it is still being done despite the language change. Approving the DIP shouldn't mean that the WFC expansion is approved without questions answered and plans presented. If we plan to build something it needs to be explicitly stated. We shouldn't invest in any new projects until we understand the ramifications. Dr. Title did say there could be room for improvement at WFC, but how can that be done and also then have an expansion where we take students from other districts. Wants to see it explicitly laid out instead of imbedded. Mrs. Maxon-Kennelly reiterated that there has been an attempt made at communication but it isn't always working well. Infinite Campus isn't always the best way, but it is efficient. You can't say an attempt hasn't been made. We haven't rubberstamped anything for WFC; we are seeking to make it a better environment; better to be proactive. We made a financial commitment to hire new admin there during the budget season. Mr. Llewellyn said he can get the audio regarding the conversation regarding WFC; there's a difference between improving it and taking students from other districts. When admin was added, a teacher was cut. Mrs. Maxon-Kennelly said that a leader is needed at WFC for many reasons, including educational ones, especially for this site. Mrs. Miska said that progress never seems to be made. We have a tendency to see the Board approve things without understanding full implications. As a taxpayer and parent she would like to see more information given in advance before it just becomes a number on a page. Frustrated with process of curriculum review; felt she was only asked to look at it and not make input. It would nice to feel like part of the process.

13. Mr. Steele thanked the members and audience for their participation.

14. Mr. Dwyer thanked Mr. Steele and the audience for their participation.

15. Meeting adjourned 10:15 pm.