

**Special Meeting Minutes (Town-Hall Style)
Fairfield BoE; February 28, 2015**

Call to order of the Special Meeting of the Board of Education and Roll Call

Chairman Philip Dwyer called the Special meeting to order at 9:35AM. Present were members John Convertito, Donna Karnal, Jessica Gerber (left at 12:05PM), Philip Dwyer, Paul Fattibene, Jennifer Maxon-Kennelly, Marc Patten and John Llewellyn. Eileen Liu-McCormack was not present. Others present were RTM Moderator Pamela Iacono and approximately 30 members of the public.

Public Comment:

Sandra Tallman – has students at FLHS and RLMS. Concerned with Science department at FLHS. Is a Physics teacher in Wilton and noted the differences between the two districts in terms of aligning courses. Is concerned that students at FLHS get different grades depending on what teacher they have, that there's not top down alignment. Wants to know what is being done. Mr. Llewellyn stated he had heard about issues, thinks we should advocate for a complete curriculum in curriculum development. Mrs. Maxon-Kennelly said that we have gotten more complete curriculum presentations in recent years, and that Science is due to come to the Board. Dr. Title is working for horizontal and vertical alignment. FLHS experienced a "perfect storm" in terms of late retirements and teachers on medical leave. Mr. Fattibene that the Board had discussed issues that were taking place in science department at FLHS, especially Physics, and said that perhaps Board should take a more active role should the issues persist. Mr. Convertito said that the curriculum is in the process of being reviewed, looks forward to seeing the presentation, thinks that valid points were brought up. Mr. Dwyer said that the school administration is concerned with vertical and horizontal integration. Curriculum is due to come up in 2016. Social studies is coming to the Board in 2015-16. Mrs. Gerber says there's no secret that there has been a problem at FLHS with science this year, but some circumstances were out of the administration's control. Ms. Karnal said she thinks there have been some serious discussions about science in general, and that she and another Board member had asked if science curriculum review could be moved up. Mrs. Gerber mentioned the chain of command in terms of who to talk to with concerns. Mr. Llewellyn said the Board should be made aware of how things are being done. Mr. Patten said chain of command is important, and said that Dr. Title has created much more alignment in new curriculum. It is hard to get new science teachers. Agrees that content should be the same across all classes. Mentioned focus groups that include parents.

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Kelly Jacobson – parent of a 3rd grader and kindergartener at Mill Hill. Biggest concern is consistency across elementary schools, especially the way in which math is taught at Dwight and Burr versus the other nine elementary schools. Many parents at those schools think this is a good methodology and she believes CMT scores back this up. Wants to know why the model can't be used. Mentioned Stratfield using Wordly Wise books, asked why no other schools used it. Mrs. Maxon-Kennelly said that all schools being aligned in ELA meant that Stratfield stopped using Wordly Wise. She said new curriculum are being revisited to see how they are doing 1-2 years out. Asked if Dwight and Burr's scores were the result of the teaching methodology. Mrs. Jacobson asked when her questions can be answered. Mr. Patten thinks teachers need to teach, wonders if total alignment will hinder that. Mr. Llewellyn thinks that the methodology at Dwight and Burr should be used at all schools, he has been advocating for this for years. In other districts, the BoE sees the data from the data teams; we should as well. Need to address consistency across district. Mr. Dwyer said you need to meet the unique needs of all children, and should trust professional judgment of the teachers. Mr. Llewellyn said we need to look at leveling.

Robinson Strong asked about student transportation. Doesn't want to discount safety, but notices that buses are empty in her neighborhood; what can be done to address this. Asked about bus stops. Mr. Fattibene is on the transportation safety committee, and said transportation is a complex issue. State is obligated to provide transportation to every student who is eligible. There are guidelines for transportation. Ms. Strong said she thought parents would want to lower transportation costs to afford more teachers. Mr. Dwyer said that there is a way to opt out of transportation; 10 parents opted out; 6 opted back in.

Jackie Reilly – parent and teacher in Fairfield. Concerned with residency issues – how is it being addressed. Trumbull requires proof of residency; Fairfield should as well, not just when students enter the system. Westport, Greenwich and Stratford have more stringent ways to check. Mr. Convertito thinks it's a good idea; happy to look into it more. Mr. Llewellyn asked how prevalent the issue is; Mrs. Reilly said she heard that there were more than 100 at one school. Mrs. Maxon-Kennelly said she believed there is one full-time staff person whose job is to deal with residency issues; it is hard when people can provide paperwork even if they do not live in Fairfield.

Pamela Patterson – parent and long term sub in Fairfield. K-5 math curriculum -- concerned about some things being developmentally

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appropriate; wondered if it will be looked at again. Mr. Dwyer said that the curriculum is always being reviewed by staff. Mrs. Patterson asked how parents and teachers can address concerns. Mr. Dwyer said to address it through chain of command. Mr. Llewellyn said that the Board has yet to see the impact of the curriculum, didn't see implementation guides. Good to get parent feedback through curriculum reviews. Mr. Convertito said that the Board gets status updates. Mr. Llewellyn said Board should have data on K-5. Mrs. Patterson said that teacher feedback didn't seem to register. Mrs. Maxon-Kennelly said that the Board will get a full K-12 review, to see it as a continual series, she respects the end desire.

Tricia Donovan – asked about chain of command. Said that parents have tried to give feedback and there has not been a change. Parents don't feel as if they are being heard; what can Board do. Mrs. Gerber said chain of command is there because BoE is not there to address specific issue in specific schools. Important to remember roles – what Board can and cannot do; what staff can and cannot do. Ms. Karnal suggested meeting with two staff members at once.

Carolyn Trabuco – What does the Board think is/are the greatest needs in the district. Ms. Karnal said that consistency in the district is important. Continuity from ES-MS-HS. Transition years have been difficult. It should always be about the students' needs. Mr. Patten said that transitioning is important. Would love to see more money in professional development. Mr. Fattibene said that fiscal challenges make things difficult in terms of maintaining the level of services. Concerned that the "average" child sometimes overlooked, perhaps should address that. Mr. Dwyer said the biggest challenge is balancing expectations of quality education with budgetary constraints. Mentioned achievement gap and school culture. Mrs. Maxon-Kennelly mentioned achievement gap. Said we need to think about who do we want to be as a district. Looking forward to see results of alumni survey once it is put into place. Should look at criteria for different rankings. Mr. Convertito said that learning gap needs to be closed, early intervention critical. Formulation of strategic plan is critical. Ms. Karnal said that we need to look at the best way to spend our money for the students.

Jan Reber Mentioned school climate study and was concerned with some of the results, especially in regards to students feeling safe on the bus and at recess. Hopes that someone will look at the issues and explain them to the Board. Also concerned about school building projects going over budget. Mr. Patten said that some have gone over budget due to unforeseen circumstances, others have come in way below. Mr. Reber

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said there appears to be a lack of supervision. Mr. Dwyer said that the BoE approves ed specs for building projects, which are then turned over to the town that then forms a building committee, which reports to the town. BoE does not have oversight over building committees. Mr. Dwyer said the Board will be receiving a report on the school climate survey results, and school climate teams work within their own schools. Mr. Llewellyn asked when the school survey results will be put on a BoE agenda.

Bill Dunn said that other town bodies use the rate of inflation in regards to the budget process, and asked if that is an appropriate measure. Mr. Llewellyn said it is one appropriate measure, we should not spend more than people can afford. We need to understand how we are spending. Metrics. We could do a better job negotiating contracts. Mrs. Maxon-Kennelly said budget should not be in lockstep with CPI. Mr. Dwyer said there is an education CPI, which is much higher than “common” CPI. Said we need to focus on needs of 10,000 students. Mr. Fattibene said we need to be concerned with overall economy; CPI shouldn't be only factor, but we have to be aware that it reflects what is affordable. Resources from the town are driven by CPI.

Bill Gerber said that sometimes turnover of veteran teachers is not always a bad thing, we don't know why teachers leave. Issue is how do we replace teachers. Teachers in many other towns are paid substantially more than in Fairfield. What do we aspire to be – DRG A or DRG B. Mrs. Maxon-Kennelly said that as a teacher she went to a district that paid more. We need to find a way to make our district attractive to high quality teachers. Ms. Karnal said that the Board policy committee is looking at interview process – how are we interviewing, how are we hiring. Mr. Gerber said that some teachers feel consistently feel attacked by parents. Mr. Llewellyn said in terms of DRG A and B, Fairfield floats the line, should look at combination of the two. We have had 72 teachers resign or retire last year; don't know why. Need transparency. Interested to look at climate study. Mr. Patten said we hire to teachers' ability. We can't pay as much as other districts. Mrs. Maxon-Kennelly said that new teacher evaluation plan has perhaps impacted the increase in teachers' retiring or leaving. Mr. Dwyer said that a number of changes, including common core and teacher evaluations, have perhaps impacted teachers' leaving.

Bud Morten asked about impact of teachers' contract on overall operating budget. Mr. Dwyer said that RTM had asked him about impact of teachers' contract on both salary and benefits of the budget, but that does not include other bargaining units, or medical trend, which is 9%, or additional paraprofessionals, or utilities or transportation or supplies. He

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was not suggesting that teachers' contract going up 1.7% meant that the whole budget was going up 1.7%. Mr. Llewellyn asked about town budget increase. Mr. Morten said it's up .8%, so tax rate will rise 1.64%, which he thinks is a good number.

Elizabeth Comb asked about SBAC scores and how that plays into how we measure ourselves as a district. Mr. Convertito said we don't know yet; no track record, hoping for data to understand better. Difficult question to answer. Mr. Dwyer that in terms of former testing, you can see 10 years of CMT scores on the FPS website. Moving forward, Dr. Title has made a presentation of a large number of metrics that will be tied into strategic plan. Mrs. Maxon-Kennelly said that she hopes SBAC scores have little impact on teacher evaluation. Is looking forward to getting more data. Mr. Llewellyn said the Board hasn't received any scores, but is concerned that we have no metrics to assess student achievement. We should be seeing a lot more metrics. Some members have asked for updates on K-3 ELA or math.

Tricia Donovan said that the Board needs to answer the question "who are we." Mentioned Westport's long-term plan. Fairfield needs a vision. Hopes that public input takes place for long term plan development. Mr. Dwyer said that public can always comment during presentations. Mrs. Donovan questioned early input for public. Mr. Patten mentioned Mission & Goals ad hoc committee; public input occurred then. Mrs. Donovan asked about 21st century skills being important. Mr. Llewellyn suggested that another meeting take place to allow public input for strategic plan. Concerned about lack of a STEM program.

Jackie Reilly spoke to common assessments, which take place regularly in MS. Teacher evaluation is not as difficult as people first thought. Questioned differences of goals for different teachers in regards of evaluations. Teachers leaving the system – she has heard it's about money and meetings. Questioned differences in budgets for art department between the high schools. Asked about alumni survey. Mrs. Maxon-Kennelly said that survey is not available yet. Mrs. Reilly said exit interviews a good idea.

Board Closing Remarks

Mr. Patten thanked communications committee for suggesting the public forum idea, and thanked public for turning out. Looking forward to more forums.

Ms. Karnal thanked the public. Feedback is helpful. Some constraints are in place in a large district. Parents need to speak out.

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Mr. Dwyer said the Board is planning on doing another forum. Encouraged Board and public feedback.

Mr. Convertito thanked all for attending. Encouraged people to reach out with further questions.

Mr. Fattibene thanked the public for coming out. We are a large district which is difficult to manage on a Board level. We should have a district that the town wants it to be. Would like to see every student achieve as much as they want. Need to provide opportunity and resources for students evenly and fairly.

Mrs. Maxon-Kennelly thanked everyone for coming out. There are constraints on BoE to respond as quickly as possible in a district this large. Asked for feedback and encouraged public to talk to neighbors and friends to encourage more participation.

Mr. Llewellyn encouraged public to include Board members in emails to staff.

Mr. Dwyer mentioned confidentiality issues in regards to Board members being included in some communications.

Adjournment

Mrs. Maxon-Kennelly moved/Ms. Karnal seconded the recommended motion "that this Regular Meeting of the Board of Education adjourn". Motion passed 7-0 (Mrs. Gerber was not present for the vote). Meeting adjourned 12-15PM.