

**BOARD OF EDUCATION
SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES
OCTOBER 22, 2013**

A special meeting of the Enfield Board of Education was held at Town Hall in the Enfield Room, located at 820 Enfield Street, Enfield, CT on October 22, 2013.

1. **CALL TO ORDER:** The meeting was called to order at 5:45 PM by Chairman Neville.
2. **PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE:** Chairman Neville
3. **FIRE EVACUATION ANNOUNCEMENT:** Chairman Neville announced the fire evacuation announcement.
4. **ROLL CALL:**

MEMBERS PRESENT: Peter Jonaitis, Tina LeBlanc, Kevin Fealy (arrived at 5:47 PM), Vin Grady, Donna Szewczak, Joyce Hall, Tom Sirard (arrived at 6:05 PM), Jen Rancourt and Timothy Neville

MEMBERS ABSENT: None

ALSO PRESENT: Dr. Jeffrey Schumann, Superintendent; Mr. Christopher Drezek, Deputy Superintendent; Anne McKernan, Chief Academic Officer and Guy Bourassa, Chief Education Information Officer

5. **DISCUSSION RELATED TO BOE YEAREND REVIEW:**

Chairman Neville stated the only item on the agenda is for the Board to discuss a yearend review of what went well and what can be improved upon. Also present tonight are some of our administrators. He would like each Board member to give their opinions and we will keep a list of items that are positive and what can be improved for next year.

Mrs. LeBlanc stated an ongoing concern for her is that every school is separate and operates individually. There is no unity amongst the schools. Even at the high schools, they are both run differently. All schools are run differently. We knew with the elementary reorganization scheduling school events would be difficult and is still a concern.

Mrs. Rancourt agrees and feels coordinating all events is needed.

Mrs. Rancourt has heard from the teachers and they appreciate the administration's walkthroughs. They would like some of the faculty and principals to not be present so they can talk to the administration one-on-one.

Mrs. LeBlanc stated that the teachers are collaborating more. Teachers are more comfortable with this situation. She is not sure that the specialist teachers are collaborating as much as may be needed in reading, math and SPED. Mrs. Hall believes that this would be a time issue.

Mrs. LeBlanc believes that some students are recognized to receive services and some students are teetering.

Mrs. Rancourt stated that a SPED audit is needed. There are some students that are not receiving services they should be getting.

Ms. Hall stated they are not meeting their IEP needs. She believed Ms. McKernan would review this.

Mr. Fealy felt we handled the crises dealing with suicides, bullying and Sandy Hook as a whole very well. The climate has settled down with student's tensions in the schools.

Chairman Neville stated we have dealt with a number of crises in the past two years with new administration. Rachel's Challenge has done a lot of good for us. Collaborating with the Town Manager and Mayor bringing Rachel's Challenge to us was a positive. Then we dealt with Sandy Hook and the turmoil that followed. We have dealt with a lot over the past two years. He is sure we could have done some things better.

Ms. Hall stated we have been dealing with a number of protective custody situations. What happens to the student after this? Are we dealing with a serious problem at all secondary schools?

Mr. Fealy asked if protective custody is also a suicide watch or potential bullying situation. Why are we using this?

Dr. Schumann stated the schools will operate a protective custody if a student is a threat to themselves, other student(s) or staff and they will receive assistance. Professionals outside of the school system will provide the student with assistance that is needed.

Chairman Neville stated at the secondary level if a student indicates that they will hurt themselves, the police will take them into protective custody. We have increased the number of students being placed into protective custody at the elementary level also.

Dr. Schumann stated we had discussed the increased amount of elementary students being placed into protective custody. We are going to look at the data with CHC but have not had the time yet. We were going to look at the number of students, grades and the schools to see if there are any key indicators.

Chairman Neville stated we receive around 2-3 protective custody notices each week and sometimes more. Dr. Schumann added it varies on the different times of the year.

Mrs. LeBlanc stated she will go on her children's e-mail accounts and will monitor what she reads. What she is seeing is not necessarily bullying. Kids in general have misunderstanding issues at home. No one understands them and they might say things to have someone notice them. They are reaching out for help.

Ms. Hall asked if Mrs. LeBlanc talks to her kids about this or the parents of the other children. Mrs. LeBlanc stated that if she ever saw something that was a threat, she would call the police. Her kids are not exposed to what some of these other kids are.

Chairman Neville added kids are dealing with a lot. When he was a principal, he saw that some of this is coming from inside the school like bullying or social media and there was a lot that was coming from home as well.

Mr. Sirard arrived at 6:05 PM.

Mrs. LeBlanc stated during the Rachel's Challenge program there was a question about if you ever contemplated suicide. Over half of the group of students responded that they had.

Chairman Neville asked if we place more students in protective custody than other districts. Does anyone keep track of this data besides us? Dr. Schumann stated we are higher than Newington.

Mr. Drezek added the State will also have this information. Sometimes it is the same child that

we have been dealing with during the same week.

Ms. Hall stated this might mean that the student is not receiving the services they need.

Mr. Fealy added that the student might be abusing the situation. Is there something that might be contributing to the situation? Dr. Schumann stated we are dealing with a lot of students.

Mr. Sirard asked if this is due to disciplinary issues. Chairman Neville stated they are transported because they may hurt themselves or others. They are not being transported due to disciplinary reasons.

Mr. Sirard asked if the divorce rate in Enfield has gone up. The unemployment rate has gone up in Enfield. This could be a reflection of the economics in Enfield.

Mr. Grady added we are seeing more single families at Whitney and the other schools. Mrs. Szewczak added this is more regional.

Chairman Neville added that more adults are also being placed in protective custody. Mrs. Rancourt stated last year the Chief of Police stated that 400 people were placed in protective custody and 146 were in the first three months of the year.

Mrs. Szewczak stated we have more families moving to Enfield that have relatives in prison. The prison attracts families.

Mrs. LeBlanc stated she feels she can approach Ms. McKernan with any question. We are moving in the right direction with our curriculum. She feels her kids are being challenged.

Mrs. Rancourt stated her son is overwhelmed with work. It is difficult for the students. She works with her son every day. The curriculum is challenging the students.

Mr. Sirard stated the math is very difficult for the students and some parents. The problems are teaching the students estimation.

Mrs. LeBlanc stated vocabulary is given every week at the high school and it is cumulative. The vocab words they are learning will help them with their SAT's. Her daughter has algebra homework every day. She is definitely being challenged at the high school.

Mrs. Rancourt stated some of the parents were discussing CMT scores. She never recalls parents discussing this. Parents are more aware of what is going on in the schools with curriculum.

Chairman Neville added this is a positive thing.

Mr. Fealy stated we need more oversight about what is being taught to our students. Ms. McKernan has done a good job of informing us. He is concerned that we are moving forward with electronics and handwriting is now archaic language. This is not a positive. We should integrate a foundation of the primitive skills.

Mrs. Szewczak stated they are losing fine and gross motor skills. These skills are needed.

Mr. Fealy stated with all of the texting and media, students are losing coping skills. This is adding to the protective custody issues as well as learning skills. They are losing their perspectives.

Chairman Neville agreed with Mr. Fealy.

Mr. Jonaitis added students do not know how to tell time – only digital time.

Chairman Neville is concerned that we are eliminating penmanship skills. What grades is writing being taught at? Ms. McKernan stated grades 3-5. Cursive writing is easier than writing. We need to balance where cursive writing can be used with an emphasis on writing. Staff has received training on this topic and it was well received.

Mr. Fealy asked if the writing is balanced. Ms. McKernan stated it is a balancing act of using student's skills.

Mr. Fealy also believes they need to have the students concentrate on grammar and punctuation skills. Ms. McKernan believes this is an area they will be addressing more and more.

Mr. Fealy asked when do they stop grading spelling as a course? Mr. McKernan believes in grade 6.

Chairman Neville asked how does technology fit in. With the use of texting and social media it gives the students shortcuts and they develop bad habits. How far will we go with the iPads? We have purchased a lot of technology over the past few years. He can see us saving money purchasing textbooks. How will this fit in as a curriculum tool for writing?

Ms. McKernan stated these are all entry points for the student's development of skills. Students can access applications while they are at home. Raz-Kids is an application that staff has asked for. There are many titles available for student use. Developing a balance is the key.

Chairman Neville believes we need to set a direction as to where we will go with technology. We are looking for efficiencies and economies. Technology is a way to become more efficient. We want our kids to have a set of skills with technology.

Mr. Bourassa stated it will always be a blended situation of paper and text. There will be times when paper is needed. He never thought that we would start with students in grade 2 teaching them basic keyboarding skills. This will be a challenge integrating these skills.

Mrs. Rancourt stated last year her son was part of the iPad Consortium. This year it is different. He does not use a computer except for the computer class which is once a week.

Mrs. LeBlanc agreed that computer use is limited. They are using paper first.

Mr. Fealy is concerned that we are not teaching students to write effectively. They are not learning proper grammar and punctuation skills. Kids are lacking this skill. They are missing the foundation.

Chairman Neville stated we need to link these skills together. Writing made him think. There are benefits to writing and technology. He wants to discuss the most effective technology that we can provide our kids with.

Mr. Sirard stated he learned thinking skills when he had science. You need to see mistakes and see the corrections that are needed. That is part of the learning experience. This is part of the education experience.

Chairman Neville stated we used to pay a lot of attention to grammar. Thinking and sentence structure are important. We need to discuss where we are going with technology.

Mr. Fealy stated a foundation is needed first. He would encourage moving forward with this.

Chairman Neville stated with the transition with our administration, we have learned a lot and there have been many changes. Ms. McKernan has shown us how we are evolving with our curriculum. We need to know where we are going. He would like Ms. McKernan to provide them with this information.

Mrs. LeBlanc asked about the placements for grade 3. How are they done? Do the grade 2 teachers meet with the grade 3 teachers? Ms. McKernan stated on May 7, 2013 the counselors met with the grade 2 and 3 staff collaboratively. They shared information for placing the students. She is personally nervous with the transition of the students. There are always expectations.

Mr. Grady is hearing that the communication between the teachers is not there. Kids are being placed together when they shouldn't be together. Special education students are being placed in the same classes. There is no communication between the two levels.

Mr. Jonaitis stated we would transition the students leaving JFK to the high schools. We knew this might be a new problem with the reorganization. Data from the grade 2 teachers should be given to someone at the next level.

Mr. Grady added that data is not being shared from grade 2 to grade 3. There are problems with communication that need to be addressed.

Chairman Neville stated we used to have the grade 6 teachers meet with the grade 7 teachers.

Mrs. LeBlanc asked Mr. Grady about when you are in the grade 3 classes. Is it across the board or certain schools where information is not being shared? Mr. Grady stated it is in all the schools. The information is not being shared with the classroom teachers. There are also problems with the students not being at the same level. Students are being advanced without mastering basic skills. Some of the students are still reading at a much lower reading level.

Mrs. Szewczak asked if the students are being assigned or were they promoted?

Mr. Fealy stated by allowing the grade 2 and grade 3 teachers to talk, they can discuss concerns with students academic performances.

Mrs. LeBlanc stated some of the schools feed several schools and this may be difficult.

Mr. Jonaitis added something is wrong here. The numbers are not that big.

Chairman Neville stated this is an issue that needs to be discussed by the administration. Ms. McKernan stated she will address this. Some of the students with special needs and supports can be grouped together due to the kind of support they are receiving. Additional research is needed.

Mr. Sirard asked if there was a policy change that allows for students to be promoted. We are responsible for their education. Assignment is social promotion. This will not work and will not do anyone any service.

Chairman Neville stated we should be discussing what interventions are needed. We need to intervene in a meaningful way and looking at why the student is failing. This is what should be happening.

Mr. Fealy is suggesting that the teachers should talk to each other about the students. A flow of information between the teachers is needed.

Mr. Sirard is concerned with students reading at a grade one level in the third grade. This bothers him.

Mrs. Szewczak stated students can be assigned. Mr. Jonaitis added some of the students in the middle school are also reading at lower levels as well as at the high school.

Mr. Sirard believes they should be reading at grade or goal level. This is bothersome to him. We are failing our primary responsibilities.

Mr. Fealy asked if there are certain test responsibilities or skills needed for passing. Ms. McKernan stated there is a policy for promoting, assigning and retaining students that is based on information that supports this.

Mr. Fealy stated this is more subjective than objective rating. Ms. McKernan stated there will be objective test data and some subjective test data. At the high school level, students must pass 4 credits and must pass English and math before being promoted to grade 10. Students in grade 11 must meet certain requirements to be considered a senior.

Chairman Neville stated students at JFK needed to have a C- or better average to be promoted. Mr. Jonaitis asked if the C- or better policy is also at the elementary level. Chairman Neville stated no.

Mr. Jonaitis stated you can tell when a student comes to JFK after being assigned in the elementary school with some retentions. We even had some students that wanted to drive to the middle school due to this.

Chairman Neville understands the dilemma with this and it is easier said than done. We can't keep a student in a certain grade until they meet the requirements. This is a topic for a bigger discussion.

Mr. Fealy agrees that this should be discussed further along with the goals to approve on. This would be a worthy discussion to have.

Mr. Jonaitis loved working with modified groups that fell below level at JFK. The students were usually below level in reading. The class sizes were smaller. You could work at a common base. You could see the light-bulbs go on with these kids when they understood the information. A lot of people did not like this program but he did.

Mr. Fealy stated those that can't keep up, you find remedies on the basis for them as a group. You cannot hold back your achievers so the gap is not increased.

Mr. Jonaitis stated one of the biggest drawbacks was you weren't working with reading and math as much. You needed modified text books. Integrating students does not always work.

Mr. Fealy stated the persons that are excited about learning will lose the excitement about learning because they are waiting for their classmates to excel.

Ms. Hall stated that Mr. Jonaitis is talking about below student performers.

Mr. Jonaitis stated he was discussing keeping the students segregated. Integration does not always work. He found that these kids outshined the honors kids. These kids are smart. They just cannot read or write and it is frustrating to them. When the kids see that they are all same, they feel better about themselves. This is from his past experiences at JFK.

Chairman Neville stated one of the biggest concerns is number of increasing paras for special

education students. He would like to see an audit done to see how we are using the paras. What are the gains from using the paras?

Mrs. Rancourt stated at a recent curriculum meeting, one of the Special Education Directors was present. Enfield is so nervous about being sued. It seems to be that if you threaten to sue, they will give you basically whatever you want. She fought to get her child into Special Education.

Mr. Jonaitis stated that a lot of parents use advocates now.

Mrs. Rancourt stated she fought for her child for years and should have used an advocate instead.

Chairman Neville stated you need to look at the student's performance and testing data and can see what kind of a para that is needed. We are over \$100k for special education costs. We need to look at this closely.

Mr. Jonaitis stated the special education population in Enfield has increased. Mr. Sirard added that the word on the street is that we are a special education community.

Chairman Neville stated looking at the student's IEP's and conducting an audit to see what percentage of student's that are being serviced are needed. We will have a clearer picture if we are meeting the needs of our students or if we are giving away the ranch.

Mr. Sirard agrees that an audit should be conducted.

Mrs. Rancourt wants someone from outside of our school system to perform this audit like someone from CREC or the State.

Chairman Neville added we need to make sure that our student's needs are being met.

Mrs. LeBlanc stated she would like a greater concentration focus on students that need math or reading support services that are not on the list like the students that are teetering.

Mrs. Szewczak stated the Academic Academy program can help in this area.

Mr. Jonaitis stated the gap between average and below average, special education students and the students that are teetering.

Mrs. LeBlanc stated our students are expected to know so much more now.

Ms. Hall stated that some students are very good orally but they are not able to read. She questions if they have been properly tested. They could be dyslexic and reading becomes difficult.

Mrs. LeBlanc stated her youngest child loves to read but when he was tested on the CMT's he did poorly. He is now receiving reading services. He only comprehends what he likes to read.

Mr. Fealy stated his son flunked geometry because he cannot retain what he reads. He has a reading comprehension problem. How did he get to the tenth grade with no one noticing this?

Mr. Jonaitis stated students can read for pleasure but lack the comprehension needed for testing. Some kids can orally read but not quietly read.

Mrs. LeBlanc stated they used math facts and reading fluency cards as tools with their kids. Things like this help. Mr. Jonaitis added that if all kids came home to this we would be better

off.

Mrs. LeBlanc stated we need to reinforce math facts or fun ways to learn it will help.

Mrs. Rancourt stated that Mrs. Collins is doing a great job at JFK and her digital presence is felt by everyone. She really gets it and is doing it right. She communicates with the parents. She has only heard good things about her being the interim principal.

Mr. Grady has concerns with the guidance departments at the high schools. He would like to see this be audited also. He has been informed about students apply for scholarships and deadlines not being met due to the counselors meeting the deadlines. Students are not receiving the help that they need. Both high schools need to be looked into.

Positive Outcomes:

- Classroom teachers are collaborating more.
- Collaborating with the Town and bringing Rachel's Challenge to Enfield.
- New Administrators handled multiple crises positively (suicides, bullying and Sandy Hook).
- School climate has settled down with student tensions.
- Staff appreciates Academic walkthroughs.
- Academic Academy helps students.
- Stronger curriculum is in place.
- Interim Principal Sarah Collins is doing a great job at JFK.

Items that need to be addressed further:

- Specialist teachers are not collaborating enough.
- Additional services are needed for students that are teetering in math and reading.
- Scheduling events between all schools.
- Unity is needed between all schools.
- Look into the number of protective custody issues.
- Grammar, punctuation and writing are not being effectively taught.
- We need to know where we are going with our technology and curriculum – economies and efficiencies are needed.
- Better communication is needed between grade 2 to grade 3 transition
- Better communication between staff is needed at the elementary level.
- Review why students are being assigned/retained and look at the interventions that are needed for these students.
- Special Education Audit – review the need for para's and review IEP's.
- Concerns with high school guidance departments meeting scholarship deadlines – audit needed.

6. ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Grady moved, seconded by Mr. Sirard to adjourn the Special Meeting of October 22, 2013.

All ayes, motion passed unanimously.

Meeting stood adjourned at 6:49 PM.

Donna Szewczak
Secretary
Board of Education

Respectfully Submitted,

Kathy Zalucki, Recording Secretary