

WINDHAM BOARD OF EDUCATION
WILLIMANTIC, CONNECTICUT
BOARD OF EDUCATION WORKSHOP MEETING MINUTES
January 23, 2013

BOARD PRESENT: Chair Dr. Sewall, Mrs. Osuba, Mr. Desaulniers, Mr. French, Dr. Switchenko, Mrs. Collins, Mrs. Lambert (arrived at 7:08 PM), Mr. Adamo (left at 9:00 PM)

BOARD ABSENT: Ms. Tinker

ADMINISTRATION

PRESENT: Superintendent Ms. Ortiz, Deputy Superintendent Ms. England, Assistant Superintendent Ms. Barker-Jones, Directors Mrs. Banks and Mr. Nelson, Communications Officer Ms. Kerry Markey

STUDENT

REPRESENTATIVES: No one

OTHERS PRESENT: CT SDE Priority Project Manager Ms. Gabrielle Ramos, general public, staff, administrators, news media

CALL TO ORDER

Chair Dr. Sewall called the January 23, 2013, Board of Education workshop meeting to order at 7:00 P.M. in the Windham High School Library Media Center.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Board and the public recited the Pledge of Allegiance.

WORKSHOP SESSION

Windham Middle School Redesign

Ms. England and Mr. Olkowski presented the Windham Middle School Redesign Plan. Ms. England explained that the redesign committee is comprised of parents, teachers and administrators who have worked for two years to develop a redesign plan with the vision to make Windham Middle School a high performing school. Mr. Olkowski explained that positive behavior supports and curriculum are large parts of the plan with the Mission Statement focusing on interdisciplinary learning, common core planning and fostering a sense of respect and responsibility with students. Teacher talent development, school climate and culture, which are outlined in the plan, are essential to moving the school forward. The plans calls for the Middle School schedule to encompass advisory, core and encore classes. House structure will be made up of a traditional day house and a traditional extended day/year house connected by blended learning to meet the needs of the whole middle school child. Committee member, Sydney Gilbey, was present to explain blended learning and its benefits. Mr. Olkowski spoke about the benefits of the extended day/extended year learning. He also compared a traditional day core curriculum with an extended day/extended year core curriculum. Eighth grade students will complete a culminating activity in eighth grade which will be a requirement for graduation. The redesign has a very comprehensive curriculum aspect which will meet the social and emotional needs of the students and move the Middle School in the right direction ultimately helping to improve student achievement. Windham Middle School is eligible to be considered as a member of the Commissioner's Network for 2013-14. Acceptance into the Network would provide additional resources which would be used to implement the redesign plan. Ms. England thanked the committee, as

well as Jane Cook, for all of the work and planning that went into this important project. There was discussion about behavior at the Middle School and questions were answered throughout the presentation.

PUBLIC DIALOGUE

Mary Gallucci, Willimantic, said that tonight's meeting had some substance for a change and complimented the energy and efforts put into the redesign plan. She said that the frustration expressed by the Board of Education is difficult to listen to but it is nowhere near the parents' frustration. She finds it offensive to talk about the School Improvement Grant as Natchaug is no longer enjoying supplementary programs. She feels that there is a lack of commitment and a lack of staying with proposed changes in the district. Class size is an issue and classes are sometimes doubled up due to the lack of substitutes. Teachers are occupied with other things other than teaching and the morale is very low. Teachers early in their careers used to get support from other teachers, but these supports are no longer there. The lack of support for staff is a direct cause of the flight of staff from the district. Every few years, there are new programs instituted. She said that there is some responsibility with the people who have been on the Board of Education all of these years, and Board members should go to the Middle School and Natchaug School. She said that having Natchaug at the Middle School is an intolerable situation and either the roof gets repaired or the students and staff go to the magnet school next year. Having Natchaug students and staff housed at the Middle School is impeding the Middle School's redesign.

Ms. Ortiz responded that many districts are having issues with getting substitutes. Windham is looking at Kelly Services to bring substitutes to the district. Also, many surrounding districts pay more than Windham does per day. Getting a sufficient number of substitutes at all of the schools is a district problem.

Lori Sfakios, North Windham, has a ninth and a seventh grader in the accelerated program. Recently she said that she heard that there may be a change in the team structure and the accelerated team will be integrated with other students. She said that this is the first time that her children have been challenged and there are no distractions in the class. She said that behavior issues have to be addressed before anything changes. Ms. Sfakios said that children look to their peers for social acceptance and will follow the students who are misbehaving. Teachers cannot control their classes when so many students are misbehaving. She spoke about a friend who substituted at the Middle School and was not respected by the students. She did not receive support from the administration and will no longer substitute there. If teachers who work there can't control their students, how will substitutes control them? If the gifted students are put back with other students, they will have taken steps backward. There has never been a push for the students at or above grade level; however, the district is always looking for ways to help students with low scores. Also, it is not the job of the teachers to be the parent; it is the parent's job to teach their children how to behave and show respect. She asked about student accountability and parent communication. Teachers don't respond to her e-mails. She asked why there are no students of the month listed for Team C, only for teams A and B.

Ms. England clarified that there are no plans to disperse the accelerated academy back to the teams. Also the district has met with Joe Renzulli and Sally Reiss and is looking into partnering with the Renzulli program for the gifted and talented students in the district.

Mr. Olkowski said that he will look into students of the month for Team C.

Dr. Sewall said that the data shows that PBIS works but it only works when it's done the way that it is intended and with fidelity.

Jerome Perry, Willimantic, Parent SEE advocate and SGC member, said the SGC charge per legislation is basically to help improve student achievement. He said that Mr. Olkowski has taken over something that already existed, and he does have a plan. Mr. Perry also said that tonight he is hearing that the main focus is on behaviors but he is not hearing anything about the resource needs of the school or about class size which are concerns. He also said that if a student doesn't have support from home with parents partnering with the

school, there are some behaviors that are not going to stop. He asked that Mr. Olkowski's plan be considered and given a chance to work.

Ms. Ortiz said that inclusion in the Commissioner's Network and implementation of the Renzulli Academy will bring additional money and resources to the Middle School beyond the general budget.

Elizabeth Espitia, Windham Middle School parent, voiced her concerns with classroom distractions. She said that the teachers are incredibly good but the disruptive students are in the same classes with regular students. As a parent she would like to have her son in a bubble. He understands that not all children are in a bubble and being at the Middle School is a learning experience for him. It may not be the best situation but the teachers are very supportive. She said that it is not only the responsibility of Mr. Olkowski and Windham Middle School, but it is also the Board's responsibility and she asked what the Board is going to do. Ms. Espitia said that there were four security personnel and now there are only two for such a large building. Windham Middle School is suffering the consequences of budgets cuts every year. Once the fifth grade was moved out of the building, the school was going to have more space but having Natchaug move there has impaired the potential at Windham Middle School. She said that people need to work for their schools and support the budget. She said that she loves the school and the staff and there are good people there but they need to be embraced and supported. All of the cuts have affected what is happening in the classrooms. Ms. Espitia used to do Restorative for Justice program at the Middle School but now she doesn't have the time because she covers the front counter. The Middle School does not have the resources it needs.

Dr. Sewall said that resource issues are a challenge. The Board will advocate for more resources for all of the schools which is a community decision. Mrs. Lambert said that Board members are trying to do their utmost to get Natchaug students returned to their building, and they are grateful that Windham Middle School gave up a portion of their space to house Natchaug.

Commissioner's Network

Ms. Ortiz provided an overview of the Commissioner's Network, which is a partnership between local stake holders and the State Department of Education to turnaround chronically low-performing schools. The Middle School is the only school in Windham that meets the requirements to be considered for the Commissioner's Network. Ms. Ortiz submitted a letter of intent in January which is the first step of the process. Ms. Ortiz reviewed the 2013-2014 Commissioner's Network process which takes place between January 2013 – July 2013. Each school that is considered requires a turnaround committee which is responsible for developing and reaching consensus on the turnaround plan and overseeing the plan's implementation. An instructional and operational audit conducted by the CSDE and external consultants in partnership with local stakeholders will then take place. The turnaround committee will develop a turnaround plan to respond to the findings of the audit. The plan will include turnaround strategies provided to turnaround committees during training that will be provided. Commissioner's Network schools will remain part of the local school district but can partner with or be supported by different organizations, such as a regional education service center, a public or private institution of higher education or an approved high-performing, non-profit educational management organization. Final selection in the Commissioner's Network will be contingent on the approval of the turnaround plan by the State Board of Education. Ms. Ramos and Ms. Ortiz answered questions throughout the presentation.

Dr. Sewall said that the Board was able to conclude the Board /Superintendent contract during last night's meeting and won't need to discuss that topic tonight.

BOARD PRESENT: Chair Dr. Sewall, Mrs. Osuba, Mr. Desaulniers, Mr. French, Dr. Switchenko, Mrs. Collins, Mrs. Lambert

Mr. Adamo left the meeting.

ADMINISTRATION

PRESENT: Superintendent Ms. Ortiz, Deputy Superintendent Ms. England, Directors Mrs. Banks and Mr. Nelson

EXECUTIVE SESSION

Motion by Mrs. Lambert, seconded by Dr. Switchenko, that the Board enter executive session for the discussion of bargaining unit negotiations at 9:08 PM.

On the motion: Aye, unanimous.

REGULAR SESSION RECONVENED

Dr. Sewall reconvened regular session at 9:50 PM.

ADJOURNMENT

Motion by Dr. Switchenko, seconded by Mrs. Lambert, that the Board of Education adjourn its meeting at 9:50 PM.

On the motion: Aye, unanimous.

Respectfully submitted,

Mrs. Luz Osuba, Secretary