

WINDHAM BOARD OF EDUCATION  
WILLIMANTIC, CONNECTICUT  
BOARD OF EDUCATION BUSINESS MEETING MINUTES  
October 9, 2013

BOARD PRESENT: Chair Dr. Sewall, Vice-chair Mrs. Collins (arrived at 7:04 PM), Secretary Mrs. Osuba, Mrs. Lambert, Dr. Switchenko, Mr. Adamo, Ms. Tinker, Mr. French Mr. Desaulniers

BOARD ABSENT: No one

ADMINISTRATION

PRESENT: Superintendent Ms. Ortiz, Deputy Superintendent Dr. Gasper, Communications Officer Ms. Markey, Director Mrs. Banks

STUDENT

REPRESENTATIVES: Nicole Moore, Dakota Fleming

OTHERS PRESENT: Special Master Dr. Adamowski, general public, staff, administrators, news media

CALL TO ORDER

Dr. Sewall called the October 9, 2013, Special Board of Education regular business meeting to order at 7:02 P.M. in the Windham High School Library Media Center.

There was a moment of silence for Skye McKee, an eight-year old student, who passed away last weekend.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Mrs. Collins led the Board and the public in the reciting of the Pledge of Allegiance.

BOARD OF EDUCATION MINUTES

The September 11, 2013, business meeting minutes (Ref. 1); the September 18, 2013, special meeting minutes; and the September 25, 2013, workshop meeting minutes were accepted as submitted.

Dr. Sewall explained that there are two Board of Education policies, which are not compatible, that address the length of public comment. These policies will be reviewed and revised. At this time, speakers will be permitted to speak for five minutes.

PUBLIC DIALOGUE

Dorothy Potter, STEM Headmaster at Windham High School spoke on behalf of the headmasters and administrators at the High School in support of Superintendent Ortiz. She said that Ms. Ortiz treats them as individuals and cares about their goals and what they are trying to accomplish, and she gives them good advice. She said that Ms. Ortiz is a true asset to the school community.

Lorraine McDevitt, Willimantic, reported on the activities for Windham students on behalf of the Windham Regional Arts Council. She said that again this year, the third and fifth grade students, including fifth grade students from the magnet school, will be attending the symphony and the opera at the Hyde Center. Ms. McDevitt said that the Windham school system is well represented and the students are among the best behaved children in attendance. She said that all of this would not be possible without the cooperation and support of Ms. Ortiz. She said that Ms. Ortiz's commitment to the children and to the programs offered by the Windham Regional Arts Council is truly appreciated by the members. If additional

funding is received, the Council would like to expand the program and offer a trip to Gillette Castle for fifth grade students. Classes would participate in a contest and the class that won would visit the Castle. Ms. McDevitt said that it is the Council's pleasure to provide these activities for the children and to work with Ms. Ortiz who is always in favor of things that benefit the children.

Melanie Godbout, teacher, coach, parent, class advisor and product of Windham Public Schools, spoke on behalf of Ms. Ortiz. She said that when she was in school, she didn't know her superintendent but her daughter, a tenth grade student in the STEM program, and her daughter's peers know Ms. Ortiz because she is present at many of the school and community activities. She said that Ms. Ortiz is available and is approachable and is a compassionate and committed superintendent. Ms. Godbout said that people don't always agree with her decisions, but they cannot dispute the fact that she is a stable presence in the district. She asked why Ms. Ortiz is held accountable for test scores if others aren't. She urged the Board to do what is best for the district and the community by not depriving them of having a transparent leader who understands the vision for the town and the schools.

Mary Gallucci, Willimantic, said that fifth grade students at Barrows are treated as part of the middle school but that doesn't happen at the other schools. She asked the Board to explore having a healthier bus policy by limiting the amount of time students can ride the bus. Her son, who lives fifteen minutes from the school he attends, rides the bus for one hour and fifteen minutes in the morning. She said that children of staff members should be allowed to attend the magnet school or any school in the district. She asked how square footage at the high school is calculated. Ms. Gallucci said that she is troubled by discussions about the capacity of the high school and is also troubled by cuts to programs like auto shop and industrial arts. Ms. Gallucci said that when exploring the magnet school idea for the high school, protections for the town and the district should also be explored if percentages of out-of-district students aren't met. She said that Windham shouldn't have programs only if students from other districts are also attending. She said that she supports the Superintendent and pointed out that one person had a letter to the editor published twice along with a difficult to understand op ed piece as compared to other individuals who have written on the Superintendent's behalf including herself. She said that she is distressed by the number of TFA teachers at Windham Middle School and asked for a count of the number of TFA teachers there. She also asked what will happen when there is not a stable teaching force at the school. She asked if Board members visit the schools while they are in session to see what is happening. Ms. Gallucci said that she feels the policy being discussed tonight about magnet schools is ambiguous regarding enrollment of out-of-district families and feels it could be adapted in ways to be detrimental to families. She also said that she doesn't like discussion about choice. Ms. Gallucci said that she would like to know how Natchaug School test scores are being evaluated when there were additional classes in third and fourth grades. She said that there should be an audit because Steven Adamowski disrupted the School Improvement Grant in its third year. She also said that she protested the cuts to preschool immediately after they happened which occurred as soon as Steven Adamowski came to the district in September 2011.

Mike Lessard, South Windham, spoke on behalf of the teachers. He submitted a petition on behalf of Superintendent Ortiz keeping her position. He said that even though it was just generated yesterday, the petition already has one hundred and sixty-five staff member signatures on it; and a high percentage of the signatures are those of teachers. Mr. Lessard said that Ms. Ortiz has stability, she has grown, and she cares a lot. The petition reads as follows: *Ana Ortiz has been Superintendent of Windham Public Schools during a period of unprecedented state intervention. The appointment of a Special Master to oversee the district has significantly curtailed the autonomy of the Superintendent and led to widespread programmatic and structural changes. In his report to the State Board of Education in September, the Special Master lauded Windham for making 'significant strides' over the past two years. In the same report, he detailed the evaluation process for the superintendent being based upon "gap-closing targets for the improvement of student achievement, and implementation of strategies of the SOP designed to bring about such*

*improvement. He notes that “the district has maintained a focus on the Performance Targets” of the strategies outlined in the SOP. In his commentary concerning testing results, the Special Master notes that scores were ‘mixed,’ and that ‘progress was not expected at the Windham Middle School following a 50% turnover in staff’ and that the declining CAPT scores at the high school [were not] “representative of their respective programs” [STEM and Humanities]. In the press, both the Special Master and Board of Education Chair have called for patience in measuring the presumably positive results of myriad interventions and programmatic changes. We urge the Board to take a similar approach in its evaluation of Superintendent Ortiz and allow her the opportunity to continue to serve the district while evidence related to the success of state intervention under the auspices of the Special Master is gathered. We recognize the strength and stability Superintendent Ortiz represents within this district. Superintendent Ortiz knows her staff and her students, and she is a devoted advocate for this community. Her passion for achieving educational excellence and her tireless willingness to serve our community are laudable.*

Bill Powers, Windham, said that he spoke in support of the Superintendent at the last Board meeting and has a couple of other things to say. He said that the petition is a vote of confidence for the Superintendent by the teachers in this district. He took graduate courses at the University of Connecticut Neag School, and as part of his course work, he researched and spoke with many Latino parents about their experiences in Windham. 100% of the parents that he interviewed spoke very positively about Windham’s Superintendent. Parents felt comfortable with her and felt that she was working for them. They felt that Ms. Ortiz was involved in the lives of families and students. He said that the reason he did the research was to get a better handle on understanding how to involve Latino parents. The parents he spoke with thought that Windham has a great Superintendent and he agrees.

Kim Begin, Art teacher at Windham Middle School, said that she was sad to have to have this conversation. She said that the Superintendent is very likeable, she is approachable and she tells the truth. Ms. Begin said that she has served on many committees with her, including working many hours with her on the Turnaround Committee, and has seen the time and energy that she puts in to her work. She said that Ms. Ortiz attends a lot of functions after hours and puts 100% into everything that she does. Ms. Begin said that she doesn’t agree with taking data and scores and tying them into evaluations. She said that our children are not statistics. Ms. Begin said that when budgets aren’t passed year after year, the education budget must be lowered, and the district has had to get grants and figure out other ways to keep the schools running. She said that there have been many initiatives which never last longer than a year; and if teachers are confused by these constant changes, how does the Board think the students feel? She said that Ms. Ortiz is the one constant thing the district has. Ms. Begin said that everyone is responsible for test scores; it is not only one person; and now teachers think that they aren’t going to keep their jobs because children aren’t passing. She said that maybe the tests should be looked at. She ended by saying, “Shame on all of you if you don’t vote to renew her contract.”

Nicole Moore, said that lunches have considerably shrunk since last year. Students are complaining about the size and the fact that the cafeteria is running out of hot lunches. She said that student athletes who have an away game after school don’t eat until 7:30 at night. She showed the size of the bagel which was very hard and difficult to eat. She said that a protein consists of a small yogurt or string cheese and a fruit which is not enough. She ended by saying that that Ms. Ortiz is wonderful.

Marissa Machalek, WHS senior student, agreed with Ms. Moore and said that twenty students went without lunch yesterday. She said that this could affect test scores. She also said that Ms. Ortiz is a leader who supports the students as a whole. She said that Ms. Ortiz made time in her schedule to speak with her mother who had some issues with the school when no one else would take the time to listen and try to help her. Ms. Machalek said that she shouldn’t have to sit here and defend the Superintendent. She said that she doesn’t understand why test scores are being targeted at the Superintendent while no one else is being blamed.

Tom Drewry, Willimantic, clarified a comment he made at the last meeting in regards to the Board's adherence to its public dialogue policy. He said that he didn't mean to suggest that the Board wasn't in compliance with state law that establishes minimum guidelines for conducting Board of Education meetings but rather was not in full compliance with aspects of its own locally adopted policy that is contradictory. He has exchanged e-mails on the matter with Chairman Sewall and is confident that he and the Board are committed to the free and open exchange of conversation and ideas. He said that he believes that the public forum should be conducted to allow the maximum possible participation on the part of citizens because it is the one vehicle to ensure that certain kinds of information and perspectives are entered into the public record which is vital because the daily local newspaper takes a hostile position towards the school system in general. Mr. Drewry said that the local newspaper's assault on our schools comes not only through seeming never ending ill-informed and poorly articulated editorials but in its misrepresentation and outright omission of key voices pertinent to educational policy in town. He also said that the newspaper's editorial policy reveals its bias and newspaper pieces advocating pro school positions are difficult to find on its pages and anti-school positions regularly are given greater opportunities to state their cases. He said that Mr. Fenn was just granted over 1000 words by the newspaper where he demonstrated minimal knowledge and less understanding, and his piece was a jumble of misinformation and contradictions. Mr. Drewry said that it appears that Mr. Fenn believes that Ms. Ortiz should be replaced because she did not implement with adequate fidelity the Special Master's program of reform. He said that Mr. Fenn's reference to high teacher turnover is one of the few accurate points in his article; however, no one understands an inexperienced staff is primarily a virtue. He also said that the Special Master's recognition of the benefits of a highly experienced staff is written directly into the Middle School Turnaround Plan, and it is defined as a need addressed to the specific recruitment and retention strategies. Also, the Special Master's initial strategy was to bring in TFA as a compromised necessity because the district has been unable to fill all of its open positions. Mr. Drewry said that Windham does hire into August but has never had serious problems finding viable candidates. He said that Mr. Fenn has been given a wide audience to disseminate questionable claims about the Superintendent's performance; and therefore, Windham needs the public forum to function at its most open and accessible so citizens are able to garner a fuller and more accurate understanding of the issues than they would have if they had to depend exclusively on the local media.

Alexsandra Rios, North Windham, spoke in Spanish (Ms. Ortiz translated). She said that the bus stop is not convenient for her child due to medical issues. She doesn't understand who created the bus routes. She asked why students are being picked up outside of Windham Heights but students who live in Ivy Gardens are picked up closer to where they live. She also said that students who live on Pennywood have to walk to High Street.

## REPORTS

### Superintendent's Report

#### Discipline Data for Middle School and High School

Mr. Olkowski compared discipline data for last year to current data for this year for the Middle School. He reported that students and teachers are working very hard to improve school climate, and the beginning of this school year has been very positive. He reviewed the number of referrals per day which are much lower compared to last year at this time. He indicated that the implementation of PBIS and many of the interventions that began last year have helped to make a difference. Mr. Olkowski also reported that great strides have been made to lower the number of students in the hallways. He reviewed the steps taken, which will continue, to promote positive school climate and culture at the school.

Ms. Potter and Mr. Harris presented discipline data for the High School. Data for out-of-school suspension incidents, in-school suspension incidents, out-of-school suspensions by unique student, and in-school suspensions by unique student were compared by month for last year and thus far for this year. Their

ultimate goal is to get students who are serving suspensions back into the classroom. Many interventions that have been put in place were reviewed, including PBIS. Contacting parents and parent engagement are areas of focus for this year at the High School.

### Committee Reports

#### Finance and Audit Committee

Mr. Johnson reviewed budget transfers for 2012-2013 which are included as an action item on tonight's agenda.

#### School Planning and Design Committee

Mrs. Lambert reported that plans for the Natchaug roof are moving forward. Also, Ms. Ortiz met with Father LaPointe regarding parking spaces at St. Joseph's Church and a Memorandum of Understanding is in progress. Mrs. Lambert reported that Mr. Donaldson has gone through the magnet school and there are a few small items to be taken care of. The order of the Facilities Master Plan was discussed regarding moving the High School to the first phase of the plan due to the upcoming accreditation process. Four possible options for the school were reviewed: increasing the enrollment to 1000 students; tearing down a portion of the building to accommodate the number of enrolled students; building a new high school; or including preschool students and taking a portion of the building off line to use for Central Office space. The committee will explore the last option to maximize reimbursement. Mrs. Lambert will draw up a proposal to have Mr. Donaldson included in the standing building committee that is being formed by the Town. This will be brought to the full Board prior to submitting it to the Town Council.

#### Executive Committee

Dr. Sewall reported that the Executive Committee agreed to form a committee to review policy updates in order to keep up with statute changes, as well as to identify present policies that are contradictory or redundant. Policies will be brought to the full Board for approval as necessary. Mrs. Osuba will chair the committee and Ms. Tinker and Mr. Desaulniers will serve on it.

#### Ad hoc Transportation Policy Committee

Mr. French reported that the bus contract has not been fully completed. At this time, the purchase of fuel from the Town to M&J is being reviewed. Dr. Sewall said that the charge of the committee has been completed and he thanked Chair Mr. French and Board members Mrs. Osuba and Dr. Switchenko for their work on the committee.

### ACTION ITEMS

#### Teacher Evaluation and Support Program (Ref. 2)

Ms. Ortiz explained that the mid-year evaluation was initially set for February 15, but on behalf of administration and teachers, it was realized that this was too early in the process. Therefore, the date for the mid-year evaluation will be changed from February 15 to March 15 to allow ample time to go through the process.

**Motion of Mrs. Collins, seconded by Dr. Switchenko, that the Board of Education approve the adoption of the Windham Public Schools' Professional Learning and Evaluation Plan with a change from February 15 to March 15 for the mid-year evaluation.**

**Aye: Mrs. Collins, Mrs. Osuba, Mr. Adamo, Ms. Tinker, Dr. Switchenko, Mr. French, Mr. Desaulniers**

**Nay: No one**

**Abstained: Mrs. Lambert**

**The motion passes.**

Budget Transfers (Ref. 3)

**Motion of Mr. French, seconded by Mrs. Osuba, that the Board of Education approve the budget transfers as submitted.**

**Aye: Mrs. Collins, Mrs. Osuba, Mr. Adamo, Ms. Tinker, Dr. Switchenko, Mr. French, Mr.**

**Desaulniers**

**Nay: No one**

**Abstained: Mrs. Lambert**

**The motion passes.**

Authorized signatures change form (Ref. 4)

**Motion of Ms. Tinker, seconded by Mrs. Collins, that the Board of Education approve the *ED-099 Agreement for Child Nutrition Programs' Authorized Signatures Change From* and therefore authorizes Superintendent Ana V. Ortiz to sign the Connecticut State Department of Education Nutrition Programs agreement and related claims for reimbursement, and in her absence, Christian S. Johnson, Finance Director, is authorized to sign claims for reimbursement.**

**Aye: Mrs. Collins, Mrs. Osuba, Mr. Adamo, Ms. Tinker, Dr. Switchenko, Mr. French, Mr.**

**Desaulniers**

**Nay: No one**

**Abstained: Mrs. Lambert**

**The motion passes.**

Communications Policy: News Media Relations (Ref. 5)

Ms. Ortiz said that she received an e-mail from the WFT field representative with some concerns regarding this policy and impact on bargaining and is waiting to hear back regarding these concerns. The Board decided to defer the vote on this policy until the November meeting.

Use of Social Media Policy (Ref. 6)

Dr. Sewall received a query from a teacher regarding the Rules and Guidelines Concerning Personal Social Media Activity section of the policy which he referred to the Board attorney. Per the Board Attorney, Number 10 in that section is covered elsewhere in the policy and is, therefore, redundant. Dr. Sewall is recommending that the policy be approved with the deletion of number 10 under the Rules and Guidelines Concerning Personal Social Media Activity section of the policy.

**Motion of Mrs. Lambert, seconded by Ms. Tinker, that the Board of Education approve the new Use of Social Media Policy with the deletion of Number 10 in the Rules and Guidelines Concerning Personal Social Media Activity section of the policy.**

**The motion is unanimously approved.**

Air Force sponsorship for Windham High School robotics class (Ref. 7)

**Motion of Mrs. Lambert, seconded by Mr. French, that the Board of Education gratefully approve the acceptance of a sponsorship for the Windham High School Robotics Class from the Air Force in the amount of \$2000.**

**The motion is unanimously approved.**

Approval of Appointments

**Motion of Mrs. Lambert, seconded by Mrs. Collins, that the Board of Education approve the following appointments:**

1. Todd D. Cunha to the position of Talent Development Director effective November 12, 2013. New
2. Michelle Scott to the position of Speech Language Pathologist at Windham Middle School effective October 7, 2013. Replacement
3. Caitlin Merriman to the position of Social Worker at Sweeney School effective October 9, 2013. Replacement
4. Kimberly Boonstra to the position of .20 Music Teacher at Natchaug School effective October 23, 2013. Replacement

Mr. Cunha thanked the Board for his appointment and said that he is excited to begin in his position and looks forward to working with everyone.

**The motion is unanimously approved.**

#### First reading of Magnet Schools/Enrollment Outside of Attendance Districts Policy (Ref. 6)

There was discussion regarding enrollment of twins and preference for children of staff members. Final action on this policy is planned for the November 13, 2013, Board meeting.

#### Special Master's Report

Dr. Adamowski provided information as a follow up to Mrs. Lambert's committee report regarding the High School and the Facilities Master Plan. He explained that four viable alternatives were developed for further study by the committee. In order to meet the standard for full state reimbursement (80 % level), the option of having a multi-use facility at the High School might be worth consideration. Dr. Adamowski also said that perhaps the building might include a joint school town recreation facility because the pool must remain at the facility since it is tied into the power plant and is part of the cogeneration of the energy system. He also explained that an option that is not on the table is sending students, on a tuition basis, to other schools and not having a high school. However, on a practical basis, the number of students is much too large to do this and is also counter to the vision statement of the Strategic Operating Plan which states that the school is to be a better school than the school that currently exists and is one that is capable over time to attract students from other communities. Dr. Adamowski said that there is renewed confidence that there might be a way to move the project ahead in the sequencing of the Facilities Master Plan and Mr. Roach will present some options and preliminary plans for further consideration.

The Board convened to the Windham High School Conference Room A for the Executive Session portion of the meeting.

#### EXECUTIVE SESSION

**Motion of Mrs. Lambert, seconded by Mr. French, that the Board of Education enter into executive session at 8:55 PM for the discussion of exempt documents pertaining to Performance Based Evaluation of the Superintendent for 2012-13 process going forward and consideration and possible action on the extension of the Superintendent's contract.**

**The motion is unanimously approved.**

BOARD PRESENT: Chair Dr. Sewall, Vice-chair Mrs. Collins, Secretary Mrs. Osuba, Mrs. Lambert, Dr. Switchenko, Mr. Adamo, Mr. French, Ms. Tinker, Mr. Desaulniers

#### ADMINISTRATION

PRESENT: Superintendent Ms. Ortiz

#### REGULAR SESSION RECONVENES

Chair Dr. Sewall reconvened regular session at 9:50 P.M. in the Windham High School Library Media Center.

**Motion of Mr. French, seconded by Ms. Tinker, that the Board of Education move that the score on the rubric for the Superintendent's evaluation to be added to the Superintendent's personnel file is 55.**

**Aye: Mrs. Collins, Mrs. Osuba, Mr. Adamo, Ms. Tinker, Dr. Switchenko, Mr. French, Mr. Desaulniers**

**Nay: Mrs. Lambert**

**Abstained: No one**

**The motion passes: Aye: 7; Nay: 1**

**Motion of Mr. French, seconded by Ms. Tinker, that the Board of Education move that the Superintendent's current contract not be renewed.**

**Aye: Dr. Sewall, Mrs. Osuba, Ms. Tinker, Dr. Switchenko, Mr. French, Mr. Desaulniers**

**Nay: Mrs. Collins, Mrs. Lambert, Mr. Adamo**

**Abstained: No one**

**The motion passes: Aye: 6; Nay: 3**

#### ADJOURNMENT

**Motion by Mr. Adamo, seconded by Mrs. Lambert, that the Board meeting adjourn at 10:00 P.M.**

**The motion is unanimously approved.**

Respectfully submitted,

Mrs. Luz Osuba, Secretary