

WINDHAM BOARD OF EDUCATION
WILLIMANTIC, CONNECTICUT
BOARD OF EDUCATION BUSINESS MEETING MINUTES
September 11, 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: No one

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

CALL TO ORDER

Dr. Sewall called the September 11, 2013, Special Board of Education regular business meeting to order at 7:02 P.M. in the Windham High School Library Media Center.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

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

MINUTES

The August 21, 2013, Board of Education Business meeting minutes (Ref. 1) were accepted as submitted.

(Mrs. Collins arrived.)

PUBLIC DIALOGUE

Mary Gallucci, Willimantic, questioned Dr. Adamowski's authority over the district. She said that Dr. Adamowski is now a new employee of the State Department of Education; however, there was no job search conducted to fill the position. Ms. Gallucci said that she brought up items at the State Board of Education meeting that were not addressed by Dr. Adamowski. She asked Board members to be cautious about the magnet school enrollment. She said that some of the choices that are imposed by the Special Master will take bus services away from students and choices are limited in these so called small communities. Ms. Gallucci also said that she hopes the communication policy is not some kind of a gag rule for staff. She said that in the third year of the School Improvement Grant, the Board let Dr. Adamowski increase the population in every grade at Natchaug School while it wasn't mentioned that Windham Center had only an additional seventeen students even though an entire fifth grade was added. She said that Dr. Adamowski spoke about failing test scores at Natchaug, while, in fact, CMT scores for Natchaug School at every grade level showed an increase.

Lorraine McDevitt, Willimantic, said that she is a forty-three year resident of Willimantic, has served on many community committees and in political positions, and has had four children and two grandchildren go through the Windham Public Schools. She said that she has seen the Town stick together through adversity and she hopes that this continues. Mrs. McDevitt said that she has had many opportunities to meet with Ms. Ortiz, who rules with passion and pride, over the years. Ms. Ortiz did not hesitate to support and assist the

Windham Regional Arts Council when members offered to provide the opportunity for students to attend out-of-town programs at the Hyde Center. Mrs. McDevitt urged the Board of Education to keep Ms. Ortiz as Superintendent and keep the continuity that the district needs. She said that a lot of what people are complaining about is not the fault of Ms. Ortiz but rather the fault of Dr. Adamowski. She encouraged Board members to stand behind Ms. Ortiz 100%.

Kathleen Koljian, Willimantic resident and an employee of the school district, said the loss of Ms. Ortiz's leadership would be detrimental to the school district. Ms. Koljian explained that Ms. Ortiz's clear insight to the needs of the community and her knowledge are important factors and Windham needs stability. She also said that Ms. Ortiz has shown her willingness to engage in dialogues, listen to others and define her reasons. She has the qualities essential to be an effective leader, and her commitment to the district is evident. Ms. Koljian said that since the arrival of the special master, opportunities for dialogue have been curtailed. She explained that in the local press, the special master discounted the importance of the decline in scores and suggested the decline was a result of the residual of prior times. She said that the special master's lack of accountability is a luxury that no one else in the district has as he doesn't believe that standardized test scores are a measure of his performance. She ended her comments by saying that she hopes that Board members will all consider the Superintendent's reappointment.

William Baldasty, North Windham, said that he has an issue that concerns his daughter but as a result of attending tonight's meeting, he is hearing about much larger issues that affect everyone. He said that he has spoken with Ms. Ortiz numerous times and she has been very helpful. Mr. Baldasty explained that his daughter is passionate about being a farmer and he has been trying to get her into an Ag Tech program. Mr. Baldasty said that he has not had time to serve on committees in town and thanked the people who give their time. He explained that he has every intention to transport his daughter to a program in another town but found that he needs the Board's approval for her to attend an out-of-district program.

Tom Drewry, Willimantic resident and teacher in Windham, asked the Board of Education to extend Ms. Ortiz's tenure as Superintendent. He said that for two years she has been prevented from assuming the responsibility of the position. He said that, as seen, at the State Board of Education meeting last week in Hartford, there is a double standard which is fundamentally wrong. Mr. Drewry said that even though, at times, he has been at direct odds with the Superintendent, he has observed her performance and seen firsthand how she has nurtured meaningful relations with both the children and adults who spend their days in the classroom. Mr. Drewry said that Ms. Ortiz gives much of herself to the community, spending time at after-hours events with children and parents getting to know them better. He said that this is what makes her invaluable. He said that he believes that Ms. Ortiz looks at what she can do to make things better for Windham children. Mr. Drewry said that people need to ask themselves what qualities are desired in school leaders as the cold tools of administration and management practices cannot be allowed to define schools as this is a disservice to the children. Mr. Drewry said that Ms. Ortiz brings patience, understanding, compassion, empathy, and love to the office of the superintendent every day.

Kellie Prescott, Windham, said that she has two children that arrive at Windham Middle School from twelve to twenty minutes prior to the 7:00 AM opening time for the school and they sit on the bus until the school is open. She's been told that Windham Tech's schedule is the reason this happens. She has contacted Windham Tech as well as the bus company. Ms. Prescott said that there are many buses that sit in front of the Middle School every morning with students waiting to get off the bus and enter the school. She asked who approved this and made the decision that bus drivers would be babysitting the children.

Kevin Hoxie, Willimantic, said that he asked Mr. Coleman when he came to Windham a couple of years ago how much money would be needed to improve the schools and what would be done to improve them. He said that two years later, there are two salaries and the district has fallen below where it was when Dr. Adamowski first arrived. Mr. Hoxie said that more money is needed in order to get more resources. He said that the administration needs to work closer with the teachers since there are many new teachers, and if the

scores don't go up, it will be tough to get money from the taxpayers. He also said that Mr. Olkowski is doing a good job with discipline at the Middle School.

Joseph Catulo, Columbia, is a senior at Windham High School and acting president of the Windham High School DECA program. He said that last year students were told that marketing courses and the DECA program would be phased out and he and his fellow DECA members have been working hard to keep the program going. He said that High School administrators have been encouraging and support having a DECA club; however, DECA is supposed to be tied to a curriculum and those classes have been canceled as a result of the academy model. He said that he hopes to continue to represent his school in DECA competitions. He also hopes that funds from the Perkins Grant can be used to help restore the program at the High School.

Ryan Garvie, Willimantic, spoke about the need to have someone ride his son's bus who has been trained to use an EpiPen. His son is four years old and he is concerned with his health safety on the bus. He said that Natchaug School staff members have been great and have tried to help him find a solution to his problem but feels that now he is getting the runaround because nothing more can be done. He feels this is a state/national level issue and is working with representatives to move this problem forward.

Dara Bowling, Willimantic resident, Windham teacher, and parent, spoke on behalf of Superintendent Ortiz, saying she has boundless energy and takes the time to know students and their needs, and students respect her. She said that Ms. Ortiz is a visible and a stable presence in the schools. As a teacher, Ms. Bowling feels supported by her. Ms. Bowling said that she doesn't always agree with her but respects her openness and her willingness to always listen. Ms. Ortiz makes an effort to know every teacher and administrator in the district. She said that Ms. Ortiz is a consistent and vibrant presence and encourages teachers to grow. She takes an interest in students' learning. As a teacher, parent and Windham taxpayer, Ms. Bowling said that Superintendent Ortiz is the person she wants making decisions for the district, and it is in the best interest of everyone that this Board continue her contract and allow her to keep making a difference.

Mary Lou DeVivo, Willimantic, spoke about the plan to have a Montessori School at Windham Center School and said that before that happens, Windham should send students to the Montessori School in Mansfield to see if there is any interest in that type of program. She also said that the Natchaug grant for the Family Resource Center should be for both Natchaug and Sweeney families, and the North Windham grant should be for both North Windham and Windham Center families. Mrs. DeVivo also said that Father LaPointe still needs to be contacted regarding the use of the St. Joseph Church parking lot now that work is being done at the school.

James Flores, Willimantic, said that scores keep going lower in spite of having a special master. Bringing in a new superintendent won't guarantee that scores will improve. Mr. Flores said he wants to work with the Board and the community to improve the education system; and if he gets elected to the Town Council, he will attend every Board of Education meeting. He said that it is time to stop playing games and time to work together to improve the system. Mr. Flores said that Ms. Ortiz has his full support and she is doing a good job.

Nicole Moore, Columbia, Vice President of the Senior Class, said that she is speaking for her senior classmates. She said that when they were freshmen, Windham High was one school with one heart; but now there are three schools and school spirit is close to nonexistent. The goal of the senior class is to leave the school a better place than the way they found it as freshmen but they feel that they are not doing their duty. The senior class is working hard to bridge the gap between the academies and the upper school. Athletic teams had to fight to be allowed to wear team jerseys during school spirit week to show school spirit and pride. Ms. Moore said that in the past, students and teams have done all sorts of things to show their school pride. She is asking the Board to encourage school spirit rather than discourage it. She is also requesting that there be no fees to participate in activities during school spirit week so that all students can take part in

the activities. She said that it should be an option for students to donate so that those that can't afford to pay aren't left out.

Jessica Taylor, Willimantic, said that her main concern is that her six-year old and her five year-old children have been dropped off from the bus by themselves and she was unaware that was okay to do. She said that this was very upsetting and she feels that she doesn't have a say. She has called the bus company and asked tonight if something could be done to make the bus company more aware of the safety of the children. Her children have to cross the street and she feels this is not safe for them.

Bill Powers, Windham resident and Windham teacher, said that he has worked with Ms. Ortiz on many committees and always sees her at afterschool and Saturday activities and has marched with her in the July 4th parade. He said that the Superintendent should not be held accountable when she doesn't have the authority and she should not be made the scapegoat. He said that Ms. Ortiz and Dr. Sewall listen to his complaints regularly at Open Office hours. Mr. Powers said that resources are taken away from special education and bilingual students, as well as from 504 students. He said that he was warned that if he went to the State Board of Education, he would be terminated because he violated student privacy. However, he said that he found that there is a whistle blowing statute for State employees. Mr. Powers asked how someone can be a consultant one day and be a State employee the next day as there are certain protocols and procedures to follow. A safety issue that he addressed was the fact that the 25 MPH signs by Windham Center School have been taken down and he has been told that the Town Manager and State Representative are working on it.

Catina Caban-Owen, Windham resident and Windham Public Schools' employee, said that she supports Superintendent Ortiz. She said that the Town of Windham citizens elected the members of the Board. She encouraged them to keep their independence, critical thinking, and their authority to support wholeheartedly Superintendent Ortiz and renew her contract.

Rebecca Cronin, Windham resident, parent and teacher, spoke in support of Ms. Ortiz and said that she sees no reason to replace her. She also spoke about her concerns regarding behavior and discipline at the Middle School. She said that for a district moving towards school choice, parents who are looking at an academically rigorous program have no choice. Windham won't have any students left in the Middle School and the High School because families will either move out of town or send their children to private schools, which will completely drain the school district of anything that resembles diversity or a meaningful educational program. She asked the Board to provide transparency around those issues including safety.

Randy Moore, Columbia, said he attended tonight's meeting to support his daughter who spoke about school spirit earlier during public dialogue. He said that the Board has a responsibility to deal with the students and separate them from the politics. He asked that the Board let the students be themselves during school spirit week. He said that giving them one week is not asking a lot.

REPORTS

Superintendent's Report

Ms. Ortiz thanked those who spoke on her behalf. She reported that junior varsity sports will be reinstated at the High School.

Student Recognition- Windham Middle School TSA

Matthew Morin, Dylan Werth, and Brenna Lynn spoke about their accomplishments at the recent Technology Student Association (TSA) national conference held in Florida. State Advisor, Jim Hutson, thanked parents for their support and students were presented with plaques, as well as Windham Middle School principal, Mr. Olkowski. The Board congratulated them.

Committee Reports

Finance and Audit Committee

Ms. Tinker reported that there will be a committee meeting on September 17, 2013, for the close out of the fiscal year.

School Planning and Design Committee

Mrs. Lambert reported that the Natchaug roof bids were opened and the contract was awarded to Silk Town. Work on the roof will begin immediately. The High School roof replacement project was approved at a Town meeting and now a building committee will be formed by the Town so that the work will take place next spring and summer. A community forum is scheduled on the Facilities Master Plan (FMP) for September 24, 2013, at 6 PM, at Windham Middle School. Due to the schedule for the High School's accreditation, the committee discussed moving the High School renovations into the first phase of the FMP. There was discussion at tonight's meeting and it was decided to hold a special Board meeting prior to September 24, 2013, to discuss the change in the sequence of the FMP.

Executive Committee

Dr. Sewall reported that the committee met and reviewed the student records management system project plan, Windham Official Records Management (WORMS), which is an action item on tonight's agenda. He said that Mrs. Osuba and Ms. Tinker have agreed to review policies that need to be updated to reflect legislation changes. Dr. Sewall provided a summary of the Board's recent retreat where detailed CMT and CAPT test data were reviewed.

Ad hoc Transportation Policy Committee

Mr. French reported that the committee met prior to tonight's Board meeting. M&J has created bus routes according to the Board's policy and busses are not stopping as often. He said that any problems with routes and bus stops are being reviewed by Mr. Green who has done a great job. Some bus issues were discussed by Board members.

ACTION ITEMS

Grant applications (Ref. 2)

Motion of Ms. Tinker, seconded by Mrs. Collins, that the Board of Education approve the submission of the following grant applications: State Consolidated Grant; Young Parents Program Grant; Family Resource Center at Natchaug School Grant; Family Resource Center at North Windham School Grant; ECS-Alliance District Funding Grant; 21st Century Community Learning Center Grant (Windham High School, North Windham School and Windham Center School); 21st Century Community Learning Center Grant (Windham Middle School); and Education for Homeless Children and Youths with a hold on the submission of the Carl D. Perkins Grant application. There was discussion regarding the Perkins grant, business classes at the High School and the inclusion of DECA in the grant. Ms. Ortiz explained that the deadline for submission of this grant is prior to the date of the next Board meeting.

Ms. Tinker amended the motion that the Board of Education approve the grants listed above including the Carl D. Perkins Grant application and that the Administration brings information back to the Board about how the grant will be applied to keep the DECA program at the High School. Mrs. Collins seconded the amended motion.

Unanimously approved

Student Records Management (Ref. 3)

Motion of Mrs. Collins, seconded by Ms. Tinker, that the Board of Education approve the Windham Official Records Management System (WORMS) project plan. Dr. Sewall explained that

Mr. Kent has done a good job developing the plan, which is compliant with statutory guidelines. Records older than six years will be sent to an offsite location for storage with a slight fee charged if retrieval is necessary. Records for the past six years and going forward will be digitized. The vision is to eventually have a paperless data system. The organization and digitizing of records is part of the three-year Strategic Operating Plan.

Unanimously approved

Approval of Appointments

Motion of Mrs. Lambert, seconded by Mrs. Collins, that the Board of Education approve the following appointments including the addendum distributed at tonight's meeting:

1. Christian Johnson to the position of Finance Director at Central Office effective September 30, 2013. Replacement
2. Tara Cramer to the position of Dean of Students at Windham Middle School effective August 26, 2013. Replacement

Addendum

3. Margaret Levine to the position of Social Worker at The Charles H. Barrows STEM Academy Effective October 7, 2013. New Position
4. Arianna Gray to the position of Science Teacher at Windham Middle School effective September 9, 2013. Replacement
5. Amy Welch to the position of Grades 5/6 Teacher at The Charles H. Barrows STEM Academy effective October 7, 2013. Replacement

Mr. Johnson thanked the Board for his appointment and said that he looks forward to joining the team.

Ms. Cramer said that she is proud to continue to serve Windham schools, now in the capacity of an administrator.

The motion is unanimously approved.

First reading of Communications Policy: News Media Relations (Ref. 4)

Ms. Ortiz said that the Communications policy has been redrafted to enhance the present policy and does not stop anyone from speaking to the media. Final action will take place at the October 9, 2013, Board meeting.

First reading of Social Media Policy (Ref. 5)

This is the first reading of this policy with final action taking place at the October 9, 2013, Board meeting.

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

Ms. Ortiz said that discussion of lottery procedures can take place at the upcoming special meeting next week prior to the October 9, 2013, Board meeting when it will be on the agenda again.

Special Master's Report

Dr. Adamowski reported that the Commissioner's Network proposal has been approved for the first year and details for years two and three need to be developed. The three objectives for the first year are full implementation of PBIS; implementation of complete SRBI continuum; and implementation of 90-minute blocks of instruction in reading and math. Five to six new math teachers will need to be hired to accomplish the 90-minute block times. Due to the need for additional classroom space at the Middle School, this will take place once students return to Natchaug School. Dr. Adamowski also reported that the State is moving

towards the implementation and measurement of Common Core Standards which is being done throughout the nation using Smarter Balanced Testing.

Discussions took place regarding the lack of substitutes, as well as the need to design a transitional alternative program to meet the needs of the High School.

Proposed workshop topics for September, October and November are as follows: September - Review/Discussion of SOP Implementation Steps 4, 5, 6, and 9 for Year 1 and Years 1-2, organized by strategy; October – Tiered Reading Instruction and ELL Service Delivery; and November – Curriculum Audit and Update on Windham High School Accreditation.

ADJOURNMENT

**Motion by Mr. Adamo, seconded by Mrs. Osuba, that the Board meeting adjourn at 9:53 P.M.
The motion is unanimously approved.**

Respectfully submitted,

Mrs. Luz Osuba, Secretary