

WINDHAM BOARD OF EDUCATION
WILLIMANTIC, CONNECTICUT
BOARD OF EDUCATION WORKSHOP MEETING MINUTES
September 25, 2013

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

BOARD ABSENT: Mrs. Osuba

ADMINISTRATION

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

STUDENT

REPRESENTATIVES: Dakota Fleming

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

CALL TO ORDER

Chair Dr. Sewall called the September 25, 2013, Board of Education workshop meeting to order at 7:00 P.M. in the Windham High School Library Media Center.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Mr. French led the Board and the public in the reciting of the Pledge of Allegiance.

WORKSHOP SESSION

Strategic Operating Plan

Ms. Ortiz reviewed strategy implementation steps for year one and implementation steps staged over years one and two for goals in the Strategic Operating Plan. She provided details on the status of individual targets. Throughout the presentation, Ms. Ortiz answered questions and discussion took place.

PUBLIC DIALOGUE

Tom Drewry, teacher at the High School and Willimantic resident, said that at the last regular Board meeting, the special master arrived late because he was meeting with WFT president Randall Prose. During his meeting with Mr. Prose, he agreed to the reinstatement of the alternative program at the High School and the return of DECA as an extracurricular program. Mr. Drewry said that he was surprised by the special master's account at the Board meeting as to why he was prepared to make changes regarding both of these programs. Mr. Drewry said that the special master erroneously said the high school never had an alternative program; however, it was a direct mandate from him to end the High School's Connections program. The program was to be phased out with no new ninth graders enrolled but when teachers returned in the fall, the program had been disbanded and students from the program were placed in regular classes with little or no support. Mr. Drewry said that there was an abundance of evidence that students in the Connections program were making behavioral and academic progress; however, the special master indicated that the program was not successful. He also said that at the same time that the program was being disbanded, the special master was advocating for the opening of an alternative charter school in Windham run by an organization that he worked with in Hartford. Mr. Drewry also said that the special master indicated that the High School never

implemented PBIS; however, teachers spent days working with SERC last year and are now in the second year of PBIS.

Mr. Drewry was stopped after three minutes of speaking; however, he said that Board policy states that each speaker may speak for three to five minutes, and he feels that the opportunity to speak is restricted due to the limit of time and topic and there should be a public session at the beginning and end of each meeting. He asked Dr. Sewall for permission to continue speaking regarding DECA. Permission was granted.

Mr. Drewry continued by saying that he served on the initial team considering the high school structure, and it was immediately conveyed to the committee that the special master required the adoption of two vertical academies to generate choice and one had to be STEM. DECA students made an appeal and everyone wholeheartedly agreed that DECA and marketing classes could be integrated into either the STEM or AHA academies. There was unanimous support by those in the district that DECA would be incorporated into the new High School design; however, that didn't happen. He said that all of these inaccuracies raise a host of issues and he thanked the Board for letting him correct them.

Dr. Adamowski responded that the superintendent reported to the Board that the DECA program would continue until participating seniors graduated this year. Neither he nor the superintendent was aware of the decision that was made at the High School level to discontinue the DECA program because it didn't have the correct threshold number of students. He said that had it been implemented correctly, it would not be an issue now. Dr. Adamowski clarified that this decision was a mistake and not consistent with his or Ms. Ortiz's understanding and that is why steps are now being taken to reinstate the program.

Kathleen Koljian, Willimantic, said that she unequivocally supported Ms. Ortiz and her continued employment and the great benefit she brings to the district at the last Board meeting. She was surprised and puzzled by some of Dr. Sewall's comments in the Bulletin following that meeting; especially when he said that individual board members may have an opinion but the Board as a body does not have an opinion but must use the formula and procedure approved to evaluate the superintendent. Ms. Koljian reviewed the policy and said that it does set a framework but it does provide the Board with significant latitude in how the Board chooses to consider Ms. Ortiz's performance over the past two years. She said that Dr. Sewall's presentation at the last Board meeting and Dr. Adamowski's presentation to the State Board of Education were far more positive and she hopes that will be kept in mind.

Mary Gallucci, Willimantic, said that one of her children rides the bus for 1 hour and 24 minutes and there should be limits on the length of bus rides for students who live fifteen minutes from the school. Children have to walk several blocks to the bus stop at Summit and High streets, and all of the parents whose children get the bus there agree that it is a dangerous location for a bus stop. She said that she finds it intolerable that the Board is now saying they want to hear from high school students regarding the lack of school spirit and school unity that the seniors are sensing. She said that students should have been contacted in the formative stages. Ms. Gallucci said that academies are different from small learning communities. She believes that the High School needs to be comprehensive but offer different focuses. Separate academies are not needed for this to occur. She said that prior to coming before the accreditation committee, Bulkeley High School combined its academies.

Dr. Sewall said that the Board does not choose the location of bus stops and the district's transportation coordinator handles transportation issues.

ADJOURNMENT

Motion by Mr. Adamo, seconded by Mrs. Lambert, that the Board meeting adjourn at 8:57 P.M.

On the motion: Motion is unanimously approved.

Respectfully submitted,

Dr. Murphy Sewall, Chair