

WINDHAM BOARD OF EDUCATION MINUTES
WILLIMANTIC, CONNECTICUT
April 11, 2011

(Special meeting held in place of April 13, 2011, Regular Board of Education meeting)

BOARD PRESENT: Chair Mr. Folan, Vice-chair Mrs. Rayhall, Mr. Adamo, Mr. Doyle, Dr. Switchenko, Mrs. Lambert, Mrs. Collins, Mrs. Haney, Dr. Sewall (left at 7:45 PM)

BOARD ABSENT: No one

ADMINISTRATION

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

STUDENT

REPRESENTATIVES: Abbey Baldarelli, Alison Risley, Matthew Poirier

OTHERS PRESENT: Acting Commissioner George Coleman, State Representative Susan Johnson, State Senator Don Williams, general public, staff, administrators, news media

CALL TO ORDER

Chair Mr. Folan called the April 11, 2011, Special Board of Education meeting to order at 7:00 P.M. in the Windham High School auditorium.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Board and public recited the Pledge of Allegiance.

Mr. Folan took a moment of silence in memory of Art Breault, a local resident, long-time educator and former Windham Board of Education member, who recently passed away.

Mr. Folan welcomed Acting Commissioner George Coleman, State Representative Susan Johnson and State Senator Don Williams to the meeting.

BOARD OF EDUCATION MINUTES

March 23, 2011, Regular Board of Education meeting minutes (Ref. 1)

(210)Motion of Mr. Doyle, seconded by Dr. Switchenko, that the Board of Education approve the March 23, 2011, Regular Board of Education minutes, Reference 1.

On the motion: Aye: Mr. Folan, Mrs. Rayhall, Mr. Adamo, Mr. Doyle, Dr. Switchenko, Mrs. Haney, Mrs. Lambert, Dr. Sewall

Nay: No one

Abstained: Mrs. Collins

The motion passes: 8-0-1

March 17, 2011, Special Board of Education meeting minutes (Ref. 1A)

(211)Motion of Mrs. Rayhall, seconded by Dr. Sewall, that the Board of Education approve the March 17, 2011, Special Board of Education minutes, Reference 1A.

On the motion: Aye: Mr. Folan, Mrs. Rayhall, Mrs. Collins, Dr. Sewall

Nay: No one

Abstained: Mr. Adamo, Mrs. Haney, Mr. Doyle, Dr. Switchenko, Mrs. Lambert

The motion passes: 4-0-5

March 24, 2011, Special Board of Education meeting minutes (Ref. 1B)

(212)Motion of Mr. Adamo, seconded by Mrs. Haney, that the Board of Education approve the March 24, 2011, Special Board of Education minutes, Reference 1B.

On the motion: Aye: Mr. Folan, Mr. Adamo, Mrs. Collins, Mrs. Haney, Mrs. Lambert

Nay: No one

Abstained: Mrs. Rayhall, Mr. Doyle, Dr. Sewall, Dr. Switchenko

The motion passes: 5-0-4

March 30, 2011, Special Board of Education meeting minutes (Ref. 1A)

(213)Motion of Mr. Adamo, seconded by Mrs. Rayhall, that the Board of Education approve the March 30, 2011, Special Board of Education minutes, Reference 1A.

On the motion: Aye: Mr. Folan, Mrs. Rayhall, Mr. Adamo

Nay: No one

Abstained: Mrs. Collins, Mrs. Haney, Mr. Doyle, Dr. Switchenko, Dr. Sewall, Mrs. Lambert

The motion passes: 3-0-6

COMMUNICATIONS

Mr. Folan received a copy of a letter from Dr. Charles Wynn, 2011 Special Olympics Invitational Swim Meet Director, thanking staff and the Board of Education for the use of the high school facilities for the annual meet. Mr. Folan thanked Mrs. Rayhall for representing the Board of Education again this year. Ms. Ortiz noted a letter from Mr. Dean Williams who was pleased to write about terrific things happening at the Middle School and the positive experience he had reading to students there. Ms. Ortiz showed the video of the ExxonMobil commercial that aired during the Masters Golf Tournament highlighting three AP Windham High School students, Thomas Martin, Pahola Almonte, and Chiana Montesi, and the company's national math and science initiative.

STUDENT COUNCIL

Matt Poirier reported that the WHIPS Club is raising money to purchase a ShelterBox to be sent to assist the people of Japan.

CITIZENS/DELEGATIONS

Juan Perez, member of the Latino Puerto Rican Affairs Commission in Hartford and graduate of Windham schools, said that issues in Windham are the rejection of the budget time after time and teachers leaving the district to take higher paying jobs in surrounding towns. He said it takes teachers and the whole community to help students succeed. Mr. Perez said that the school system needs to hire more Latino teachers to work with students and also the political parties have to put more effort into having Latino representation on the Board.

Nicole Krassas, resident of Willimantic, parent of two students and professor of political science at ECSU, said that over the last eleven years, education in Windham has been short changed and now the situation is dire and the children have suffered. She questioned the timing of the State's announcement which is prior to the budget referendum which will make it difficult to get the budget passed. By cutting education funds and budgets, the Town and State are failing the students. She said that there are many devoted and talented teachers in Windham but they lack support and there needs to be greater emphasis on academic achievement. Teachers need support and students need enrichment activities. Ms. Krassas said that she finds it hard to believe that teachers need to be trained in order to raise the bar. She asked how training will increase parent involvement and help us improve schools.

Henry Crane, Willimantic, said that he has told the school Board that they need to put three million more dollars in the budget. He asked how teacher development will help student development. He said that the education of students needs to improve so that these students are effective in the work force and can get hired. He asked who will support him once he retires if this generation cannot get jobs.

Mr. Folan said that there will be a fifteen-minute question and answer session following the acting commissioner's talk.

Presentation by Acting Commissioner of Education George Coleman

Mr. Coleman thanked Windham for inviting him to speak this evening. He explained that as a result of the last assessment cycle, performance of Windham students justified the State's intervention action. Plans are to place a special master and two assistants in Windham to work with the district. Additional professional training for teachers and administrators is also part of the plan. This will all be done with an additional \$1 million in State funding that is separate from the education budget. Mr. Coleman said that the State is moving forward even though the legislation for the special master has not been passed. The Acting Commissioner said that there are no easy answers but the ultimate goal is to close the achievement gap. He said that everyone will have to work together, including students, staff, district leaders and parents, to make the changes that are necessary. The District Improvement Plan which is already in place will be reviewed and district needs will be identified. If necessary, the reallocation of resources will be reviewed. Work will be done in collaboration with the local town government, the local Board of Education and the Superintendent.

State Senator Don Williams thanked Acting Commissioner Coleman for coming to speak in Windham and said that there will be additional forums for community participation. He said that the children of Windham deserve a good education and everyone will work towards making Windham Public Schools the best that they can be. He said that due to No Child Left Behind, certain performance standards must be met and Windham needs to address the high percentage of ELL students and special education students as do other towns in the state. The differences between poorer and wealthier communities should not serve as an excuse not to move forward and make change. He said that it is important to have transparency and give people the opportunity to ask questions to learn more about the process that is being presented.

State Representative Susan Johnson, thanked everyone for attending tonight's meeting. She said that everyone will be working hard to close the achievement gap. She also said that legislation is in the process to address ELL and special education students and that other towns face these problems as well. (Dr. Sewall left the meeting.)

Questions and Answers

Peter Quercia, Willimantic, thanked the Acting Commissioner and the State for stepping in to assist Windham. He said that he lives next door to the High School and is outraged with what he sees. He asked what will be done to get the students to settle down and allow the teachers to do their job which is to teach.

Mr. Coleman said that the Windham Board of Education has made requests for support in the past and the State has been working with Windham for the past five years. The State Department of Education has now developed additional interventions to be more supportive. Mr. Coleman said that he has been working with legislatures and the Governor to bring resources to Windham as soon as possible. He said that when students succeed in school, there is the need for less intervention for behavioral issues.

Jeremy Schwartz, Willimantic, said that he didn't know there was a District Improvement Plan and asked about communication. He asked about the status of the legislation for the special master.

Mr. Coleman said that the District Improvement Plan should be on the district's website. He said that the State Department of Education has asked that legislatures address the required legislation for a special master.

Angela Kiss, Sweeney School principal, asked if the special master has been selected and also asked what criteria is necessary.

Mr. Coleman said the special master has not yet been selected. The person will be required to have a comprehensive knowledge of the education system, has been responsible for a school district and also would have the skills necessary to direct the collaborative work that will take place using the resources that will be made available.

Sara Coulliard, parent of third grader at North Windham School, asked when the special master would be chosen for Windham and if it would be someone from the Town or the State Board of Education. She also asked if the curriculum would change.

Mr. Coleman said that they are looking for the best person for Windham which will be someone who has the necessary assets and skills. Even though the legislation is not in place, plans for choosing a special master are moving forward. As far as changing the curriculum, Mr. Coleman said that everything will be open for review.

Carmen Alamo, Windham and mother of a student at Windham High School, spoke about several issues and problems that she and her daughter are having at the high school. She said that she has requested services for her daughter but that she is not getting anywhere with school staff.

Mr. Coleman said that he hopes that as we move forward, everyone can work together to create an atmosphere to help youngster be successful.

Catina Caban-Owen, Windham and employee of Windham Public Schools, said that Latino parents are involved in the school system. She said that the majority of Latino students are born in Windham and speak English as their first language. However, since poverty affects language development, she said all students in Windham should be considered ELL students. She said that education is suffering and it is demoralizing and exhausting that Windham Public School employees are blamed for issues that are social, economic and political. She asked when the Department of Education and legislators are going to change how education is funded.

Mr. Coleman let Senator Williams and Representative Susan Johnson respond. Senator Williams said that education is funded through property taxes in part and steps have been taken to equalize funding between poor and wealthy communities through ECS dollars. It is a long-term goal to move away from property tax to fund education. Representative Johnson said that she agreed with what Senator Williams stated and would like to have the State find a funding stream to fund education which is a work in progress.

Kevin Hoxie, Willimantic, said that the union and teacher tenure block teacher performance. He asked if Windham is teaching students to take tests or are students being taught for the future. He said that Windham is a poor town and asked how the State would compensate for everything that is planned.

Mr. Coleman said that Connecticut has a long history in assessing students and the tests assess what is being taught and gives every student the opportunity to test themselves against the standard. He said that there is an effort on the federal and state levels to have evaluations better reflect student performance.

Leo Santucci, Willimantic, asked where Windham placed in achievement and per capita out of the 169 towns.

Mr. Coleman said that Windham is very close to the bottom in achievement and very challenged per capita. He didn't have the exact figures but said that he could get that information for Mr. Santucci.

Bernie D'Auteuil, Willimantic, said that he was disappointed when money was extracted from the budget earmarked for school resource officers. He asked that the special master include school resource officers in the plan.

Ms. Ortiz answered that the district has been working with the police chief to put something in place.

Barbara McGrath, Windham, said that it took five referendums last year to get the budget passed. She said that anything that the State can do to help to get the budget passed this year on the first try would be appreciated. She thanked Board of Education members who have been working with the Board of Finance this year to provide a transparent budget.

Peter Hughes, South Windham, said that he is confused about the authority of the special master. He said that he has concerns that a statute is necessary and asked why things that are already in place can't be used.

Mr. Coleman explained that legislation has been introduced by the State Department of Education to address the special master. The special master will work with the district and the town using the District Improvement Plan. He said that the potential is in Windham to place a special master to effect change and there will be other towns, as well, that will be included in time. Mr. Coleman said that the District Improvement Plan has the basis to meet the challenge.

Nicole Bay, Windham resident and teacher in Windham, said that intervention and resources are needed. She asked for an example of what could be put in place by a special master.

Mr. Coleman said that available resources and the types of training with the intent of improvement will be examined. He said that reallocating or reorganization of what is already in place is an option.

Luz Montalvo, said that she graduated from Windham High School and asked how Windham would be made a welcoming place for parents and for students. She asked if any studies were done when the decision was made.

Mr. Coleman said that data has been reviewed and the State is looking to have discussions at the local and state levels to see what can be done to have this cohort of students improve performance.

Mark Phelps, Windham, said that testing is driving many decisions, and programs are being taken away. He asked how test scores could be increased and programs kept in place.

Mr. Coleman said that communities will have to make painful choices. Policy makers will have to create new opportunities to fund education so that dollars are used in the most effective way while planning for the future.

Mary Lou DeVivo, North Windham, asked if there was any way for the State to fund free lunch and breakfast for every student.

Tom DeVivo, Chairman of the Interdistrict Magnet School committee, said that any assistance from the Commissioner's office and the special master in this endeavor would be appreciated.

Dennis O'Brien, Willimantic, said that poverty has an impact on the schools. He said that having Mr. Coleman come here and the State's involvement in Windham are important for the Town and will benefit the children of Windham.

Mr. Coleman said that the school has to make a difference in the lives of the youngsters. He said that there are fifteen communities that are challenged and the State is looking at ways to bring balance and create opportunities.

Henry Crane, Willimantic, said that there are common sense things not being communicated to students. He talked about students using cell phones.

Mr. Coleman said that he is available to the Superintendent and is looking forward to working with the Board of Education. He thanked everyone for their willingness to listen to what he had to say this evening.

Mr. Folan took a five-minute recess at 9:08 PM.

Mr. Folan reconvened the meeting at 9:14 PM.

SUMMARY ACTION

Personnel Action (Ref. 2)

(214)Motion of Dr. Switchenko, seconded by Mrs. Lambert, that the Board of Education approve Reference 2 as follows.

Resignations

- Ana Maria Olezza, Director of Grants/Developmental Programs effective May 1, 2011 for the purpose of retirement.
- Jennifer Kelchner, Math Teacher/Windham High School effective June 20, 2011.
- Daniel Piccione, Math Teacher/Windham High School effective April 29, 2011.

- Heather O'Brien, Non Certified Librarian/Natchaug & Sweeney School effective April 13, 2011.
- John Richards, Special Education Paraprofessional/Windham High School effective March 28, 2011 for the purpose of retirement.

Appointments

- Ann Marie DeMarchi, General Cafeteria worker/Sweeney School effective April 4, 2011. Hourly rate is \$9.90, replaces Carolyn Taylor who transferred.
- James Moore, Crossing Guard/Windham Middle School effective April 4, 2011. Hourly rate is \$12.26, replaces Harold White Jr. who resigned.

Leaves of absence

- Rory Gibbons, Maintenance Worker/Systemwide, medical leave of absence beginning March 31, 2011 for approximately 4-6 weeks.
- Ivette Adames, Home Based Teacher/Head Start, medical leave of absence beginning March 7, 2011 through approximately June 4, 2011.
- Nancy Sequin, Paraprofessional/North Windham School, medical leave of absence beginning April 12, 2011 through May 10, 2011.

There was no discussion.

On the motion: Aye, 8-0; unanimous

ACTION ITEMS

Donation to Windham High School (Ref. 3)

(215)Motion of Mrs. Haney, seconded by Dr. Switchenko, that the Board of Education accept with deep gratitude the donation of two Kimball Studio used pianos to Windham High School. Mr. Folan and Board members thanked Mr. Pelto, owner of Piano Arts, for his generosity.

On the motion: Aye, 8-0; unanimous

Windham High School Scholarship (Ref. 4)

(216)Motion of Mr. Adamo, seconded by Mrs. Lambert, that the Board of Education accept with deep gratitude the Anita M. Drewry Windham Memorial Scholarship. On behalf of the Board, Mr. Folan expressed his gratitude for this scholarship to be given to a Windham High School student.

On the motion: Aye, 8-0; unanimous

School Improvement grant application for Windham High School (Ref. 5)

(217)Motion of Mr. Doyle, seconded by Dr. Switchenko, that the Board of Education approve submission of the School Improvement grant application for Windham High School. There was no discussion.

On the motion: Aye, 8-0; unanimous

2011-2012 School Calendar (Ref. 6)

(218)Motion of Mrs. Lambert, seconded by Dr. Switchenko, that the Board of Education approve the 2011-2012 school calendar as presented with the noted typographical correction in March (March 28 is typed as March 21). There was no discussion.

On the motion: Aye, 8-0; unanimous

REPORTS AND DISCUSSION ITEMS

Superintendent's Reports

Financial statement (March 2011) (Ref. 7)

Mr. Nelson noted that there was an increase in March due to some changes in special education placements. Mr. Doyle said that there is a Board of Finance meeting at 7:00 PM on Wednesday and he and Mr. Folan said that they would appreciate everyone's attendance at this meeting.

Announcements/Information (Ref. 8)

The following were included as informational: Library Media Center newsletter (February-March 2011) and National Professional Development grant proposal. There was no discussion.

Board of Education

Subcommittee Reports:

Districtwide PTO: Mrs. Haney reported that the committee met at Windham Center School. Plans are underway for the spring Family Day activity. The Town Recreation Department will provide assistance and schools will exhibit student work. The next Districtwide PTO meeting will take place at Sweeney School and the following meeting will possibly take place at the Community Center at Windham Heights. Different activities are being planned for each month.

Budget/Finance: Mr. Doyle reported that a plan is being worked on to fund sports at the Middle School.

FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS

Mr. Folan reminded members that the Community Conversation is taking place on Thursday at 5 PM at Windham Middle School.

Mrs. Collins said that there is a planning meeting for a health and fitness fair in June at WRCC at 12:00 PM on April 19. She said that she hoped that there would be a number of reports on future agendas so that the community can hear about the good things that are taking place in our schools. Mrs. Collins also said that she would like to meet with the community as a Board to hear what they have to say.

Ms. Ortiz provided Board members with the information about the members of the Windham High School girls' basketball team that was requested at a previous meeting.

CITIZENS/DELEGATIONS

Mary Lou DeVivo, North Windham, spoke about the Windham Reads program.

ADJOURNMENT

(219)Motion by Mr. Adamo, seconded by Mr. Doyle, that the Board adjourn its meeting at 9:25 P.M.

On the motion: Aye, 8-0; unanimous.

Respectfully submitted,

John Adamo, Secretary