

BRANFORD BOARD OF EDUCATION MEETING MINUTES

DATE: September 16, 2020

LOCATION: Branford High School Lowe Media Center
185 East Main Street, Branford, CT 06405

SUBJECT: Board of Education Meeting

Page 1 of 5

ATTENDANCE

HERE	ATTENDEE	AFFILIATION
Y	John R. Prins, Vice-Chair	Board of Education
Y	Joanne Borrus	Board of Education
Y	Cristina Cantu	Board of Education
Y	Chad Edgar	Board of Education
Y	Meredith Gaffney	Board of Education
Y	Ellen Michaels	Board of Education
N	Dawn Perrotti	Board of Education
Y	Hamlet M. Hernandez, Superintendent	Central Office
Y	Rachel Sexton, Assistant Superintendent	Central Office
Y	Don Neel, Chief Operating Officer	Central Office
N	Charles Cicarella, Director Student Services	Central Office

Others present:

BUSINESS ITEMS

ITEM DESCRIPTION

This meeting was conducted remotely in accordance with State of Connecticut Executive Order No. 7b, issued by His Excellency Ned Lamont

CALL TO ORDER

- 01 Meeting was called to order at 6:00 PM by BOE Vice-Chair, John Prins.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Stephanie Carvin, District parent, spoke about the District scheduling important events at the same time.

Gregg Jerolman, Branford resident, stated that he was sending an email to the Board regarding his various concerns and his request for a no confidence vote for the Superintendent.

Doug Green, District parent, discussed parent communication, his desire to see more open meetings with the Board and Superintendent and the District, the District's remote learning, and the plan for getting back to in person learning.

Jennifer Ricaro, District parent, discussed her disappointment with online learning and her experience with her child's teacher.

Celia Toche, District parent, stated the she was glad to see that the Board was moving ahead to in-person meetings. Ms. Toche also stated that she felt there was a need for the answers from the parent forum to be located on the district website, a communication plan and a central source for contact information.

Mimi Leone, District parent, discussed her concerns regarding remote learning.

Erin Conora, District parent, thanked everyone for their hard work and discussed the difficulties of in-person and online classes and logistics.

Continued...

BRANFORD BOARD OF EDUCATION MEETING MINUTES

DATE: September 16, 2020

LOCATION: Branford High School Lowe Media Center
185 East Main Street, Branford, CT 06405

SUBJECT: Board of Education Meeting

Page 2 of 5

APPROVE MINUTES

- 02** MOTION (Gaffney/Michaels) to approve the minutes from the June 17, 2020 Full Regular BOE Meeting.
APPROVED UNANIMOUSLY
- 03** MOTION (Gaffney/Michaels) to approve the minutes from the August 19, 2020 Full Regular BOE Meeting.
APPROVED UNANIMOUSLY

COMMUNICATION

Mr. Prins stated that the Board received correspondence from Mr. Cook regarding Branford's proposed energy plan.

SUPERINTENDENT REPORT/WIS PROJECT UPDATE

Before turning over the first part of the Superintendent's Report to Don Neel for the Personnel & Finance Committee reports Superintendent Hernandez stated that all Committee meetings will resume next month.

Don Neel, presented the monthly expenditures report. Mr. Neel reported on the 2019-2020 fiscal results from last year. He stated that the unused portion of the budget was \$609,413.57 which was four times more from where we usually end up. This budget balance was driven largely by savings in transportation and no spring athletic season. He stated that this was an unusual year. When asked what happens to the unused funds Mr. Neel stated that all unused money is given back to the Town and it goes into the General Fund.

Mr. Neel discussed the 2021 current year report through the end of August. He stated that the Pupil Services Budget is 54.4% committed, the General Operations budget is 66.6% committed, for a consolidated commitment of 64.4% of our budget. Mr. Neel stated that it should be noted that the State of Connecticut Department of Education has allowed a whole extra year to use our Federal grants and we have taken advantage of it.

Mr. Neel stated that the food service is going really well. He thanked John Turrene for his hard work to take advantage of the opportunity to expand the summer food service program. This opportunity means that we do not have to charge students and is great for families. Mr. Neel also stated that remote students can still go to BHS for meals, everyone 18 years or younger is eligible and the program is in effect until December. Superintendent Hernandez reported that from March 13th through August 31st we served 76,287 meals.

In the absence of Charles Cicarella, Mr. Neel presented the Special Education Tuition and Transportation Report. Mr. Neel stated that on a 2.9 million dollar budget we the current total projected expenses are 2.85 million dollars with a projected tuition balance of \$80,883. For transportation we have a budget of \$782,000 with current projected expenses of \$726,000 for a transportation balance of \$55,485, for a combined budget of 3,721,792 with expenses of 3,585,424. The current project residuals for these two budgets are \$136,368.

Continued...

BRANFORD BOARD OF EDUCATION MEETING MINUTES

DATE: September 16, 2020

LOCATION: Branford High School Lowe Media Center
185 East Main Street, Branford, CT 06405

SUBJECT: Board of Education Meeting

Page 3 of 5

SUPERINTENDENT REPORT/WIS PROJECT UPDATE (Continued)

Mr. Neel discussed the Personnel Report. He stated that we have added “9 great new teachers to our staff. Given the pandemic turnover has been low and very management. We are in good shape.” Mr. Neel concluded by stating, as is customary for this time of year there were a fair number of para resignations but hiring for these positions is going well.

Superintendent Hernandez stated that he was sad to announce that the Branford Learning Community suffered the loss of Dr. Ed Higgins, who passed away on September 13th. Mr. Hernandez stated that Dr. Higgins served over 50 years in public education. Having served over 15 years as the principal at Branford High School.

Superintendent Hernandez discussed Back-to-School Nights. He stated that the elementary school’s dates will be disseminated by the building principals. These dates will also be posted on their school websites. Walsh Intermediate School and Branford High School will also be holding their events.

Superintendent Hernandez addressed the comments made earlier in this evenings public comments section. He stated that Ms. Carvin’s comment around scheduling is duly noted and we will certainly make a better effort to be more attentive to this as we move through the school year. Mr. Hernandez discussed Mr. Green’s comment regarding full attendance. He stated that this is certainly something that we hope to achieve this year. We are working very closely with Public Health and he wants to be clear that the school district is prepared to pivot to either full in-person or fully remote should the numbers dictate that we move in that direction. Superintendent Hernandez addressed Ms. Toche’s comment relative to a communication plan and a liaison. He stated that it should be up on our website. The District’s liaisons are already engaged with families. We will be making this publically known throughout the district to let people know who they should go to should they have questions. Addressing the monumental task of responding to the hundreds of emails received with questions (many of them similar) coming from the Town Hall meeting, Mr. Hernandez, stated that a working document that is now online will be replaced with another document that is better developed and more attuned with what is actually happening on the ground. Addressing Ms. Ricaro’s comment, Superintendent Hernandez stated that this is something that we are hearing from parents on the remote side of the program. We are five days into this and there have certainly been some hiccups but we are also doing things differently from what we did in BPS flex. In addressing Ms. Leone’s comment, Superintendent Hernandez stated that he wanted to acknowledge the fact that remote learning and gender issues is something that he has heard of anecdotally and see’s in his own life. He stated that he knows that remote learning is an incredible demand on families and it is not our desire to place this demand on families unnecessarily. He added that we are in hybrid for safety reasons. Lastly Superintendent Hernandez addressed Ms. Conora’s comment speaking about logistics. Mr. Hernandez stated that moving from hybrid to in-person we hear as a theme and understand that people prefer to (and we would also like to) be in person. Mr. Hernandez stated that this is not something we can do just because we would like to, we need to be prepared to do it so we don’t contribute to the spread and create a bigger issue but we are certainly prepared to pivot in that direction. Superintendent Hernandez concluded by thanking everyone for their constructive comments.

Continued...

BRANFORD BOARD OF EDUCATION MEETING MINUTES

DATE: September 16, 2020

LOCATION: Branford High School Lowe Media Center
185 East Main Street, Branford, CT 06405

SUBJECT: Board of Education Meeting

Page 4 of 5

SUPERINTENDENT REPORT/WIS PROJECT UPDATE (Continued)

Superintendent Hernandez continued his report by making a general comment about athletics and extracurricular activities. Mr. Hernandez stated that there has been a lot of discussion going back and forth and our district is committed to following the recommendations of Public Health. Public Health is truly the lead agency so we would follow their guidance. Having said that if we can continue to keep our students involved (short of competition) with extracurricular and sports activities within the guidelines of public health we will continue to do that. A letter is going out to coaches later this week letting them know that this is what we are prepared to do. High risk sports (football and girl's indoor volleyball) are two sports that Public Health has said should not continue. We will follow that but will have the athletes participate in something sort of competition. Extracurricular activities usually begin in September; we plan to pivot to these activities if possible to allow students to participate. Preferably in-person but if not remotely. It is a sequencing piece.

Superintendent Hernandez and Assistant Superintendent Rachel Sexton discussed the BPS Hybrid Plan. Among the items they discussed were key dates, student counts, school start/end times and BPS Flex vs. BPS Hybrid,

CONSENT AGENDA

04 BHS Donations

These donations were discussed and voted on at the August 19, 2020 Full Regular BOE meeting but members who were participating virtually were not able to offer their vote.

- a. MOTION (Gaffney/Michaels) to accept the donation of \$5000 that was given to the Class of 2020 by Project Graduation.

APPROVED UNANIMOUSLY

- b. MOTION (Gaffney/Michaels) to accept the donation of 5,000 that was given to the BHS Robotics Team by the Branford Community Foundation.

APPROVED UNANIMOUSLY

DISCUSSION/ACTION ITEMS

05 A. Revised 2020-2021 School Year Calendar

MOTION (Gaffney/Michaels) to approve the revised 2020-2021 School Year Calendar.

APPROVED UNANIMOUSLY

06 B. Board Reconstitution

John Prins discussed the Board bylaws and the Board's reconstitution. Meredith Gaffney and Cristy Cantu both suggested putting a vote on the next meeting agenda. Chad Edgar asked about the feasibility of having a meeting in between now and the next BOE meeting in October.

Joanne Borrus motioned to nominate John Prins as the Board chair.

Continued...

BRANFORD BOARD OF EDUCATION MEETING MINUTES

DATE: September 16, 2020

LOCATION: Branford High School Lowe Media Center
185 East Main Street, Branford, CT 06405

SUBJECT: Board of Education Meeting

Page 5 of 5

DISCUSSION/ACTION ITEMS (Continued)

MOTION (Borrus/Michaels) to nominate John Prins as the Board Chair.

APPROVED (Cantu and Gaffney opposed, Edgar abstained)

Meredith Gaffney nominated herself for Board Chair.

BOE Chair Candidate:

John Prins:

Meredith Gaffney:

Votes:

John Prins, Joanne Borrus, Ellen Michaels

Meredith Gaffney, Cristina Cantu

Chad Edgar Abstained

John Prins was declared the Branford Public Schools Board of Education Chair.

MOTION (Cantu/Edgar) to elect Meredith Gaffney as Vice-Chair.

APPROVED UNANIMOUSLY

Mr. Prins stated that he has received interest from five candidates to become a Board Member. Mr. Prins stated that he will work on putting together a schedule for interviewing these individuals.

07 C. October Board Retreat

Mr. Prins discussed the need for dates and planning the October Board Retreat.

PUBLIC COMMENTS ON ACTION ITEMS

Gregg Jerolman, Branford resident, questioned the vote for Chair taking place this evening because it was not on the agenda. Mr. Jerolman discussed Roberts Rule of Order and suggested that Mr. Prins should reconsider being the Board Chair.

BOARD REPORTS:

ACES – Ellen Michaels discussed the last ACES meeting. Ms. Michaels stated that ACES received 47 resignations/retirements. ACES is partnering with CREC and CES to increase diversity in staffing. Students are receiving in-person instruction with the exception of Thomas Edison School. Ms. Michaels concluded her report by stating that ACES has begun a daycare center for children of their employees and the cost is similar with what other facilities charge.

CABE – John Prins reported that CABE has been conducting board chair check-ins and there will be a four-day legal workshop in October.

ADJOURN

08 MOTION (Michaels/Gaffney) to adjourn.

APPROVED UNANIMOUSLY

Ms. Prins adjourned the meeting 8:06 PM to go into a non-meeting to discuss collective bargaining strategy.

Respectfully submitted,
Meredith Gaffney
Secretary

Prepared by,
Kerry Eyrich