

# **Board of Education**

## **Ellington, Connecticut**

January 27, 2021

A regular meeting of the Ellington Board of Education was held on Wednesday, January 27, 2021, at the Ellington High School Gymnasium, 37 Maple Street, Ellington, CT.

Present were: Mr. Blanchette, Purcaro and Young; Ms. Dzen, Picard-Wambolt, Nord, Kupferschmid, Underwood, Mullin and Dr. Scott Nicol, Superintendent of Schools.

Administration present were: Mr. John Collins, Director of Technology; Mr. Brian Hendrickson, Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction; and Mr. Brian Greenleaf, Director of Finance and Operations.

Also in attendance: Ms. Jennifer Brown, Executive Assistant to the Superintendent/Human Resources Coordinator; Mr. Michael Nash, Assistant Principal at Ellington Middle School; Ms. Maria Enrique, Math Teacher at Ellington Middle School; Ms. Victoria Schilling, Science Teacher at Ellington Middle School; and Ayushman Choudury, Appointed Board of Education Student Representative.

The meeting was called to order at 5:16 p.m. by Ms. Dzen, Vice Chairperson.  
(Timestamp: 0:23:56)

Pledge of Allegiance

BOARD CHAIR REPORT (Timestamp: 0:24:40)

Ms. Dzen reported that Mr. Purcaro's attendance would be later in the meeting due to a phone call with the Governor. Ms Dzen thanked administration and board members for their work in the budget process as it can be a challenging task and that change is never easy however necessary for the best interests of the district.

Ms. Dzen that the State of Connecticut has reached Phase 1b which included individuals seventy five years of age and older, healthcare professionals, long care facility residents and medical first responders to receive the Covid 19 vaccination. There are three phases within Phase 1b with the next including individuals sixty five years to seventy four years age and then the final stage of Phase 1b which included frontline

essential workers and teachers. Ms. Dzen stated that the Board is doing everything possible to push the vaccination process forward.

Ms Dzen concluded with information regarding the CAFE legislation breakfast for Board members interested in attending which would be held virtually on Thursday February 4, 2021, from 8:00 a.m. - 9:00 a.m. Registration is required through the CAFE website.

### SPECIAL RECOGNITION

(Timestamp: 0:26:43)

#### UCONN's Outstanding Early Career Professional - EMS Math Teacher Maria Enrique

Dr. Nicol introduced award recipient Ms. Enrique from Ellington Middle School who had received the Outstanding Early Career Professional award from Uconn. Dr. Nicol stated that Ms. Enrique's friend and colleague Ms. Schilling received this recognition from Uconn two years ago as well. Dr. Nicol stated that two former members of Ellington Public Schools administration, Ms. Erin McGurk and Mrs. David Pearson respectfully, had significant involvement in recruiting the best and brightest education graduates from UConn to be part of the Ellington Public School district. Dr. Nicol thanked Ms. McGurk and Mr. Pearson publically for their recruitment development of the talented educators working in the district.

Mr. Nash commended Ms. Enrique for this recognition and stated she is an asset to Ellington Middle School. Ms. Enrique is passionate about equality both inside and outside the classroom and had started the Social Justice Club at the middle school, where the club's focus is making EMS an inclusive and tolerant place. Mr. Nash continued by describing Ms. Enrique as a very passionate teacher, creating a positive and fun learning experience for her students. Ms. Enrique has been an integral part of reorganizing math curriculum and provided equitable learning opportunities for all students. Mr. Nash concluded by stating he could not think of a more deserving teacher and was proud of all of her outstanding work.

Ms. Enrique thanked the Board and stated what an honor it was to receive this award as she loved her career and working with students everyday. Ms. Enrique thanked the Board of Education and the town of Ellington for the opportunity to live out her passion.

### CITIZENS AND STAFF FORUM

(Timestamp: 0:31:30)

Mr. Mark Mahler, president of local teacher union and teacher from Ellington High School addressed the Board by acknowledging the changes discussed at the Board of Finance meeting held on January 26, 2021, regarding the elimination of the Library Media Specialist position and Art positions as part of the budget. Mr. Mahler continued by stating that during Dr. Nicol's tenure there has not been a reduction of force and the

district has maintained the high quality of teaching and learning. However with the possibility of making these changes, acknowledging that budget discussions were still in process, that the high quality standards that the district is known for would be sacrificed. Mr. Mahler acknowledged that for some board members and parents the need and desire for a Gifted and Talented learning program and enrichment is present however teachers would be excited to collaboratively design the program. On the return on investment standpoint, if the program could be designed as a coaching and learning model similar to an athletic program as a stipend position, there could be more opportunities to reach many more students, increase the diversity of those offerings, allow more options for students to pursue. Mr. Maller concluded by stating that the Board is committed to continuing the high standards set for Ellington Public Schools and would like to work together on the budget where standards are maintained without the reduction of force.

### CONSENT AGENDA

(Timestamp: 0:33:30)

1. Approval of the December 16, 2020, Regular Board of Education Meeting Minutes
2. Acceptance of the resignation of Jennifer Martin, ASL Teacher at Ellington High School, effective January 13, 2021.
3. Approval of the employment of Stacy Kluczowski, Long Term Substitute ASL Teacher at Ellington High School, effective January 13, 2021.
4. Acceptance of the resignation of Adam Smith, Plumber, effective January 20, 2021.
5. Approval of the employment of Elijah Ford, full-time Special Education Aide, Ellington High School, effective January 21, 2021.

Ms. Dzen asked if anyone wished to remove any item from the Consent Agenda. Ms. Dzen announced that hearing none, the Consent Agenda is accepted as written.

Prior to Mr. Greenleaf's presentation, Ms. Dzen stated that the budget is a continued discussion, there is no need to make absolute decisions during this meeting, discussions can continue at the next budget meeting if necessary.

### REPORT AND DISCUSSION ITEMS

Special Reports

Continued Discussion on Budget 2021/2022 - Mr. Greenleaf (Timestamp:  
0:34:30)

Mr. Greenleaf did not have additional information to present, but offered the Board to ask questions in regards to the budget.

Ms. Nord inquired to Mr. Greenleaf if the dental insurance reserve could be utilized to offset some health insurance costs. Mr. Greenleaf explained that the dental self insurance fund is set up specifically for dental self insurance. If work could be done in collaboration with the Board of Selectmen, the movement of excess funds in the dental insurance reserve to the medical self insurance fund from the dental self insurance fund would help offset the reserves when self insurance is moved at some point in time. Spending excess funds for operations would not likely be approved by the Board of Selectmen.

Ms. Nord inquired about insurance quotes in which Mr. Greenleaf responded that recent quotes received were in line with the nine percent that is held in the current budget. Mr. Greenleaf would invite those who were lowest back in order to get a reasonable cost. A recent higher bid had contacted Mr. Greenleaf with an adjusted price and there could be a recommendation of what could be cut from the medical insurance fund, more details would be provided at the next Finance meeting on February 3, 2021. Ms. Nord questioned if for the gifted and talented program if funding would be available, as in New York where Ms. Nord had involvement in the program and received funding under special education. Mr. Greenleaf responded that in Connecticut the program does fall under special education however there are laws and processes that must be followed. Mr. Hendrickson added that it is accurate that special education being the umbrella for the gifted and talented programs in Connecticut. Connecticut statutes and guidelines indicate that districts are required to identify under child find students who qualify as talented and gifted however school districts are not required to provide services for gifted and talented students. Mr. Hendrickson stated that he was unaware of any specific state funding that would exclusively go towards the gifted and talented program, however would do additional research with Dr. Laporte for this topic.

Ms. Underwood questioned Dr. Nicol regarding the reduction of Library Media Specialists positions from four positions to two positions in his budget proposal, with one remaining at Windermere and one at Ellington Middle School. Ms. Underwood requested clarification in regards to the Library Media Assistants at both Center School and Crystal Lake, would the two positions in the budget proposal be required to travel

from school to school. Dr. Nicol responded that the Library Media Specialists for grades K-8 is 3.6: one full time position at the middle school, one full time position at both Center School and Windermere, and 0.6 position at Crystal Lake. Additionally, each school has a Library Media Assistant and or paraprofessional. The proposal includes a full time media specialist on a consistent basis for all four schools with a reduction of 1.6. The 1.6 reduction accounts for the 1.0 that would not be filled because of the retirement of one of the district Library Media Specialist employees and the .6 Library Media Specialist at Crystal Lake would not be filled. How the proposed two K-8 Library Media Specialist positions will be allocated across the district will be a process run by Mr. Hendrickson involves the Library Media Assistants, Library Media Specialists, feedback and conversations with teachers at the elementary and middle schools to determine the non-negotiables in a collaborative way. In addition, the tech integrationists and any gifted and talented/enrichment positions will contribute to the development of the K-8 program model.

Ms. Kupferschmid commented on the proposed reduction of .4 art teacher position understanding the difficult process in proposing a budget and requested more information regarding the reduction. Dr. Nicol responded by acknowledging that it is challenging to make difficult decisions regarding eliminating positions. Dr. Nicol feels although the .4 position was helpful in scheduling, the reduction would still allow the elementary art program to run to satisfaction. Mr. Hendrickson echoed the comments of Dr. Nicol of the importance of all programming including specials in unified arts at the elementary schools. The reduction of the .4 art position from an operational standpoint looked at the number of teachers, number of students, and number of sections throughout the school day. Ms. Nord inquired how many classes does the art teacher have each day in order to service every student at Windermere. Mr. Hendrickson replied that the number of special classes can vary by school per year but varies between five and seven classes a day. Ms. Nord asked how many minutes students received art instruction in which Mr. Hendrickson replied forty to fifty minutes per week and there are variables involved in scheduling each class. Ms. Nord replied that the reduction of art class time and the .4 art teacher is not an ideal situation for students at this time. Ms. Nord continued by explaining that she feels that the Library Media Specialists could assist in the implementation of gifted and talented programming with the ability to find more resources for students. Ms. Underwood commented that she had concerns with the reduction and cutting of positions to assist a gifted and talented program that has not been concretely determined and developed.

### Regular Board Committee Reports

Communications

(Timestamp: 1:08:24)

No update at this time.

Operations (Timestamp: 0:54:43)

Mr. Greenleaf spoke on behalf of Committee Chair Socha by updating the Board of the status of the Windermere Building project. Discussions were held regarding whether to move the project forward this calendar year by submitting an application by June 30, 2021, to receive approval by the legislature in 2022 or to move it off a year for approval and into the State by June 30, 2022, to receive approval by the legislature in 2023. The enrollment projection for Windermere and the district as a whole coming from NESDEC changed significantly. In December 2019, Windermere was projected to have seven hundred and eighty eight students and in December 2020 six hundred and eighty students were projected. The change in projected student enrollment would have an impact on the Windermere project as six to eight classrooms could be reduced, although during the time of Covid, the student enrollment could increase and the need for more classrooms would be necessary.

Mr. Greenleaf presented three paths forward:

1. Push to project off a year, which most of the Operations Committee members agreed, but not unanimous;
2. Build the project bigger than is allowable and get a reduction to the percentage reimbursed by the state, which would cost the town more;
3. Build the project based on the current projected student enrollment of six hundred and eighty but if the student enrollment increased another referendum would be required by the town to request more money from the state.

Mr. Greenleaf stated the preference of the committee was to delay the Windermere Building project a year as the other options had too much risk associated with them as well as additional costs. Dr. Nicol added that prior to the Covid pandemic, the Board of Education, Board of Finance, Board of Selectmen and Planning and Zoning were close to referendum for a vote on the building project. However, postponement of the referendum was the correct decision. Due to the large investment required for the Windermere Building project, it's imperative the student projected enrollment is solid and not have so much variance as currently indicated in order to go forward with the project. Dr. Nicol stated that it was the Administration and Operations Committee's recommendation to postpone the project one year, and the Administration supports the decision of the committee. Mr. Greenleaf concluded by stating that the Operations Committee's commitment to go forward with the Windermere Building Project is present as the improvement on the building is necessary.

Curriculum (Timestamp: 1:08:05)

Ms. Dzen spoke on behalf of Committee Chair Young and there was no Curriculum meeting held, however the next meeting will be scheduled on February 16, 2021, at 5:00 p.m.

Finance (Timestamp: 1:04:58)

Committee Chair Nord stated at the last meeting that staff members of the district's PreSchool Program requested an increase of twenty five cents per hour for preschool children; an increase from six (\$6.00) dollars an hour to six dollars and twenty five cents (\$6.25). Committee Chair Nord commented on the budget that was presented by Dr. Nicol which was discussed earlier in the meeting, and concluded with stating a deficit in the food service account of two hundred thousand dollars (\$200,000.00) which may be assisted by Covid grant money to help offset the deficit.

Mr. Greenleaf added the food service count has been running this year with the same amount of labor. The overall number of students in the buildings is lower, therefore the overall sales are lower with the projected deficit of \$200,000.00. Mr. Greenleaf believed that total would be covered by operating including potential money received from ESSER round two and will have more updates as they become available.

Policy (Timestamp: 1:01:39)

Committee Chair Picard-Wambolt presented the revision of Bylaw 9326 - Minutes/Taping; which included the minimum three month time frame for retaining audio and video minutes was changed to three years. The requirement to have board minutes available in unapproved form within seventy-two hours now included committee meetings minutes. The minutes approved by the full Board would be signed by the secretary of the Board whereas all committee meetings would be signed by designated Chairperson.

Committee Chair Picard-Wambolt continued by presenting the revision of Bylaw 9132 - Standing Committees; which the committee Chairperson or designee would be responsible for each committee meeting minutes.

ADMINISTRATIVE REPORTSSuperintendent's Report (Timestamp: 1:08:31)

Dr. Nicol reported an email or letter communication sent to all Board members and all Connecticut Superintendents regarding the legislative platform endorsing calling for state legislators to increase or expand CREC Teacher Residency Program. The response was well received and Dr. Nicol would be present at the legislative meeting breakfast to discuss this topic further. In addition, the Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents (CAPSS) have developed a blueprint for revamping education in the state of Connecticut. Line item ten (10) on the platform CAPPs has developed and aligned with the Ellington Board of Education. Dr. Nicol stated that this was a great collaborative initiative and was proud of the work by both CAPPs and the Ellington Board of Education. Dr. Nicol concluded his report with information from a memo sent by Principal John Guidry of Ellington High School that the same grading practices and approaches used in March 2020 would extend through the end of the 2020-2021 school year.

Ms. Nord questioned if the CREC Teacher Residency Program was included in Dr. Nicol's proposed budget. Dr. Nicol responded that the program is fully funded in the Choice Grant and is not included in the current 3.38% increase proposed.

Ms. Picard-Wambolt expressed concern regarding the pass/fail grading system extended at the high school level and how that could affect students' overall rank. Mr. Hendrickson responded that it could be a statistically possibility perhaps at the same time it would be detrimental to a student pursuing a class rank valedictorian/salutatorian etc. At the level of performance it could have a negative impact more times than not, however it was on the radar of high school administrators and would be dealt with very specifically on a case by case basis.

### Directors' Reports

#### Mid-Year Climate Parent/Staff Surveys - Mr. Hendrickson (Timestamp: 1:17:59)

Mr. Hendrickson updated the Board that based on the survey responses received from families were 1,291 responses, 915 student responses grades 3-12 and 281 staff responses. Mr. Hendrickson credits the staff, students and families for their resolve, dedication and resilience during this challenging school year. In addition, 93% of staff members responded that they feel comfortable approaching an administrator if they had a problem. The main area of growth was stress management, especially at the high school level and for Silver students as well. The Silver model has been highly effective at the elementary level and Mr. Hendrickson thanked the Board for their support in addition to those teachers working in that model. However, at the secondary level, having both students in person and on line at the same time presented challenges.

Working with Youth Services and offering psychological first aid has helped students navigate these difficulties.

Ms. Dzen inquired about the updated key district based qualitative measures and what the projected goals were for 2021 comparatively to 2019 and 2020. Mr. Hendrickson pointed out that the target column is the 2021 target goal. The climate numbers have been entered into the annual report which included the district's improvement plan. Ms. Dzen commented on the response of the student feeling challenged at school which ties into the potential gifted and talented program initiative. Mr. Hendrickson replied that at a national level the response of what I learn is valuable may decrease slightly as a student may go through adolescence. However offering a curriculum as relevant as possible for students is a prime focus.

Monthly Financial Report - Mr. Greenleaf (Timestamp: 1:24:41)

Mr. Greenleaf reported that there was a strong balance and there are accounts in the negative due to Covid.

BOARD LIAISON REPORT (Timestamp: 1:25:10)

No updates at this time.

ACTION ITEMS (Timestamp: 1:25:30)

Move that the Board approve action item #6 to determine Pre-Kindergarten Tuition Rates for Fiscal Years 2022-2024

1st. K. Picard-Wambolt                      2nd. L.Nord

VOTE: Unanimous. The motion passed.

1. Move, that upon the recommendation of the Policy Committee, the Board of Education holds a second and final vote to adopt the Ellington Public Schools revised Bylaw 9321 - Time, Place and Notification of Meetings as presented.

1st. K. Picard-Wambolt                      2nd. M. Kupferschmid

VOTE: Unanimous. The motion passed.



OLD/NEW BUSINESS

(Timestamp: 1:31:06)

NONE

CORRESPONDENCE/ROUNDTABLE

(Timestamp: 1:31:18)

Ms. Nord expressed she would like the Board to review the proposed budget and create ways to add the gifted and talented program and unassigned teacher without the reduction of Library Media Specialists. Ms. Nord inquired if there may be grants available to offset the cost before any final decisions are made.

(Timestamp 1:32:53)

Move that the Board of Education enter into the Executive Session for the purpose of discussing personnel salary negotiations and invite Dr. Scott Nicol, Superintendent of Schools and Mr. Brian Greeneleaf, Director of Finance and Operations into the session.

1st. K. Picard Wambolt

2nd. M. Kupferschmid

VOTE: Unanimous. The motion passed.

(Timestamp: 1:33:18)

The Board entered into Executive Session at 6:25 p.m.

The Board exited Executive Session at: 7:10 p.m.

A motion was made to adjourn the meeting at 7:12 p.m.

1st. M. Underwood

2nd. M. Kupferschmid

VOTE: Unanimous. The motion passed.

Respectfully submitted,

Kris Picard-Wambolt  
Secretary