

A Regular Meeting of the Ellington Board of Education was held on Wednesday, September 27, 2023, in the Ellington High School Library Media Center, 37 Maple Street, Ellington, CT 06029.

**The meeting was called to order at 6:01 p.m. by Chair Jennifer Dzen.**

**PRESENT** Chair Jennifer Dzen, Vice-Chair Mike Young, Secretary Jennifer Mullin, Treasurer Liz Nord, Gary Blanchette, Marcia Kupferschmid, Angela Moser, Kerry Socha (6:25 p.m.), Miriam Underwood, Steve Viens

**ALSO PRESENT** Dr. Scott V. Nicol, Superintendent of Schools  
Mr. Oliver Barton, Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction  
Ms. Alisha Carpino, Director of Finance and Operations  
Dr. Kristy LaPorte, Director of Special Services  
Mr. Aaron Fliss, Director of Technology  
Ms. Jennifer Brown, Coordinator of Human Resources

**PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

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Courtesy of Ms. Giroux and Ms. Garcia's Kindergarten classes at Crystal Lake Elementary School

**SPECIAL RECOGNITIONS**

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**IT Department - Mr. Aaron Fliss, Director of Information Technology**

Mr. Fliss shared his appreciation for the outstanding efforts of our exceptional tech team. Their work goes far beyond the day-to-day needs, they are continually monitoring for new threats and developments in the technology world. Mr. Fliss shared that he considers himself fortunate to have an exceptional team and thanked the Board for their support.

**BOARD CHAIR REPORT**

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Ms. Dzen shared that we had a nice reception to welcome the new teachers prior to the regular meeting. Chair Dzen addressed the recent warm days and wants the staff, teachers, and administrators to know that the Board heard you, both positive and negative feedback, and we will work toward improving the processes. She thanked those who reached out and for their support. Chair Dzen also stated that the Board is heading into budget season and could start preparing earlier, start looking at ways to improve processes, stay fiscally responsible and that it's never too early to start. Lastly, Chair Dzen wished Ms. Miriam Underwood a very happy birthday. She shared that Ms. Underwood's commitment to the Board is nothing short of exceptional. She shared her appreciation for all that Board Member Miriam Underwood does.

**CITIZEN & STAFF FORUM**

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**Peter Hany Jr. of the Ellington Volunteer Fire Department**

Mr. Hany addressed the Board.

**Pete Buonomi of the CT Fire Department Instructor's Association**

Mr. Buonomi addressed the Board.

**Christal Banville, 5 Standish Road, Ellington, CT 06029**

Ms. Banville addressed the Board.

**Christian Gervin, 163 Crystal Lake Road, Ellington, CT 06029**

Mr. Gervin addressed the Board.

**Allison Hadden, 14 Allen Ridge Drive, Ellington, CT 06029**

Ms. Hadden addressed the Board.

**Jenna Miller, 35 Blueberry Circle, Ellington, CT 06029**

Ms. Miller addressed the Board.

**Katie Herrity, 115 Springfield Road, Somers, CT 06071**

Ms. Herrity addressed the Board

**Melissa Scarbrough, 1 Trumbull Street, Vernon, CT 06066**

Ms. Scarbrough addressed the Board.

**CONSENT AGENDA**

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1. Approval of Minutes: Regular Meeting, August 23, 2023, 6:00 p.m.
2. Approval of Minutes: Special Meeting, August 30, 2023, 2:00 p.m.
3. Human Resources Monthly Report

Chair Dzen asked if anyone wished to remove any item(s) from the Consent Agenda. Chair Dzen announced that with hearing none, the Consent Agenda stands.

**REPORT AND DISCUSSION ITEMS**

**SPECIAL REPORTS**

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**Exploration of Separate Ellington Public Schools Pre-K Program**

**Ms. Alisha Carpino, Director of Finance and Operations and Ms. Sara Spak, Special Education Supervisor**

Dr. Nicol called upon Alisha Carpino and Sara Spak to provide some conceptual challenges that the district will be facing around Pre-K programming and classroom space. Sara Spak shared with the Board that enrollment is increasing in our Pre-K program. We are the only National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) accredited program in Ellington. We have reached our max capacity at our elementary schools for preschool. New legislation also affects the enrollment going forward where students cannot begin K if they are not five by 9/1, this will create an enrollment bubble because we have current preschool students who will be no longer eligible to start Kindergarten in the fall. These impacts will be seen beginning with the 24-25 school year.

Ms. Carpino shared a low probability option to find an alternate location to serve the classroom needs, the need warrants approximately 15k square feet. Funding will be needed to configure the space, cover start-up costs, staffing needs, and to support the program overall without increasing the general fund budget. The goal is for this to be a self-sustaining program.

Ms. Spak and Ms. Carpino would like to come back to the Board with more details, devise a plan, use the next few months to compile data and enrollment forecasts, and present to the Board.

**REGULAR BOARD COMMITTEE REPORTS**

**Curriculum**

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Dr. Young called upon Mr. Barton to discuss SBAC and SAT scores. Mr. Barton began with grades 3-6. There have been incremental gains across the elementary school grades. Mr. Barton shared that we are seeing gains in cohorts as they move up in grade. Overall, the growth is showing higher scores than before the pandemic in lower grades. We are confident that the work on Science of Reading and adjustments to the reading programs have paid off. On the math side, the gains are also positive. In grades 7-8, Mr. Barton shared that we are seeing average improvement but not fast enough to meet the current standards in place. That is a particular challenge that the middle school is working on.

Moving on to the High School and the SAT. The state reports results for schoolwide school day SAT in 11th grade. Mr. Barton shared that the percentage of students reaching the college and career readiness standard had dropped for the current 12th-grade class. The task turned to looking at how the students improved over the whole four years from annual PSATs and then SAT. For the class of 2023, there was a 480 average to start and ended at 550. The lower-scoring cohort also grew over the course of four years. The district is confident that the high school is doing good work in moving students forward. The College Board predicts that students can improve by 30 points each year they take the test. Test changes are coming and we will have access to sample tests and, anecdotally, the way for educators to understand what is on the test is to also take the test, stated Mr. Barton.

#### **Finance**

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Ms. Nord shared that the committee shared that the motion for the transfer of unexpended funds was approved by the Town of Ellington and the Board of Finance on September 6, 2023, and that the total of the transfer was \$29,657.51. Not many impacts right now, being only one month into school. Ms. Nord also shared that an update on the electric services rate, stating that a contract was acquired locking in a rate of .1147 per kilowatt for the next two years starting November 1, 2023. Ms. Carpino stated that a quick analysis against rates and usage from the prior budget year predicted an estimated savings of \$30,000. Ms. Carpino added that budget season is coming so we will be busy planning, that the audit is completed and went really well, and that the previous year's budget is officially closed.

**Communications** - No Report

**Operations** - No Report

**Policy** - No Report

#### **ADMINISTRATION REPORTS**

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##### **Superintendent's Report - Weather Operations**

###### **Dr. Scott V. Nicol, Superintendent**

Dr. Nicol addressed the criticism regarding weather operations in the District. When making challenging judgment decisions such as a weather-related call, Dr. Nicol greatly respects parents, staff, students, and the community and stated that criticism is important whether they agree or disagree. It is challenging as a Board and Administrative team to navigate these challenging situations and they will do that with honesty and integrity. Dr. Nicol works closely with the teachers' union presidents and will continue to make challenging decisions and is open to reflection. The discussion continued regarding how the district came to a decision regarding early release on Thursday, September 28th.

Dr. Nicol also shared the warm weather athletics protocol and an update that all sports ran, with modifications, both indoor and outdoor based on the CIAC guidelines. Modifications included, but were not limited to hydration, rest periods, shade, and location changes.

Dr. Nicol also shared an HVAC update in relation to hot weather. The new projects at Center, EMS, and EHS will include dehumidification rather than reducing temperature. Crystal Lake already has this system in place and there were and will continue to be hot classrooms that will reach approximately 80 degrees. Windermere School is projected to be complete in 25-26 and will be the only school fully air-conditioned.

Dr. Nicol concluded by stating that regardless if there is a number of teachers or staff upset with the decisions made they will be thanked for their work. Dr. Nicol thanked the public for feedback and criticism and that this is what is needed and will help to move forward in making future decisions.

#### **Directors' Reports**

### **Human Resources Fall Staffing Report 2023**

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#### **Ms. Jennifer Brown, Coordinator of Human Resources**

Ms. Brown shared with the Board some highlights to this year's hiring process. The numbers are down for certified hires which puts the district back on target to the pre-pandemic average. We had 18 new certified hires. Three of which are new positions to the district. New positions included an Occupational Therapist, Social Worker, Psychologist, Preschool teachers, and two new Security Officers. Ms. Brown shared that the new security team has done a great job and shared her kudos for their quick acclimations to the district as a team. Lastly, Ms. Brown shared that the marketing strategies have significantly grown, and adding to that is in-person college fairs attendance which has been really great. We were able to fill a very hard-to-fill position through a career fair...our new ASL teacher at the high school.

### **Monthly Financial Report**

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#### **Ms. Alisha Carpino, Director of Finance and Operations**

Ms. Carpino shared that the current balance on the budget of \$45,083,347 is \$4,298,438.43. This includes all encumbrances, pre-encumbrances, accounts payable, and payroll through September 19, 2023. The certified, non-certified and group insurance numbers are being reviewed currently and will be on track soon.

### **BOARD LIAISON REPORTS**

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Student Liaison, Noelle Krawsynski began by thanking the Board for the opportunity to represent the high school and to share with the Board student-focused information regarding the community at Ellington High School. Her report included the following points:

- Freshmen were welcomed by Link Crew Leaders at Freshman Orientation. The new students were taught the new Suit Up, Stand Up cheer and concept.
- Add/drop period is over. Students are acclimating to their classes and new teachers are becoming a valued part of the school community.
- Midpoint of Q1 is 9/29/23
- Student Council and Knights Nation are teaming up to reinvent the student section of sports games. Football is the most attended. Plans are to create a fun and thrilling experience for the students as well as a contained, safe, and appropriate experience while still having fun.
- Opening Knights Players: 30x60 performance on 9/29 and 10/1 at 7:30 PM. This show includes 30 acts in 60 minutes, all acts are student-written. \$6 and \$8 tickets
- Open House is on 9/28. The Open House is student-centered and will show parents what EHS is all about. Mr. David Helmin and the culinary students will be providing the food.

### **Permanent Building Committee**

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PBC committee selected an architect and HVAC company is in discussions with Alisha Carpino. Plans will be submitted on each school.

### **Ellington Middle School**

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Liaison Kerry Socha wanted to give a shout-out to the EMS program that allows students to go to first period at the High School to take Geometry, Latin, and/or Robotics. She shared her appreciation for the program and that it is a great opportunity for the students. Ms. Socha stated she is glad to see that it has expanded and that it is a great piece of the promotion of enrichment programs. Dr. Young added additional discussion on these opportunities. There are a lot of activities at the Middle School and based on feedback, everything is going really well.

### **Shared Services**

Jen Dzen shared that the committee will meet next month.

### **Windermere School**

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Liaison Steve Viens shared that Windermere is implementing positive behavior awards. New awards include the golden spatula from the cafeteria and the golden swing at recess. At the end of each week, the top grade levels earn either special seating or VIP access to fun games/toys outside. Ms. Viens also shared that Windermere is holding their first-ever Glo Run, it is a major fundraiser this year taking place on October 10th. Principal Hill will be slimed at the front of the school as an incentive!

#### **Crystal Lake School**

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Liaison Miriam Underwood shared that the PTO installed a sensory hallway in addition to the sensory path outside. It has already been used and enjoyed by many. Ms. Underwood also shared that CLS Open House was successful, RULER is being implemented, a generous gift card was received from Back to School Ellington and Ellington Unplugged is being implemented with Friday activities.

#### **Wellness Committee**

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Liaison Underwood shared that the committee is putting together a quarterly staff newsletter featuring Dr. Rampal, District Medical Advisor who will be writing a column on staff wellness and working in Ellington Unplugged concepts. Additional initiatives included using the popular Walker Tracker app to encourage movement and activity, prizes will be awarded. Lindsay Stellar, Director of Food Services, will provide nutritional presentations one time per month, per school and the high school is implementing a wellness break during PD days with physical activity, meditation, etc.

#### **Ellington High School**

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Liaison Moser shared that the PSAT coming up on 10/11 and that this exam helps identify the National Merit Scholars. Ms. Moser shared that curriculum work continues to press forward on the 5-year curriculum plan and lastly, she stated that Mr. Helmin shared that the theme for Open House from the Culinary Program is Mission Nutrition.

#### **ACTION ITEMS**

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##### **First read to adopt revisions to Policy 5800, Student Discipline**

##### **MOTION**

First: A. Moser

Second: J. Mullin

First read to adopt revisions to Policy 5800, Student Discipline.

Motion unanimously carried.

##### **First read to adopt revisions to Policy 4300, Employment and Student Teacher Checks**

##### **MOTION**

First: A. Moser

Second: J. Mullin

First read to adopt revisions to Policy 4300, Employment and Student Teacher Checks.

Motion unanimously carried.

##### **First read to adopt revisions to Policy 4500, Hiring of Staff**

##### **MOTION**

First: A. Moser

Second: L. Nord

First read to adopt revisions to Policy 4500, Hiring of Staff.

Motion unanimously carried.

##### **First read to adopt revisions to Policy 6147, Grade Weighting/Class Ranking**

##### **MOTION**

First: A. Moser

Second: M. Underwood

First read to adopt revisions to Policy 6147, Grade Weighting/Class Ranking.

Motion unanimously carried.

**Approval of District Improvement Plan 2023-2024**

**MOTION**

First: L. Nord

Second: M. Young

To approve the District Improvement Plan 2023-2024.

Motion unanimously carried.

**Accept the retirement of Maureen Turney, Custodian at Windermere School, effective January 1, 2024**

**MOTION**

First: M. Kupferschmid

Second: L. Nord

Accept the retirement of Maureen Turney, Custodian at Windermere School, effective January 1, 2024.

Motion unanimously carried.

**CORRESPONDENCE/ROUNDTABLE**

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Dr. Nicol took a moment to address the swim team concerns shared by the community. He shared that Ellington is part of a co-op team and that Enfield is the host, therefore, we do not have control over the staffing or the ability to leave the co-op per CIAC agreement. We are committed to the co-op for one more year. Ellington is working with the host, Enfield, to come up with a plan. Dr. Nicol shared that there are budgetary concerns around travel. The budget allotted for athletics travel is 30k but the actual cost is 80-90k per year for transportation, with the difference funded by pay-to-play. Swim is only a small portion of the athletics program and transportation is only provided partially. The goal would be to become a stand-alone EHS Knights Swim team or a co-op where Ellington is the host school. Dr. Nicol added that if someone were to donate to the district, the donation could be specific to where and how the money is spent, specifically to swim if presented as such but that isn't the primary matter, there is more work to look at and to do.

Ms. Underwood and Ms. Millun would like to refer to the Curriculum Committee to follow up with regard to the Fire Education Programming. Ms. Moser appreciates seeing options to direct career paths such as the program with DESCO, she inquired if there are other businesses willing to provide a similar opportunity. Mr. Barton shared that Linda Roberson and Assistant Principal Marc Richards are looking into these opportunities.

**ADJOURNMENT**

**MOTION**

First: J. Mullin

Second: M. Kupferschmid

To adjourn the Regular Meeting of the Board (8:14 p.m.)

Motion unanimously carried.

