

**COVENTRY BOARD OF EDUCATION  
APPROVED MINUTES  
SPECIAL MEETING OF TUESDAY, JANUARY 29, 2008**

Members Present: Larry Pietrantonio, Chairman  
Cheryl Trudon, Secretary (arrived at 7:37 p.m.)  
John Barrett  
Mary Kortmann  
Michael Whitham  
Richard Williams

Members Absent: Kathleen Ryan, Vice Chairman

Administrators Present: Dr. Donna Bernard, Superintendent  
Sherry Holmes, Fiscal Services Director

Also present were Judith Richard, Pupil and Staff Support Services Director; Paul Noel, Director of Physical Plant and Facilities; Troy Hopkins, CHS Principal; Michele Mullaly, CNH Interim Principal; David Petrone, GHR Principal; Raymond Grasso, CGS Principal; Scott Sadinsky, CNH Assistant Principal; and a few citizens. The Chronicle newspaper was represented. All motions are directed to the Coventry Board of Education.

**I. CALL TO ORDER**

By: Chairman, L. Pietrantonio                      Time: 7:35 p.m.  
Place: Administration Building Conference Room

**II. SALUTE THE FLAG**

The Pledge of Allegiance was led by L. Pietrantonio.

**III. AUDIENCE OF CITIZENS**

Jennifer Beausoleil of 221 Eastview Drive said she noticed the discussion of the Superintendent's evaluation would happen tonight in executive session. She said she wanted to comment as an active parent in the community and she speaks for many parents who are pleased with Dr. Bernard's work and the progress the district is making under her supervision. She said Dr. Bernard's commitment to excellence has been phenomenal.

Barbara Riordan of 855 Merrow Road said she hoped the Board would consider including the following items in the FY09 budget. She said an Athletic Trainer is desperately needed. She conveyed her experience at a recent girls' basketball game when one of the players was hurt. She said it was a frightening moment before they knew she was going to be okay. She said it was evident a trainer was missing, with comments made by a visitor sitting close by. She stated adding a trainer is the right thing for the Board to do and she hopes a way is found to get it in the budget. In addition, she is concerned about the Enrichment programs. She said the district has always lacked in this area and some families have even left town due to the deficiency. She acknowledged the schools do try to make up for it, but it is such an important subject for the children effected and she believes it would get a lot of support.

## X. NEW BUSINESS

L. Pietrantonio said he would like all of the presentations to be heard first and then the floor would be open for questions afterwards.

### A. Information: Budget Presentation/Discussions

#### 1. Presentation of FY09 Budget – Dr. Bernard and S. Holmes

Dr. Bernard said it is a very tight position to be in, to develop a budget that serves students well and is agreeable to those who have to approve it by referendum. She said the 2-column spreadsheet is located in the budget book and the Board would note that she is recommending a budget which came in at 6.09% and the site based recommendations came in at 7.87%. She stated there isn't anything in column one that she would not recommend and that she recommends everything, but the percentage is not what the taxpayers will approve. She reiterated she appreciates the Board's questions ahead of time, via email, which gives staff enough time to answer items correctly.

#### 2. Physical Plant & Facilities – P. Noel

Mr. Noel informed the Board that included in his department's responsibilities is the cleaning of buildings, repair and maintenance to buildings, ordering of supplies, setting up for events, and caring for perimeters of schools, just to name a few. He stated that for the 2006-07 school year the maintenance department operated at 70% of others in DRG E. If you take away the many items of which he has no control, such as heat costs, he only has 18.7% to work with in creating a budget for the other items. He commented that a few increases he would like to see include support to summer projects, stipends for a chemical hygiene officer and a safety officer, and for an emergency response update.

#### 3. Central Office – S. Holmes

Ms. Holmes asked the Board to refer to the last section in their books marked CO. She said they would find mostly overhead costs in this section. She commented that the secretary salaries have been increased by 3% and this is the placeholder because the secretarial contract is to be negotiated this spring. She said health insurance is another item in this section. She added the pension account is up due to contractual obligations and that the unemployment costs are up as well, which is very hard to predict from year to year. She said that legal and audit services needed increases and the legal account increase was due to employee related issues and negotiation of contracts. She noted the student transportation contract has an increase for next year which had to be accounted for in the budget. She added the 1<sup>st</sup> Student contract is up in 2009 and the district will go out to bid on the contract. Continuing she said one new bus was added due to overcrowding issues on the middle and high school runs. She told members that this section includes magnet school transportation funding and advertising for vacancies. She finished by commenting that expenses for printing, travel reimbursement by IRS standards, diesel fuel, and dues and fees for workshops and associations are included in this section.

#### 4. Coventry Grammar School – R. Grasso

Mr. Grasso stated there are certain things an administrator has no control over in budget development, such as copier contracts. He said that items in account 611 are the ones that mean the most to the school. He added when he talked to his people about budget development he asked for a 0% increase. He said this means fewer markers, pencils, and other supplies for students. He noted that technology has expanded, which is a wonderful thing, but it also means there is the need for additional costs, such as the appropriate

software, repair of computers, and printers that need more cartridges. He continued by noting the increase to the account for professional development workshops. He said in 2003-04 the average cost was \$95 per person and now the range is \$195 - \$210, depending on how many people attend. He said topics covered in these workshops are ones that cannot be covered by in-house staff. He continued by saying the number one resource at CGS is the faculty and staff. He said there are two issues with staffing he wanted to mention to the Board, one is a concern and the other a request. He noted that funding from the Title I grant covers most of the reading room para-educators and unfortunately the distribution of these grant funds are based on the numbers of students receiving free/reduced lunch. He said this is very concerning because CGS cannot include in the count up to 150 students because Kindergarteners do not receive lunch. In the future, if this does not change a para-educator would need to be reassigned to GHR. He said this change in staff would devastate the program. He asked for the inclusion of one reading room para-educator in the budget so one would be left in the reading room if this reassignment had to take place. He finished by asking that the gifted and talented teacher be included to share half-time with GHR and stated this person would be a mentor for students and advisor to parents.

Dr. Bernard commented that she has authorized the administrators to make their case to the Board on what they need, even though some items have not made it to the final budget sheets.

#### 5. G. H. Robertson School – D. Petrone

Mr. Petrone began by saying if the salaries are removed GHR is left with just over \$100,000 to dedicate to instructional materials. He said he had definite priorities with this budget and the first he addressed was the need to maintain the current level of staff support. He said to do this he had to look at running the school more efficiently and he did this by being more creative and productive without increasing staff. He noted that the Expanding Horizons program has been kept without the UCONN funding and staff hours have been adjusted to provide additional before and after school programs. He said this has all been done without increasing funding. He said an additional focus is to continue the work on the ABC project. Next he noted the need for instructional material and training and that the Everyday Math Program is extremely important. Finally he spoke to the request for a half time world language teacher and a half time challenge and enrichment teacher. He said since the one day a week program has been added, parents and students want more. He continued that sharing the librarian with CGS has worked out well and he would like to see the same with a challenge and enrichment teacher. He said that the world language program is parent requested and he did research looking at surrounding towns. He said Bolton starts in third grade and Mansfield in second. He stated he wants Coventry students to have the same opportunities as student in other towns and although the afterschool program has been great, he would like see it brought into the regular school day.

#### 6. Capt. Nathan Hale School – M. Mullaly

Ms. Mullaly stated that the CNH proposed budget supports the district goals and achievement of all students. She said CNH students are counting on the continuation of the challenge and enrichment program, which has been cut back this year due to its expansion to other schools. She continued that the heart and soul of the budget are the instructional supplies. She also conveyed the need for the teacher for technical education. She said the Board will note that the textbook account has decreased while the workbook account has increased due to CMT preparation work and that these items are an important resource for our students. She added that the reinstatement of the industrial

arts program/curriculum will give our students the opportunity to be prepared for attending a technical high school and without it we are compromising the program at Coventry High School. In addition, she noted interscholastic clubs and programs are so important for the students. She finished by mentioning a quick list of items that have increased which included the SmartBoard lab, a Kiln, overtime funding for secretarial work, and a bass clarinet. She finished by commenting that some needs require long term planning and there are wonderful things happening at CNH.

#### 7. Coventry High School – T. Hopkins

Mr. Hopkins began by reminding the Board that the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) requires the school to respond to them according to the NEASC schedule. He said CHS has focused heavily on two areas due to NEASC recommendations, one is curriculum and the other is instruction. He commented there are CHS teachers who are ready and motivated to use SmartBoards and the high school does not have one SmartBoard for use. He said this is one reason the computer education equipment line has increased. He added there is the need to redesign the graduation portfolio and portfolio committee meetings have been held and with these improvements students will have better opportunities for more enhanced portfolios. He said this would require more computer storage. He continued that student athletes should have the benefit of an athletic trainer and CHS is the only school in their athletic conference without a trainer. Next he spoke to students who are struggling to succeed and how the situation can be discouraging which leads to the disruption of others learning. He said one of the school's jobs is to help prepare students for success in life. He said one position he had hoped for in 2008-09 was the addition of a Career Pathways teacher. Finally he addressed extra curricular activities for students, including funds to BCL (Bolton-Coventry-Lyman) hockey. He said Bolton supports the team at \$3,000 per year and he would like to see Coventry match that figure. He said he would also like to see football partly funded by paying for an assistant coach and the indoor track team should receive coach funding also. He concluded by saying he would like non-athletic extra-curricular student activities to receive \$3,000 for clubs like speech and debate.

#### 8. Pupil & Staff Support Services – J. Richard

Ms. Richard began by reminding the Board that the PSSS budget is an extremely complex budget serving a complex student population. She said the PSSS budget has low level increases in many categories and where there are increases they are needed and required. She said the speech assistance item is comprehensive and involved and includes refinements to services related to a speech and hearing mechanism. She added that alternate communication devices have become much more complex and we are looking into having someone manage it in-house rather than outsourcing it. She said Coventry must provide the device and the services and it is expensive to repair and maintain the item. The next item she addressed was the IEP Direct Program. She explained that all of the special education students have an Individualized Educational Program (IEP) and for some students they are 30 pages long. She said all of the IEPs are processed through the special education office and with 269 students that is a lot of processing and if there is just one mistake it could put the district into a due process hearing, which could run anywhere between \$60,000 and \$90,000. She said the district is very careful in how the IEPs are processed, and the guidelines are incredibly difficult to accomplish by hand – it has become more than what people can do and with this program every report can be generated. She continued with the item of transportation stating there are currently two active group homes in Coventry with a third in the works, which could give us the potential of 18 additional students. For instance, she said, Coventry assumed a placement and the situation requires we transport to Plainville daily. She finished by

speaking to the tuition account, which is up due to students attending magnet schools – the district has to pay special education costs for any special education student attending a magnet school.

Dr. Bernard stated that the staff and administration have worked collaboratively to advocate for children in their budgets and thanked them for their time and efforts.

L. Pietrantonio opened the floor for questions.

M. Whitham asked if Challenge and Enrichment was the same as Gifted and Talented. Dr. Bernard answered yes.

M. Whitham asked Mr. Petrone which language would be offered if that position was approved. Mr. Petrone responded, Spanish, and added that it was the most commonly taught and requested language.

M. Whitham asked Mr. Hopkins if the Career Pathways position was a counselor or a teacher. Mr. Hopkins said teacher and M. Whitham asked why not a counselor. Mr. Hopkins explained the program would be somewhat self-contained. He said the students would work in academics in collaboration with other teachers, in addition to possible work programs offsite. He said the program would have a varied schedule, which requires a teacher with training specific to these types of students. He added the hope is the students will connect with this teacher and this is the type of assistance these students need. M. Whitham asked if it would be a multi-grade program. Mr. Hopkins responded yes, for 10-12 students and possibly grade 8 and 9, if the situation arose.

M. Whitham next addressed the technology education teacher and what the reasoning was to add one when Coventry has two technology education schools so close by. Ms. Mullaly responded that it gives the opportunity to the younger students to check out the program and a possible feel for going to a technology education school. She also said that it would give a better foundation for the existing CHS program.

R. Williams thanked Mr. Grasso for preparing his budget at the lowest percentage compared to the other administrators and that he does this year after year.

M. Kortmann questioned the vocational agricultural tuition and the magnet school tuition increase of \$55,000. It was decided the answer would be broken down and sent in an email to the Board.

M. Kortmann wondered why account # 1000-30-112-2130 – Salaries: Health Services CNHS would go down by 40%. Ms. Richard and Ms. Holmes said it was for a nurse that would move with the student when s/he left that school.

J. Barrett asked about the reasoning behind the addition of a safety officer. He asked if the maintenance department had these MSDS (Material Safety Data Sheets) books in place. Mr. Noel responded that the district is working toward compliance and as the chairman of safety committee he has become even more aware of the concern. J. Barrett continued asking if the MSDS is taken care of now when the product comes in. Mr. Noel stated the MSDS is required in various locations and all of the steps in the procedure are not fully happening at this time and someone on staff to monitor this program is truly needed.

J. Barrett said there was a long list of items noted under account # 1000-60-430-2600 and he wanted to know if there was a detailed list of what these items cost individually, which would equal \$92,000. Mr. Noel explained he had a larger amount, but knew it would make his percentage increase too large, so he rounded down to a figure he thought would be “workable”. It was decided a detailed list would be given to the Board via email.

J. Barrett questioned why the district was still using pagers. Mr. Noel said the pagers are more reliable than cell phones and a maintenance person needs to be on call for the buildings after hours.

R. Williams stated that the previous years budget books had the detailed costs of accounts and wanted to know why this year’s had changed. Dr. Bernard responded that all information can be provided, if asked. She said that some of the items are provided in more detail and some accounts did not need the small items costed out. Dr. Bernard added that she had seen CAFE (Connecticut Association of Boards of Education) examples and award winning budget book formats and the format Coventry was using was extremely outdated. She said this newer format is more inline to what is recommended. Ms. Holmes added that CASBO (Connecticut Association of School Business Officials) is also aligning to this type of format. Dr. Bernard reiterated that more detail can be given if needed and she encouraged the Board members to send those requests via email, copying all Board members.

J. Barrett commented that it would be much easier as a Board member to have all of the detail available in the book.

Dr. Bernard explained, as an example, when there are cuts to be made usually she is directed to cut to a flat percentage. She continued when she has that figure she goes to the administrators with that percent and they go back and make the adjustments because they know what can be cut from their budgets. She said she does not tell the administrators where to cut specifically, just as a Board of Directors would not say “cut those reams of paper” or “do not to use that toilet paper.” She explained it is not the role of a Board of Directors to do those details, but rather they focus on “big, priority items.” She added the new budget book format is following the professional organization standards, however she understands the interest in those numbers and they can be provided upon request.

M. Whitham told the administrators they did a great job in preparing this budget. He said there are some things that will require more detail and he understands now the Board will be able to get that info. He asked how many special education students Coventry has. J. Richard responded 269. M. Whitham asked how many special education staff Coventry has. It was decided that information would be provided to the Board in an email.

M. Whitham asked for clarification on page 4 of the PSSS section, specifically the additional costs listed for vocational programs. Ms. Richard responded those costs are for Coventry students attending those programs who have special education needs of which we have to pay extra. M. Whitham continued asking for clarification on out-of-state tuition. Ms. Richard went on to explain how Coventry came fiscally responsible for this student. The conversation continued and focused on students living in Coventry group homes. Ms. Richard explained that the district has incurred a lot of students this year through the DCF group homes and they hold Coventry responsible.

M. Whitham asked how many para-educators are in the reading program at CGS. Mr. Grasso replied there are 4 and 2.5 are funded through Title I grant funds.

M. Whitham again thanked everyone for their hard work on the budget development.

Dr. Bernard said she understands this can take a lot of time to digest. She encouraged the Board members to email questions, copying the full Board. She said her staff would reply as quickly as possible.

J. Barrett asked about the addition of a bass clarinet at CNH and commented he thought students were expected to bring their own instrument. Ms. Mullaly explained it would be a replacement for the school's clarinet, one of the instruments that is lent out to students who can't afford to purchase/rent their own. She added there hasn't been a budgetary commitment to instruments at CNH since 1991. J. Barrett suggested perhaps a donation could be sought.

J. Barrett asked for an explanation of the term "504 student." Ms. Richard explained it comes from the Americans with Disabilities Act and is a student with special needs, but who does not qualify for special education.

J. Barrett asked what percentage of Coventry students are special education. J. Richard said it is 12.9%, which is keeping with DRG E and the state average. She added these special education students are not "504" students, the number of 269 is special education only, "504" is separate. Mr. Grasso added that Coventry has only 12 or 13 "504" students currently and the "504" status can change for a student.

J. Barrett asked about the education of expelled students through tutoring. Ms. Richard said the district provides an alternative education as required by law.

J. Barrett asked for clarification on the magnet school costs, specifically the cost for Great Path Academy. It was decided the details on that would be confirmed in an email to the full Board. Dr. Bernard did comment that the district is attempting to get into participatory agreements with various magnet programs so the budget has a set cost for tuition. A discussion ensued about magnet school lotteries and transportation costs.

C. Trudon asked if the noted 22 slots at E. O. Smith are the same as this year, or did they increase. Dr. Bernard said it is the same.

J. Barrett questioned the property liability insurance increase by 100%. Ms. Holmes responded that the town has paid a portion of this in the past, but it has been determined that the Board should pay 59% of the cost. She added this is not an increase in the amount of the insurance, just in the Board's portion.

## **XI. EXECUTIVE SESSION**

Pursuant to CGS-1-200(c)(6)(A), the Board of Education will go into Executive Session for discussion related to the Superintendent's Evaluation and Non-Union Agreements.

**MOTION: Pursuant to CGS-1-200(c)(6)(A), the Board of Education will go into Executive Session for discussion related to the Superintendent's Evaluation and Non-Union Agreements with the Superintendent present.**

**By: C. Trudon**

**Seconded: R. Williams**

**Result: Motion passes unanimously.**

**XII. OPEN SESSION**

VOTE: The Board will return to open session and vote on Non-Union Employment Agreements.

The Board returned to Open Session at 10:32 p.m.

**MOTION: To Accept the Employment Agreement for the Position of Data Management Specialist as presented by the Superintendent.**

**By: M. Kortmann                      Seconded: M. Whitham**

**Result: Motion passes unanimously.**

**MOTION: To Renew the Employment Agreement as negotiated for Frederic Lambert the MIS/Network Administrator.**

**By: M. Whitham                      Seconded: M. Kortmann**

**Result: Motion passes unanimously.**

**MOTION: To Renew the Employment Agreement as negotiated for Kathy Zanotti the Technology Specialist.**

**By: J. Barrett                      Seconded: M. Kortmann**

**Result: Motion passes unanimously.**

**MOTION: To Renew the Employment Agreement as negotiated for William Holmes the Computer Repair Technician.**

**By: M. Kortmann                      Seconded: J. Barrett**

**Result: Motion passes unanimously.**

**XIII. ADJOURNMENT**

**MOTION: To adjourn the Board meeting at 10:35 p.m.**

**By: M. Kortmann                      Seconded: M. Whitham**

**Result: Motion passes unanimously.**

---

Respectfully submitted,

---

Kimberlee Michaud  
Board Clerk

**February 14, 2008**  
**Approved**