

**COVENTRY BOARD OF EDUCATION  
APPROVED MINUTES  
MEETING OF THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 13, 2008**

Members Present: Larry Pietrantonio, Chairman  
Kathleen Ryan, Vice Chairman  
Cheryl Trudon, Secretary  
John Barrett  
Mary Kortmann  
Michael Whitham (arrived 7:35 p.m.)  
Richard Williams

Also Present: Kyle Beausoleil, Student BOE Representative

Administrators Present: Donna Bernard, Superintendent of Schools  
Sherry Holmes, Fiscal Services Director  
Judith Richard, Pupil & Staff Support Services

Also present were Marybeth Moyer, CGS Principal; David Petrone, GHR Principal; Michele Mullaly, CNH Principal; Troy Hopkins, CHS Principal; Paul Noel, Director of Physical Plant and Facilities; and a few citizens. All motions are directed to the Coventry Board of Education.

**I. CALL TO ORDER**

By: Chairman, L. Pietrantonio at 7:29 p.m.  
Place: Town Hall Annex

**II. SALUTE THE FLAG**

The Pledge of Allegiance was led by L. Pietrantonio.

**III. AUDIENCE OF CITIZENS**

There were none.

**IV. REPORT OF THE SUPERINTENDENT**

A. Student Recognition: *Coventry Pride* – CHS Student Amanda McGowan attended July 2008 Girls State/Nation

Dr. Bernard said she was pleased to have Coventry High School senior Amanda McGowan present at the meeting. Miss McGowan was a participant in the American Legion's Girls State/Nation program in July 2008. Miss McGowan spoke briefly about her experiences. Dr. Bernard noted how very proud she and the Board is of this accomplishment. Miss McGowan will be presented with a gift certificate from the Board of Education.

Dr. Bernard noted there will be a new page on the website regarding Outstanding Coventry Graduates. She said anyone can recommend a graduate for the webpage. They can contact the Superintendent's Office for further information.

B. Information: EASTCONN Autism Program at CGS

Dr. Bernard introduced Judith Richard to facilitate the presentation. Ms. Richard introduced the presenters: Dr. Marianne Barton, Associate Clinical Professor, Psychology at the University of Connecticut; Thomas Cronin, Director of Education Services at

EASTCONN; and Ronald Morin, Coordinator of Autism Spectrum Disorder Services at EASTCONN.

Dr. Barton began the presentation by explaining autism in general. She said it is a lifelong disability which can affect children's issues from academics to social behavior. She also noted it is a biologically driven disorder. She continued talking about the types of services these children need and that many of the services required are in addition to special education services provided.

Ms. Richard talked about Coventry students with autism who are currently going out of town for schooling and services. She introduced Mr. Cronin from EASTCONN.

Mr. Cronin talked about how EASTCONN approaches finding solutions for the needs of students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). He said about four years ago EASTCONN did an extensive "needs assessment" for the region and found there is not a solution for districts east of the river in providing services for children with ASD. He continued saying by EASTCONN partnering with Coventry it becomes a "win win" for students, the district, and for EASTCONN. He said a goal is to build a PreK-12 support system for these students in these small integrated programs. He introduced Ronald Morin to speak next for EASTCONN.

Mr. Morin talked about the need for the programs to be inclusive and briefly reviewed the staff working in the EASTCONN program at CGS. In addition, he reviewed how these members work with the students and noted the educational goals that are involved in all of the daily events. He continued talking about parent involvement and noted the program location in the community will make it much easier to include parents. He added, Coventry also benefits from EASTCONN staff being on site, by daily in-service work and easy access to the consultative staff.

Dr. Bernard opened the conversation for questions.

C. Trudon asked if the training, which is available to CGS staff, would also be available to Coventry's other schools. Mr. Cronin said that could be looked at in the future; at this moment they are trying to establish the program at CGS and focusing on CGS first because they are the people dealing with the program/students. C. Trudon asked about other schools' parents benefiting from the programs as well. Mr. Cronin said this would happen over time. Ms. Moyer said the conversations have already begun. Mr. Morin said the parent involvement is a goal and very important.

Dr. Bernard said the greater the level of knowledge, that is able to be developed in the community, will better serve all students, all staff and all parents.

M. Kortmann asked about the program and how many students there are now and what the capacity is.

Mr. Morin said there is one student currently and the capacity is for 5 to 6 students. He said the goal is to maintain the low numbers, which will maintain the integrity of the program.

Dr. Barton talked about the importance of the physical space of the program and what is needed for each child. She said smaller groups are better for individualized services.

R. Williams asked how many Coventry students at the K-2 level are diagnosed with ASD. Ms. Richard said there are a number of Coventry students, but she did not have the exact figure for that level available. R. Williams asked what the percentage is of Coventry's students who are expected to go to the EASTCONN/Coventry program. Dr. Bernard said a goal is to fill it with Coventry students.

R. Williams asked about the true expense for the students and what the actual tuition is. Mr. Cronin said it is \$98K for each student, compared to other programs which come in at

about \$140K, plus transportation. Mr. Cronin said the Coventry program is much more cost effective and the savings to Coventry could be substantial. R. Williams asked if there is a guarantee for Coventry students to attend this program. Mr. Cronin replied saying where a student is placed is dependant on the PPT decision and there are varying decision makers. R. Williams asked about the square footage being used at Coventry Grammar School. It was said to be less than 2000 square feet.

R. Williams said he would like to see Coventry have first choice at the program, which is run in Coventry. Mr. Cronin said the goal was not to tie the hands of the district or of EASTCONN; the placement truly depends the individual student needs and the PPT decision. By having assigned slots the result could be to force a student into the program. Mr. Cronin said EASTCONN most certainly wants the program to benefit Coventry as well as the region.

J. Barrett asked for clarification about the current student in the program and if they are from Coventry. It was said no, the child is not a Coventry resident. J. Barrett asked about the size of the region EASTCONN services. Mr. Cronin said it is a large region of 36 towns and those towns have very little choices when it comes to these programs. J. Barrett asked about the liability of what might happen under the Coventry Grammar School's roof. Mr. Cronin replied that EASTCONN has liability insurance for its program. J. Barrett asked for a copy of the agreement between Coventry and EASTCONN related to this program. Dr. Bernard said she would get that to the Board members. J. Barrett talked about the difference in costs between the CREC program and the Coventry program. Ms. Richard said there is a difference and Coventry would still pay EASTCONN tuition if a Coventry student attended the program at CGS. J. Barrett asked what Coventry gets out of this partnership, beyond teachers being able to ask questions to the EASTCONN staff. Ms. Richard talked about services for the teachers and staff and the importance of the integration of these children into the school environment she said it is a very proactive step for Coventry.

Mr. Cronin said there is potential savings in transportation cost and the possibility of the state's excess cost reimbursement going down.

R. Williams asked what the benefit of the program is for Coventry and noted that the daily expenses of the program are at Coventry's expense. Ms. Richard clarified the EASTCONN staff are employed and "payrolled" by EASTCONN.

R. Williams continued saying space is being taken up in our school and the benefit is not guaranteed for Coventry students.

J. Barrett said the district is giving over 1400 – 1600 square feet of Coventry school space and he sees no direct financial benefit for Coventry from this program. He said there is a district financial responsibility here, along with a loss of space and opportunity for Coventry students. He noted his bigger concern is that the Board of Education is being presented this item in full for the first time tonight. He said there has not been an opportunity for the Board to negotiate with EASTCONN on the use of our facilities. Ms. Richard said Board members were informed in April at a Board meeting during the Superintendent goal review.

K. Ryan said, according to the SSP, there are 13 students in Coventry as being identified with ASD. She continued saying, down the road there may be a Coventry student or students who will need the program and it will be right here in Coventry. At this time, the program does not fit the needs of the students and that is the key factor for enrollment.

C. Trudon noted Coventry students are already imbedded in a different program and it may not be in their best interest to leave their current program for this new one. She said it is important the program be in place in Coventry so the opportunity exists for younger children to attend when they reach the age. Ms. Richard agreed.

Dr. Bernard noted that any upstart program is very small when it starts and it is way too early in the first 9 weeks to give it a proper assessment. She said there is not enough proper data to make the decision if this is cost effective now, but we do have enough data to say Coventry has the potential for capacity building.

M. Whitham said it sounds like a good program. He asked, beyond the hard to calculate space and energy costs, are there any actual costs that we can document. The answer was no. Dr. Bernard said it is an excellent time to be in this program. M. Whitham reiterated his question asking if there are any costs to our budget. Dr. Bernard responded no. M. Whitham asked for clarification, would Coventry have to pay tuition to EASTCONN to send a student to the program. It was said yes, minus transportation, which could be a substantial savings.

Mr. Williams reiterated his concern that Coventry should have guaranteed spots in this program. It was said Mr. Cronin said Ms. Richard would work with parents and through the PPT process. Mr. Williams said theoretically the program could be full in the next 60 days through the appropriate process and then next year there would no spots left if a Coventry student was in need and it was deemed appropriate. Mr. Williams said the big advantage is that the students can be with their peers, and if we cannot guarantee that Coventry students will have that advantage, then it does not make sense for Coventry schools to house the program.

Mr. Cronin said that EASTCONN wants Coventry students in the program and they will work very closely with the PSSS director to make sure the offer is there to Coventry families.

J. Barrett said, in reference to M. Whitham's comments about whether the program is reflected in the district budget, he believes it is reflected in the budget by the district providing heating, electricity and maintenance. He said the program is taking away from the current student body the ability to use the class space. He said if the program is filled by out of town students there is no financial benefit to Coventry. He is disappointed that the Board did not have a chance to discuss and vote on the item as a Board.

L. Pietrantonio said the program was talked about a Board meeting in April and as far as the future goes, the Board can look at the program after it has been up and running for a year. He said he is sure EASTCONN will look at it after a year as well. L. Pietrantonio said all options should be considered and it is a good program and it will help Coventry.

R. Williams said there is a huge benefit to having the program in-house; there are many EASTCONN professionals on site for our staff to use and there is a lot of collaboration going on. He said he is still concerned that there are not at least one or two Coventry students in the program.

J. Barrett said his comments were not to diminish the program, but to find out Coventry's financial position in this area. He said it sounds like it is a good program, he is concerned that district space is being used and it does not appear there is any financial benefit. Dr. Bernard said in addition to the professional development services, there are \$15K in-kind services noted in the contract, which she will provide to the Board expeditiously.

#### C. Information: Review of 2007-2008 Strategic School Profile

Dr. Bernard noted a few items in the 2007-2008 Strategic School Profile (SSP). She opened the conversation up for questions.

R. Williams noted the decline in enrollment district wide, except at the middle school and also the increase in gifted and talented students. Dr. Bernard said generally the middle school is a time when you get new families in town and that could be the reason for the increase. Regarding the gifted and talented number, she said the staff has continued to improve the procedures and practices for identification of gifted and talented students.

R. Williams noted that the staff members at the G. H. Robertson School are out 3% more than other staff at the other schools in the area of personal days and sick days. In addition R. Williams noted that the high school students identified as gifted and talented is at 24%. Ms. Richard said the identification procedures need to be fine tuned at the high school level.

## **VI. REPORT OF CHAIRMAN**

Nothing at this time.

## **VIII. APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

VOTE: Approve Minutes of October 30, 2008

**MOTION: To Approve the Minutes of October 30, 2008**

**By: J. Barrett**

**Seconded: R. Williams**

**Result: The motion passes 5-0-2 (Ryan, Kortmann abstain)**

## **X. NEW BUSINESS**

A. VOTE: Accept Retirement of Joanne Colwick, CNH Teacher

**MOTION: To Accept Retirement of Joanne Colwick, CNH Teacher**

**By: C. Trudon**

**Seconded: M. Kortmann**

**Result: Motion passes unanimously.**

B. VOTE: Approve Board of Education Meeting Dates for 2009

**MOTION: To Approve Board of Education Meeting Dates for 2009**

**By: K. Ryan**

**Seconded: C. Trudon**

J. Barrett asked that the wording at the bottom of the memo be changed to read the following, "All meetings will be held in the Town Hall Annex Building at 7:30 p.m., unless otherwise noted on the agenda." All agreed.

**Result: Motion passes unanimously.**

## **XI. REPORT OF BOARD MEMBERS**

Information: Fiscal Committee Report – C. Trudon and S. Holmes

M. Whitham suggested, regarding the meeting of Monday night with the Town Finance Committee, that the report to the Board come after the Fiscal Committee has a chance to meet and discuss the results. It was said the Fiscal Committee meeting would be scheduled for an hour on December 11 to ensure enough time for discussion.

M. Kortmann said the meeting on Monday was a good meeting and a review of the reports was productive. Dr. Bernard said the Finance Committee expressed appreciation for the collaboration as did our Committee and they felt the goals were achieved at that meeting. It was said another meeting would be scheduled for February.

K. Ryan noted the CNH Veterans Day program, which was noted in The Chronicle and how pleased she is to see that the school is still involved in the area of Veterans and Veterans Day celebrations and that they are doing it so well.

K. Ryan wished Dr. Bernard "bon voyage!" Next month she is traveling to China to continue Coventry's partnership with our sister school in Shandong, China.

