

**COVENTRY BOARD OF EDUCATION  
APPROVED MINUTES  
SPECIAL MEETING OF THURSDAY, JANUARY 21, 2010**

Members Present: Larry Pietrantonio, Chairman  
Cheryl Trudon, Vice Chairman  
Mary Ann Emanuele, Secretary  
John Barrett  
Jennifer Beausoleil  
Mary Kortmann  
Mark Malcolm

Also Present: Robert Joyce, Student Representative

Administrators Present: Dr. Donna Bernard, Superintendent  
Judith Richard, PSSS Director

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; Gina Olearczyk, PSSS; a couple of high school students and several citizens. The Chronicle newspaper was represented. All motions are directed to the Coventry Board of Education.

**I. CALL TO ORDER**

By: Chairman, L. Pietrantonio at 7:35 p.m.  
Place: Town Hall Annex

**II. SALUTE THE FLAG**

The Pledge of Allegiance was led by L. Pietrantonio.

**III. AUDIENCE OF CITIZENS**

Mary Miner of 67 Old Tolland Turnpike said she is a mother of a first grader and a preschooler. She said she recognizes the fact that we are involved in a difficult budget process. She encouraged the Board to be guided by what is in the best interest of the children. She said she was here to speak to the benefits of an all day kindergarten program. She said she has read the studies and reviewed the literature. She said the evidence is overwhelming about the long-term benefits for children who attend all day kindergarten. She reviewed those benefits. She said the evidence is irrefutable that all day kindergarten is what is best for our children. She said the Board's challenge, obligation, and responsibility is to find a way to fund it and provide it for our children. She said it seems, an immediate cost savings could be recognized in transportation. She said all day kindergarten would not need a special kindergarten bus run. She finished by saying she was here tonight with a group of mothers who were here in support of all day kindergarten. Those mothers were: Jen Bynes, 2991 South Street; Kari Bennett, 34 Lathrop Drive; Jamie Thompson, 237 Old Tolland Tpke; Sara Palombizio, 61 Leslie Lane; and Kristy Pezzino, 49 Zeya Drive.

Dena DeJulius, 46 Eastview Drive, said she was here tonight to show her support of a full day kindergarten. She said she is a mother of four boys, three of which are students in Coventry Public Schools. She said her fourth son is getting ready to start kindergarten. She said she is in support of the pilot program and it was wonderful news to hear it may be possible. She said in this community, it is owed to all of the working families to have it

as an option and it would benefit so many working parents and their children. She said the number of working mothers with children under six years old continues to grow. She said kindergarten is a very important part of a child's development. She said children who attend full day kindergarten are less likely to be retained and/or enrolled in special education classes. She said the half day kindergarten program presents challenges for working parents. She encouraged Coventry to embrace a full day kindergarten pilot for the 2010-2011 academic year. She said there will be budget impacts and she encouraged the Board to look at potential savings in transportation and the long-term savings in the lives of our neediest children.

Crissy Stinson of 112 John Hand Drive said she has a kindergartener, third grader, and a fifth grader. She said there are 27 students in her fifth grader's class and she is concerned about the class sizes. She said if we try to keep the budget that we have right now, we are going to lose a lot of staff. She said she is very concerned about that. She noted the teachers do a great job right. She said she is concerned about the positions that could be lost this coming budget season. She realizes the Board is faced with a lot of hard challenges. She said she would like to see the teachers that we have stay. She said that would be her first priority. She said it would be great if we could have an all day kindergarten. She said it is really hard times and we want to maintain what we have. She said the classes are getting harder all of the time. She noted the PTO and how much is donated through that alone.

## **IX. OLD BUSINESS**

### **A. Possible Interview with Roof Project Architect**

L. Pietrantonio noted that the architect chosen is not available until February to meet with the Board. The group agreed they would wait until that time.

L. Pietrantonio noted he met with the Town Manager regarding putting the roof project on the CIP. He said they discussed including the study work for a temporary fix. He said Mr. Noel was going to work on that item and have someone come out and estimate the roofs to see what kind of maintenance can be done until the project is done.

### **B. Discussion: FY11 Budget**

L. Pietrantonio asked for the Superintendent to hand out updated budget book information and answers to the questions that had come in. He asked that the discussion be set up in a reasonable manner, perhaps discussing one subject at a time. He suggested the items to discuss tonight; special education, grant money, and excess cost. He said additional meetings can be added if needed.

M. Malcolm said he liked that concept for discussions and there are a lot of different topics to cover. He proposed a list of priorities. The group agreed.

L. Pietrantonio asked Dr. Bernard to hand out the new documents. Dr. Bernard said she would like to review the new/updated relevant documents. In addition, she noted a list of priorities for discussion – Assumptions, Special Education Excess Cost, Fixed Cost Issues, and School Staffing Issues. She distributed the updated 2010/2011 Budget Development Assumptions sheet and reviewed the changes. In addition she reviewed the Addition/Reduction Analysis Spreadsheet and the updates included on that document. She also provided two Excess Cost spreadsheets, one provided by the Business Office and one by M. Malcolm. Also handed out were answers to questions that were sent in by Board members during the week.

C. Trudon noted the Superintendent's proposed budget column on the Addition/Reduction Analysis spreadsheet and the proposed cuts in relation to the retirement plan savings. Dr. Bernard clarified that the savings related to the retirement plan was already calculated into the figures noted. C. Trudon said that column is looking at 12 staff reductions; they are real numbers.

M. Malcolm said the 2.86% increase does not include the Excess Cost issue that is being discussed. He said once that is figured in, the percentage will go up.

Dr. Bernard said there is not anyone in town who wants to pay a 5% budget increase. She noted nobody wants to have larger class sizes, no one wants to lose related arts, and no one wants to have the failed referendum syndrome. She said, in addition, no one wants to have to split up a class in October or November because of staff reductions, due to failed referendums. She said the strategic design is to know what you need to serve children in this economy and what the voter will say yes to. She said you want a yes vote in May. She said nothing is more important than a yes vote in May. She said it is wiser to be conservative and serve students well by opening up school knowing what you have for staff, because you had a yes vote in May.

J. Beausoleil noted the Addition/Reduction Analysis spreadsheet and that the pension adjustment figures and the insurance adjustment figures should be across all three columns. She said they are not only applicable to the Superintendent's proposed budget. The group agreed. Dr. Bernard said the sheet would be updated.

L. Pietrantonio said the group could start with questions on the Assumption sheet.

J. Beausoleil asked about the insurance increase of 15% and if it was a "best estimate." Dr. Bernard said the insurance vendors are saying it should not be more than that, but it is not a final number. L. Pietrantonio said the Town is under the opinion that 15% is a relatively "hard number."

J. Beausoleil asked about the unemployment compensation figure and if it was based on the proposed 12 staff member cuts. Dr. Bernard said it is based in 19.5% increase over last year's figures. She said it is based in a straight increased ratio. M. Kortmann said that is a number that needs to be addressed and could be discussed when we reach the staff issues. J. Beausoleil said if we reach 12 staff cuts, that number is underfunded. The group agreed. Dr. Bernard said you never get your full value of a cut staff member for various reasons. J. Beausoleil asked that a note be added to the Assumptions sheet, that it does not include the proposed staff cuts for 2010-2011.

Dr. Bernard noted that there is a tough negotiation season ahead.

J. Barrett asked about the discussion process and if the group is going to get into details on the Assumptions page. He noted the assumption of 3.87% increase in legal and wanted to know what the parameters of the discussion were. He noted the utilities section was next and asked if they could discuss something under utilities. L. Pietrantonio said it could be discussed.

J. Barrett said two years ago legal fees went through the roof because two contracts were negotiated. He noted we are looking at four negotiations for the year, including one of the biggest ones we do. He said, in his opinion the line is way underfunded and that is based on his own history of being on the Board for two and a half years.

M. Emanuele asked if it was unusual to have four contracts negotiated in one year and would that not automatically increase the amount that has to be budgeted for. Dr. Bernard said the Board would receive the schedule of the negotiations. She said some are spread out over years and some will not start until the end of 2010-11.

Dr. Bernard agreed saying there is a FY11 impact of negotiations in a variety of forms. She said Mr. Barrett is “right on the money” on this one. M. Malcolm agreed.

M. Malcolm asked about the procedure for discussions and if the Board is just trying to understand what is on the Assumptions page. L. Pietrantonio said it is for understanding and these are items for discussion. L. Pietrantonio continued, it provides the ground rules on what the budget was built.

J. Barrett said the budgeted oil price has him very concerned. He distributed the NYMEX Heating Oil Futures “high – low” trend. He discussed the trend line of oil prices. He said he believes the figure used in formulating the budget is no longer a good figure. He believes the trend will be more toward \$3.00 per gallon. He asked when the oil figure would be locked in. Dr. Bernard said the projection is it will happen in February or March. C. Trudon said there are several sources that are being looked at.

The group discussed the oil prices and trends and said they would discuss it further during the facilities discussion.

The group moved to the Special Education department and in particular the Excess Cost discussion.

Dr. Bernard reviewed the Excess Cost monies and state funding issues. She said towns are always appreciative when the state funds these monies at 100%. She continued, in the past couple of years the funding has been less. She said for this year, notification was received from the state that the funding would be 23% less. She said the projections and expectations for funding for the FY11 fiscal year is at about 30% less. This presents a problem of about \$350,000.

J. Barrett shared that he had a conversation with a State Representative in the majority in Harford. He said he was sharing his concerns with him about the Excess Cost issues. J. Barrett said the Representative said the towns are supposed to use the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) grant money to cover what is not received through Excess Cost from the state. J. Barrett asked if the district was at a point this year to recommit the ARRA money for next year. Dr. Bernard referred to page 5 and the ARRA report. She noted the special education items and related funds. J. Barrett asked if the ARRA money is included in the budget. Dr. Bernard said no, it is a stand alone grant, separate from the budget. J. Barrett said the state is assuming schools will be using the ARRA money for Excess Cost supplement, reflected in the budget. Dr. Bernard said it is already supplementing current special education programs. C. Trudon noted districts were given specific guidelines about how the money could be used; the money could not be used to supplement, but now we are being told to use it that way. J. Barrett said that is another point as well.

Ms. Richard said her office talked to the State Comptroller for Excess Cost. She said she was told the 27% decrease in funding may actually be only 15%. Dr. Bernard asked when that would come in writing. Ms. Richard said mid-February.

The Board discussed how the Excess Cost money is returned to the Board of Education by the State, the history behind that decision, and why/how other towns are different.

The discussion turned to shortfalls in the budget in special education and having to go to the Town for reimbursement.

M. Malcolm asked what the definition is of “shortfall.” He said you shouldn’t have to lay off 10 teachers to cover a shortfall. He said the shortfall should be at a line item level, not the overall. Dr. Bernard said the attorney has been asked, what the responsibility is of the Town in regard to a special education overage. She is expecting something in writing, but verbally was told there is quotation in the statute that says the Board of Education must exhaust all other resources in order to cover the shortage, prior to depending on the

town. C. Trudon said once the Board comes to the consensus that we have done our due diligence to find any money and if we go to the Town they may not say yes. She continued, they may say we have not exhausted all of our resources.

L. Pietrantonio said when the arrangements were made years ago, the budgets were different. He said the perspective has changed; there are no longer any 7% budget increases.

M. Kortmann asked for a short history of percentage increases in the budgets. She focused on the Excess Cost spreadsheet. She said the figure that starts the spreadsheet is what the State thinks is our per pupil expenditure.

The group discussed further the Excess Cost money, the calculating of the per pupil expenditure, the multiplier for calculating the LEA figure, and the percentages from the State.

Dr. Bernard said the question that needs to be addressed is, are we going to off load a \$350,000 problem onto the taxpayer, or are we going to modify programs and practices or split the difference.

M. Kortmann said she would like the Excess Cost spreadsheet to be somewhat accurate to what we think the assumptions are. She continued, if it turns out the State does better than 70% reimbursement, the excess column needs to be accurate. She said we do not need to be spending money that belongs in another column.

The group continued to discuss different percentages of reimbursement from the state, along with the LEA multiplier.

There was a consensus that, for now, the multiplier would be 2.5% in the LEA figure and the expected Excess Cost funding from the state would be 70%.

M. Malcolm noted there is a \$10,000 error on the Excess Cost spreadsheet under transportation on the CREC-River Street line. He said there is a formulation error in the transportation number, which left off the ten-thousands placement.

Dr. Bernard quoted the actual budget sheet for that item. Ms. Richard said she was the one to originally find the error. Dr. Bernard clarified, the Excess Cost spreadsheet figure is incorrect and the budget sheet is correct. M. Kortmann said when the spreadsheet is adjusted we will know the final Excess Cost figure we will be short.

M. Kortmann asked if there is anything in grants that could offset the Excess Cost figure.

Dr. Bernard said Administrative Council is meeting regularly to discuss the budget issues and how staff and services can be modified. She said we will be looking at all sources – the conversations will be extensive.

M. Kortmann said with that scenario there is no other item we get to put on the Addition/Reduction Analysis spreadsheet as a “minus.” She said the cut will come from staff. Dr. Bernard said the conversations are continuing, we cannot say anything for sure yet. She said the Administrators need to hammer it out.

J. Beausoleil said in order to support the hemorrhaging, the Board will need to know up front what the cuts will be, before final decisions can be made. She said the backlash from the community will be great and the impact will need to be explained prior to the referendum. She said otherwise the buy-in won't happen. C. Trudon agreed saying it gives value to “the column.”

J. Barrett noted he requested a copy of the EASTCONN transportation contract. He asked about the CREC-Coltsville line and asked about three students riding on one van with an aid. He said he would like a comparison of the services that are actually needed. Dr. Bernard said PSSS can come back with those answers.

J. Barrett asked if the parent who is receiving transportation reimbursement is included in the budget. J. Richard said she was unsure. (She noted later that the student is graduating, so the figure is not included in FY11.)

There was brief discussion about the new special education transportation bid and whether it had gone out. Dr. Bernard said she would get the bid specs to the Transportation Committee before it went out, for their review.

J. Barrett said the majority of transportation numbers on the Excess Cost spreadsheet need to be reviewed. He continued that there are several students that go to offsite schools, but there is no transportation paid. Ms. Richard said the students reside at those schools and do not need transportation.

J. Barrett asked about E. O. Smith students and why there was no transportation cost. Ms. Richard said they travel on the regular education bus. J. Barrett asked if we could get reimbursed from the state for that cost. There was discussion about how the actual cost would be figured when regular education students take the same bus and if it was actually worth the staff time. Ms. Richard said it does not work that way and the State does not allow for that type of reimbursement.

Dr. Bernard said the issue is the reconciliation between the EASTCONN contract and the Excess Cost spreadsheet. Ms. Richard said she would go through it with a fine-tooth comb. She also offered that the transportation contract was based in figures and student conditions from December 2008.

M. Kortmann noted the ARRA information sheet and the Lincoln Academy funds. Dr. Bernard said the Lincoln Academy agreement would not continue past December 2010; the actual "end date" is to be determined.

M. Kortmann noted Study Island and said the feedback was very good and if for some reason the Administration decides not to continue it for money reasons the Board would like to hear about it. Mr. Petrone said the Study Island agreement is good to July 2011. He said, with the one year pilot fee we received the extension for one year at no cost.

J. Beausoleil asked why summer school is provided for special education students and not regular education. J. Richard said extended school year services are mandated by federal law (IDEA). She said every student's IEP needs to consider extended school year services, in order that they not regress in their skill level and take so long to recoup those skills into the next school year. She said a PPT meeting determines whether the student needs summer school. J. Beausoleil asked about field experience costs for special education students and why they do not have to pay out of pocket. J. Richard said the federal law outlines that districts are responsible for the student's transportation and extra curricular activities and if it involves transportation, the district must fund it.

J. Beausoleil asked if the charter/magnet schools fall under the excess cost category. J. Richard said those are parental choice, they are not special education. She continued if a special education student is accepted, the school will bill the sending district for special education costs.

L. Pietrantonio asked if there were other questions for special education, there were none. The group next discussed Facilities' expenses.

J. Beausoleil asked about the new green cleaning chemicals and if they would affect the budget. P. Noel said most products are green already and the law does not go into effect until July 2011, so it would not effect the 2010-11 school year.

There was discussion about the new green law and how it will affect donations by families.

J. Barrett said he is not comfortable with the oil figures. P. Noel handed out the district energy summary sheet which accounts for the number of 105 gallons.

The group discussed the oil trends and the increases from the previous years. C. Trudon wanted to wait and not make any decisions tonight. L. Pietrantonio and M. Kortmann were comfortable with the \$2.50 per gallon. J. Barrett said, as of now, the trend line is going up. He continued, we should be basing our budget on what happened last year with trends and where we are now in the trends.

There was consensus, as of this meeting, the budgeting figure would stay at \$2.50 per gallon.

J. Beausoleil asked about the revenues of renting the facilities to outside groups. Dr. Bernard said there is about \$9,000 in the account. Mr. Noel said the funds are used for repair and enhancement of the areas that are used for outside facility use; the gymnasium and auditorium.

J. Beausoleil asked if there was a figure on how much was spent to keep the facilities open for outside use. Mr. Noel said a cost per hour for lights and such could be given. He said he did a study a few years back and the figure was \$2,300 for gym lights for basketball.

L. Pietrantonio said he has had conversations with the Town Manager on generating more revenue. He said he was told the Board would need to approach the Town Council because much use is by the Recreation Department. He said perhaps the Recreation fees could be increased, but it would need to be addressed with the Town.

J. Beausoleil said we could look at reducing the hours the buildings are available for public use. L. Pietrantonio said the outrage will be substantial from the public.

The conversation turned to specifics of shutting down the buildings at certain times each night or certain days during the week. The group also discussed possibly charging the Recreation Department for use of the buildings. Dr. Bernard noted the policy on facilities use, including a new fee structure, is in the process of being revised. She also noted that there is a balanced partnership with the Town for services rendered. L. Pietrantonio said the conversation needs to happen with the Town.

Dr. Bernard said the idea of increasing revenue is an option.

M. Kortmann asked about contracted services. P. Noel responded the compressor is to be repaired this year, so it was not included in next year's budget. He said he believes the line item is solid and as good as other years. M. Kortmann said that she is worried about items that may break and wonders if the figure should be hirer.

C. Trudon said she was glad to see parents attend the meeting tonight and she thanked them for their time.

## **XII. EXECUTIVE SESSION**

Pursuant to CGS-1-200(c)(6)(A), the Board of Education will go into Executive Session for discussion related to Custodial Negotiations, Teacher Negotiations, 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 Custodial Negotiations, Teacher Negotiations, and Non-Union Agreements with the Superintendent at 10:05 p.m.**

**By: C. Trudon**

**Seconded: J. Barrett**

**Result: Motion passes unanimously.**

The Board came out of Executive Session at 10:59 p.m.

**MOTION: To extend the BOE meeting beyond 11:00 p.m.**

**By: C. Trudon                      Seconded: J. Beausoleil**

**Result: Motion passes unanimously.**

**MOTION: To return to Executive Session for discussion related to Custodial Negotiations, Teacher Negotiations, and Non-Union Agreements with the Superintendent at 11:00 a.m.**

**By: C. Trudon                      Seconded: M. Malcolm**

**Result: Motion passes unanimously.**

### **XIII. OPEN SESSION**

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

The Board returned to Open Session at 11:12 p.m.

**MOTION: To Accept the Contract as agreed upon by the Board to be presented to Paul Noel as the Director of Physical Plant and Facilities**

**By: M. Emanuele                      Seconded: C. Trudon**

**Result: Motion passes unanimously.**

**MOTION: To Accept the Contract as agreed upon by the Board to be presented to Kimberlee Michaud as the Executive Assistant to the Superintendent**

**By: M. Emanuele                      Seconded: M. Kortmann**

**Result: Motion passes unanimously.**

### **XIV. ADJOURNMENT**

**MOTION: To adjourn the Board meeting at 11:15 p.m.**

**By: M. Kortmann                      Seconded: C. Trudon**

**Result: Motion passes unanimously.**

---

Respectfully submitted,

---

Kimberlee Michaud  
Board Clerk

**February 11, 2010**  
Approved