

# MINUTES OF THE SPECIAL MEETING OF THE BOARD OF EDUCATION

Stamford, Connecticut

April 16, 2009

The Special Meeting of the Board of Education was held on April 16, 2009 at the Government Center, 888 Washington Boulevard. The meeting was called to order at 7:10 p.m. by Ms. Nabel, President with the following Board members present: Ms. Heftman, Ms. Lahiri-Hoherchak, Ms. Lorenti, Mr. Mathews, Ms. Nabel, Mr. Polo, Mr. Rubino, and Ms. Wade. Absent: Mr. King and Mayor Malloy. Also in attendance: Dr. Starr, Dr. Hamilton, Ms. Swerdlick, Ms. Gagne, Ms. Karwan, a member of the Press, two representatives of the SEA, and approximately 10 visitors.

Dr. Starr began the meeting with a presentation that covered the following areas concerning the Middle School reform initiative: historical background; development of middle school structure in Stamford Public Schools; various educational theories regarding the education of middle school/junior high children; definitions of various terms such as grouping and tracking; what placement criteria have been in use and what ideas are under consideration now; what role administrators and guidance personnel will play in a restructuring; and what the timeline might be for yearly assessments. He also described the timeline of meetings with the Middle School Think Tank in 2008-2009 and the Middle School Advisory Council during the present school year as well as various discussions with the Board of Education that covered how the Middle school reform initiative fits into the Strategic Plan. Dr. Starr pointed out that for the 2009-2010 school year, sixth grade restructuring to accommodate flexible grouping is planned, and that a final decision regarding the number of groups has not been made. He described this year's roll out of professional development for sixth grade teachers.

Board of Education members questioned Dr. Starr on the following topics: criteria used by all SPS middle schools for placement; influence of this reform on the requirements for High School Honors and Advanced Placement Classes; impact on staffing; requirements for professional development for teachers, including embedded professional development; cost of testing. Several members of the Board asked Dr. Starr to refer them to other school districts where heterogeneous grouping has resulted in increased student achievement; Dr. Starr mentioned Montgomery County, MD and Meriden, CT, and also noted Stamford's own Scofield Magnet School and AITE as well as a pilot at Dolan Middle School. Dr. Starr said he would provide the Board with additional reading and website references.

Several Board members questioned the *Advocate* report on a program at Cloonan to regroup students that is to begin this year. Dr. Starr gave the background of that initiative and described his communication with the administration of Cloonan that led up to the implementation of the program. Board members asked that they be kept informed of any departures from the reform plan as it has been laid out at the Public Forum and MSAC meetings as well as in Dr. Starr's presentation.

The Board and Dr. Starr then discussed next steps for the Board in this process. Two policies were cited, Numbers 6119 and 6152, as examples of current policy work that needs to be strengthened and deepened, and recommended by the PDK Literacy Audit and the Cambridge Report. Dr. Starr also asked the Board to outline its expectations of his administration regarding (a) communicating progress of the initiative, and (b) monitoring success of the regrouping practice. It was agreed that the Board would focus on a July/August report on the Cloonan pilot, metrics to be determined; that report would be used as a basis for laying out a further plan for monitoring middle school reform.

Mr. Rubino moved, seconded by Ms. Lorenti, to adjourn the meeting at 9:40 p.m. with the following Board members voting in favor: Ms. Heftman, Ms. Lahiri-Hoherchak, Ms. Lorenti, Mr. Mathews, Ms. Nabel, Mr. Polo, Mr. Rubino, and Ms. Wade.

Joshua P. Starr, Ed.D.  
Superintendent of Schools  
Executive Officer