

MINUTES OF THE WORKING MEETING OF THE BOARD OF EDUCATION Stamford, Connecticut March 2, 2010

The Working Meeting of the Board of Education was held on March 2, 2010 at the Government Center, 888 Washington Boulevard. The meeting was called to order at 7:08 p.m. by Mrs. Heftman, President, with the following Board members present: Mrs. Heftman, Mr. King, Ms. Lahiri-Hoherchak, Ms. Olson, Mr. Polo, Dr. Rauh, and Ms. Wade. Absent: Mr. Limone, Mayor Pavia, and Mr. Pia. Also in attendance: Dr. Starr, Dr. Hamilton, Ms. Arnold, Ms. Siladi, Mr. Meyer, Advocate reporter, and approximately 10 guests.

Salute to the flag.

MISSION STATEMENT

Lorraine Olson presented the mission statement of the Board of Education.

REPORTS/DISCUSSIONS/RESOLUTIONS

CURRICULUM

Dr. Rauh reported that Dr. Bruno will present information at the March 23, 2010, Board meeting on Mid-Term Standardized Assessments for 6-12 Science & Math for the past year and current year. Dr. Rauh indicated that Dr. Bruno would be presenting CMT math scores as a whole and the strands that lead into it for success in math for Grades 6-12. For science she will be presenting standard assessment for high schools. There are concerns that if we have a standard curriculum that matches the standard assessment at the high school level, we will have to look at our middle schools to see if they are actually teaching the same thing under the same conditions. Dr. Rauh asked staff to make sure that the flow of math in the high schools is in sync with next year's Program of Studies. Dr. Rauh expressed that there is a need to make sure that the standardized curriculum matches the standardized assessment.

The Committee supported requesting information that will help answer their concerns which would include process, scoring, and results by classroom and also confirm that within a building that the assessment was the same and not an individual teacher choice. Mr. King requested copies of the tests that were administered. Request for information will be for Math 6-12 and Science at the

high school level. Dr. Starr reviewed what administration has been doing around district benchmark assessments. Ms. Wade indicated she would like to see the cohort that was presented previously and would like to see that report again with the same cohort and how those students are doing now.

Dr. Starr will provide the Board with a complete report.

Under Middle School Transformation, Ms. Olson had requested a report on what the scenario would look like with class sizes going from 2 groups to 3 groups. The Committee decided they did not want to see this information, but would like to receive updates on Middle School Transformation at a later date. The Committee at its April 6, 2010 Working meeting will look at establishing a timeline to receive reports on Middle School Transformation. The Committee also agreed to set up a Curriculum Committee meeting specific to Middle School Transformation.

Under Review of Curriculum Policies, Dr. Rauh will include this as part of the Curriculum Committee meeting that she will be scheduling.

AD HOC PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

Ms. Wade discussed reaching out to the community with respect to the Board of Education Operating budget for 2010-2011 to educate the public on the budget and the process on how it moves forward. In the past we have reached out to say that public education is important and you need to come out and support the budget. However, she felt that it would have more impact if we identified leaders of different organizations in the community to speak on behalf of their organization at the public hearing of the Board of Finance and Board of Representatives scheduled for Monday, March 15, 2010 and how the cuts would affect their organizations. The Committee was supportive of Ms. Wade's suggestion and Mrs. Heftman asked that Committee and Board members e-mail Ms. Wade with their ideas of which groups and organizations should be on the list that she developed. After everyone has weighed in it would be only fair for Ms. Wade to look at this list and ask each of the Board members to share in contacting groups/organizations. This effort will be separate from the group that Mr. Pia is working with. Ms Wade was sorry that he could not be at the meeting this evening since she wanted him to share his ideas for his committee.

Ms. Arnold stated that many organizations have been contacting us in the last week or so as they are aware of the budget situation. Dr. Starr has already met with PT Council and PTO presidents and has another meeting scheduled for Thursday, March 4, 2010 to give them additional information. He also noted that the Board has set two meetings to discuss specific scenarios which will be held on March 9 and March 11 and these meetings would be informative for the public.

Dr. Starr addressed and reviewed the Vida Social article. He noted that this is a new publication and the article is not representative of the way he

speaks. He believes there were errors in the translation which, were not intentional by the writer/publisher, and that there was no ill intent on behalf of the writer/publisher. He directed Board members to different parts of the article and gave explanations. He stated that he made an error in judgment in that he should have immediately written a response to the publisher and the author of the article. He has a meeting scheduled for Wednesday, March 3, 2010 with the writer and publisher who will be printing a retraction. Mr. Polo requested a follow-up after this meeting and other Board members felt Dr. Starr should have responded to the article when it was published.

Ms. Olson stated that her concern was that this article was put out in December and she thought there are some things in the article that could have been misinterpreted or written perhaps not in the language or the way that Dr. Starr speaks, but she thought that the real paragraph that everyone has been concerned about is the one where he says that many of these parents have spread lies. She wondered why Dr. Starr waited this long to respond to the article? She thinks it is causing a racial divide among parents. She thinks he used poor judgment in waiting so long to respond. Dr. Starr responded and stated that the first issue the Board members would have to consider is whether or not you believe that these are direct quotes from him and want to use them as such or whether you believe that the message was in fact garbled. The fact remains is that what is printed here is not an accurate representation of what he said. Everyone has the right to judge for themselves whether or not they choose to believe that. Dr. Starr stated again that he did make a mistake in not addressing this earlier and that mistake was based partially on timing. It was the holiday season and there was a lot going on and partially it was on thinking that we don't even know how many people would see this article and it probably won't go anywhere. Dr. Starr stated it was a mistake not to immediately address it and he owns that. As soon as the Board president brought it to his attention he told her that whatever she wanted to do to address the article, he was happy to do. It was brought to his attention 2-3 weeks ago by the Board president. He had forgotten about the article from the time it had been published until Mrs. Heftman brought it to his attention. Dr. Starr stated that he made a mistake in not immediately writing something in response, but he also stands by the fact that this is an inaccurate presentation of his statement during the interview. He is not clear on how anything that is said in here relates to any accusations that were just levied at him by Ms. Olson regarding statements about race or anything like that. There is nothing in the article that says that other than his statements about the NCLB and is not clear on how that fits into this article.

Ms. Olson stated that she had received emails and calls from parents about the article back in December. Dr. Starr responded that it is a Board member's responsibility to immediately bring to his or the Board president's attention matters like this that concerns the district. He said the entire piece garbles his message and that he would never want to use language that explicitly divides folks or accuses people and he continues to stand by that.

Ms. Olson stated that she met with the publisher and talked to her about it. The publisher told her that she has it on tape that you said parents were lying. Dr. Starr responded to Ms. Olson and noted that she is on record now as going and meeting with the reporter and listening to the tape. Ms. Olson stated she did not listen to the tape. He believes that it is not appropriate, unless he is presented with the same information by that reporter and they have not met with him yet. Dr. Starr noted that there are questions around Board members responsibilities to the Board and to the Superintendent regarding this and we can discuss this at another time and until he hears the actual tape and, hopefully, he will be able to do so, it is hard to do anything other than state that there are numerous inaccuracies within this piece and that the interpretation of this piece needs to be taken within that context. Ms. Wade asked to stop this now. Ms. Olson stated she was not finished and she had one more thing she would like to say. Ms. Wade stated that the role of the Board is that we are not detectives, we are not inspectors, and this is not our role. She asked to conclude her Committee. Ms. Olson said this is not acceptable at all. He asked to have this in public and she is going to discuss it. Ms. Wade responded that Ms. Olson's job is not to go and research this information. Ms. Olson said she was not finished and reported that the publisher told her that she sent this article to Dr. Starr and asked him to review it and he did not. Dr. Starr responded that this statement is absolutely not true and asked Ms. Arnold is she received the article prior to publication. She reported that she had not received it

Dr. Rauh said she saw the article 5 weeks ago and brought it to Ms. Heftman's attention. She spoke to Ms. Lahiri-Hoherchak and she suggested that the Board discuss it in Executive Session. It was the Superintendent's decision to discuss it in an open forum. He invited any of us, to come in and share any of our concerns and as far as she knows she was the only one that went. But the fact that it is open is Dr. Starr's choice and as far as she is concerned the point that she is making is that you can't wish bad things to go away and feels that things need to be addressed head-on and early and feels that this was a very poor decision to just ignore it. Board members should also not ignore bad news either. Ms. Wade absolutely agreed with Dr. Rauh, but her comments are more directed that one Board member decides to do their own research on this in advance of a presentation by the Superintendent. If in fact we want additional information than it is for the Board to decide what additional information we want. It is not for individual Board members to go out there and conduct an investigation unless asked to do so by the Board

Mr. King agree that we all have to be very careful with the language that we use, but in all fairness Dr. Starr has said to us that his judgment was not on target, there are some inconsistencies in the way it has been presented and he has apologized for it and is meeting with the people tomorrow. I think we have heard that he is going to bring the results back to us of the meeting. What more do we want because we have all erred in this particular way. Let's all be careful, all be respectful of one another, and give Dr. Starr an opportunity to come back to us and close this out because we are the ones who are becoming divisive.

Mrs. Heftman commented that since this was handled in a public manner, everyone who has read the article has had an opportunity to hear Dr. Starr's explanation, Board members have asked the questions they wanted asked, there won't be an Executive Session on this item. We already have a mechanism for performance reviews agreed upon by the Board and the Superintendent, and the performance review will happen as the timetable dictates. We will not have an Executive Session on this.

Mrs. Heftman added to the Ad Hoc Public Engagement agenda Review of Policies for Series 1000. The Committee will set a date to review these policies.

POLICY

Under Seat Belts in Buses, Ms. Wade reported that on a Channel 12 News report there have been 23 efforts to have a State statute passed regarding seat belts in buses. The reporter was responding to a letter from the Danbury/Bethel school district that has been using seat belts on buses for several years without a problem. When the Board met with the Legislative Delegation one of the questions asked was "where is that law now on the legislative agenda" and were informed that it is working its way through the legislation, but did not know if it would come to pass. Committee members agreed not to pursue this item at the present time, but agreed to keep it as a pending item.

Mrs. Heftman reported on the Policy Review Process and noted that it is a bit early to decide whether the Committee Review Process is going to work or not since not everyone has had a chance to really spend a lot of time other than Dr. Rauh. She suggested using Dr. Rauh's model for how all the Committees should look at the policies. Mrs. Heftman, with Board approval, will develop a list of policies that require monitoring. Board members were in agreement for Mrs. Heftman to develop a list.

Ms. Olson left the meeting prior to the adjournment.

Mr. Polo moved, seconded by Dr. Rauh to adjourn the meeting at 9:26 p.m. with the following Board members voting in favor: Mrs. Heftman, Mr. King, Ms. Lahiri-Hoherchak, Mr. Polo, Dr. Rauh, and Ms. Wade.

Dr. Joshua P. Starr
Superintendent of Schools
Executive Office