

**THESE MINUTES ARE SUBJECT TO BOARD APPROVAL AT THE Sept. 06, 2018 MEETING  
REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT NO. 4 Board of Education**

A regular meeting of the Regional School District No. 4 Board of Education was held on Thursday, May 03, 2018 in the John Winthrop Middle School Library, with the following Board members in attendance:

Jennifer Clark, Jane Cavanaugh, Trisha Brookhart, Rick Daniels, Kate Sandmann, and Leigh Rankin as well as Senior Student Representatives Max Klin and Sydney Suedmeier, and Junior Student Representatives Kate Farrell and Cooper McCormick

Also in attendance:

Administrators: Superintendent Dr. Ruth I. Levy,  
Assistant Superintendent, Dr. Kristina Martineau  
Business Manager Kim Allen;  
Valley Regional Associate Principal Carolyn Gbunblee  
John Winthrop Principal William Duffy

Board Clerk: Jennifer Bryan

**CALL TO ORDER**

Chair Jennifer Clark called the meeting to order at 7:01 p.m.

**CONSENT AGENDA**

On motion duly made and seconded, the Board VOTED unanimously to approve the consent agenda consisting of the minutes of the Regular Meeting of March 01, 2018, the minutes of the Public Hearing of April 02, 2018, and the Accounts Payable Report

**AUDIENCE OF CITIZENS**

One citizen present - no comments were made

**OTHER ITEMS**

**Recognition of Top 10% of VRHS Graduation Class of 2018**

Valley Regional High School Associate Principal Carolyn Gbunblee presented the top 10% of the 2018 Valley Regional High School Graduating class to the Board. She read the names of three students who were unable to attend the meeting, and then let the students who were present introduce themselves and announce their chosen college and major, if decided.

**Recognition of Region 4 Senior Student Representatives and Introduction of Junior Representatives**

Chair Clark recognized the service of Senior BOE representatives Max Klin and Sydney Suedmeier over the past year. The Board presented them with a small token of appreciation for their service. Max and Sydney both updated the Board on upcoming events at Valley including AP testing and May 1st Decision Day. They noted that scholarships are now all decided and Capstone projects are either finished or very close to being finished. The Senior Class trip and Senior Week are coming up soon. The Future Business Leaders of America recently recently visited Boston and other

exciting academic events are still scheduled as well including the AP Science class trip to Plum Island and the annual trip to NYC for Western Civ. class. Warriors in the Community Day and Night of the Arts are coming up soon, as are Junior Prom and Senior Reception. Both students thanked the Board for allowing them to serve on the Board.

Newly appointed Junior Student Representatives, Kate Farrell and Cooper McCormick were introduced. They gave a brief introduction of themselves and their interests. Dr. Levy welcomed them to the Board and said everyone looks forward to hearing from them at next year's meetings.

### **Region 4 Student Representatives Report**

JWMS Middle School 8th grade students Tucker Burr and James Marsden updated the Board on recent and upcoming events at JWMS including athletics; debate teams; SBAC and NGSS testing; and the DIRT assemblies held on Monday for students and parents. There are still many after school activity offerings and more opportunities to enjoy activities outside for all of the students. Orientation for sixth graders heading to JWMS next year will be held next week. And there will be the annual academic/science linked trip to Lake Compounce along with the annual trip to Cave Hill and Hammonasset State Park coming up soon as well.

### **Principal Updates**

Valley Regional High School Associate Principal, Carolyn Gbunlee gave a general update on recent and upcoming activities at VRHS including Warriors in the Community, to which they are adding in a few new work sites this year. Valley will also be holding their Film Festival on the Essex Town Green soon, as well as Junior Prom and the Senior Reception. AP testing will take place soon, and SAT tests were administered on March 21st.

John Winthrop Middle School Principal Bill Duffy gave a general update on recent and upcoming activities at JWMS. He also discussed changes to the schedule for next year in order to accommodate staffing reductions due to declining enrollment. The staffing reductions had left them with 3 teams instead of 4. After an initial review of the schedule, they decided they needed to rework the plan in order to make it better for the students and to be able to maintain the small interactive same-grade groups that the Middle School currently enjoys. Principal Duffy noted that by reworking the schedule, to the students' view, they will be on a 7th grade or 8th grade team, just as before, although now one team of teachers will teach same-grade groups of 7th or 8th grade students at different times. The biggest difference will be seen by the teachers, but not by the students. He and the faculty feel that this plan is the best for putting students first.

Principal Duffy also shared that he is excited about extending the school's dedication to critical thinking and problem solving by updating their writing classes next year to become more focused in problem solving processes and critical thinking skills. This will engage students more and enhance the writing program.

The Board heard a presentation on the Region 4 Therapeutic Program by Sarah Smalley, Director of Pupil Services. Ms. Smalley noted that it had been one year since she first asked the Board to support the program and she was here one year later to thank the board and share what the program has been able to do for students in just this past year alone. Benefits to students include greatly decreasing anxiety, school avoidance, and truancy problems. The program has been addressing social and emotional issues that would have normally negatively impacted their classroom performance. It has enabled students to better face challenges in their school, families, and community.

This program has allowed three students to return to district from out-of-district placements, meaning that the program has been operating at a cost savings, and not even just cost-neutral. She noted that the program has allowed the district to be proactive vs. reactive and has also helped avoid new outplacements. She described their classroom and typical daily activities and noted that she hopes to add more community-based opportunities for next year to enhance the program even more. She thanked the Board for the opportunity to run this program and she looks forward to doing

even more in the future. There was a brief discussion and question period, during which Ms. Smalley responded that parent feedback has been wonderful - parents are very happy with the support their students are receiving and the fact that their students are not spending 2+ hours every day being transported out of district.

Dr. Levy thanked Ms. Smalley for her guidance, patience, and leadership in directing this program and noted that in addition to providing the best services for the students, the program has also saved the district several hundreds of thousands of dollars by avoiding costly outplacements. Ms. Smalley state that it is an honor to serve these students and work with them and she again thanked the Board for allowing her to provide these services for these kids.

## **REPORTS**

### **Financial Status Updates**

Business Manager Kim Allen reviewed the financial status update and the cafeteria account update, including anticipated deficits and surpluses at this time. There was a brief discussion about the procedures needed if Region 4 costs were ever to exceed the budgeted amount in a given year, and what actions are taken when there is a worry that there could be excess expenditures due to unanticipated costs. Some Board members also voiced concern that when trying to address excess expenditures when large unanticipated costs happen to arise, it should not be accomplished by deferring important things that often get cut in times of financial crunches, especially building and systems maintenance needs.

On motion duly made and seconded, the Board unanimously VOTED to approve the recommended Region No. 4 budget transfers for 2017-18 as presented.

### **Committee Reports**

**Policy Committee** - Committee Chair Leigh Rankin reported that she has been going through the entire policy manual and looking at required and recommended policies in particular. She said that she is looking to do a massive clean up and streamlining of what we currently have. She also reported on past and upcoming work by the Policy Committee. The Committee continues to do a complete review of all policies that were last revised or reviewed 10 or more years ago. They have also been conducting other directed policy reviews as needed and requested. The Committee recently met with Valley student leaders for a discussion regarding possible changes to the 'VRHS only' amendment to the Cell Phone policy. The Committee will be revisiting all of this again at their next meeting on May 21st.

Ms. Rankin presented a First Reading of Policy #3160 Transfer of Funds Between Categories; Amendments (which applies to Region 4 and Supv. Dist. only) and involves unexpended funds and what is done with them. Ms. Rankin noted that the recommended policy before them revises the current policy in order to align it with state legislative requirements.

A Board member voiced concern that this recommended policy doesn't support a promise that he feels the Board made to the towns, during this year's Public Budget Hearing, that they would return all unexpended, post audit funds, to the towns in the future (instead of splitting them 50/50 between return to the towns and a capital funds reserve, as allowed by law). Some Board members noted that they recalled a discussion was held at the public hearing about the BOE policy being in conflict with State statute, and that they see the recommended policy revision being intended as a way to rectify that, without "hamstringing" future options for the Board. It was also noted that said revision wouldn't preclude the Board from still being able to return 100% without a contribution to the capital reserve fund if they voted to do so. Other Board members recalled a general consensus at the Public Hearing about such a promise, although no

formal vote was taken at that time. It was determined that Policy #3160 will come back before the Board for a second reading and further discussion and possible vote at the September meeting.

**Curriculum Committee** - Dr. Martineau reported that the next meeting is scheduled for May 21st and they will be discussing the IB program.

**Finance Committee** - Ms. Allen reported that an additional meeting has scheduled for May 15th because two previously scheduled meetings had to be cancelled due to weather.

**Supervision District Committee Update** - There was nothing new to report.

### **Superintendent's Report**

Superintendent Levy announced that the Region 4 2018-19 budget referendum passed yesterday by a large margin. She thanked the Board and the administration for all of their thought and energy in putting together a thoughtful budget that serves students well.

Dr. Levy update the Board on the status of funds that the town of Deep River had requested from Region 4 for tax payments on a recent land purchase. A Shipman and Goodwin letter was sent to the Deep River Town Assessor showing the supporting law that Region 4 is a tax exempt entity that should not be taxed for this transaction. The Superintendent's office sent a follow-up letter to the Town Assessor asking for a refund by May 1, 2018 in the amount of property taxes that were paid on Jan 31, 2018. The Town has sent a reply that their attorney will be reviewing our letters and the town will inform the Region of his legal opinion. The Region awaits that response.

Dr. Levy reported that after looking into the cost of having an outside company come in to conduct safety and security audits for all of our schools, she feels the money would be better spent on providing any safety and security enhancements our schools actually need. She shared an in depth security audit tool that could be used "in house" by an appointed committee if we were to resurrect our Safety Advisory Committee that last operated in 2013 and audited all of our schools, both inside and outside. That is the direction she will be recommending for all of our five schools in order to provide a better return on limited resources. There was a brief discussion. Dr. Levy will restart this committee in order to conduct safety audits over the summer, which will be less disruptive to students. Board members interested in serving on this committee were asked to e-mail Chair Clark and Dr. Levy.

Dr. Levy was happy to share that the State is reporting that VRHS has a 100% 4-year graduation rate for 2016-17. She noted that it is the result of a complete PK-12 effort and it should be owned and celebrated by every board, school, student, staff, and administrator.

Dr. Levy said that she had been asked to report on how FOIA requests have been impacting costs for the district in recent years. She reported out on costs from one individual's multiple FOIA requests over the last two years which equaled to date over \$17,000 (\$10,197.11 in legal fees and \$7000+ in staff working time hours). A Board member raised a concern that administration was not responding to FOI requests properly, and stated that he wanted to see all FOI requests and the responses to them. Dr. Levy clarified that administration responds to all FOI requests per statute. She also told the member that if he wants to see completed FOI requests he may make an appointment to come in Central Office to view those documents. Dr. Levy also shared a legislative act that recently came to her attention that, if approved, would permit the FOIA Commission to grant relief from vexatious requesters. There was continued discussion.

On motion duly made and seconded the Board unanimously VOTED to table the discussion and move forward with the agenda.

Region 4 Director of Facilities, Bruce Glowac reported that due to several cancellations by the initial appraiser that had been recommend to him, he does not have an appraisal of the land that the Board requested, ready to present this evening. However, he has now contacted a new appraiser and has a promise of receiving an appraisal within 2 weeks.

Dr. Levy asked the Board to consider moving the regularly scheduled Region 4 BOE meeting on November 1st to Tues., Nov. 13th @ 7:00 p.m. due to a conflict that she has on her calendar.

On motion duly made and seconded the Board unanimously VOTED to move the regularly scheduled Region 4 BOE meeting from November 1, 2018 to November 13, 2018 in order to avoid a conflict where Dr. Levy would not be able to attend the meeting.

A BOE member asked about the effort made to limit Board meeting and school event conflicts. Dr. Levy noted that administration always tries their best to avoid conflicts, but unfortunately with so many board meetings that need to be held throughout the year, and so many school events that take place, there are occasional conflicts that cannot be avoided.

Chair Clark asked the Board to decide when they want to schedule their annual BOE self evaluation. Several options were discussed. The consensus of the Board was to hold a special meeting in September dedicated to completing a BOE self evaluation. Jennifer Bryan will send out at least two possible dates to Board members in order to find the one that is best for the majority.

Chair Clark discussed Policy #9132.1 which requires the formation of a Region 4 Grounds Maintenance and Oversight Committee made up of 6 members - 3 BOE members and one representative from each of the 3 towns who are to be appointed by the First Selectman of each town. The 6 members would be joined the Region 4 Director of Facilities. Chair Clark said she also envisions it making recommendations on buildings and capital projects.

Bruce Glowac, the current Director of Facilities for Region 4 shared the history on the creation of this policy, which was actually done around 1995 when he was a Selectman, prior to working for Region 4. The Committee was formed and continued to meet for 5-6 years mostly to determine a field maintenance contractor each year. After a while, the need for the committee disappeared and it was disbanded. He noted that it may be a good idea to resurrect it again, because 1995 was a long time ago. If the Board wanted to include recommendations for capital projects and building maintenance under the committee's charge, it would be a nice way to engage town representatives at the early stages. The charge of the committee would then conceivably be to bring recommendations to the Board on those issues, and the Board would then take those recommendations into consideration when developing future budgets. Chair Clark asked any interested Board members to e-mail Dr. Levy and her.

A Board member asked if having a Region 4 representative for the LEARN Ad Hoc Committee was important, because he had noticed that there was no current Region 4 Board member appointed to that position. It was determined that while not essential, it would be good to have all positions filled. Chair Clark will try to find a member interested in serving in that role.

### **Assistant Superintendent's Report**

Dr. Martineau updated the board on the work being done on the rubrics she shared with the Board earlier in the year. Last month the groups met to revise and streamline the rubrics based on classroom feedback. They are now looking at designing assessments and taking the rubrics through the process that will result in reports back to the Board. They want the assessments embedded within classroom work and not be a stand alone assessment.

## **AUDIENCE OF CITIZENS**

1 citizen was present - Phil from Ivoryton state that he was concerned about the recommended revision to the Transfer of Funds policy as he felt the Board had agreed to something different at the Public Hearing, as well. He also mentioned that he liked what he heard in the discussion regarding the re-formation of the Region 4 Maintenance Committee.

## **EXECUTIVE SESSION**

The Board unanimously VOTED to move into Executive Session at 9:27 p.m. for the evaluation of the Superintendent, who was invited to stay.

The Board moved out of Executive Session at approx. 10:10 p.m.

## **FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS**

- Next Joint BOE meeting is June 07, 2018
- Next Region 4 BOE meeting is September 06, 2018

## **ADJOURNMENT**

On motion duly made and seconded the Board unanimously VOTED to adjourn at approx. 10:11 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

---

Leigh Rankin, Secretary  
Jennifer Bryan, Clerk