

**COVENTRY BOARD OF EDUCATION
APPROVED MINUTES
MEETING OF THURSDAY, JANUARY 31, 2008**

Members Present: Larry Pietrantonio, Chairman
 Kathleen Ryan, Vice Chairman
 Cheryl Trudon, Secretary
 John Barrett (arrived 7:45 p.m.)
 Mary Kortmann
 Michael Whitham (arrived 7:37 p.m.)
 Richard Williams

Also Present: Kelley Smart, BOE Student Representative

Administrators Present: Dr. Donna Bernard, Superintendent
 Sherry Holmes, Fiscal Services Director

Also present were Judith Richard, Pupil and Staff Support Services Director; Paul Noel, Director of Physical Plant and Facilities; Troy Hopkins, CHS Principal; Michele Mullaly, CNH Interim Principal; David Petrone, GHR Principal; Raymond Grasso, CGS Principal; a few Contemporary Issues students; and a few citizens. The Journal Inquirer newspaper was represented. All motions are directed to the Coventry Board of Education.

I. CALL TO ORDER

By: Chairman, L. Pietrantonio Time: 7:33 p.m.
Place: Administration Building Conference Room

II. SALUTE THE FLAG

The Pledge of Allegiance was led by L. Pietrantonio.

III. AUDIENCE OF CITIZENS

David Imhof of 35 Satari Drive thanked the Board for approving the co-op hockey team seven years ago. He said the Bolton-Coventry-Lyman team has been very successful in a lot of ways, including developing school spirit and developing individual team members. He said the ice palace is a great environment and the team ranked number 1 this year in the pre-season. He told the Board that the team has followed procedures and presented their budget request to the high school principal and he added he hopes the Board takes the request into consideration. He said the sport is very expensive and the team is asking for one third of the ordinary cost, which is support the Board gives to other sports, like soccer. The total the team is asking for is about \$6,000. He finished by thanking the Board for their time and consideration.

IV. REPORT OF THE SUPERINTENDENT

Information: Student Recognition – Kelley Smart, BOE Student Representative

Dr. Bernard said Kelley Smart has represented Coventry High School very well and she is a fine example of student leadership. She said Kelley has served the Board and her fellow students well and she wished her the best in her future endeavors. The Board and the audience recognized Kelley with a round of applause. Kelley thanked the Board members for the opportunity to serve and commented that the chance has given her insight of what goes on in the town and she thanked the Board for the experience.

V. CONSENT AGENDA (VOTE: One vote for all items.)

- A. Accept Retirement of Barbara Frye, GHR Secretary
- B. Accept Retirement of Patricia Martello, GHR Teacher

MOTION: To approve with regret and gratitude the retirements listed on the Consent Agenda for the long years of service given to Coventry Public Schools.

By: K. Ryan Seconded: C. Trudon

Result: Motion passes unanimously.

VIII. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

VOTE: Approve Minutes of January 10, 2008

MOTION: To Approve the Minutes of January 10, 2008

By: C. Trudon Seconded: M. Kortmann

C. Trudon asked the word “curriculum” be added before the word “documents” to the first sentence in the fourth paragraph on page 3.

Result: Motion to approve the minutes with noted changes passes 5-0-2 (K. Ryan and J. Barrett abstain).

IX. OLD BUSINESS

Discussion: FY 2009 Budget

L. Pietrantonio said any reasonable questions would be entertained to get the budget discussion started.

C. Trudon asked if there is an increase in how many students could take the high school virtual classroom course. Mr. Hopkins answered there is a fulltime teacher teaching the course, which gives an increase of 20 students. He clarified this does not cause a cost increase.

J. Barrett stated he had seen a news clip regarding virtual classroom courses being given by the state. Mr. Hopkins responded that the high school guidance counselors have been informed of the pilot program and one CHS student has been enrolled. He added the state program is a bit different than the one currently available at CHS and is geared toward remediation and students who have failed a course. Mr. Hopkins added that during this pilot phase the state program is free, but the number/selection of courses is very limited. Dr. Bernard added we will see much more in the way of these “hybrid” education programs in the future.

R. Williams asked, in reference to the Curriculum Specialist position, currently how much is the curriculum project costing district in staff. Dr. Bernard replied one half time teacher and two teachers released from one class a day. R. Williams wondered what the exact dollar amount was and said it seems this is costing the district a lot of money. Dr. Bernard responded most districts have full time administrators as curriculum directors, with additional people working on curriculum. She said yes, it is a lot of money that districts are putting into curriculum, and it is a result of state testing expectations and requirements.

R. Williams asked if the new curriculum specialist position is the best way of using funds. He said it seems the money could be allocated instead to the Coventry Grammar School. He added, when combining all of the costs associated with these curriculum positions, perhaps the money could be spent differently.

Dr. Bernard commented the most interesting conversation will happen when the Board looks at the 2 column spreadsheet and discusses those items. R. Williams said the other schools have huge increases and wants to know how Mr. Grasso at CGS runs such a low percentage increase every year.

Dr. Bernard stated all the administrators run their departments and schools efficiently. She reminded the Board that 85% - 90% of the budget is in personnel. She asked, should CGS have more staff – yes, should the other schools have what they have asked for in column one – yes.

R. Williams asked if the Board should really allocate for the curriculum specialist if the district cannot afford it and said in his opinion the Board may want to look at other items instead.

K. Ryan said the curriculum development has always been done piecemeal because of tight funding. She said when looking at curriculum across schools and the district, no matter how good the teachers are who are writing it, an expert is needed for the overall project. She added the district has different factors to look at, from the NEASC recommendations to making data driven decisions on testing. She said the district needs someone to oversee all of these items. She commented that it will continue at the school level by the teachers too. She said she would be very concerned if the Board does not approve this position in this cycle and it would be a great loss to the system.

M. Whitham commented on the curriculum specialist position and added it is an item that is not needed yet. He said he felt strongly listening to the presenters that they had a good grasp on this project and the work being done by teachers is very good. He noted that a “project coordinator” at this time would undermine what is going on. He said it would be premature to add someone, because the results they are getting now are good and introducing another player can be a distraction. He said it was stated 90% of this budget is salaries and every year Coventry talks about doing “it” for the students, yet every year because of this salary issue, the student items come off the budget. He added the curriculum specialist position would be an additional salary with benefits needing funding year after year and instead that money could pay for student items. He said he believes the Board should hold off one to two years and instead give the money to student items. He added he would rather see the athletic trainer, extra curricular activities, and foreign language added in.

J. Barrett said he echoed M. Whitham’s comments. He said the curriculum team is doing an outstanding job and he believed that was the goal, to have insiders working with insiders. He said the district should wait to have the curriculum coordinated and then introduce a curriculum coordinator. He said the district bought the right software package at the right time. He said he doesn’t see a coordinator needed at all at this time and he believes the money is better spent on a technology education teacher, the instrument for CNH, an athletic trainer, and funding for football, hockey, and indoor track. He said these items were eliminated before the Board even got to the table and he thinks they should be added back in and the curriculum specialist should be taken out. R. Williams said he agreed.

L. Pietrantonio said the time is right now to add the curriculum specialist position and if the Board waits two years it will multiply into more time. He said in the meantime the program will fall apart if there isn't someone in charge. He said you cannot force the members of the team to continue and that a head to the program is needed.

C. Trudon stated that the focus has been on curriculum and this has carried through to the staff development days. She said there has been a lot of time and money that has gone into this project and the addition of a curriculum specialist is the next logical step.

M. Whitham asked if the people who are working on the project now are happy doing it. Dr. Bernard said it is a huge systemic effort for a small district and they are giving it their best try.

J. Barrett said it seems there is the mentality of "all or nothing." He stated a slow and steady pace would serve the district better. He added the Board cannot be afraid of someone quitting and cannot base a decision on that scenario. L. Pietrantonio said too many projects have fallen by the wayside because they have stalled.

K. Ryan said at the time ABC was introduced it was stated it would be developed over a long period of time and as it develops the district needs the expertise of a professional, the project needs to be directed by a coordinator. She added that the Board is about academics first and foremost, and academics and instruction need curriculum coordination. She said the coordination has been done piecemeal over 14 years because it has not been adequately funded and the Board has the chance to fund it now. She said it could be funded with the ECS (Education Cost Sharing) money.

A discussion ensued about what ECS money was available and when the Town would see those funds.

J. Barrett said he would like to look at the money saved from retirements and that it was more than \$200,000 last year. He said if the district saves \$20,000 - \$30,000 on each retirement that is a significant amount of money the district saves yearly and it is not reflected in this budget. He stated the Board would not have to raise overall spending if that money was used. Dr. Bernard noted she strongly encourages the board to not count on vacancy savings and it needs to be saved for emergencies. She said the Board should be very cautious when looking at that money and it is the only potential place the schools can go if there is an unexpected expense. She added she does not want to be responsible for a budget that does not have the vacancy savings available. S. Holmes commented that last year there was only several thousand dollars left in June. C. Trudon added as of right now, the district is upside-down in a couple of accounts and there is not tons of money to spend. R. Williams said that is even more of a reason not to spend tons of money on staff that will be incurred year after year. M. Kortmann said the school system is the staff, it is what we have and it is what we do. She said we buy people to teach our children.

J. Barrett said the money comes from the community and he is reflecting the arguments made in this town for 20 years. He said the schools don't think of the taxpayers well enough and the town is looking at an increase of 6% over last year.

Dr. Bernard commented that a budget that reflects well on the students needs to be presented and in addition it needs to pass in May with the taxpayers' approval.

C. Trudon noted that a curriculum specialist applies to the students district-wide, not like some other items on the spreadsheet.

M. Whitham asked what the situation was with the busses. Ms. Holmes commented that with the CNH/CHS runs there are still some students 3 to a seat and we are not within standards. She added with the current leasing of a bus it looks much better, it is not a perfect 48 on each bus, but it is less than 58 – 60.

J. Barrett asked specifically about bus 17 and what that bus does after it drops off students. Ms. Holmes said it is the E. O. Smith bus and she would have to do research on that issue. It was decided an answer would be emailed to the entire Board. A discussion ensued regarding changes in enrollment and students not able to drive friends to school due to changes in the law, as possible reasons for increased bus use.

M. Whitham said there are so many things included in the budget on which the Board cannot even make decisions.

J. Barrett asked Mr. Grasso about the ink cartridges for the printers at his school and are they all different. Mr. Grasso said they were all different, but now they are standardizing what they purchase. J. Barrett asked if it would make sense to have a central printer in the office. Mr. Grasso clarified that the classroom printers are not for large copy projects, but mainly for student work. He said the teachers have access to a high or low volume copier in the main office and they can also key into the laser printer in the main office.

J. Barrett addressed the item of video taping Board meetings. He asked for reasoning behind the allocated amount of \$12,000. Dr. Bernard said it was for the taping of Program Highlights presented at the Board meetings and Ms. Holmes added it was for other district video taping.

M. Whitham asked about the phone system account. Ms. Holmes said it was for the administration building and the two elementary schools and it was a maintenance program.

R. Williams again asked for clarification on the new budget book format. Dr. Bernard stated this question was answered at the meeting on Tuesday and the administration had looked at the association recommendations and other award winning budget books. R. Williams stated that now details are missing. Ms. Holmes said details can be provided if questions are asked.

C. Trudon stated the previous books were more confusing, there were more complaints, and it did not decrease questions. Dr. Bernard said it is important for members to ask the questions they have about specific line items. L. Pietrantonio stated the Board is not going to get the old format back and everyone needs to accept that fact.

Dr. Bernard stated right now the role of the Board is to come up with a third column. L. Pietrantonio said the Board has to decide on cuts that can be lived with. He asked the Board to look at the columns and those items. He said there is nothing in special education that this Board can change.

M. Whitham asked if a 5.41% increase is the “status quo” budget. L. Pietrantonio replied, yes, it is the baseline. R. Williams said the Board needs to take a serious look at this

coming back with a rejection from the voters in May and that there are grand plans by the Town Council to spend tremendous amounts of money.

R. Williams motioned that the Board push through column 1 as presented. John Barrett seconded the motion.

Dr. Bernard stated a motion to add a vote on the FY09 budget was needed before the motion could be made.

J. Barrett recommended the Board wipe out everything in column 2 and add in the extra curricular support – grades 3-8, the technology education teacher, the music instrument, the athletic/extra curricular salaries-CHS and look at taking \$120,000 out of salaries based on retirement. L. Pietrantonio asked J. Barrett what the number was he was trying to reach in column 2. J. Barrett replied he did not have a target in mind, but 1.1 million is what he arrived at.

Dr. Bernard reminded the Board that a motion needed to be made to add the vote to the agenda.

MOTION: To add the VOTE on the budget to agenda.

By: J. Barrett Seconded: R. Williams

A discussion ensued on multiple votes on the budget, voting item by item according to the spreadsheet, and a prioritized list for the Board to work from if there were vacancy savings money.

Result: Motion fails 5-2 (L. Pietrantonio, K. Ryan, M. Kortmann, C. Trudon, and M. Whitham against.)

M. Whitham said he liked the suggestion of a prioritized list for the Board to approve if money became available and asked if that could be discussed further at the next meeting.

K. Ryan suggested the Board email or fax any additional questions before next week's meeting and that they be sent as soon as possible to give staff and the Board enough time for review.

Discussion ensued about alternative ways to fund the instrument at CNH.

J. Barrett asked about the Board's CAFE (Connecticut Association of Boards of Education) membership and if the Board could do without it. K. Ryan suggested strongly against dropping that membership as it provides a large range of services for the Board.

R. Grasso said if the para-educator is not funded at CGS it will leave the student program in peril. He added he has concerns about all of the items in column one not being addressed.

R. Williams commented he does not think even a low 5% increase will work with the voters because he believes the town side will be too high. K. Ryan said she hopes the Board members would talk up and support the funding of the schools. C. Trudon added that sometimes people don't understand the programs behind the money, but if they knew about them it might be different. R. Williams said the public vote is based on the bottom line number.

X. NEW BUSINESS

Discussion: Possible Tape Recording of Board of Education Meetings

L. Pietrantonio asked Dr. Bernard for the legal opinion on this matter. She responded that Shipman and Goodwin does not recommend it. J. Barrett said we have to be willing to keep complete and accurate minutes and right now we are giving summaries. He said the Board is not in compliance with its own policy. C. Trudon said “complete and accurate” is subjective. J. Barrett disagreed and said the Board owed it to the citizens to keep an accurate account.

The consensus was the Board wanted to vote formally and the item would be placed on the next regular meeting agenda – February 14, 2008.

XI. REPORT OF BOARD MEMBERS

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

VOTE: Approve Budget Transfers as Presented

C. Trudon verified all members received the fiscal items in their packets and she reviewed those documents. She added that Ms. Holmes has put a caution to the district on spending because there are accounts that are upside-down. She commented that there are Budget Transfers this evening that need to be voted on. A discussion ensued about the budget transfers.

MOTION: To Approve the Budget Transfers as presented

By: K. Ryan Seconded: M. Kortmann

Result: Motion passes unanimously.

B. Information: School Building Committee Report – L. Pietrantonio

L. Pietrantonio had nothing to report. He said the committee was still waiting for signatures from the state and hopefully that would happen within the next two weeks.

XII. ADJOURNMENT

MOTION: To adjourn the Board meeting at 10:15 p.m.

By: K. Ryan Seconded: C. Trudon

Result: Motion passes unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,

Kimberlee Michaud
Board Clerk

February 14, 2008
Approved