

**COVENTRY BOARD OF EDUCATION
APPROVED MINUTES
MEETING OF THURSDAY, AUGUST 28, 2008**

Members Present: Larry Pietrantonio, Chairman
Kathleen Ryan, Vice Chairman
Cheryl Trudon, Secretary
Mary Kortmann
Michael Whitham
Richard Williams

Members Absent: John Barrett

Administrators Present: Dr. Donna Bernard, Superintendent
Sherry Holmes, Fiscal Services Director
Judith Richard, Pupil and Staff Support Services Director

Also present was David Petrone, GHR Principal and a couple of 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 7:38 p.m.
Place: Administration Building Conference Room

II. SALUTE THE FLAG

The Pledge of Allegiance was led by L. Pietrantonio

III. AUDIENCE OF CITIZENS

Jennifer Beausoleil of 222 Eastview Drive spoke regarding the fiscal activities that have been going on over the last couple of months between the Town Council and the Board of Education. She thanked the board and the administration for mitigating a difficult financial situation that began in January and based on the economy got progressively worse. She reviewed the recent Board minutes and believes that the request for funds by the Board to the Town Council was small and impressive compared to what it could have been if the administrators had not tried to mitigate the issues by staying conservative. Additionally, as a parent of two students in Coventry, she thanked the administration for a phenomenal start to the new school year. She said the eighth graders are so excited for the opportunity to go to the high school and take the higher level courses. She said they appreciated the opportunity and the respect it gives them. She concluded by saying she looks forward to seeing more of it.

IV. REPORT OF THE SUPERINTENDENT

Dr. Bernard said she reported to the press that the district could not have had a better opening to the school year. She then reviewed with the Board the district's summer happenings. She passed out and reviewed two day Administrative Council meeting agenda, which was held in August. Next she went over a hard copy of the New Teacher Orientation schedule, noting it was the first year for three days of training. She handed out the list of new teachers. Dr. Bernard then reviewed the schedule for staff opening

days on August 25 & 26. She said that the program on August 25 was outstanding with many “working parts” and stated the staff was pleased with the day’s events. Dr. Bernard continued talking about the summer work that was done and how curriculum was a big part of that. She handed out the summary of the summer curriculum writing which had been accomplished. She added when the district “goes live” in January, the project will not be complete, but huge gains will have been made.

Dr. Bernard next addressed the enrollment figures for the start of school and said the figures are just a snapshot of the beginning of school. She noted the approximate number of students who are attending schools outside of Coventry, which is now included in the report.

She handed out the administrators’ goal report schedule for the September 11, 25 and October 16 BOE meetings. She also added that she wanted to mention the summer school programs, which were very effective tools. She said there were 22 3rd & 4th graders who participated at GHR and there were 4 students who were in the 8th grade summer school program.

She mentioned the leadership change at the Coventry Grammar School as a “district level” change and that all reports are good from CGS.

K. Ryan asked about instructional materials and supplies and if the schools were properly equipped considering the fiscally conservative times. Dr. Bernard assured the Board the schools were up and running and students have what they need. She added that at no time during the course of the 07-08 year were there students who went without basic instructional materials.

C. Trudon wanted it noted for the record that buses were not used for summer school.

R. Williams asked how transportation was in general for the first two days.

Ms. Holmes said there no individual issues with buses and only three requests for bus stop changes had been made.

R. Williams said it was nice to see some clarification on the enrollment sheet regarding resident students who attend schools outside of Coventry. He said it does seem that enrollment numbers overall are dropping.

R. Williams asked if the Board could see where the students are going outside of Coventry. Dr. Bernard said that could be provided toward the end of fall, once the report is complete. L. Pietrantonio added that CREC is advertising on the television and local public schools are under financial stress paying for students going to out-of-town schools.

Dr. Bernard said the magnet schools are multi-million dollar facilities and it can be very appealing to parents, including very low classroom numbers. Although, she added that Coventry has had students return because of the comprehensive educational programs that are offered here.

R. Williams asked about the special education outplacements and what the outlook was in that regard. J. Richard said the figures are very preliminary and it is very hard to forecast.

K. Ryan added that regarding enrollment, Coventry is pretty much on the mark for long term enrollment projections. R. Williams reiterated that it seems like the numbers are going down and it is a statewide issue, not just in Coventry.

Result: The motion to approve the minutes with noted changes passes unanimously.

B. VOTE: Approve minutes of August 18, 2008

MOTION: To approve minutes of August 18, 2008

By: K. Ryan

Seconded: M. Kortmann

M. Kortmann asked that the last sentence on page one read, "She stated again that it is a special education problem."

K. Ryan asked that the word "than" be changed to "then" in paragraph 11 on page 2.

M. Whitham asked his name be spelled correctly in the third paragraph on page 2.

Result: The motion to approve the minutes with noted changes passes unanimously.

XI. REPORT OF BOARD MEMBERS

A. Information: School Building Committee Update – L. Pietrantonio

L. Pietrantonio reported that the trenching was going on for the water project and things are moving along. He said there are no bills to be paid at this time, but they will probably have a meeting in September.

B. Information: Transportation Committee Update – K. Ryan and S. Holmes

K. Ryan reported that the Committee met on August 6 and discussed the bus routes and agreed to send them out to publication. She said they also discussed cost savings measures for this year and the new bid specifications that will go out which will also include cost saving measures. She reviewed the minutes from the meeting, which were included in the Board Bulletin.

C. Information: Fiscal committee Update – C. Trudon and S. Holmes

C. Trudon began with the report for June 2008 and read from the information that was included in all of the Board packets. She also spoke to the budget transfers for 2007-08. She said the committee added an hour on to the meeting this evening to have enough time to discuss these issues. She added that the issues were varied in regard to why the budget transfers needed to take place.

VOTE: Approve Budget Transfers as Presented

MOTION: To approve the Budget Transfers as presented for 2007-08.

By: M. Kortmann

Seconded: C. Trudon

R. Williams asked about the 560 line and asked why there was money left in that account. It was explained that the special education transportation line 510 offsets that line.

L. Pietrantonio asked for further discussion regarding the motion. There were none.

Result: Motion passes 4-2 (M. Whitham and R. Williams against)

M. Whitham said he has a hard time with how things are transferred from one area to another and does not always agree with where money is taken from. He did not think it should come from school supplies and extra curricular activities. He said he is hoping for a better year and stated the Fiscal Committee will be looking at things differently and more closely.

Ms. Holmes reminded the Board that these accounting practices are totally accepted by the auditors.

M. Whitham said he realizes that this is how it has been done, but he would like to see it handled differently.

M. Kortmann said another option is to spend down the accounts that had money left, no matter what the outcome.

R. Williams said he wants to see the money spent for the items for which it has been set aside and reiterated that he felt the Board was disingenuous in how the information was presented to the public.

C. Trudon referenced the memo for expenditure report July 2008. It noted the district is currently in “critical spending” mode for 08-09 year. She continued that things are being done differently than in the past and she presented the FY07-08/08-09 Budget Comparison Report noting that the sheet shows the worse-case scenario for 08-09. She added, in regard to the 07-08 shortage, the Board was able to cover \$462,471.74 and asked the Town Council for only \$49,206.03.

Dr. Bernard said the worse case scenario is coverable by vacancy savings and such, but in the end there will be budget transfers.

M. Kortmann asked if the first place to go to cover shortages would be vacancy savings? Dr. Bernard replied yes.

Dr. Bernard added that “critical spending” mode has been implementing now, instead of January for instance. L. Pietrantonio said the problem is the special education cost overages, which won't be known until the end of the year and there is nothing the Board can do about that.

R. Williams said the Board has not budgeted correctly in regard to line items that do not need the money. He said he believes if the Board budgets a certain amount of money for a line item, then that is where the money should be spent.

M. Whitham said a strategy for moving into this year is to look at the history of the items and when the next year's budget is developed, adjusting those items that may need adjusting. He said he is glad there will be a separate tracking of special education costs and if it continues to be an issue, the Board may have to ask the town council for special education cost assistance every year.

C. Trudon said she views the Board budget as a whole for all students no matter what type of student they are. She said it is wrong to separate out one type of student with regard to spending and educating. She said the Board has been given a certain amount of money for all of the students and it is our responsibility to stay within that budget. She said she does not believe the Board can keep going back to the Town Council.

M. Whitham said he is not saying to treat the students differently, just to track the legally mandated spending.

