

**COVENTRY BOARD OF EDUCATION
APPROVED MINUTES
MEETING OF THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 11, 2010**

Members Present: Larry Pietrantonio, Chairman
 Cheryl Trudon, Vice Chairman
 Mary Ann Emanuele, Secretary
 John Barrett
 Jennifer Beausoleil (arrived 7:41 p.m.)
 Mary Kortmann
 Mark Malcolm

Administrators Present: Dr. Donna Bernard, Superintendent
 Judith Richard, PSSS Director

Also present were David Petrone, GHR Principal; Troy Hopkins, CHS Principal; Marybeth Moyer, CGS Principal; Michele Mullaly, CNH Principal; Scott Sadinsky, CNH Assistant Principal; Paul Noel, Director of Physical Plant and Facilities; Gina Olearczyk, PSSS; Katie Baumgartner, Payroll Clerk; and a few Coventry High School students. All motions are directed to the Coventry Board of Education.

I. CALL TO ORDER

By: Chairman, L. Pietrantonio at 7:30 p.m.
Place: Town Hall Annex

II. SALUTE THE FLAG

The Pledge of Allegiance was led by L. Pietrantonio.

III. AUDIENCE OF CITIZENS

There were none.

VI. REPORT OF CHAIRMAN

L. Pietrantonio said he would like to talk about cuts first as the Board focuses on budget discussions.

VIII. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

A. VOTE: Approve Minutes of January 21, 2010

MOTION: To Approve the Minutes of January 21, 2010

By: C. Trudon Seconded: M. Kortmann

C. Trudon noted page 5, the fourth full paragraph, the first sentence, the word addresses should be “addressed.”

Result: Motion to approve minutes with noted change passes unanimously.

B. VOTE: Approve Minutes of January 28, 2010

MOTION: To Approve the Minutes of January 28, 2010

By: C. Trudon Seconded: M. Kortmann

M. Kortmann noted the word “dye” was incorrect on pages 2 and 3 and asked that it be changed to “dire.”

Result: Motion to approve minutes with noted changes passes unanimously

(J. Beausoleil arrives 7:41 p.m.)

IX. OLD BUSINESS

Discussion: FY2011 Budget

Dr. Bernard said she realized the Board received the most recent “Board Members Question and Answer” document with their packets, but for the matter of public record and conversation purposes she passed it out again. Secondly she handed out the updated Addition/Reduction Analysis Spreadsheet which had a column added addressing the Excess Cost Figure Reduction cuts, due to reduced State of Connecticut funding. Last she shared a document which noted the potential cuts in both special education and regular education.

M. Malcolm said if you cut a salary you are going to have to compensate for that cut with unemployment benefits. He asked if the information being provided took that into consideration. Dr. Bernard replied there is an unemployment line for 2010-11, which does not take into consideration this large scope of \$500,000 worth of cuts in people.

M. Kortmann explained there are at least twelve staff leaving due to retirements. She said there may not be as many laid off as are noted on the cut lists. She said in actuality it is the “replacement,” for some of the spots left by retirees, that is being cut.

M. Malcolm verified that unemployment costs associated with the cuts were not addressed in the cuts document. Dr. Bernard said that was correct, but added with certified staff unemployment should not be an additional problem, but with non-certified staff it could be.

C. Trudon said there is a good possibility that staff hours and FTEs would be reduced, which does not result in unemployment cost increases. Dr. Bernard said the possibility of part-time schedules was just opened up to all staff.

M. Malcolm asked if the cuts document was just salary savings or salary and benefits savings. Dr. Bernard said it is just salary savings.

L. Pietrantonio asked if anyone had additional cuts to put on the table. J. Barrett said he would like to talk additions first. The group talked about which should be discussed first, cuts or additions.

J. Beausoleil asked what fee changes are built into the current set of proposals that effect revenue. Dr. Bernard said nothing at this time. J. Beausoleil asked, if fees were added or changed, they be brought before the Board.”

C. Trudon asked if there was any hope expected for grants to bring money in to the district. Dr. Bernard said the district aggressively goes after grants as much as possible, although they are small because of the demographics of the town. She added the word from the state and the federal government is, potentially, grant funds will be reduced, not enhanced.

J. Barrett asked what the ARRA grant’s impact was on next year’s budget. He said, his understanding is that it has an impact on the current year as well. Dr. Bernard answered that it is incorporated within the regular budget. She said next year’s resource is expected to be equivalent to this year and then it falls off after that. J. Barrett said according to the information we were given that means it reduces our budget and how does that effect our budget with the Town. M. Kortmann said the

agreement with the Town is they will carry the budget as it was approved. J. Barrett said it becomes “off budget” and asked if it would be figured in or would it just not show up. M. Kortmann said it would just not show up; it does not add or subtract any revenue. Dr. Bernard said the figures are not significant enough to impact the bottom line percentage of the budget. J. Barrett said it is a grant and it bothers him if it is in the budget and it does not show. He said he thinks the grant budgets should be included in the budget and the Board should be overseeing that money.

J. Barrett continued noting the grant-paid employees. He said the base salaries are paid by the grant (\$283,010) and the benefits (\$196,885) are paid for by the district. He said the budgets (grant and regular) are coming together and being segregated and are coming together and being segregated. He said not having the two budgets together is convoluted and polluting what the real dollars are. He said we should not be paying for health insurance for grant employees even if that means cutting grant employees. Dr. Bernard explained, if you made the grant pay for the benefits you would have to cut half the positions. Dr. Bernard said common practice is for the districts to pick up the benefit costs, to enable more staff to be working with children. Ms. Richard added that the IDEA grant has a cap on how much can be charged to the grant for insurance benefits. J. Barrett said his point is, the Board is being asked to layoff staff and he is looking at what “bucket” to take it out of. He said it is an issue of grant staff versus regular staff. He said we can always turn down the grant. Ms. Richard explained the IDEA rules and regulations are specific that the grant money is to be allocated specifically for special education programs. She continued to go beyond the proposed special education cuts of \$329,000 would end in violation of special education laws. J. Barrett said he would rather keep the majority of the \$329,000 versus the grant funded staff. Ms. Richard said the staff would then be switched; the services need to be rendered to the students. Dr. Bernard said the IDEA is a regular, ongoing, not periodic, support grant for special education services. She added that the people who are serving special education children are usually a combination of regular special education staff and IDEA funded staff.

The group continued to discuss the grants and grant staff and special education services.

The discussion returned to the proposed cuts. M. Malcolm said wherever possible we would want to reduce the hours of an individual, save money on the salary, but not incur the cost of unemployment with layoffs.

M. Malcolm asked, are the resulting benefits of any of these cuts represented on the benefits health care line item. Dr. Bernard said no; the budget is too tight. She explained that employees have the right to take benefits at any time, so you cannot count on it. She said if there was a “nickel” left over in that area, it would help you with any line that would go underfunded.

C. Trudon noted the special education proposed cuts. She asked if any of the cuts are related to services that we know would not be needed next year. Ms. Richard said at least one of those cuts is for that reason.

M. Emanuele asked if the grants could be re-written to include the benefits. Ms. Richard said she would have to research that. Dr. Bernard said we would get answers to the following in writing: Can the benefits be written into the grants and what is the cap (for both the IDEA and Title I grants).

M. Malcolm inquired about the current year’s salary accounts for special education. He said it seems that, if he is reading it correctly, the accounts would be to the good by \$300,000 by the end of the year. M. Kortmann said if the non-certified accounts are included they are not encumbered and that is why it would look that way.

J. Beausoleil noted the tuition account. She asked if there was flexibility on the nine slots at the Great Path Academy. Dr. Bernard confirmed there is an agreement with Great Path Academy for nine slots. She explained that the laws have changed several times and districts could be required to fund any magnet school tuition at anytime. The group discussed magnet schools and the placement of students as part of an agreement or not.

M. Emanuele said it is hard to think about cuts when we have not nailed down some of the assumptions that are incorporated into the making up of the budget. She asked if there are any changes to the assumptions. L. Pietrantonio said there are always going to be assumptions that will not be fixed. He said the budget needs to be decided and given to the Town by a certain date and we will never have all of the answers by that date.

J. Barrett noted the town has projected a significant debt reduction over the next few years. He said that is money that is being made available to be used in other areas. He said maybe the Board should be presenting to the Town Council an idea that would utilize some of that money, instead of laying off staff.

C. Trudon said we are not going to get the answer to that while we are in this short budget development process. She stated she wants no cuts made beyond what the Administrative Council has given the Board.

J. Beausoleil asked what items would be included in the “materials and supplies” noted on the regular education cut sheet at the high school. Mr. Hopkins said the list has not been finalized, but would be a combination of instructional, technology, textbooks, and supplies. J. Beausoleil said she would go on record saying she would rather save a teacher than buy a smartboard or LCD projector. In addition, she said she would like to see the following considerations for adjustments:

- Professional service of shredding papers – eliminated, and cross cut shredders purchased
- BOE travel – eliminated
- CHS drama assistants (2)
- AV support at each of the schools – eliminated. Dr. Bernard noted this is a contractual item.
- Overtime on all salary accounts cut by 10%
- Intramural items could be cut versus cutting team sports
- Low volume copiers and printers replaced by a large volume equivalent
- The custom printed handbook/agenda books replaced with a paper or electronic handout and standard commercial calendars
- Eliminate Renzulli at the middle school - Ms. Mullaly responded she negotiated a lower rate.

Dr. Bernard said she would hope the Board would allow the Administrators to analyze and discuss the suggestions. In addition, with such a large scope, she said the Administration would prefer to see if there is full Board consensus and make recommendations regarding the cuts. She said there should be a more complex conversation had about many of these items. J. Beausoleil agreed that they were good suggestions, and they were recommendations for the \$90,000 budget, not that they were absolutes.

L. Pietrantonio said these are great suggestions and should come under the \$90,000 “other cuts to be determined.”

Dr. Bernard said they would be within the \$90,000 of optional items, which are to be determined later.

J. Beausoleil said we are talking about eliminating staff over keeping tools. She said she would rather keep a math teacher than the tool.

J. Barrett said professional printing should not be used for the newsletter at the middle school.

J. Barrett asked what could be taken out of dues and fees. Dr. Bernard said \$46,000 has been taken out of Central Office, which includes a reduction in dues and fees. She said in addition, there is \$50,000 in special education and \$90,000 in regular education that is to be determined and there will not be dues or fees paid anywhere without being scrutinized.

J. Barrett asked if they could discuss the additions at this point.

L. Pietrantonio asked if there were any other proposed cuts.

M. Emanuele said the Physicians Desk Reference is useless for the nurses and should be eliminated. She said she would rather see decreasing hours of non-certified staff than eliminating programs. She said she would also like to see freezes on wages, but understands that answer would not be provided in time.

M. Malcolm asked about non-certified staff and can you force part-time. Dr. Bernard said no, it is contractual. She said she is hoping for volunteers. M. Malcolm said you get more value for your money out of non-certified. He said the para-educators are working one-on-one or in small groups with students who really need help. He said if those para-educators are not there, those students may not get the help; that is a lot of value right there at a small salary.

M. Emanuele said you still have to have those professional/certified staff in the lead. She said we are at the point where we have to figure out what is best and none of this is easy; these are real people who live in our community.

C. Trudon said she is not a big fan of cutting intramural sports or stipends related to them. She said we need to allow as many students as possible to stay active and engaged afterschool; it is a priority.

L. Pietrantonio asked for any potential additions.

J. Barrett asked to begin with legal. He said he believes it is about 50% underfunded. He said the Board has to come up with a number that is real. M. Malcolm said he agrees 100%.

L. Pietrantonio asked what figure J. Barrett was looking at.

J. Barrett said looking at all of the legal expenses coming up he believes it needs to be doubled. C. Trudon said she would be comfortable with increasing, but not doubling.

M. Malcolm said the projection for this year is, we will be short \$40,000. He said an adjustment for next year of adding \$50,000 sounds reasonable. The group discussed different legal services over the past couple of years. J. Beausoleil said she could agree with \$40,000 - \$50,000. J. Barrett said \$50,000 is better.

For draft purposes, the group agreed \$50,000 would be left "on the table" as an addition for legal services.

M. Malcolm said he would like to see the three special education para-educator positions saved. For draft purposes, the group agreed to add \$51,000 back in special education, as is programmatically appropriate.

M. Malcolm noted he would like to qualify his comments. He said the state underfunded Excess Cost. He said that “hits” special education specifically. He continued, that resulted in the PSSS Director having to reduce special education to offset those reduced funds. He said if, as an example, the state had said they were going to underfund mathematics, the direction would not have been to find all of the funds in the mathematics program. He said, in this case, it is wrong to direct all of the hit to special education. J. Beausoleil said the history has been, whenever there is an unanticipated cost in special education, the transfer comes from somewhere else. She said if we are taking a \$500,000 hit in regular staff members, and there is opportunity for cuts in special education, it should be addressed.

C. Trudon noted that some of the special education cuts are specifically related to services that will not be needed next year. Ms. Richard agreed.

M. Kortmann said she would like to see two (2.0 FTE) teachers added back to regular education for a total of \$84,000. For draft purposes, the group agreed to this addition.

M. Malcolm said the recommendation would be, wherever possible, to scale back the percentage of FTEs so as to not incur additional unemployment costs.

J. Barrett said there are a lot of items noted in the budget sheets related to student activities. He continued, regular budget money is transferred into the student activity funds and spent through those accounts. He said he would like to see a change in procedure and that those funds be spent from the regular budget directly through the purchase order procedure. He said it is important, as there was over \$300,000 remaining in the student activity funds account at the end of June 2009. He said the Board should have more control over those monies and he would like to see a tighter reign on that money.

Dr. Bernard said the Board has been provided extensive information on the student activity fund accounts in the past. She said if it is a change in procedure that is being discussed, an informed conversation needs to be had. She said for example, if you are talking about the labor cost involved in having to cut checks for referees that need to be paid for games every night, that is a significant change in procedure. She said, it may or may not be the right decision, but an informed conversation about the procedure needs to be had.

The group discussed how student activity funds are managed at the sites, what checks and balances are in place, and what funds are carried over from year to year. In addition, it was noted that some of the items titled “student activities” in the budget books do go through the purchase order process.

J. Barrett said we need an accounting of money the regular budget is funding to the student activity fund and if it is appropriate and if it has all been spent at the end of the year. M. Malcolm said the Board should know if there is a balance left at the end of the year of regular budget money in the student activity fund accounts. Dr. Bernard said the answer to “what is the district allocation direct into student activity and has it all been spent within the fiscal year” would be provided and the Board could analyze that information.

J. Barrett said the Board could be figuring into the budget the money made when we invoice for special education tuition. He said the average nexus enrollments could be figured and the anticipated tuition could be noted.

J. Barrett also wondered if fuel money could be saved by consolidating bus runs from the Grammar school to the Robertson school. Dr. Bernard said the transportation committee could analyze that scenario.

L. Pietrantonio noted there was consensus to revise the green “Addition/Reduction Analysis” spreadsheet for draft and discussion purposes for February 18.

X. NEW BUSINESS

VOTE: Accept the Certified Retirees for 2011 and 2012 as Submitted

L. Pietrantonio noted the typo on the agenda and that the years for retirement should have read 2010 and 2011.

MOTION: Accept the Certified Retirees for 2010 and 2011 as Submitted

By: C. Trudon

Seconded: M. Kortmann

J. Beausoleil commented that Scott Rhoades’ retirement had already been accepted and asked if it was supposed to be part of this list or not. J. Barrett agreed and said it should not be listed again. Dr. Bernard clarified that Scott Rhoades’ letter of retirement was already acted upon by the Board and the acceptance of retirees tonight had nothing to do with the Retirement Incentive Plan that was previously approved by the Board (of which Mr. Rhoades is a part). That was confirmed. J. Barrett asked to add a friendly amendment to the motion: “... **and to remove Scott Rhoades from the list because he was already accepted for retirement.**” C. Trudon accepted the amendment, as did M. Kortmann.

Result: Motion passes unanimously.

XI. REPORT OF BOARD MEMBERS

Information: Appointment of BOE Member to PSSS Director Search Paper Screening Committee

M. Malcolm volunteered.

XII. ADJOURNMENT

MOTION: To adjourn the meeting at 10:30 p.m.

By: C. Trudon

Seconded: M. Kortmann

Result: Motion passes unanimously.

Respectfully submitted:

Kimberlee Michaud
Board Clerk

February 25, 2010

Approved