

The Board of Education Town of Vernon

30 Park Street – PO Box 600
Vernon, Connecticut 06066

Anne Fischer, Chairperson
Mark Kalina, Vice Chairperson
Stephen Linton, Secretary
Patricia Buxton, Treasurer
Kevin Brown
Deborah Rodriguez
Mason Thrall

December 14, 2020

DRAFT MINUTES BOARD OF EDUCATION MEETING

A meeting of the Vernon Board of Education was held via Zoom Webinar and in person on Monday, December 14, 2020.

1.0 Establish Quorum

Roll call was taken at 7:01 p.m. Board members present in person: Mrs. Fischer, Mr. Kalina, Mr. Linton, Dr. Buxton, Mr. Brown, Mrs. Rodriguez and Mr. Thrall. There was a quorum.

Also in attendance via Zoom: Victoria Nordlund, Rockville High School Teacher; Cynthia Zingler, Director of Family School & Community Partnership; Rachel Linkkila, Grant Manager.

Student Representatives present via Zoom: Allison Blume and James Wheeler.

Administration present in person: Superintendent Dr. Joseph Macary, Assistant Superintendent Robert Testa, Director of Business and Finance Angela Wang

2.0 Call to Order

Chairperson Fischer called the meeting to order at 7:02 p.m.

3.0 Pledge of Allegiance

4.0 Recognitions and Presentations

4.1 Book Presentation: Wine-Dark Sea by Victoria Nordlund

Dr. Macary presented a book to each Board member titled “Wine-Dark Sea”, a collection of poems written by Rockville High School teacher Victoria Nordlund. Mrs. Nordlund said this is her second book and was written in collaboration with Rockville High School

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Art teacher Helen Kennedy, who read the poems before creating the illustrations. She also shared this book with her students. She was asked about the back story to the title. She explained that it originates from Homer's "The Iliad and The Odyssey" where he said the ocean was never blue, but "Wine Dark". She was asked about how many literary articles has she written; she responded that she writes between 30 – 40 per year. Mrs. Fischer congratulated Mrs. Nordlund on her book and said she makes Rockville High School very proud and is a great asset to the staff.

5.0 Secretary's Report

5.1 Opportunity for Board of Education to add/delete urgent agenda items

No agenda items were added or deleted.

5.2 Rockville High School Student Representative Report

Student Representative Allison Blume reported the following:

- Allison began by saying what an amazing teacher Mrs. Nordlund is. She inspires her students every day and they are very lucky to have her. She was glad to see that Mrs. Nordlund was recognized as she is the best teacher she's ever had.
- Friday, December 11th and today, December 14th were PJ Days at RHS. Students and staff donated one dollar to support CCMC for the privilege to wear PJs to school and have their name entered in a raffle to win a prize. On Friday, over \$600.00 was raised and over \$700.00 was raised today. It was a huge success.
- Over the next 2 weeks, RHS Administration will be giving away 20 school spirit prizes. This effort is to keep students excited and motivated during the Holiday Season.
- In lieu of the Holiday break, RHS peer advocates will hold "Spirit Week" in the coming days, with themes such as "Flannel Day", "Holiday Theme" and "Red & Green Day". All cohorts will participate.
- Coaches are meeting with student athletes both virtually and in small groups to keep them engaged.

Student Representative James Wheeler reported the following:

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- The Holiday sale was a great success. They raised over \$6,000.00.
- The sheep were confirmed pregnant as of December 7th. They are due to give birth sometime in March – April 2021.
- He is almost positive the goats are pregnant as well.
- He expects that the cow will be pregnant too. Once confirmed, she would give birth sometime in September 2021.
- During the month of December, the library is encouraging students to check out a book. If they do, they will be entered to win a \$20.00 gift card to either Dunkin Donuts or Barnes & Noble.
- The Student Athlete Leadership Team is presenting a College Night on January 14th for any students who are interested in playing a sport in college. More information will follow.
- Winter sports are officially set to begin on January 19th. They are awaiting further guidance from the State on January 7th.

6.0 Community Forum

Opportunity for comments on agenda items, potential future agenda items, or general information provided to the Board from citizens and community organizations (limited to 15 minutes)

No one addressed the Board.

7.0 Consent Agenda

7.1

- (a) Approval of the Minutes of the Board of Education Regular Meeting held on November 23, 2020.

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MOTION: Mr. Kalina moved to approve Consent Agenda Items #7.1 (a).

SECOND: Mr. Linton

VOTE: Unanimous

8.0 Teaching and Learning

8.1 Department Improvement Plan (BOE Goal #2)

Assistant Superintendent Robert Testa introduced Mrs. Cynthia Zingler, Director of School Family & Community Partnerships, who will be presenting her Department Improvement Plan.

(a) Family School & Community Partnership Office – Mrs. Zingler summarized the FSCP plan:

- The theme of their plan is “Building Relationships” and focuses on three major areas.
- The first area is “Transition”.
 - Increase their outreach and programming efforts for families transitioning into Kindergarten through orientation, the Ready Set School Fair, Crayola Family Night, virtual Laugh and Learn for children 1 – 5 and monthly family literacy lunch bunches held at the schools.
 - Create opportunities for families and students entering into grade 6 by including orientation, a family dinner and family lunches.
 - Create opportunities for families and students entering into grade 9 including orientation and 9th Grade Family Night.
 - A personal connection to grade K, 6 and 9 families will be established via phone and / or email after registration to welcome and answer questions.
 - The registration process moved to an online format in March and it has been a smooth transition. Through this new format, 443 students were registered for Pre-K through 12th grade.
- The second area is “supporting the social and emotional well-being of our school community through equitable practices”.

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- District Climate and Engagement team will develop understanding of unconscious bias and systemic racism through professional learning opportunities, book studies and professional articles and discussion.
- Provide family learning opportunities on social, emotional and behavioral development of children through on-line workshops, available materials/resources, website and health/wellness tips.
- The third area is “Attendance”.
 - Utilize text messaging/emails to increase awareness around attendance through monthly message about attendance importance in the school newsletter and social media. Share the VPS attendance policy with families through email, text or postcard.
 - Implement virtual mentor programs to support students in the district. Students who are chronically absent will be partnered with a staff member who will act as a check-in point for identified students. The mentor will be in regular contact with the family. Families will be invited to celebrate attendance successes. Mentors will meet monthly to discuss successes and challenges.
 - Strengthen relationships with community partners to address barriers to attendance for families. For example, if a student does not want to come to school because of a “limited clothing” situation (clothes have not been washed), the team would work with a community partner to have the clothes washed for the family.
- They are working with the Hartford Foundation to monitor and assess the success of their goals.

A question was asked about how many Pre-K students did not get into the program for this school year. Mrs. Zingler estimated that there were about 35 – 40 students who did not have an opportunity to attend this year due to the class being filled, so these students were invited to participate in online play groups.

9.0 General Business

9.1 Overview of Vernon Public School Grants

Assistant Superintendent Robert Testa introduced Grant Manager Rachel Linkkila who will give a

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summary of the Vernon Public School grants received this year. She included a power point presentation in the Board packet to follow.

Ms. Linkkila summarized the grants into 4 categories:

- Adult Education Grants
 - Total \$1,252,880.00
- Entitlement Grants
 - Total \$4,496,620.00
- Competitive & Foundation Grants
 - Total \$691,627.00
- COVID Funding Grants
 - Total \$876,650.00

Total Grant Funding is \$7,317,777.00

A question was asked as to how do we find out about available grants.

- One way is that we are notified through the state's EGMS (Electronic Grant Management System) which emails us whenever a potential grant comes up.
- Another way is through state agencies who have a request for proposal page on their websites.
- Another large way is through word of mouth with other school district colleagues.

A question was asked if Ms. Linkkila feels grants are less numerous or valuable.

- She said the market is flooded with grants, but Vernon Public Schools is in a good place with all available grants.

A question was asked about historical data of previous year grant balances.

- Ms. Linkkila did not have that information readily available but will send that to the Board.

A question was asked about what does the homeless grant cover.

- Ms. Linkkila said this covers transportation

Clarification of the ABE grant was requested.

- Ms. Linkkila said this is funding we receive from 14 other cooperative towns to run their programs for them. We write their grants for them because they do not have the staff to do so. They then receive the funds and we invoice them for the amount they receive.

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9.2 Board Budget Priorities 2021-2022

Dr. Macary presented the Board Budget Priorities for review and Board approval for the 2021-2022 school year:

1. Universal Pre-School Education for 3 & 4 Year Olds (Mission Statement)
 - We will start a committee to assess our needs within the district
2. Minority Teacher Recruitment Strategies (Goal #1)
 - We need to hire more teachers of color so that we have a staff that is representative of our student demographic.
3. Instructional Coach at Rockville High School (Goal #2)
 - Instructional coaches have worked out well in other grade levels and this would be the next level to provide coaching to.
4. Additional Tiered Interventions for ELA & Math (Goal #2)
 - We felt this was important, especially due to a learning loss from the effects of COVID.
5. Continue Social and Emotional (SEL) Learning (Goal #3)
 - We started this initiative 2 years ago and want to keep this in the forefront. It's good that we did this because COVID-19 has created trauma for our school families.

MOTION: Mrs. Rodriguez moved to approve the Board Budget Priorities for 2021-2022

SECOND: Dr. Buxton

VOTE: Unanimous

9.3 Board of Education Finance Committee Report (BOE Goal #1, #2, #3)

Angela Wang shared information from the last Finance Committee meeting held this evening. Referring to the reports provided in the Finance Packet, she reported that we are on track to spend down the FY21 budget. The special funds segment shows minimal activity for the past month. She introduced Exhibit G, a letter to Mayor Champagne, which requests an additional deposit to the Capital and Non-Recurring Education Account

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for the amount of \$129,077.00. This balance was largely due to General Fund expenditures on COVID-19 related costs which were reimbursed by the ESSER Grant. We will present this letter to the Town Council in January. The Food & Nutrition P&L report reflects a \$65,000.00 loss, due in part to decreased meal participation and 3 payroll periods in October. She did report that November saw a 200% increase in meal participation due to the elimination of mandatory sign-up for meals and now providing weekend meals to families. This increase benefits our district as we are reimbursed by the Federal Government in-full for each meal provided. We are not seeing pre-COVID levels yet, but we are heading in the right direction with the positive changes made to the meal distribution program. We will also be providing meals to Town of Vernon families on December 23rd and 30th.

Ms. Wang presented an action item to the Board for review and approval of five Asset Disposal Request forms for outdated foreign language textbooks, a broken smartboard, a kiln and WIAT-2 Testing Materials.

MOTION: Mr. Kalina moved to approve the Asset Disposal requests presented

SECOND: Mr. Linton

VOTE: Unanimous

A question was asked about what happens to the items once approved. Are they destroyed or do we sell them? Dr. Macary said we work with a company who sells them and sends us the money made from the sale of those items.

A question was asked about distribution of scholarships to students – is it once a year or twice a year? Ms. Wang said we distribute annual scholarships to our students in May. Most checks are written to the students with a few exceptions to the college when requested by the charter of the scholarship.

9.4 Naming of Park Street Learning Center at 38 Park Street

Dr. Macary announced that the West Main Learning Center closed on September 30th

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and moved to the newly refurbished building at 38 Park Street. This building houses our Expulsion program and our 18-21 program. The program is going very well and they now need a new name for their center. He is asking the Board to approve naming 38 Park Street the “Park Street Learning Center”.

A question was asked as to how many students are in the program. Dr. Macary said there are 13 students in the 18-21 program who are in-person five days a week.

MOTION: Mr. Kalina moved to approve naming 38 Park Street the “Park Street Learning Center”
SECOND: Mr. Thrall
VOTE: Unanimous

9.5 Covid-19 Update (BOE Goal #1, #2, #3)

Dr. Macary reported that staffing has become an issue over the past few weeks. Several surrounding towns are closing and switching to remote learning December 21, 22 & 23. We will most likely move to remote learning as well because our staff members also come from these surrounding towns and child care will be an issue for them when their children are home remote learning. He will send a notice to parents in our district by end of day tomorrow.

A question was asked about how are students adapting to virtual art and music. Dr. Macary said it’s working well, but it’s not perfect. Band is being held on a limited basis with members standing 12 feet apart in smaller groups.

A question was asked if we have enough staff to run remote learning. Dr. Macary said yes.

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10.0 To Review and Update Board of Education Calendar

<https://www.vernonpublicschools.org/district-information/district-calendar>

No changes were made to the calendar.

11.0 Opportunity for Questions from the Press Regarding Agenda Items

There were no questions from the press.

12.0 Adjournment

MOTION: Mr. Linton motioned to adjourn at 8:01 p.m.

SECOND: Mr. Thrall

VOTE: Unanimous

The video of the December 14, 2020 Board of Education Meeting will be posted to the Vernon Public Schools website at a later date. The link will be provided once posted.

Respectfully submitted,

Stephen Linton, Board Secretary