

The Board of Education

Town of Vernon

30 Park Street – PO Box 600
Vernon, Connecticut 06066

Paul Grabowski, Chair
Kristiana Wintress, Vice Chair
Karen Colt, Secretary
Anthony Bedlack
Patricia Buxton
Susan Jablonecki
Kriste Nucci
Simone Sewell
Mason Thrall

September 9, 2024

APPROVED MINUTES

BOARD OF EDUCATION MEETING

A meeting of the Vernon Board of Education was held in-person and via Zoom Webinar at the Administration Building on Monday, September 9, 2024.

Roll call was taken at 7:00 PM

There was a quorum. Board members present: Mr. Grabowski, Ms. Wintress, Mr. Bedlack, Dr. Buxton, Mrs. Jablonecki, Ms. Nucci, Ms. Sewell and Mr. Thrall. Ms. Colt attended via Zoom Meeting.

Administration present: Superintendent Dr. Joseph Macary, Assistant Superintendent Mr. Robert Testa and Director of Business and Finance Mr. William Meier III.

2.0 Call to Order

Board Chair Mr. Grabowski called the meeting to order at 7:01 p.m.

3.0 Pledge of Allegiance

4.0 Recognitions and Presentations

4.1 Introduction of New Board of Education Student Representative (BOE Goal #1, #2, #3)

Superintendent Dr. Joseph Macary introduced our newest Board of Education Student Representative, Thomas Glinski, Jr. Tommy is a junior at Rockville High School and is a three-sport athlete. His favorite sports to play are basketball and volleyball. He has also organized a district-wide event called “Socktober” since he was in the 3rd Grade. This event collects socks for the Cornerstone Foundation, which runs low on clean socks during the winter months for those in need. To date, Tommy has collected over 10,000 pairs of socks and has raised over \$2,000.00. He is hoping this year’s event will be the biggest yet! Tommy spoke more about Socktober and said he is happy to serve as a student

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representative for the Board. Dr. Macary thanked Tommy for all he does for those in need in the Town of Vernon.

4.2 National History Day Competition Presentation (BOE Goal #1, #2)

Dr. Macary introduced Vernon Center Middle School Teachers Regina Lee and Cyndee McManaman, who are the National History Day Advisors in Vernon and attended the National History Day Competition in Washington, DC with two of their students, Jacob & Charlie. The NHD Program is a year-long academic program for students in grades 6 – 12. It is inquiry-based and supports CT ELA and Social Studies Standards. The program centers around historical research, interpretation and creative expression. Students compete in Regional, State and National contests. Project types include Exhibit, Performance, Documentary, Website and Paper. The theme for 2024 was “Turning Points in History”; the theme for 2025 will be “Rights and Responsibilities”. Jacob and Charlie’s presentation focused on “The Election of 1876; The Dastardly Compromise”. Projects are evaluated on Historical Quality (80%) and Clarity of Presentation (20%). Vernon has had students at the State contest for nine years in a row and National competitors for seven years. This program is currently offered only at VCMS, but the hope is to offer it at RHS in the future.

4.3 Presentation by Rockville High School Students (BOE Goal #1, #2)

Mr. Dan Pichette, Assistant Principal at Rockville High School, introduced a new student leadership group at Rockville High School called “The Avengers”. He had the students in the group introduce themselves to the Board. This group is a unique cross-section of representatives from various leadership groups at RHS including Student Council, Peer Advocates, Youth Equity Squad, ASTE Leadership Council, Student Athlete Leadership Team and Football leadership Council. The foundation of the Avengers is “Student Voice and Leadership” and their task is to provide leadership in the school, suggest improvements and provide student-centered strategies to grow the culture and climate at RHS. One of their first projects was to plan and lead the 9th Grade Orientation for incoming Freshmen in August. The group attended a 2-day planning session over the summer. The result of their efforts was a day filled with enthusiasm and eagerness for

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incoming Freshmen. The feedback was very positive and the students' apprehension of starting a new school was quickly eased by the great day they had at orientation. One take away from the day was that the Avengers felt there should be teachers stationed in each classroom as Freshmen are moving about from class to class, so that the kids could meet their teachers prior to the start of school. They also felt the day should be longer in order to fit everything in. Mr. Pichette ended by saying how proud he is of this great group of student leaders and that they truly exemplify their pride for Rockville High School.

5.0 Secretary's Report

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

No agenda items were added.

5.2 Rockville High School Student Representative Report

My-Ngoc Lai-Huyen reported on the following:

- Students welcomed their new Assistant Principal, Mrs. Houlihan, to RHS
- UConn is offering the Financial Literacy Innovation Program (FLIP) once again this year, where students are given the opportunity to learn about budgeting, investing & saving money and other personal finance lessons vital for their future. These courses are taught by business leaders, alumni and UConn Business students.
- We have two new science teachers, Ms. Arvanitis and Ms. Kelemen, that we have welcomed this year to the school.
- The biology team is piloting a new curriculum called OpenSciEd, which offers students opportunities to investigate real-world phenomena and figure out scientific concepts through a storyline approach.
- We are starting to fill the newly renovated greenhouse with plants.
- Overall, the students and teachers have had a great start to the school year.

Thomas Glinski, Jr. reported on the following:

- There will be an open house from 6:00 PM to 7:30 PM on Thursday, September 12th, starting in the auditorium. Anyone is welcome to visit to see the teachers and administrators, classrooms and clubs that RHS has to offer.

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- There will also be a Dunkin Celebration tomorrow on Sept. 10th, where Dunkin is celebrating the students and staff at RHS by coming during lunches with gift cards to give out.
- The RHS Marching Band is hosting the Festival of Bands this Saturday at the high school, where area Marching Bands will compete, including RHS's Marching Band. There will also be a special performance by the University of New Haven's Marching Band. It will be on September 14th and the gates will open at 4:00 PM. The show starts at 5:00 PM. Anyone is welcome to attend; the tickets are \$5.00 for students and Seniors 65+; adults are \$10.00 and children are free.
- Our first regular season football game will be held at Coventry this Friday, Sept. 13th.
- Picture day is September 26th.
- The first home game for volleyball is against East Windsor this Thursday, Sept. 12th.

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 (Individual speakers shall be limited to five minutes and the total time for public forum shall be limited to 15 minutes.)

No one addressed the Board.

7.0 Consent Agenda

7.1 Consent Agenda

- (a) Approval of the Minutes of the Regular Board of Education Meeting held on August 26, 2024.

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

SECOND: Mrs. Jablonecki

VOTE: Unanimous

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8.0 Personnel

8.1 Superintendent's Evaluation (BOE Goal #1, #2, #3) (Executive Session Anticipated)

This item was moved to the end of the meeting.

9.0 Teaching and Learning

9.1 Summer School Program Update (BOE Goal #1, #2, #3)

Assistant Superintendent Robert Testa introduced Alicia McEvila, Elementary Summer Learning Coordinator and Hannah Steed, High School Summer Learning Coordinator for 2024.

Alicia McEvila noted that the Elementary program ran from June 24th through July 25th. Elementary enrollment totaled 128 students in Pre-K through Grade 8 as compared to 121 students in Pre-K through Grade 7 last year. Highlights during the program included a visit to the CT Science Center and a visit from the Vernon PD Canine Unit. They also had a visit from a magician and the Kona Ice Truck. Students experienced “hands-on learning” and developed self-confidence and independence. Attendance by far was the best yet as they only had one grade level below 70% attendance as compared to 3 grade levels below 70% attendance last year.

Hannah Steed spoke of the high school program for students in grades 9-12. Each student had the ability to earn back credits (up to two full credits) that they had not earned during the academic year. Students had to meet the threshold of a 50 or above in order to be eligible.

The program offered the following:

- EdGenuity Program – an online program for students who require additional courses to maintain “on-track” status for graduation. 34 students participated in semester 1 and 25 students participated in semester 2. Teachers were available to support students in their content areas through small group instruction. Students

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also completed work outside of the classroom setting independently. Semester 1 students earned 15 credits and semester 2 students earned 13.5 credits.

- In-Person Program – for students who require additional support in classes to remain on track for graduation. A focus on 9th graders.
- ABL Program – for students who benefit from additional support with social skills and basic living skills.

Courses offered included Spanish I & II, World History, US History, Biology, English 9 & 10, Algebra 1, Geometry, Health 9 & 10 and Physical Education.

To summarize the high school summer program, there were a total of 140 credits earned with a total of 96 students participating. 8 seniors were able to meet graduation requirements and a small graduation ceremony was held for those students who wished to attend. Out of the 100 students who signed up for the summer learning program, only 4 did not attend.

9.2 Smarter Balanced 2023-2024 Student Achievement Results (BOE Goal #2)

Assistant Superintendent Robert Testa presented the results of the Smarter Balanced Summative Assessment for the 2023-2024 school year. This report provides an annual snapshot of student achievement throughout the District. It measures the percent of students who meet grade level mastery in English Language Arts and Mathematics in grades 3-8 and Science in grades 5, 8 and 11. In English Language Arts, Vernon students met or exceeded the standard in grades 3-8 with a 55% score, surpassing the State of CT who had a 48.9% score. Vernon has surpassed the State consistently for the last 3 school years and ranked #1 in English Language Arts when compared to the 33 Alliance Districts. We have also outperformed 63 school districts in CT in ELA. In Mathematics, 46.7% of Vernon students met or exceeded the standard in grades 3-8 as compared to the State's score of 44.1%. Vernon has surpassed the State consistently for the last 3 school years and ranked #1 in Math when compared to the 33 Alliance Districts in grades 3-8. We outperformed 56 districts in CT in Math. In Science, Vernon met or exceeded the standard with a score of 50.7% and surpassed the State, who had a score of 48.5%. We have outperformed the State for the last four school years and ranked 3rd when compared to

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Alliance districts in grades 5, 8, & 11. Vernon outperformed 42 districts in CT in Science. To summarize, our goals for improving the instructional core are as follows:

- Raise the cognitive level of the content that is being taught (Curriculum)
- Increase the skills and knowledge of the teachers through Professional learning
- Increase the engagement of the students in learning

This is our recipe for success.

9.3 2024 RHS Advanced Placement & Dual Enrollment Programs (BOE Goal #2, #3)

Assistant Superintendent Robert Testa provided a presentation on RHS Advanced Placement and Dual Enrollment courses offered at Rockville High School to the Board. We offer eight AP courses at RHS, where students have the opportunity to take college-level courses in a high school setting. Students gain college level skills and earn college credits. Exams taken are graded by the College Board over the summer. Mr. Testa noted that the pass rate has increased over the last 3 years: 55% in 2021-2022, 58% in 2022-2023 and 63% in 2023-2024. Dual Enrollment Programs are offered through our partnerships with universities such as Eastern CT State University, Southern CT State University, UCONN, Manchester Community College, Middlesex Community College and Goodwin University. Dual Enrollment courses offer students access to college courses while in high school, with the opportunity to earn college credits. Credits earned have been impressive: in 2020-2021, 859 credits were earned; in 2021-2022, 854 credits were earned; in 2022-2023, 1,193 credits were earned and in 2023-2024, 1,595 credits were earned. 261 RHS students earned college credits during the 2023-2024 school year, which comprises 53% of the Class of 2024.

9.4 RHS & VCMS School Improvement Plans (BOE Goal #1, #2, #3)

Mr. David Caruso, Principal of Vernon Center Middle School and Mr. Jason Magao, Principal of Rockville High School, introduced themselves to the Board.

Each were asked to present their School Improvement Plans. They outlined their plans for the 2024-2025 school year, explaining how they fall in-line with the Vernon Public Schools Mission Statement, Vision of the Graduate, Core Beliefs, Equity Stance and 5-

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Year Strategic Plan. Their plans follow the three strategic plan priorities: Student Success, Family and Community Partnership and System Excellence. They described how they are meeting these goals and how they plan to continue to meet them in the 2024 - 2025 school year. Mr. Caruso noted that social/emotional support is needed more than ever and hired another Social Worker to help with this need. He also moved the school counselors out into the halls, where the students are, to make it easier for students to access counselors when the need arises. He also said that his team is laser focused on providing instructional activities at appropriate levels of cognitive challenge that include opportunities for reasoning, justification, synthesis, analysis, critical thinking and problem solving. Mr. Magao noted that the NEASC Accreditation permeates his entire school improvement plan. He wants to create an environment in which students will engage in safe, high-quality, equitable learning experiences. Chronic Absenteeism is an ongoing issue and part of his plan is to mitigate this and get students to school through engaging family and community. RHS has so much to offer students and there is a great deal of support for students and their families.

10.0 General Business

10.1 Proposed 2024-2025 Out-of-District Tuition Rates for Non-Resident Students (BOE Goal #2)

Director of Business and Finance Mr. William Meier III shared the Out-of-District Tuition Rate sheet for the 2024-2025 school year and asked the Board for their approval. He noted that there was a general rate increase of 3% across the board, with a one-time adjustment for Paras, due to the minimum wage increase and District costs.

MOTION: Kristiana Wintress moved to approve the 2024-2025 Out-of-District Tuition Rates for Non-Resident Students as discussed and presented.
SECOND: Dr. Buxton
VOTE: Unanimous

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10.2 Asset Disposal Requests (BOE Goal #3)

Director of Business and Finance Mr. William Meier III presented several asset disposal requests listing computer devices to be disposed of. These requests are due to technology replacements. The IT Dept. reviewed each device and determined they have reached the end of their useful life and have no value. He is asking the Board for their approval to dispose of these devices.

MOTION: Dr. Buxton moved to approve the Asset Disposal Requests as discussed and presented.
SECOND: Kristiana Wintress
VOTE: Unanimous

10.3 Proposed Settlement of Workers' Comp Case (BOE Goal #1) (Executive Session Anticipated)

This item was moved to the end of the meeting.

10.4 Approval of the RHS Aqua Lab Contract (BOE Goal #3)

Superintendent Dr. Joseph Macary spoke of a JOINT meeting held earlier this evening with the Finance & Facilities Committees to discuss the Aqua Lab project. There was only one bidder for the project, which will cost approximately 1.5 to 1.6 million dollars. Funding for this project will be provided by the State and will not come out of the local budget.

MOTION: Mr. Thrall moved to approve the RHS Aqua Lab Contract discussed and presented.
SECOND: Ms. Nucci
VOTE: Unanimous

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10.5 Approval of CABE Board Recognition Award Application (BOE Goal #1, #2, #3)

Superintendent Dr. Joseph Macary announced that we have completed the application process for the CABE Board Recognition Award and is asking for their approval to submit to CABE. It's a lengthy application and requires many documents in order to meet the criteria to qualify for consideration of the award. He thanked his Executive Assistant, Diane Ritchotte, for the time it took to put the application packet together. He is very proud of the work the Board of Education does for Vernon Public Schools and thanked them for the numerous hours they contribute to the District.

MOTION: Ms. Nucci moved to approve the CABE Board Recognition Award Application as discussed and presented.

SECOND: Mrs. Jablonecki

VOTE: Unanimous

10.6 Update on the Status of RHS's NEASC Accreditation (BOE Goal #3)

Superintendent Dr. Joseph Macary shared a letter from the New England Association of Schools and Colleges to RHS Principal Jason Magao, which detailed their findings of the Collaborative Conference Visit to RHS. The commission was impressed with the many programs and services RHS offers. There were 4 Priority Areas for Growth that the team pointed out and Mr. Magao has already implemented their recommendations for improvement. NEASC has scheduled their Decennial Accreditation Visit for March 1 through 4, 2026, where they will focus on the school's implementation of the Priority Areas of Growth recommendations. Dr. Macary said this was a very good report for Rockville High School.

10.7 Reports from Board of Education Liaisons Regarding Attendance at Organization / Committee Meetings (BOE Goal #1)

There were no liaison reports.

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MOTION: Mr. Thrall motioned to go into executive session at 9:10 PM to address items 8.1 and 10.3, inviting Superintendent Dr. Joseph Macary and Director of Business and Finance Mr. William Meier III
SECOND: Ms. Nucci
VOTE: Unanimous

The Board came out of executive session at 9:45 PM

11.0 Review and Update Board of Education Calendar

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

No updates were made. Dr. Macary reminded Board members that there is a Curriculum Committee meeting on September 25th and there are more Committee meetings scheduled in October.

12.0 Opportunity for Questions from the Press Regarding Agenda Items

No one from the Press was in attendance.

13.0 Adjournment

MOTION: Ms. Nucci made a motion to adjourn at 9:46 PM
SECOND: Ms. Wintress
VOTE: Unanimous

Respectfully submitted,



Karen Colt, Board Secretary