

Concord School District
Board of Education
Regular monthly meeting
March 2, 2020

Board members: Jennifer Patterson, *President*; Gina Cannon, Tom Croteau, Barb Higgins, David Parker, Liza Poinier, Jim Richards, Danielle Smith; student representatives Gaven Brown and Alice Richards

Board member absent: Chuck Crush

Administrators: *Superintendent* Frank Bass, *Assistant Superintendent* Donna Palley, *Business Administrator* Jack Dunn, *Director of Facilities* Matt Cashman

Agenda Item 1. Call to Order

Board President Jennifer Patterson called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

Agenda Item 2. Approval of Agenda

Jim Richards made a motion to amend the agenda to include a brief non-public session after Item 12.

The Board voted 8-0 to approve the amended agenda as stated (motioned by Mr. Richards, seconded by Tom Croteau).

Agenda Item 3. Special Recognition of Savannah Shannon

Dr. Bass introduced CHS sophomore Savannah Shannon, a member of the CHS ski team, who was recently recognized as the current NH champion in giant slalom, who will now represent CHS in the "Easterns." She was congratulated by Board members.

Agenda Item 4. Safety, security and well-being update

DHHS Director of Communications Jake Leon and Lindsay Pierce, Chief of the Infectious Disease Prevention, Investigation and Care Services Section, discussed the status of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19). Dr. Bass noted that there was now one confirmed case of COVID-19 in New Hampshire. Mr. Leon stated that this particular coronavirus was first discovered about two months ago in China. Up to now, concerns were related to people who had traveled from China, but as the virus became more widespread, travel from more countries would present greater concerns. He said that the test of the subject

mentioned above was the first that had been conducted in New Hampshire (previous tests took five days), but that the sample would still be sent to the CDC to confirm.

Ms. Pierce discussed the origin of this particular virus in Wuhan, China, stating that there were over 89,000 confirmed cases in more than 50 countries as of today's date. There were 48 non-patriated individuals in the U.S. currently. She encouraged people to continue to check the DHHS and CDC websites and to be diligent about hygiene. Dr. Bass noted that he had sent a note to District parents and staff about COVID-19 that afternoon. He said the District was in contact with partner agencies about contagious disease protocols. Director of Facilities Matt Cashman explained the District's proactive efforts in cleaning, including an electrostatic cleaning machine and the use of wipes for faucets, door handles, desks and other surfaces. Mr. Croteau asked if every classroom had hand sanitizer and suggested obtaining a sufficient supply. Ms. Pierce suggested the use of wipes for items like keyboards. In response to a question about how the District was communicating protocols to students, Dr. Bass said he was speaking building Principals about how they were going to do this.

Dr. Bass reported on mental health awareness efforts in the District. He introduced BMS teacher Barbara O'Brien, whose sabbatical was being considered in the budget. She discussed ACES (adverse childhood experiences), noting that 20% of CSD students had experienced two or more of these, and over 50% had experienced one ACE. She said there was a need to build classroom structure and find ways to help young children now, as older students statistically die due to suicide, bullying and other social difficulties. The statistic is that 15% of students have a diagnosable mental illness by the time they are 18. She described her sabbatical work on behalf of both students and teachers. Several Board members commented on the sabbatical and thanked her for her efforts.

CHS guidance counselor and Social Worker Jocelyn Jerry-Wolcott spoke about the increasing number of social workers in school districts throughout the state. She said that RTI – a tiered system that supports the emotional and behavioral needs of students - was the way children were assessed in Concord, and that many teachers attend her strands on PD days. Between 5% and 10% of students need more support. Tier 3 students are those who have been coded with an emotional handicap (severely emotionally disturbed). She said parents must also be fully involved in this process; that all parties must look at a child in the system in which they live. She said that social work used a systems approach, and social workers were liaison among student, school, family, and the community. She suggested that support at the elementary level would allow students to gain the skills they need to be successful at the elementary, middle and high school level. Ms. Patterson asked how this related to activity in CSD schools; Ms. Jerry-Wolcott remarked that the District needed to do more at the elementary level for Tiers 2 and 3, and needed more family involvement.

Assistant Superintendent Donna Palley introduced Elaine Demello, Director of Suicide Prevention services at NAMI, who described the organization's programs including support groups, classes and one-on-one services. NAMI recognizes that suicide prevention is an important element of its work; the Connect Suicide Prevention Program

has operated for 20 years in NH. She remarked that NAMI had worked closely with CSD in both prevention and “post-vention,” after a suicide. She said her organization provided guidance to schools and communities and had also trained trainers in the District; some of those staff members responded to Second Start recently. She said that RSA 193-J required suicide prevention plans and two-hour training for youth and all school personnel. She said the state recently was awarded a five-year grant for suicide prevention for youth up to age 24; Concord was a main recipient. She suggested that suicide prevention and mental health were issues of the greater community, not just in discrete families or in the schools. Ms. Palley noted how many agencies mobilized in a matter of minutes to the tragic suicide at Second Start a few weeks ago. She said virtually all Concord High School staff had been trained in suicide prevention, and about 20 student leaders have also been trained. She commented that a pilot project with 9th grade teams was starting in the spring. Many students who are trained through the Connect program have started the “Connect Club” that provides a safe place for stigma-free discussion.

Ms. Palley also reported on several groups that are meeting regularly to address issues of student safety and social/emotional teaching and learning with a trauma lens.

The Strategic Task Force arose from a request from the Board to develop a strategic plan to address student safety. This group of 25 individuals includes parents, students, staff and community partners and is led by an outside facilitator, Gerri King, who is leading the process to develop a strategic plan. Two to three additional meetings are needed to complete the draft plan, which will then be shared with the broader community for input before being finalized and coming to the Board. It is expected that the plan will guide work in the area of student safety for the next several years.

A social-emotional learning task force, which had been in development for several years, began meeting last fall. The group is mapping the District’s multi-tiered supports and resources, identifying gaps and needs, and establishing social-emotional competencies to serve as a foundation for future work.

The District’s GROW team is in its third year of work, focused on ongoing professional learning for staff in the area of trauma-responsive practices. The group organized a conference in January for approximately 400 certified staff; CSD staff and community partners presented over 40 workshop topics. The response was very positive.

Dr. Bass noted that consultant Michael Worsley might conduct diversity training in the District. Mr. Worsley, who was present, spoke about particular trauma for children of color. He has lived in Manchester since 1985, and said that living in a predominantly white culture as a person of color had made him aware that neither diversity training nor diversity awareness was needed as much as “diversity acknowledgement.” He said that included developing awareness of biases; “what we don’t know has determined how we have interacted with one another.” He said, for example, that he would have appreciated, as a child of color, to have known about black inventors or other black scientists. Mr. Worsley said his work was not just about children, and that there are many biases and stereotypes that aren’t discussed that represent obstacles in relationships.

Agenda Item 5. Public Comment– agenda items only. Ms. Patterson reviewed the relevant policy and gave guidance about input. Beth Richards interrupted and said she felt some students present should have an opportunity to speak on a topic that pertained to the CHS Principal search. Ms. Patterson continued to describe the topics that might be open to public comment at that point.

Concord resident and 58-year taxpayer Elizabeth Hoadley commented about the February 13 Board Work Session and her astonishment at the significant number of proposed new positions. She suggested that the Board consider moving Recognitions from no. 6 to no. 7 on the agenda. She addressed Dr. Bass, commenting that there were from 21 to 31 new positions in the proposed budget. She said that, while the budget was still under development, she hoped the Board would consider *Needs, Wants, and Wishes* and categorize expenditures accordingly. She said the Board had a twofold job; whether the District was run as it should be and an equal responsibility to Concord taxpayers. She said that Concord was not an affluent city. She thanked the Rollins family for their father's beneficiary scholarship gift to the District.

CHS junior Niyanta Nepal commented on what she stated was a topic regarding the future of the CHS community. She said she was aware that a new grading system was being put in place, although it was not in the student handbook and had not been approved by the Board. She said that competency grading had been implemented inconsistently and that she could not use this system to monitor her own progress. She said she wanted to go back to the old system.

CHS junior Nick Richards spoke about new grading system, saying he had challenged himself with advanced and AP level classes, but that his AP class had been negatively affected by the new system. He said students would receive either a 100 or a 92 and nothing in between. He stated that one mistake would be recorded with a difference of 12 points. He said the implementation of the new grading system was sloppy and disorganized and that he had serious concerns presenting his transcript in an extremely competitive college application process. He recommended that the Board either explicitly approve or disapprove of the system, or revert to the old system.

CHS junior Neil Shea commented that teachers had started talking about 1-4 competency-based grading, eliminating the numbered system, but that this, apparently, did not get rid of the percent system. He said the new scale did not have an explanation and was "all or nothing." He said he appreciated the effort invested in a new system, but said that half of his high school career was based on one system and half on the other and expressed concern that his transcript would look uneven to colleges.

Ms. Cannon asked if the students could understand, from the competency-based grading, mistakes they may have made and how they made them.

CHS junior Evan Marcus responded that, with the influx of rubrics which were made to be overarching, often what the teachers were looking for was vaguer. He said he felt that mistakes weren't evenly "punished" and expectations were unclear. He stated that the new system was inconsistent to the point that his parents offered to send him to another

school this year. He said he disliked feeling that his future and transcript were constantly in flux. He said he would support “taking back” his grades and supported a strong student voice on the grading system.

Gaven suggested that teachers’ approach to the competency system differ; it is not the grading system itself. One teacher’s “4” was another teacher’s “3.” He said the new system does “jump around;” for example, some teachers have created four or five sections for each assignment.

Alice suggested there was a need to improve implementation of the competency grading system, as it was inconsistent for students, and possibly also for teachers.

Concord resident and parent Beth Richards expressed disapproval of the new CHS grading system, noting that it was her understanding that both the Board and administration had expressed the importance of community involvement in the grading system change. She said the transition had been inconsistent, and the Board had expressly asked administration not to implement it. Ms. Patterson responded, saying the Board would consider her comments.

Agenda Item 6. Approval of Board Minutes

Ms. Patterson noted the minutes of the Board meeting on February 3, 2020, the work session on the budget on February 10, 13 and 17, and the Special Board meeting on the Superintendent search on February 20.

The Board voted 8-0 to approve the minutes of the Board meeting on February 3, the work sessions on the budget on February 10, 13 and 17, and the Special Board meeting on the Superintendent search on February 20 (moved by Ms. Higgins, seconded by Mr. Parker).

Agenda Item 7. Recognitions/Reports

Jack Dunn summarized a gift made to the District from the estate of George “Red” Rollins, noting that acceptance required a vote of the full Board per Policy #214. Mr. Dunn introduced George and Madeline Rollins’ daughter Pat Vaillancourt and son Scott Rollins, with his wife Marie. Mr. Rollins spoke about his father. Ms. Vaillancourt noted how hard a worker her father had been, a “damn Yankee,” and how happy she and her brother were to have found out about his bequest. Board members thanked Mr. Rollins’ children on behalf of their father.

The Board voted 8-0 to accept the gift from the estate of George Rollins of over \$19,000, with deep thanks (motioned by Ms. Cannon, seconded by Ms. Higgins).

Student Board representatives Gaven Brown and Alice Richards noted that they have begun work on Policy #414 Sexual Harassment, which will include the formation of focus groups with a range of students to examine the policy in sections. CHS recently took part

in the annual “Respect Week” through the New Hampshire Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Violence (NHCADSV). The theme was “It’s time to talk about sexual assault” and its goals were raising awareness about teen dating violence, providing teens, schools and communities with the tools to address, respond to and prevent harassment, abuse and violence as well as promoting healthy relationships, fostering a respectful environment in schools, and connecting teens to support services in their community. Each day, a different club covered a different topic which this year were recognizing sexual assault; interrupt and speak out; know your Title IX; be respectful; and stay strong. On February 18, a letter from the Board was sent to staff and students thanking them for feedback on the draft Employee-Student Relations policy. A few days later, a complementary video aired on *CHS Live*, in which they and Ms. Patterson discussed similar concepts. These two formats were effective ways to reach staff and students. Since these releases, students and staff have talked about the policy around school, thanked them and encouraged continuing the policy work. On the Friday before winter break, CHS students celebrated with games, activities, food and the annual Winter Carnival. Each grade spent time at the Carnival socializing and having fun before break. Each school club promoted their activities at booths, selling goods and organizing games.

Superintendent Bass presented an update on the permanent CHS Principal search process, noting the committee had met earlier that day for interviews of two candidates, and would interview two more next week. A full schedule of candidate visits would take place the week after. The Superintendent would make a recommendation to the Board of a final CHS Principal candidate, which the Board would vote on.

Superintendent Bass spoke about the School Safety Compliance Officer position. Two interesting candidates are attorneys with significant experience. Dr. Bass, Ms. Cannon, Ms. Patterson, Mr. Reardon, Paulette Fitzgerald and Ms. Palley will interview the first candidate this week, and the second candidate next week.

Agenda Item 8. Superintendent search update

Mr. Croteau provided an update on the Superintendent search process, noting that the Superintendent profile had been developed by the Board using community input. The screening committee would meet on March 4 with NESDEC staff to create interview questions based on this profile. The 14-member screening committee will interview prospective candidates and recommend two or three qualified candidates to the full Board for a final selection. Mr. Croteau noted that NESDEC had created a one-page summary of what the new Superintendent would need to accomplish in the first year. Ms. Patterson invited community members to review the online recording of the February 20 meeting.

Agenda Item 9. Amicus brief on school funding suit

Ms. Patterson introduced Attorneys John Tobin and Natalie Laflamme, to discuss the amicus brief in the ongoing school funding lawsuit (“ConVal case”) that was currently on appeal before the New Hampshire Supreme Court. Amicus briefs are filings by non-parties to a case which have an interest in the matter, which support one side or the other, and which provide the court with more information or raise additional arguments for the court to consider. This brief would be prepared without any cost to the District, and would not commit the District to any ongoing role in the ConVal case. Attorney Tobin described how ConVal School District had challenged portions of the current funding formula. The court decided that the current funding formula was unconstitutional; the state has since appealed and the case was before the State Supreme Court. Attorney Laflamme noted that the District would not receive money awarded as a direct result of any judgment. Attorney Tobin said the purpose of the amicus brief was to send several messages to the court; he suggested there was a good chance the court would send the case back down, and there would then be a trial. They want to make the court aware of the urgency of the case, how little money districts get from the state, how the rates are disparate from one town to another, and to send a message to the Governor and Legislature that this was urgent and needed to be addressed.

Mr. Croteau expressed concern whether signing on would put the District in difficulty down the road. Attorney Tobin said the issue of school funding had been litigated for years by many communities. The school funding formula is not rational and no one can defend it. He suggested it would be significant that the school district in the state capital took a stance on the issue, and spoke up for the taxpayers in Concord that the current funding formula was unfair. As an example, he noted that Berlin has 80% or more of its land in state or national land. This property is taken off the tax rolls but no extra money is ever “put back in the pot.”

In response to a question from Ms. Cannon about how the way the Concord Board is formed and the way the state has land in Concord that is off the tax rolls figures in to this case, Attorney Tobin indicated it did not matter whether the Board was chartered, and reiterated that the Board possesses no other way to raise funds than directly taxing residents for the education it provides students.

Mr. Croteau made a motion to adopt the following resolution, and he later amended to read:

Resolved, that the Board of the Concord School District preliminarily agrees to be a signatory to the amicus brief to be filed in the NH Supreme Court in the ConVal school funding case on behalf of a number of school districts across the state. The Board understands that this brief is being prepared without any cost to the District, that the filing of this brief does not commit the District to any ongoing role in the ConVal case, and that a draft of the brief will be provided to the District several weeks before the filing date. Final approval shall be contingent upon review of the draft brief.

Ms. Cannon said she would like to review the brief before agreeing to it. Attorney Tobin said a very quick turnaround (a week) response time was required. Attorney Laflamme asked if there were specific concerns; there were not. Mr. Croteau suggested running the amicus brief by the District attorney. Liza Poinier thanked the attorneys for their important work, and stated that it was important for Concord to be a leader in this arena.

The Board voted 7-1 (Jim Richards abstained) to adopt the resolution as presented (motioned by Mr. Croteau, seconded by Ms. Higgins).

Agenda Item 10. Communications and Policy Committee

Ms. Patterson noted that the Committee had not met in February, but that proposed policy #437 Employee-Student Relations was before the Board for a second reading and vote. She described again the extensive process, which included students and staff, that was used to develop this policy. She reiterated that the policy could be modified in the future if needed. Mr. Parker expressed concerns about item 11, that seemed to bar employees from counseling students about topics including mental or physical health or family relationships. Ms. Patterson, Mr. Brown and Ms. Richards clarified the discussion and care that had been taken in the crafting of that particular sentence.

The Board voted 8-0 to adopt proposed policy #437 Employee-Student Relations as presented (motioned by Ms. Patterson, seconded by Mr. Croteau).

Agenda Item 11. Proposed calendars of meetings

Superintendent Bass discussed the proposed Board calendars for March and April, highlighting the remaining budget Work Sessions and the simultaneous Superintendent search process. The final budget vote was planned for March 26, with three to five Superintendent finalists to be announced on the same day.

Agenda Item 12. Public comment

Concord resident and parent Kate Frey said that Policy #437 was a good document. She reiterated that DOE training on its code of ethics had been offered and had been rejected. Dr. Bass responded to Ms. Frey's comment, that in fact he had discussed the issue with DOE Attorney Diana Fenton.

Concord resident and parent Beth Richards suggested that Dr. Bass' earlier comment, that "only the Board can fire and hire in the District" was incorrect. He clarified that this was only for professional educators.

Ms. Patterson made a motion to move into non-public session at 9:50 p.m. under RSA 91-A:3 II (b) "The hiring of any person as a public employee."

The Board by roll call voted 8-0 to move into non-public session at 9:50 p.m. under RSA 91-A:3 II (b) (motioned by Ms. Patterson, seconded by Mr. Richards) to discuss “the hiring of any person as a public employee.”

Ms. Higgins moved to come out of non-public session.

The Board came out of non-public session at 9:59 p.m. (motioned by Ms. Higgins, seconded by Ms. Patterson).

The Board recessed the non-public session at 9:59 p.m.

The Board by roll call voted 8-0 to seal the minutes under RSA 91-A:3 II (b) “the hiring of any person as a public employee” (motioned by Ms. Patterson, seconded by Mr. Richards).

Agenda Item 13. Adjournment

The Board voted 9-0 to adjourn (motioned by Mr. Richards, seconded by Ms. Cannon).

The Board adjourned at 10:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Barb Higgins, *Secretary*
Linden Jackett, *Recorder*