



**Monthly Meeting**  
Avon Board of Education  
34 Simsbury Road, Avon, Connecticut

**Mission Statement**

*Our mission is to inspire in each student a joy and passion for learning and a commitment to excellence, personal integrity, and social responsibility.*

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Tuesday, February 26, 2019, 7:00 pm

Avon High School, Community Room

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**Minutes**

**Attendance**

**Members Present:** Jackie Blea, David Cavanaugh, Debra Chute, Jeffrey S. Fleischman, Jason Indomenico, Houston Putnam Lowry, Bogdan Oprica, Jay Spivak, Laura Young

**Member(s) Absent:** none

**Administration Present:** Dr. Bridget Heston Carnemolla, Superintendent of Schools; Roberto Medic, Director of Human Resources; Heather Michaud, Director of Fiscal Affairs; Dr. Kimberly Mearman, Director of Pupil Services; Dr. Donna Nestler-Rusack, Assistant Superintendent

**Call to Order**

*The Board was called to order in public session by Debra Chute, Board Chair at 7:04 pm*  
The mission statement was also read by Chair Chute.

- I. **Pledge of Allegiance**
- II. **Avon Achiever** -
  - A. Jennifer Dufine (RBS Parent) – in recognition for her unofficial role as Roaring Brook School’s resident historian. Ms. Dufine’s diligent efforts in metaphorically recording the stories of the students’ collective experiences are deeply appreciated.
  - B. William Dowd, Michael Nicholas and Abigail Van Hoof (RBS Students) – in recognition of their roles in helping recognize our local veterans during Roaring Brook School’s Veterans’ Day Recognition ceremony. As a part of the Student Council, they worked with dedication and thoughtfulness to create a fantastic student-centered program that expressed appreciation to the veterans and their families. They are true student-leaders.
- III. **Approval of Minutes**
  - A. Board of Education Special Meeting, January 16, 2019
  - B. Board of Education Regular Monthly Meeting, January 22, 2019
  - C. Board of Education Special Meeting, February 4, 2019

*Mr. Lowry moved, Ms. Young seconded, to approve all three sets of minutes with the following changes to the Jan. 22<sup>nd</sup> Monthly Meeting minutes – Item VII, 4 delete the first “the” from “committee chair and the to the Board secretary” and Item XI, C to change “non-certified administration” to “non-affiliated employees.”*

*The motion carried 9-0-0.*

iv. Communication from Public

Ms. Catherine Lewis, an AHS parent, shared her concerns regarding an English class lesson that divided students up by race and when her son expressed his concerns was told it was a “white attitude” which Ms. Lewis and her son found disturbing and racist. Ms. Lewis implored the Board to look at performance and curriculum; the schools are not here to teach religion, politics or give approbation to hate speech and asked that respect be given to all people.

v. Items of Information and Proposals

A. Avon High School Program of Studies Presentation – Michael Renkawitz, AHS Principal and Todd Dyer – Director of Guidance

Mr. Renkawitz gave a brief synopsis of the processes taken to ensure student have a good understanding for choosing courses at Avon High School:

- The Course of Studies is driven by the Mission Statement as is all the work.
- One of the goals for the Course of Studies is to reflect accurate information from a logistical side which aligns with the Avon Public School goals of achievement and communication.
- The Course of Studies includes information on graduation requirements; course offerings, description of the courses and what levels are available; logistical procedures and processes; and GPA applications.
- Communication was also sent to families and shared with students as well so all had a clear understanding of the procedures and processes.
- An Elective Exploration Night was also held to explain and give a hand’s on experience of the various electives that are available to students.
- The Course of Studies workbook and a worksheet was given to each student during advisory so students could take responsibility for their path of learning. Students were to meet with their teachers and parents to talk about their academic plans.
- Recommendations of courses were then entered by teachers into PowerSchool.
- An override process is available which ensures that the student, parent and teacher are all onboard with the courses selected.
- Future analysis of what teachers are recommending and what students are actually choosing to take will be done.
- Announcements are made as well as emailed to all students to further communication.
- Counselors will sit with each student and have more conversations.

Mr. Dyer further explained that he came into the process late having been hired just four months ago and found the process in good shape. Moving forward he would like to do a reflective process to better evaluate how the Course of Studies match up to the goals of our students and their future plans and to see if anything is missing. Mr. Dyer added they will present to the Board again next year revisions and changes that the reflective process may have revealed. Mr. Dyer also stated that the requirements for graduation are also being looked at as the State Dept. is revising their requirements. Benchmarking work will be done with what other districts are offering, looking at their Course of Studies, how their processes work and their graduation requirements.

Mr. Renkawitz thanked all those who were involved in the process and asked for any questions and/or comments.

Dr. Carnemolla expressed her appreciation for the work done to meet the needs of the students and the goals that the Board and District have put forth which included increased communication and parental involvement. Dr. Carnemolla extended her appreciation that the new process helps students and parents to better understand the courses and various levels being offered which

allows students to extend themselves in trying new challenges. The Superintendent reminded the Board that there is no substantive changes as all the courses offered in the Course of Studies is nothing the Board had not already approved in the past except for Chinese V due to the progression of the students taking Chinese as their language requirement which is pending Board approval. Also being looked at is the Early College Experience (ECE) and Advanced Placement (AP) courses to ensure that the courses are aligned and not in competition with each other allowing students college credits for both types of courses if requirements are met. If changes are needed for graduation requirements, the District will be in front of the curve and not waiting for the State's requirements. Mr. Dyer added that the State will be looking for 25 credits, a senior Capstone experience and 1.5 PE credits. Dr. Carnemolla stated that currently Avon High School's requirement for graduation is 22.5 credits and further explained that the State is considering other changes as well.

Board members asked questions regarding override of recommendations to which Mr. Dyer explained that teachers make the recommendations and if a student sees him/herself at a different level, a conversation is had with student, teacher and counselor. Parents are required to sign off on the changes to ensure parental input. Dr. Carnemolla added that if a student were 18 or emancipated a parent signature was not needed. The Policy Committee will review the graduation requirement policy to ensure fidelity of this matter and that language is consistently aligned between the policy and course of studies. Board members stressed the importance that communication was had with students and parents informing them that they have control over making the decisions of courses selected.

Board members asked questions concerning the Course of Studies and some of the courses offered such as AP vs Honors as well as virtual high school courses. Discussion was also had as to what the high school hoped to find from analyzing the data. Mr. Dyer responded that it would give better understanding to which courses students took and their level of success in their choices. Mr. Dyer commenting that the challenge is getting students to access college level courses while in high school and see how it connects to a student's next steps. Board members felt the page created from Central Office detailing the differences between ECE and AP would be helpful to have in the Course of Studies booklet. A Board member also expressed concern that honors level courses were eliminated because they were being taught at a college level and hoped that could be revisited as there is value in honors level learning and for the Board to reevaluate what expectations are to be responsible to the curriculum and the levels put forth. It was also suggested that the notation of CP (college prep) be included in the Course of Studies. Mr. Dyer responded that college admittance counselors know according to the weighting of transcripts that all courses not AP or ECE are CP level courses but per the Board's request a look at what other districts put on their transcripts will be done. Another concern expressed was that while Avon has a high number of students attend college, the number of students taking AP courses is extremely low. Student Representative, Addisen Ganiats, shared her personal reflection on the process saying it was a vast improvement. The new process provided students the conversations with teachers and course information they needed to make their choices. The Board extended their appreciation for the work done on the revised Course of Studies.

- B. Student Representative Report – Addisen Ganiats & Amir Johnson, AHS Student Representatives  
Addisen Ganiats reported that Acoustic Night was recently held at AHS and an upcoming talent show is on March 8<sup>th</sup>. Student Government visited a homeless shelter with another visit in May; Avon Club will also be visiting a homeless shelter. The Junior Class is beginning the process of planning prom.

C. Financial Report – Heather Michaud, Director of Fiscal Affairs

Ms. Michaud reported that the month ending in January had been relatively uneventful. The unencumbered balance was \$543,000 from the month prior. Lookback at fiscal year to date comparison, last year the District was at 14.73% unencumbered versus the 10.98% this year.

VI. Committees & Liaison Reports

A. Committee Reports

- Curriculum & Professional Practices – Jackie Blea, Chair

Ms. Blea had nothing to report as the next meeting is March 5<sup>th</sup> with a continuation of what was discussed tonight as well as the goals and responsibility of school climate.

- Finance – Jay Spivak, Chair

Mr. Spivak briefly mentioned the budget transfers and high school boiler that will be discussed further in the meeting. Next meeting is March 12.

- Negotiations – Jason Indomenico, Chair

Mr. Indomenico had nothing to report as there are currently no contracts to be negotiated.

- Policy – Laura Young, Chair

Ms. Young reported that the Policy Committee did not meet in February but will be asking the Board to take a second look at the Discipline policy. Next meeting is March 26<sup>th</sup>.

B. Liaison Reports

- Board Representative to Curriculum Professional Development Council – Bogdan Oprica and Deb Chute, Board Rep.

Chair Chute reported that Curriculum Professional Development Council will be meeting this coming week.

- Board Representative to Avon Board of Finance – David Cavanaugh, Board Rep.

Mr. Cavanaugh shared that the Board of Finance met the previous night and reviewed the independent auditor's findings for the previous year; no inconsistencies were found. The reserved fund is well managed, however, because the grand list has declined by approximately 2% the mill rate will need to be increased by possibly 5%. There was also discussion of the State holding the Town responsible for some of the teacher pensions as well as the State's efforts for regionalization of school districts.

- Board Representative to Avon Town Council – Jason Indomenico, Board Rep.

Mr. Indomenico reported on the January 29<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Town Council where discussion was had about the possibility of adding lights and buffering to the turf field project. At the Turf Field Meeting, choices were made on the aesthetics of the field and discussion was had on the timeline of the project. Construction is scheduled for April 22<sup>nd</sup> with a substantial completion date of August 23<sup>rd</sup> with a final completion in September. Board members requested Mr. Indomenico bring to the Town Council's attention the State's possible legislation regarding the use of artificial turf for further conversation.

- Board Representative to Capital Region Education Council – Jackie Blea, Board Rep.

Ms. Blea was unable to attend; the next meeting is March 20<sup>th</sup>.

VII. Chair's Report – Debra Chute, Board Chair

A. Board Chair Update

Chair Chute shared that she and Dr. Carnemolla were invited to attend the last Avon Education Foundation (AEF) meeting; though the Superintendent was unable to attend, Ms. Chute was in attendance. AEF raises funds to help supplement programs in the buildings that are not budgeted by the Board. TBS Teacher Brendan Lynch received a check to incorporate escape room aspects into learning. Ms. Chute expressed her appreciation of the talents displayed when Mr. Brochu had one of AHS' choral groups perform with six other choirs in Meriden last Sunday.

VIII. Superintendent’s Report – Dr. Bridget Heston Carnemolla

A. Hiring Report

Dr. Carnemolla reported that the IT Dept. is now full with the latest hire of Mr. Ley as a technology specialist; also an ELL tutor was hired.

B. Enrollment Reports

The enrollment numbers are static with most of the students moving from here to out of state.

C. NEASC Update

An update was given on the NEASC accreditation process with NEASC accepting the five year progress report that Mr. Renkawitz prepared and therefore continuing our accreditation. NEASC highlighted several items to be commended including: the implementation of the Senior Capstone project; having a formal process for measuring the alignment between the written and taught curriculum through the K-12 vertical review process; the curriculum review process; the research based instructional practices in all classrooms; and other items. Additional items will need to be completed and reported back to NEASC.

D. Strategic Plan Update

Dr. Carnemolla was happy to report that some aspects of the Strategic Plan were reflected in the Course of Studies, linking pieces of goals to the District Improvement Plan. The work continues with communication sent out on our recommitment to the Mission and our expectation that everyone in the district fully engages in it.

As requested by the Board, the Superintendent reported on the vaping incidences within the district. In the 2017-2018 year, there were 14 incidences at the high school and 2 in the middle school. In the current school year as of Feb. 19<sup>th</sup>, there were 9 incidences in the high school and 1 in the middle school. All incidences resulted in school disciplinary consequences; not all involved the SRO and may include repeat students.

IX. Consent Calendar

Any member may remove an item from the consent calendar and it will be considered in full in the ordinary course after the consent calendar is voted upon.

A. 18-19/35 Approval of Budget Transfers

B. 18-19/36 Approval of Technology Support Specialist Job Description

C. 18-19/37 Approval of Technology Support Specialist Contracts

***Mr. Lowry moved, Ms. Blea seconded, to approve Items 18-19/35-37 as listed on the Consent Calendar.***

***The motion carried 9-0-0***

X. Old Business

A. 18-19/32 Policy 5144 – Discipline, Second Read

Dr. Carnemolla explained that a red lined version of the policy was sent to Board members which was the exact same as the version that was a first read at last month’s Board meeting. This policy was reviewed twice by the Policy Committee and adjustments were made after the first read and added in the “disclaimer clause” that students may also be subject to legal consequences when illegal acts are committed on school grounds. This was then brought to Board council for their review. The clause about immigration status potentially being impacted was suggested and brought back to Board council. Board council found no objections to including the items in the policy. Ms. Young, Chair of the Policy Committee, reminded the Board that the District was already adhering to State statute and the expectation was to be able to vote on this policy.

***Mr. Lowry moved, Mr. Indomenico seconded, to adopt Policy 5144 - Discipline***

***The motion carried 9-0-0***

Dr. Carnemolla added that the policy will be disseminated properly now that it has been adopted.

XI. New Business

A. 18-19/38 Supplemental Appropriation Request – AHS Water Heater Boiler and Tank

Ms. Michaud expressed her appreciation of the Town and the Board working together on something that has been deemed a priority. The high school is designated as an emergency shelter for the Town and the domestic water heater boiler and tank at the high school has deteriorated and past its life cycle. This supplemental appropriation is requesting access to an existing capital improvement plan account that exists on the Town side which was originally designated for the AHS HVAC boiler, which has a longer life expectancy and a better mitigation plan in place should something go wrong with the unit.

***Mr. Spivak moved, Mr. Lowry seconded, to approve the request for a supplemental appropriation to fund the Avon High School Domestic Water Heater Boiler and Tank totaling \$211,000.00.***

***The motion carried 9-0-0***

B. 18-19/39 AHS Field Trip – Class M Wrestling Championships, Guilford, CT, Feb. 15-16

Ms. Michaud, who oversees all field trip requests, explained that the overnight field trip request came after the last Board meeting and the Superintendent needed to exercise her authority as per Policy to approve the field trip in order for the wrestling team to compete in the championships. Dr. Carnemolla further explained that the wrestling team did not know prior to the last Board meeting that they qualified for the championships. The information of the field trip is being brought before the Board per Board Policy.

***Mr. Lowry moved, Ms. Blea seconded, to approve the AHS Class M Wrestling Championship field trip that took place on Feb. 15-16.***

***The motion carried 9-0-0***

XII. Communication from Avon Board of Education Members

Mr. Fleischman reminded his Board colleagues of the State public hearings on the two bills on regionalization and encouraged each member to submit their own testimony. Mr. Fleischman shared his opinion that by going to a regionalized system, each district will lose the ability to deliver the specialized curriculums that the individual students need.

The Board discussed whether to submit a joint statement as a Board or individual ones as members of the Board. The Superintendent shared that regionalization is being proposed for the sake of efficiency but there is no proof of efficiency or plan associated with regionalization. CAPSS and CABA will also be submitting testimonies. Mr. Cavanaugh shared his experiences while working at the State level and how many of the State initiatives failed to achieve what they were expected to do. For the sake of efficiency it was decided that members willing to give a statement submit their testimonies no later than Thursday, 3:30pm. The Superintendent stated that she and the Board Chair intended to attend the State public hearing.

Mr. Oprica reflected back on the earlier comment by Ms. Lewis and asked his colleagues to acknowledge Ms. Lewis' concerns and consider options to tackle the issue brought forth. The Board discussed this and decided this is an issue best left to the superintendent to review and resolve. The Superintendent declined to comment on the matter further during the meeting as it was in regards to a particular teacher and it was the first she had heard of the situation.

Ms. Blea asked the location of the high school graduation given the work of the Turf Field to which Dr. Carnemolla confirmed graduation has been relocated to the Farmington Polo Grounds.

XIII. Communication from the Public

Debra Sterenburg, an Avon parent, applauded Mr. Renkawitz's presentation and thought the forms that were mentioned were crucial. Mr. Dyer has also sent monthly newsletter which were exceptionally clear and informative. Ms. Sterenburg also thanked the Superintendent for holding open conversations at the library - for letting parents come out and talk, for listening, for addressing questions and concerns and for following up. Ms. Sterenburg also appreciated how the Superintendent makes herself available to all the schools and classrooms.

***The Board invited Dr. Carnemolla, Dr. Nestler-Rusack, Ms. Michaud and Roberto Medic to join the Executive Session.***

***At 9:32 pm, Mr. Lowry moved, Mr. Indomenico seconded, to adjourn Public Session and enter Executive Session after a brief recess prior.***

***The motion carried 9-0-0.***

XIV. Executive Session

A. Discussion regarding Superintendent's Evaluation

B. Discussion concerning Strategy Concerning Pending Litigation

XV. Return to Public Session

***The Board exited Executive Session and entered Public Session at 9:51 pm.***

XVI. Adjournment

***Mr. Lowry moved, Mr. Cavanaugh seconded, to adjourn at 9:52 pm.***

***The motion carried 9-0-0.***

Minutes prepared by Shirley Moy, Board Recording Secretary

Minutes respectfully submitted by Jeffrey S. Fleischman, Board Secretary

*Jeffrey S. Fleischman 3/6/19*

**Board minutes are approved at the next regular monthly Board meeting, and any corrections to the minutes, if needed, will be made at that time.**