

SPECIAL MEETING of the AVON BOARD OF EDUCATION
Avon Board of Education Office, Avon, CT
Tuesday, July 11, 2017 – 7:00 p.m.
MINUTES

Attendance

Members Present: Jackie Blea, Ken Birk, Debra Chute, Jason Indomenico, Houston Putnam Lowry (Chair), Peggy Roell, Jay Spivak, Laura Young, Kathy Zirolli

Administration Present: Gary Mala, Kim Mearman, Heather Michaud, Donna Nestler-Rusack

I. 17-18/BR1 Call to Order

The meeting was called to order by Chair Houston Putnam Lowry at 7:02 p.m.

Motion by Chair Lowry to move into Executive Session at 7:03 p.m. approved by unanimous consent.

Administration (Mr. Mala, Ms. Mearman, Ms. Michaud, Ms. Nestler-Rusack) were invited into executive session.

II. Executive Session

A. Personnel matters

B. Legal matters

C. Paraprofessional negotiations

Motion by Mr. Lowry to move out of executive session and return to public session at 7:53 p.m. approved by unanimous consent.

III. 17-18/BR6 Reassigning Family Engagement Specialist

Mr. Lowry opened to the Board the thought of dispersing the duties of the recently vacant position of the Family Engagement Specialist (FES) to someone at each of the schools.

Dr. Kimberly Mearman, Director of Special Education commented that she believes the duties of family engagement is the role and responsibility of everyone and should not be centralized with just one person. She asked the Board to consider a study from Boston entitled the "Dual Capacity Framework," a strategic problem solving process to be used for both families and staff. Dr. Mearman will also meet with Carol Kerkin from CREC to discuss further ways to "engage" the families outside of Avon, to build the immediate supports necessary and to form a strategic plan.

The Board discussed communication concerns to families and students, transportation issues, best practices of other schools, obtaining input from the new high school principal, and the importance of having staff and systems in place by the first day of school.

Dr. Mearman reminded everyone that family engagement is for all students not just for the students who live outside the district. CREC has hired an FES and feels that many of the issues may be dealt through the new FES and Carol Kerkin. CREC has also established a family resource center for its families.

Dr. Mearman responded to a board question about the desire and/or need for a social worker being part of a team for students. She stated it is critical to consider all the different components needed for a disciplinary team. She added that the two important components to assess are whether the needs are currently being met and how we thoughtfully plan during a tight budget year. Currently Dr. Mearman has not heard of any issues of student needs not being met with the current disciplinary team in place.

The Board also discussed the importance of all students having access to a social worker, not just those identified, funds remaining available for a social worker and timing of a strategic plan.

Dr. Mearman will work with Curriculum Professional Development Council to come up with a plan and it would likely take the better part of a year.

Mr. Lowry charged Dr. Mearman with coming back at the September meeting with her update/proposal.

IV. 17-18/BR2 Reflection Session – how to improve our internal processes

Mr. Lowry suggested discussion focus on how to evaluate the Board, how to evaluate the leadership team, professional goals, and a strong working relationship with the leadership team and the Board?

Specific suggestions include:

- Post consistent messages
- Handle things in a routine way/not everything is an exception
- Put items on the agenda, make decisions and review if necessary
- Build trust
- Work in the same direction
- Develop an understanding of the Board's roles
 - Oversee the superintendent, policy and budget.
 - Bring to the attention of the administration unusual circumstances for them to resolve, not for the Board to resolve.
 - Constituency service

Mr. Mala suggested the Board discuss their areas of commonalities and work on the differences of opinion; to decide what the Board should be, fundamental, philosophical belief systems, the Board's identity. He believes that this unified identity will be critical in creating the profile for the next superintendent.

Board discussions included the following: trusting relationships, safe environment to speak and ask questions without attitude/judgment, education of Board roles and responsibilities, determine what the Board collectively values, how to support administration to achieve Board goals, and how to discuss issues and determine resolutions.

It was agreed to review the Board Self Evaluation as it would be helpful in the search process for a superintendent. Some of the major roles and responsibilities include:

- Engenders confidence in the superintendent by respecting his/her professional expertise and administrative prerogatives.
- Reaches decisions only on the basis of study of all available background data and consideration of the recommendations of the superintendent.
- Requests district information through the superintendent.
- Provides a climate of mutual respect and trust offering commendation whenever earned and constructive criticism when necessary.
- Matters tending to alienate either Board members or superintendent are discussed immediately rather than being permitted to fester and deteriorate.
- Provides time for the superintendent to plan.

The Board commented that while the roles and responsibilities of a superintendent don't change, there will be different issues with new leaders and asked the superintendent to reflect back on some of the areas of change he sees necessary to help the Board. The superintendent suggested the Board speak to

other Boards in neighboring districts and to CABE to get perspective on how various areas are handled. Mr. Lowry reminded Board members CABE will be offering a training session on July 28th.

Additional Board Self Evaluation Areas discussed were “Community Relationships”, including:

- Channels all concerns, complaints, and criticisms of the school system through the superintendent for study with the expectation that he/she will report back to the Board if action is required.
- Protects the superintendent from unjust criticism and the efforts of vocal special interest groups.
- An individual board member does not commit himself/herself to a position in answer to an inquiry or in public statements unless board policy is already established and clear or the question addressed to him/her requires merely a recitation of facts about the school system.
- Encourages citizen participation in an advisory capacity in the solution of specific problems.
- Is aware of community attitudes and the special interest groups which seek to influence the district’s program.
- Board members participate in community forums/meetings to help share positive information about the school district.

The Board discussed the potential need for human resources to address turnover and to provide a person or opportunity for staff to talk regarding retention, including administrators. The Chair asked to consider how Avon compares to other districts as to turn over and retention.

Mr. Mala suggested to remember contact is important with not just elected officials on the town level but the state level as well; coming with a powerful voice not only as a resident of the town they represent but also as an elected member of the Board of Education.

V. 17-18/BR3 Evaluation of the Board and goal setting

Not discussed

VI. 17-18/BR4 Leadership team goal/priority setting

Not discussed

VII. 17-18/BR5 Superintendent’s professional goals and objectives

Not discussed

VIII. Adjournment

Motion by Mr. Birk to adjourn at 9:18 p.m. approved by unanimous consent.

Minutes are official after Board of Education approval, usually at its next meeting.

Minutes Prepared by Shirley Moy, Board Recording Secretary
Minutes Respectfully Submitted by Kathy Zirolli, Board Secretary

Katharine F. Zirolli
July 18, 2017