

BOE Regular Meeting
February 13, 2023 7:00 PM
PPMS Library

1. Call to Order

Dr. Nugent, Board Chair, called the meeting to order at 7:00PM. Other members present: Deborah Burke-Grabarek, Charles Raymond, Megan Gallant, Dan Harris, and Cindy Luty. Also present: Dr. Roy Seitsinger; Superintendent, and Gloria Homiski; Recording Secretary.

2. Pledge of Allegiance

3. Public Comment

Beth Bonosconi: She is a Preston Resident, Tax payer, and MEUI Member and Steward. Beth addressed the Board seeking an adjustment for MEUI members' rates of pay. The cost of living rate has tripled and para-educators have received a 1.29/hour increase over a four year period of time. Health insurance costs continue to raise and therefore members are making less and less money. New hires are coming in and making higher rates of pay with less experience. Beth thanked the Board for their time and asked that they please consider the need for an adjustment.

Heather Ballestrini: She is a Preston Resident, Tax payer, and MEUI Member on the negotiation team. Heather explained that her rate of pay is so low that she qualifies for SNAP and food stamps. Insurance costs are too high. Other school districts pay their para-educators up to 30.00 more per hour when they cover for a teacher. Preston pays paras covering for a teacher 3.00 more per hour. Preston paras are highly qualified and adaptable. Heather requested that the Board recognize a pay adjustment is necessary.

Susan Strader: Susan is a resident, Tax payer, Teacher and EAP Union President. She spoke in support of the para-educators and stated that they are an integral part of student success. The para-educators' work during COVID was remarkable. Susan asked that the Board be mindful of this during negotiations.

Jill Keith: She is a resident and Preston Tax payer. She shared 3 points with the Board: 1. She asked that they consider universal screening for gifted and talented students. She said this would create valuable data for the district. 2. She was pleased to see a budget calendar that all boards worked together on. 3. As a previous educator/administrator who offered training to para-educators, Jill spoke on behalf of Preston MEUI. In her previous districts, certified personnel took a pay cut to support the uncertified staff members.

4. Consent Agenda

Dr. Seitsinger asked that policy 3231 be pulled from the consent agenda. He would like to review it with Ann Perzan before discussing it with the Board.

The remainder of the consent agenda was accepted as submitted.

5. Superintendent's Report

NAEYC Update: Lynn DePina, NAEYC liaison from LEARN, worked with Mr. Bernier and Gail Smith to complete about 20 out of 163 slides. The balance

of the slides are more detailed and will require more time and effort. The project is due approximately one year from now. Some policies will need to be reviewed by the Board. Dr. Nugent asked for this information to be brought to the next update in April.

Reading Program Update: Our current reading program is coming to its end of life. Mr. Bernier and Emily Main, PVMS teacher, spoke about the program that has been chosen to replace it. The reading program chosen for PK is called "3 Cheers," and will cost approximately \$13,094 for 5 years. The reading program chosen for grades K thru 5 is called "Into Reading." The cost for 1 year is \$68,000. The cost for 3 years is \$111,400 and the cost for 6 years is \$164,000. Professional development is included in all of these prices. Dr. Nugent asked for a summary sheet for the BOE Finance Committee Meeting on Thursday, 2-16-23.

Policies at 2nd Read:

Policy 1110.1 Communication with the Public: This policy required a new citation at the end of it as well as one typo correction.

Moved, to accept the modifications to Policy 1110.1 as presented. Luty/Burke-Grabarek. Unanimous. Motion Carries.

Policy 5145.53 Transgender and Gender Non-Conforming Youth: This is a brand new policy being recommended by CABE. A lengthy discussion followed. Stanley Stefanowicz, teacher and AFA Coordinator, stated that the policy was shared with the members of the AFA Club. The students approved the policy. Dr. Nugent asked for specific state statutes supporting the policy.

Moved, to accept Policy 5145.53 with legal adjustment. Luty/Gallant. Nugent, Burke-Grabarek, Raymond also in favor. Harris opposed. Motion Carries.

Policy 3542.43 Food Service Charging Policy: Legislature voted to serve free school meals to all students until the end of this school year. Therefore this policy may need to change in the future.

Moved, to accept Policy 3542.43 as modified. Gallant/Luty. Unanimous. Motion Carries.

BOE Member Resignation Letter: Cindy DuPointe resigned from the BOE. The opening is currently posted on the website, the district facebook page, and The Day newspaper. The posting expires on 2-17-23. Dr. Nugent would like to hold a special BOE meeting on 2-27-23 at 7PM to interview applicants. In doing so, the new member would be seated at the 3-13-2023 BOE Meeting.

2023 Legislative Priorities were reviewed.

Draft Letter to the Governor and Representatives Regarding Transportation: Dr. Seitsinger asked for endorsement of this letter.

Moved, to support this letter being shared with the Governor and Representatives with a cc to Sandra Allyn-Gauthier and Brian Lanoue. Raymond/Gallant. Unanimous. Motion Carries.

Dr. Seitsinger shared his draft ECS letter as well.

Moved, to support this letter being shared with the Governor and Representatives. Burke-Grabarek/Raymond. Unanimous. Motion Carries.

Revised Cadence Calendar was reviewed.

Update on Administrator Search Committee: Dr. Seitsinger stated that he accepted with regret the resignation letter of Dr. Ivy Davis-Tomczuk. He recommends the hiring of a 3rd party search committee; CABA, with a cost not to exceed \$6000. Discussion followed.

Moved, to approve an expense not to exceed \$6000 to hire CABA to conduct a screening search for the PPMS Principal position. Burke-Grabarek/Gallant. Unanimous. Motion Carries.

Charles Raymond and Cindy Luty volunteered to be the 2 Board Members to participate on the interview committee.

Dr. Seitsinger shared the brochure and letter that goes out to all new students enrolling in the district. He thanked Gail Smith for her work on this brochure.

He also shared that the district received a grant in the amount of \$226,000 to support social work.

Dr. Seitsinger and First Selectwoman Sandra Allyn-Gauthier received 3 strategic planning profiles. They will meet to review these documents next week.

The Town is working on installing solar panels on several town properties.

Relamping was completed at PPMS and is being completed at PVMS. The contractors are doing a good job.

6. Principals'/Director of Special Education Reports

Dr. Ivy Davis-Tomczuk stated that the Band concert will be held in the PPMS Cafeteria on Thursday, 2-16-23, at 7PM. Grade 8 has a tentative graduation date of June 13th. Parent/Teacher Conferences will be held in March. There will be virtual and face to face options. Seventeen teachers are serving on the Professional Development Committee. They will continue to meet until a complete PD Plan for 2023-2024 is completed in May. Testing accommodations for SBAC will come through CTSEDS from now on. The student chrome-bases are at their end of life. Students will not be able to use them for SBAC testing this year. They will use chrome-books instead. Discussion followed regarding whether or not each student should have their own computer.

Mr. Raymond Bernier stated that PVMS enrollment is at an all-time high at 324 students. Students participated in a "souper" bowl can soup donation competition. The school also participated in a laser show in January. Their environmental club is working on growing carts. Grade K had a 100 day celebration parade. Clips of all these events were shared via smartboard. Dr. Seitsinger and Mr. Bernier are participating in science and mind-up walk-throughs at PVMS.

Dr. Seitsinger shared Ann Perzan's report. She is monitoring special education tuition with 2 new students coming in. She is working on having

faculty share CTSEDS responsibilities with regular education teachers. Grant funding is available to those faculty members doing catch up work in CTSEDS.

7. Committee Reports

Megan Gallant stated that she attended a Communication PD. She wants to look at BOE policies, community policies and even national policies regarding this topic. She would like to discuss this topic at the Board's next retreat.

8. Financial/Capital Report

Mrs. Cindy Varricchio shared an FY23 update. 53.8% of the current budget has been expended. 58.2% of PK tuition has been collected. This is much better than years past. The audit is complete. The BOF will receive a draft audit document on Wednesday, 2-15-23. Our Capital Plan is on the BOF agenda on Wednesday as well. FY24 budget process well under way. Preston locked into excellent fuel and oil prices with Dime Oil.

9. Adjournment

Moved, to adjourn the meeting at 9:39pm. Luty/Burke-Grabarek. Unanimous. Motion Carries.

On Jan 11, 2023, at 1:53 PM, Andrew Sawyer <sawyer.andrewd@gmail.com> wrote:

Dear Preston Board of Education:

We are writing about the curriculum in the District, and specifically the lack of opportunities for children that are above grade level to continue to advance in math at the middle school.

Our understanding is that 8th graders are given the opportunity to take a placement test for high school math. However, since all children are grouped together in the 8th grade classes, key concepts in algebra are not always being taught. The result is that placing out of Algebra I in high school is difficult.

While this sounds benign, there can be meaningful long-term consequences for students, depending on the paths they wish to pursue. Many college programs, particularly in STEM fields and/or military academies, favor those that have completed calculus in high school, or in some instances require it as a pre-requisite to admission. Calculus is generally out-of-reach for students that do not place out of Algebra given the standard path: Algebra I, Algebra II, Geometry, Pre-Calculus, Calculus.

We appreciate that the small class sizes at Preston limit the flexibility to have tiered math classes by grade. That said, Preston found ways to offer tiered classes in the past. And even if tiered classes are not an option, improved technology could at least give Preston students a chance to place out of Algebra after 8th grade.

Students that are capable of advancing could remain in the standard classes, but also be offered supplemental online programs to get exposure to the material prior to the placement tests. We would hope that the teachers would also be able to offer some modest guidance, even if it is only an hour each week.

We are aware of other parents in the district that have hired independent tutors to help their children place out of Algebra. However, this option may not be affordable to all of the families in the District.

We are asking the Board to strongly consider such changes as it evaluates the District's curriculum, particularly as it assesses potential new hires for the Curriculum Director position.

Sincerely,
Andrew & Cara Sawyer
100 Miller Road
Preston, CT

From: **Jill Keith** <jillskeith@gmail.com>

Date: Fri, Jan 20, 2023 at 2:44 PM

Subject: Public comment for BOE Budget Workshop, Monday, 1/23/2023 at 6pm

To: Gloria Homiski <homiskig@prestonschools.org>

Cc: Jill Keith <jillskeith@gmail.com>

Dear Gloria,

Happy New Year! I hope you are well. We are all doing amazing.

I would like to offer the following public comment for Monday night's meeting.

I have a prior commitment at that time. In advance, I am sorry I am unable to attend in person and appreciate the inclusion of my public comment via this email.

These relate to my recent public comments:

- Thank you for the consideration of reframing public statements about the BOE budget as including

- "an unfunded ~ \$100,000 mandate of new required reading program curriculum" as an 'investment of best practices in effective reading instruction for Preston's students, which has a deadline to choose as now.'

- A historical analysis of data from the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) reveals the Preston school district has not reported any of our learners as gifted nor talented for as long as data is available.

Please include in your budgeting and cycle planning for the screening assessments of all children ages 3 through 15 (at least one required in high school before age 17) of gifted and talented identification, as well as the reporting to the CSDE, differentiated instruction (as allowed currently by SRBI - Scientifically Research-Based Interventions - and PBS/RtI - Positive Behavioral Supports/Response to Intervention) and resource sharing among all of our educators.

The CSDE provides free resources and best practices, from ages 3 through 15. The best schools in Connecticut do this, including those with lower per student spending than ours; we should be no different. The free lifetime benefits to all families (and all educators for all students) who are provided this screening and identification information is invaluable.

Thank you,

Jill

Jill S Keith

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