

The minutes presented within this document provide a summary of the discussion that took place at the Board of Education meeting. For the complete discussion of the agenda items, please view the video of the Board meeting on our website at www.southingtonschools.org. These minutes are considered a draft until approved at the following regular Board of Education meeting.

**SOUTHINGTON BOARD OF EDUCATION
SOUTHINGTON, CONNECTICUT**

**REGULAR MEETING
SEPTEMBER 22, 2022**

The regular meeting of the Southington Board of Education (Committee of the Whole - Instruction) was held on Thursday, September 22, 2022, at 7:00 p.m. as a public meeting in the John Weichsel Municipal Center Public Assembly Room, 200 North Main Street, Southington, Connecticut with an Executive Session preceding at 6:30 p.m.

1. CALL TO ORDER

Mrs. Colleen Clark, Chairperson, called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m.

Board members present: Mrs. Dawn Anastasio, Mr. Joseph Baczewski, Mrs. Terri Carmody, Mr. Sean Carson, Mr. James Chrzanowski (*arrived at 6:35 p.m.*), Mrs. Colleen Clark, Mr. David Derynoski, Mr. Zaya Oshana. Absent was Mr. Jasper Williams.

Cabinet administrators present: Mr. Steven Madancy, Superintendent of Schools, and Mr. Frank Pepe, Assistant Superintendent

2. EXECUTIVE SESSION – School Security, Student Matters, SAA Contract Negotiations Update

MOTION: by Mr. Derynoski, seconded by Mr. Baczewski:

“Move to go into Executive Session, excluding the public and the press, for the purpose of discussing School Security, Student Matters, and SAA Contract Negotiations Update, and upon conclusion reconvene to public session.”

Motion carried unanimously by voice vote.

Mrs. Clark ended Executive Session at 6:40 p.m.

The Regular Board Meeting was reconvened at 6:58 p.m.

3. RECONVENE MEETING – REGULAR SESSION

Board members present: Mrs. Dawn Anastasio, Mr. Joseph Baczewski, Mrs. Terri Carmody, Mr. Sean Carson, Mr. James Chrzanowski, Mrs. Colleen Clark, Mr. David Derynoski, Mr. Zaya Oshana. Absent was Mr. Jasper Williams.

Cabinet administrators present: Mr. Steven Madancy, Superintendent of Schools; Mr. Frank Pepe, Assistant Superintendent; Mrs. Jennifer Mellitt, Director of Business & Finance, and Ms. Rebecca Cavallaro, Director of Pupil Personnel Services.

Student Representatives present were Angelina Micacci, Uptej Singh, and Ryan Ogren.

4. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE & MOMENT OF SILENCE

The student representatives led in reciting the Pledge of Allegiance.

Mrs. Clark called for a moment of silence in memory of the following:

- Peter Sepko, who passed away on September 8, 2022. He graduated from Southington High School and worked as Physical Education teacher and coach in Southington for 36 years until his retirement in 2006.
- Walter Hushak, who passed away on August 28, 2022. Mr. Hushak was a graduate of Lewis High School, decorated World War II veteran, and a frequent valued visitor and volunteer for many years at all schools in our district.

5. APPROVAL OF MINUTES – September 8, 2022

MOTION: Mr. Derynoski, seconded by Mrs. Carmody:

“Move to approve the Regular Board of Education Minutes of September 8, 2022, as submitted.”

Motion carried unanimously by voice vote.

MOTION: by Mr. Oshana, seconded by Mr. Chrzanowski:

“Move to add Agenda Item 9.d ‘Student Expulsion’ to the agenda.”

Motion carried unanimously by voice vote.

6. PUBLIC COMMUNICATIONS

a. Communications from Student Board Representatives

Angelina Micacci reported that the SHS Blue Knights Advisory Portfolio Program reviewed grade level procedures and expectations. Various SHS clubs have started for the school year. Drama Club will be presenting two musicals this year. The College and Career Fair was well attended. The CyberKnights are planning their annual “STEM for All” event at the Southington Drive-in on September 24, 2022.

Ryan Ogren reported that the Blue Knights Marching Band started the year with new uniforms and placed first in the Division IV Open. The Blue Knights Football Team currently holds an undefeated 2-0 record to start the season. He congratulated Football Coach Drury on his 100th win at Southington. The Blue Knights Girls Soccer Team will have their home opener on Saturday.

Uptej Singh reported that DePaolo Middle School held their first, in-person, Open House in three years and collected over 300 food donations for families in need. Leadership training for interested students was held at Camp Sloper. DePaolo’s Garden Club sells cut flowers and vegetables from their garden next to school every Wednesday from 3:00-5:00 p.m. Kennedy Middle School held their Open House and piloted a college fair format. Clubs and athletics have

started. Kennedy's first PTO meeting was held Wednesday night and parents were introduced to the new assistant principal Mr. Marc DiDominizio.

b. Communications from Board Members

Mrs. Clark read the following statement into the record: *“A resource document that was not properly vetted was distributed in a tenth grade English class. We acknowledge that processes for classroom learning were not followed regarding this material, and we look to this to be a learning experience for all. But I resent that a personnel matter regarding one of our teachers and our schools has been turned into a political platform by those who have non-educational agendas. In my 15 years on this Board that I have had the pleasure to serve, I have never seen a disruption like this in our district. Our world is changing, and we want to prepare our students for the world beyond Southington High School. As a Board, we support our teachers and our staff, and I look forward to moving on and getting back to what we do best providing the best public education for the students of Southington Public Schools. Thank you.”*

Mrs. Carmody read the following statement: *“I have been upset to see our school system and students and administration and our community maligned on national news this past week. We strive to maintain continuous improvement in our educational system. Our teachers worked diligently to navigate our students through the pandemic, which was an extremely difficult time for them. We must allow our students to become informed, develop critical thinking skills, and apply them to the society that we live in today. It is a very important skill that they need. We recognize the concerns that some people have, and we need to work together, all of us, to correct them. Let us celebrate the successes of our school system, not malign them, and recognize the hard work of our teachers, administrators, and our students. Please. Thank you.”*

Mr. Baczewski read the following statement: *“I want to first start by saying thank you to those in the community that have provided feedback and weighed-in on the issues that the town has experienced these past two weeks. Arguments for pros and cons...you are being heard. Second, thanks to the students that continue to speak up and spark conversation; you are the end users of the decisions that I, as a singular Board member, have the honor of hearing, vetting, and, ultimately, voting on that impact policy and curriculum effecting the education you receive in our schools. Last, but arguably most important, thank you to the parents, families, teachers, and supportive staff; you all are playing the roles in the education and upbringing of every student that walks through our doors. As we find our way through challenging times, these are the situations galvanized and bring to life how important it is to hear one another. With that, I want to reflect on some of the messages that I received this past week. ‘What’s next, banning books?’ ‘You should be ashamed of yourself.’ ‘This type of thing does not belong in our schools.’ ‘I am embarrassed for our town.’ What all these statements share in commonality are misplaced on a singular issue, the issue was not on what was being taught, it is how it was introduced. We follow specific guidelines in everything that we do, in our jobs, when we drive on our roads, even guidelines on how a public meeting is supposed to go. We have guidelines in our schools for curriculum. They are guidelines similar to that of a recipe. We have ingredients that need to be prepared and added at the right time and need to have a consistent finished product that adheres to our creed of having students’ career or college ready. The finished product is taught throughout a student’s time in grade school by different chefs, if you will. We have meetings between teachers to help with consistency of the finished product that we desire as a community. Lesson plans are the spices that are added into our curriculum recipe. The spices work when they are added at the right time and do not when added obscurely. When a teacher wishes to change the flavor of the dish, if you will, there is a guideline and protocol to discuss*

that and understand the change. This is exceptionally, most important when it is a polarizing topic. The reality of this situation was that guidelines and protocols were not followed as they are outlined and understood by me as a Board member and that is the issue. If there are supportive documents that could hone or sharpen our student's mastery of material, I am always willing to hear about it. There are terms in theory that can cause divisiveness in instruction if it is not carefully thought out and planned. Controversial subjects will always be present and relatable to instruction. This is how we become better at what we do helping to prevent the missteps of our past and provide real time application of lesson. This has to be done with transparency. It is your duty as a student, a parent, a teacher, a Board member, and/or a citizen of our fine town to be active in learning and teaching. We are all learning. We are all teaching. I believe that the very foundation of our American experiment is to hear each other, not agree, not teach based on what we think is truth, but to help present the entire situation at hand. This is a place for learning, not virtue signaling, not for being outraged. Through the uncomfortable situations comes hope, tenacity, and pursuit of being better versions of ourselves. I support wholeheartedly the staff and teachers of this amazing school system. The administration and their decision-making capacities and individuals that make mistakes. We are always learning. Everyday is a new opportunity; every person deserves chances to learn through experience. The real issue is this particular situation has been propagated into something entirely different from where it started. I want to end with a quote from Neil Gaiman, 'I hope that in this year to come, you make mistakes. Because if you are making mistakes, then you are making new things, trying new things, learning, living, pushing yourself, changing yourself, changing your world. You are doing things you had never done before and, more importantly, you are doing something.' I hope that we move on from this with greater understanding of one another. Thank you."

Mr. Oshana stated that the administration and the Board had been handling an issue that was brought before them and that they were following the established policies set by the Board. He read Board Policy 6144 entitled, Curriculum – Controversial Issues. *"Students in the schools shall have the opportunity for responsible discussion of controversial issues. Such free discussion requires that students have the following rights: 1) The right to study any controversial issue which has political, economic, or social significance and concern and which the student, at his/her level, should begin to have an opinion. 2) The right to freely access all relevant information, including the material that circulates freely in the community. 3) The right to form and express his/her own opinion on controversial issues without jeopardizing the student's relations with the teacher or the school. Instructional policy on controversial issues is stated by the Board of Education to protect teachers and school administrators from unwarranted attack by pressure groups and to ensure youth a well-balanced preparation for American citizenship."*

Mr. Oshana read the following statement: *"It was disappointing that this issue had been politicized to the extent that it has. Southington is a great town with a great school system filled with hardworking, dedicated teachers, students, and administrators. On a national level, we have been portrayed as the exact opposite. I trust our teachers and administrators to create the curriculum that our local district uses, they do an amazing job of creating curriculum to prepare the students for the next phases of their lives whether it be for work or continued education. The teachers develop the curriculum and present that data to the Curriculum Committee of the Board of Education where it is discussed and finalized, then brought to the full Board for review and approval. We, as Board members, get to read every piece of curriculum created, we could raise questions or concerns, and are prepared at the next Board meeting to discuss. In my entire time on this Board, I cannot recall one time that this Board, or previous Boards, had anything but rave reviews and compliments for the curriculum that has been created to help our students*

grow. Our teachers should be proud of what they do, and we all should be proud of them. As a Board, we have worked hard to drive the need for our students to be critical thinkers. Without that skill, they will be at a huge disadvantage over others as they venture out into the real world of work and continued education. Our teachers need to present their lessons to our students devoid of political opinions, have open and honest discussions about that information and allow our students to critically think about what it is that they are learning and discussing and come to their own opinions and decisions based on the facts and the data. We, as Board members, are not and should not be in the classroom when lessons are taught. We are not certified or trained educators, although, we have had some on this Board. The teachers and administrators are those trained professionals. If there is an issue that comes up, those issues should be brought to the administration, and they would be looked into. I, for one, give our students a lot more credit than others that they can listen, discuss, and process data on their own. We have to teach the students of today not only history, but the full history, whether it is something we like or dislike. We must also teach our students about the current times that we are living in because the times we are living in will become history. On the national news, this Board has been accused of being a Woke Board of Education and not doing our job. I am not exactly sure what this means but I take pride on being on this Board and working with our staff to prepare our students with the knowledge, lessons, and experiences that they need for the world that they will be entering. Again, I thank our teachers and administration for that. Lastly, we all say that we want free and open debate, but that can only happen when we open this up to the full spectrum of ideas, not just with those that we agree with, [because] that is just not the American way. Thank you.”

Mr. Derynoski reported that he participated in the Technology Advisory Committee meeting via Zoom, which was the first for the year since the pandemic. He also attended the Cable Advisory Committee meeting and was not sure how long the committee will be in existence because Frontier no longer has cable and Cox was considering getting out of the cable business and not being forthcoming about what is happening. The committee will be meeting in October.

c. Communications from Administration

Mr. Madancy shared an update relating to the document that was distributed in a tenth grade English class at Southington High School. *“Some community members expected an immediate response indicating the district’s position as soon as the district became aware of this document. It is important to know that when we address personnel issues the district maintains a responsibility to abide by appropriate due process protocols as outlined within the provisions of the Board of Labor Contract Agreements that we have and Connecticut State Labor Laws. Further, as a district practice, we do not comment on personnel matters relative to specific individuals. However, it is important to address this situation, what we have learned from our extensive review and my recommendations moving forward. I have heard from several parents and community members offering multiple perspectives and opinions on this situation. For every concern that the district received over the use of this material, the district received an equal amount of correspondence expressing support for its use. In doing a comprehensive review of the material and gaining context to the decision making that went into the use of the material in question, here is what we know. Past classes taught by this teacher have had challenges navigating conversations relative to novels that contain complex themes, vocabulary, and experiences of characters within. In anticipation of this, an effort was made to frame common language based on the instructor’s direct observations of students misusing these terms in the past. While all these terms do not appear within the novels, per se, many become part of the conversations due to the various identities and lived experiences of students within our*

community. These materials have never been used before, were not shared amongst colleagues, nor distributed in other classes other than those taught by this teacher. It was clear during our comprehensive review that the teacher had no intent on slanting student perception and instead was trying to create a space for classroom discussions that would be occurring throughout the year. As a result of our comprehensive review, the teacher now realizes that the sources utilized developed these supplemental materials may not have been neutral in nature and recognizes the bias and controversial statements that some have taken issue with. My recommendations moving forward: 1) It is my recommendation to the district Professional Development and Evaluation Committee that all staff teaching content that might touch on complex issues be provided further professional development in the teaching of such material in conjunction with the regulations outlined in Board of Education Policy 6144 “Controversial Issues”. 2) High School English and Social Studies Departments will be provided additional collaboration time both within and across departments to vet sources together and share lesson materials. 3) As is our practice, whenever there may be a question as to the appropriateness of a particular document or video, ensure our teachers consult with colleagues teaching the same course, if necessary, the department leader or building administrator. This is causing stress for all of us, especially our teachers, staff and students as our school is now in the national spotlight over a 10th grade English document. Let me be clear. Moving forward, I support this teacher and all teachers in our district who are in today’s world facing the reality of having to teach what could be considered at times controversial subjects and contemporary issues in our classrooms. This has been an unfortunate distraction for all of us and we will not debate in the media or social media. We pride ourselves that the Southington Public Schools is a place for our young people to access the best public education possible. We want parents to know that their children are in a safe, and inclusive learning environment, and we must not rush to judgement. We should support and respect our teachers and their dedication to our students. Thank you.”

d. Communication from Public

Mrs. Clark noted that numerous people had signed in on the laptop to speak (*Attachment #1*). In the interest of time, she limited each public speaker two (2) minutes to talk. She outlined the rules and conduct expectations of all speakers per the Board of Education policy.

Over 100 people packed the Municipal Center Public Assembly Room. Parents, teachers, students, and community members came to the podium and addressed several topics mainly a worksheet from the University of Arizona on “*Vocabulary for Conversations about Race, Gender, Equality and Inclusivity*” that was distributed to students in a 10th grade high school English class on the first day of school. There was a wide range of both pros and cons expressed regarding the issue. The YouTube video of the meeting is posted on both the Board of Education and Town of Southington websites for detailed information.

Mrs. Clark called for a recess at 8:30 p.m.

Mrs. Clark reconvened the regular meeting at 8:47 p.m.

7. COMMITTEE REPORTS

a. Finance Committee Meeting – September 19, 2022

Mr. Chrzanowski reported that the committee met and discussed a request by the Director of Operations for funding to repair two unforeseen leaking boilers at Hatton and Thalberg Elementary Schools. A vendor was contacted who would be able to do the work under a

Connecticut State Contract that had experience with schools. The committee recommended using the FY’21 Non-lapsing funds in the amount of \$28,200 to repair the two boilers using the State of Connecticut Contract #19PSX002 to award the work to Air Temp Mechanical Services performing the work at Hatton for \$14,100 and at Thalberg for \$14,100.

MOTION: by Mr. Chrzanowski, seconded by Mr. Oshana:

“Move to approve the use of Fiscal Year 2021 Non-Lapsing Funds to repair the boilers at Hatton and Thalberg Elementary Schools in the amount of \$28,200.”

Motion carried unanimously by voice vote.

8. OLD BUSINESS

a. Town Government Communications

There was no Town Government Communications to report.

9. NEW BUSINESS

a. RFP 2023-01, Engineering Services for Facility Study

Mr. Chrzanowski reported that the Finance Committee discussed the bids received that were reviewed for Bid 2023-01, Engineering Services for Facility Study at five (5) elementary schools to evaluate existing conditions for all HVAC systems. The committee recommended that the bid be awarded to the lowest bidder, Consulting Engineering Services.

MOTION: by Mr. Chrzanowski, seconded by Mr. Carson:

“Move to award engineering services for Facility Study at Hatton, Oshana, South End, Strong, and Thalberg Elementary Schools to Consulting Engineering Services in the amount of \$33,500, as recommended by the Finance Committee.”

Mr. Derynoski stated that he and Mr. Oshana reviewed the bids and noted a big discrepancy in bid prices. The lowest bidder, Consulting Engineering Services, was interviewed about their quote and the committee was assured that their bid price was correct and that they had the ability to complete the study within the strict timeframe.

Motion carried unanimously by voice vote.

b. Special Education Audit Report

Mr. Pepe explained that the reason for the Special Education Audit was because special education represented a large proportion of the operating budget and to make sure that the special education staff was being used effectively. He introduced Dana Corriveau, Ph.D. from CREC (Capitol Region Education Council), who conducted the audit of the Southington Public Schools Special Education Program and gave a PowerPoint presentation (Attachment #2) on the focal points of the full comprehensive report that was given to administration and the Board. She explained that in the spring of 2021, Southington administration requested a program review of special education services and practices to study the utilization of resources, organizational

structures, collaboration and communication, and the educational benefit that students derived from participating in the program.

Dr. Corriveau highlighted in depth the use of mixed methods for the audit with 55 class observations, staff and parent survey responses, and staff focus group participants as well as numerous data sources. Four research domains were used pertaining to 1) Resources, 2) Organizational Structures and Processes, 3) Student Learning, and 4) Communication and Collaboration. Quantitative data was addressed for per pupil expenditures and enrollments comparing Southington with three similar districts (Milford, Shelton, Wallingford) including the state for comparison over a three-year period. The Southington Operating Budget was reviewed for how much of the budget was appropriated for Special Education compared to the four other districts and the state. Expenditures for certified and non-certified staff and for out-of-district students with disabilities was also compared to the other districts and state. She noted that Southington was able to keep many students in-district that would have otherwise been outplaced. Staffing was addressed in terms of the student population, with Southington only experiencing a decrease of 110 students over three years, compared to other districts that experienced decreases of 200-350 students over three years. Southington decreased central office administration employees while maintaining their school-level administrators. These changes increased administrators' responsibilities as the overall workload did not change. Feedback was received from staff on administrative support. Comparisons were also made regarding staffing for both special education students and general education students. Discussed was caseload vs. hours, IEP Development, roles and responsibilities of paraprofessionals, and promising practices and IEP training.

Mrs. Carmody questioned outplaced tuition comparisons, inconsistency in the use paraprofessionals, the need for more special education teachers and paraprofessionals, and Southington keeping special needs students in-district at a tuition cost savings compared to similar school districts. Mr. Carson questioned the district's number one priority need to improve outcomes for students. Dr. Corriveau stated that it would be "alignment." Alignment with curriculum, instruction, interventions, data collection, and with assessments. All these alignments are in place in Southington, but the time and investment must stay steady. Mr. Derynoski questioned if the special education students were being serviced to the level that the staff and parents were happy. Dr. Corriveau noted that through the parent survey, the majority of parents were satisfied with programs offered but there were a few that were not. She stated that Southington was in compliance with IEPs (Individualized Education Plan); however, it was difficult to answer if the services were giving good outcomes and how the students were doing with the services because of the various complexities of services needed. There is a gap between students in regular education and special needs students. Mrs. Carmody noted that the disruption of the pandemic had to be taken into consideration as well.

c. Ratification of Southington Administrators Association (SAA) Contract

MOTION: by Mr. Baczewski, seconded by Mr. Derynoski:

“Move to approve the contract agreement between the Southington Board of Education and the Southington Administrators Association (SAA) for three (3) years July 1, 2023 through June 30, 2026.

Motion carried unanimously by voice vote.

d. Student Expulsion

MOTION: by Mr. Oshana, seconded by Mr. Baczewski:

“Move to expel Student #2022-25, as presented by administration.”

Motion carried by voice vote with Mr. Chrzanowski abstaining.

10. ADJOURNMENT

MOTION: by Mr. Derynoski, seconded by Mr. Oshana:

“Move to adjourn.”

Motion carried unanimously by voice vote.

The meeting adjourned at 9:39 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Linda Blanchard

Recording Secretary

ATTACHMENT #1
Public Communications Speakers & Topic
September 22, 2022

Full Name	Address	Reason to Speak
Kristen Mongillo	34 Nutmeg Drive, Plantsville, CT 06479	Regarding handout from a SHS teacher
Nathan Wright	1070 Marion Avenue Plantsville CT 06479	Father of two students in school system, providing feedback
Shawna Kohl	10 North Summit Street	Regarding the vocabulary packet
Dante Napoletano	500 Darling St. Apt. 22B	Student perspective and minority perspective on the handout and experience in the Southington Public School System
John Moise	238 Stonegate Road	support teachers
Elizabeth Johnston	103 Orchard Hill Drive	Support our teachers!
Evan Carey	341 Harness Drive	Support Education
Janet Galati	8 Doe Meadow Court, Southington	On behalf of Southington Community and Education
Katie Wade	39 Madalyn Lane, Southington	Support of teachers
Travis Riccio	910 Prospect Street	CRT
Tyler Young	48 Berkely Ave, Southington	Curriculum
Susan Zabohonski	Plantsville	Curriculum
Michael Kryzanski	27 Hitching Post Dr, Southington	Curriculum
Regina Coviello	12 Beecher Street, Southington	Curriculum
Tia Jones	21 Greenwood Drive, Southington	Supporting students
Grace Toro	15 Russel Road, Milldale	Supporting teachers
Esther Akano-Davis	30 Rustlewood Drive, Southington	Curriculum
Christina Simms	359 Pattenwood Drive	Supporting teachers, diversity/equity inclusion
Kristen Keska	149 Wonx Spring Road Plantsville	BOE meeting
Valerie Ragucci	102 West Str, Southington	Representing children
Rodney Ragucci	102 West Street	Representing children in southington
Julia Catricala	204 Stonegate Road	Curriculum
Rriley Irwin	32 Vermont Ave	na
Skylar Prinzhorn	37 Wyndcrest Court Plantsville CT	Supporting the certain problem at hand regarding the vocab sheet
Shawn Irwin	32 Vermont Ave	Regarding 10th grade english document and shs climate
Richard Cooper		
Ella Perlot		

ATTACHMENT #2

CREC SOUTHLINGTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS SPECIAL EDUCATION
PROGRAM REVIEW
September 22, 2022



Southington SpEd Review - BOE Sept 2022 (1).pdf
