

LITCHFIELD PUBLIC SCHOOLS
BOARD OF EDUCATION MINUTES
March 11, 2021

1. Call to Order The Board of Education meeting, held in the Litchfield Intermediate School Auditorium and via teleconference, was called to order at 7:00 p.m. by Mr. Terzian.

Members present: Mr. Terzian, Chair, Mr. Clock, Vice Chair, Mr. Malo, Secretary, Mr. Morosani, Mr. Shuhi, Mr. Pavlick, Ms. Reardon, and Ms. Stone. Also present: Mr. Leone, Superintendent, Mr. Fiorillo, Chief Financial Officer, Mr. Sattazahn, Chief Operating Officer, Mrs. Kennedy, Chief Academic Officer, Ms. Della Volpe, Principal Litchfield Middle & High School, Dr. Pascento, Principal Litchfield Intermediate School, Mrs. Deltano, Principal Litchfield Center School, Mr. Valerio, Dean of Students Litchfield High School, Mr. Storrs, Dean of Students Litchfield Middle School, Ms. Haggard, Director of Pupil Services, and Mrs. Vecca, K-12 Humanities Coordinator, Regional School District No. 6.

2. Pledge of Allegiance

Mr. Terzian invited everyone to stand and recite the Pledge of Allegiance.

3. Approval of Minutes

- a. Review the minutes of the regular meeting of January 14, 2021

Mr. Pavlick made a motion to approve the minutes of the regular meeting of January 14, 2021 with the modification of removing Mr. Falcetti as a meeting attendee. Mr. Malo seconded the motion as amended. The motion passes unanimously.

4. Public Comments

Amy Sobeck - I am concerned about this book that was passed out to students. There is an anti-police message on page 8 where a Mexican father says to his son “don’t worry about that power happy (bleep)” which that word in Spanish literally means pubic hair but in slang actually means a-hole. Later, there are derogatory statements that are made against the military as well. Like there was a Major in the Air Force and the narrator mentions that when his mom is mad at him, like when he doesn’t put the toilet seat down, she calls him Major jack(bleep). Once again, last three letters in that word are capitalized in the book to further emphasize that. This is not the way that I feel we should be portraying the military, it sends a mixed message when we have Veteran’s Day honoring type of things or we write letters to the police man in kindergarten and yet two different profanities are used to tear down the people that protect us. And if the goal in our program is to create empathy for a marginalized group, but we do so by slandering others, whether it is the military or the police, we just exchanged one form of hate for another. In another portion where the grandmother was concerned that her grandson took school too seriously she takes him to Spain and drops off her middle school age son at a nude beach despite his parents protests. As we are trying to promote an academic environment in our schools, we have a grandmotherly voice disparaging it. And as we combat pornography on our school computers, settings like nude beaches only give fodder to impressionable minds including Pre-K and up really do not need to be drawing up those mental images. Furthermore, many families believe that sensitive and controversial topics like homosexuality, should not be introduced by the school through distributive literature in kindergarten but rather let parents instead introduce those topics when they feel it’s developmentally appropriate from their own vantage point. In the past, the book initiative that we have done have included things like *Charlotte’s Web*, *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* and *The Enormous Egg* It is very sad that a school elementary initiative that was set to promote a love of reading and encourage

adults to read to their children has deteriorated to distributing a book that is so controversial it means elementary aged school kids are not even involved. And I'm glad they are not involved given the content of this book. There is no decorating the gym to look like a barnyard, no coloring, spider webs and fun part, animals. Let's all read a chapter together and answer questions. All of that has been lost with this book I hope that similar book initiatives in the future, that we can return to the love of children's classics especially for those elementary ages so we can all unify together promoting a love of reading. Thank you.

Jenna Schildgen - I am a Native American Indian and my father is from a tribe that comes from Southeast Canada. He is also a Navy Veteran. It was offensive the way that Native American people are portrayed in the text. My people are seen as little more than nothing but folks who exaggerate storytelling. Children were admonished to not believe a word these people say. It is my understanding that this text, *Flying Lessons*, was pushed forward in the name of diversity, but this is not a diverse text. It is a text where some people groups are elevated and celebrated and at the same time other people groups are portrayed in a very negative light; Native Americans being one, the police being the second, military being a third. These are people, who are willing to sacrifice their lives, living day in and day out to protect and help shape our nation the way it is. I am dismayed that the book was pushed forward in the name of diversity. Again, it is not a diverse text and I really wish the brakes had been pumped a little bit before this book found its way into the hands of every school child across two districts. Thank you.

Bea Thompson – I know they spoke about the book, but I just want to speak about the letter that went home. Because when I was made aware of the book, I reviewed the letter and there was nothing in the letter to give any type of indication that there is profanity in this book or controversial topics in this book. You see that on TV when you turn on the movie, there is violence, there is sexual nudity, and there is profanity. You have none of that in the letter so that parents can be prepared. I thought that was an issue and I love the program. I am hoping that we can return to it next year and get back to its roots, which was what it was for K to 6 and really for those kids. I am an avid reader and this book is not staying in my house, so it's gone. But, I thank you for all you do and we would love to see it come back.

Margaret Hunt – I would just like to say that I have watched several of the recordings of the book readings and I thank you, what a wonderful idea. And it was a way, also for me to meet some of the staff of both districts so I very much appreciated that. Thank you.

Rebecca Parilla – I want to say that we have been parents in the district for 15 years and we are thrilled to see this forward thinking and wide scope the book presents to our students and our parents. I appreciate the wide scope and that it is written from multiple psychosocial, cultural racial perspectives spanning time and experience and that it offers our young learners so many opportunities to step outside of themselves and to consider another's perspective.

This is so incredibly important, especially right now as we are trying to launch our kids into a very diverse, beautiful, and complicated world. And more importantly it also offers opportunities for our students to see themselves represented within its pages. I don't think we should shy away from these opportunities. I think we should embrace them. I think we should know that the more we understand about each other, the more grace and compassion we will find within ourselves. I believe that is what we are hoping our students will bring into the world. It is a spirit of curiosity, knowing that we are not the center of the universe, but part of

a larger tapestry that is really shaping all of our futures. Litchfield is a very small town. We need to prepare our students to live in a different world and it is really important that our students can see themselves; feeling, heard, and seen. And, you know, kids are paying attention to us. They don't wake up one day and say hey I'm gay at 18. They know. They are paying attention and trust me they are paying attention to the signs that tell them, this person is a safe person, this person is a safe place or not. And those that don't have a safe place and a safe space to feel okay are at great risk for depression, suicide and anxiety and they can fall pray to unscrupulous individuals that don't have their best interest at heart. So in this small town, we have an ability to help every child feel held and feel heard and it is shameful that we would treat any youth – LGBTQ, or otherwise, in this town or any other town with anything other than understanding, open arms and compassion. Thank you.

Mr. Leone requested of the Board to address everyone. Mr. Leone shared he wrote to the community on Wednesday and it would have been out earlier. He apologized as he was laid up for a few days. Mr. Leone read every single bit of feedback and shared it with the Board. There were some positives, some negatives. In Mr. Leone's email he said there was a process in selecting the book. A book that also now is used by Teachers College, which happens to be the district's curriculum, though this book is currently not part of the district's curriculum. Mr. Leone also shared when he wrote to the community that some said, as you heard tonight, the book is a direction needed, others called it offensive, other said these topics should be discussed in my house. In hindsight, Mr. Leone said, the greatest misstep may have been not giving parents enough time to preview. In the future, the district will put parents onto the book committee; a committee that included a local librarian and educators. Having now done this project over the course of several years, Mr. Leone has also come to another realization that nobody will read the same thing and find the same conclusion. Last year, the district did a book called *Hidden Figures*, which drew feedback that it was promoting a myth of institutional racism. Some have suggested the district go back to the classics like *Charlotte's Web* and in *Charlotte's Web*, Charlotte passes away which is not fair to children. Mr. Leone shared because there is a valuable lesson in all of this. The best lesson in this is we can always continue to do better. We can always continue to do better in our work and in our day to day. Mr. Leone went onto to say he is proud that people are able to voice opinions and have opinions, which makes this country beautiful whether you agree with them or disagree with them. It was nice to have 5 people speak at a BOE meeting. The district needs to have conversations about some things, not after the fact, but ideally before the fact. The district needs to have people to engage. Tomorrow will mark a year of COVID, and outside of Margaret Hunt speaking every single month, the district doesn't have anybody showing up at meetings. Mr. Leone said, no offense John (McKenna), and you can put this in your story too. People show up when there is controversy but not when there goodness, or for discussion, and that grows old. The only way this gets better is if we are all vested. Yes, we can do better. The district will do better on many fronts. But let's stay involved. Mr. Leone read through every single one of the letters, and all the letters, whether for, positive, negative or against, were respectful and that is where we need to be having a conversation. And Mr. Leone is hopeful that will continue and hopeful more people will be engaged and hopeful people will stay out of the toxic social media sphere; the *Instagram*, *Facebook*, *Twitter* blogs and have a dialogue face to face. By doing so, the district can do anything. That is how the district got reopened, stayed open and how the district pulled everything off. Mr. Leone closed by sharing a quote from one of his favorite authors, Aubrey Graham, also known as Drake, "*Leave me out the comments, leave me out the nonsense,*" have a dialogue just like we are doing tonight and there is potential for greatness. Thank you.

5. Superintendent's Report

a. Enrollment Report

Mr. Leone reviewed the March Enrollment Report commenting on the percentage of remote learners at the middle and high school. Mr. Leone went onto say at the Curriculum, Programs, and Personnel meeting, there was great conversation around creating a Virtual Academy for remote learners in the 2021-2022 school year. Mr. Leone also spoke to student attendance with Litchfield Center School at 97%, Litchfield Intermediate School at 96%, and 93% and 96% for the Litchfield Middle School and High School respectively.

b. Finance Report

Mr. Leone reviewed the March Finance Report stating the district has a balanced budget with \$235k in contingency. Next month, Mr. Leone will bring forward a budget transfer request and capital projects to begin this spring.

c. Work Group Update

The Work Group reviewed the fiscal plan, the one district budget, based on *The Concept* presentation shared with the Board last month. To summarize, overall savings of *The Concept* sits at \$2.2 million.

6. New Business

a. 2021-2022 Superintendent's Budget Presentation

Mr. Leone presented the 2021-2022 Superintendent's Budget Presentation holding at a zero percent increase to the Town of Litchfield. Some highlights of the presentation include an outline of the budget process and timeline, holding a zero increase in health insurance costs for the second consecutive year and maintains the non-lapsing capital account that was started in 2020-2021 to insure against emergency or non-planned circumstances (including COVID-19). The Superintendent's Recommended Budget – 2021-2022 is posted on the district website and will go before the Board for approval on April 8, 2021.

b. Transportation Contract Approval

Mr. Morosani made a motion to approve the Transportation Contract. Mr. Pavlick seconded the motion. The motion passes unanimously.

c. Approval of 2021-2022 Middle School Schedule

Ms. Reardon made a motion to approve the 2021-2022 Middle School Schedule. Ms. Stone seconded the motion. The motion passes.

d. Approval of 2021the 2021 High School Graduation Date.

Ms. Stone made a motion to approve the 2021 High School Graduation Date. Mr. Malo seconded the motion. The motion passes unanimously.

e. Approve of Contract with Custodians, Local 1303-392 of Council 4, AFSCME, AFL-CIO

Mr. Morosani made a motion to approve the Contract with Custodians, Local 1303-392 of Council 4, AFSCME, AFL-CIO. Mr. Morosani seconded the motion. The motion passes unanimously.

f. Tuition Student Request

Mr. Clock made a motion to approve the Tuition Student Request. Mr. Malo seconded the motion. The motion passes unanimously.

7. Old Business

None

8. Committee Reports

Mr. Terzian commented the Prevention Council is looking for a Board of Education Liaison. Mr. Terzian will serve as the liaison until someone else comes forward.

Mr. Clock reported the district is looking at “a hard zero percent” budget increase for the 2021-2022 school year.

Ms. Reardon shared the Curriculum, Programs, and Personnel Committee met earlier in the evening and discussed setting up a Virtual Academy for the 2021-2022 school year for student’s grades 6-12 who choose remote instruction. This concept is currently in the planning stages. Additionally, the committee reviewed two new electives, *African America/Black and Puerto Rican/Latino Studies* and *Electrical Engineering – The Basics* for the 2021-2022 school year.

Ms. Stone provided the EdAdvance update commenting their budget is in the black.

Mr. Shuhi reported the Facilities and Technology Committee met on February 25 and discussed issues brought forth by the Litchfield Fire Marshall and the district’s remediation plan, reviewed the proposed list of capital projects for summer 2021, discussed undertaking additional capital projects this spring, and received an update that *Optimum* plans to rollout broadband in the community by 2023.

9. Policy Reviewa. Recommendation to Rescind

- i. Policy 4151 Leaves
- ii. Policy 5113 Regulation – Attendance and Excuses

b. First Reading

- i. Policy 4133/4233 – Travel; Reimbursement
- ii. Policy 4134 – Tutoring
- iii. Policy 4148/4248 – Employee Protection
- iv. Policy 4149/4249 – Employee Use of the District’s Technology Systems
- v. Policy 5000 – Concept and Roles in Student Personnel
- vi. Policy 5111 – Ages of Attendance
- vii. Policy 5113 – Attendance and Excuses

c. Second Reading

- i. Bylaw 9330 – Board/School District Records
- ii. Bylaw 9330 Regulation - Board/School District Records
- iii. Bylaw 9330 Form 1 – Notification to Employee of Request for Records
- iv. Bylaw 9330 Form 2 – Objection to Disclosure of Records
- v. Bylaw 9330 Form 3 – Notification of Denial of Request for Records
- vi. Policy 3280 Form – Gifts, Grants and Bequests
- vii. Policy 3541.3 School Approved Trips
- viii. Policy 4111.1/4211.1 Affirmative Action: Recruitment and Selection
- ix. Policy 4131 Professional Development

- x. Policy 5141.12 Use of Automatic External Defibrillators (AEDs)
- xi. Policy 5141.12 Regulation – Procedure for Use of Automatic External Defibrillators (AEDs)
- xii. Policy 5141.12 Form I – Lifepak CR Plus Defibrillator User’s Checklist
- xiii. Policy 5141.12 Form III – Certification of Compliance with Procedure for Use of AED

Mr. Pavlick requested a motion to approve *9a.Recommendation to Rescind item -ii*. Mr. Morosani made a motion to approve *9a.Recommendation to Rescind item i-ii*. Mr. Malo seconded the motion. The motion passes unanimously.

Mr. Pavlick requested a motion to aggregate and approve *9c. Second Reading items i.-xiii*. Mr. Clock made a motion to approve *9c. Second Reading items i.-xiii*. Mr. Malo seconded the motion. The motion passes unanimously.

Mr. Clock made a motion to approve *9c. Second Reading items i.-xiii*. Ms. Reardon seconded the motion. The motion passes unanimously.

10. Adjournment There being no further business to come before the Board, Ms. Stone made a motion to adjourn. Mr. Shuhi seconded the motion. The motion passes unanimously. The meeting adjourned at 8:05 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Christine Escobar
Secretary, pro-tem