

The regular meeting of the New London Board of Education was held in the Science and Technology Magnet High School Lecture Hall on May 23, 2013.

1. Call to Order

DRAFT

Ms. Curtin called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

Present for the Board of Education: President Margaret Mary Curtin – Presiding
Vice President Delanna Muse
Secretary Jason L. Catala

Board Members: Elizabeth Garcia-Gonzalez
Barbara Major
Bill Morse
Sylvia Potter

Absent: Mayor Daryl Finizio (Ex-Officio member)

Present for the administration: Nicholas A. Fischer, Superintendent of Schools
Kate Ericson, Chief Academic Officer
Gabrielle Ramos

Ms. Curtin recessed the regular Board meeting at 7:00 p.m. to reconvene the Parent/Union meeting.

Ms. Curtin reconvened the regular Board meeting at 7:07 p.m.

2. Pledge of Allegiance

Mr. Catala led the Board in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Ms. Curtin requested a moment of silence for Val Tamano's sister who recently passed away. A moment of silence was also held for the residents of Oklahoma who suffered the devastating destruction from the tornados and for those who passed away especially the children in the elementary school.

3. Student and Staff Presentation/Recognition

- The Board recognized Kleber Pacheco, as Jennings School's Student of the Month. Mr. Pacheco is a 5th grader at Jennings School.
- The Board recognized Mildred Lopez as Jennings School's Employee of the Month. Ms. Lopez is the Secretary to the Jennings School Principal.
- The following NJROTC Cadets for received special recognition for their Outstanding Achievement:
 - David Wood
 - Ryan Dickinson
 - Liam Greene

- Ben Toth
- Thomas Glavan
- The BDJMS Choir performed for the Board and those in attendance.

Ms. Curtin recessed the meeting at 7:35 p.m.

The meeting was reconvened at 7:47 p.m.

4. Reports and Communications

- Report of the Chair

Ms. Curtin reported that during the past month she:

- Attended the Autism Workshop at Winthrop School
- Served on the Bulkeley School Scholarship Fund Committee
- Held her monthly meeting with Mayor Finizio
- Went to a radiological meeting on behalf of the City, and informed the Board that a session will be held in the near future
- Appeared on Dr. George Spreccace's show
- Janet Farquar appeared on her show and discussed the STMHS
- Spoke to parents and community members about a variety of issues
- In accordance with the Board's By Laws she will be establishing an ad hoc committee that will assist the Board in obtaining and providing in a timely manner, objective data, research and other factual information as requested in performing its responsibilities more effectively and in making informed education policy and operation decision. This ad hoc committee will serve until the new Board is seated in December

The following will serve on the ad hoc committee: Sandy Grande; Connecticut College Education Department professor Lauren Anderson; Connecticut College Economics Department professor Monika Lopez-Anuarbe; U.S. Coast Guard Academy professor Elizabeth Rivero; retired attorney Helen Sandalls; Jose Ulloa, co-founder of Expressiones Cultural Center; and Mongi Dhaoudi, a member of the New London Parents Advocacy Group. Mike James, co-founder of the ISAAC charter school, has been named as an alternate.

- Would like to name the Media Center at Winthrop School in honor of Dr. Anthony Bauduccio who served as a member of the New London Board of Education for a number of years and who advocated for children. This will be placed on the June Board meeting.
- Reminded the Board has a training session on June 29th and are supposed to be preparing a draft Management Oversight Plan. Suggested the Board meet together to develop the draft. Ms. Curtin will contact Board members to schedule this meeting.

- Reports and Communication

- Finance & Audit Committee

- Mrs. Muse reported that the Finance & Audit Committee met with Dr. Fischer and Mrs. Whalen to review and discuss the 2013 Budget Report through March 31st. The committee also reviewed and discussed account transfers made through May 1st and, for the record, there were no transfers over \$25,000 because any such transfers would have to be approved by the Board and there were none.

- School Facilities & Design Committee

- Mr. Catala reported that the School Facilities & Design Committee met and discussed the Renzulli Academy and the different options and programs that can be implemented, as well as the funding that comes along with it. The committee also discussed a \$500,000 savings that could be realized as a result of 9 special education students staying in district. New plans are in place to keep more of our special education population in district. Mr. Catala stated that he requested more information about this potential savings. The next School Facilities & Design Committee meeting will be held on June 20th.

- Report of the Superintendent

Dr. Fischer reported

- Mrs. Farqhar and students who visited Italy gave a presentation on their trip to Italy.
 - Dr. Fischer recently held a Back-to-School Days where parents and community members have an opportunity to come and visit classes during the school day. They visited BDJMS, NLHS and Jennings School. As usual, the feedback was very positive. When people have a chance to interact with our students they are without fail impressed with the fact that students go to class, they do their work, they are very polite and talkative about their experiences and what they like and don't like. This is not staged – what folks see is what they get. We have now had about 70 folks go through this program, and it has proven to be a great success one of the best marketing tool we have.
 - He, Mr. Allen, Mrs. Ericson and Mr. Thompson have visited several magnet schools around the state. They visited a Multilanguage Center north of Hartford, a Sports Medicine School in Hartford and the Public Safety and Leadership Academy in Enfield. The visit to Norwalk had to be rescheduled because of the train derailment. We also plan to visit a school in Danbury or Waterbury. The most important thing that comes out of this is what makes these schools very good is the same thing that makes the STMHS very good. The leadership of the school, the

relationship with students, the level of rigor and establishing a high level of expectations for students. The purpose of these visits is to bring the experience back to see what we can learn and see how we can benefit from their experiences.

- We will be able to open Nathan Hale School on the first day of the 2013-2014 School Year. Our plan is to pilot our magnet program next year. Mrs. Ericson advised that we will be running a lottery very quickly, enrolling 15 to 20 out-of-district students, developing the art theme and integrating the curriculum for the year. We will be looking to reach that 25% in the second year. Mrs. Ericson stated that because we found out so late about the opening of Nathan Hale we have not had a chance to do any marketing. Dr. Fischer advised that any student who currently attends Nathan Hale will be grandfathered and able to attend the Nathan Hale Magnet School.

5. Public Comments (30 Minutes)

Mariah Bonnano, Bank Street, New London, a 5th grade student at Jennings School, shared with the Board that growing up in her public school she was her teachers' pet. She enjoyed homework, studying and learning in general. She idolized her teachers and felt happy in her school environment. But now she feels that things have changed. There have been many bullying incidents in the past several years, many schools have cut down on their art programs, expectations are lower, and kids are not even getting the same standards. This is why students misbehave. Ms. Bonnano stated that this is why when she is older if this does not change she will refuse to send her children to school. Miss Bonnano stated that she is sure there are many other reasons that will cause others to make decisions like this, too. If this does not change now, it will be even be worse later on. Your kids and your students deserve better.

Lou Allen, Director of the Science & Technology Magnet High School, Hilltop Trail, Salem, stated that he was very excited to see the BDJMS Choir performance. They were inspiring. Mr. Allen reminded the Board that the SMTHS seniors will be doing their senior projects this week, and he urged the Board members to stop in and see these outstanding projects. It really sheds the light on how great our kids are doing. Mr. Allen also advised the Board that Janet Farquhar has been invited back to Italy next year and the first week in September we will have 20 new students from Italy visit the STMHS and in the spring we will be sending 20 new STMHS students to Italy.

Sandy Grande, Connecticut College, addressed the Board on agenda item 7.4, the Renzulli Academy. Dr. Grande stated that while she supports and applauds the aim to expand and operationalize the definition of gifted and talented, she urged the Board to reject the current gifted and talented proposal for the following reasons: 1) A clearly articulated method, policy process to identify gifted and talented students has not been developed and must be in place before moving forward. She understands and applauds the desire to put in place a research-based model. But given the fact that the Renzulli model has been around since 1983 she feels we should be further along in that process. 2) There is a real question of feasibility given the many important initiatives that are currently being undertaken by the NLPS. 3) Dr. Grande

advised the Board that the CT College Education Department sent a letter to the NLPS administration which articulates the reasons for not supporting the Renzulli model and offering the college's resources and services to develop partnerships and work with teachers to support their abilities to differentiate instruction across the curriculum.

Connie Fields, Mahan Street, New London, received word that the Board was going to vote tonight to not renew Dr. Fischer's contract, and she is a little annoyed. Mrs. Fields stated that her son was a freshmen she was annoyed every day. She was so annoyed that she considered removing him from NLHS. Her son graduated in 2012. Mrs. Fields stated that when you look at where we were when her son was a freshman, to where we are now, it is a huge leap. Unfortunately in New London the Superintendent has a short-term contract. Under Dr. Fischer's leadership we have made so much progress in just 4 years. Dr. Fischer has touched my son's life and the lives of his friends. Even now Dr. Fischer will inquire how her son is doing and if he needs any help. Now you want to remove him as Superintendent and start all over. Four years ago she saw no hope, but she now sees the hope and the change. Mrs. Fields urged the Board to look at the progress we have made and consider the positive impact Dr. Fischer has had. We would waste so much time hiring a new superintendent who would have to acclimate himself to the district.

Khaleed Fields, Mahan Street, New London, stated that Dr. Fischer has made a lot of changes After his football games he would be there, he wants to be part of the community, and he has been there to help him. He is always there to support the students. Study hall for football was a joke in his freshman year, but it has progressed more and more every year, and the athletes have tutors in there now. Both Dr. and Mrs. Fischer are always there helping the students and trying to get students to apply to colleges. Each year it improves. Mr. Fields stated that if you do not renew Dr. Fischer's contract, we are going to have to start all over again.

Larry Lewis, Vauxhall Street, New London, a 1970 graduate of NLHS, stated that he would like to invoke the spirit of two people who would be here if they were alive - Clarence Faulk and Eunice Waller. He is here tonight to speak on behalf of Dr. Fischer. He does not know Dr. Fischer, he only knows what he has read in the paper. He has heard many good things about Dr. Fischer, and he is very happy he is in our community. Mr. Lewis read a quote from Thurgood Marshall, "... my intent will be evident in the results," and he believes Dr. Fischer's intent will be evident in his results. Mr. Lewis asked the Board to examine their own intent as they make this incredibly important decision. The Board has heard from individuals tonight what Dr. Fischer has meant to our school system. Unfortunately there are not more people here to speak on behalf of Dr. Fischer. But Dr. Fischer's actions do speak. Mr. Lewis pleaded with the Board to reconsider their decision because we are on the move, and he is proud of what he heard tonight. Mr. Lewis thanked Dr. Fischer and his wife for the commitment they have made to our schools and our community.

Denise Bevza, Pequot Avenue, is here tonight in support of Dr. Fischer. Ms. Bevza stated that she is also here as a parent of a student at the STMHS and a student at ISAAC. Ms. Bevza stated that she does not understand. She believes that everyone's heart here is for the children. As Board members you would not be giving all you give if it were not for the kids, and she thanked the Board members for that. Dr. and Mrs. Fischer give all kinds of their time so above the call of duty. Ms. Bevza stated that she does not think the Board knows how much they do. They are so visible at all the activities for the children. The public does not

understand the Board's decision not to renew Dr. Fischer's contract. Ms. Bevza stated that the Board owes the public the right to know why you are taking this action when we are making such progress in our community and our school system under Dr. Fischer. While she does not challenge the Board's desire to do right for the children, she has no doubt in her mind about Dr. Fischer.

Haley Brennan, Channing Street, New London, stated that she is here tonight to speak on behalf of Dr. Fischer. Miss Brennan stated that she plays varsity basketball and varsity softball and nearly every game he has been there supporting us. Basketball went from a season of winning 2 games to 18 and this year we went from winning 12 to 8. Dr. Fischer was there almost every game cheering us on. Miss Brennan stated that she would like to show her support for Dr. Fischer, as much as he has shown for his support for the students. She is disappointed that not more students are here to show what he has really done for us. If all the kids that Dr. Fischer has touched in our system were in this room, it would be packed. He really is here for the students, and she hopes the Board renews his contract.

Alison Ryan, Principal of BDJMS, is here as an alumni of the NLPS and as a parent. It is within these roles that she urges the Board to please provide the highest quality programming for our gifted and talented students. Mrs. Ryan stated that she was a 4-8 alum of our gifted program. My program looked very similar to what many people have discussed, adequate gifted education. On the bus once a week to the old Winthrop where I was challenged by my peers and that truly amazing teacher. Even back then she used the Renzulli triad model as a core to her instruction. In junior high she sat with Mr. O'Neill for a course one period a day. But it was not enough. The type of setup did not allow me to fulfill my potential. Before you make a decision on how or if a Renzulli Academy exist in New London, I urge you to speak to other alumni of our gifted programming over the years. Speak to the students who qualified to go to John Hopkins for a week over the summer. When you do you will hear the kids say, "I could finally be myself – it was OK to be smart – I didn't have to pretend not to be smart." The designation of gifted and talented is not a New London thing, it is a state designated title. But we know that all kids have gifts and talents. This label is something that is truly different, special and unique. Mrs. Ryan urged the Board to please treat gifted and talented education as special and unique. Please provide the education that our gifted and talented kids really need five days a week.

Chris Baker, Woodlawn Road, New London, stated that he is also here tonight to speak on behalf of Dr. Fischer. Mr. Baker stated that when he got to NLHS it was a disorganized mess. From the time Dr. Fischer got here everything has become streamlined. There is currently a culture change going on in the NLPS. It is a change from adequacy or inadequacy to demanding success. We are in the middle of this right now and you can see it in the improvement in test scores. If you get rid of Dr. Fischer that will stop the culture change or at least put it on hold, and Mr. Baker does not think our district can afford to do that. Mr. Baker urged the Board to reconsider their decision to not renew Dr. Fischer's contract.

Jason Pellum also spoke on behalf of Dr. Fischer, and he stated that just as others have said tonight, Dr. Fischer has taken the time to develop a personal connection with the students. He takes the time to get to know the students by name and asks how we are doing with our college applications, how we are doing academically and he offered his assistance. Mrs. Fischer actually came to our study hall and gave us an acupuncture type massages. Dr. and

Mrs. Fischer care about us. My friends and I have graduated, but Dr. Fischer still keeps in touch and wants to know how we are doing. His help doesn't stop just because we graduated. Dr. Fischer continues to support us and urges us to stay in college. Mr. Pellum asks the Board to reconsider and renew Dr. Fischer's contract.

Javon Elmore, another member of the NLHS Class of 2012. Mr. Elmore stated that he is here to speak on behalf of Dr. Fischer. Dr. Fischer support while I was at NLHS was tremendous. Mr. Elmore stated that he was actually accepted in the U.S. Military Academy Preparatory School. I attended the academy for 6 months. During the 3 months summer training, Dr. Fischer and his wife sent the first package I received. These little expressions prove that their connection with the students didn't stop when we left NLHS. It proves that they do care above and beyond. Our youth is the future of New London. If you terminate his contract I feel you will just put a stop to everything that he has been doing, and I feel he has been doing a tremendous job.

Jason Morris, Bank Street, New London, a parent, stated that he is glad that the Day wrote the article that appeared in today's paper which turn people out tonight. He has no doubt that there are no personal vendettas between Board members and the Superintendent. The reason the Board cannot say anything is that the Board has a legal challenge in front of them. If the Board were to say anything so far away from Dr. Fischer's evaluation they could be held liable. So when Dr. Fischer reads off his embellished brag list, he can say to the media that he does not know why they voted no. While Dr. Fischer has been here we have seen a slowing in test score improvement. The City Council has asked a multiple times for a more detailed budget and was told no from both Dr. Fischer and Dr. Adamowski. This budget and the last budget did not have plans or goals to indicate what we planned to achieve with the budget. Mr. Morris believes this contributed to having our budget being reduced. Mr. Morris stated that there is an unwritten policy that creates a culture of fear of being fired or harassed if you are a whistle blower in the educational system. That is something that comes from the top. Teachers walking out of evaluations balling - you do not get that from teachers who don't care or are ineffective. These are people who care about their jobs and students. When you are told you are a cruddy teacher - they come to tears. Mr. Morris stated that much of what he heard tonight is PR - it is on the surface. Attending events is something he would expect from any superintendent. There are so many things that are so much deeper that were unable to be said by our Board or anybody else and will only be said by someone like myself who is not afraid to be fired.

Mirna Martinez, Prospect Street, New London, stated that she is all for attending to the academic needs of all of our students, including those that are gifted. It does not appear that the definition for "gifted" has been set yet, and we are looking to broaden the definition to encompass multiple intelligences. In that case, Mrs. Martinez stated that she is opposed to Renzulli because it is an institution that will be limited to a few hundred students. She has heard from Alison Ryan and others who attended a gifted and talented program that the environment should be one where intelligence is not a stigma. Mrs. Martinez stated that this should be something throughout our entire system and that we have the foresight to create a rich academic environment where we could push all of our students towards that goal. Mrs. Martinez reminded the Board and administrators that the New London Parents Advocates have also issued a similar statement against a separate institution for gifted and talented.

Helen Sandalls, Glenwood Avenue, New London, stated that according to Commissioner Stefan Pryor, CT law mandates that every district define what is gifted and talented for the district kids and then develop a battery of screening methodology that is sensitive to underserved and culturally diverse populations. We do have a track record for Renzulli in Hartford which has similar demographics to New London but the demographics of the Renzulli Academy is not reflective of the demographics of Hartford because it uses primarily, if not exclusively, the CMT which is indicative of high scores on the CMT and reflective of family wealth, a large English vocabulary and enrichment. CT law does not mandate that you have a gifted and talented program, but it does mandate that you screen and that your screen is adaptive to your demographics. This is an issue and one that must be addressed before a pilot program is approved because it is putting the cart before the horse. The other problem with the Renzulli Academy is the separateness. The Board has not been able to consider any other type of Renzulli model or any other gifted in-school model. Another flaw with the separateness because kids will be identified as if they will always be gifted and talented and put in a different school when in fact the gifted and talented identification is dynamic and can change. Does this mean that you will demote the kids back to the school they came from or will you keep the non-gifted kids in a gifted only school – it does not make any sense.

Monghi Dhaouadi, Spring Street, New London, a parent, stated that he is not speaking on behalf of or against Dr. Fischer, but he wants to comment about the attempt of The Day paper, which is the major source of information for all of us in New London, to inform us and to evaluate decisions made by public officials is quite inadequate because those who are speaking on behalf of Dr. Fischer do not attend these meetings. We do not see them engaging the teachers or the parents. The New London Parents Advocates group has held several meetings around the important topics including the budget and other than one meeting where Julianne from The Day covered that first event, but the meetings where meaningful discussions took place as to where the district is going The Day was completely absent. When I read these articles in the paper they can have whatever opinion they would like, but they should not engage in lazy journalism. In a previous editorial the reporter took talking points from the administration and just pasted it in the editorial and made it appear that that was the opinion of The Day. Our priority at this point should not be the Renzulli Academy. We can revisit this in five years when a majority of the kids are reading on grade level and graduating on time. We are taking our high achievers and making them a priority over the rest of the kids and diverting resources from the work that needs to be done.

Dr. Dennis Long, Montauk Avenue, New London, stated that he has been pediatrician in the greater community for the past 45 years and has had a solo practice in New London for the past 10 years. Dr. Long has no children in the NLPS. He is here tonight to speak on behalf of Dr. Fischer. He knows Dr. Fischer, and he knows him to be a good fellow. Dr. Long stated that there is a lack of transparency in what is going on here. The best he can figure out is there is a disagreement about the quality of communication among the different Board members and Dr. Fischer. Dr. Long commented that communication is a 2-way street; so if Dr. Fischer is let go because of a lack of communication than you should all fire yourself because you are not asking the right questions. Dr. Long stated that as an average citizen who is not involved with any self-interest, he cannot figure out what this is all about and no one has the courage to say what the problem is and then explain yourselves. You need to explain your decision. It may be uncomfortable, but you have to have that degree of courage to do it.

6. Approval of the Minutes

- Motion by Mr. Catala seconded by Mrs. Major, to approve the minutes of the May 8, 2013, Special meeting.

Motion carried, 7 – 0

- Motion by Mrs. Potter seconded by Mrs. Muse to approve the minutes of the May 8, 2013, Board Workshop.

Motion carried, 7 - 0

7. Action items:

- 7.1. Motion by Ms. Curtin, seconded by Mr. Catala, to approve the Inter-District Magnet School Operations Plan for Winthrop Magnet Elementary STEM School and the STEM Academy at BDJMS.

Motion carried, 7 - 0

- 7.2. Motion by Ms. Curtin, seconded by Mr. Catala, that there were no transfers over the threshold.

Motion carried, 7 - 0

- 7.3. Motion by Mrs. Potter, seconded by Ms. Curtin, to table the following job descriptions to support the implementation of the Strategic Operating Plan:

- Artistic Dean
- Communication Manager
- Supervisor of Professional Development and Career Management

Motion failed: 2 – 5

*Voting no: Mr. Catala
Mrs. Garcia-Gonzalez
Mrs. Major
Mr. Morse
Mrs. Muse*

Motion by Mr. Catala to move the question and accept the three job descriptions.

Mr Catala withdrew his motion.

Motion by Ms. Curtin, seconded by Ms. Catala,
to accept the job description for Artistic Dean to support the implementation of the Strategic Operating Plan:

Motion carried: 7 - 0

Motion by Ms. Curtin, seconded by Mr. Catala,
to accept the job description for Communications Manager to support the implementation of the Strategic Operating Plan:

Motion carried: 4 - 3

*Voting no: Ms. Curtin
Mrs. Muse
Mrs. Potter*

Motion by Ms. Curtin, seconded by Mr. Catala,
to accept the job description for Supervisor of Professional Development and Career Management to support the implementation of the Strategic Operating Plan:

Motion carried: 4 - 3

*Voting no: Ms. Curtin
Mrs. Muse
Mrs. Potter*

- 7.4. Motion by Ms. Curtin, seconded by
not to recommend the Renzulli Academy.

Motion carried: 4 - 3

*Voting no: Mr. Catala
Mrs. Major
Mr. Morse*

- 7.5. Motion by Ms. Curtin, seconded by Mr. Catala, to:

- a) Establish a school building project to "Build and/or Renovate to New" the New London High School; and
- b) The standing School Building and Maintenance Committee is hereby established as the building committee for the school building project to "Build and/or Renovate to New" the New London High School

Motion carried, 7 - 0

8. Board Comments, Questions and Requests

There were no comments.

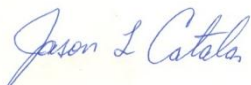
9. Adjournment

Motion by Ms. Curtin, seconded by Muse
to adjourn the meeting.

Motion carried, 7 - 0

The meeting was adjourned at 10:15 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,


Jason L. Catala
Secretary