

**DANBURY BOARD OF EDUCATION MEETING  
WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 10, 2021 - 7:00 PM  
VIRTUAL MEETING VIA ZOOM  
LIVE STREAM**

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**PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

The Chairperson, G. Cooper, called the meeting to order at 7:02 pm and those assembled recited the Pledge of Allegiance.

**ROLL CALL**

Present: Joseph Britton, Rachel Chaleski, Kate Conetta, Gladys Cooper, Loren Daly, Joseph DaSilva, Richard Jannelli, Kathleen Molinaro, Albert Russo, Amy Spallino  
Absent: Kathryn Hodgdon  
Also Present: Dr. Pascarella, Courtney Leborious, Kelly Truchsess, Kevin Walston, Dr. Casimiro, Kim Thompson

**PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

- Patty Alessandro
  - I am writing to ask the Board to give families with special needs students, who were granted the schedule of four day in-person learning in October, a timeline for when this schedule will begin now that students have returned to their school buildings. While the special education teachers and paraeducators have been working incredibly hard since September with their students, distance learning can be especially challenging for this population. Navigating Google Meets and receiving necessary services on-line can initiate frustration and be an ineffective way to measure and meet the required objectives stated on a student's IEP. While mainstream academic students may have found other forms of socializing safely during this time, for many special needs students, being in school with peers is the only form of social development. Allowing special needs students to begin in-person on a hybrid schedule after Thanksgiving was the beginning of making up the fragmented in-person special education services lost since March. Many surrounding districts with the hybrid learning model see the importance of a four day in-person schedule for their special needs population and I hope the Board can quickly work with the school administrators to do the same for Danbury's special needs students as well.
- Oswaldo Chin.
  - First, I would like to thank you for your service and for all the hard work you put in by making sure that our children's needs are met. Second, I write in support of the new school budget proposal, however, and considering that for many years our beloved public schools are being defunded, I wish you would have proposed a higher amount. Third, you as elected officials must do everything in your power to protect our public school system, our public school system is the jewel of our democracy. I am committed to support and protect our public schools and I strongly Oppose Charter School Funding in the Connecticut Budget.

**CONSENT CALENDAR**

**EXHIBIT**

MOTION: A. Spallino moved, seconded by J. DaSilva that the Board of Education approve the item on the Consent Calendar, Exhibit 21-14, through 21-17- as recommended:

**MINUTES**

1/27/21 Regular Meeting	21-14 (pg.4)
2/2/21 Finance Committee	21-15 pg.18)
2/2/21 Board Workshop	21-16 (pg.19)
2/3/21 Sites and Facilities Committee	21-17 (pg.20)

10 Votes Yes: Rachel Chaleski, Kate Conetta, Gladys Cooper, Joseph DaSilva, Albert Russo, Amy Spallino, Kathleen Molinaro, Loren Daly, Joseph Britton, Richard Jannelli

1 Vote Not Present: Kathryn Hodgdon

**Motion carried at 7:07 pm**

**STUDENT REPRESENTATIVES**

- ACE Representatives: Chris Johnston, Nicole Quizphe
  - As we approach March, the ACE staff led by Kyle Trocolla as our SAT Administrator, prepare for the March 24th SAT day. ACE would like to thank K. Trocolla for all his efforts in organizing what will be a successful day for our 20 Juniors who will be testing.
  - I would like to announce that the ACE Showcase Website, which highlights student writings, paintings and all things creative has been created and is being managed by Joanne Tolles. J. Tolles and her poetry students are already planning our annual Spring coffeehouse, which will be a venue for students and staff to read original pieces of poetry, display artwork, and host musical performances. We would like our creativity to be on full display on our Alternative Center for Excellence YouTube channel.
  - ACE would like to publicly acknowledge and congratulate our January Students of the month; Chris Pais and Brianna Villani. Both students are Freshman that are new to the ACE family this year and have excelled and engaged consistently throughout the first semester.
  - Lastly ACE would like to congratulate our most recent student of the week award winners; Laura Medina and Zander Wixon. Congratulations to both of you and keep up the great work during the rest of Semester 2.

**ACTION ITEMS**

A. Approval of Final Plans, Specifications, and Cost Estimates for Ellsworth Avenue School Addition Project and Associated Board of Education Space

MOTION: J. Britton moved, seconded by R. Chaleski that the Board of Education authorizes the Chairperson of the Board of Education and the Superintendent of Schools to approve the final plans, contract specifications, and cost estimates for the Ellsworth Avenue School Addition project (State Project 034-150EA) and the associated Board of Education space (State Project 034-151BE), and sign the SCG-042 forms for submission to the State of Connecticut for approvals.

8 Votes Yes: Rachel Chaleski, Kate Conetta, Gladys Cooper, Joseph DaSilva, Amy Spallino, Kathleen Molinaro, Loren Daly, Joseph Britton,

1 Vote Not Present: Kathryn Hodgdon

2 Abstentions: Albert Russo, Richard Jannelli

**Motion carried at 7:12 pm**

B. Fiscal Year 2021-2022 Budget

MOTION: K. Conetta moved, seconded by J. DaSilva that the Board of Education adopt the Superintendent's Fiscal Year 2021-2022 Budget as presented, for submission to the Mayor as required by City Charter.

R. Jannelli stated that the Finance Committee voted unanimously to recommend the budget to the Board.

A. Russo stated that he received the final version of the budget 5:40 pm on 2/10/2021.

A. Spallino stated that she appreciated the PowerPoint presentation however, wished there was more time to discuss what we will actually be able to include once we take budget to the city and have the final number that the City will give us. Just feels very rushed. What will we do with all the needs? Will we really be able to afford them?

Dr. Pascarella stated that after the Board gives the ok, the booklet is produced that the Board gets and goes to City Hall. Between now and when Mayor Cavo decides the recommendation of budget to the City, then we will have an idea of what it is that we have to spend. Last year we knew earlier because there wasn't a vote, and we were told what we would get in regard to the budget. We will braid again this year. Governor divided Danbury over two years on the \$10 million, included in ECS. Whatever we wind up getting, how do we get the things discussed at the budget workshop? That is the creativity of trying to use the Alliance Grant. According to the Governors message, it looks like we will get the same as we got last year. Last year the money we had wasn't all the same. It was left over money so we could use it differently. It will be a challenge, but we will come back to the Board and discuss what we can and cannot do.

Apologized for getting the budget late to the Board. Any questions can be directed to C. Leborious.

C. Leborious stated that the budget in hand ten days ago from the first workshop changed in minor items. Removal of three teachers from elementary proposal, consolidating a category from the curriculum and programming support with humanities. Two categories got collapsed and added \$10,000 for an interventionist. Reduced the bus request. All is reflected in the current package as they are changes from the last two weeks after the Cabinet reviewed. Cares funding will be an initial submission of 2/22/2021.

R. Chaleski echoed A. Spallino's concerns. When we got the budget last week, it changed to the following workshop. The numbers and the format changed. Difficult to compare. Understands that braiding of the funds has to be done but it doesn't seem sustainable, puts us further into the hole. Dr. Pascarella has been clear in communicating that additional funding is not to be used just to plant operations but we are braiding into the operations budget. Understands there are a lot of moving parts and it is an unprecedented year, but she doesn't feel part of the team to help to develop this budget. Requested more transparency and collaboration with the Board. As a parent and Board member, we want all of this for our kids, but this is a tough year and our community is struggling through a pandemic and this is a huge ask. Not sure if she feels comfortable approving something without having the binder before being asked to approve it.

G. Cooper stated that maybe a different type of conversation with C. Leborious, R. Jannelli and A. Russo needs to be had to answer some of these questions. It has been a different year, but she has been on the Board long enough to remember the times where the binder was received at City Hall.

C. Leborious stated that she was under the impression that the binder was produced after the Board votes because that is when the budget becomes the budget to present to the City. Everything is ready to go once we get the vote from the Board so the binder will be produced before it goes to the City. The deadline is the first business day after 2/14/2021.

R. Chaleski stated that in previous years, she thought the binder was given beforehand. If we aren't given the details, how can we vote on something?

Dr. Pascarella stated that maybe we start a Finance Committee earlier next year.

L. Daly asked if the Board will see the budget once the City informs the district of how much will be received? Dr. Pascarella stated that the City will give its approval for a specific amount, it then goes to a subcommittee of the City and they will either accept it or adjust it. Then it goes to the mayor for approval. Then the district puts together what they can and cannot do. That will then be shared with the Board.

C. Leborious stated that there will be an opportunity to lobby what they are interested in putting forth.

J. DaSilva stated that this is a big ask, just like there was a big ask last year. A significant part of why it is a big ask is because over the last decade the district received 15% in the aggregate budget increase. In 2011 the district got less than a 1% increase. In 2012 it got

less than 1% increase. In 2013 and 2014 it got less than 3% increase. In 2015, 2016 and 2017 it got less than 2% increases. In 2018 it got a 3% increase. In 2019 it got a .06% increase. Last year we got \$1.2 million. The rest of the money was money we had, saved and grant money we were allowed to roll over in Cares Act money. It wasn't budget money. The reason it is a big ask and so hard to fund is because we haven't had the budgets we have needed for the last decade. We have been playing catch up. This isn't even a big enough ask to do what we need to do.

A. Russo stated that the \$15 million was over a \$2 million increase in our tax. Feels we have acted responsibly in the past and will act responsibly in the future. Just can't have everything we want. We have been practical; it has worked and we have continued to move ahead.

K. Molinaro stated that it is the Board's job to advocate for the kids. That is what we need to tell people. This is what we need to raise your house values. To make sure that Danbury Public Schools stay ahead of the curve. To make sure that we are educating our kids to the fullest extent. To make sure that we are following all of the guidelines sent down to us from the federal government and the state government that are unfunded mandates, but still we have to put them in place. We have to stay on the side of the kids.

Dr. Casimiro stated that it is no secret that we have not been funded to the level that we need to be funded but we have creative and innovative people who have been working the best that they can to put forth for the kids. It took a pandemic to get computers into the hands of all of our students and that shouldn't be the case. The silver lining in the pandemic was that we brought technology to our district for the first time at a level that our students and teachers deserve. To sustain that approach, we will need continual funding. Google Chromebooks have a lifespan of three to four years, max. We will need to sustain some of the infrastructure and technology that we finally have been able to get moving forward. We have visions in Danbury to build an academy model to provide opportunities to our students (Summit). We will need to outfit that with staff members and equipment. If we don't start to dig out of the hole to make incremental growth towards the budget this year, not sure how we will open and sustain that new location. We have to be able to fund the programs we are trying to get off the ground and have been doing in the last couple of years. We are planning for the growth in enrollment that is meeting us at the middle school level and will be steady on through high school. We need to start continually moving up in our budget when that building opens. We do not want to open up a brand new building and not be able to staff it or fund it appropriately. We need the resources. With some of the braiding, we have been able to get materials that we have not had in the past, in an efficient manner. By having some of the materials we have been able to put it, we are getting some of the programming the students are getting. That was difficult in the past to guarantee. We are on the right upswing.

Dr. Pascarella stated that you have the growth, the new building and new graduation requirements of 25 credits. We are adding every year 25 FTEs that we have to phase in. This is something that will move us forward and help build for the next few years so that we can hopefully be prepared to open the Summit.

Dr. Casimiro stated that some things cited in the NEASC report were having more counselors and curriculum development in some of the special areas. A lot of the things that were cited were a direct result of things we have not been able to get over the past several years that have built up. We need to rectify those components, continue to support our programs and address the enrollment that keeps coming.

A. Russo stated that we need to do a better job of selling this to the public. To get public support and to move our leaders towards a direction. We need to garner total community support. That takes marketing.

9 Votes Yes: Kate Conetta, Gladys Cooper, Joseph DaSilva, Albert Russo, Amy Spallino, Kathleen Molinaro, Loren Daly, Joseph Britton, Richard Jannelli

1 Vote Not Present: Kathryn Hodgdon

1 Abstain: Rachel Chaleski

**Motion carried at 7:44 pm**

### **PRESENTATION**

- The Danbury Minority and Bilingual Teacher Pipeline Program. Robert Pote, Western Connecticut State University
  - Partnership with the school district for over 20 years.
  - Excel program for rising 7th and 8th graders. Looking to expand. Currently 37 students enrolled. Wants to bring it to 75 students; 25 at each middle school.
  - Upward Bound program, 9-12 graders. Grant provided by the US Department of Education.
  - Services first generation college bound students, low income with a small percentage of academically at risk students.
  - Branched out and opened up a Minority and Bilingual Teaching Pipeline. In the seventh cohort. One of the graduates went through the program, got an education degree at WCSU and is now working in DPS. Three to four more students are graduating this year.
  - Newest program, in its 3rd year, is the Computer Science Pipeline. 15-20 students in the program. Similar to the teaching pipeline where students treat it as a dual enrollment. Three college credits.
  - Education Achievement and Access program at college level. For first year students at WCSU. Give students tools to make sure they can get through. Taking applications now. In the process of doing interviews for that program.
  - Promoting Academically Student Success program. Comes from the Department of Higher Education in Hartford. This program focuses on students of color that are on academic probation and getting them off academic probation and into a major with the right GPA.
  - Dr. O' Callaghan, from WCSU, stated that this program was the very first of its kind in the state of Connecticut. Began in 2015. State liked the program so much

that it became the blueprint for the other programs in the state. Purpose of the program is to grow our own teachers for Danbury. Recruit from Danbury juniors and seniors who have an interest in teaching. They come through the Danbury fellows' program. Receive three university credits funded by the Precollegiate and Access program. The department funds the course instructor. They get teaching experience in Danbury Public Schools. Many are bilingual which is such a desperate need for our schools. Already coming to fruition with our first completer of the program who is now teaching third grade at Pembroke Elementary School. Graduating even more this May from the pipeline program. Looks forward to working with district leadership to expand it even further.

- Professor Huertas, Assistant Principal in Hartford. In education for his 18th year. Being an educator is a transformative and political act that he does every day. First language was Spanish. His heroes were his teachers. His teachers inspired him and made him feel deserving of an education. He is a year and a half from getting a doctorate. Parents didn't have the language to provide the education to him but they, along with his teachers, instilled in him that he had the possibility. That's what we want, for our kids to have that will and desire to act upon what they desire. He tries to provide that context to all of our students so that what they thought was impossible, becomes possible and becomes the reality. Does this from the heart and for the kids in the pipeline so they can be that transformative agent for their students too.
- Jessica Coronel, Assistance Director. Was an educator prior to this job teaching Spanish at WSMSA. Recruited to help create more teachers. Graduate of DHS, WCSU and Central. In her second year for a doctoral degree. Came from Ecuador at the age of 12. Was a student of Upward Bound. Now has the opportunity teaching students that things are possible and they can make it to college, any college they want. Currently recruiting for rising 7th, 8th and 9th graders. Have reached out to middle school counselors and community programs like Jericho and churches. First virtual info session will be on 2/12/2021.
- Recruiting will begin on 4/1/2021 for the Minority and Bilingual Teaching and Computer Science Pipeline.
- R. Pote stated that they had a seven-week summer program during Covid. Did teaching pipeline in the Summer and Fall. Puts us in a good position to recruit more for that teaching pipeline.
- K. Molinaro asked how students are recruited.
- R. Pote stated that there are many different ways. The Excel program essentially services as a feeder program to the highschool component. Middle school counselors, advisors and teachers help identify students that will qualify for the program.
- J. Coronel stated that for the Minority Teaching and Computer Science Pipelines, they meet with the counselors at DIHS and explain the program. They then send out emails through Naviance or identify students interested in those careers. Reach out to programs such as child development, infant toddler and psychology to identify any students who may be interested in teaching. Before Covid, recruiting would be held in the cafeteria with a big sign to get interest.
- Funded through grants.

- R. Pote stated that originally the teaching pipeline came from the Department of Education in Hartford. He worked with Dr. Pascarella and Dr. Glass to try and secure some of that seed money. Problem with seed money is that it tends to dry out. Federal grant that targets students in dual enrollment courses.
- K. Walston and K. Thompson will be interviewing candidates.
- R. Pote stated that there are two coming through the WCSU program that will be applying for jobs in Danbury. There are about seven current Juniors for next year, all in our pipeline.

## SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT

- Portrait of a Graduate Update
  - A. Spallino stated that POG was going in one direction when it first started but they have since picked up with another facilitator who has really taken the team through once-a-month meetings, small group sessions and focus groups. Drilling it down to the five or six qualities that we want all of our students to have. Teachers, administrators, community, and students are involved. Everyone is committed to meeting that once a month and getting the job done. Would love to do a workshop for the Board.
  - K. Walston stated that he wants all to understand the connection of the POG and what this means for actual student experiences.
  - Had some work initially around mission and vision statements. Remains unchanged but has anchored us with our POG work.
  - Equity has been mentioned and discussed as part of our POG work and resonates throughout the discussions.
  - Parents, teachers, administrators, students, and folks in the business industry are involved. All have helped to inform Danbury's vision for the 21st century skills, character traits, and/or social-emotional competencies that students will need to succeed in college, career, and life.
  - Attributes landed on thus far are a communicator, collaborator, innovator, thinker, advocate, and self-reliant learner.
  - Timeline:
    - 2/8/2021 - 3/1/2021: Engage the community in focus groups to examine the categories and descriptors.
    - 3/12/2021, 4/20/2021, 5/4/2021 - Coalition meetings.
    - 5/12/2021 - BOE workshop to present POG slideshow.
    - 5/26/2021 - Propose BOE endorsement.
    - 5/12/2021 - 6/1/2021 - Submit all materials to Barr Foundation in conjunction with request for Round 2 funding.
- (Summit) College and Career Pathways Project Update/Ed Specifications
  - Dr. Casimiro stated that running concurrent to work of the POG has been work on flushing out the broader ideas behind the academy model. As we move ahead, will start to hold more formalized meetings with stakeholders around the academy model.
  - Currently in collaboration with the State as a pilot school working with representatives from the National Career and Academy Coalition.
  - Also working with Jay Steele, National Academy Coalition President.



- This ties in with POG because everything we do in POG with the academy model design will be intertwined.
- Dr. Pascarella stated that this project should be the venue for development of a budget. The next step is to look at a rising 8th grader and a rising 5th grader. This isn't just about the highschool.
- Reopening School In Person - Update
  - Dr. Pascarella stated that middle school students have been moving about the school after two weeks.
  - Going well. We are being challenged with staff and students being quarantined. That information is on the district website
  - Infection rate is going down. Down to 42 per 100,000 from 172 a few weeks ago.
  - Received information on 2/8/2021 that 65 and older in the district can be uploaded into VAMS for their vaccines. We don't know yet when the rest of the staff members will get their vaccines.
  - Dr. Casimiro stated that we are still in the process of gathering feedback on the opening. Working with folks to implement a meaningful way for students to connect from home during the school day. Also discussing a way to use some of the funds coming our way to take things to a level we could not do before. Revisiting some areas.
  - K. Truchsess stated that the goals across the SpEd Department and related services are looking to maximize instruction to students to make sure that they are making progress towards their individualized programs. In late November, started reentry by bringing high need SpEd students in for the hybrid model. Students did well and it was successful. Recognize that some of our higher needs SpEd students do have a need to be in person more. K. O'Dowd, K. Truchsess, medical advisors and Cabinet have been speaking about when it will be safe to bring in those students four days a week. This means that there will be cross cohorting of students, as the students will be coming in for both cohort A and cohort B. Going through different classrooms and environments looking to make sure they are making the safest choice first that also supports the students educationally. Have also engaged in conversations looking at some of the ELL newcomers to see if they would benefit from a very similar model.

## **INFORMATION**

- Dr. Pascarella stated that some schools are in person for elementary and DL for secondary. That is also a possibility when we have delays or school affected weather. The goal is to try to increase in school, in person learning.
- K. Thompson stated that we are in a holding period for vaccines right now. Happy to be able to put in about 160 names in the VAMS system for the 65 and over group. Will continue to share information as it becomes available.
- Dr. Pascarella stated the governor gave his State of the Union. None of this has passed yet but it looks as though our Alliance money is ok. The money from the government is in there but it is split over two years, even though we could use it all at once if we want. Also has the choice program on there for endorsement.

## **BOARD REPORTS, COMMUNICATIONS AND COMMENTS**

- J. DaSilva asked how many people are quarantined through DPS. K. O'Dowd stated that for the month of January, 159 cases were reported with 229 close contacts identified and 243 in quarantine. For the month of February 33 reported cases, 44 close contacts and 44 in quarantine. Those quarantined at the end of January and beginning of February have all returned. There has been no in school transmission.
- J. DaSilva asked that if bringing students into a four-day model and cross cohorting, is that also a bridge between two cohorts. K. Truchsess stated the majority of these students are in our self-contained programs and most are in a contained classroom. They would be exposed if they are in lunch or specials. Minimal exposures outside of the classroom but there are some and we are thinking through that.
- R. Chaleski stated that the City Building Committee met on 2/9/2021. There are three phases of construction for the Ellsworth addition: general construction, FF&E and playscape phase. They broke down projected costs of the school and administration part of it. Grand total would be \$11 million.
  - Planned Timeline:
    - Final state review on 3/2/2021.
    - Approval in early April.
    - Enter into a contract and begin construction in June.
    - Open for occupancy in 2022.
- R. Chaleski attended the DHS PTO meeting on 2/8/2021. Second virtual meeting this school year, 37 participants. Working on a beautification project for the campus. Purchased signage for the athletic entrance. One on the brick wall and a free-standing sign. Also focused on their Seniors in order to keep spirits up. Eager to learn what end of year activities will look like.
- R. Chaleski would like to have a Policy Committee meeting soon. Two SpEd policies that need to be updated. Need to continue policy audit and get back into a regular routine of meeting monthly. A meeting was set for 2/17/2021 at 6pm via zoom.
- R. Chaleski asked if all City Council members were extended the invitation to the Board meeting on 2/10/2021 as there were members in attendance?
- J. Britton thanked Councilmen Salvatore and Santos for attending.

## **EXECUTIVE SESSION**

MOTION: K. Conetta moved, seconded by K. Molinaro that the Board of Education convene in Executive Session for the purpose of discussing personnel matters.

**Motion carried at 8:46 pm**

## **PUBLIC SESSION**

The Board returned into Public Session with no action taken.

## **ADJOURNMENT**

The Board of Education adjourned its Meeting of February 10, 2021 at 8:55 pm.

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Kathleen Molinaro, Secretary

(Meeting was videotaped)