

**DANBURY BOARD OF EDUCATION MEETING
WEDNESDAY, APRIL 7, 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. G. Cooper requested a Moment of silence for Officer William Evans who was killed in Washington DC.

ROLL CALL

Present: Kate Conetta, Gladys Cooper, Loren Daly,
Joseph DaSilva, Kathryn Hodgdon, Richard Jannelli, Kathleen Molinaro, Amy Spallino,
Absent: Joseph Britton, Rachel Chaleski, Albert Russo (joined at 7:20 pm)
Also Present: Courtney Leborious, Kelly Truchsess, Kevin Walston, Dr. Casimiro, Kim Thompson

RECOGNITIONS

EXHIBIT

- Kimberly D'Auria, DHS Teacher awarded the Harvey Milk Sylvia Rivera Award Challenging Discrimination Related to Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation. 21-51 (pg.4)

K. Waltson described the selection process for this award, congratulated her and spoke about K. D'Auria and how her room is always open to students to find a safe place. K. D'Auria expressed her gratitude and appreciation and stated "Hope will never be silent, our young people relating to sexual orientation and identity deserve a safe environment (Harvey Milk). We can no longer stay silent".

- K. Conetta thanked K. D'Auria for her work in the community and appreciated her efforts to embrace equality.
- G. Cooper thanked K. D'Auria for being part of our Danbury community.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

- Oswaldo Chin
My name is Oswaldo Chin and I write in support of the school budget and to thank you for all the hard work you all do.
I also share the frustration of many parents who wish the schools would be fully open, but I am also aware of the great job our teachers are doing despite of lack of resources from our city and state. Thank you for a great job, I support our teachers and our school board officials.
- Maria Matos
Hello my name is Maria Matos. I am the programs manager for LEAD (Latinos for Educational Advocacy and Diversity). First I would like to thank the board for all of the hard work you are doing especially during these trying times. As you might know LEAD has been one of a coalition of groups working to bring another high quality educational option to our city. But today my testimony will not be about that. I am writing today again to reaffirm LEAD's commitment to work together with our

elected officials in order to bring more equity and representation for all. As we have mentioned before Latinos now make up the majority of the students in most of our schools and our ability to recruit and develop Latino teachers and administrators most now become one of the top priorities of the board. We need our students to have people in the classrooms that not only look like them but can also serve as role models. LEAD is willing to help in any way we can as we work together on this goal. LEAD would also like to continue to remind the board as it seeks a new superintendent that the Latino community in Danbury is severely underrepresented. That recruiting and well qualified Latino educational leader would be a great advancement for true equity and representation for our city. Finally I will also want the board to know that most of our job will be to bring educational opportunities and activities to our community. We invite board members to join us in our efforts to bring more people to the table and work for the common good of our community. We have partnered with the Health Department to bring access to vaccines and education to our hard to reach populations. We will be having an earth day activity on April 24th to teach our youth the importance of civic engagement.

If you are interested in learning more about our organization and ways in which we can partner please contact us. Again thank you for your continued service and we look forward to cooperating with you.

- Kathy Snow

I am writing tonight as I understand there is a good chance students at the high school will not be back in school full days in the fall. My understanding is this is due to cafeteria capacity at lunches. This is absolutely unacceptable and in my mind a cop-out on the part of Administration and the Cabinet. The cafeteria space issue has been known for a very long time and not having a solution in place is deplorable and a failure to our children. We have all heard over and over how the high school is the biggest in the state.....doesn't that also mean it has a lot of space? There is a huge cafeteria, outdoor courtyard, auditorium, black box theater, stadium and multiple gyms. I cannot believe there is not a plan in place. Have additional lunch waves been added? What about lunch in lieu of the flex period until we get through this? What about a lunch wave for students who are fully vaccinated? What are the capacity numbers if the tables are removed? These are young adults and I believe can handle eating without a tabletop if necessary.

Have you thought about the effects on students of only attending school for half days? Yet again students would be denied the ability to participate in after school activities or sports as they must leave school grounds at lunchtime and would need to use their own transportation or be driven back to the school. How is that fair and equitable? Many students rely on activities and sports to assist in getting them into college as well as to obtain scholarships. Not to mention the positive mental health benefits of after school activities; which I think we can agree are at critically low levels. How can you be OK with students not getting the chance to participate in these activities? The Administration and Cabinet need to make full day high school a priority. Come up with a solution so that the high school students can go back to school full days in the fall as you have done for every other grade in the District. Do not give up on these students as it appears you are, they are worth your effort. A concrete plan has to be worked out now.

- Christina Sweeney

During what has been a most challenging year for everyone, and particularly educators, I would like to express my gratitude for the building administrators, faculty, and staff at Rogers Park Middle School. Although distance and hybrid learning has been difficult, the administration, led by Dr. Zaleta has been communicative and responsive throughout the entire year. Every single school day, Dr. Zaleta posts a thoughtful (and beautifully edited, I might add) morning video that clearly outlines expectations as well as upcoming events and announcements for the students. Similarly, the teachers have been wonderful despite the enormous challenge they face teaching to two groups of students - online and in person - simultaneously, not an easy feat. The teachers at Rogers Park are, hands down, are an incredibly talented and committed group of educators. They have done their best to build connections with their students and help them learn under very difficult circumstances. Rogers Park Middle School is a diverse and vibrant community of learners, and aside from the restrictions required due to the pandemic, I could not be happier with the educational experience my son has received over the past two years. And, I would like to give a huge shout out to the incredible musical theater program the school offers. Unfortunately, I am also extremely disappointed to learn that the City Council has decided not to fully fund the BOE's approved budget. This shortfall only continues the tradition of the City Council not funding the needs of the schools for the past ten years, resulting in a school system at its breaking point. With everything that happened this year it has become exceedingly clear how critical our schools are to our families and the value they bring to our community.

- Oswaldo Chin

My name is Oswaldo Chin, yesterday I wrote an email to the board of education thanking for a such good job you all are doing and supporting the proposed school budget, that was before I had watched the City Council monthly meeting where Mayor Cavo presented his budget proposal. Today I write to make my support even stronger for the Board Of Education and for our teachers, but I would also want to repudiate as of how Mayor Cavo not only insulted our children and our teachers but deceived the citizens of Danbury by saying that he was giving an increase of 9.8 million to the board of education, when in reality the actual increase was 1.25 million only. Let me be clear, I was disappointed but not surprised by his action. The question is, why should he do something different when he knows that the same strategy worked and allowed his predecessor to stay in power for over twenty years. After seeing the actions of the former and current Mayor, it is clear that they do not care about our children and the only thing they really care about it is to give tax breaks to real estate developers and to stay in power. For so long we have asked and requested the Mayor and City Council to properly fund our public schools, no more, we must call them for who they are, not our children's friends and demand to do the right thing. If they do not listen to us, we must work to beat them on the ballot box, because these people will not do anything different unless they know that their power is in jeopardy. In closing I would like to encourage the board of education to spread the word to the whole city to inform and expose as of how the current party in power has a total disregard for its citizens and our children and make sure that when November comes, we all remember their names so we can reward them on the ballot box.

- Eavyn Fernandez

My Name is Eavyn Fernandez and I am a ACE graduate. Thinking back on the time I spent at the Alternative center for excellence I am overwhelmed with gratitude. I was very lucky

to have had the opportunity and option to find a school that was able to teach me in a way that felt accessible and fun. My freshman and sophomore year I attended Danbury high school however I quickly discovered that my personal learning style was not compatible with the way I was being taught. Luckily, the Alternative center for excellence accepted me and they were immediately able to help me in a way DHS couldn't. I often think back to my friends at DHS who also wanted access to find a school that worked for them but unfortunately they were not able to have the same experience as me. Again, I emphasize how lucky I was to get randomly accepted to attend ACE but as you all know the school is only able to help so many students and there are few other options in Danbury. I Hope that soon in the future Danbury students will be able to choose between charter schools, magnet schools, alternative schools, Montessori style schools or traditional schooling based on what is best for their individual needs. I hope in the future these options aren't limited to students lucky enough to win a lottery. Thank you for your time, have a great evening.

- Gabriela Perez

Hello everyone, my name is Raquel and I have two children; my first son currently attends an elementary school in Danbury and my second is 2 years old. I love both my boys dearly and feel lucky to be able to send them to school in a district where the students are so diverse. I am sure they will not only find friends from their own culture but also learn about a variety of cultures and become more socially conscious children. My only qualm with Danbury is that I feel this plethora of diversity does not extend to teachers and staff at these schools. As I have recently moved, I've been able to experience the demographics of two different schools and found that they were both pretty similar. While I still believe my sons will receive a great education, I still wish they were able to be exposed to teachers of various backgrounds so that all students are able to see themselves reflected in their role models. Please take this opportunity to think of how something that simple can change a child's perspective on education.

- Maria Sorrentino

Hello, I am a Danbury resident, a taxpayer, and had four children attend the Danbury Public Schools. They were successful and two had learning disabilities and still went on to college. I would like to correct one parent that claimed the Middle School Magnet had students from other districts. and inform that individual that the Tech school is state-run. Also, my thesis for my Master's Degree was on Charter Schools. These are facts: and I will send citations to anyone who wants them. Most charter schools are autonomous of the Board of Ed.directives. The Charter school model was based on the Parochial school model. The students wear uniforms and they are not required to provide free meals. The teachers of most charters are also not required to have a Certification in Education. The most successful charters do not provide SPED, ELL, or Bi-lingual programs. That is why they excel. Those that excel have what is known as a Skim and Purge System. That means if a student cannot keep up with the curriculum the student is asked to go back to a public school. My daughter was a teacher in a charter school in New Orleans (a city of color) and it was shut down after three years. The teachers were not paid well and they rarely stayed longer than a year. A private charter school does not have to follow the Common Core and many are backed by corporations that are about making a profit. The Walden Foundation (Walmart owners) made a profit putting students in sub-par buildings. My daughter taught in the basement with exposed pipes and mold. It was horrendous. The school with two other charters were shut down due to low performance. Kindly research

the most successful charter schools and you will find out that many do not always represent students of color or low income and if they do, those students have high GPAs. Charter schools tend to have contracts that delineate demands. They require parents to invest many hours of volunteer service and if they cannot keep up, the students are also asked to leave. Those single parents or parents that have 2 jobs cannot provide unreasonable volunteer hours. Many charters can choose to not have Phys Ed, Art or Music Depts. either.

CONSENT CALENDAR

EXHIBIT

MOTION: Kate Conetta moved, seconded by Joe DaSilva that the Board of Education approve the items on the Consent Calendar, Exhibit 21-52, through 21-53.

MINUTES

3/24/21 Regular Meeting	21-52 (pg.5)
3/31/21 Sites and Facilities Committee	21-53 (pg.16)

R. Jannelli asked to thank Colonial Subaru acknowledging the donation.

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

Absent: Rachel Chaleski, Joseph Britton

Motion carried at 7:25 pm

EDUCATIONAL STAFF REPRESENTATIVES REPORTS

- **NEA-Danbury Representative:** Erin Daly, President
 - None
- **DSAA: Dr. Kristy Zaleta, President**
 - Dr. Zaleta presented a Video of K-12 DPS Students Part 2. RPMS Bagpipe played by Mr. Gil welcomed students on St. Patrick's Day, showcased Holidays around the world, Vans patterns, and gardens. Pembroke Elementary showed classes during a pandemic, Hayestown featured DL and in class learning, Dr. Seuss Day and Art Work. Ellsworth showed Samantha on how to make a strawberry milkshake. Dr. Zaleta stated "This is what our students are doing".

STUDENT REPRESENTATIVES

- **DHS Representatives:** Jake Goodwin, Rebecca D'Ostilio
 - None
- **Ace Representatives:** Chris Johnston, Nicole Quizphe
 - ACE students participated in the 53rd annual Danbury Cultural Commission Poetry Contest. Students from grades 9 thru 12 submitted 30 of their original works.
 - The ACE graduation ceremony will take place on 6/10 at the Broadview Auditorium at 3 p.m. A special thanks to Edie Thomas and the hospitality of the

Broadview Team for allowing us to use their auditorium to be able to provide a graduation experience for our students, families, and staff.

- Planning for the ACE Renaissance Fair is underway. This day of student engagement is being led by english teacher Daniela Esposito, social studies teacher Kyle Trocolla, and art teacher Savannah Hastey.
- ACE will be hosting a Spring Career Day with virtual guest speakers to present careers that serve the community. This special day is being organized by Dianna Dinardo, DJ Jimenez, and Laura Blake.
- ACE would like to announce our March Student of the Month award winners: Larissa Medeiros and Tyler Scherer. We would also like to publicly acknowledge and congratulate our most recent students of the week: Keep up the great work!

ACTION ITEMS

SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT

● High School Graduation

- K. Waltson spoke about the Citywide PTO Meeting he attended and how parents had questions about the HS Graduation.
- Dr. Martins on behalf of the HS-We want to make the Graduation an important special event and make it a safe event. We need to follow CDC guidelines and will take input from the Senior Class and parents.
- She discussed 3 different options.
 1. Stadium-834 Students and faculty of 230. All Seniors only in attendance and live streaming the event for family and friends.
 2. Graduate over a series of 3 nights. Students can have 2 guests.
 3. Something like last year. Students sign up for a time slot and cars with guests with a photo opportunity area, this would be over 2 days. 6/10 and 6/11 with rain dates of 6/12 and 6/14.
 - J. DaSilva-Will the students be on the Field or on the stands? They would put the students on the field. Capacity for the stadium accounts for students walking in and out.
 - K. Molinaro-Will the Board be allowed to be on the field? Yes, it would be as usual, just no guests.

● 2021-2022 School Planning

- K. Waltson reiterated that the intention is that the 21-22 school year will be in person full time. Heard from many parents at the TW PTO Meeting with concerns about bringing students back in school full time. This can include having more resources to add additional building spaces and adding more staff. For K-5 with the 3ft minimum need to find an additional 89 classrooms.
- J. DaSilva-Is contemplating that DL will be an option? K. Walston-We are moving forward as if it is not going to be an option.

● Budget Update

- K. Waltson gave an overview of the Budget for 21-22. Reduced the ask from 14 million to 9 million because of the funds received from the state. They understand the financial difficulties from the City, need to partner with them. There is an increase in enrollment, and we need to plan for it.

- R. Jannelli-Does it make sense to give the Council a presentation to provide them all the information like a finance workshop? We need to find an opportunity to educate and continue to inform. R. Jannelli would like to set up a meeting. We need a commitment to fund the infrastructure.
- J. DaSilva-ESSER funds question, what can they be used for? C. LeBoriosis explained that it is not to supplant the budget. J. DaSilva recognizes the financial strains the city faces but feels the 1.5 budget proposed is an embarrassment.
- A.Russo-Understand the needs but realize that the City is in financial difficulties.
- J. DaSilva-Does the 1.5 cover the contractual obligations? C. LeBoriosis answered no, it does not cover.
- K. Conetta-The Mayor talked about a surplus, is it 3.5 M? C. LeBoriosis explained the surplus came from transportation (savings from not using the busses), energy savings (from not using the buildings) and health insurance (this number fluctuates, people did not go to the doctor as much because of pandemic). This money is for reserves not intended to be part of the operational budget.
- K. Conetta-Bringing information to the City Council can be very beneficial. Share with them the potential of the Career Academy to bring in revenues from tourism.:
- C. LeBoriosis gave a presentation on Budget update.
- Original Request-\$13.32M for 21-22
- Modified Request-\$9.13M for 21-22 (\$3.87M of ESSER\$ I and II funds) \$12M over next 4 years
- Mayor's Proposal-\$1.25M (add 0.9%)
- DPS is utilizing 1/3 of the ESSER funds over the next 4 years to offset some of the costs of these operational needs. If the City and State do not keep pace with our student's needs, we could face a \$30M shortfall by 2026. The priority for ESSER funds is to bring students back 5 days per week.
- R. Jannelli-Thank you to C. LeBoriosis. We need to educate and what the impact will be if we don't get the funds. Need to schedule a workshop.

INFORMATION

BOARD CHAIRPERSON'S REPORT

- G. Cooper would like to personally thank all the Board Members for their hard work and commitment to the BOE. Has been a very difficult year and nobody has complained, did what needed to be done as elected officials.
- Pleased to update for the search for the new Superintendent. Together we decided to retain a firm to help with the search. A subcommittee has been appointed to review the proposals from a list of consultants. This group will work to narrow the list and make recommendations to the Board. The full Board will interview a small number of them. The Board will formally retain one firm to help with the search. I will have updates at every meeting and hope to bring a new Superintendent to the district.

BOARD REPORTS, COMMUNICATIONS AND COMMENTS

- J. DaSilva-Site and Facilities Report. Looked at the preliminary draft of Spec for Career Academy. Hopefully will have something more final to present to

ADJOURNMENT

J. DaSilva moved, seconded by Conetta that the Board of Education adjourn its Meeting of April 7, 2021 and the meeting was adjourned at 8:32 pm.

Kathleen Molinaro, Secretary

(Meeting was videotaped)