

**BRISTOL WARREN REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE  
VIRTUAL BUSINESS MEETING**

Thursday, May 21, 2020

A virtual meeting of the Bristol Warren Regional School Committee was held on Thursday, May 21, 2020, via ZOOM Video Conferencing. Chairperson Schofield opened the meeting and called the Executive Session part of the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

**Present:** Erin Schofield, Chairperson; Adam Ramos, Vice-Chairperson; Brian Bradshaw, Treasurer; John P. Saviano, Secretary; Sheila Ellsworth, John Bento, Victor Cabral, Marjorie McBride, and Carly Reich; Jonathan T. Brice, Ed.D., Superintendent; Diane Sanna, Ed.D., Assistant Superintendent; Tina Fogell, Esq., Chief Operating Officer; Edward Clarke, Director of Student Support Services; and Mary Ann Carroll, Esq., District Solicitor; Kathryn Brown, Recording Secretary

**EXECUTIVE SESSION:**

The Committee may seek to convene in execution session in accordance with R.I. Gen. Law § 42-46-5(a) for the following:

1. **42-46-5(a)(1)** Job Performance of individuals - Said persons have been notified in advance, in writing, and advised that they may require that the discussion be held in open session.
2. **42-46-5(a)(2)** Litigation Updates

**MOTION:** Mr. Saviano made a motion to adjourn the executive session at 7:41 p.m.; seconded by Mrs. McBride.

The motion passed unanimously.

**OPEN SESSION**

Open session was called to order at 7:45 p.m. by Chairperson Schofield. Chairperson Schofield thanked everyone for their attendance and apologized that the previous executive session went over in time.

**OPENING BUSINESS**

Chairperson Schofield invited all present to join in the recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag.

**PUBLIC COMMENT/PUBLIC FORUM**

*Liz Cannavo-Gruber, Bristol, RI*

Mrs. Cannavo-Gruber stated that she is on the board of the Colt Andrews Parent Group and was speaking on behalf of our fourth grade teacher, our social worker, and our special education teacher at Colt Andrews as it was her understanding that these positions are being cut and that it was her understanding that the school district's budget was fully funded for this upcoming year. She urged the school committee to reconsider these decisions. With the pending regulation restrictions due to the current COVID-19 crisis, we may be in need of additional support staff to meet the social emotional needs our students have to fill the gap that distance learning has left. In addition, special educators will have more challenges in the coming year, and displacing a teacher for one year and needing to replace the teacher the following year is a short sighted decision in our fluid downtown community as that number could easily go up. The needs of our children must come

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first, and this is not the time to disrupt a school by making these staffing cuts that are instrumental in facing the challenges that we will have to overcome this upcoming school year.

*Ann Marie Shoppell, Bristol, RI*

Mrs. Shoppell asked how is cutting a fourth grade teacher, a social worker and special education teacher in the best interest of students? She added that it seems short sighted to cut a fourth grade teacher, especially when we will need to bring one back the following year. In turn, will we be facing a cut when looking to the upcoming school year of 2021-2022 for a fifth grade teacher? She agreed with Mrs. Cannavo-Gruber's statement about needing social emotional supports for our students and asked who is going to fill that gap? She also stated that she did not understand how we will be able to go without one of our special educators at Colt Andrews. She asked if Colt Andrews still had a Title I standing or did that change?

*Nathan Calouro, Bristol, RI*

Mr. Calouro expressed displeasure and frustration with the public comment process during these meetings as it is a one-way conversation and there is not a discussion or response to the questions raised by the public in this setting. Mr. Calouro stated that the Joint Finance Committee fully funded the budget request for 2020-2021 and asked how these budget cuts are going to support the goal of becoming a Top 5 School District in Rhode Island in the next 5 years? Mr. Calouro made a suggestion to move the executive session to the end of the meeting in order for the meetings to start on time.

*Tara Rudman, Bristol, RI*

Mrs. Rudman stated that she is a parent of a Colt Andrews third grade student and that she is concerned about the proposed staffing cuts. Both the special educator and the social worker at Colt Andrews have helped students, including her son, in supporting their social emotional needs throughout the year, especially during this pandemic. She asked that the school committee please keep these kids in mind when making these decisions.

*Shannon Gray, Bristol, RI*

Ms. Gray commented that as a parent of a second grade student at Colt Andrews and is a special educator in another district, she is concerned about losing these positions. She stated that her daughter is losing two members of her team and that there will be violations in IEPs if these staffing cuts are made.

*Elizabeth O'Shea, Bristol, RI*

Mrs. O'Shea commented that she is a parent of two third graders at Colt Andrews and is a Co-President of the Colt Andrews Parent Group. She stated that she was concerned about the cuts of three vital members of the Colt Andrews staff and that it will negatively impact students.

*Jessica Lazo, Bristol, RI*

Ms. Lazo shared that she is a parent of a Colt Andrews third grader. After working with Ms. Correia this year, her son went from a first grade level to a third grade level,

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he loves school, he says he is smart, and he loves to read. She stated that cutting these positions will negatively impact not only my son but other student's as well.

*Michelle Jones, Bristol, RI*

Ms. Jones stated that as a parent of a fourth grader at Colt Andrews and two eighth graders at KMS, she is concerned about cuts throughout the school district? She stated that she wanted to make my voice heard regarding the importance of the services being cut at the schools in being instrumental in student's education, their well-being and their lives.

*Daryl Gould, Warren, RI*

Mr. Gould stated that he is a parent of three children at KMS. He expressed concern regarding the process of public comment that Mr. Caluoro mentioned earlier. The School Committee needs to listen to the concerns of the public and answer their questions regarding these cuts being made as the school district's budget was fully funded for next year and the school district is operating with a surplus.

Chairperson Schofield commented in response to concerns about the public comment without discussion as the school committee can only discuss items listed on the agenda. Members of the public have to decide whether they want to attend and comment on the items on the agenda. Chairperson Schofield shared that the school committee wants to hear from the public and invited them to continue to reach out to all members and thanked everyone for their comments.

**APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

MOTION: Mr. Saviano made a motion to approve the May 11, 2020, School Committee Virtual Meeting Minutes; seconded by Mr. Bradshaw.

The motion passed unanimously (9-0).

**MOTION TO SEAL EXECUTIVE SESSION MINUTES**

MOTION: Mr. Saviano made a motion to seal the May 21, 2020, executive session meeting minutes; seconded by Mr. Bradshaw.

The motion passed unanimously (9-0).

**DISCUSSION/ACTION**

**Non-renewal of Certified Teachers**

MOTION: Mr. Saviano made a motion to approve the non-renewal of certified teachers; seconded by Mrs. McBride.

**DISCUSSION:**

Mrs. Ellsworth stated that an explanation is owed to the public in attendance on this agenda item as the JFC and both towns fully funded our budget request. The RI General Assembly Finance Committees have stated that state aid will be an average based on the previous three years funding received.

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Dr. Brice stated that this is not a situation of our own making, of the JFC's making or of either town's making. He commented that the school district is appreciative and thankful to the JFC and both towns for fully funding our budget request for the coming year.

School districts in Rhode Island have to adhere to statutory requirements and must notify teaching staff if they will be laid off by June 1st of each year. School superintendents lobbied to have the notification date moved to July 1 but the proposal was not approved.

As a result, staff were notified about these that they would be laid off at the conclusion of the school year and we reiterated in these meetings that these layoffs are precautionary in nature due to the budget uncertainty at the state level.

While the Joint Finance Committee (JFC) fully funded our budget for next school year, we are waiting for definitive information about revenue from state and local governments, final budget savings for this year due to COVID-19, as well as potential costs associated with COVID-19 related to reopening procedures, to inform our decisions moving forward.

I am absolutely proud of every member in the BWRSD as we are taking care of each other. This is an administrative issue that all superintendents within the state are dealing with regarding revenue issues and the state deadline.

The JFC fully funded our budget and we are so very thankful for this. If the revenues come in, it will be my recommendation to the school committee to recall all of the staff to their positions.

This is not about the towns, this is about what comes in through the state and federal levels regarding revenue.

Mr. Ramos thanked Dr. Brice for the thorough explanation of this decision. These are not decisions we want to make and there is no reason that these people are notified of a layoff, but want to make sure that all students have the personal care and attention to meet their needs. If we get all the money we expect in state aid, all of these people will be coming back. These cuts are not based on the budget but a contingency plan. We heard all of you and we share these sentiments. This is not our vision for our district and we hope that we do not have to implement this worst case scenario. He extended his apologies in regards to this decision and the level of uncertainty with this situation.

Mr. Bradshaw stated that this is not the desire of any School Committee members to make these decisions and apologized for causing this anguish. One of the things that has been shared with the school committee members over the past week is that there is a possible 10% cut in funding in the worst case scenario. It is unfortunate that we have to take this position to hedge our bets if the funding doesn't come

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through. We do not take these decisions lightly as we know they impact our community and individuals.

Mrs. Reich stated that the number of people who showed up at tonight's meeting is indicative of how many people who support education in our community. This news is unsettling and reiterated the sentiments of Mr. Ramos and Mr. Bradshaw. She thanked everyone for showing up and that the school committee heard their comments, concerns and asked that they continue to show up to share their concerns.

Mrs. Ellsworth stated that she does not understand why we are going down this road when we are fully funded by the JFC. She stated that she appreciated everyone who has spoken tonight, and as a parent it is disheartening to hear about these cuts.

Dr. Brice he has spoken with both town administrators and they cannot state definitively that they will be fully funding our budget. As a precaution, we had to make these cuts prior to the June 1st deadline. Because of the pandemic we are off cycle. Revenue cycles are off. What we really needed from the state was to move the statutory requirement to notify teachers regarding layoffs to be moved from June 1 to July 1. We have shared that there is a best case scenario and a worst case scenario. We do not have enough information that we will not be hit by the worst case scenario.

Mr. Cabral shared that these notices have to be made due to Rhode Island General Law and this is something that has to be done to protect the district. We hope that we can recall all of these positions and have all these teachers back. I have five granddaughters in the system and I want to see our district succeed.

Mrs. McBride thanked Mr. Cabral for his comments. We know that these decisions impact all of us. It is a shame that the unions on a state level could not come to an agreement on changing the date of these layoff notices

Chairperson Schofield stated that this is the toughest decision we have to make every year and it is taken seriously. We all have children and grandchildren in this district. We would not be doing this if we didn't care. She echoed Dr. Brice's statement that the state and federal government will fill the revenue hole and the school committee can recall all the staff that have been noticed. This decision had to be made prior to June 1 due to state regulations. If the towns cannot commit to the amount previously agreed upon due to the state and federal funding shortfalls, we have to make these unfortunate decisions.

The motion passed with an 8-1 vote, with Mrs. Ellsworth dissenting.

Interim Business Manager Contract

MOTION: Mr. Saviano made a motion to approve the contract of the Interim Business Manager; seconded by Mrs. McBride.

DISCUSSION:

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Mr. Ramos asked Dr. Brice to describe the recommendation and explain the rationale to all present on the call.

Dr. Brice stated that the recommendation is to hire an individual who currently works in the district as the interim business manager with a salary range that would be approved by the school committee. This individual would be provided with a one-year contract to allow this individual to work in the position while we continue to watch for a level of success that is needed for this position. Next year, I will come to you with a multi-year recommendation for a contract for this position.

Mr. Ramos thanked Dr. Brice for that explanation regarding the interim business manager contract. After hearing Dr. Brice's recommendation and the rationale for why he believe this individual is the right person for this position to serve the district, Mr. Ramos stated that he is in support of this recommendation.

The motion passed with a 7-2 vote, with Mrs. Ellsworth and Mr. Cabral dissenting.

Amendment of Previously Approved Administrative Contracts

MOTION: Mr. Saviano made a motion to approve the amendment of previously approved administrative contracts; seconded by Mrs. McBride.

The motion passed with a 7-2 vote, with Mrs. Ellsworth and Mr. Cabral dissenting.

ADJOURNMENT - 9:05 p.m.

MOTION: There being no further business to discuss, Mr. Saviano made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 9:05 p.m.; seconded by Mr. Bradshaw.

The motion passed unanimously (9-0).

Respectfully submitted,

John P. Saviano, Secretary  
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