

ANSONIA PUBLIC SCHOOLS BOARD OF EDUCATION

MINUTES

PLACE: ANSONIA CITY HALL

DATE: 06 JANUARY 2010

TIME: 7:10 P.M.

MEETING CALLED TO ORDER BY: PRESIDENT John Lawlor

I. OPENING

A. Pledge of Allegiance

B. Roll Call

MEMBERS OF THE BOARD	PRESENT	ABSENT	LATE (time)
MR. GEORGE BOATH	X		
MR. ROBERT CARUSO	X		
MS. FRANCES DIGIORGI	X		
MR. JOHN LAWLOR, President	X		
MR. WILLIAM NIMONS	X		
MR. CARMEN PITNEY	X		
MR. EDWARD SHARKEY	X		
TOTAL	7	0	0

II. PUBLIC SESSION

After asking three times if anyone wished to speak, Mr. Lawlor closed the public session.

III. ACTION ITEMS, CONSIDERATION OF APPROVING . . .

A. Ansonia Board of Education meeting minutes dated November 4, 2009 (regular), December 2, 2009 (organizational), December 2, 2009 (regular), December 3, 2009 (special), and December 9, 2009 (special)

MOTION: That the minutes dated November 4, 2009, (regular) be accepted as presented.

	MOTION	YES	NO	ABSTAIN
MR. GEORGE BOATH				X
MR. ROBERT CARUSO				X
MS. FRANCES DIGIORGI	2	X		
MR. JOHN LAWLOR, President		X		
MR. WILLIAM NIMONS		X		
MR. CARMEN PITNEY	1	X		
MR. EDWARD SHARKEY		X		
TOTAL		5	0	2

MOTION: That the minutes dated December 2, 2009,
(organizational) be accepted as presented.

	MOTION	YES	NO	ABSTAIN
MR. GEORGE BOATH		X		
MR. ROBERT CARUSO				X
MS. FRANCES DIGIORGI	2	X		
MR. JOHN LAWLOR, President		X		
MR. WILLIAM NIMONS		X		
MR. CARMEN PITNEY	1	X		
MR. EDWARD SHARKEY				X
TOTAL		5	0	2

MOTION: That the minutes dated December 2, 2009,
(regular) be accepted as presented.

	MOTION	YES	NO	ABSTAIN
MR. GEORGE BOATH	1	X		
MR. ROBERT CARUSO		X		
MS. FRANCES DIGIORGI	2	X		
MR. JOHN LAWLOR, President				X
MR. WILLIAM NIMONS		X		
MR. CARMEN PITNEY		X		
MR. EDWARD SHARKEY				X
TOTAL		5	0	2

MOTION: That the minutes dated December 3, 2009,
(special) be accepted as presented.

	MOTION	YES	NO	ABSTAIN
MR. GEORGE BOATH		X		
MR. ROBERT CARUSO				X
MS. FRANCES DIGIORGI		X		
MR. JOHN LAWLOR, President		X		
MR. WILLIAM NIMONS				X
MR. CARMEN PITNEY	1	X		
MR. EDWARD SHARKEY	2	X		
TOTAL		5	0	2

MOTION: That the minutes dated December 9, 2009,
(special) be accepted as presented.

	MOTION	YES	NO	ABSTAIN
MR. GEORGE BOATH		X		
MR. ROBERT CARUSO		X		
MS. FRANCES DIGIORGI	2	X		
MR. JOHN LAWLOR, President				X
MR. WILLIAM NIMONS				X
MR. CARMEN PITNEY	1	X		
MR. EDWARD SHARKEY				X
TOTAL		4	0	3

B. Resignation/Susan Skipp-Tittle/English/P.A.C.E.

MOTION: To accept the resignation of Susan Skipp-Tittle, English teacher at P.A.C.E. and send a letter of thanks.

	MOTION	YES	NO	ABSTAIN
MR. GEORGE BOATH	1	X		
MR. ROBERT CARUSO		X		
MS. FRANCES DIGIORGI		X		
MR. JOHN LAWLOR, President		X		
MR. WILLIAM NIMONS		X		
MR. CARMEN PITNEY	2	X		
MR. EDWARD SHARKEY		X		
TOTAL		7	0	0

C. Revisions to School Nurses' Policies, Procedures and Standing Orders

DISCUSSION: Superintendent Merlone explained that revisions were needed to our School Nurses' Policies, Procedures and Standing Orders. Dr. Casablanca, our school physician, made the revisions.

MOTION: To accept the revisions to school nurses' policies, procedures and standing orders as presented.

	MOTION	YES	NO	ABSTAIN
MR. GEORGE BOATH	1	X		
MR. ROBERT CARUSO		X		
MS. FRANCES DIGIORGI		X		
MR. JOHN LAWLOR, President		X		
MR. WILLIAM NIMONS		X		
MR. CARMEN PITNEY	2	X		
MR. EDWARD SHARKEY		X		
TOTAL		7	0	0

D. Race to the Top Education Grant – MOU

DISCUSSION: Superintendent Merlone explained that yesterday she along with Mr. Lawlor, Assistant Superintendent Diane Conway, and the president of the teachers' union, Michele Fraher, were invited to attend the Commissioner's meeting at ACES. She explained what this means for the State of Connecticut is \$175 million to be spent over a four year period. The State is applying for part of the \$4.35 billion of a competitive grant being awarded to states for adopting standards and assessments that prepare students to succeed in college and the workplace, building data systems that measure student success and inform teachers and principals about how they can improve instruction, recruiting, rewarding, and retaining effective teachers and principals, and turning around our lowest-achieving schools. This was put out to the 15 districts that did not meet Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). We were invited in the initial phase in November. Since then neighboring towns have been invited. This was broken up into three different levels. There are participating districts, involved districts, and collaborating districts. Ansonia is a collaborating district because we receive Priority District funding and because we are an urban district participating, and currently in our fourth year at Prendergast and fifth year at Mead of not meeting AYP. Superintendent Merlone said it's not mandatory to participate however, if we don't, some of this is going to be mandated anyways and that means we won't have the funding provided. Yesterday, the Commissioner said we could sign the memorandum of understanding (MOU) and the more signatures he receives the better the State's chance of getting funding. The Commissioner said we could pull out at any time. If the State gets the funding and Ansonia decides they don't want to go forward, we do not have to fill out the application. Mrs. Merlone said our portion would be based on a formula using our Title I allocation and it will not affect our regular Title I funding if we don't participate. Ansonia would receive \$584,760 over a four year period, which is \$146,190 per year because we would be a collaborating district. There are additional monies that we would receive because one-half of the money is allocated to support these initiatives for participating districts. One-half of the money will be allocated to support the State with providing CALI, for example, to the districts. Mr. Boath asked if because we are one of the collaborating districts we are on a higher level of priority for potential funding. Mrs. Merlone said yes. Mr.

Boath then asked if this money would dovetail our District Improvement Plan (DIP). Mrs. Merlone said if we look at the four goals what we are lacking is at the high school level. So, most of our money would be allocated at the high school level. We do not have enough credits toward graduation. They talk about science and math programs that are essential at that level for students to succeed in college and about collaboration between college and high school in order to make that work. Mr. Lawlor said a lot of our grant money would go for mandated secondary school reform. Mr. Lawlor said he was not able to attend the meeting yesterday but will take part in a telephonic version tomorrow of that meeting. He said he has collaborated with other Board Chairs. This may not be an ideal situation for certain school districts. On the surface, Mr. Lawlor said, he feels that this is a good deal for Ansonia. This will allow us to not only meet secondary education reform, it will allow us breathing room relative to the DIP. There is some concern with school districts relative to the MOU that is currently on the table. He said the Superintendent did indicate that the Commissioner has verbally indicated that there is an opt-out to the participation if we feel it is not right for us, some time down the road, but the MOU does not say that. Mr. Boath said he is not concerned about that. What he is concerned about are the penalties if we opt-out after receiving funding. Mr. Lawlor said it is his understanding that if we did opt-out and it isn't for a sufficient reason, certainly it is his understanding from what he has seen that the State could come back and require us to set up a plan to repay the funding received. There is some pushback right now from CAFE memberships and also school districts for the Commissioner to be a little more explicit with the MOU. The big concern, as we go through this process, there is a lot to do and will cost a lot of money if it turns into another unfunded mandate at some point in the future, will we still be required to do it or can we opt-out at that point? Mr. Boath said if we get through the four years and we have done everything that has been asked of us by the State through the program and then the grant money is no longer available through the State, what happens to any new hires that we have put in place? Superintendent Merlone said another concern was that the money be allocated directly to the districts and not to the city. The Commissioner said that he was going to push for that because he understands the difficulties that many districts have. Mr. Lawlor asked Mr. Gaskins, business manager, if a grant is allocated to the district it goes directly to the district. Mr. Gaskins said yes, pending any special situations that apply to this grant, we have had problems before. Generally speaking, all grants do come directly to the Board of Education. Mr. Lawlor said this is not a reason to not participate but obviously we know how others can view this. They will see us with extra money and take it away from something else. Mrs. Merlone said we are being held accountable to do this work. That money needs to be spent on staff in order to do the work. She said she believes that in order to move forward with this application, education is a main thrust here. We have to educate our community on this grant so that they have a full understanding because when it comes time to build our budget this could impact us greatly. Mr. Boath asked if this grant money would be managed through Mr. Gaskins in our operational budget or outside of our budget. Mr. Gaskins said it would not be part of our operational budget, as with all the other grants it would be managed in a separate fund for just grants and that line item for the city is a separate line item from our operational budget. Superintendent Merlone said if we are tied to this we need to be able to fund this and use the money for what we are supposed to achieve. Mr. Boath said there are more pluses than minuses right now and until there is an expenditure of funding, he doesn't think there is any harm with us engaging in the MOU. Mr. Lawlor said the Commissioner has indicated in a memo to the superintendents formalized outside of the MOU. If districts sign up and decide that between now and when the funding comes in, he will allow an opt-out. If we start receiving funds and then decide to opt-out his position is that there needs to be an agreement between both sides. Mrs. Merlone said the Commissioner does not expect us to receive this during the first round, whose deadline is January 19, 2010 and the award would be in April 2010. The second round would be June 1, 2010 and the award would be September 2010. If we did get the award it would come sometime in September. We have time to think about this. Once the funding is awarded, we have 90 days to make application. Mr. Boath said we can't count on this money until after our budget has been passed. Mrs. Merlone said correct. Mr. Lawlor said what the Board would be approving, if they do so, is to authorize the Superintendent and the Board Chair to sign the MOU so we could get back to the State prior to Monday of next week. As information continues to come in, Mr. Lawlor said, he would keep the Board apprised and if we feel that something comes in that is adverse to what we originally thought, then we could discuss it. Mr. Boath said this MOU is not binding us at this point; it locks in our willingness to participate. Mrs. Merlone said the teachers union met with her today and they have an addendum to the MOU. The AFT doesn't have a problem with this either. Mr. Boath asked what the substance of the addendum was. Mr. Lawlor read:

The LEA and the Ansonia Federation of Teachers agree to work in good faith over matters within the scope of the MOU assuming that the grant is funded. However, nothing in this MOU shall be construed to waive, alter or otherwise effect rights or duties as provided by the Teachers Negotiation Act (Connecticut General Statutes §10-153a-n) or any Federal or State statutes or regulations or terms of the collective bargaining agreement or past practice of the parties. The areas subject to collective bargaining will be implemented only upon a written agreement between the LEA and the Ansonia Federation of Teachers.

By way of the signature below, the LEA and local collective bargaining representative agree to collaborate in good faith over matters within the scope of the MOU and agree further that those portions of the MOU subject to collective bargaining shall be implemented only upon the agreement of the LEA and the local collective bargaining representative.

Mr. Nimons asked, what happens after the end of the four years, when we have people on staff and the grant runs out? Mrs. Conway said do you mean if we use the money to hire staff? Mr. Nimons said yes. Mrs. Conway she doesn't know if that is necessarily the case. Mr. Nimons said his concern is if we put people on staff and the grant ends we would have to fund those salaries from somewhere else. Mrs. Conway said when you look at the four goals that the State has, the State intends to achieve these goals in the four years. They are, for example, to participate in building a national common standards and assessments, we would participate in helping with that. She said she doesn't know if that would necessarily mean more staff. Mr. Nimons said his concern is if we set up an infrastructure funded by the grant, the grant ends in four years, the fifth year we are stuck with it. Mr. Lawlor said that is a valid point, it is our responsibility as a district and as a Board to make sure we are smart in how we perform within the scopes of this project and whether we actually need people to do that. Mr. Boath said he thinks we do because if we are going to increase the number of credits at the secondary level we have to hire teachers. Mrs. Merlone said we have to hire more teachers, that is going to be a mandate whether we accept this money or not. Mr. Nimons said, so in the fifth year this will be an unfunded mandate and we are stuck with it. Mrs. Merlone said yes. Mrs. Conway said if we participate then we get a chance to work on this with that State and have input. If we don't participate it is going to be done to us. They will still mandate this without the money. Mr. Lawlor said secondary reform is right around the corner. Mrs. Merlone said the 25 credits are going to be a mandate, whether we start it four years from now or we start it now, wouldn't it be better to start it now and receive funding? We can't put structures in that we don't need; we have to put the structures in that we only essentially need, which are the electives to meet the credits so our high school is an accredited school. Mr. Boath said once we are put into the program and accepted; when we receive funding there will be a formal agreement between us and the State outlining what our rights and obligations are. We will be getting ahead of the curve a little bit.

MOTION: To authorize the Superintendent and the Board Chair to execute the Memorandum of Understanding for the Race to the Top application.

	MOTION	YES	NO	ABSTAIN
MR. GEORGE BOATH	1	X		
MR. ROBERT CARUSO		X		
MS. FRANCES DIGIORGI		X		
MR. JOHN LAWLOR, President		X		
MR. WILLIAM NIMONS	2	X		
MR. CARMEN PITNEY		X		
MR. EDWARD SHARKEY		X		
TOTAL		7	0	0

IV. INFORMATION ITEMS

A. Assistant Superintendent's Report/District Improvement Plan (DIP)

ATTACHMENT #1

DISCUSSION: Diane Conway, Assistant Superintendent, reported on the DIP and gave the Board three handouts, the District Improvement Plan Quick Reference, the Fall Reading Benchmark Free/Reduced Eligible vs. Non-Eligible, and the Sign-up Form for CALI Data Showcase Conference. She said in the DIP the monthly results indicators, everything in the December column has been completed and by the end of January all of January's will be completed. Mr. Lawlor asked about parent involvement in the November column. Has that been completed? Mrs. Conway said we are late with that. The building principals have collected how many parents attended the teacher conferences. That will be brought to the District Data Team next week. We want to see how many parents are involved with their child's education. We are trying to get parent and community involvement. Mr. Lawlor asked if there are any ideas in how to do this. Mrs. Merlone said we are going to set up forums to invite the parents and the community to go through what we are doing so that they have some knowledge. These forums would also be opened up to questions anyone might have. Hopefully once we do that, the Superintendent said, she would get more attendance at her community meetings. Mrs. Conway showed the Board banners she had made with the mission/vision statement. She would like to have these displayed around the City. Mrs. Merlone said we have to let the parents know that their students need their support and that they have to take education more seriously.

There was a discussion on the Fall Reading Benchmark handout regarding the third column for each grade. Mrs. Conway said she would get clarification on that and get back to the Board. Mr. Boath asked, using this chart as a guide, what would be considered a good number to achieve across the board in terms of a percentage? Mr. Lawlor said he isn't sure if this information is intended to determine that. Mr. Boath asked, what is the goal? Mrs. Merlone said an increase of at least 5% in each subgroup, by the end of the year. We are supposed to be closing the gap. Ms. Gabrielson, special education director, said benchmark testing tests information prior to students having been instructed in some of it. It is supposed to measure growth over the year as skills are taught by teachers and acquired by students. Mrs. Conway said we are not happy with this but it looks like our CMT's.

Mrs. Conway said every year CALI has a showcase to show what districts have been successful in data teams. Ansonia has been asked to present at the April 2010 CALI Data Showcase Conference.

Mr. Lawlor said there is a lot going on, how is the staff reacting? Mrs. Conway said the staff is settling down a little with the new curriculum. We need to address with the teachers what is going well and what isn't going well. Mr. Lawlor asked with the new curriculum in place is it correct to assume that we could use this to determine if our curriculum is working. Mrs. Conway said the curriculum will not be totally in place for three years. What is not in place is the monthly pre and post assessments. We are also creating performance tasks which are what tasks our students can do that are engaging that cause them to apply this knowledge so that we could see that they are learning. We are missing key pieces. Mr. Lawlor asked, we don't have to wait three years to see these bars move? Mrs. Conway said no, but we have a long haul ahead of us. We have grade three students who cannot read at a third grade level. Mrs. Merlone explained that the Mead School afterschool program where teachers cross over and know exactly which students are not performing well in different areas. Mr. Goldson, principal of Mead School, said we have the Charger Club, for grade 6-8 students, and the CMT Prep Program, for grade 3-5 students, and we try to target those students who have just missed proficiency in the CMT's. We are not getting support from the parents. We have students who should be attending the programs and are not. Mrs. Merlone said we are now in the process of sending letters to those parents. Mr. Lawlor asked if anyone has thought about some way of tying in parents' performance into the overall performance of the students. Can we do that? Mr. Goldson said some schools have parent contracts. Ms. Gabrielson said that is part of the goal for parent involvement in the DIP. If you increase parent involvement, education, understanding, and awareness then theoretically you are going to see student improvement occur. Ms. DiGiorgi asked about the parents who don't speak English. Ms. Gabrielson said they were taking with Reina Marasco from Valley Regional Adult Education about developing and making parents aware of that program that would help adult English language learners acquire more proficiency in the English language. Also, helping them improve their own skills. Ms. DiGiorgi said a lot of these people don't have transportation or babysitters and cannot get to those classes.

Mr. Boath asked if there would be any benefit to grouping students who are identified as low performers for whatever reason. Ms. Gabrielson said that is the SRBI model. We tier students according to the intensity of their need in different areas and those groups could be fluid. It takes 3-5 years to get SRBI completely up and running so that you are seeing the end results that you are hoping for. Mrs. Merlone said we had to start implementing this in July 2009. We are further along than a lot of districts. Mrs. Conway said we are asking classroom teachers to group students all the time.

B. Special Education Director's Report

ATTACHMENT #2

DISCUSSION: Ms. Gabrielson explained her report to the Board. No questions were asked.

C. Technology Report

ATTACHMENT #3

DISCUSSION: Mrs. Turner gave her report to the Board members. She also spoke about the replacement of the student information system. She said she is in the process of writing an RFP to replace WinSchool, our current student information system. Mr. Lawlor asked, where are we with identifying a new system. Mrs. Turner said the group has looked at several products, and she will be formally presenting details about student information systems at next month's meeting. Mr. Lawlor asked if we are on track in having a new system in place for next school year. Mrs. Turner said yes.

D. Financial Reports

ATTACHMENT #4

1. 2009-2010 Year to Date

DISCUSSION: Mr. Gaskins explained the financial report. We are proceeding this year in a controlled and cautious manner. The spending freeze is in place. Regarding the 2008-2009 audit, there is no exception for a due date for the Board of Education so the audit for the Board of Education is filed. They have filed for an extension for the audit for the City.

Mr. Gaskins said the 2010/2011 Board of Education budget has been approved at 4.9%.

In looking at the projections, Mr. Gaskins said, there are a few items of note. The certified salaries project a balance of \$20,000 that is expected to go up. We are completely revising the estimates around February 1st. There is a mid-year step movement for teachers this year. This district continues to have high turnovers on every level, non-certified as well.

The reason for the projected deficit in the benefits grouping is mostly because of unemployment and are accounting for the maximum projection liability Mr. Gaskins said.

Mr. Gaskins said he expects the utilities surplus to go up. Pupil transportation routinely is a projected deficit right now because of reconfiguration. We have regular education students that need out-of-district transportation. Mr. Gaskins explained the good news with the special education tuition line is that we projected a surplus of \$80,000. This is significant and shows a trend in management and in budgeting. We have moved in the right direction. Mr. Lawlor asked what is driving that. Ms. Gabrielson said change in residency status. She said Mr. Hunt did some residency checks this week found that one of the higher tuition students parent resides in Shelton and is checking on another student as well. Mr. Lawlor asked, in that particular case, do we ask for a refund? Ms. Gabrielson said we have in the past and have not been successful. Mr. Gaskins

said the reason for a surplus now is not only because of management or student enrollments; it has to do with the budgeting factor. This line item has been increased to match actual expenditures. It used to be significantly under funded. Mr. Lawlor said the same goes for the transportation line.

Mr. Gaskins explained telephone is projected to be over budgeted for the year. The telephone line item is ERate funded, up to 80% for certain things based on what the federal government approves for any given year and there are different tiers.

Altogether, Mr. Gaskins said, we are projecting 99.65% of our budget expended, at the time of this projection. That would leave us with a balance of \$90,000.

Mr. Gaskins said as we receive new grants, the funding in the grant report is substantially growing, primarily because of the ARRA funding. We will be going to BOAT to request a budget change for their line item so that we match. Mr. Lawlor added, which is what the City requested us to do.

2. Athletics

DISCUSSION: No questions were asked.

3. Food Services

DISCUSSION: No questions were asked.

4. Grants

DISCUSSION: No questions were asked.

5. Other Income

DISCUSSION: No questions were asked.

E. Enrollment

DISCUSSION: No questions were asked.

F. Attendance Officer's Report

DISCUSSION: Superintendent Merlone said Mr. Hunt has done some residency checks but didn't send in a report.

G. Teacher Absences

DISCUSSION: No questions were asked.

H. Notes from the Desk of the Superintendent

ATTACHMENT #5

DISCUSSION: The Superintendent presented her notes to the Board members. Mrs. Merlone said she has asked the administrators to participate in the Lighthouse Project. Mr. Boath asked how many administrators expressed interest in participating. Mrs. Merlone said most all of the administrators will be attending the meeting. Mr. Lawlor said the next Lighthouse Project meeting will be held at 6:30 p.m., January 14th at A.H.S.

Mrs. Merlone spoke about having an entrance type screening for kindergarten students and look to make decisions, as other districts do, in order to decide whether to put the children in full day or part day kindergarten. She said she will keep the Board apprised. We are looking to set up criteria rather than a lottery. This would substantiate our reason for putting children in full or part day kindergarten.

The Superintendent said she has asked the guidance counselors at the high school and Mr. Dobbins to meet with Reina Marasco, to look at our students that are 17 or 18 years old and still registered as sophomores. They could continue their education in the Continuing Education Program and get a diploma. This is not considered a GED. No one will be forced out. It is just another avenue of getting a high school diploma. We want to make sure that students have every opportunity to graduate. That is our main agenda here.

I. Additional; Administration or Board of Education

DISCUSSION: None.

V. ADJOURNMENT

MOTION: To adjourn the meeting at 8:45 p.m.

	MOTION	YES	NO	ABSTAIN
MR. GEORGE BOATH		X		
MR. ROBERT CARUSO	1	X		
MS. FRANCES DIGIORGI	2	X		
MR. JOHN LAWLOR, President		X		
MR. WILLIAM NIMONS		X		
MR. CARMEN PITNEY		X		
MR. EDWARD SHARKEY		X		
TOTAL		7	0	0

NOTE: The Board of Education members were given handouts, the Ansonia Public Schools January 2010 Calendar of Events, the Ansonia High School, Ansonia Middle School, and Prendergast School January 2010 calendars, and the Prendergast School newsletters.

Respectfully submitted,

Fran Perrotti
Recording Secretary
January 11, 2010