

**TOWN OF SIMSBURY
BOARD OF EDUCATION**

Record of Proceedings

Regular Meeting

September 10, 2024

Mr. Jeff Tindall called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m. in the Board of Education Conference Room.

Roll Call:

Members present: Mmes. Jen Batchelar, Tara Willerup and Lydia Tedone. Messrs. Jeff Tindall, Brian Watson and Josh Falco. Ms. Jessica Parise arrived at 6:56 p.m.

Members absent: Ms. Sharon Thomas

Also present: Superintendent Matt Curtis, Assistant Superintendent Sue Homrok-Lemke, Assistant Superintendent Neil Sullivan, Director of Infrastructure & Technology, BOE Student Representative Macie Goetz and Recording Secretary Katie Wilde.

RECOGNITIONS

Mr. Curtis introduced the 2025 Simsbury Teacher of the Year, Diane Tobio. Diane teaches Spanish to grades 3-6 at multiple elementary schools. Mr. Curtis spoke about Diane’s energy during her speech at Convocation and the importance of teacher voice in the district. He noted the positive energy and juice that Diane brings to the district. Ms. Tobio noted the feeling of support and love that has continued into the school year, along with the feeling of community.

Recognitions

PUBLIC AUDIENCE

Lori Boyko, 14 Oakhurst Road, expressed concern that the schools are adopting curriculum on how to speak and grading students on their social interactions. She stated that she doesn’t believe students should be asked to use the same dystopian speech, noting that she doesn’t want her child to be friends with some of the other students. Ms. Boyko suggested that the district is teaching social achievement while academics are abysmal. She asked when the board adopted the Everyday Speech curriculum.

Public Audience

COMMITTEE REPORTS/BOE COMMUNICATIONS

Mr. Falco reported that the Communications Committee will be scheduling a meeting soon. Ms. Tedone stated that CAFE is working on their educational platform, CREC had their 50 anniversary celebration, and advocacy continues at the federal level.

Communications

Mr. Casey stated that the Simsbury Fire Marshal performed the annual inspections at the schools prior to the start of the school year, and all schools passed inspection. Mr. Tindall thanked the central office staff for their hard work over the summer working on a lot of big issues.

Ms. Goetz reported on the Encouraging Words campaign, as well as back to school assemblies and activities at the elementary schools. She noted that fall sports are underway at SHS. Ms. Goetz stated that the student cell phone policy is going well and September 23-27 is spirit week that will include a spirit rally.

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

A. Approval of Minutes of June 11, 2024 Meeting

Mr. Watson: MOVE to approve the minutes of the June 11, 2024 meeting.

Mr. Falco: Seconded. So moved. Ms. Tedone and Ms. Willerup abstained.

Approval of
Minutes of June
11, 2024

B. Personnel

Ms. Tedone: MOVE that the Board of Education accept the resignations of William Antonitis and Kelly Dell'Aera effective June 30, 2024; Amy Joyce effective July 16, 2024; Rebecca Levine effective July 1, 2024; Melissa Nimmo effective July 31, 2024 and Erin Szymanski effective September 20, 2024.

Mr. Watson: Seconded. So moved.

Ms. Willerup: MOVE that the Board of Education accept the notice of intent to retire of Sharon Geoghan effective June 30, 2027.

Ms. Batchelar: Seconded. So moved.

Mr. Sullivan reviewed the list of new faculty who were hired over the summer in 5 of the 7 schools. In response to Mr. Tindall, he stated that we have one vacant position for a Speech and Language Pathologist.

Personnel

C. Review and Approval of 2025-26 School Calendar

Ms. Willerup: MOVE to approve the 2025-26 school calendar as presented.

Ms. Tedone: Seconded. So moved.

Approval of
2025-26 School
Calendar

D. Acceptance of Gift from Central School PTO

Ms. Willerup: MOVE that the proposed gift of \$9,100 to Central School by the Central School Parent-Teacher Organization be approved.

Ms. Batchelar: Seconded. So moved.

Gift from Central
School PTO

E. Acceptance of Gift to Tariffville School

Ms. Batchelar: MOVE that the proposed gift of \$3,430 to Tariffville School by Lawrence Paul White be approved.

Mr. Watson: Seconded. So moved.

Gift to Tariffville
School

F. Acceptance of Gift to Tootin' Hills PTO

Ms. Tedone: MOVE that the proposed gift of \$7,249 from the Tootin' Hills PTO be approved.

Gift to Tootin'
Hills PTO

Ms. Willerup: Seconded. So moved.

INFORMATION AND REPORTS

A. School Year Opening Report

School Year
Opening Report

Ms. Lemke stated that this year's Convocation theme was around a continuation of the Olympics, carrying the torch of excellence into the school year. She addressed 3 goals areas from the Strategic Plan and the priorities for the school year. Student success includes elementary curricular updates and a curricular review of math, PE/Wellness, and library media. Positive school culture addresses how we go about our business each day and the implementation of the Encouraging Words campaign. Premier workforce includes the new educator evaluation plan and providing quality feedback.

Ms. Lemke reviewed student learning data. The Smarter Balanced Assessment (SBA) results for grades 3-6 are 77.8% at or above benchmark in ELA and 76% in math. These results rank Simsbury 2nd and 3rd in DRG B respectively. In grades 7-8 73.4% are at or above benchmark in ELA and 59.8% in math. Simsbury ranks 10th and 15 in DRG B respectively. Ms. Lemke noted that rankings are climbing at the elementary level and there is a correlation with math performance and THINK math pilot classrooms. She stated that percentages for grades 7-8 are not what we want them to be and there will be an instructional focus at HJMS this year, as well as a math curriculum review.

Mr. Tindall expressed concern with the HJMS rankings. Ms. Lemke stated there will be a focus on instructional practices in non-honor math classes. In response to Ms. Batchelar, Ms. Lemke noted that a strong cohort had moved to SHS and the incoming 7th grade class was a strong cohort in 6th grade. Mr. Watson asked if moving 6th grade to HJMS would help. Ms. Lemke stated that the administration is looking into that now. Ms. Parise questioned whether the scores at the elementary level are consistent across the 5 schools. Mr. Curtis responded that a breakdown will be provided in the elementary curriculum report to the board. In response to Mr. Falco, Mr. Curtis stated that Mr. Baker will provide historic data in his HJMS academic report to the board.

Ms. Lemke provided the Next General Science Standards (NGSS) scores for grades 5, 8 and 11. Grade 5 has a rating of 70.7% at or above benchmark, with a DRG B ranking of 10. Grade 8 has a rating of 74.8% at or above benchmark, with a DRG B ranking of 4. Grade 11 has a rating of 86.6% at or above benchmark, with a DRG B ranking of 1. Ms. Lemke stated that there will be continued focus on strengthening grade 5, noting that 7th grade is when students start having science every day.

Ms. Lemke provided grade 11 SAT ELA data with 85.3% at or above benchmark, ranked #1 in DRG B; in math 60.0% at or above benchmark, ranked #2 in DRG B. She stated that ELA scores increased by 5% and math by 0.6% over last year. Benchmark scores are 530 in ELA and 480 in math.

Mr. Sullivan reported on New Teacher Orientation with 20 new educators coming to the district. He reviewed the 3 day orientation schedule. Mr. Sullivan presented new certified staff experience, noting that 66.7% of new certified staff have 0-5 years of experience. He pointed out that we are mindful of the budget when hiring new

teachers. Mr. Sullivan noted that 66.7% of new staff have a master's degree or higher.

Mr. Sullivan addressed the August 30, 2024 school enrollment. The 4,069 enrollment is 35 fewer students than on October 1, 2023. Mr. Sullivan stated that an additional 1st grade class was added at Latimer Lane School due to enrollment. He noted that enrollment at HJMS is the largest it has been in a long time and there are 3 full teams in both 7th and 8th grade. Mr. Tindall asked if enrollment is increasing at the lower grades. Mr. Sullivan responded that affordability in Simsbury, for young families, may be the reason those grade levels are not increasing. Mr. Curtis pointed out that the Kindergarten starting age legislation is also affecting the elementary cohort.

Mr. Casey introduced Kyle Loveland, Supervisor of Maintenance, and noted that this summer saw the most facility improvement projects completed. He provided an update on the Latimer Lane School project, stating that the project is ahead of schedule and the nurse's and main office should be completed by the end of October.

Mr. Casey addressed technology in the district, noting the addition of 965 Chromebooks and a refreshed copier fleet which allows staff to print at the copier using their FOB. He stated that relative to security, upgrades were made to our cameras with digital cameras replacing analog cameras. Additionally, some cameras were added to buses. Mr. Casey stated that the FOB system at 4 of the schools was replaced so that now all 7 schools are on the same system.

Mr. Tindall asked if behavior on the buses has improved with the addition of the cameras. Mr. Curtis responded that the cameras were installed in April and if there is an issue a parent can watch their child's behavior on the bus. In response to Ms. Parise, Mr. Sullivan stated that the cameras are in full view to the children. Mr. Casey noted that the cameras can be moved to different buses if there is need.

Mr. Casey addressed the maintenance projects completed over the summer. Partial roof replacements were completed at Tariffville and Central Schools and a plumbing overhaul was done at Tootin' Hills School. Mr. Casey stated that the maintenance staff made HVAC improvements at SHS, Central, Tariffville and Squadron Line schools utilizing reallocated equipment from Latimer Lane School. Painting and flooring improvements were made in 20 locations at 6 of our schools.

Mr. Casey spoke about projects moving forward. He stated that the addition of 4 irrigated grass fields at SHS would help to regulate practice times for SHS athletic teams. HVAC improvements will likely occur as CT Statute now requires that regular assessments of our systems be done. Striping of parking lots, playgrounds and courts will be completed. A partial roof replacement at Tootin' Hills School and the replacement of seating and flooring in the SHS amphitheater have already been funded and will be completed next summer. An additional 2 buses and 1 van are on order and were also previously funded.

Mr. Falco asked if we sell outgoing buses. Mr. Casey responded that we must certify that they've been destroyed. Mr. Sullivan noted that Salters scraps everything possible. Ms. Batchelar asked if all bus driver positions are filled. Mr. Sullivan responded that we have the same number of drivers as last year, enough to start the year.

B. Policy Second Reading

Mr. Sullivan stated that this is the second reading to add a Finance Committee to the BOE By-Laws. The board will vote on the revision at the next meeting.

PUBLIC AUDIENCE

Lori Boyko, 14 Oakhurst Road, stated she moved here for the schools and academics and paid more in taxes to do so. She stated that she expects Simsbury to be at the top of the DRG and is concerned that 40% of 11 grade students taking the math SAT are not at or above goal. Ms. Boyko stated that social and emotional learning time should be used for academics, expressing concern that funds, teachers and curriculum have been moved toward special education leaving the kids in the middle to get squeezed.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

Ms. Tedone: MOVE to enter Executive Session to discuss the possible acquisition of real estate, and include Mr. Curtis, at 7:59 p.m.

Ms. Batchelar: Seconded. So moved.

ADJOURNMENT

Ms. Willerup: MOVE to adjourn the meeting at 8:27 p.m.

Ms. Parise: Seconded. So moved.

Sharon Thomas
Secretary

Katie Wilde
Recording Secretary

Policy Second Reading

Public Audience

Executive Session

Adjournment