

**Regular Meeting
Stafford Board of Education
Pinney Administration Building
Monday, September 22, 2008**

Board Members Present: Mr. Mark Fontanella, Chairperson
Mrs. Sandy Fowler, Secretary
Mrs. Lisa Bradway
Mrs. Lisa Finch
Mrs. Tracy Rummel
Ms. Julie Stafford

Also Present: Dr. Therese G. Fishman, Superintendent of Schools
Mr. Michael Bednarz, Director of Curriculum and Instruction
Miss Katie Bradway, Student Representative
Ms. Linda DeSantis, Teacher, Stafford High School
Mrs. Meg Devlin, Financial Analyst
Mr. Francis Kennedy, Principal, Stafford High School
Dr. Daniel Lefebvre, Director of Pupil Services
Mr. Gary Shearer, Teacher, Stafford High School
Mr. Hank Skala, Principal, Stafford Elementary School
Mr. Kenneth Valentine, Principal, Stafford Middle School

The meeting was called to order at 7:02 p.m. A quorum was established.

ITEM I. Secretary's Report- Approval of Minutes

Regular Meeting, September 8, 2008
Special Meeting, September 9, 2008

A consensus of the Board approved the Secretary's Report for the regular meeting held on September 8, 2008, and the special meeting held on September 9, 2008, as presented.

ITEM II. Treasurer's Report

A. Report on Bills

<u>Bills:</u>		
	September 10, 2008	\$515,393.32
	September 17, 2008	\$582,417.05
<u>Grants:</u>		
Federal	September 9, 2008	\$ 14,280.32
State	September 9, 2008	\$ 5,157.97
State	September 17, 2008	\$ 8,015.71
Federal	September 17, 2008	\$ 2,711.80

A consensus of the Board approved the board bills and grants as presented.

ITEM III. Correspondence

There was no correspondence.

ITEM IV. Board Reports

Mr. Fontanella gave a brief update regarding the special Board meeting that was held on Tuesday, September 9, 2008. He reported that this meeting was very productive and that the Board intends to continue having these meetings a few times each year.

Miss Katie Bradway reported that there are three foreign exchange students at the high school this year. She noted that they are from Finland, Thailand and Estonia, and the students speak fluent English.

Miss Bradway also reported on the following topics:

- ❖ The high school band and color guard performed at the Big E on Sunday, September 21.
- ❖ The seniors raised \$300 at the car wash on Sunday, September 21.
- ❖ The first home football game will take place on Friday, September 26, at 7 p.m.
- ❖ Parent / teacher conferences will be held on October 2.
- ❖ SAT's will be administered on Saturday, October 4.
- ❖ Progress reports will be distributed on Thursday, September 25.
- ❖ October 6 and 7 is the last chance for senior pictures.
- ❖ A Partners in Education (PIE) meeting will be held on October 7.
- ❖ The high school variety show will be held on October 16.

Dr. Fishman noted that the October dates that were given as possible dates for the high school dedication ceremony were not good for the members of the building committee. The new tentative dates are Sunday, November 9 or Sunday, November 16. Mrs. Fowler stated that she would not be available on November 16, but that they should go on without her if that date was good for everyone else.

ITEM V. Superintendent's Reports

A. First Week of School Attendance

Dr. Fishman stated that student attendance was reported to the Board for the first three days of school, which were Wednesday, August 27, Thursday, August 28, and Friday, August 29. Dr. Fishman noted that the figures on the attendance report were not the district's official enrollment numbers. The official enrollment data will be collected on October 1, 2008.

As compared to October 1, 2007, enrollment data, which was 1,905 students, the district's attendance numbers seem to have declined slightly to 1,895 students. Dr. Fishman noted that the district is seeing the same trend as is being seen statewide. This trend is a gentle decline in enrollment in suburban / rural areas,

which is expected to continue until about 2015, while city enrollments should be increasing.

Mrs. Fowler noted that absenteeism seemed to be much higher on Friday, August 29. She asked if this could be due to starting school before Labor Day. She stated that she would like to look at that information more closely when the Board considers the school calendar for 2009 – 2010.

Mr. Fontanella noted that the attendance figures could also be down slightly due to the students that are now attending magnet schools.

B. CMT Results and District AYP Status, Mr. Michael Bednarz , Director of Curriculum and Instruction

Dr. Fishman stated that on the Connecticut Mastery Test (CMT) at all grade levels, and in all subject areas tested, with the exception of writing in grade 4 and reading in grade 3, Stafford's students exceeded State and District Reference Group (DRG) F averages in meeting State goal, with grade 7 posting stellar results.

She also noted that when the district examines the percentage of students scoring proficient or above, using the new NCLB math target goal that went up 8 points over last year's goal and the new NCLB reading target goal that went up 11 points over last year's goal, it is noted that with the exception of math in grade 5, Stafford either remained at about the same number of students who met the proficiency standards (11/24 subtests, grades 3-8) in 2007 or exceeded the number of students who met the proficiency standards (12/24 subtests, grades 3-8) in 2007.

Lastly, Dr. Fishman reported that when the new NCLB reading target went up by 11 points, a sub-group at Stafford Elementary School, those students who are on free and reduced lunch, did not meet this new target, and Stafford Elementary School was designated as a school that did not make adequate yearly progress (AYP) for a sub-group.

Dr. Fishman introduced Mr. Michael Bednarz, Director of Curriculum and Instruction.

Mr. Bednarz stated that the NCLB goal is raised every three years and that this is the first year of a new target goal. He also noted that Stafford is in District Reference Group (DRG) "F". He read the names of the other towns in Stafford's DRG, which are Canterbury, East Windsor, Enfield, Griswold, Montville, North Canaan, Plainville, Plymouth, Regional District 11, Seymour, Sprague, Sterling, Thompson, Voluntown, Windsor Locks, and Wolcott. These towns all have a similar socio-economic population.

Mr. Bednarz stated that as students progress through Stafford's schools, there is a significant and positive trend in their scores. He also highlighted the following points of pride:

- ❖ The focus goal for 2007 – 2008 was to improve reading scores in two areas. First, reduce the percent of students at Level 1 (below basic) and secondly,

- increase the percent of students at goal. Using cohort comparison data, the number of students at Level 1 was reduced in four of five grades. Additionally, the percent of students at goal increased in four of five grades.
- ❖ Students showed growth in 13 of 15 subtests when comparing cohort data for 2007 and 2008 (same students over two years)
 - ❖ On 18 of the 20 sub-tests (grades 3-8) Stafford outperformed DRG and State averages.
 - ❖ Stafford students significantly outperformed state averages.
 - ❖ Students maintained or improved DRG F ranking in 11 of 15 subtests.
 - ❖ Scores were very strong in grades 5 and 7.

Mr. Bednarz briefly reviewed each of the twenty-six charts that he provided for the Board. The charts included information in the following areas: Percent Achieving Goal for Grades 3-8; CMT 2008 Math Results: Grades 3-8; Cohort Comparison: Change in DRG F Ranking from 2007 to 2008; 2008 Reading Results by Content Strand: Gr. 3-8; Grade Level Participation Rate; Grades 3 – 8 Comparisons of 2006 – 2008 CMT Results; and 2008 Cohort CMT Results: Percent Change from 2007.

Mrs. Fowler asked why the DRG comparisons were no longer given out by the State. Mr. Bednarz said that they no longer provide this information because they do not want to encourage town by town comparisons.

Mr. Bednarz introduced Mr. Skala, Principal of Stafford Elementary School and Mr. Kenneth Valentine, Principal of Stafford Middle School. Mr. Skala and Mr. Valentine reviewed their action plans for improving CMT scores this coming year.

Mr. Skala stated that everything that is done at Stafford Elementary School somehow relates back to the CMT. All of the staff members have the standards and all teachers are working toward improving CMT test scores. Mr. Skala noted that he is using his school's new technology in innovative ways to help student achievement. For example, during lunchtime students will be asked CMT related questions via the mimio board / projector in the cafetorium.

Mr. Skala stated that he feels scores will be better next year due to the fact that the school is coming together as a community. He noted that they are committed to the following shared values:

- ❖ Staff, students and their families feel as if they belong at the school and the school belongs to them. Everyone plays a part in making the school feel safe and welcoming for all.
- ❖ Adults in the school feel a sense of responsibility for children's academic, social, physical and emotional welfare.
- ❖ There are agreed-upon standards for student behavior and learning throughout the school.
- ❖ The entire community interacts with each other in a caring and respectful manner.
- ❖ The school community gathers together to recognize and celebrate student accomplishments and achievements.

Mr. Skala also reported on the following initiatives that are in place to ensure greater gains on the CMT:

- ❖ Collaboration time has been expanded in the teacher schedule this year in order to provide opportunities to share successful practices, review student work, explore new programs and monitor student performance in reading, writing and math. He stated that each grade level meets once per week before the beginning of the school day.
- ❖ Data will be reviewed on an on-going basis in math, reading and writing.
- ❖ Time on task with uninterrupted instructional blocks in all grade levels is scheduled to maximize achievement.
- ❖ Incorporate more student incentives / celebrations. Additionally, Mr. Skala and Mr. Bartlett, Assistant Principal, visit classrooms every day to see first-hand how students are doing.
- ❖ The School Improvement Plan contains all measureable goals to provide direction and accountability throughout the school year.

Mr. Valentine reported that the middle school's scores were good, but the more he analyzed the scores this year, the more questions he had. For example, he determined that some questions on the CMT must be more heavily weighted than others. He determined this by looking at the scores the district received on each section individually and then looking at the resulting final score that combines all the sections together. He also noted that scores fluctuate from year to year, even in the highest DRGs.

Mr. Valentine stated that he and his staff are planning to stick to what has worked for the middle school in the past. He said that the middle school's preparation for the CMT is good and will continue to be good. He also noted that he has a strong buy-in from the middle school students.

Mr. Valentine stated that this year the middle school exchanged a special education teacher for a math teacher. This change has allowed the new math teacher to meet with small groups of students with problems in math. Mr. Valentine stated that the fact that students no longer have reading in grade eight because they are taking world language instead may also have caused a drop in the CMT scores. He noted that he only has one year of data to look at so far. A possible remedy may be to have a refresher course on the CMT and test-taking strategies for eighth graders.

Mrs. Bradway asked if the Board could look at data for world language and reading in grade 9 to see if the program change at the middle school has made a difference. The suggestion was also made that the middle school could look at a different type of schedule to possibly give more focus to specific skills / subjects.

Mrs. Rummel asked if the middle school would be implementing any new initiatives. Mr. Valentine stated that students that need extra help in an area are being helped in smaller groups in all three grade levels. He stated that the students will also be using Study Island during the school year, and he will be looking at the data regarding reading / language arts in grade eight.

Mrs. Bradway stated that she would like to see an analysis of our scores as compared to the towns surrounding Stafford. Since taxpayers see Stafford compared to those towns in the newspapers, she would like to have the same information. Mrs. Fowler and Ms. Stafford stated that they would rather have the Superintendent communicate with the public in a clear, concise way explaining why our scores are compared to the DRG towns and explain what the DRG is.

Mr. Bednarz reviewed the 2007 – 2008 Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) Status Report with the Board. He stated that the district achieved AYP, while Stafford Elementary School did not achieve AYP for the subgroup of “Economically Disadvantaged”. Mr. Bednarz noted that in order to maintain “Safe Harbor” status, scores in the area not at goal must improve by at least 10% each year toward goal.

Dr. Lefebvre stated that not all outplaced students receive the same academic rigor as they would in our district. However, those students’ scores are included in Stafford’s report, because those students are Stafford residents. He noted that bringing students who can be successful in our academic setting back to the district would benefit those students and the district’s test scores.

Mrs. Rummel stated that in light of the current economy, she would like to see the number of students on free and reduced lunch this year versus the past six years. Mr. Bednarz stated that, in general, our numbers went up but other districts’ numbers went up more. As a result, Stafford has lost 15% of our grant funding.

C. Head Start Report

Dr. Fishman stated that since we have been in school for less than a month, only \$2,410 of the \$48,316 Head Start grant budget has been expended through September 16, 2008.

D. New England Association of Schools and Colleges Final Report of the Visiting Committee for Stafford High School

Dr. Fishman began by stating that she wished that she did not have to present this report to the Board at this time, because we do not yet have the final disposition of the NEAS&C commission. However, she was told by NEAS&C officials that the district must make this report public at this time. Dr. Fishman introduced Mr. Kennedy, Principal of Stafford High School.

Mr. Kennedy introduced the co-chairs of the NEAS&C steering committee, Mr. Gary Shearer and Ms. Linda DeSantis. Mr. Shearer and Ms. DeSantis were instrumental in creating Stafford High School’s self-study, which Mr. Kennedy feels is accurate, thorough and honest. Mr. Kennedy stated that he was very pleased with the fact that the visiting committee’s findings were congruent with the findings of the high school’s self-study.

Mr. Kennedy stated that there were two surprises in the report. First, the fire extinguishers in the new wing were not being stored properly. Mr. Kennedy reminded the Board that the wing was finish just prior to the visit by the committee. Second, the chemicals for the science classrooms were being stored improperly.

Both of these issues were corrected before the visiting committee concluded its visit.

Mr. Kennedy stated that the high school received commendations and recommendations in all areas. He stated that we should find out relatively soon where we stand with regard to accreditation. He noted that the next meetings of the NEAS&C Commission are scheduled for September 28 and 29, 2008. He stated that the commission is comprised of volunteers, some of whom are high school principals from Connecticut. He said that they will review the report of the visiting committee and the self-study and then determine final recommendations. The earliest the high school will receive the disposition of the commission would be mid-October. When the high school receives its accreditation status it can be one of the following: Denial of Accreditation, Probation (fail a number of standards; this is a public status), Warning (for one or more standards), or Total Accreditation.

Mrs. Bradway asked how the commendations and recommendations compared to the report from ten years ago (the last time the high school went through this process). Mr. Kennedy responded that the entire process has changed so significantly that it is nearly impossible to compare the reports.

Dr. Fishman suggested that once the high school receives the disposition of the commission, the Board should schedule a special meeting to review the findings or make that the focus of two regularly scheduled meetings.

Mr. Kennedy stated that Mr. Shearer and Ms. DeSantis worked with him and the teachers to create critical needs committees. Mr. Kennedy thanked the co-chairs for their help and attention to detail.

E. Update on Attendance Policy Revision / Attendance Data

Dr. Fishman stated that at the December 10, 2007, Board of Education meeting, Board members approved a revision of Board policy # 5110, 5111—*K- 12 Student Attendance*. She stated that the revision addressed attendance of middle school students, setting 23 absences for any one student in any one school year as being a benchmark for “serious consideration for retention.” Additionally, a schedule for warning letters based on a student’s growing number of absences and an appeals process were also put into place. She noted that the reason middle school administrators had requested this change in Board policy was the large number of students who had excessive absences.

Dr. Fishman reported that at the end of the 2007- 2008 school year, middle school attendance data was compiled for 2005- 2006, 2006- 2007, and 2007- 2008. This data showed the following:

2005 / 2006

24 students over 22 absences
9 students over 30 absences
5 students over 40 absences

2006 / 2007

30 students over 22 absences
 12 students over 30 absences
 3 students over 40 absences

2007 / 2008

10 students over 22 absences
 3 students over 30 absences
 0 students over 36 absences

Dr. Fishman stated that the policy revisions have obviously made a positive impact on the attendance figures. It was noted that students that have been expelled or have been on long-term medical leave are not included in these numbers.

F. Student Appointment to State Student Advisory Council on Education

Dr. Fishman reported that Miss Katherine Bradway, Student Representative to the Board of Education, has been selected for the honor of serving on the State Student Advisory Council on Education (SSACE), which consists of 19 students selected from all Connecticut high schools. They must be seniors with at least a B+ grade point average. Dr. Fishman stated that it is an honor to have Miss Bradway represent Stafford on this committee.

Item VI. Public Forum

A member of the audience informed the Board that Board meetings would be posted on the Town website for viewing by the public. It was asked that Mr. Bednarz post the CMT charts on the school's website so the public can follow along with his presentation at the meeting.

Item VII. Old Business**A. ACT Magnet School Transportation**

Dr. Fishman reviewed with the Board the options regarding ACT Magnet School transportation that were considered at the Board meeting on September 8. One option allows students to ride the Windham Tech bus to ACT, which would be provided at no cost to them and which would arrive at 7 a.m. However, it was understood that this would necessitate students having a 2-hour study period prior to ACT's start time of 9 a.m. No after-school ride on the Windham Tech bus would be available for ACT students, since Windham Tech ends at 2 p.m., and ACT ends at 5 p.m. Carpooling was also suggested by Board members as an option, and Dr. Fishman has learned that, in such a case, each of the three families with full-time students attending ACT through "parent choice" would be eligible to receive \$1,300 from the State toward the cost of gas.

Dr. Fishman stated that working together with EASTCONN, she was notified last week that the cost of transportation would be significantly reduced by \$7,800 to a total of \$11,700 for the two students attending ACT in Stafford "slots" and the three students attending ACT as full-time students through "parent choice", if a

centralized pick-up and drop-off point, located some place in Stafford, was utilized for all of these students. Presently, these students receive door-to-door transportation.

Mrs. Rummel made a motion, seconded by Ms. Stafford, that the Board of Education provide transportation to the ACT magnet school for those three students attending ACT through “parent choice” for the 2008- 2009 school year, and notify the parents of these students that this exception is being made for one school year only. Mrs. Bradway, Mrs. Finch, Mrs. Fowler, Mrs. Rummel and Ms. Stafford voted for the motion, which carried.

Mrs. Bradway asked if anyone has communicated with the other two families who won the “slots” regarding the possible change of loss of door-to-door transportation. Dr. Fishman said that she has not, but would contact them the next day.

Dr. Fishman stated that she will get more information regarding the purchasing of slots to see if it is worth it for the district. She said that she will get clarification regarding the benefits of having the slots.

Item VIII. New Business

A. Approval of BEST Mentors

Mrs. Finch made a motion, seconded by Mrs. Bradway, that the Board of Education approve Mrs. Diane Glettenberg and Mrs. Eileen Laramie for support teacher training in the BEST program for the Stafford Public Schools. Mrs. Bradway, Mrs. Finch, Mrs. Fowler, Mrs. Rummel and Ms. Stafford voted for the motion, which carried.

B. Schedule Board of Education Policy Sub-Committee Meeting

The committee decided that they would like to schedule this meeting via e-mail.

C. Authorization of Signatures on the ED-099 Agreement for Child Nutrition Programs

Mrs. Finch made a motion, seconded by Mrs. Bradway, that the Board of Education approve the Superintendent of Schools, Dr. Therese G. Fishman, as the designated representative authorized to sign the Agreement for Child Nutrition Programs and to sign claims for reimbursement, and approve the Financial Analyst, Mrs. Meg Devlin, to sign the claims for reimbursement in the absence or incapacity of the Superintendent. Further recommend that the Board of Education certify that this action has been taken by the signature of Mrs. Sandra Fowler, Secretary of the Board of Education, on the authorized signatures change form of the Agreement for Child Nutrition Programs. Mrs. Bradway, Mrs. Finch, Mrs. Fowler, Mrs. Rummel and Ms. Stafford voted for the motion, which carried.

D. Interview Candidate(s) for Board of Education Vacancy (Executive Session Anticipated)

This item was tabled until the October 6, 2008, regular meeting due to the fact that the Board of Education has not yet been presented with candidates. Mr. Fontanella stated that he spoke with the Chairman of the Republican Town Committee. He stated that they have two candidates, but the Board of Education has asked for three.

Mrs. Fowler made a motion, seconded by Mrs. Rummel, that the Board of Education add item **VIII.E.- Appointment of Board Member to the Stafford Administrator Association Negotiation Committee** to the agenda. Mrs. Bradway, Mrs. Finch, Mrs. Fowler, Mrs. Rummel and Ms. Stafford voted for the motion, which carried.

E. Appointment of Board Member to the Stafford Administrator Association Negotiation Committee

Mr. Fontanella stated that due to the resignation of a Board member, Ms. Patricia Saunders, another Board member would be needed to serve on the negotiation committee. Mrs. Bradway volunteered to serve on the committee. Mrs. Bradway was notified that there was a meeting the following night at 6 p.m.

Item IX. Personnel Matters

There were no personnel matters.

Item X. Student Matters

There were no student matters.

Item XI. Adjournment

Mrs. Finch made a motion, seconded by Ms. Stafford, to adjourn the meeting. Mrs. Bradway, Mrs. Finch, Mrs. Fowler, Mrs. Rummel and Ms. Stafford voted for the motion, which carried. The meeting adjourned at 10:23 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Christine C. Marinelli, Recording Secretary

Mark Fontanella, Chairperson

Sandra Fowler, Secretary