

The regular meeting of the Board of Education of the City of Vineland was held in the Board Room, 625 Plum Street, Vineland, New Jersey, Wednesday, March 12, 2014 at 7:02 p.m., pursuant to notice with Mr. Medio presiding and the following members present: Mr. Baruffi, Mr. DeWinne, Mr. DiGiorgio, Mr. English, Mr. Jennings, Ms. Morello, Ms. Rios and Mr. Ulrich. Absent: None.

Also present: Dr. Gruccio, Superintendent, Mr. Frey and Mrs. Polof, Assistant Superintendents, Mr. Schectman, Board Secretary, Mrs. Haley, Assistant Business Administrator, Dr. Rossi, Executive Director of Personnel, Mr. DeSanto, Solicitor, press and public. Absent: None.

Mr. Medio announced that in compliance with the New Jersey meeting law commonly referred to as "The Sunshine Law," the Vineland Board of Education has caused notice of this meeting to be sent to the following, announcing time and place thereof, agenda, etc.: The Daily Journal, the Atlantic City Press, Clerk - City of Vineland, and Administrative Office Public Bulletin Board.

Resolution: None.

Flag Salute: Students from Dane Barse and Max Leuchter Elementary Schools led the Board in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Special Presentation (s): Dr. Gruccio introduced Mrs. Lauren DeBello, Supervisor of Technology, to honor Mrs. Cathy DeMarco a teacher at Vineland High School North.

Mrs. DeBello said it is her pleasure to honor Mrs. Cathy DeMarco, a technology teacher at Vineland High School North, who is also a celebrated artist. She said Mrs. DeMarco is a self-taught artist who is also a poet, photographer, print maker and computer graphics expert. Mrs. DeBello said Mrs. DeMarco created artwork on silk scarfs that were displayed in the Eco Friendly Fashion Show Art Exhibit in Philadelphia City Hall. She said the show was part of the Art in the City Project which presents exhibitions and showcases contemporary artwork by professional and emerging Philadelphia area visual artists.

Dr. Gruccio introduced Mr. William Breese, a Vineland High School South teacher and coach for the girls' basketball team to honor a student, Tanashia Russell.

Mr. Breese said he has had the pleasure of coaching Tanashia for three years and watching her mature as an athlete. He said Tanashia has developed leadership skills on and off the basketball court. Mr. Breese said Tanashia has received the ESPN Award for player of the month. He said Tanashia has achieved a 1,000 point milestone and received a full scholarship to Wagner College. Mr. Breese presented the award to Tanashia.

Dr. Gruccio introduced Mr. Ed Benish, Assistant Principal at Sabater Elementary School, to honor students who received awards for their participation in the American Legion Post #4 Coloring Contest.

Mr. Benish introduced and congratulated Lynda Bonilla, 1st place winner, Steven Centeno, 2nd place winner, and Arelis Emiliano Villegas, 3rd place winner.

Dr. Gruccio introduced Ms. Madeline Galan, Vice Principal at Vineland High School and Ms. Kathy Malone to honor the Air Force Junior ROTC Cadets.

Ms. Galan said there are currently 135 cadets enrolled in the Air Force Junior ROTC Program at Vineland High School. She said the primary goal of the AFJROTC program is to develop students to be better citizens for the local and national community. Ms. Galan said the program emphasizes the Air Force core values of integrity first, service before self and excellence in all we do. She introduced Ms. Kathy Malone an AFJROTC parent.

Ms. Malone said on February 1st fourteen of our AFJROTC Program students competed in the 15th Annual Drills and Colors Classic Competition in New Castle, Delaware. She said the Vineland team took third place overall and second in the academic challenge, which involved presenting a persuasive argument on whether the United States should get involved with Syria. Ms. Malone introduced the following AFJROTC cadet team members: Cristian Jimenez, Phillip Kemp, Justin Whitaker, Kayel Cruzado, Stephen Fairman, Christiana Bailey, Jade Stevenson, Zorjuli Crespo, Kristofer Cajigas, Breyon Jordan, Christopher Malone, Joseph Zerra and Darwin Peralta.

Dr. Gruccio introduced Mr. Herb Schectman, Business Administrator, to present the 2014-2015 School District Budget.

Mr. Schectman introduced Mrs. Helen Haley, the Assistant Business Administrator and said it is their privilege to present the proposed operating budget for the 2014-2015 school year. He said enrollment has increased slightly over the past three years and we have a little over 11,000 students. Mr. Schectman said the district has historically received funding from seven major sources: fund balance, local tax levy, local non-tax revenue, State and Federal funds, local grants, state and federal grants. He said the state has increased our provided funds by \$203,200 this year, which amounts to approximately \$20.00 per child. Mr. Schectman said our funds are spent for instruction, support services, employee benefits, capital outlay and special schools with the majority going into school based budgets. He said this coming year, with the modest increase of funding from the state, we are faced with a potential shortfall of 5.4 million dollars. Mr. Schectman said the reasons for this are increased health insurance costs, negotiated salary increases, and an increase in fixed costs such as insurance and utilities. He said the question is what we do to address the 5.4 million dollar shortfall. Mr. Schectman said in central administration we have agreed to reduce overtime, decrease summer hours and change some of our business practices. In the transportation area there are certain routes that will be contracted out. Mr. Schectman said we propose in special education to eliminate one child study team, one position, and reduce special education costs. We are going to decrease supplies throughout the district, reduce instructional staff and school-based administration along with other items throughout the budget. Mr. Schectman said the capital projects included in the initial budget will total \$1,948,000. He said we will reduce operating expenses and increase revenues. Mr. Schectman said there are two items that we are proposing one is an increase in the local tax rate. He said the district is allowed a cap of 2% and we propose that the Board puts this forth, which will create about \$434,000 in additional revenues. Mr. Schectman said we have also received No Child Left Behind approval to increase our funding by \$438,000. He said with those two line items we will have a balanced budget. Mr. Schectman said we continue to minimize costs by participating in internet services with police, city hall and the library. He said we do everything we can to save every dollar and still have a 5.4 million dollar shortfall next year.

Mr. DeWinne asked for clarifications on the sidewalks at Wallace Middle School. Mr. Schectman said the sidewalks were not done this year and is an agreement we have with the city.

Mr. Ulrich asked about the curtailment of overtime. Mrs. Haley said an analysis of overtime was done for the fiscal year June 2013 and it was a total of 1.3 million dollars. Mr. Ulrich asked how much of that 1.3 million dollars is projected to be saved. Mr. Schectman said we believe that 50 thousand dollars will come from transportation, facilities, central administration and school secretarial services over the summer. Dr. Gruccio believes we also have a cut in security. Mr. Ulrich asked if any thought was given to reducing overtime through scheduling. Mr. Schectman said that is the security piece that was done. Mr. Ulrich asked if the 1.2 million dollars in overtime is essential and has to happen. He said that he is not good with the explanation that we are going to try to reduce 90 thousand dollars off of a 1.3 million dollar overtime budget. Mr. Schectman said he thinks we can come up with creative ways to reduce overtime with cooperation from department heads and good management. Mr. Ulrich asked if weekend fees for rentals, when schools are closed, are matched with what our actual overtime costs are. Mr. Schectman said board policy dictates that that we offer our facilities at no cost to various organizations throughout the city that are not for profit. He said overall our costs are not matched at all but in instances when we can charge for groups that come in we charge for maintenance and utilities. Mr. Ulrich asked if there are maintenance people who are scheduled to work on Saturday and Sunday or is it strictly an overtime basis. Mr. Schectman said there is some overtime depending on the location and event. Mr. Weaver said his staff currently works Monday through Friday, which is in their contract.

Mr. DiGiorgio asked Mr. Schectman if he was ever directed to have overtime cut to a certain level. Mr. Schectman said not yet and believes we will probably get there.

Mr. DeWinne said there will always be a need for overtime but he does not see why we cannot make an attempt to cut one third of it.

Ms. Morello said she agrees with her colleagues that something has to be done and things need to be looked at differently. She said there are 4 elementary and 2 middle school computer teachers listed in the proposed reductions. Ms. Morello said she cannot begin to imagine what the plan is to get students literate if you are taking that many teachers out of the classroom. She said classroom teachers may have a working knowledge of technology and in many cases may not be able to teach their students everything they need in order to be proficient.

Ms. Morello asked for an explanation on Achieve 3000 and Success Maker. Mr. Frey said SuccessMaker is used to benchmark students in a skill setting. Ms. Morello asked what does reduce overtime (requires two upgrades) mean. Mr. Frey said to make two employees, who handle emergencies, salaried staff because their overtime was rather large. Ms. Morello asked what is spent annually during the summer on curriculum writing. Dr. Gruccio said we cannot cut curriculum writing completely but there are other things that were approved last summer that we may have to cut. She said Dr. Rossi's office is working on that list for us. Ms. Morello asked how many child study teams the district has. Mr. Schectman said he believes nine. Ms. Morello asked if we will be shuffling students around again at the middle school level for busing. Dr. Gruccio said it will not be to the extent that it was last year. Mr. Callavini said we are trying to get the students closer to their home school.

Mr. Baruffi asked how many people are required to work on snow days and who the essential personnel are. Dr. Gruccio said maintenance and some transportation supervisors.

Mr. English asked what does freeze three skilled maintenance positions mean. Mr. Weaver explained that these are currently three open budgeted positions in the 2013-2014 budget and the proposal for this year is to cut the positions. Mr. English asked Mr. Weaver what would happen without those positions. Mr. Weaver said our employees are competing against prevailing wage which is good for us. Mr. Ulrich asked Mr. Weaver how many substitutes he has to utilize a day because of sick time usage. Mr. Weaver said 10 to 12 substitutes. Mr. English asked if there is a way to chart the work that these men would normally do versus what we had to sub out throughout a year's time to see what was spent. Mr. Weaver said that can be done easily with School Dude.

Mr. DeWinne asked Mr. Weaver if has enough funds in his budget to get done what he feels needs to be done. Mr. Weaver said yes what is on the capital side will take care of some major systems that are coming due this year.

Mr. Baruffi asked if any attention will be given to the Vineland High School North gym. Mr. Weaver said everything in the gym is from 1976, which is something to take a look at for next year.

Mr. English asked Mr. Weaver if he will be able to manage without the skilled maintenance workers. Mr. Weaver responded yes. Dr. Guccio said we are trying to find the money to put the HVAC position back.

Ms. Morello asked where the students will go if the special education tuition is reduced. Mr. Schectman said we believe that we will receive additional funds through the IDEA grant that will allow us to reduce the costs of that program. Ms. Morello said she thought that summer school was self-funding. Dr. Guccio said we are mandated to have special education summer school. Mrs. Haley explained that they are removing unexpended funds because the summer school program changed and the cost was on the students.

Ms. Rios asked if the fifteen district vacancies are on the list the board received today. Mr. Schectman said it is not included. Ms. Rios asked for a list of the fifteen vacancies.

Mr. English asked if there was discussion about moving the alternative program or are the alternative education reductions just cutting positions from the building. Mr. Schectman said it is eliminating the middle school teachers in the program. Mr. English asked if that means we will not have middle school students at the alternative school program. Mr. Schectman responded yes there are only six middle school students at the alternative school. Mr. English said we can save a lot of money if we do what the Millville School District does with their alternative program, which is held at 3:00 p.m. in the afternoon. Mr. Ulrich said the concern is you will have children unsupervised during the day. Ms. Morello asked if anyone has done a cost analysis of the students who were placed in an out of district program to address some of the issues and concerns they present.

Mr. DeWinne asked what the reduction of nine buses is for. Mr. Schectman said that has been pulled off of the list. Mr. DeWinne asked if that is an on-going budget item. Mr. Schectman responded yes we replace nine buses every year. Mr. DeWinne said we have a six million dollar hole to look at for next year plus anything else that will come our way. He said in the years to come we need to get as lean as possible. He said he is pro athletics, arts and music. Mr. DeWinne said he would like to see some of these cuts turn into money for those programs. Mr. DeWinne said this is the first time they are looking at the preliminary budget and they need more time. He said we should ask the County Superintendent to give us a few extra weeks to get the budget in.

Ms. Morello asked Mr. DeSanto how we request additional time for the budget. Mr. DeSanto said the first thing to do is to consult with the County Superintendent and Business Administrator as to how things are handled. He said many times it is internal guidance and procedures.

Mr. Medio said the Board agrees to ask the County Superintendent for an extension on the budget and if we cannot get an extension we will have a special meeting next Wednesday, March 19, 2014 at 7:00 p.m. to pass the budget.

Mr. DeWinne said another Finance Committee meeting needs to be scheduled no later than Monday.

Ms. Morello thanked the Finance Committee members for all the time and effort they have put in.

A Finance Committee meeting was tentatively scheduled for Monday, March 17, 2014 at 6:00 p.m.

Public Comment
On Agenda Items:

Lou Russo, President VEA

Mr. Russo said currently cell phones are not allowed but are a severe distraction in our schools to our students. He said if the Board is amending the cell phone policy, to please consider two things; the teacher should have the authority on how the cell phone will be used and when it is proper to use. Mr. Russo said cell phones are equipped with cameras and recording devices. He said cyber bullying is a serious problem and issues of recording of students and staff have been problems we want to avoid. Mr. Russo said he submitted paperwork to the Board around a month ago regarding a request for additional sick time and the response was we have a sick day bank. He said the VEA has decided that they cannot participate in the sick day bank because the current Board policy is out of compliance with the statute. Mr. Russo requested for the Board to please consider granting the request for this individual. He also asked the Board to consider raising the local tax revenue. Mr. Russo said currently the district has the ability to raise 3.8 million dollars out of the local tax revenue without a vote. He expressed his concern that we are exceeding the statutory class size limits and are cutting into serious programs. Mr. Russo said if they have to the VEA will seek court relief next year for exceeding the cap.

Mr. English requested a copy of the current class sizes throughout the district.

Lori Cummines, VHS Select Choir Director

Ms. Cummines said it is Music in Our Schools month and urged the Board to come out to the spring musicals. She asked how we as a community will continue to have a music or fine arts program in our schools. Ms. Cummines also asked who proposed the original mandatory lunch policy and what happens to programs at the high school if lunch is made mandatory. She expressed her concern that if lunch was made mandatory this year both the choir and string ensemble programs would be cut in half. Ms. Cummines said we need to consider a full time arts academy.

Mr. Medio asked how people equate having a lunch to not having fine arts. Ms. Cummines said it represents a large portion of our population and the sacrifices that need to be made for our students to have those programs. Mr. Medio asked why a scheduling change is not adequate to address this issue. Ms. Cummines said we are always open to that.

Ronald Walker, Parent

Mr. Walker expressed his concern in regards to the cell phone policy. He said children need the ability to contact parents, authorities etc. Mr. Walker urged the Board to reconsider cutting RTI teachers. He also expressed his concern that the students in the Alternative School are not following procedures such as wearing school uniforms and we are wasting money on students who do not want to be in school.

Lou Russo, VEA President

Mr. Russo said one of the problems with the Vineland High School schedule is that lunch is a 40 minute academic class period. He said he knows that there are no high schools in South Jersey where lunch is part of the academic schedule. Mr. Russo said he worked in the old after school program and that program is not something we should return to.

Maria Perez

Ms. Perez expressed her concern in regards to students who do not take lunch and students wearing hoodies who cannot afford a coat.

Approval of Minutes: Upon motion by Ms. Morello, seconded by Mr. DiGiorgio, the minutes were approved from February 5, 2014. All Members voted "yes."

Report of the
Secretary/Custodian
Of School Monies: Upon motion by Ms. Morello, seconded by Mr. DiGiorgio, the reports of the Secretary and Custodian of School Monies for the month December of 2013 and January of 2014, which are in agreement were approved as submitted and on file in the Minute Book, and the Board approved its monthly certification of budgetary major account fund status and the Board Secretary's monthly certification as on file with the Secretary. All Members voted "yes."

Solicitor's Report: None.

Recommendations:

B. Proposed for review or discussion or adoption by Board Members:

The Board approve a Resolution denying four (4) grievances submitted by the Vineland Administrators and Supervisors Association (VASA) to the Vineland Board of Education.

Motion: A motion was made by Ms. Morello, seconded by Mr. DeWinne, to approve a Resolution denying four (4) grievances submitted by the Vineland Administrators and Supervisors Association (VASA) to the Vineland Board of Education. All Members voted “yes.”

Approval of Bills: Mr. Schectman said the Board approved all the bills through January 31st at the last Board meeting.

Emergent Item(s)
(with prior approval): The Board approve the following field trips: Skills USA Competition, TSA State Technology Competition and CCTECH Skills USA.

Ms. Morello expressed her concern in regards to the field trip process. Dr. Guccio said people are not submitting the paperwork on time so we are writing up people who submit late paperwork and putting a copy in their personnel file. Ms. Morello asked if the person who is written up submits paperwork for a couple years in a timely fashion could have the write up removed from their file. Dr. Guccio said she does not have a problem with doing that.

Motion: A motion was made by Ms. Rios, seconded by Ms. Morello, to approve the Skills USA Competition, TSA State Technology Competition and CCTECH Skills USA field trips. All Members voted “yes.”

Board Member
Remarks: Mr. Ulrich thanked and congratulated all the students who were recognized tonight. He is amazed that the VEA does not support helping out a member who is in need. Mr. Ulrich said state statute allows for the donation of sick time when in need. He said he was that ill person around nine years ago and will never forget the employees who reached out immediately to help him. Mr. Ulrich said he challenges the VEA leadership to show him that the majority of their 900 members do not want to help out their fellow worker.

Mr. DeWinne said we are able to raise taxes six percent without a taxpayer vote. He said the budget in 1991 was 49 million dollars and twenty years later it is 200 million dollars. Mr. DeWinne said he does not see our grades and scores quadrupling. He asked Mr. DeSanto what the contracted rate increase of pay has been for the last twenty years. Mr. DeWinne said he would like to see a change with the transportation mileage.

Ms. Rios thanked Mr. Walker and Ms. Perez for coming out tonight to speak. She also thanked Mr. DeWinne for trying to get the budget process extension. Ms. Rios said she does not believe in the reduction of RTI or computer teachers. She said hoodies were not allowed to be worn in school prior to the uniform policy. Ms. Rios said if students are cold they should be allowed to wear a hoodie. She said we forget that we were young at one time and we should not be so judgmental of children.

Mr. DiGiorgio congratulated the retirees. He requested a list of the school painting schedule. Mr. DiGiorgio said in New Jersey property taxation and school funding are closely linked, which is unfortunate. He said some taxes are inflexible even if there is a decrease of those who have to pay it. Mr. DiGiorgio said costs go one way and it is not down. He said once your property is paid off you should own your home however, if you do not pay your taxes in a couple of years you will lose your home. Mr. DiGiorgio said county, municipal and school taxes make up the majority of the tax rate. He said it is true that the school portion of the equation has not gone up significantly over the past decade or so in Vineland. Mr. DiGiorgio said at some point we may need to increase taxes.

Mr. Jennings thanked Mrs. Haley and Mr. Schectman for their work on the budget along with Mr. DeWinne. He feels everyone who is working on the budget needs to communicate and work together.

Ms. Morello said there is a lot to digest with this budget and is very uncomfortable with portions. She said that she and Mr. Frey had a conversation on Monday in regards to the need to have staff members become familiar with all devices and levels of acceptable use in the classroom.

Ms. Morello said she is not being judgmental or disrespectful of teachers because she is in a classroom every day and works with young children who constantly give her a hard time because she does not have an iPhone but a Galaxy GS4. She is a huge believer in following process and policy because without it there is anarchy. Ms. Morello said we have to set the guidelines and goals and try to make the best decisions for everybody. She invited everyone in the community to be a part of the strategic planning process. Ms. Morello said she would like more information on the sick time issue.

Mr. Baruffi congratulated all the students who received awards tonight. He said if we all use good common sense we could get a lot of things done. Mr. Baruffi said Mr. DeWinne is doing great with the Finance Committee.

Mr. English said he agrees with Mr. Ulrich in regards to the sick leave time. He is going to plant the seed tonight because he wants an arts academy and agriculture program. Mr. English wished the Italian students a safe successful trip to Italy next week. He said the Cap N Dagger show will be Thursday, Friday and Saturday night at 7:00 p.m. The Pops Concert will be held on March 20th at Vineland High School South at 7:00 p.m. Mr. English said the Vendor Meet & Greet will be held at Vineland High School North at 5:00 p.m.

Mr. DeWinne said he watched a former Vineland High School student athlete who is his niece, Lauren Carastro; compete live via the web in Geneva in swimming. He said she earned sixth place which qualifies her for her fourth All American status with two more races to go.

Report/Remarks by
Board President:

None.

Adjournment: The Board adjourned the meeting by voice vote at 9:47 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Herbert G. Schectman, CPA
Board Secretary

HGS:df

