

A special meeting of the Board of Education of the City of Vineland was held Friday, May 11, 2012 at 5:00 p.m., in the Board Room, 625 Plum Street, Vineland, New Jersey, pursuant to notice with Mr. Ulrich presiding and the following members present: Mr. Fanucci, Mr. Medio, Dr. Mounier and Ms. Rios. Absent: Mr. DiGiorgio, Mr. English, Mr. Mercado and Mrs. Phillips.

Also present: Dr. Gruccio, Interim Superintendent, Dr. Schneider, Interim Assistant Superintendent, Ms. Candi, Diaz, Interim Personnel Director, Mr. Daniel Smith, Acting Board Secretary and Mr. DeSanto, Board Solicitor. Absent: Ms. Barber, Interim Board Secretary.

Mr. Ulrich 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.

Flag Salute:

The Board recessed to executive session at 5:02 p.m.

The meeting resumed at 5:50 p.m.

Public: None.

Comments by
Board Solicitor:

Mr. DeSanto said the Board Secretary sent out several Rice Notices. An employee, Maria Rivera Garcia, requested that in the event her name was to be discussed in executive session, she wanted the discussion in public. Mr. DeSanto said he is reporting that no board member indicated that they had any question regarding Ms. Garcia therefore; there was no discussion in executive session and no discussion is needed in public.

Recommendations:

Public Comments: Ivona Dumanyan, VHS Student

Ms. Dumanyan expressed concern that her Grade Point Average (GPA) along with Matthew Wolfe and Blake Pescatore are not correct and will jeopardize their chance for scholarships. She also does not appreciate being portrayed as a disgruntled student looking for a hand out because she earned her position as number one in this class by working hard. Ms. Dumanyan said all she is seeking is a fair compromise.

Dr. Guccio wanted to clarify that she never stated that the grades were not appropriately done. She said what she explained at their meeting is there were two ways that the grades could be calculated. The first way was what the lawyers agreed to in the meeting. Dr. Guccio said she then explained at that meeting that there was another way to calculate the grades that would change the ranking of students and would impact everyone. She said in order not to hurt anyone it was decided to have a dual valedictorian. Dr. Guccio said she never stated that the grades were calculated wrong and no one on the board nor herself did anything wrong. She said after speaking to council they decided to put valedictorian on both transcripts and if the colleges have any questions to please contact her.

Ms. Dumanyan apologized and said that she did not mean to imply that the board did anything wrong. She said the word “co-valedictorian” appears on her transcript and it is not fair. Ms. Dumanyan said she would like her class rank as well as Matthew Wolfe’s class rank to be corrected. Dr. Guccio said she cannot do that because that is what she earned and the numbers are what they are.

Wendi Wolfe, Parent

Mrs. Wolfe said they filed a complaint with the court and the day before the case was to be heard they were told that their son’s class rank did not change and he was still number #3. She said they were told that it would be a waste of their money to fight. Mrs. Wolfe asked what formula was used and was told it was calculated like Sarah’s and Stephanie’s. Mrs. Wolfe said what they found out later was that was not the case. She expressed her concern that two students were planning to take non-weighted required courses over the summer at the county college and replace them with weighted courses in their senior year. Mrs. Wolfe said Dr. McCann recognized this as an attempt to manipulate class rank and GPA. She said Dr. McCann gave us his word that he would not sign off on the request and has kept his word. Mrs. Wolfe said they expressed their concern that Blake Pescatore had already done what these other students were attempting to do. She said Blake had taken an art course at the college and replaced it with an AP class. Mrs. Wolfe said Dr. McCann assured them that he did not approve this, which he denied in writing twice.

Mrs. Wolfe said this administration through lies and manipulations refuses to admit to their mistakes. She said despite the fact that her son, Matthew Wolfe, is clearly the salutatorian at Vineland High School and Ivona is the valedictorian neither of these hard working students will have their real class rank reflected on their high school transcript. She said instead of doing the right thing this administration is trying to cover up their mistakes by penalizing our children. Mrs. Wolfe said this needs to be fixed once and for all.

Dr. Gruccio said to her knowledge the two letters Mrs. Wolfe spoke about in regards to an art course that Dr. McCann denied do not exist. She said Dr. McCann told her that he was not involved in this at all and knew nothing about it. Dr. Gruccio said Dr. McCann was copied on Mr. Stanger's letter but never responded to it. She said in a meeting with Dr. Banks and Mrs. Wolfe Dr. Banks stated that there was no way that she was going to change anything that was done two years ago.

Ken Wolfe, Parent

Mr. Wolfe said it has been a year since this matter was brought to the board's attention. He expressed his concern that the matter with his son, Matthew, and Ivona has not been fully rectified. Mr. Wolfe said he blames administration. He said during the past year they have been lied to, given misleading information, subjected to delayed tactics, seen favoritism and backdoor deals. Mr. Wolfe said employees in this district have come to them with information because of the injustice that is going on. He said Ivona and Matthew have worked hard to obtain this honor by following the rules and policies of this district. Mr. Wolfe said Ivona earned valedictorian and her transcripts should reflect that as well as his son's.

Mr. Ulrich said the board sets policies that they hope the administration and faculty will follow. He said there is no board member here, that he knows of, who was approached by anybody wanting to do a backdoor deal to make Blake Pescatore the valedictorian. Mr. Ulrich said he thinks they are unsubstantiated rumors and allegations. He said if someone brings him an affidavit or a person willing to testify that a board member engaged in a backdoor deal he will personally recommend ethic charges against that board member. Mr. Ulrich said the issue here is that a district supervisor approved the course for Blake to take. He said at this point there has been an administrative solution and if this is a legal process beyond that then you have to continue with that progress.

Mr. Wolfe said he did not insinuate that any of the board members did anything wrong it has been just the opposite. He said the board has been very diligent in responding to their complaints. Mr. Ulrich said if there has been any staff member who made a backroom deal that personally benefited a student and if there is an employee who will testify to that we need to know. Mr. Wolfe said it is employees and he will not identify them. Mrs. Wolfe said look at the numbers one student is getting preferential treatment. She said they were willing to compromise but she will not compromise on the transcript. Dr. Gruccio said both lawyers came to an agreement.

Mr. Ulrich said an appointment can be made with Dr. Gruccio.

Ms. Dumanyan said she does not understand how the approval of one administrator, who is not as high as Dr. McCann, could have over ridden the policies that were laid out by the board.

Dr. Mounier said at the beginning of every meeting we stand up and salute the flag. The Pledge of Allegiance ends with the words “in justice for all.” Dr. Mounier said what we are seeing here is not justice for all but an inequitable solution that may be the solution that the administration prefers. He feels that legally we do not have to do this. Dr. Mounier said there is a difference between what is legal and what is right and it is time for this board to stand up and say we need to do the right thing.

The meeting was adjourned by voice vote at 6:21 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Daniel Smith
Acting Board Secretary

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