

Public Work Session

A Public Work Session of the Board of Education of the Northport-East Northport Union Free School District was held on Monday evening, December 5, 2011, beginning at 6:30 p.m., in the Board Conference Room at the William J. Brosnan School, 158 Laurel Avenue, Northport, New York, with Mr. Stephen V. Waldenburg, Jr., Chairperson, opening the meeting and presiding.

Members present: Ms. Julia Binger, Mrs. Kristen Gavin, Mrs. Lori McCue, Mrs. Donna McNaughton, Mr. Andrew Rapiejko, Mr. Joseph Sabia, Mrs. Jennifer Thompson, Mrs. Tammie Topel, Mr. Stephen V. Waldenburg, Jr.,

Members absent: None

Also present: Dr. Marylou McDermott, Superintendent of Schools  
United Teachers of Northport Representatives: Antoinette Blanck, President, Joe Burke, Carol Carpenter, Danielle DePonte, Frank Doyle, Bob Feinstein, Virginia FitzSimmons, Bryan Krahel, Kevin McGinn, Virginia Neill-Meade, Diane Radimer, Scott Schutka, George Searing, Steve Taylor, Tammy Walsh

1. President Waldenburg called the meeting to order.

Motion was made by Trustee McCue, seconded by Trustee Topel, to convene into Executive Session to discuss matters pertaining to the employment history of particular persons. These matters cannot be discussed in public session because it may compromise privacy rights.

Unanimously carried.

At 7:00 p.m. the Board reconvened in public session in the cafeteria at the William J. Brosnan School.

Public attendance: There were approximately 150 persons present.

2. Mr. Waldenburg led those present in the Pledge of Allegiance; and
3. Pointed out the emergency exits.
4. PUBLIC WORK SESSION

President Waldenburg stated that this public work session is for the Board and Members of the UTN leadership to discuss Board and UTN relations. Mr. Waldenburg explained that there are responsibilities when meeting in public and noted that the parties will not engage in any discussion regarding any particular student(s) enrolled in the School District, and the parties will be mindful and observant of the School District's legal obligation to protect the privacy of its students. The parties will not engage in any discussion regarding specific members of the School District's personnel. Neither the Board, nor the Administration, nor the Association shall castigate any school district employee, member of the Administration or member of the Board at the meeting. The meeting shall be conducted as a public work session, and hence shall not be open for public comment. The parties shall not discuss any information that if disclosed would constitute an invasion of personal privacy of one or more individuals. The parties will not engage in any public discussion regarding pending or current litigation, criminal matters, or collective bargaining negotiations, and shall not otherwise deviate from the agreed upon agenda for the meeting.

President Waldenburg stated that tonight's agenda would be discussion regarding the District's initiatives, the roles and responsibilities for the Board, the Administration and the staff. Discussion would also include the communication and articulation of the initiatives and how they are implemented.

Ms. Antoinette Blanck, UTN President, thanked everyone present for joining what should be a productive and beneficial dialogue between the Board of Education and the UTN. Ms. Blanck stated that this is an opportunity to inform each other of educational needs and problems encountered, mutual goals and prepare to begin a discussion to mutually foster and environment where every child can grow to potential. The UTN has a strong belief that they must be involved in the decision making process and have their voices heard and listened to. The talents and expertise of each member of the professional staff to have true collaboration. Ms. Blanck stated that imposition has become the method of recent years and the top down management has caused moral to be at an all time low. Ms. Blanck stated there is a lack of genuine collaboration.

Mr. George Searing stated that when he joined the District the faculty was encouraged to provide ideas on curriculum. The District's profile states that the members of the faculty are leaders in their fields. Mr. Searing noted that the faculty is the District's greatest resource. Mr. Searing stated that lately these attributes are being ignored and that the professional teaching staff is being minimalized. The trend is an unsettling pattern of decision making adversely impacting the ability to serve students of the district.

President Waldenburg stated that there were specific instances or items that the UTN wanted to bring to the attention of the Board.

Mr. Scott Schutka stated that he represents the middle school sciences and he is speaking on behalf of the community and science teachers in the District. Mr. Schutka stated that there are concerns about the formulation of guidelines and procedures for implementing an 8<sup>th</sup> grade all Regents level in 2012. Mr. Schutka stated that he has great difficulty with the 2012 deadline of starting this curriculum and that this might be setting up the students for frustration and failure, especially the special needs students. Mr. Schutka stated that there needs to be an open discussion as to when this really could take place and in order to have a successful Regents program at the middle school level steps have to be setup for success for this to occur. Mr. Schutka stated that this initiative took a lot of teachers by surprise. Teachers see the everyday character development, strengths and weaknesses of each student. Mr. Schutka hoped that before the initiative was set that the resources of the professionals in the District would have been sought. Mr. Schutka stated that he is in support of this initiative but wants to do it right.

Dr. McDermott stated that the State wants every student to be college and career ready. The State is moving very quickly and the District has to move as quickly as they can. Dr. McDermott stated that the initiative is in the discussion stages and invited Mr. Schutka to the secondary curriculum council meeting for a discussion on the initiative. Dr. McDermott stated that this initiative was formulated in January 2011 and is in the working phases. Discussions will be had and if it is believed that it is not feasible for it to happen it will not happen. Dr. McDermott noted that the initiatives are ideas being considered for the following year. Dr. McDermott stated that the District is looking to elevate the standard for every student.

There was a discussion regarding the secondary curriculum council meeting, the flow of communication to the staff, communicating concerns of teachers, State laws and the need to be proactive, opportunities for collaboration and troubleshooting, and teachers being are part of the decisions, sharing knowledge and professionalism.

Dr. McDermott stated that she has an open door every day for any discussion regarding the growth of students. The District needs to prepare every student to be a learner in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Trustee Thompson stated that the Board has talked about the initiatives in open meetings week after week and the Superintendent shared what the expectations were.

Vice President McNaughton stated that the expenditures for the netbooks were to give the opportunity for every staff member to have the tools to engage the students for the future. Mrs. McNaughton stated that

the District initiatives come from the Superintendent.

Mr. Schutka stated that there is frustration that the teachers were given the devices at Superintendents Conference Day and they are not functioning as they are supposed to. Mr. Schutka stated that the devices cannot be used in the classroom as some teachers are not able to link to the internet. There is supposed to be a wireless network in place and the infrastructure should have been in place before the devices were given out.

President Waldenburg stated that the District is in a build out phase to implement the wireless and that the District is moving as fast as it can.

Dr. McDermott stated that the purpose of giving the teachers the devices at Superintendent's Conference Day was to give the teacher the opportunity to get used to the devices so that when the wireless network was up and running they had a tool to use in the classroom.

President Blanck stated that the concern is lack of information being disseminated to the rank and file. There was no information to the teachers as to what they were expected to do with the devices. Ms. Blanck stated that it is frustrating being told that you are getting something but not sure what you're expected to do with it and how to prepare for it.

There was a discussion regarding technology, the wireless system, the number of computer techs in the District, and formulation of committees on initiatives.

Ms. Virginia FitzSimmons stated that there are curriculum concerns at the elementary level and that the main concern is the lack of consistency across the District and continuation of programs being implemented without piloting by staff. Ms. FitzSimmons stated that there are significant curriculum concerns in K-5 with regards to science, the math program, outdated social studies textbooks, NWEA and half day kindergarten program. Ms. FitzSimmons stated that she was going to focus on the literacy component. Ms. FitzSimmons stated that guided reading groups are a positive approach to help students but that there is no actual program to guide instruction, there is no order or sequence guide. Ms. FitzSimmons stated that there needs to be structured resources to plan for different needs in classrooms and that there is a concern about the literacy success of students. Ms. FitzSimmons stated that there is a lack of a program and that teachers are making up lessons for each book. Ms. FitzSimmons stated that with the amount of changes and lack of collaboration the teachers are feeling disrespected.

Dr. McDermott stated that the District does have a balanced literary program and that the heart of a balanced literacy program is guided reading. Teachers sit with children in small groups and listen to them read and help with comprehension. Dr. McDermott stated that every classroom should have a library with books for all student levels and if there is a lack of supplies that it should be brought to the attention of the principal. Dr. McDermott stated that if more professional development is needed in guided reading the District would supply it.

Mrs. Virginia Neall-Meade stated that they need to teach kids not just the comprehension and inference, they need actual skills such as a grammar program and spelling program which is consistent through every school. Mrs. Neall-Meade stated that there is no equity across the District.

Dr. McDermott stated that curriculum writing professional development is needed. Guided reading is a component of a balanced literary program and other components need to be put in such as grammar. Dr. McDermott stated that there needs to be further discussion on this with building principals.

There was a discussion regarding materials and guides, teaching children strategies to develop better writing skills, and curriculum coordinators as resources.

President Blanck stated that teachers are gathering information independently across the District and that there needs to be a better way to work together to maximize teacher efficiency.

Mr. Bob Feinstein stated that when the Superintendent announced that in 2012-2013 all students would take IB English this was completely foreign news to the high school English department and that this had never been discussed. Mr. Feinstein stated that it is unrealistic to think that the District would be able to bring 490 11<sup>th</sup> graders to this level or near this level. There are inherent problems that need to be addressed. Mr. Feinstein stated that the English teachers should have been a part of this discussion and should have been a part of the decision making process out of professional respect. Mr. Feinstein stated there was no discussion regarding English 9 Honors not being offered and the probability that 10 Honors would not be offered the following year. Mr. Feinstein asked if Northport High School was going to be converted to an IB school. Mr. Feinstein stated that the teachers want a seat at the decision making table before changes are implemented.

Dr. McDermott stated that it is a teacher's responsibility to lift their own moral for quality of education in the classroom. Dr. McDermott stated that the IB program is something that she has discussed and has identified it as something that she is very interested in coming from a desire to make all students college and career ready, and raising students to be reading and writing ready. Dr. McDermott stated that the IB program sets a high standard for all students.

President Waldenburg stated that the Superintendent has provided to the Board her goals and visions on how to grow the IB program. The Board is aware of her desires and does support them. The implementation is a continuing dialogue that needs to be had. Mr. Waldenburg stated that the IB program is something that all students could aspire to.

There was a discussion regarding the rigor of the English Department, elevating standards for all students, discussions at department meetings, decisions made without department input, and flow of communication through department.

Dr. McDermott stated that part of her responsibility is to present goals and initiatives in January for the following school year to the Board of Education. These proposed goals are based on input from the principals and common standards for students. Dr. McDermott stated that as she is formulating her initiatives she is sharing with the Board what her plans are for the 2012-2013 school year and is also sharing them with the department chairs and building principals.

Mrs. Virginia Neill-Meade stated that there needs to be a constant conversation and noted that the District used to be a very collaborative District.

Dr. McDermott stated that the State is saying that every child must be college and career ready.

Mr. Frank Doyle stated that he is troubled by dates being kicked around at the high school and asked if there was a way to move forward without putting dates on everything.

Dr. McDermott stated that she will meet with department chairs and determine what is reasonable and what is realistic. Dr. McDermott stated that there are hard choices and decisions to make going forward and that there is a need to find balance.

President Waldenburg stated that there is a need for more communication and noted that he would like to see similar meetings or perhaps smaller group meetings.

President Blanck stated that there were several occasions where information was disseminated from central administration and asked if the District could use a more efficient way of communicating with staff through its "all users" email. Ms. Blanck stated that the message is clearer when it comes directly from

central administration. Ms. Blanck stated that, unfortunately, moral is at an all time low and hoped that this meeting is the beginning of dialogue and noted that collaboration is the key.

There was discussion regarding scheduling future meetings and the concept of having smaller meetings where specific concepts were worked out, putting a communication scaffold into place, and collaboration with individual departments.

President Waldenburg, Vice President McNaughton, Superintendent McDermott and President Blanck thanked everyone for attending the meeting and look forward to future meetings and improved communications.

5. ADJOURNMENT

Motion was made by Trustee McNaughton, seconded by Trustee McCue, to adjourn.

At 10:00 p.m., the chair declared the meeting adjourned.

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Beth M. Nystrom  
District Clerk

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