

Tentative minutes of the **Bethel Board of Education Special Meeting** held on **Wednesday, July 23, 2008**, in the Board of Education Conference Room E.

Attendance: James Leonard, Lynn Fenn, Janice Stevenson, Michael Taylor, Jen Larsen, David Vieira

Administrative Attendance: G. Chesley, T. Yonsky, P. Cosentino, B. Germinaro

B. Kingston, Chairman, called the meeting to order at 7:30 p. m.

1. **Call to Order**
 - A. ***Roll Call for Quorum***

Board Members Present: S. Carlsen, L. Craybas, J. DeRosa, M. Duff, B. Foulk, K. Harrison, B. Kingston, M. Knickerbocker, R. Renner

Board Members Absent: None

- B. ***Pledge Allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America***

2. **Approval of Minutes**
 - A. ***June 5, 2008 – Regular Meeting***

Motion by S. Carlsen: Move to approve the minutes of June 5, 2008.
Seconded by M. Duff
AYE: S. Carlsen, L. Craybas, M. Duff, B. Foulk, B. Kingston, M. Knickerbocker, R. Renner
NAY: None
Abstain: K. Harrison, J. DeRosa
Motion Carried.

June 14, 2008 – Special Meeting

Motion by S. Carlsen: Move to approve the minutes of June 14, 2008, as corrected.
Seconded by M. Knickerbocker
AYE: S. Carlsen, L. Craybas, J. DeRosa, M. Duff, B. Foulk, K. Harrison, M. Knickerbocker, R. Renner
NAY: None
Abstain: B. Kingston
Motion Carried.

June 24, 2008 – Special Meeting

Motion by M. Knickerbocker: Move to approve the minutes of June 24, 2008.
Seconded by S. Carlsen
AYE: S. Carlsen, L. Craybas, M. Duff, B. Kingston, M. Knickerbocker,

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TOWN OF BETHEL
TOWN CLERK

R. Renner

NAY: None

Abstain: J. DeRosa, B. Foulk, K. Harrison

Motion Carried.

3. Audience Participation

Kristen Trent, 19 Fox Den Rd, commended the Board on a difficult process. Ms. Trent said although pay-to-play is not ideal, academics should be restored first and pay-to-play at the high school level should be kept. She feels any high school player could easily earn \$150 over the summer.

Gervaise Tiernan, 12 Grand View Ave, said she is against pay-to-play and campaigned against it. She stated that she feels that there are other options. Ms. Tiernan said 15 year-olds can't go out and earn \$150. If you do pay-to-play you are penalizing a group of students. If you are going to charge for extra-curricular activities you need to charge across the board include band, ROTC, drama clubs, etc.; you are loosing what public school is all about. You can't have it both ways it has to be one way or the other. She is not advocating getting rid of teachers.

Janice Stevenson, 32 Sunset Hill Rd, said she is not generally in favor of pay-to-play but she thinks that due to the current financial situation of the town it is preferable. We have already seen significant reductions in the academic program. She thinks it is unacceptable to put athletics in front of academics.

Kitty Grant, 23 Quaker Ridge Rd., said she agrees these are very hard times for residents. We are already paying \$4.30 a gallon for gas and are going to be paying \$5 a gallon for home heating fuel and thinks sports are a very important part of the curriculum and adds to the whole child and would like to think that you do not do pay-to-play.

Michelle Zanchelli, 15 Kristy Dr., said she agrees whole heartily with Mrs. Stevenson and believes that the Board should not eliminate pay-to-play. She has been paying for her children to play sports since they were five years old and will gladly continue to.

Joe Witcofsky, 12 Allan Way, said he is not speaking for the elimination of pay-to-play but rather the reduction to a more reasonable amount similar to other districts in the area. Again, what you're doing is acting financially as coaches. If you're setting that value at \$150 you are eliminating students that are incapable of affording that and subsequently acting as the coach. The coach is the only one that should be making cuts in sports programs, not finances.

Jen Larsen, 128 Grassy Plain St., said she currently pays for her children to play sports and has been for many years. She currently pays \$250 for her son to play soccer and also pays for her other children to play. \$150 would be a reduction in what she is currently paying so therefore she does not see a problem. As far as students earning money, there are many opportunities in this town. Her son earned over \$300 this spring as a twelve-

year old for youth soccer. There are many opportunities available in the town for students. The PTO and booster clubs will also help out those who can't afford to pay for a sport.

Dave Bruckenthal, Old Field Dr., is against pay-to-play. In his situation it has created a cost of about \$600, not \$150, for his children. He supported the school budget in the first budget vote and feels the first budget sent to the voters is usually the best. He stated that he can not write off the \$600. These are not tax reductions that you get when doing taxes. The \$600 would have cost him only \$150 if the budget had passed the first time. Now he feels he is being penalized as a parent in supporting the school budget. Instead of his taxes going up \$150 he is now paying \$600. This is kind of taxation without representation which the country revolted over that many years ago. Would like the Board to consider it a little more closely and if there is need for pay-to-participate it needs to go across the board at every grade level and every extra curricular activity the schools fund.

Bob Legnard said he is opposed to pay-to-play. When his children went to school he said he saw it decimate some of the sports programs and the numbers of kids that came out to play. People made choices not to try out for a particular team in their freshman or sophomore year. There may have been a kid that would have developed into a premier player for a team later on in life. He challenged the comment that was made that academics are more important than athletics. Anything that happens in the high school has to do with academics. Students playing sports are learning life skills of teamwork and sharing others. To take that away from a student over \$150 is ludicrous. If you have to have it then spread it across the board and charge for every activity. Then it becomes a private school for only those that can afford to go there.

Ron Linehart, 7 Oven Rock Rd, said he is currently a coach at Bethel High. His numbers are already currently down because parents are figuring what will happen with this pay-to-play. His children participated in sports because he wanted them to come home tired so that he would never have the police come to his door. Kids will find something to entertain themselves if they can't play sports and the idle mind is the devil's workshop.

Tim Beeble, 63 Grassy Plain, said when he went to high school, they embraced the importance of both academics and athletics and athletics was a requirement. Every term you had to participate in a sport. The problem with pay-to-play is the greatest impact falls upon the lowest income families and their children.

Nick Ellis, 13 Fawn Rd, said the it's a small amount of money you generate and then a lot of people wouldn't be able to play. He thinks that out of the thirty-seven million dollars you should be able to find the \$50, \$60, \$70,000 somewhere in some of the budgets so all the kids can play. That's what it's about, a team school so everybody can play.

Bill Slifkin, 16 Katrina Circle, You ran on "Education not politics." Education is about the children not anything else. What has happened in the budget process is you were forced to cut teachers, you were forced to cut a lot of things, and yet at the same time

according to the newspaper you are thinking about increases for the administrators and on top of that you had \$50-\$60,000 left over and went out and spent it on whatever. That money could have gone to pay-to-play. He said the Board has a responsibility to the children of this town to get rid of pay-to-play.

Michelle Bradshaw, 19 Hearthstone Dr, said she is in favor of keeping pay-to-play so we do not lose anymore teachers in our school system. She agrees with everyone's comments that it shouldn't be just sports, it should be across all the clubs. She has paid for her children in soccer not only in town, but in premier teams. She is OK with the \$150. In other years fund raisers were held to help the students who could not afford it to keep all the kids involved.

Michael Taylor, 6 Farnum Hill Rd., said he is opposed to pay-to-play. For every kid we fund raise for, there are 4-5 kids that we don't hear from and fund raise for. He thinks sports are just as important as academics. He thinks the fees should be spread across other activities.

Henry Curl, 22 Winthrop Rd., said he proposed taking half of the \$11,000 to educate each child and offer tuition vouchers to private schools. He feels that 30-40 students would be interested and it would make enough funds available to cover pay-to-play.

Paul Szatkowski, 24 Winthrop Rd, he said voters in the town, whether they are senior citizens or parents, can't afford the \$150. It's a common denominator. All of you on the board you are the administrators of education. Of the \$32+ million dollars \$70,000 should not be hard to find and you shouldn't have to eliminate a teacher. He said if the Board members put their heads together you should be able to find \$70,000 and eliminate pay-to-play.

Robert Burke, First Selectman, said "Eight of you people ran with me in two elections. In both elections the people of Bethel were promised "No pay-to-play." You stood up came forward to take the stand in the public service as I did. We promised and formed a covenant with the people of Bethel, "No pay-to-play." If you go forward with pay-to-play, and I am not telling one of you how to vote, because I don't do that, but I would ask you to make pay-to-play go away. The covenant was formed with the people of Bethel that voted for you resoundingly. Do not leave this room making me and yourselves a liar. The other part that is wrong that people have so noted tonight. The teacher belongs in the classroom. The most important thing we have is a couple of parents and a teacher to raise our children. I've raised eight. Two parents and good teachers. I am a product of this system. I am not the most shining product of the system but I am a product of the system. I am proud of this system. This system is not as good as it was when I was here and we were a simple people, an agricultural people. We did not have pay-to-play; every person was recognized as being equal. The tea was thrown in Boston Harbor in 1775 because of taxation without representation. To take \$30 or \$40 off my tax bill that I vote to take off, or the people voted to take off and then stick me with \$150, \$300, \$450, or \$500 and not look to save in areas and not look for waste in areas but to punish a child and not let him attend the field of sports, commit to his honor on the field like a gladiator

did in Rome, free of charge, free public education. Sports is part of that education. Some of you people on this board played sports. I can tell by your stature, I can tell by your stance. Both man and woman. It's an important part of the competitiveness of life. It's part of the surviving with the fittest. Don't leave this room breaking the covenant with the people of Bethel. The promise of "No pay-to-play." Keep the teacher in the classroom. Do your diligence. It's a hard time. The people voted. We work for the people. You've been voted to lead and administer the Board of Education. Please do what the people tell you to do and please keep your covenant. Thank you for the opportunity to speak it's a special meeting you did not have to put it on the agenda. Mr. Kingston, I admire you for the ability of you to let the people have their say here tonight. The most important part of democracy. Something I firmly believe in. Thank you for that."

Terri Nackid, 8 Almar Dr, when we voted to accept the budget that was presented in the last budget referendum, the people of Bethel understood that teaching positions were going to be eliminated. The 3rd grade strings program was going to be eliminated. The IG program would be eliminated and that pay-to-play would become an unfortunate reality for our town. We understood that while we voted to accept the budget that was proposed. The people of Bethel understand that. In this harsh economic environment, there is no reason that more academic programs should be cut or that academics in anyway should be affected while varsity athletes get a free ride.

Only one sports program was cut from the educational budget. Student athletes are simply asked to pay their fair share if they want to play. In this respect they still come out ahead. They come out ahead of the students who wish they could participate in the programs that have been eliminated. They can no longer participate in at all. Student athletes still have the opportunity to participate. I also want to say I was raised in a town that had pay-to-play many years ago before it was common everywhere and we not only had pay-to-play sports we had pay-to-play extra-curricular music. I can tell you we had an exceptional program that was well participated in and was the envy of the State. It doesn't have to affect the quality of these programs to have pay-to-play. The costs that are being talked about for pay-to-play are similar to the cost we incur if we choose for our children to participate in a sport that is offered through the Park and Recreation programs. It's a similar cost to us. We choose to do that anyway. There are also sports that are offered in no other environment that we choose to participate in that are much more expensive and that is our choice. Extra-curricular varsity athletics are a choice that we as families choose for our children to participate in. I don't think it is an undue burden for us to have to have some other financial burden as well.

4. **Reports to the Board**

A. Personnel

1. Resignations/Leave of Absences

**Motion by M. Knickerbocker: Move to approve the following resignations:
Jennifer Coletti, Grade 7 English Teacher, effective 7/16/08
Kara Dolan, COF Teacher, effective 7/15/08**

Nicole Marciano, Spanish Teacher, effective 7/15/08
Heather Monte, SPED Teacher, effective 7/8/08
Lisa Morlock, Grade 1 Teacher, effective 6/24/08
Chanon Robinson, Business Teacher, effective 6/30/08
Seconded by S. Carlsen
Motion Carried Unanimously.

Motion by S. Carlsen: Move to approve the following leave of absences:
Kristen Brooks, Principal, Berry School
Elizabeth DiBiase, Supervisor of Special Education
Julie Foss, Spanish Teacher
Seconded by S. Carlsen
Motion Carried Unanimously.

2. Appointments

Motion by R. Renner: Move to approve the following personnel appointments:
Elizabeth Johnson, Physical Science/Biology Teacher, High School
Patricia Berkowitz, Special Education Teacher, Middle School
Lauren Zafrin, Grade 5 Teacher, Johnson School
Amanda Weinheimer, Grade 1 Teacher, Rockwell School
Seconded by S. Carlsen
Motion Carried Unanimously.

B. Policy

1. Second Reading:

- *Policy 5118.2, Children of Non-Resident Certified Staff: Qualified Tuition Reduction*

Motion by M. Knickerbocker: Move to approve Policy 5118.2.
Seconded by B. Foulk
Motion Failed

Motion by L. Craybas: Move to table Policy 5118.2 and refer to Policy Subcommittee.
Seconded by M. Duff
AYE: S. Carlsen, L. Craybas, J. DeRosa, M. Duff, B. Foulk, K. Harrison, B. Kingston
NAY: M. Knickerbocker
Motion Carried

C. Finance

1. 2007-2008 Education Budget

Ms. Yonsky, Director of Fiscal Services, said bills are still being processed and she will have a final number on August 24, 2008.

2. Approval of 2008-2009 Education Budget (Remove from table)

**Motion by M. Knickerbocker: Move to remove approval of 2008-2009 Education Budget from the table.
Seconded by S. Carlsen
Motion Carried Unanimously**

**Motion by M. Knickerbocker: Move to approve the 2008-2009 Education Budget of \$36,567,417.
Seconded by S. Carlsen
Motion Carried Unanimously**

3. 2008-2009 Anticipated Savings

Ms. Yonsky, Director of Fiscal Services, informed the Board of a savings from the new refuse-recycling contract of \$12,852 and revenue from BESBE of \$14,389 that can be used towards reducing the cost of pay-to-play from \$150 to \$100.

**Motion by M. Knickerbocker: Move to take the savings on the refuse contract and BESBE revenue and put those funds towards reduction of pay-to-play, reducing the cost from \$150 to \$100.
Seconded by S. Carlsen
Motion Carried Unanimously**

R. Renner stated she would like to use the funds to restore staff.

B. Kingston stated he thinks athletics is an integral part of school and people who are marginally able to afford it will not ask for help and won't play.

S. Carlsen supports Mr. Kingston's point of view. He stated those students who participate in athletics are more likely to succeed than those with high test scores. If the Board eliminates pay-to-play there would be more support for the budget.

M. Duff spoke about comments made during audience participation regarding Board members running for election and pay-to-play. He said he did not run under the "No pay-to-play" banner.

J. DeRosa said many of those in attendance during audience participation received phone calls to come and speak against pay-to-play and she has heard the opposite opinion from the community than what Mr. Szatkowski said. Mrs. DeRosa agreed with Mrs. Renner that the funds should be put towards restoring staff.

L. Craybas stated it would be taking away school spirit if students are unable to participate due to the cost. Mr. Craybas would like to know the cost of sports at the middle school.

**Motion by M. Duff: Move the question.
Seconded by M. Knickerbocker
Motion Carried Unanimously**

**Motion by S. Carlsen: Move that pay to play be eliminated, contingent on the administration finding additional savings with the exception of further staff reduction covering the \$48,759 for pay-to-play by August 11, 2008.
Seconded by M. Knickerbocker
AYE: L. Craybas, S. Carlsen, M. Duff, K. Harrison, B. Kingston
NAY: J. DeRosa, B. Foulk, M. Knickerbocker, R. Renner
Motion Carried**

4. Tuition Rates 2008-2009

**Motion by M. Knickerbocker: Move the Bethel Board of Education sets the tuition rates for non-resident students attending Bethel Public Schools for the 2008-2009 school year as stated in the memorandum dated July 23, 2008.
Seconded by S. Carlsen
Motion Carried Unanimously**

5. Refuse, Recycling Contract Approval

**Motion by S. Carlsen: Move that the Bethel Board of Education enter into a one year contract, renewable for four additional years, with Phil LoPresti & Sons Carting Co., Inc. for collection and disposal of refuse and recyclable materials. The cost of this contract is \$38,500 for 2008-2009, \$40,500 for 2009-10, \$44,500 for 2010-11, \$48,500 for 2011-12 and \$53,500 for 2012-13.
Seconded by M. Knickerbocker
Motion Carried Unanimously**

It is the consensus of the Board of Education the administration set a family cap for pay-to-play by August 11, 2008 if pay-to-play is not eliminated.

R. Renner said she needs to say about the pay-to-play issue that Mr. Robert Burke had no right to make pay-to-play a campaign promise. It was not his promise to make and to sit here and say eight members out of the nine ran on that is incorrect because she didn't run on that. J. DeRosa said nor did she run on a no pay-to-play promise.

B. Kingston said nor did he.

B. Foulk said nor did he.

Mrs. Renner said for him to stand here and threaten the Board of Education to eliminate pay-to-play is very wrong and we don't appreciate him coming in here and lecturing to us and the audience on what our job is. We know what our job is and we made the best

decision and we don't want to debate it anymore either. We do not feel that it was right for him to do and for phone calls to go out today telling people to come here and talk about the elimination of pay-to-play. This discussion has been going on for months and up until now no one has come and said eliminate pay-to-play. But because of that phone call today that is exactly what happened and I think he owes this Board an apology.

B. Kingston stated Mr. Burke does make it very difficult to be on his side.

J. DeRosa said he was forceful. Threatening is what he was doing. The other issue I have is that all these people got their phone call and came, but then they didn't bother to stay and hear the discussion that was involved in it. So really they are nothing but sheep being herded. It was disrespectful. She said she was glad everyone voted politically, that's great.

B. Kingston said there was a lot wrong with it tonight.

S. Carlsen reminded the Board members they have a prohibition against denigrating anybody. Mrs. Renner said she is not denigrating him. Mr. Carlsen said using the term "sheep" as applied to people who come out to take their own time regardless of their motivation to attend a Board meeting. I don't think they should be characterized as sheep.

Mrs. DeRosa agreed with Mr. Carlsen and apologized for the comment.

- 5. **Recommended Executive Session**
CT General Statutes 1-18a(e)(2)
Non-Union Salaries
Superintendent's Evaluation
Board of Education Self Evaluation

Motion by M. Knickerbocker: Move that the Board of Education enter Executive Session at 8:50 p.m.
Seconded by S. Carlsen
Motion Carried Unanimously

Board Members Present: S. Carlsen, L. Craybas, J. DeRosa, M. Duff, B. Foulk, K. Harrison, B. Kingston, M. Knickerbocker, R. Renner

Board Members Absent: None

Attendance: G. Chesley

Motion by R. Renner: Move that the Board of Education come out of Executive Session at 10:05 p.m.
Seconded by M. Knickerbocker
Motion Carried Unanimously

Motion by S. Carlsen: Move to accept the salary recommendations made by the Superintendent of Schools for administrative and support personnel for the 2008-2009 school year.

Seconded by M. Knickerbocker

Motion Carried Unanimously

Motion by M. Knickerbocker: Move to accept salary increase for Dr. Chesley, Superintendent of Schools.

Seconded by R. Renner

Motion Carried Unanimously

10. Adjourn

Motion by S. Carlsen: Move to adjourn at 10:15 p.m.

Seconded by R. Renner

Motion Carried Unanimously

Respectfully submitted,

Susan Paré
Board Recorder