

COLCHESTER SCHOOL DISTRICT

Board of Education Meeting
Colchester High School Library

Tuesday, December 21, 2021
7:00 p.m.

MINUTES (General Session)

The Colchester Board of Education held a regular board meeting on Tuesday, December 21, 2021, in the Colchester High School Library. Board members in attendance were Board Chair Craig Kieny, Directors Lindsey Cox, Laurie Kigonya, Ben Yousey-Hindes, and student representative Gloria Kigonya. District administrators in attendance included Superintendent Amy Minor, Director of Curriculum Gwendolyn Carmolli, and Director of Student Support Services Carrie Lutz. There were three employees and eight students in the audience.

I. Call to Order & Pledge of Allegiance

Board Chair Craig Kieny called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. and led in the Pledge of Allegiance.

II. Citizen Participation

Colchester resident, Genna Barnaby, provided a video statement outlining concerns and sharing data related to the mask mandate at schools in the district. She also voiced concerns about the COVID-19 vaccine.

III. Black Lives Matter Flag Proposal

Action

In October, at the request of students, the school board approved flying the Black Lives Matter (BLM) flag at all schools for three months per the district's Flagpole Request Policy. With the flag nearing the end of the three-month period, students from the Social Justice Alliance Clubs at Colchester Middle School and Colchester High School wrote a letter to the board that was read aloud by CHS student, club member, and school board representative Gloria Kigonya. The letter requested that the board continue flying the BLM flag at schools in the district. The students urged the board and community members to recognize the significance that the flag has for minority students. Allyson Whelihan, a student at CHS stated that the flag gives students in the black community and other minorities a chance to feel included in the school. Board Chair Kieny asked if the group had considered an alternate flag to BLM, possibly one that was inclusive to other minorities. Jaelynn Neal, a student at CHS, acknowledged that the flag is sometimes viewed controversially, but as a person of color, the flag is a symbol that her school supports her. She shared that race-related topics and things that are going on in the world can be scary and overwhelming but seeing the flag each day reassures her that she is welcome at school.

She feels it is a significant statement for all people of color in the community. Rebecca Sofferman, an employee at CMS and an advisor of the club, shared that the flag does not create the divide seen in our community, the divide is already there. However, students have expressed that the flag shows them the support of the district, and any form of support should not be removed right now. Jamilah Vogel, the district's diversity, equity, and inclusion coordinator, went on to say that the BLM statement has become synonymous with the current civil rights movement. Raising the flag responds to the movement in a way that is bold, brave, and leans into conversations about race in a

manner that is timely and meaningful to students. Board Chair Kieny asked how long the group expects to continue requesting the flag be flown. Ms. Vogel and the students stated they intend to write a letter every three months through the end of the school year, but they acknowledged that the flag will eventually come down. Ms. Vogel explained that this process is truly being student-led and they need adequate time to build skill, form relationships, and think through the next steps so they can engage in meaningful action and have a thoughtful plan for eventually removing the flag with purpose. Colchester Middle School student, Destany Carter, emphasized that the group needs more time to talk to other students about the flag and what it means to them. Several members of the group highlighted that having to return to the board in-person every three months to prove the flag's worth could lead to unintended consequences and inequitable barriers.

Director Laurie Kigonya expressed appreciation for the students in attendance who spoke to educate the board and the community. After hearing their comments, specifically about how they feel having to make the flag request every three months, she would like to review the policy to allow the flag to be up more permanently.

Directory Yousey-Hindes thanked the students for demonstrating how important the flag is to them. He noted that the flag is a symbol and the meaning behind a symbol is created and defined through action and thought. He appreciated their passion for the topic and shared that much of what they said resonated with them. He noted that it should not be the responsibility of the students to repeatedly justify why their basic human rights should be recognized and supports receiving a written request from the group in the future rather than an in-person petition. It was pointed out that this is allowable per the policy.

Director Cox expressed her support and encouraged the group to continue meeting and working towards their goals.

Board Chair Kieny acknowledged that of the three times the board voted on the BLM flag, he was the only one to have voted against it once, citing concerns about political implications and a desire for including other minorities. He shared that coming into the meeting this evening he was prepared to vote against or abstain, but the student's statements persuaded him to vote in favor.

Director L. Kigonya moved to raise the Black Lives Matter flag at all CSD schools for a full three months starting Thursday, January 6, 2021. The motion passed unanimously.

IV. FY'23 Budget Discussion: ESSER Funds and School Requests

Information

Director of Curriculum and Instruction, Gwen Carmolli, gave an overview of the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) funds. The funds have been broken up into three phases. ESSER I includes emergency relief from March 2020 – September 2022; ESSER II includes academic, social-emotional (SEL), and engagement recovery planning from January 2022 – September 2023; and ARP/ESSER III includes continued support for recovery from March 2022 to September 2024. The expenditures that these funds can cover include things such as additional staff for cleaning, substitutes, salaries for nurses and added food service offerings, online learning software, PPE and health supplies, furniture, instructional materials to limit sharing, summer programming, instructional coaches, stipends for planning, transportation, and devices. Ms. Carmolli provided financial breakdowns of each phase to explain the amount of funds allotted, how much has been used, and in what categories. She stressed that this work is ongoing and there are plans to gather community input on the use of ESSER III funds.

Director Yousey-Hindes suggested that administrators consider what types of purchases and investments are made with ESSER funds. He made the point that some necessary investments, such as SEL work, are hard to explain to voters so that may be best suited for federal funding. Whereas, replacing HVAC or other facility work is easier to explain and could more freely be put through a bond process.

Superintendent Amy Minor went over the list of long-term staffing needs that was developed in collaboration with building principals and administrators at Central Office. Superintendent Minor presented an overview of the FY'23 preliminary budget requests and the rationale for each item. First and foremost, it was recommended to maintain the current level of staffing and programming throughout the district. Second, it was recommended to continue investing in early literacy competency by adding 1.0 FTE for a reading teacher at MBS. Literacy is a high-priority area for the district and the state. The district uses an early intervention model and the academic and enrollment data is showing that targeted support in reading is needed at MBS where there is higher student enrollment and fewer FTEs in reading teachers than the other elementary schools. The data also shows a growing number of preschool and elementary students who have been identified as needing speech-language services, so the third recommendation was to add .5 FTE for a speech-language pathologist. Fourth, it requested to add 1.0 FTE for a social-emotional learning coordinator. There has been an increase in students who are struggling emotionally and behaviorally across all grade levels. Schools have voiced that they need more support to respond to behaviors and proactively teach skills, create systems, and train employees on SEL supports. The position would create a systematic approach districtwide, so schools and administrators are not tasked with using resources to try to do this work individually. Lastly, it was requested to create an assistant director of student support services. In the last few years, there have been a series of new requirements, both on a state and federal level, which duties and oversight have been forced to be absorbed by the three existing central office administrators. These responsibilities include Title IX, Hazing, Harassment, Bullying laws, the new special education law regarding reimbursement, educational support team coordination, oversight of school counseling, and oversight of the nursing program. All of the proposed positions could be funded with a combination of federal funding and voter budget. At the next meeting, Superintendent Minor and Business and Operations Manager, George Trieb, will bring back specific costs associated with each role and options for cost-sharing or blended funding.

Director Cox asked for a visual organization chart to help illustrate the proposed positions with regards to student-facing and systems-facing components. She pointed out that the current administrative team is very lean and wants to understand more deeply how the added position would address some of the struggles that have been uncovered.

Director L. Kigonya stressed the need to properly explain SEL to the community before the budget vote to help them understand the significant needs of students right now.

V. Approval of Consent Agenda

Action

The following Consent Agenda was reviewed by the board. Director Cox raised a question related to an employee request listed on the Consent Agenda that required the board enter executive session.

CONSENT AGENDA

Board Meeting Date: December 21, 2021

REVISED

Licensed Employees (Teacher/Administrator)										
Contract Type	First Name	Last Name	Category	Position	FTE/Hours	Building	Agenda Information	Person Replacing	Budgeted	Admin Support
Teacher	Abigale	Stannard	New Hire	Special Educator	1.0	CHS	Request to Hire	Open Position	Yes	Yes
Administrator	Heather	Baron	Resignation	Principal	1.0	CHS	Request to Resign Effective 6/30/2022			
Teacher	Emily	Desautels	Leave of Absence	Music Teacher	1.0	CMS	Request Leave of Absence for 2022-2023 School Year			
Teacher	John	Helme	Resignation	Math Teacher	1.0	CMS	Request to Resign Effective 1/30/2022			

Non-Licensed Employees (Support Staff), Board Approval Required										
Contract Type	First Name	Last Name	Category	Position	FTE/Hours	Building	Agenda Information	Person Replacing	Budgeted	Admin Support

Non-Licensed Employees (Support Staff), Informational										
Contract Type	First Name	Last Name	Category	Position	FTE/Hours	Building	Agenda Information	Person Replacing	Budgeted	Admin Support
Support Staff	Jason	Singh	Resignation	Technology Specialist III	37.5	CHS	Notice of Resignation			
Support Staff	Jared	Brunelle	Resignation	Technology Specialist II	40	CHS	Notice of Resignation			
Support Staff	Cynthia	Sheehan	Resignation	Paraeducator	40	CMS	Notice of Resignation			
Support Staff	Scott	Lang	Resignation	Paraeducator	32.5	CMS	Notice of Resignation			
Support Staff	Kasigwa	Zephyrene	New Hire	Custodian	40	MBS	Notice of Hire	Open Position	Yes	Yes
Support Staff	Simeon	Munanga	New Hire	Custodian	40	CHS	Notice of Hire	Ode Mbilizi	Yes	Yes
Support Staff	Ode	Mbilizi	Transfer	Lead Custodian	40	CHS	Notice of Transfer	Sandra Boyd	Yes	Yes
Support Staff	Munanga	Byamungu	Resignation	Custodian	40	CHS	Notice of Resignation			
Support Staff	Bernique	Shakimana	New Hire	Custodian	40	CHS	Notice of Hire	Munanga	Yes	Yes
Support Staff	Deborah	Moore	New Hire	Food Service Worker	40	MBS	Notice of Hire	Open Position	Yes	Yes
Support Staff	Kasigwa	Zephyrene	Resignation	Custodian	40	MBS	Notice of Resignation			
Support Staff	Sara	Modire	New Hire	Custodian	40	MBS	Notice of Hire	Zephyrene Kasigwa	Yes	Yes
Support Staff	Heather	Finelli	Resignation	Admin Assistant to the Special Ed Director	40	CO	Notice of Resignation			
Support Staff	Pam	Lash	New Hire	Paraeducator	32.5	CMS	Notice of Hire	Cynthia Sheehan	Yes	Yes
Support Staff	Emily	Kopacz	Transfer	Behavior Interventionist	35	CMS	Notice of Transfer	Open Position	Yes	Yes
Support Staff	Lijuan	Merkel	Resignation	Paraeducator ELL	32.5	MBS	Notice of Resignation			
Support Staff	Christopher	Adkins	New Hire	Systems Administrator	40	CHS	Notice of Hire	Jason Singh	Yes	Yes

Director Yousey-Hindes moved to enter executive session at 9:17 p.m. to discuss personnel details relative to the consent agenda. The motion passed unanimously.

*Director Cox moved to exit executive session at 9:38 p.m. The motion passed unanimously.
Director Cox moved to approve the Consent Agenda for December 21, 2021 except for one item that needs additional documentation. The motion passed unanimously.*

VI. Approval of Meeting Minutes: December 7, 2021 Action

*yousey-hindes (NH)
Director Longo moved to approve the minutes from the meeting held on December 7, 2021. The motion passed unanimously.*

VII. Board/Administration Communication, Correspondence, Committee Reports Informational

- Superintendent Minor shared that the lease for the new Central Office space at 59 Rathe Road in Colchester has been signed. She will keep the board updated on this project.
- Superintendent Minor shared that the Test to Stay Program recently surpassed the 1,000th test mark since it was started last month. She thanked the dedicated employees who have been working the program and subsequently keeping hundreds of students in school safely during their quarantine.

VIII. Future Agenda Items Informational

- FY'23 Budget
- Citizens Participation Discussion
- Facilities Information
- Policy Work

IX. Executive Session to Discuss Contract Negotiations Action

Director Yousey-Hindes moved to enter executive session to discuss contract negotiations at 9:43 p.m. The motion passed unanimously.

Director Yousey-Hindes moved to exit executive session at 9:48 p.m. The motion passed unanimously.

X. Adjournment

Director Yousey-Hindes moved to adjourn at 9:48 p.m. The motion passed unanimously.

Recorder:


Meghan Baule
Recording Secretary

Board Clerk:


Nic Longo
Board Clerk