

**BOARD OF EDUCATION  
SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES  
AUGUST 22, 2023**

A special meeting of the Enfield Board of Education was held in Council Chambers on August 22, 2023.

1. **CALL TO ORDER:** The meeting was called to order at 5:05 PM by Madam Chair LeBlanc.
2. **MOMENT OF SILENCE:** Scott Ryder
3. **PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE:** Scott Ryder
4. **FIRE EVACUATION ANNOUNCEMENT:**
5. **ROLL CALL:**

**MEMBERS PRESENT:** Jean Acree, Dr. Gerald Calnen, Janet Cushman, Joshua Hamre, Scott Ryder, John Unghire, Jonathan LeBlanc and Tina LeBlanc

**MEMBERS ABSENT:** Amanda Pickett

**ALSO PRESENT:** Mr. Christopher J. Drezek, Superintendent & Mr. Andrew B. Longey, Assistant Superintendent

Madam Chair explained to audience and TV viewing members the reason we changed the time for tonight's meeting was due to the concert being held outside on the bandshell starting at the same time as our meeting. Our last meeting held in June was very distracting and we couldn't hear each other over the music that was being played outside. Parking was also a huge concern. Some Board members needed to park across the street. We decided to start tonight's meeting at 5:00 PM. Even though it is a special meeting, we kept our regular meeting agenda format.

Madam Chair thanked each Board member for adjusting their schedules to meet tonight at an earlier time.

6. **BOARD GUEST(S)** - None

7. **SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT**

- a. **First Day of School & Labor Day** – as presented
- b. **EPS Update**

Mr. Drezek stated he planned to talk about our goals, plans and objectives tonight, but our standardized test scores have been embargoed. Our plans and discussions will be centered around this. We are excited to start our new school year.

Mr. Drezek discussed changes to our school lunch program. We are not able to offer free lunch for all our students this year. The State has made a modification from what was offered last year. Breakfast for all students is still free. Any student who is eligible and qualifies for free or reduced meals, lunch will be free for only them. All other students will go back to paid lunches. Our student lunch prices have not increased. If you need a lunch form, please contact our nutrition services department. He encouraged families to complete this form.

Mr. Drezek added our schools are all open for visits from families and visitors. We have put some additional security in place, so buildings might look a little different. You will also need a reason for visiting. We want our buildings to be welcoming for our students, staff and families.

A lot of good things are happening in our schools. It is time we get back to what life used to be about.

Mr. Drezek stated his back to school message for our 12 month staff members and teachers, is summer is just about over. We welcome back all our teachers tomorrow for their first professional development workshop being held on August 23<sup>rd</sup>. He welcomed our students that will start back on August 29<sup>th</sup>.

Mr. Drezek stated the teacher shortage is being felt everywhere. There are shortages everywhere and this includes paraprofessionals, nurses, and bus drivers. He also welcomed our 30 new certified teachers and a number of non-certified staff that have been hired will also start tomorrow. Yes, we lost 30 teachers, but we are excited to have these new teachers join us. He welcomed everyone back.

Mr. Drezek added the teacher shortage is real. The media has contacted him for their back to school articles, and they always ask how many are you down, what subject areas, and how will you fix it. He can answer the first two questions easily. He always asks our staff members why they do this. The teacher shortage is everywhere. How did we get here? He believes the system has finally caught up to us. Covid burnout is real. The problem is not something that is new, and this has been happening for years. We expect our teachers to reach high and teach, keep our students safe both emotionally, behaviorally and socially, be care givers, dietitians, nurses, custodians, etc. This is not because these other jobs are not being done, it is because they are there, and our teachers do what is necessary. We are asking our teachers to do more than just teach. They are also advisors and coaches that are also expected to produce our next astronauts and D-I ready athletes. All of these expectations were here prior to Covid. Unfortunately the level of respect for this profession is low. We also hear the old phrase that teachers make a lot of money, have good pensions and have summers off, or the union is the problem with binding arbitration. Until we close this gap of expectations and respect, this will not change. These kind of conversations need to happen.

Mr. Drezek stated the State puts out durational shortage lists for certain certifications. These are the areas where we never have enough teachers in Special Education. The state will give temporary certification (DSAP) for SPED, Earth Science, and Latin. This year Social Studies was added. We should not be surprised about this. Five years ago, we would have had over 100 applicants for an open social studies position. This is our reality. People now want to do something different, and he cannot blame them. You all know someone that is a teacher, when you leave here ask them what they feared about their job 10 years ago. Losing their job is not an answer. You will hear all the usual responses. Ask them what they are afraid of now. He asked the teachers that left our district, and the common answer was they do not want to be next. They don't want to make a mistake and be the next news topic. This is real. We need to level the playing field. We want our students to succeed and excel. We need to add teachers to the list.

Mr. Drezek added we can control what we do, how we act, and how we can rise up above this and fight negativity. We will not let these negative forces into our classrooms. We are done with this. He will make sure that our staff are here for our 5,000 students. He can make sure we let our kids excel and learn. This starts with us. He thanked our teachers for being here for our kids. We cannot do this without you. He knows you will be here tomorrow because that is who you are. You will ignore the negativity. You will continue to make sure our kids are okay. He is not worried because we have you and you teachers can handle anything. Our kids will be here on Tuesday morning because of our teachers. Thank you. You will all have a good school year.

## **8. AUDIENCES**

Walter J. Kruzel, Charnle Road – Mr. Kruzel thanked Mr. Drezek for his speech. He asked about the School Modernization Committee and if there are any updates. Both the JFK

Building Committee and the Joint Facility Committee are meeting on the same night. We need an update. This is something the Town Council needs to vote on if we want any State money. He understands the time schedule is tight and a lot of work is going into this. He wished all the teachers, staff, and administration a great school year. He was honored to be able to give out a diploma at the EHS graduation ceremony. We had a lot of honors and high honors students graduate. He cannot believe we are an alliance district with all these honor students. Learning starts with the parents. Get your kids to school to learn and have a great school year.

Maria Griffin, Abbe Road – Ms. Griffin spoke about Enfield High’s Eagle Hour Block time being cut to only a couple of days now. This is unacceptable. Many students depend on this time for extra help. She has a signed petition trying to get Eagle Block back to a full week. Many students depend on Eagle Hour and need this time in order to manage our time. We need this time for academics. Many students are suffering because of this change. She understands that some students abuse this time. There is not enough staff to cover Eagle Block. She has emailed the EHS administration with suggestions on how to cover this. This is in direct conflict of our school motto.

Maureen Griffin, Abbe Road – Mrs. Griffin also spoke about the students concerns about Eagle Block and their frustrations. A number of students felt signing the petition would not change anything and didn’t bother to sign it. They are using this time to help each other and tutor other students. This is what we want from our students. The administration can be a bit defensive when something is not working to their expectations and can be biased. There is bias and discrimination happening at the high school and this needs to be looked into. She added that our student representatives did a great job last year. She would like more students to be involved and get more input from the student body. She believes our administrators are working hard but we are missing the target in a lot of areas. There is a large number of students that do not feel seen and heard.

## **9. BOARD MEMBER COMMENTS**

Mrs. Acree welcomed back students, parents, families, staff, and administration members. She hope you all had a restful summer. During the summer she attended the EPS Summer Music Instrumental performances. The students were wonderful – kudos to all the students and music specialist involved. She was unable to attend the Winnie the Pooh production. She toured Enfield High School and was quite impressed with what we are offering our students. She looks forward to working with the Board and making the best and wisest decisions for all of our students and also looking into the Eagle Block situation. Thank you.

Dr. Calnen also enjoyed the tour of Enfield High School. He is a graduate from Enfield High school, and it looks nothing like what it did. He thanked Mr. Drezek for his comments. He added our teachers are struggling and nothing is worse than suffering in silence. Our teachers are facing many challenges. Reflective Supervision is an option for our teachers to consider. They need to be able to express their emotions to avoid serious mental concerns, burnout and early retirement. With Reflective Supervision, a therapist can help them feel free to share their problems with others and look at their problems from a different perspective. He is sharing this from his own personal experience.

Mrs. Cushman thanked Dr. Calnen for this option for our teachers and to share more information about Reflective Supervision. She thanked our audience members for speaking and for taking the initiative by getting a petition signed by fellow students. She shared a quote from Michael Phelps. She added that there is help and support available to those that need it. She welcomed back our teachers and students.

Mr. Hamre welcomed everyone back. He thanked Mr. Drezek for sharing information about staffing shortages. Shortages can be found everywhere. There is also a shortage of therapists. This is an area of concern with our teachers leaving this profession. Our teachers are dealing with conducting safety drills and active shooter training. These are legitimate concerns.

Hearing that they do not want to be next – this is real for an active shooter and on-line attacks. This Board has been directly affected by this and the fact that this is less than acceptable is a problem.

Mr. Hamre addressed a comment made by an audience member about being an Alliance District. Being an Alliance District has nothing to do with honor students or student academic accomplishments. Being an Alliance District is based on socio economics. We are not failing due to academics. He also expressed concerns made about EHS Eagle Block. The rotation of student representatives would be nice. Thank you for speaking tonight.

Mr. LeBlanc also welcomed everyone back. This is his last term on the Board. His main focus and goal has been promoting education over the past 4 years. Every district and town is dealing with teacher shortages. We have 30 new teachers and new opportunities. We did lose some staff and they will be missed. Enfield has faced many challenges just like other towns. Enfield has made education a priority. If we stay on this track, this will help our town to continue to grow. We have new population and growth here. Enfield is very unique, and our students have many opportunities after they graduate. He will continue to push for education. He wished all the students good luck in 2023-24. As Mr. Drezek stated, there will be issues along the way. Look at where we are now compared from 2020. We have come a long way and are back better and stronger than ever.

Mr. Unghire also welcomed back our students, families, and teachers. To our 30 new teachers, don't be afraid to use your talents and skills to teach our kids. He challenged our teachers and students as we start this new year to set a goal for yourself. It could be something you might not think you could achieve. As you focus and work on that, you might just surprise yourself. Welcome back!

Mr. Unghire thanked our audience member for speaking about the importance of Eagle Block and trying to restore it. Congratulations on a job well done.

Mr. Ryder stated we have had 6 years with EnfieldPTO.com. He urged principals to send him your newsletters and updates so he can post them to share with families.

Mr. Ryder added Eli Whitney will hold their open house on September 6<sup>th</sup> at 6:00 PM. Parents should check for updates from your child's principal. There are many important updates to be found in these newsletters.

Mr. Ryder thanked our bus drivers and welcomed them back. They are transporting our kids to/from school safely. Please look out for the flashing lights and be prepared to stop. Kids are excited and might not be paying attention to traffic.

Mr. Ryder gave a shout out to his son and wished him a happy birthday. The one good thing about moving our meeting time up is we can get home to dinner sooner.

Madam Chair addressed Mr. Kruzel and stated we will discuss the Modernization Committee under board committee reports. We were also unaware about the special meeting.

Madam Chair thanked Ms. Griffin for speaking about Eagle Block. We love hearing from our students. Eagle Block was designed to help students. This is something we will look into. Thank you for the petition. She also thanked Mrs. Griffin for her comments. It is really about learning and education. Thank you both.

Madam Chair stated Mr. Ryder has mentioned volunteering. She had someone contact her about volunteering, so she directed them to enfieldpto.com.

Madam Chair shared some great student news about seniors Delaney Hutchings and Autumn LeDuke who are Best Buddies. They are candidates for "Best Buddies, Champion of the Year".

They are both fundraising to reach their goal of \$5K. She explained what Best Buddies is about. These students met in JFK with Mrs. Santanella 6 years ago. Best Buddies at JFK is one of the largest clubs to date. She would like to invite them to attend a Board meeting.

Mr. Drezek stated he responded to Ms. Clark. If you would like them to attend the September 12<sup>th</sup> meeting, you can ask them directly on the camera.

Madam Chair invited both Autumn and Delaney to attend the September 12<sup>th</sup> Board meeting at 7:00 PM. We would love to have you both hear to talk about your experiences. She is extremely proud of both of you. She added they will hold a fundraiser at Enfield High on August 26<sup>th</sup> for a bottle and can drive. They will hold another event at Red Robin on September 6<sup>th</sup> where 20% of the sales will go to their Best Buddies goal. They will also have raffle prizes. The Best Buddies Gala will be held on October 6<sup>th</sup> at the Farmington Country Club. She hopes the students and Mrs. Santanella can attend the September 12<sup>th</sup> meeting. She loves hearing about our students helping other students.

Madam Chair spoke about being an Alliance District and the definition of what an Alliance District is. Central Office and our administration have been blamed for this. Our teachers are in the trenches and are also being blamed. It is based on socio economic status. She will remind people about this and how you are making our teachers feel.

Madam Chair added Mr. LeBlanc only has a few Board meetings left. Her grandparents message them after each meeting and take a picture of them and place it on the refrigerator. They are watching tonight, so they both posed for a picture.

Madam Chair wished everyone a safe happy school year. Enjoy it, school years go by very quickly. She expressed to our teachers we all support you.

**10. UNFINISHED BUSINESS:** None

**11. NEW BUSINESS:**

**a. Approve Henry Barnard Family Resource Center Grant**

Mr. Ryder moved, seconded by Dr. Calnen, that the Enfield Board of Education approves the Family Resource Center Grant.

**Discussion:**

Dr. Calnen stated we provide care to our students. Our family resource center is about forming connections with our families and other entities that protect and promote the health of our children. We have connections with ECDC, Kite, ERfC, Enfield Social Services, Enfield Adult Education, Raising Readers Parent Book Club, Enfield Public Library, Licensed Family Childcare Providers, the Office of Early Childhood, Enfield Public Schools, and the medical community. The collaborative spirit has made the Enfield Family Resource Center so successful. FRC also offer referrals that can often be overlooked. An essential part of the referral is a follow-up to make sure the family is receiving the help they might need. He appreciates the efforts they are making to protect family confidentiality. He would like to see us continue to support the FRC that is providing valuable resources to our families.

Mr. Hamre thanked the Town Council for approving and supporting the FRC Grant previously.

A vote by **roll call – 8-0-0** passed unanimously.

**12. BOARD COMMITTEE REPORTS:**

Curriculum – Madam Chair reported the Curriculum Committee will meet on September 21<sup>st</sup>.

She asked Mrs. Cushman and Mrs. Acree if Ms. Middleton addressed your curriculum questions.

Mrs. Acree added Ms. Middleton provided us with an excellent presentation and addressed all of our questions.

Finance – Dr. Calnen reported the Finance Committee will meet on September 11<sup>th</sup>.

Policy – Mr. Ryder reported the Policy Committee will meet on September 19<sup>th</sup>.

Leadership – Madam Chair has not met. We have received questions about the strategic plan and having more availability on the website. She would like to receive an update on this at the end of September including alliance funding. Mr. Drezek added the end of September is doable.

PK-5 School Modernization Committee – Mr. Ryder reported that he received information this afternoon. There was no update received by the Town Council yesterday. It was on their agenda to discuss if there were any updates available. This is also on the Joint Facilities agenda for Thursday. All we know at this time is Russell & Dawson Architecture Firm is still reviewing and revising based on the information they received. They are working with John Dague and Fred Gerber and other town employees. There is nothing available yet for them to present. We are planning to meet as a committee in the next couple of weeks. They also provided us with a first draft of a floor plan for a potential build. We do not have any full reports or plans with options yet.

Mr. Drezek agreed with what Mr. Ryder has reported. There has been some confusion but there has not been any meetings yet. Once there is an update we will provide one. They will need a feasibility and demographic study and decisions will need to be made. We have an aggressive timeline we are following. We will also need to present our feasibility plans to the State. We had a meeting set up with the State, but the August 8<sup>th</sup> meeting was cancelled. We have made calls to the State about why we are not on the docket for another meeting. We need to do this right.

Mr. LeBlanc understands this is an aggressive schedule and we all know the government can hold things up.

Mr. Drezek added when we did this with the two high schools, this took around 2 years. When we did JFK, it was done in around 1 year. We are looking at 7 schools. This is a lot. There is a shortage with this kind of work also. We need to be patient with the process. It is coming along. We will get the committee and Town Council together soon. We are eager to move this forward. Mr. Ryder has been asking me about this quite frequently. He added that both John Dague and Fred Gerber are amazing to work with. He appreciates all of their hard work.

Joint Facility – Mr. Ryder reported the Joint Facilities Committee will meet on Thursday at 6:00 PM.

JFK Building Committee – Mr. Ryder reported the JFK Building Committee will also meet on Thursday at 6:30 PM.

Mr. Hamre asked about the audio in the JFK auditorium. He would like an update on this. Madam Chair stated we will add that to our next meeting for an update.

Joint Security Committee – Mr. Ryder is not sure when the Joint Security Committee will meet. He has requested to meet.

Enfield Mental Health Wellness & Workgroup – Dr. Calnen reported that we met during July about a school based health center (SBHC) in Enfield and requirements. The startup costs for

this are challenging and the State does not support them. We would be financially responsible for this. SBHC's need to service 700 students to be financially viable. EHS does not have available space for a full service program. The first step would be to send home a survey about this to all students. We will receive monthly reports from them. This is an ultimate goal.

Dr. Calnen added that both he and Mrs. Acree are looking forward to working with them to address health concerns. We are also working on a mission statement that Senator Kissel urged us to make for funding procurement. We would like to add this to our next agenda for the Board's input and approval.

Madam Chair added we will add this item to the next agenda. Thank you for your research on this. You are both very endearing and she appreciates your dedication.

Enfield Cultural Arts Commission – Mr. Hamre stated ECAC will hold another concert here tonight at 7 PM. He thanked the Town Manager's office for the newly completed bandshell. Open mic night will be held on the first Wednesday of each month starting on September 6<sup>th</sup> at the Enfield Public Library. He congratulated the Opera House Players for their production of "School of Rock". They raised money for United Sound. Also local artist Chris Tetro "butterflies wings" exhibit is outstanding. He is excited for the upcoming school year and to see student artworks and productions.

Madam Chair added that Counselor Santanella that the ECAC is looking to form a partnership with the musicians who perform on the bandshell. Mr. Hamre stated the Hall of Fame for Artists is looking to bring more talent to perform here in our bandshell.

Madam Chair added we can usually only see students perform at the schools. This would allow them to perform on the bandshell as a townwide event where we can showcase our amazingly talented students. Mr. Hamre added this would be an amazing opportunity for our talented students to showcase their talents. We also recognize our students at the Woman's Club Art Show.

Madam Chair stated we have talented poets, writers. Mr. Hamre congratulated Nzima as our new Poet Laureate.

Madam Chair asked who should be the point person for this partnership? Mr. Drezek stated it should be Mr. Reppucci. Mr. Hamre can reach out to him about this.

Mr. Unghire added we could also include teachers that want to perform. Mr. Hamre added there is no shortage of talent here in Enfield.

Madam Chair added with fall upon us, a lot of planning is needed for this to start in the spring and summer for next year. This is very exciting.

### **13. APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

Mr. Ryder moved, seconded by Mr. Hamre, that the Regular Meeting Minutes of June 13, 2023 be approved. A vote by **show-of-hands 7-0-1** passed with Mr. Unghire abstaining.

Dr. Calnen moved, seconded by Mr. Ryder that the Special Meeting Minutes of June 20, 2023, be approved. A vote by **show-of-hands 7-0-1** passed with Mr. Unghire abstaining.

Mr. Hamre moved, seconded by Mr. Ryder that the Special Meeting Minutes of June 27, 2023, be approved. A vote by **show-of-hands 6-0-2** passed with Mr. Unghire and Mrs. Cushman abstaining.

### **14. APPROVAL OF ACCOUNTS AND PAYROLL - None**

15. **CORRESPONDENCE & COMMUNICATION** - None

16. **EXECUTIVE SESSION** - None

17. **ADJOURNMENT**

Mr. Hamre moved, seconded by Mr. Unghire to adjourn the Special Meeting of August 22, 2023.

All ayes, motion passed unanimously. Meeting stood adjourned at 6:26 PM.

Jonathan LeBlanc  
Secretary  
Board of Education

Respectfully Submitted,  
Kathy Zalucki, Recording Secretary