



**BELCHERTOWN PUBLIC SCHOOLS  
REGULAR SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING  
September 10, 2013**

**LOCATION:** Swift River Elementary School Library  
**TIME:** 7:00 pm

**SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEMBERS:** Dr. Linda Tsoumas, Chair (present); Ms. Clare Popowich, Vice-Chair (present); Mr. Richard Fritsch, Secretary (present); Ms. Myndi Bogdanovich, Member (present); Dr. Michael Knapp, Member (present)

**ADMINISTRATION:** Dr. Judith Houle, Superintendent of Schools (present); Mr. Brian Cameron, Assistant Superintendent for Teaching and Learning (present); Mr. Edward Dunn, Contracted School Business Manager (present); Mr. Kristi Guzzo, Director of Student Support Services (present); Mr. Thomas Ruscio, JBMS Principal (present); Ms. Stacy Monette, JBMS Assistant Principal (present)

**BHS STUDENT ADVISORY COUNCIL REPRESENTATIVES:** (not present)

**VISITORS:** Paul Scully, President and CEO, and Shelley Regin, First Vice President and Director of Marketing & Public Relations, Country Bank for Savings; Ms. Teresa Parton-Lopes, Belchertown Football Association President; Mr. Christopher Bourget, BHS Football Coach; Mr. Ronald McClure, CHCS Teacher; Mr. Jim Russell, Republican reporter  
(See attached sign-in sheet for additional visitors.)

**MINUTES**

- I. Call to order  
Dr. Tsoumas called the Regular School Committee meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.
- II. Special awards and presentations  
Friend of Education Award: Country Bank for Savings  
Dr. Houle presented the 2013-2014 Friend of Education Award to representatives from Country Bank for Savings, in recognition of over 10 years of financial support to the Belchertown school district (specifically the Jabish Brook Middle School After-School Program) in the amount of approximately \$175,000.00. She added that Country Bank has also sponsored financial literacy programs to the elementary students through their banking program, and donated to the development of the Foley Field/Lake Wallace project. In addition, Country Bank has been a major corporate sponsor of the Pioneer Valley Excellence in Teaching Award program, along with the Harold Grinspoon Foundation. Mr. Paul Scully, President and CEO, and Ms. Shelley Regin, First Vice President and Director of Marketing & Public Relations, were pleased to accept this award on behalf of Country Bank, and thanked the School Committee for this formal recognition of their support of education in Belchertown.

- III. Update from BHS Student Advisory Council representatives  
None; Dr. Tsoumas noted that representatives who will serve on the BHS Student Advisory Council are in the process of being chosen.
- IV. Public comment regarding items on the agenda  
Mr. Ron McClure came forward to speak in reference to *Item VIII. A. Superintendent search process*. He stated that he has been a teacher in the Belchertown Public Schools for 26 years, and is also a resident of Belchertown. Mr. McClure specifically referred to Dr. Houle's letter presented at the August 20, 2013 School Committee meeting in which she expressed her intent to not renew her contract beyond June 30, 2014. Mr. McClure discussed the Superintendent's many accomplishments during her four years in Belchertown, noting that he had taught for over 20 years with no formal curriculum. He lauded the advancements she has made in that area, as well as in technology upgrades throughout the district, in professional development opportunities, etc. Mr. McClure then expressed his deep concern over the situation involving a group of parents whose criticism of the Superintendent he believes has led to her desire to leave the district. He feels that this sets a bad precedent for solving problems that may arise in the future between community members and the School Committee, and he also believes that there will not be many candidates willing to take on this position due to the treatment he feels Dr. Houle has received from the small percentage of parents who have vocalized their lack of support of her. Mr. McClure also said that he would like the School Committee to stand in support of Dr. Houle and ask her to reconsider her decision.
- V. Approval of minutes
  - A. August 20, 2013  
MOTION: Dr. Knapp moved to approve the minutes of the August 20, 2013 Regular School Committee meeting, as presented. Mr. Fritsch seconded the motion.  
VOTE: 5-0-0, approved unanimously
- VI. Reports and recommendations of the Superintendent
  - A. Report on the opening days of school  
Dr. Houle reported on the opening days of school, stating that things ran smoothly with only a few minor bus issues which were easily solved. She stated that a New Teacher Orientation Day had been held prior to the beginning of school, as well as a Professional Development Day. An Opening Day Convocation was also held, at which teacher and staff milestones were recognized. Dr. Houle was pleased to credit all the staff for making the opening days run with very few glitches.
  - B. Donation of equipment by the Belchertown Football Association  
Ms. Teresa Parton-Lopes, as Belchertown Football Association President, presented the Association's offer to donate two pieces of equipment (tug-a-ball football trainer and football line-up marker) for use by the football program, with a total estimated value of \$120.88. Mr. Chris Bourget, BHS Football Coach, noted that these items would be put to good use by the football team, and Dr. Houle recommended that the School Committee accept this generous donation.

MOTION: Mr. Fritsch moved to accept the donation of football equipment from the Belchertown Football Association, as presented. Dr. Knapp seconded the motion.

VOTE: 5-0-0, approved unanimously

C. Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education Mid-Cycle Review Report

Dr. Houle referred to this report dated August 6, 2013, which is included in this evening's correspondence, and asked Ms. Guzzo to review its findings.

Ms. Guzzo stated that the district had previously been found to be significantly out of compliance in 33 criterion areas. These items were classified as either "partially implemented" or "not implemented", which required that corrective action take place. She was pleased to report that after months of diligent work, there are now only seven items that need to be addressed for full compliance with Special Education laws and regulations. Ms. Guzzo then reviewed each of the seven items and explained the status of each as her department continues to make great strides towards compliance, with training already underway pertaining to each of the seven cited areas. She will keep the School Committee informed of all progress being made in this regard, and she will also develop a full corrective action plan to be submitted to the DESE prior to November 1, 2013.

Mr. Fritsch asked when the next review will take place, and Ms. Guzzo stated that they occur every three years.

Dr. Knapp noted that it was very important for the seven cited areas to be addressed, and he asked if Ms. Guzzo was going to need more resources in order to achieve full compliance. Ms. Guzzo said that the biggest need was comprehensive training and "retraining", as she stated that many things had been handled incorrectly for a very long time.

D. Plan for engagement of parents/guardians via quarterly meetings

Dr. Houle stated that one of her established goals as Superintendent is to conduct quarterly meetings with parents and guardians of Belchertown students in order to share information about activities in the school district and to seek their input, answer questions, and address concerns. School principals and other Central Office administrators will also be present. These meetings, "Coffee and Conversation with the Superintendent", will be scheduled upon feedback resulting from a survey which will be sent out to parents. This survey will also be made available on the Belchertown Public Schools website. Questions on the survey will address choices for preferred times/days, locations, and topics of discussion. Dr. Houle stated that once the gathering times and places are established, parents will be notified about the meetings via the Connect5 call/email system and the district's website.

E. Pinwheels for Peace project update

Mr. Cameron reported that the Pinwheels for Peace project is well under way, and is timed to coincide with World Peace Day on September 21<sup>st</sup>. He said that this art installation project was first discussed last year as part of the PeaceBuilders Program and will serve as a kick-off activity for that program. Mr. Cameron stated that the

students will be creating pinwheels with messages related to the PeaceBuilders guiding principles, and that this will also provide a way for students to express their feelings about what's going on in their lives and in the world. World Peace Day 2013 coincides with the Belchertown Fair and so many pinwheels will be installed along State Street and near the fair as a welcoming message to visitors.

Mr. Cameron then gave supplies to each of the School Committee members so that they could participate in this project by creating their own pinwheels, and encouraged them to do their "homework" as good role models for the students. The Healthy & Safer Schools Advisory Committee will meet tomorrow and will finalize the details for this project, including student permission slips, etc.

VII. Unfinished business

A. Update on FY 2014 budget

Dr. Houle referred to an email received from Jill Panto, Town Accountant, with regard to a Cherry Sheet Assessment adjustment. The DESE had recently notified the town of an error in Belchertown's FY13 School Choice Assessment. Ms. Panto indicated that this error will be corrected via FY14's cherry sheet payments, and the resulting adjustment will be sufficient to cover the deficit caused by the variance between the State's final budget and the budget used in the town's projections which were based on Governor Patrick's budget.

Dr. Houle stated that this will leave the school district in good shape and Mr. Dunn will bring budget transfer items to the first School Committee meeting in October, pending ratification of all employee contracts.

VIII. New business

A. Superintendent search process

As a preface to the discussion of the Superintendent search process, Dr. Tsoumas read a statement she had prepared in the hope that Dr. Houle would reverse her decision to not renew her contract beyond June 30, 2014, and therefore the search process for a new Superintendent would be preempted. Dr. Tsoumas stated that Dr. Houle is highly qualified, a great asset to the district, and that previous problems involving her leadership had been resolved. She also mentioned that the recent annual evaluation of the Superintendent by the School Committee had given her high marks and noted her many accomplishments, including the following: mentoring of a strong Senior Leadership Team; the development of a comprehensive curriculum for K-12; constructive relationships with the bargaining units and successful contract negotiations; informative budget presentations and ongoing updates with increased transparency throughout the year; advancement in technology throughout the district as well as telecommunication systems to keep families apprised of current happenings in the district; meaningful professional development, etc. Dr. Tsoumas also addressed the issue of the small percentage of voting community members expressing their lack of support for Dr. Houle, and she feels that the School Committee should not listen solely to this group when clear progress has been made in the district under Dr. Houle. She concluded by noting that Dr. Houle's letter of August 20<sup>th</sup> had been taken under advisement at that meeting, and before moving to any discussion about a search for a new

Superintendent, she would like to ask Dr. Houle to reconsider the offer of a one year extension to her contract through June 30, 2015.

Dr. Houle stated that she would like to know how the open session vote would take place before responding to the offer.

MOTION: Ms. Popowich moved to revisit the School Committee's offer of a one year extension to the Superintendent's contract in order to retain her services through June 30, 2015. Dr. Knapp seconded the motion.

COMMENT: Ms. Bogdanovich questioned why the School Committee would readdress this issue since the decision had already been made regarding the Superintendent's contract, and she stated that she has received feedback from many people expressing their continued concern over Dr. Houle's performance as Superintendent. Mr. Fritsch stated that he felt it was clear that the community had spoken with regard to the Superintendent at the last Town Election by voting in a new member to the School Committee. He also said that any discussion about renewing Dr. Houle's contract should occur only with proper notification to the community, and Ms. Bogdanovich added that many parents would have attended tonight's meeting to voice opposition to Dr. Houle had they known it would be a topic of discussion.

Both Ms. Bogdanovich and Mr. Fritsch criticized the reading of this statement by Dr. Tsoumas, stating that it was not on the agenda, but Dr. Tsoumas said that it was directly related to the Superintendent search process. Ms. Bogdanovich felt that the offer to extend Dr. Houle's contract at this meeting was inappropriate.

A heated discussion continued among the School Committee members for several minutes until Dr. Houle interjected with a comment stating that she was "going to put a stop to this", and requested that the motion asking her to reconsider the offer of a one year extension to her contract, reversing her previous decision to not renew her contract, be rescinded.

At this point, Dr. Tsoumas asked Ms. Popowich if she would like to withdraw her motion, and Ms. Popowich did so. However, she stated clearly that she was not only unhappy with this decision, but that she feels that the School Committee is going in the wrong direction with this divisive action, and Mr. McClure reiterated his previous statement about this action setting a bad precedent for the district.

MOTION WITHDRAWN: Ms. Popowich

The School Committee then began discussion of the Superintendent search process and a request presented by Dr. Tsoumas to accept proposals for consultant services in this search. In her request, Dr. Tsoumas outlined the specifications for the scope of work involved, which may be modified by the School Committee and Search/Screening Committee, and/or the consultants if a rationale for doing so is

provided. The request also detailed the submission requirements for consultant services proposals. Dr. Tsoumas estimated that the cost for hiring a consultant for the Superintendent search would be approximately \$12,000 to \$16,000, and would be subject to a bidding process following state requirements. Dr. Knapp provided a handout of the Superintendent search process that had taken place in Attleboro, MA in January, 2013. This was a comprehensive assessment prepared by a sitting School Committee member in that district who had research experience in this field. Dr. Knapp asked how the search process had taken place in 2008, and Dr. Tsoumas stated that a search committee had been formed which she chaired, but she feels that current School Committee members have neither the time nor work experience to conduct this search, as it is a multi-step process.

Dr. Tsoumas noted that, if approved, the request for proposals will be made available tomorrow, September 11<sup>th</sup> with a submission deadline of Monday, September 23, 2013 at 4:00 p.m. in Central Office.

Dr. Tsoumas concluded the discussion by stating that she had contacted other districts in the state for their recommendations for consultant services, and three consulting groups were named, as follows: Massachusetts Association of School Committees (MASC), Boston; New England School Development Council (NESDEC), Marlborough; Future Management Systems, Inc., Beverly. It was noted that in addition to these three groups mentioned for consideration, others are also welcome to submit proposals.

MOTION: Mr. Fritsch moved to approve the request for proposals for consultant services in the Superintendent search process, as presented.

Ms. Bogdanovich seconded the motion.

VOTE: 5-0-0, approved unanimously

A special School Committee meeting was scheduled for Tuesday, October 1, 2013 at 7:00 p.m. at Swift River Elementary School Library. This meeting will include a single agenda item: consultants submitting written proposals will be invited to attend this meeting to make a formal presentation to the Committee in addition to the written proposal submission. The School Committee will make its decision that evening to choose a vendor for these services.

IX. Reports of subcommittees/representative to Collaborative for Educational Services

A. Collaborative for Educational Services (Ms. Bogdanovich)

Ms. Bogdanovich stated that the collaborative will meet tomorrow evening.

B. Curriculum & Instruction (Dr. Tsoumas/Dr. Knapp)

None

C. Healthy & Safer Schools Advisory Committee (Ms. Popowich)

Ms. Popowich stated that the Advisory Committee will meet tomorrow.

D. Jessica's Boundless Playground Committee (Dr. Tsoumas)

Dr. Tsoumas stated that there had been a sign unveiling on Wednesday, August 21<sup>st</sup> on the CHCS grounds which indicated the future site of Jessica's Boundless Playground. She noted that there were approximately 120 people in attendance, including several groups who had been active in fundraising for this project. She also said that significant progress has been made, and Dr. Houle added that she had met with a group of potential contributors who visited Central Office yesterday.

E. Personnel & Policy (Ms. Popowich/Ms. Bogdanovich)

Ms. Popowich stated that the following two items were voted on during a meeting of the Personnel & Policy Subcommittee held earlier this evening.

1. Transition Specialist job description

At the Personnel & Policy Subcommittee meeting, Ms. Guzzo presented a job description for the Transition Specialist position which has recently been filled as included in the current budget, but for which no job description had yet been determined. She consulted other districts to get their feedback in developing this draft which is included in this evening's correspondence. Ms. Guzzo referred to this document, which outlines qualifications, job goals, and performance responsibilities of the Transition Specialist. Basically, this position was created in order to aid the transition of 18-22 year old students out of district support services and into the "real world", where they may access many town resources and seek employment from area businesses.

Ms. Guzzo stated that this job description meets the needs of our district.

Dr. Tsoumas asked if it was customary for a teacher in this position to hold licenses in both Moderate Disabilities and Severe Disabilities, and Ms. Guzzo stated that ideally one would be licensed in Severe Disabilities which would cover both levels of disability.

Mr. Fritsch asked if this position will provide a financial benefit to the district, and Ms. Guzzo stated that we will slowly be able to do away with some contracted services and instead have them provided by the Transition Specialist, and this may translate into an approximate \$30,000.00 savings to the district.

VOTE: A vote was taken to approve the job description for Transition Specialist as presented and brought forward by the Personnel & Policy Subcommittee.  
5-0-0, approved unanimously

The Personnel & Policy Subcommittee will next meet on September 24th at 6:30 p.m. at SRE Library.

2. Request for fee increase: custodial fees for non-profit and community groups using school facilities

At the Personnel & Policy Subcommittee meeting, Dr. Houle presented a request for an increase in custodial fees for non-profit and community groups using school facilities. She noted that the rates for custodians covering these events

had not been raised in a long time, and she recommended that their current rate of \$27.00 per hour be raised to \$30.00 per hour. This amount is based on the ratification of the new custodian contract.

VOTE: A vote was taken to approve the request for a fee increase in custodial fees for non-profit and community groups using school facilities as presented and brought forward by the Personnel & Policy Subcommittee. 5-0-0, approved unanimously

- F. Property & Transportation (Mr. Fritsch/Dr. Knapp)  
Dr. Houle had conferred with Mr. Robert Lachance, Director of Buildings and Grounds, and it was agreed that this subcommittee will next meet on October 22<sup>nd</sup> at 6:30 p.m. at SRE Library.
- G. School Safety Task Force (Mr. Fritsch)  
Dr. Houle noted that the Safety Task Force had met on September 5<sup>th</sup>, and they are making good progress on the Crisis Emergency Plan. The group will next meet on September 23<sup>rd</sup>.
- H. Technology Advisory Committee (Mr. Fritsch)  
Mr. Fritsch stated that this Advisory Committee will meet in October.
- X. Correspondence
  - A. Agenda: September 10, 2013
  - B. Minutes: August 20, 2013
  - C. Memorandum regarding donation of equipment by the Belchertown Football Association
  - D. Mid-Cycle Review Report
    - 1. Executive summary
    - 2. Full report from the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education
  - E. Email from Town Accountant regarding the FY 2014 budget and cherry sheet adjustment
  - F. Draft survey of parents/guardians regarding quarterly meetings in each school building
  - G. Pinwheels for Peace project description
  - H. Draft RFP: Superintendent search consultant
  - I. Transition Specialist job description
  - J. Facilities Use Fees Schedule: KF-E
- XI. Vote to enter into Executive Session under M.G.L., c. 30A, §21, Part (3), to discuss strategy with respect to collective bargaining with Unit A, Teachers; Unit B, Secretaries; Unit D, Food Service Workers; and Unit E, Paraprofessionals; as conducting said business in open session would have a detrimental effect on the School Committee's negotiating position. The Committee will return to open session.



Dr. Tsoumas – yes  
Ms. Popowich – yes  
Mr. Fritsch – yes  
Ms. Bogdanovich – yes  
Dr. Knapp - yes

The Committee entered into Executive Session at 8:33 p.m.

The Committee returned to Open Session at 8:52 p.m.

MOTION: Ms. Popowich moved to approve the Memorandum of Agreement for the Unit A Contract for July 1, 2013 through June 30, 2016. Dr. Knapp seconded the motion.  
VOTE: 4-0-1 (abstention: Dr. Tsoumas)

MOTION: Ms. Popowich moved to approve the Memorandum of Agreement for the Unit B Contract for July 1, 2013 through June 30, 2016. Ms. Bogdanovich seconded the motion.  
VOTE: 5-0-0, approved unanimously

MOTION: Dr. Knapp moved to approve the Memorandum of Agreement for the Unit D Contract for July 1, 2013 through June 30, 2016. Ms. Popowich seconded the motion.  
VOTE: 5-0-0, approved unanimously

MOTION: Ms. Popowich moved to approve the Memorandum of Agreement for the Unit E Contract for July 1, 2013 through June 30, 2016. Dr. Knapp seconded the motion.  
VOTE: 5-0-0, approved unanimously

XII. Adjournment

MOTION: Ms. Popowich moved to adjourn the Regular School Committee meeting at 8:57 p.m. Dr. Knapp seconded the motion.  
VOTE: 5-0-0, approved unanimously

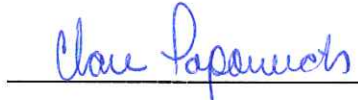
Respectfully submitted by,




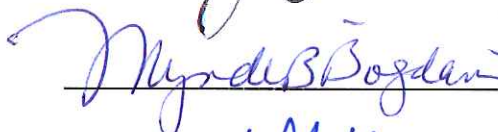
Kathryn A. Petersen  
Non-Confidential Recording Secretary to the School Committee


School Committee members' signatures:

 Linda Tsoumas, Chair

 Clare Popowich, Vice Chair

 Richard Fritsch, Secretary

 Myndi Bogdanovich, Member

 Michael Knapp, Member

*The mission of the Belchertown Public Schools is to ensure that every student meets with success every day. To that end, we pledge to ensure that we have rigorous, standards-based curriculum; instruction designed to meet the needs of diverse learners in every classroom; and access to the global learning community via state-of-the-art technology in schools that are communities of respect and civility for all.*

**2011-2015 Strategic Plan Goals (adopted by the Belchertown School Committee, 3/1/11):**

- Goal #1: To have guaranteed (standards-based and implemented by all), viable (doable and accessible to every student), seamless K-12 curriculum in every content area.
- Goal #2: To have rigorous (standards-based), relevant (grounded in 21<sup>st</sup> Century skills), differentiated instructional practices with the ability to access the global learning community via technology available to every learner.
- Goal #3: To implement a plan to ensure that our students understand the importance of acceptance, tolerance, and respect supported by all adults in the community.

The Belchertown School Committee conducts its business in open session pursuant to Chapter 30A, Section 21 of the Massachusetts General Laws. The public is welcome to comment only on items on the agenda for this meeting as noted above. If you wish to address the School Committee regarding an item not on the agenda for this meeting, please contact the Superintendent of Schools at 413.323.0423 or via email at [superintendent@belchertown.org](mailto:superintendent@belchertown.org) to determine the best way to address your concerns (see [School Committee Policy BEDH](#)).

BELCHERTOWN SCHOOL COMMITTEE  
REGULAR SESSION  
SIGN IN SHEET

DATE: 9-10-13

PLS. PRINT NAME BELOW

Kristi A. Guzzo

Ron McClure

Phona Griffin

Rob Griffin

Ann Marie Beapre

Teresa Parlon-Lopes

Jas McEl

Ellen Beardon

Stacy Monette

Thomas K. Russo

Sandy Kennel

Dawn French

Jim Russell

Chris Bourget

JOHN LOPES