



Monthly Meeting
Avon Board of Education
34 Simsbury Road, Avon, Connecticut

Mission Statement

Our mission is to inspire in each student a joy and passion for learning and a commitment to excellence, personal integrity, and social responsibility.

Tuesday, February 23, 2021, 7:00 pm

via virtual meeting

Avon Board of Education
34 Simsbury, Avon, Connecticut 06001
Via Zoom

Minutes

Attendance

Members Present: Jackie Blea; David Cavanaugh; Board Chair, Debra Chute; Board Secretary, Jeffrey S. Fleischman; Jason Indomenico; Bogdan Oprica; Lisa Seminara; Board Vice Chair, Jay Spivak; Laura Young

Members Absent: none

Administration Present: Dr. Bridget Heston Carnemolla, Superintendent of Schools; Roberto Medic, Director of Human Resources; Donna Nestler-Rusack, Assistant Superintendent; Susan Russo, Business Manager

Call to Order

Deb Chute, Board Chair, called the meeting to order at 7:01 pm.

A roll call of Board members and administrators was taken.

I. **Pledge of Allegiance**

After the Pledge, Ms. Chute read the District's Mission Statement prior to introducing the Avon Achievers.

II. **Avon Achievers**

AMS recognized its entire student body for exemplifying the four pillars of AMS: compassion, responsibility, curiosity and resilience. As Mr. Kimball shared, over this past year, which has been so unique, the students have shown compassion to one another and to the staff. They have been responsible and diligent with each other to accomplish what was needed. In spite of the circumstances of the year, students have remained intellectually curious which inspires and excites the teachers. Their resiliency with dealing with all the COVID strategies that were put in place is incredible.

III. Approval of Minutes

A. Board of Education Special Meeting, January 13, 2021

Jason Indomenico moved to approve the Minutes of the Special Meeting of January 13, 2021.

Jackie Blea seconded the motion.

The motion passed unanimously.

B. Board of Education Monthly Meeting, January 19, 2021

Laura Young moved to approve the Minutes of the Regular Monthly Meeting of January 19, 2021.

David Cavanaugh seconded the motion.

The motion passed unanimously.

IV. Communication from Public

Dr. Neil Livingston, an Avon resident, inquired about the public communication aspect of the Board meetings and when the Board will allow live comments as opposed to email communications. Dr. Livingston also asked when the Board of Education will resume having live meetings. He also asked that a reply sent from the Superintendent's Assistant, Shirley Moy, be read during the meeting. The reply stated that there were currently no talks to allow live public comment and aside from the benefit of having more people attend the virtual meetings holding the meetings in person presented logistical issues while adhering to COVID mitigation strategies at the high school.

V. Items of Information and Proposals

A. Student Representative Report – Alvin Guo & Sawyer Hernandez, AHS Student Representatives
Sawyer Hernandez reported that new clubs are starting at the high school, including French Cuisine; Muslim Students Club; and Indian Students Association. Mr. Hernandez also gave a quick update on sports including basketball; indoor track; wrestling team and the opening of registration for Spring sports. Class registration also recently began; there is a Mock Trial competition on Friday which will be held virtually and felt optimistic that Avon would do well. Mr. Hernandez thought the return of all the students has been successful. Addressing a Board member's question, Sawyer replied that in general the students are feeling positive about being back and most of the students were practicing COVID guidelines as students did not want to return to hybrid or full remote. Students are also more productive and spirits are lifted.

B. Financial Report – Susan Russo, Business Manager

Susan Russo reported that for the month ending January 31, 2021 it showed 11.59% remaining in the budget compared to 11.27% for last year. Due to funds received for COVID the District was able to offset \$480,000 of expenses. Ms. Russo shared a Financial Highlights Memo that stated a positive gain overall in the salaries line; other expenses were also explained as well as Special Education which was on target for what was budgeted and what is planned to put into escrow. There was also substantial savings in transportation due to decreased needs because of the many remote students and parents transporting their children due to COVID. The Board appreciated the Highlights Memo saying it was easy to understand and very helpful.

VI. Committees & Liaison Reports

A. Committee Reports

1. Curriculum & Professional Practices – Jackie Blea, Chair

Ms. Blea shared that an update on student performance was given focusing mainly on the high school but touching on all buildings. Also discussed was how students are receiving supports. The Committee was very appreciative of how hard the staff have been to be proactive in reaching out to students. Ms. Blea felt it was a very positive meeting in learning how students are doing during these COVID times. The next meeting is scheduled for May 4th.

2. Finance – Jay Spivak, Chair

Mr. Spivak thanked Ms. Russo for her first Finance Committee meeting and introducing new financial reports. Manually entered reports will be eliminated to avoid human error. The Turf Field Light Project was also discussed during the meeting which is on tonight's agenda. Next meeting is March 9 at 6:00 pm.

3. Negotiations – Jason Indomenico, Chair

Mr. Indomenico reported that an agreement was recently reached with the nutritional services workers with retroactive wages for the 2019-2020 school year. The Committee is also meeting regularly with the para-educators, tutors and nutrition service works with another meeting scheduled for tomorrow.

4. Policy – Laura Young, Chair

Ms. Young reported that robust discussion was had at the last meeting around policies pertaining to technology as well as the technology protection plan. There was also insightful communication from two students regarding the use of students' own devices. Student, as well as staff, acceptable use of technology policies as well as the responsible use of network and internet policies were reviewed. These discussions will continue at a special meeting sometime in March, with a date not yet determined.

B. Liaison Report

1. Board Representative to Capital Region Education Council – Jackie Blea, Board Rep.

Ms. Blea stated that the meeting last week was inspiring with the focus on diversity, equity and inclusion, which with Avon is working in tandem. Ms. Blea also forwarded an opportunity to join an equity and social challenge for the month of March to the other Board members, which several Board members will be participating.

Dr. Carnemolla spoke about attending the joint legislative breakfast that discussed the CREC, CABA and CAPSS requested priorities of the legislature. CREC's priorities included funding; Open Choice; recruitment and retention of minority workforce; and special education funding throughout the state. There was also some discussion on regionalization for the state, which appears not to be a priority at this time.

VII. Chair's Report – Debra Chute, Board Chair

A. Board Chair Update

Board Chair, Deb Chute, expressed her appreciation of how hard everyone in the District is working and was happy to hear how well students are doing in the midst of the COVID situation. Ms. Chute was also glad to hear about the athletics piece, as it is an important part of the student experience. A thank you was given to Mr. Filon for setting up a Youtube channel so parents and even grandparents can watch games and hopes this continues even past COVID times.

VIII. Superintendent's Report – Dr. Bridget Heston Carnemolla

A. Hiring Report

The Superintendent reviewed the Hiring Report highlighting the hiring of non-certified staff as well as two resignations. Dr. Carnemolla wished Mr. Barboza well in his new position in East Hartford and thanked him for a job well done as a Security Officer while in Avon.

B. Enrollment Report

The Enrollment Report showed minor fluctuations due to both withdrawals and new registrations with a net of plus one since last month. There are 65 less remote students since January with more than 2/3 of the student population back at the high school. Elementary school parents who have remote children will also be surveyed to determine their plans for the rest of the school year.

C. Strategic Plan Update

Dr. Carnemolla stated that the recent focus has been on student performance across the District zoning in a bit more on the high school which has shown performance differences greater there during this time than last year. Additional data that was just run since the C&PP meeting which will be discussed later in the meeting. In addition, to be discussed tonight will be the work being done to ensure success of students at Avon High and some multiple pathways to learning. The implementation of Writer's Workshop continues in K through 6. With a recent delivery that came in, one to one Chromebooks also continue to be rolled out. An updated version of the Fall survey will be administered to students regarding the return to school; how they're feeling about the return to school and what they may need for assistance. Aside from the performance data, this will provide another source of data for the District to use.

Mr. Medic reported on the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) work being done which is directly tied to the District's Blueprint. He stated that last month he took part in a networking event to meet with and engage in discussion with other directors of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion from the greater capital region. A professional learning organization was formed with plans to meet every other month to share strategies on how to improve DEI efforts in districts, to learn from one another and to work collaboratively on how to respond to local and/or national events that impact our student population and staff. A DEI committee has been developed at each of the schools and will be utilized on the District's DEI Council. Mr. Medic has drafted a guide for the Council that is currently being reviewed by Drs. Carnemolla and Rusack, which will be utilized at the launch of the Council this Spring; faculty, staff, students, parents and community members will be invited. The purpose of this committee is to learn collaboratively before beginning to make determinations on improving practices with the District and our schools.

The January professional development was also discussed stating the District had a highly successful launch for our building equity teams. Gloria Menguel from CREC and Derek Hall led a very engaging session on diversity, equity and inclusion terms to help launch the work for this Spring. Drs. Carnemolla and Rusack, along with Mr. Medic will meet with Ms. Menguel and Mr. Hall to discuss the upcoming March PD for the District's building equity teams. In addition, Ms. Menguel and Mr. Hall will help finalize sessions for the District Administrative Team to look at our DEI practices based on student data. The District has elected to focus on the training of staff first in an effort to serve as a "train the trainer model" which will then allow them the ability to work with students and the community members in a more confident and collaborative manner.

Mr. Medic also recently met with the staff involved with the high school group, Avon Voices for Equity, and will meet with the students at a future time. The group received funding from the AHS PTO to bring in a facilitator, Ryan Parker, an educator in a neighboring school district, to lead three sessions with the students to create an antiracism action plan to be used within the community.

Mr. Medic also shared that at the last Professional Development and Evaluation Committee (PDEC) meeting, it was decided that at the upcoming PD session, social workers and school psychologists will take part in a training on supporting our LGBTQ students. Additionally, a choice of LGBTQ sessions will be offered for grade 7-12 teachers during the March PD day.

Dr. Carnemolla added that recently, she, Dr. Rusack and Mr. Medic met with a local community group. This grass roots organization is interested in collaborating with the District in work related to diversity, equity while also furthering the work through the Town. They will be sending the

Board some communication in the near future. Avon Town Manager, Brandon Robertson has also indicated interest in using some of APS' facilitators for training town staff in the area of DEI.

D. Updates

The Superintendent reviewed the information regarding the buses to improve loading/unloading and seating to help with social distancing as well as contact tracing. Working with other school districts in the Farmington Valley and the Farmington Valley Health Districts, vaccinations are coming for school staff with the creation of vaccination clinics in the area. Dr. Carnemolla also met with the Avon Dollars for Scholars who are piloting a new scholarship program this year to offer scholarships in the names of the schools. More information will be forthcoming very shortly.

IX. Consent Calendar

No items

X. Old Business

A. 18-19/70 Pledge to ACORN for the Turf Field Lighting Project

Ms. Chute reminded the Board members that this topic was first brought up a year ago and now that the lights are being put in a decision needs to be made as to the status of this pledge. Dr. Carnemolla added that the Board had pledged up to \$30,000 last Spring for the project when ACORN was first looking to raise the money. ACORN, through its fund raising efforts, has turned over the amount raised to the Town and the Town will fund the rest of the project. It is asked of the Board that the initial \$30,000 set aside for the project be available and accessible to be utilized in the event that it is necessary for any contingencies. Mr. Spivak, Chair of the Finance Committee, stated that it is the perfect use of the money from the Facility Use account and will benefit the community; the Board has the money and any money not needed will be returned to the account. To clarify a Board member's questions, while the pledge was first made to ACORN, the money will be given to the Town. The agenda item was listed as such as this was how it was listed when first discussed and the agenda needed to show that this action was in correlation to the prior agenda item. There is no time limit to the pledged amount but will end when the project is completed. When asked for the amounts ACORN raised and the Town contributed, Ms. Russo stated she was not sure of the exact amounts but would report back. The amount that ACORN gave the Town did not include the amount of the Board's pledge. Dr. Carnemolla added that construction of the lights will begin on March 1st.

***Jay Spivak moved to approve the allocation of up to \$30,000 from the Facility Use Fund to the Town to cover expenses above the budgeted amount of \$380,048 for the Avon High School Turf Field Light Project. Laura Young seconded the motion.
The motion passed unanimously.***

XI. New Business

A. 20-21/53 Avon High School Update

Dr. Carnemolla stated that student performance data continues to be reviewed utilizing assessment data and any collected information related to teaching and learning, assessments. Social/emotional learning is also examined to look at the whole child at Avon High School. Mr. Renkawitz, Drs. O'Neil and DeVivo worked together with the Central Office Administrative Team to pull relevant data, analyze it together and work with school staff/departments coordinators to come up with conclusions to move forward. The Superintendent thanked them for all the work done to be able to share this information tonight.

Mr. Renkawitz, Avon High School Principal, thanked the Board of Ed, and Central Office Administrative Team for their support in moving this work forward and the support and feedback of the department coordinators and teachers.

Mr. Renkawitz first shared the good news of 2/3 of the students returning to full in person learning. Drs. DeVivo and O'Neil also presented.

- As for the social aspects, staff and students have mentioned the noticeable change in attitude and spirit across the school. Students are now allowed to stay after school for extra help to try to get back to as normal a school day as possible. Graduation is still on track at the Farmington Polo Grounds but will take guidelines from the FVHD as to how it is held. The prom is still scheduled for the Glastonbury Country Club but have some back-up plans if needed. A car parade like last year's is also still in the plans as is the after graduation event, Safe Grad, if it is approved by the FVHD.
- Every student is given an opportunity to participate in the College Experience, with overall numbers up from 864 students to 1,106 students. There has been a drop in AP courses but almost double the amount of students in ECE courses and the inclusion of Business courses from Tunxis. Course recommendations are currently taking place.
- To better support students, the data of grade distribution within the four core areas (English, Math, Science and Social Studies) was analyzed for semester one (Quarter 1 and Quarter 2) and compared with data from semester one of last year. This data was then analyzed by students who were remote, receive special education, 504 students and Open Choice students.
- There was an increase of F's from 36 in 2019-2020 to 143 in 2020-2021; which required new goals. The goal for solving the problem of practice is to work collaboratively with students, staff and families to ensure success for all students.
- Short term and long term actions include returning to full in person learning on Wednesdays; establish credit recovery plans for students; use of Edgenuity (an online service that is used with a certified teacher to help students with specific content that need further academic help) to fill in the gaps for identified students; maintain extra help during the school day and after school; staffed Student Success Center after school; and continue home visits, and SAT referrals for disengaged students. Coordinators will work closely with teachers to identify the issues and review the data (summative assessments, attendance, D and F list). Parent contact will be increased and full semester course credit recovery options will be established. With summer courses no longer available through the West Hartford district, the high school is looking at ways to support students through the Summer with perhaps online learning through Brigham Young University. This work will also help complete the work for the Portrait of the Graduate. Dr. Carnemolla added that this is to accelerate learning rather than remediate learning to help students keep on track.

Comments and questions from the Board included the appreciation of having multiple eyes on the students to ensure success to which Mr. Renkawitz agreed it was a concerted team effort of teachers, coordinators and counselors. Dr. Carnemolla stated that it is twofold – how to help the student who has not done well and how to prevent this in the future. The 143 F's is representative of 62 students and will prioritize what needs to be done most to correct the situation, and to relook at the support provided to the student. Dr. Carnemolla added that the focus is on the failures to see what is the most dire need and it is not just students who receive an F but any grade D and below. It was also reminded for the District to be mindful of the social/emotional impact and stigma when students receive failing grades. The Board asked how other districts are doing and what they are doing to address the situation to which the Superintendent replied that conversations with neighboring districts indicate they are seeing the same with some having even worse

statistics of student performance at the high school level. Many of the districts are hoping to do their grade recovery this summer, while Avon is ahead of other districts in looking at the statistics now, getting students back in school and trying to put in place the supports to be successful in helping students. A Board member suggested reaching out to legislators so they are aware of this nationwide issue. The Superintendent said she was not aware of what legislators could possibly do aside from providing more resources as they have extended the allowance of parents opting to keep their student fully remote which in essence is running two school systems within one district and does not lead to success. Area superintendents are advocating for this option to change or for the state to come in and assist districts as well as for additional funding for mental health supports. Dr. Carnemolla clarified that due to being remote last Spring, there is no data to compare assessments from this year to last but PSATs and can be used which will be coming up. Dr. Renkawitz added that teachers are aware that each student is unique and comes into play along with common assessments. Teachers are asked to get grades in at the same time for all students in the class but the expectation is that gradebooks are up to date but this is a continual process. Dr. Carnemolla added that there is alignment within the departments as to the assessments and assignments; the standards are part of the Portrait of the Graduate. Board members stressed that common assessment tools were important to determine if students are learning. It was also asked that the current, as well as any future data, be forwarded to Board members. The discussion on the full return of high school students began at the school level earlier today with Wednesdays to be a full day as all the other days. The Superintendent added that there was a misconception that Wednesdays were remote days to allow for cleaning of the schools which is false; the schools are cleaned every day. To answer a Board question, the Math Lab is being utilized by students and able to accommodate the demand even from middle school students. The Student Assistant Center has also been busy and able to accommodate up to 18 students at a time. The Superintendent stated that additional staff would be provided if ever needed. Mr. Renkawitz clarified that if a student is out ill, even at the end of a marking period, they are allowed extended time to complete their work. Mr. Renkawitz also stated that counselors and teachers reach out to students and parents of those who are failing, sometimes utilizing outside agencies when there was no response from parents. Home visits are coordinated with counselors, social workers and security if needed. When students have several areas that need to be worked on, Dept. Coordinators and counselors coordinate and are sensitive as to how to deliver the support so the students don't feel further overwhelmed. To avoid students fall through the cracks, the admin team meets daily, the school counselors meet as a group with the administrative rep every Friday morning, and teachers have a weekly collaborative team time to share student information. It is important to discuss how to meet student and family needs, not how the student meets the school needs. Addressing the drop in AP enrollment, Mr. Renkawitz stated that many students are switching to ECE courses, which are now accepted at many colleges. Dr. Rusack added that ECE courses have the same content as AP courses and allows students more choice. Administrators will get back to the Board as to exactly what courses the students are taking. Dr. Carnemolla clarified for the Board that the students that have F's are not all remote students but without the usual measures it has been difficult to identify if there are common patterns/trends with the failing students. The Board thanked administrators for the work done to provide the thoughtful information and asked that the message be brought back to students that they are the main priority and the Board truly wants them to do well and do not think they are failures and believe they can overcome this.

B. 20-21/54 Fiscal Year 19/20 Audit Report

Ms. Russo reported that both the Board and the Town did exceptionally well in the audit. There were no reportable comments or substantial findings.

C. 20-21/55 2021-2022 School Year Calendar

The Superintendent explained that without knowing what the State has planned if anything for the upcoming school year, the presented calendar was modeled after the current school year calendar with one notable change from previous years – having the first two days as half days. Half days were implemented during the beginning of the current school year to allow students to acclimate to the COVID strategies. Faculty and students appreciated that so much it was used again for the start of the upcoming school year to allow everyone to settle back into routines. There are 180 student days and 185 staff days. The use of remote days for snow days was a temporary order for this year only. The District may try again to create calendars two years out when situations settle. Due to staff that may live in neighboring districts we are following what other districts are doing for the April vacation. The calendar is subject to change at any time due to state or local regulations.

Deb Chute moved to approve the presented 2021-2022 School Year Calendar provided that it may be subject to change based on circumstances. Laura Young seconded the motion.

The motion passed unanimously.

XII. Communication from Avon Board of Education Members

Mr. Oprica stated that the Superintendent, teachers and staff deserved much credit for bringing the students back into school especially during this nationwide crisis. Mr. Oprica expressed his pleasure to hear the District is providing solutions to return to normalcy with clubs and activities and to think of what other steps to take for even greater normalcy. He asked that we react to science and not react to fear.

XIII. Adjournment

Jay Spivak moved to adjourn; Laura Young seconded the motion.

The meeting adjourned by unanimous consent at 9:35 pm.

Minutes prepared by Shirley Moy, Board Recording Secretary

Minutes respectfully submitted by Jeffrey S. Fleischman, Board Secretary

Jeffrey S. Fleischman, March 9, 2021

Board minutes are approved at the next regular monthly Board meeting, and any corrections to the minutes, if needed, will be made at that time.