



PLYMOUTH PUBLIC SCHOOLS

CENTRAL OFFICE

27 NORTH HARWINTON AVENUE
TERRYVILLE, CONNECTICUT 06786

MISSION STATEMENT

The Mission of Plymouth Public Schools is to challenge, inspire, and prepare all students for success in an ever-changing and complex world.

SPECIAL MEETING
OF THE
PLYMOUTH BOARD OF EDUCATION
RETREAT
TERRYVILLE HIGH SCHOOL LIBRARY
33 NORTH HARWINTON AVENUE
TERRYVILLE, CT 06786

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 11, 2023

5:30 P.M.

MINUTES

Present: Mr. Seaman, Mrs. Kulesa, Mr. Showers, Ms. Tilton, Mr. Foote, Mrs. Candrea-Floresciani, Mr. Perugini and Mr. Zbuska

Absent: Mrs. Lucian

Also present: Mr. Falcone, Superintendent of Schools

1. **Call to Order and Pledge to the Flag**

Mr. Seaman called the Special Meeting of the Plymouth Board of Education to order at 6 p.m. and the group joined in the Pledge to the Flag.

2. **Adoption of the Agenda**

MOTION: To entertain a motion to adopt the agenda as presented. Motion Mr. Showers, second Mr. Foote, any discussion, all in favor, any opposed, any abstentions, motion carries.

3. **Superintendent's Update**

Mr. Falcone – The purpose of this meeting is to have a conversation as to where we are. Take a temperature of where we are within the district currently and to answer any questions the Board may have. We are going to talk about: (1) Roles and Responsibilities of the Board to give everyone just an up-date on the norms of how we function. Also, to discuss his roles and responsibilities as Superintendent; (2) Review and Progress on the Board of Education Goals – Discuss the progress we are making towards our Goals; (3) Budget Development Update – Touch base as to where we are in terms of the budget process currently in developing the budget for the Board.

a) **Roles and Responsibilities**

The Board represents the Town and the Community. Three areas where most of the Board's responsibilities fall are: Policy, Curriculum and Budget, which are all in Board Policy. The Board's main responsibility is to (1) represent the public; (2) hire the Superintendent and evaluate him/her.

During the school day, the Board gives the Superintendent the authority to uphold the policies that they have created in order to make certain the budget is being presented and the curriculum is being followed. The Superintendent basically works for the Board. This is the reason the Board evaluates the Superintendent. He is the only employee the Board technically has. Everyone else works for the Superintendent who evaluates the

administrators. The administrators then evaluate, i.e. the teachers, paraprofessionals, etc. The Board gives the Superintendent the authority to run the day to day operations of the District.

Public Comment – There may be a time when a parent for one reason or another may not be happy with something that occurred at school and may come to a Board Meeting to comment on their particular situation by speaking during Public Comment which they have every right to do. Public Comment is exactly what it is meant to be. It is not an opportunity for the Board of respond to the individual, answer questions, or defend themselves. If a response to a questions is called for, it will be responded to at a later date. Not at the meeting. The Board should not put themselves into a situation without giving themselves enough time to respond.

Executive Session – This usually occurs at the end of a Regular or Special Board Meeting when the Board needs to address i.e. contracts and personnel issues. These meetings are to be kept confidential. This has not always been the case. At a Rotary Meeting on a Wednesday at Eagle's Nest, he was pulled aside as he was exiting the meeting and was approached with questions he knew referred to information discussed at an executive session. Mr. Falcone expressed how very important it was that information shared outside of executive session could impact people whether it be about contracts and/ or personnel issues. Since these items are not discussed in Public Session, it is very important they be kept confidential.

Chrome Books, E-Mails and Cell Phones – Any type of communication occurring during a meeting, i.e. if you are checking and looking at any one of these items is all FOI. For example, if during a meeting one Board Member is texting another this would be FOI. For example, back when he was the high school principal, the administrative team, which he was a part of, was standing in the back of the cafeteria, Ellie Cruz, Superintendent at the time, was texting during a Board Meeting. This text was FOI and came from the assistant principal at the high school at that time, Amy Radke to Ms. Cruz. Thus, the reason to be very careful about texting and using this type of communication during meetings.

Also, Mr. Falcone indicated when he sends Board Members updates on Fridays or if for some reason there was an ambulance at any of the schools, if a Board Member responds to "all", they are now creating a meeting. So, one needs to be careful. You may do one of two things, you may reach out to Walt and indicate to him that you have a question(s) for Mr. Falcone or you may call Mr. Falcone with your question(s).

Committees – Walt has brought committees up to the Board at least two times trying to put them in place. He is requesting committees for Policy, Curriculum & Instruction, and Finance. These committees align to the Board's Roles and Responsibilities. Mr. Falcone indicated that he would like to come out of this retreat with some sort of an answer as to what is being done with committees.

Outside of Meetings – Question(s) from Board Members should run through Walt. He is the Board Chair. Everything funnels to Walt, then goes to Mr. Falcone, back to Walt, then back to the Board Member asking the question. If there is a question Mr. Falcone needs to inform all the Board Members about, Walt will inform Mr. Falcone that this is a question(s) for everyone. In turn, Mr. Falcone will respond to everyone and let them know what the question(s) is. Communication runs through the Chair of the Board.

Update – Terryville High School students went to Plymouth Center School to read to the students.

(b) Review and Progress on Board of Education Goals – Goals were adopted at the first Board Meeting which took place in August. They are reviewed every year. The Goals are going to be pretty consistent:

- Student Achievement
- Engagement
- Well-Being
- Fiscal Oversight

Enrollment – There are thirty-one more students enrolled this year at this time then last year. Mr. Falcone feels the reason for this is that parents are letting their children start to come back to school from COVID. During COVID these students were home schooled. The district is beginning to see more students returning. Magnet, technical and VoAg schools. There are two less children this year than last in our programs. The enrollment is 1,337. This figure is from when we returned from winter break.

(1) Student Achievement – Test scores. Three is the bench mark of where we want our students to be. On average with Math and Reading, we have approximately 50% of our students below the bench mark and 50% are above. The goal of the district is to shift that. The district is seeing, with the many things that have been put in place last year, with kindergarten and first graders, bench marks at 70% and 80%. The district is beginning to see improvement in the lower grades. We will continue to keep this going.

SAT Scores – Terryville High School average - 969
State Average – 986
National Average – 963

Mr. Falcone- Numbers mean nothing. The action plan put in place by the district to try and improve these numbers and the academic experience for the students is what counts. The district was able to put in common planning time for all of the grade levels and departments. In the past, everyone was doing their own thing. For example, you could have fourth grade teachers or fifth grade teachers, although they are following the curriculum, they are doing things their own individual way. By doing this, gaps are created in learning and students may not master certain things before they move on to the next grade. By utilizing the Math and Reading Coaching at that level, they are in a common planning time making certain the lessons are pushing the students forward making a common learning experience in all of the classrooms. This is having a significant impact especially at Plymouth Center School.

Also, the district is offering on-going professional development for teachers by using its BCBA, Coaches and Administrators when school is in session. Teachers go through coaching cycles. Coaches will have conversations with teachers after professional development. This is a better way in which to proceed rather than have a presenter come out for just one day and then leave. What we have in place is a continuation and feedback is really good.

Although, the keys to provide a consistent Intervention Plan, as we have students that are below grade level, is a problem because we are so short on staff at times. It is difficult to make certain our Interventionists are in place as they sometimes must cover buildings based on absences due to shortages of substitutes. Although, we are working to put this process in place and there is a structure, we just do not have the substitutes to cover the buildings.

(2) Engagement Goal

Plymouth Center School - Mrs. Loveland did a lot of community service projects when she was at Harry S. Fisher Elementary School and is now introducing them to Plymouth Center School. She is introducing them to the organizations that help around town, i.e. the police department, fire department, ambulance corps. She is doing this in order for students to learn who they are, and what these organizations do. This connection has been very helpful. STEM Program at Plymouth Center School and Harry S. Fisher Elementary School and Library Media – creating engaging and various types of activities are the keys to learning.

Eli Terry Jr. Middle School – The Family & Consumer Science and Technology programs have transformed the school with the learning experiences for students. New administrators have brought different ideas, i.e. pep rally, for the first time, and pie in the face. Principal, Assistant Principal and Teacher of the Year were all pied.

Harry S. Fisher Elementary School – Ms. Suffridge is bringing a different type of energy and experience to Harry S. Fisher for the staff as well as the students.

Terryville High School – This school is the toughest to engage. The Career Center, Personal Finance, Best Buddies and Unified Buddies Programs are matching the special education students with the regular students doing things together. The new Family & Consumer Teacher is revamping the entire program by bringing better engagement with the students, i.e. foods, pastries and cakes, making for a better atmosphere for the students. Graduation requirements were upgraded which were approved by the Board. Community Service Projects for seniors.

Mr. Perugino – Are Eli Terry Jr. and Terryville High Schools Family & Consumer Science Programs working together?

Mr. Falcone – They are beginning to do things together. We are starting to align what they are doing at Eli Terry Jr. Middle School and then come into the high school so when the students go to the high school the teacher may start at a higher level of experience. This also applies to the Technology Education Program.

Some Concerns – Student Academic Expectations – stamina – getting students to where they need to be is taking longer than need be but in reality this is due to COVID. We are still recovering from COVID. We are not observing this in our kindergarten students as much because they did not go through COVID. However, we are seeing this in some of the upper grades. Student behavior is tough because this goes in turn with Mental Health concerns that we are dealing with. Learning Gaps and Losses – the district is working with intervention. But, once again, we are short faculty and staff on a daily basis. However, per our expectations, attendance has improved although it did take some time.

Mrs. Candrea-Florenciani – With respect to attendance. The district wants the parents to send the kids to school, but then the nurse sends them home sick. Where are we going to go with that? You don't want sick kids coming but yet after four days' parents are receiving a letter.

Mr. Falcone – The district was just trying to raise the bar. Technically, at the high school level, students are allowed to be out ten days without any sort of consequence. This is not a district rule, but comes from the State. The State also gave students two mental health days. He sat down with the administrative team to see where the district was with numbers. Mr. Falcone indicated he wanted the letters to be sent home consistently. This was not to punish parents or children, but to send a message that the district wanted to educate them. That is all the message was intended to do.

Mrs. Candrea-Florenciani – As a parent it looks like your inaudible

(3) Well-Being Goal – Actions are key. Counseling groups and support groups were created for students. The district is looking at i.e. pie in the face, pep rallies in the schools, and fundraisers for good causes. It is trying to build a good school community that students can be proud of. It is looking at behavior interventionists and how lessons are developed to help teachers. The district changed how substitutes are placed in the schools. Building substitutes were hired for more flexibility. At the end of last year Mr. Falcone and Mr. Seaman spoke about taking some money, \$5,000, and to do something nice occasionally for the teachers. An example, before winter break, everyone received a small bag of candy in their mailbox at school thanking them for all they do for the students and the community. This was from the Board and Administration. Environment makes a difference. Especially, since staff is able to move from district to district in search of more money. Candy bars were also distributed for Halloween as a thank you from the Board and Administration. It is important to show a united front.

Mrs. Candrea-Florenciani – Perhaps next time we can use Brooklyn Bakery.

Mr. Falcone – Maybe before April break.

(4) Fiscal Oversight Goal

Building, Grounds and Maintenance of Our Schools - A list of last year's project was provided for everything that was completed. (a) Landscaping is one thousand times better; (b) athletic field have been aerated, seeded and rolled; (c) schools especially Harry S. Fisher Elementary School and Eli Terry Jr. Middle School are cleaner and have been painted (lockers pulled out, various landscaping projects), middle school Family & Consumer Science and Technology rooms were big projects. Future Projects (which will be done one building at a time) with top priority going to the Music Room at Eli Terry Jr. Middle School which needs to be overhauled.

Mrs. Candrea-Florenciani – At Wamogo when ceiling tiles were replaced, they had students decorate them. There are a lot of old ones out there that it is nice for the kids to see. So, maybe the high school and middle school students can decorate them as the district is replacing tiles in our schools.

Mr. Falcone – Good idea. Especially with the ones that have water stains. They can be painted white and can be used as a canvas.

Mr. Seaman – To Mrs. Candrea-Florenciani – Did you bring to me concerns about some projects not being finished?

Mrs. Candrea-Florenciani – Last Meeting. Hallway, gray stuff not put back at the middle school, and blue striping is not done.

Mr. Falcone – You are right. They are not done. A punch list was prepared. Jim Mazon, Matt, building administrators and myself walked each school. List is approximately eight pages long of what still needs to be completed. These are all small projects, i.e. replacing the trim, and touching up the peeled paint at Harry S. Fisher. These will be taken care of.

He explained how the district is planning on moving forward. The number one priority is maintaining as much as we can within this budget year. We are going to talk about the budget and showing a concern while maintaining as much as we can. The district put in a structure for improvement. It wants to maintain and keep that structure in place. He indicated we are seeing the improvement, the difference, the engagement. He would like to keep that going.

Some other initiatives:

Bolster the after school programs; look at what stipends are currently in place in the contract; give principals the discretion to put clubs in place for the kids; see what the district can offer to children at Plymouth Center School and Harry S. Fisher Elementary School in terms of after school programming. For example, Kelly Banche, teacher at Plymouth Center School was interested in offering cheerleading. She had sixty students expressing interest. Due to the number, she is offering one session in the fall and one session in the spring.

Mrs. Candrea-Florenciani – She inquired if there was anything we can do at the library as her child goes there a frequently.

Mr. Falcone – He sees Gretchen every Wednesday at Rotary. He can promote activities held at the library to try and get more and more kids to go there. However, the kids are in our schools. The audience is there. He believes, the route to take is to keep them engaged in activity at school.

Mrs. Candrea-Florenciani – She asked if the reason for not having these activities was because the staff did not want to stay at school for a longer period of time?

Mr. Falcone – His response was “no”. It was just a matter of the amount of money in the contract for stipends. Some of the stipends in the contract are very outdated.

Career Center

Seeking an alternative educational program at the high school. How can the district utilize special education teachers and staff in order to meet the needs of the kids? A future initiative is academic intervention and engaging classes.

(5) Budget Development Update

Budget time – Inflation is difficult to work with when there is a set budget. Many families and retirees have a set budget and are finding it difficult to deal with inflation.

At the school level, our challenges are: i.e. outplacements; transportation costs and gas costs. As these costs go up, it creates a domino effect.

Contractual Obligations are increasing: 2.74% will all of the contracts for a total of \$423,000.

Outplacements – although there are the same number of students additional charges are approximately \$400,000.

Mr. Perugino – Is this over and above what we have now?

Mr. Falcone – Same students, same schools, same everything. Their expenses increase, therefore they are passed on to us.

Vocational Schools – As costs per pupil increase, so do our costs.

Diesel Fuel – This is just the gas we put in our buses. The price of diesel is \$85,000 more than we budgeted for last year.

Health Insurance – If the district did not change health insurance companies and remained with the state plan, the number would be approximately \$750,000.

Transportation – As a district, if we went out to bid for transportation, there would be one company and it would be from All-Star. Whatever their bid came in at we would need to pay at that price. This is not only happening with our district but across the state. Bus companies are communicating with each other expressing that they will not bid on, example All-Star, if All-Star does not bid on theirs. The district signed a 4.25% increase. This is great compared to others. For example, Trumbull is looking at a 20% increase in their transportation.

Sinking Fund – Cost needs to be covered within the budget which is \$320,000. Money was given to the district as, for example, a home equity line of credit. It was used to plug a hole in the budget. Now the district needs to fill that hole. \$320,000 is left to fill.

Social Security, Medicare, Health Insurance – These numbers are significantly higher than years past or for that matter any other year.

This is not only affecting Plymouth, but Thomaston and Wolcott are also experiencing budgets of 7% - 8% higher than last year. Districts are trying to work through their budgets given the high rate of inflation. Although Plymouth is basically reaching that number in its budget, they are trying to find a way to decrease the percentage so that it is fair to the community and to the taxpayers. They are attempting to put together a budget that is fair to everyone.

Mrs. Candrea-Florenciani – In the bus contract, that does not include fuel?

Mr. Falcone – No.

Although tonight was to have been a budget workshop and the budget was to be presented to the Board, that will not happen tonight. It was felt more time was needed based on how significant the numbers are coming in. It is important to understand, the job of the superintendent and business manager is to make recommendations to the Board. Then, if need be, two if not more budget workshops will be scheduled if necessary. The workshops take place to: tighten up the budget, make changes, and answer any questions. It is hoped that on February 8th at the Regular Board of Education Meeting the Board will adopt a budget. If adopted, it now becomes the Board of Education Budget. Walt will present the budget to the Town Board of Finance and the Town Council. Per charter, the budget must be completed and submitted by February 15th. The Board is responsible for adopting the budget.

Mrs. Candrea-Florenciani – Have you heard of what type of increase you may be able to go with?

Mr. Seaman – He is hearing the Town Council and the Board of Finance are divided. However, this is just a rumor. Some members of the Town Council do not want to raise taxes at all. Some members of the Board of Finance and Town Council are in disagreement with not raising taxes. Some see a tax increase as unavoidable. He thinks where both sides agreed is neither side wants an increase of over 3%. Neither side wants a referendum because it is felt a referendum will get defeated. Although, if that were the case, and the referendum comes out to be 3.5%, gets defeated three times, the Town Council sets the percentage anyway. Although, he does not know if they have anything to lose except maybe \$15,000 and time.

Mr. Perugino brought up that it was an election year. However, Mr. Seaman did not hold stake in that.

Mr. Seaman indicated members of the Town Council and Board of Finance did not want to go above 3%. They do not know what the grand list is going to be and will not know until sometime in February. He cannot understand how one can set a budget when you do not know what the grand list will be. Did it grow, did it shrink? He is sure there is some sort of projection, as these are not hard numbers. He understands there are individuals on the Board of Finance that are tired of the town side getting gutted. They are down to a skeleton crew at town hall. The auditors are recommending to place more people in the business office for the town.

In response to Mrs. Candrea-Florenciani's question, he has no idea yet. They need to figure that out for themselves. However, he has confidence in Brian and Matt that they are going to come in with a responsible budget. He indicated he does not want to lose anything the Board worked hard to put in place. For example, the STEM program. The students are loving it. He has heard nothing but good things. In his opinion, he would omit middle school sports before he eliminated academics. However, it is not his decision to make.

Mr. Perugino/Mr. Seaman – Commented on the availability of grants. He read where the governor wants to put \$8 million into education. Plymouth has not gotten anything. Mr. Seaman responded he had approached State Senator Henri Martin and State Representative Johana Hayes. Mr. Perugino asked for them to come down to Plymouth. Mr. Seaman indicated State Representative Hayes was on the Appropriations Committee. Mr. Showers echoed he could have these individuals here. Mr. Seaman asked Representative Hayes if the state has a surplus. If so, this would help the town's side. Rather than receiving roughly \$10 million, there would possibly be a chance of receiving \$11 or \$12 million. Although, Representative Hayes is in his first year, he was going to work on this. Mr. Perugino indicated low performing schools, i.e. New Haven for example, has an absenteeism rate of 45% and for this reason the state is allocating funds to them in order to bring the students back to school. He feels this is something the parents should be doing. We are the poor district. We have a State Senator and a State Representative who should be doing something for Plymouth. That is what they were elected to do. That is their job. The art of compromise is gone and it needs to return. Mr. Seaman agreed 100%. If we do not work together on this as a Board we are not going to get anywhere.

Mrs. Kulesa – Question: On the Board Meeting Budget Schedule, at the bottom, it reads meetings and workshops will begin at 7 p.m. in the Terryville High School Cafeteria, does that apply to the last one about the presentation to the Board of Finance?

Mr. Falcone - No. Nothing is submitted to the Board of Finance. It is sent to them.

Mrs. Kulesa - You are just sending it to them?

Mr. Falcone - It is not a presentation. We are just sending it to them.

Mr. Seaman/Mr. Falcone/Mrs. Kulesa - He thinks we present in March. Mr. Falcone thinks it is in mid-March around St. Patrick's Day. Mrs. Kulesa indicated that is what she was thinking about. She asked if February 8th was a regular meeting. Mr. Falcone indicated "yes". He indicated there would be a slide presentation. He indicated we are doing really good things in the district and we need to maintain and look at all the initiatives. This can be accomplished by taking money that is already in the contract and just using it in a smarter way. We have the structure for improvement and we are in really good shape. We just need to maintain as much as we can during these hard times.

Mrs. Kulesa - Regarding Before and After School Programs. One of the things we have run into in the past was transportation. Parents not being able to arrive at school to pick up their child by 4:30 p.m. - 5:30 p.m. or whatever time it may be and there being no transportation. Therefore, you may be running after school programs for possibly students you are not necessarily trying to target.

Mr. Falcone - We had, through the ESSERS Grant last year, after school transportation. However, this was for about 2 - 3 students on both buses total. So, the numbers were not there and I decided this year not to run the program because it was so much money for two buses to show up, then drive back to the yard or drop one or 2 children off. The question is, it is an after school program, do our students want to stay.

Mrs. Candrea-Florenciani/Mr. Falcone - Suggestion: On the days we have sports, if another school comes here to play basketball at the middle school for example, the bus driver is just waiting for the game to end to take the kids home. Can anything be negotiated with the bus company that the bus driver can bus our students home even though the driver is not from this town? Mr. Falcone responded he did not know if the bus company was even covered to transport our students. Mrs. Candrea-Florenciani asked if it were possible to subcontract or offer a stipend. Mr. Falcone indicated he honestly did not know the answer. He feels that if we have to do transportation after school, we need to start thinking outside of the box. For instance, the district purchased a van by using the special education grant. It is used by the Career Center to get kids out to go see different things. It will be used for the transition program to drop a student off, i.e. CVS to work, along with a para, during the day. Getting back to her question, he does not know if it would be feasible considering the district does not have a contract with an outside bus company. She responded, even when our students go to another school, for instance Litchfield, the bus is coming back to Plymouth and then heads back to Litchfield. Just thinking, the bus drivers are waiting for the game to end, especially in the middle school when they have double headers.

Mr. Seaman - With regard to the Career Center, a colleague of his came in to speak on Fire Investigation and was impressed with the program. He also had a friend at Waterbury Hospital who went to the Career Center and was very impressed. Commented on how excited the students were touring the hospital, walk along, the pharmacy and physical therapy. This should have occurred a long time ago.

Mrs. Kulesa - That was a bad situation and it went on for too long. We have to take responsibility for that.

Mr. Falcone - You actually do not need to take responsibility. As a Board that is not your responsibility. Mrs. Kulesa is correct, it should have been handled and we have it right now. We have an all-star in that position doing really good things.

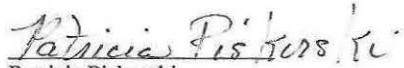
Mrs. Kulesa - Comment: She was just thinking about all the kids that went to school with her children that did not have this experience. Her kids are fine. They have her and a community. Unlike kids that are less fortunate and this troubles her.

Mr. Falcone - He feels that this should be a requirement at every high school. It should be everyone's priority. Our goal is to transition kids into the world.

At this time, Mr. Falcone asked the Board if there were any questions before he asked Mr. Seaman to adjourn the meeting and head down to the cafeteria for the Board Meeting. There being no questions, the following motion was made.

4. Adjournment

MOTION: To entertain a motion to adjourn at 6:48 p.m. Motion Mr. Foote, second Mr. Showers, any discussion, all in favor, motion carries.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Patricia Piskorski".

Patricia Piskorski
Recording Secretary
Plymouth Board of Education