

**BOARD OF EDUCATION
SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES
APRIL 5, 2023**

A special meeting of the Enfield Board of Education was held in Council Chambers on April 5, 2023.

1. **CALL TO ORDER** : The meeting was called to order at 7:01 PM by Madam Chair LeBlanc.
2. **INVOCATION OR MOMENT OF SILENCE** : Tina LeBlanc
3. **PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE** : Tina LeBlanc
4. **FIRE EVACUATION ANNOUNCEMENT** :
5. **ROLL CALL** :

MEMBERS PRESENT: Jean Acree, Dr. Gerald Calnen, Joshua Hamre, Amanda Pickett, Scott Ryder and Tina LeBlanc

MEMBERS ABSENT: Janet Cushman, Jonathan LeBlanc, and John Unghire

ALSO PRESENT: Mr. Christopher J. Drezek, and Town Manager Ellen Zoppo-Sassu, Councilor Despard, Councilor Hopkins, Councilor Ludwick, Councilor Mangini, Councilor Nelson, Councilor Pyznar, Councilor Santanella, Councilor Unghire, Deputy Mayor Cekala and Mayor Cressotti

6. **INVITED BOARD GUEST(S)**

Mr. Drezek welcomed Town Council members and members from the School Modernization Committee. Mr. Drezek reviewed the process that has brought us here tonight. The needs of our kids have changed, and this has been expressed during his budget presentation. We have space constraints in several of our buildings and the need for additional instructional support. Mr. Dague provided the Board with a presentation about our current elementary structure for PK, K-2 and 3-5 building structures. He has been discussing this with Ms. Zoppo-Sassu. The Town Council allocates CIP funds for scheduled projects that will keep us on the same path. Our facilities are a bit dated. We have a current structure in place with aging facilities or should we start looking at something different. The Board wanted to hear from the community members and from stakeholders before a decision was made. We formed a PK-5 School Modernization Committee with an aggressive timeline and toured each building. He thanked everyone that participated in this committee. If any changes are going to be made to our current structure, it is better to know this now so we can plan. It is both his and the Town Manager's responsibility to present you with plans for the future of our district and town.

Mr. Drezek added we toured each facility and heard from key stakeholders including teachers, staff members, Board and Town Council members. The committee will address the Board and Town Council tonight. Ultimately, this will be a community decision. We are starting with the 20 of you tonight and this is something the entire community will weigh in on.

Madam Chair welcomed members of the Town Council for joining us tonight to hear this presentation.

Mr. Ryder stated we identified our aging building needs and scheduled projects. We cannot continue to put band-aids on our 50-60 year old buildings. Budget season and scheduled facility projects are coming up and repairs will be needed over the next several years. Schools attract families to towns. We selected 15 members from the 36 applications we received. The committee was comprised of teachers, staff members, community members. We looked at their qualifications, input they could share and community presence. We tried to get as many members as possible so they would be able to reach out to multiple groups to share information and help spread the word. He also thanked the members on this committee including Board and Town Council Liaisons (Ken Nelson, Gina Cekala, Bob Cressotti, Tina LeBlanc, Janet Cushman & Scott Ryder). We toured our PK-5 facilities. We saw firsthand the majority of

issues that need to be addressed at Stowe, Eagle Academy, Hazardville Memorial, Eli Whitney, Enfield Street, Edgar H. Parkman, Henry Barnard and Prudence Crandall and held a working meeting at John F. Kennedy middle school. We chose to end at JFK to give committee members a tour of the recently renovated JFK. Seeing JFK excited committee members to see how well thought out everything was and how the architect and builders worked with staff, department heads and administrators. Each room was carefully planned from the walls, furniture, and speakers in the ceiling. Our high school and middle school students have been gifted by our town with these beautiful buildings and our elementary students deserve the same.

Mr. Ryder welcome our first School Modernization guest speaker Vicky MacLeod.

Mr. Drezek added our DPW department provided us with a baseline projection for CIP improvement projects at \$36 million that will keep our buildings as status quo. If you have not had the opportunity to view Mr. Dague's presentation, please do so. The presentation has been placed on our website.

Mr. Ryder added the amount of \$36 million is for repairs now and does not include any additional hiccups they might encounter during renovations.

Mr. Ryder stated Ms. MacLeod will talk about Space Concerns.

Vicky MacLeod, Raffia Road - Ms. MacLeod thanked the Board for allowing committee members to speak tonight about the many concerns with our elementary schools. We have broken this down by Space, Facility, Family Impacts and Academics. She will discuss space concerns. As they toured each building, space was a major concern. Many schools have converted spaces and are sharing spaces. OT/PT space were adapted, calming/sensory quiet spaces do not really exist. Social work and CHC are also sharing spaces. Special Education, Reading, Math, Writing, Speech Therapy sessions can all be happening at the same time increasing noise levels and causing distractions for students and teachers. These interruptions disrupt class instruction time. Staff travel with their carts from buildings and do not have privacy. The spaces that have been converted are gymnasiums, cafeteria, stages and OT/PT spaces are using closets. Elementary schools are showing signs of challenges and difficulties. Stowe has multiple programs and houses 480 students. Foot traffic in this one building is extremely high. They have AM/PM Head Start, Full day Pre-K, ECDC, KITE, Integrated Pre-K and Family Resource Center at Stowe. This is the first school our families are being introduced to when starting with Enfield Public School System. Our families, students and staff are struggling. It is time for a change.

Mr. Ryder stated Ms. Soule will talk about Facilities.

Jessica Soule, Brook Road - Ms. Soule thanked the Board and Town Council members for being here tonight and listening to our findings and concerns. Our staff and students deserve to be in safe efficient buildings. After touring the schools, they saw many issues and some issues with the facilities are hidden behind walls, ceilings and floor tiles. The physical environment greatly impacts work and learning. Heating and cooling systems do not maintain proper temperatures, boilers need to be replaced, parking issues create problems and safety concerns when hosting events, there is not enough parking spaces to accommodate for morning and afternoon bus runs and parent pickup-drop offs, parents are parking on grassy unlighted areas causing safety issues, OT/PT areas need to repairs and remodeling, additional restrooms are needed for students and staff, electrical panels are maxed out due to window units and technology needs, some of the buildings have air quality and mold concerns, additional outlets are needed in classrooms, window replacements are needed, some windows have been replaced with plexiglass. She added that 4 of the elementary schools are scheduled to have their roofs replaced. Many of the doors also need to be replaced. As mentioned by Mr. Drezek it will cost \$36 million dollars now to maintain what we currently have. This does not take into consideration any additional needs that may arise. There are many needs that are not included in that amount. Looking ahead to safety and security, ideally there would be a double set of doors at all main entrances, cameras around the building including blind spots, steel bollards would be in front of the buildings to create a clearly marked barrier, reflective glass on the windows for privacy, doorknobs that locked from the inside of a classroom would be installed, badge readers for all doors to ensure doors remained locked at all times, brighter exterior lighting in all parking areas for the security of students, staff and parents. Technology upgrades are also needed including phones in all classrooms that can call outside, Wi-Fi upgrades are needed for multiple device

uses. The physical environment of our elementary buildings greatly affects student learning and teaching. She urges you to do more than just maintain our buildings. Our students and staff deserve more. Thank you.

Mr. Ryder stated Ms. Griffin will talk about Family Impact.

Maureen Griffin, Abbe Road - Mrs. Griffin stated our kids in grades K-2 and 3-5 are riding the buses for a long time. Parents are rushing to get one child to the bus stop and then rushing to get the next one to the other school. The same occurs in the afternoon. Communication received at times is confusing about several events and happenings at multiple schools. Before school and after school care is needed. Students attending these programs also need to travel. Parents can have children in multiple buildings that makes it difficult to attend events. Family engagement is extremely important. Having a K-5 structure will give a sense of belonging, unity and community instead of the current 3 year pit stop. Families will be at a school for 6 years and will be able to establish connections with staff and other families. Families face many difficulties getting to know and trust teachers and staff, especially when supports are needed. Relationships can be strengthened with teachers by creating a sense of safety for students when sharing their needs and concerns. Our children need to feel safe in order to learn. Using a K-5 structure allow students to focus on learning and not re-adjusting to a new building, teachers and staff. Having a K-5 structure will ensure benefits will be there for all students and siblings. The older students will be there to mentor the younger students. This really is the way to go.

Mr. Ryder stated Ms. McGuire-Bruce will talk about Academics.

Kelsey Bruce McGuire-Bruce, Neelans Road - Ms. McGuire-Bruce thanked them for listening to our concerns. This is important work for our town, and we appreciate you being here. You have heard about our space issues, facility concerns, and how our current K-2, 3-5 structure has impacted families. These areas affect our students academically. Our students need consistency. We can see the transition grades cause academic concerns for some students. Specialist times will vary at each level with our current K-2 3-5 model. Teachers also feel the disconnect when students transition to the next level and are not readily available to discuss academics or behaviors with the next grade level teachers by simply walking down the hall to talk to them. Speech, special education interventions and other interventions change when students transition. Our students with the highest level of needs must rebuild their trust with new staff members. This causes regression academically and behaviorally. School procedures change at each building level. Students have a lack of comfort and confidence which means they are not ready to access learning. PBIS can also look differently at each building. At the 3-5 level they no longer have a PBIS coach to support behavior concerns. We are asking second graders to be role models before they are ready. Going back to a K-5 model will allow us to have true models. We would be able to re-establish student council and reading buddies. Transitions can escalate student behavior. We are seeing this with grades 2 and 3 students. Relationships and connections take time to build. Trust with staff and familiarity eases stress and anxieties. Students need to feel emotionally safe before learning can occur. Transitions make this very challenging. Our current model impacts students learning. Our students need consistency. Our current model is not what is best for our students. Thank you.

Madam Chair stated at this time we will invite Town Council and Board members to ask any questions or share their comments regarding the presentation from the School Modernization Committee.

Councilor Hopkins thanked the members of the School Modernization Committee and asked if you looked at other models that other towns are using and what are the benefits? He feels our school funding should be increased based on what he has seen and heard. Thank you.

Councilor Pyzner thanked the members of the committee. Education is the greatest gift we can give to our kids. Her kids attended a K-6 grade level model and she was opposed to the K-2 3-5 model. She spoke with a lot of parents about this. You are separating families. Ms. Griffin discussed this during her presentation, and she appreciates everything you said. When you are picking up your child there are security issues at the schools. We need to put our kids first. Having a good school system is a starting point for your community and it is what drives people to Enfield to live and raise a family. She applauds committee members for your efforts and looks forward to working on this more.

Councilor Mangini thanked committee members for the hard work that is ahead of you. She was on the school consolidation committee and was opposed to the K-2 3-5 model then and now. Consistency is needed along with community involvement. Our schools are 50-60 years old. It is time to move forward. The costs alone will benefit our children's needs financially. Yes, let's move forward. Thank you for your hard work.

Dr. Calnen stated this is having an impact on our children's mental health. Sometimes we overlook the obvious. The environment is having an impact on our kids mental health. This initiative can go a long way and will make an impact on their learning and mental health.

Mr. Hamre thanked the members of the School Modernization Committee. This situation we are currently in was predictable and preventable. He remembers when they were discussing our current grade level. He was sitting in the audience hearing about this plan. We were concerned for our children then losing a sense of community. We need to put our kids first and our future generations with a more holistic approach to their well-being. Mental health is a concern. No one could have predicted what would have happened when we reorganized years ago. Thank you for your commitment to this project.

Councilor Despard is very impressed by this presentation and appreciates the committees hard word. Enfield's future is the ability to attract young families. Modernizing our schools will do this. Our staff and kids deserve state of the art security and is a home run. Thank you for your work.

Mrs. Pickett stated her kids will be transitioning. She is dreading the change for next year. She has a wonderful afterschool routine. Building relationships and a sense of community is important. Thank you for your hard work and for your presentation. Our buildings need work. Accessibility where all students feel welcome are needed. Efficiencies and inclusion of our staff and student support is also needed. Students need a sense of belonging and security. We need to think smarter. We know the transition years are hard on our students. Even if we do this, we will need alignment. How can we ensure the K-5 alignment, 6-8 and 9-12 and create the frameworks. She asked community members to consider this. Having great schools attracts families to our town and will create a sense of community. What are our next steps and what will be the process? This committee had representation from all partners. She hopes we will continue with community involvement in the process. We also need to consider repurposing buildings and have a plan in place for this. Thank you.

Deputy Mayor Cekala also thanked committee members, teachers and staff for your work. She also thanked the members of the Board of Education for bringing this forward. This is important work. Her kids have attended school in our current K-2 3-5 model. There was a lot of transitioning and many nights of divide and conquer and missing events. She loves that we are getting input from our teachers, staff and families. She appreciates how the committee is doing this in a meaningful way. We have a beautiful high school and brand new middle school. It is time to do our elementary schools. It sounds like we will go back to the K-5 model and improve our elementary schools and rebuild them as new and give our kids another state of the art facilities like we have for our older children.

Councilor Santanella thanked committee members for the work you have done. He has visited the schools. Some of the conditions in our buildings are tragic and unacceptable. We need to discuss the inside as well as the outside of our facilities. We have one of the poorest funded school districts in our state on a per student basis in our DRG. We are one of the poorest funded school districts as an Alliance District. We are one of the lowest funded school districts. The Board's budget is unacceptable. We need to start moving in the right direction. There is no point in putting up fancy buildings if what is going on in our buildings isn't meeting standards of the outside. It is time to look at the budget, educate the public on why we need to spend more on education and on our kids. Just by walking in our buildings you can see why we are betting against our kids, and this is wrong. Our kids deserve better. We need to look at the budget and move in the right direction.

Councilor Unghire commented that she is really excited about this project. We have a wonderful state of the art high school and middle school. This is long overdue. We have amazing teachers, and no one works harder than Enfield teachers. Our teachers take very little and make much with nothing. They bring in their own supplies. She takes her hat off to them. Revamping our elementary schools to make it easier for our teachers and students is wonderful. Some of our teachers are working in conditions that are

far from perfect. She is really excited about this project.

Mrs. Acree also thanked committee members for a great informative presentation. Our students, teachers and staff deserve the best we can offer them.

Mayor Cressotti thanked Mr. Drezek for his vision about modernization of our elementary schools. We have discussed this with Town Council and Board leadership and Mr. Dague. He thanked Mr. Dague for all the work he has done with this committee and for your presentation. If you have not had the opportunity to view the presentation, please do so. He is looking at the investment in our town, the school system and attracting families to Enfield. The School Modernization Committee touched upon 4 major areas - Academics, Space, Facilities and Family Impact. We have a talented group on this committee. This is our first step, and we all need to be in agreement with a K-5 model. We have heard the reports and seen the statistics. We are not spending enough on our students as mentioned by Councilor Santanella. We need to make a commitment to education. We are talking about routines, transitions, and the impact on families. He was teaching during the discussion of the current K-2 3-5 model, and he was against it then. He does not believe it benefited anyone. People thrive with routines. Families are dealing with 3 or 4 transitions during a day, and it can be very stressful. We also discussed the mental health of our students. All of this needs to be considered.

Mayor Cressotti added he is happy the Town Council and Board of Education are sitting here tonight with the vision of moving forward. All the other questions will be answered. Our job tonight is to take this recommendation for a feasibility and demographic study for all the elementary schools. Let's move forward with this. This is very exciting. We are looking at stopping the band-aide bleed. Let's look into the investment in the future of this town, our students and families.

Mr. Ryder also thanked Mr. Dague and Fred Gerber for your hard work. They are both liaisons for the School Modernization Committee. He clarified the rush of the condensed schedule. Mr. Dague has been working on this from the start of this school year. He thanked our teachers and administrators for their help during this process. This decision will not be rushed and will not be fixed in a rushed manner. This will be strategic and purposeful. We will be doing the same thing we did with the high school and JFK for our K-5 schools and Stowe. It is not anyone's fault how we got here. Now is the time to figure out what we will do for the next several generation of students that will learn in our town. It doesn't matter what happened 10 years ago. What matters is what can we do to make our buildings the best they can be for the next 50 plus years. He wants to thank the teachers that are on this committee that were also students here in Enfield and are now teachers in Enfield. It is important for everyone to understand that without the Town Council's help, as the vice chair of the JV team, he welcomes the Varsity team, and we could not do this without their help. Studies are needed to be done in order to get to the next step. He would like them to let us get to the next step and find out what properties might work, costs, where the buildings should be, and how to educate our kids for the next 50 plus years. Your questions will be addressed in time. More research is needed. Our schedule was rushed, but our decision will not be. Our need is rushed but our future can be bright. He hopes the Varsity team feels the same way.

Madam Chair stated when we met at Hazardville Memorial last week reviewing the applicants for the committee. Mr. Ryder called the members and told them this would be a fast moving rigorous schedule. Everyone was in total agreement with the rushed timeline. We needed to see every building. We saw how support services were being divided by dividers, it made her sad to see this. It also made me proud that we have teachers and staff that are keeping their focus on their students' needs although the conditions are not perfect. Seeing a school psychologist using a closet for an office was really eye-opening. We heard about space concerns and needed committee members to see every school. This committee is very eager, and they want to move onto the next steps. This is the first step of work for this committee. We will continue to have great discussions throughout this process.

Madam Chair added this is a long term plan and long term vision as mentioned by Mr. Ryder. When we did this before, the teachers were told in December about change that would occur in September. The families were told about this change around March. We will be doing this differently. This is not an elected official or politically driven committee. The decisions will be made by the voting members of this committee. The BOE and TC liaisons are just that and will not vote. It will be the research and the will of the committee. We can give advice and input, but it is ultimately the will of the committee. It is important

to have staff and community input also.

Madam Chair added it was interesting to listen to the teachers speak at our first meeting at Hazardville Memorial. She was a parent that had a child go to Memorial because their school closed for one year and then they went to Eli Whitney. Listening to how the teachers felt was concerning. They felt alone in a new building with all their new colleagues. They still showed up with smiles for their students and met new parents and worked just as hard for our students even though they were struggling and didn't feel supported. We will not allow that to happen again. As a parent, she did not know this was occurring. She was very grateful for the teachers that showed up every day and did not let any parents know how they were feeling.

Madam Chair appreciated hearing from Counselor Santanella about Enfield's funding. We are one of the lowest funded districts in Connecticut. We have also learned about our very high needs since Covid and how these needs are continuing to grow. We will not be revisiting the past as mentioned by Mr. Ryder as to how we got here. We know how to fix this as a district and how to move forward as a team with our Town Council partners. This also needs to be a community group effort as well.

Madam Chair stated we cannot address questions at this time. She thanked members of the School Modernization Committee for their hard work, honesty and for their candor. Whether you are a staff member, parent or community member, asking tough questions and putting your feelings out there is important in order to get this work done. She looks forward to being a liaison in the upcoming months.

7. NEW BUSINESS :

a. Recommendation from the PK-5 School Modernization Committee

Mr. Ryder stated we took a poll last night and the majority of the School Modernization Committee would like to move forward to present this idea to the Town Council in order to get our buildings in better shape and to look at consolidation of the K-5 buildings. At this point the recommendation from the PK-5 School Modernization Committee is to ask the Board of Education first to bless this and forward this to the Town Council to make a decision.

Mr. Hamre asked if a motion is needed. Madam Chair stated a motion is not needed. The committee is recommending we revisit a K-5 configuration for our elementary schools. That is the formal recommendation from the committee.

Mrs. Pickett we will still keep our Preschool program at Stowe. Mr. Ryder stated that is correct. We are looking to modernize our PK facility but separately. We would be moving to a K-5 model.

Madam Chair stated that both Mrs. Pickett and Dr. Calnen just let out a huge sigh of relief.

Mrs. Pickett added when Ms. MacLeod spoke about space concerns, for a building with many barriers, Stowe is the most magical place. She will visit there anytime of the week. We have special people that work there.

Mr. Ryder added that is the School Modernization Committee's recommendation.

b. Action if any Regarding Approving any Additional Studies based on the Recommendation from the School Modernization Committee

Madam Chair added the Board does not need to take any action this evening.

Madam Chair stated we will adjourn our meeting and the Town Council will then meet to discuss this further.

8. ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Hamre moved, seconded by Mrs. Pickett to adjourn the Special Meeting of April 5, 2023.

All ayes, motion passed unanimously. Meeting stood adjourned at 8:04 PM.

Jonathan LeBlanc
Secretary
Board of Education

Respectfully Submitted,
Kathy Zalucki, Recording Secretary