

**TOWN OF EAST HAVEN
BOARD OF EDUCATION
35 WHEELBARROW LANE
EAST HAVEN, CONNECTICUT 06513**

**MINUTES
SPECIAL BOARD MEETING
FEBRUARY 26, 2009
6:30 P.M.**

PRESENT: Mrs. Vitale, Mr. DeNuzzo, Mr. Finkle,
Mr. Hammell, Mr. Hennessey, Mrs. Padua
and Mrs. Vineyard

ALSO PRESENT: Mr. Serio, Superintendent; Mr. Meoli, Assistant
Superintendent; Mrs. Acquarulo, Director of
Pupil Personnel; Mrs. Lewis, Finance Manager;
Mayor April Capone Almon; John Loffredo,
Board/Town Liaison; Joseph D'Albero, Chair
School Building Committee; Administrative
Staff

ABSENT: Mrs. Geraci-Anastasio and Mr. Inglese

1. CALL TO ORDER

Mrs. Vitale called the meeting to order at 6:33 p.m.

**2. Discussion of an Educational Vision for the Future of the
East Haven Public Schools and the Implications that Vision
has for the Development of a Long-term Facilities Plan**

Mr. Meoli stated for the last few months they had been engaged in a long-term initiative which resulted in three separate pieces of work. They hired NESDEC to come in and do a facilities study and they had received the results about three weeks ago. Their administrators had been engaged in conversations designed to determine what the

best educational plan was for the students in East Haven over the next 10 to 20 years. The Long-range Planning Committee was made up of key town officials such as Mayor April Capone Almon, Paul Thompson the Chairman of the Town Council, Joseph D'Albero and John Loffredo. They were going to look at the vision that the administrative staff had developed and factor in the NESDEC report and make a very, very preliminary cut at a possible school building project that would result in a reorganized system. This was the first of many community conversations that should happen.

Mr. Meoli stated that they had been led to believe that some of the stimulus money may come their way that it was a very real possibility that this may actually happen. They had engaged the administrative staff in an exercise to determine the optimal school system without regard to facilities and that was different than what they had done in the past. They were told to forget about the buildings and dream about the system they could have. Then they would build projects to fit the program. They threw scenarios out and looked at the advantages and disadvantages.

Mr. Serio and Mr. Meoli spoke about no changes taking place for the next school year. Mr. Serio spoke about the deadline of the ED049 being June 30th for a project that could possibly take place the following year. It usually took about one year for it to go through the legislature and the monies would probably be ready for the following summer of 2010. This was the fast track. There was discussion on the timeline and process when the high school had been built.

Mr. Serio explained they had talked with the principals and asked them what the best educational configuration they could look for before going to consolidation. Randomly closing schools was not an option. They looked at what would be the best educational schematic that would work as far as reconfiguring grade levels. There was discussion about the Early Learning Centers and the confinement of the buildings which limited them to kindergarten and the Little Jackets. A good configuration would probably be a Pre-K through 2 if you want to keep the Early Learning Childhood primary grade in place. Mr. Serio spoke about bringing the kindergarten back to the school and making a shorter span of educational grades

of K-4, middle school 5-8, and the high school. Once they thought about a format that would work, they would try to get themselves involved in some kind of a building ready type of project and get it going. It would be a phase in. They would have to prioritize what they thought was the most needy school and how that would solve some of their problems.

The administrators were asked for their input at this time. Some of the ideas they had come up with and discussed were as follows:

- Everyone had to buy into it including administrators, parents and teachers because there would be a shift in population to make East Haven an excellent system with better facilities to make their educational system better.
- Moving the kindergarten classes back into the early elementary schools and move grades five and six to the Middle School. There were so many advantages of moving the populations together. They could consolidate the services such as the reading consultants who were now trying to service six elementary schools. Equalizing the enrollment could lead to very productive team teaching and differentiate instruction. Currently, the educational services were not equal.
- Renovating the Middle School and how it might involve double sessions or portable classrooms. This was something that had to be phased in.
- If K-4 were put together in each of the schools, they would be on the same bus which eliminated the whole transportation issue to the Early Learning Centers for kindergarten and they could expand on the Pre-K program because right now that was really limited.
- Kindergarten could be turned into a full-day kindergarten. They felt the parents would be very receptive to this.

- Some schools have the advantage of a math coach and some of the schools did not.
- Combining the Academy with the Middle School would address a lot of issues. One of the things parents were interested in was having the Academy students with the Middle School students for sports and drama. Currently, it took a lot of time and effort to get everyone together. Having the facility at the Middle School complex would help them with those opportunities.

Mr. Meoli explained there was a lot more to be done. They were starting with the four scenarios on the blue sheet and they ended up with the two on the green sheets.

Mayor Capone Almon spoke about how proud they were of the administrators for doing such an incredible job at this preliminary stage. She wanted them to think about what they needed for education, and they would figure out the buildings. She didn't want them to think the Middle School didn't have enough of a stage because it could. She wanted them to worry about what they needed for education and everything else they could make happen.

Some of the other issues discussed by the administrators were as follows:

- Having fewer elementary schools and more convenient collaboration with teachers, perhaps they could integrate thematic teaching into the elementary schools providing them with a higher level of education.
- Consolidation and better facilities would provide kids with more hands-on such as what was done at the Academy. Additional space would help not only in terms of instruction but it would motivate kids more.
- The idea of kindergartners coming back into the elementary schools offered greater flexibility in the placement of these children. Having both a cafeteria and a gym gave

administrators greater flexibility in scheduling activities and programs.

- Grade 5-6 students currently did not step into a science lab until they got to 7th grade. By giving 5th and 6th grade students a middle school complex, it would give them access to a science lab which was priceless. They would also have access to foreign language which would open up huge doors for them.

Mr. Loffredo spoke about bonding and how the administration in the Town was not afraid to invest in capital improvements. He explained the way capital budgets worked and how every year money falls off the reducing principal and how that then gave the Town the ability to borrow and bond more money. With lower debt, you then had the ability to take on more debt and keep expenses flat. He stated that this was an administration that wanted to invest in the future of the school buildings here. The buildings had been neglected and needed improvements.

Mayor Capone Almon said that even though they were now in a tough economy, this was the best time to borrow money and get the best rates. It helped to stimulate the economy in a small way. Now was the time to take the opportunity for capital improvement projects and the State still had reimbursement money for school construction projects. She had not heard any signs of them tightening up; it was one of the things they were keeping open. Mr. Serio stated they were waiting on the Governor's budget which was still in progress and was being fine-tuned. Mayor Capone Almon stated that that was for ECS and operating expenses, but as far as reimbursement programs they were still in the roughly 70% reimbursement range. Mr. Serio agreed that it had not changed. Mayor Capone Almon stated she appreciated that they were all taxpayers here and were all concerned about the money and where it was coming from, but she wanted the Board to focus on what they did best and that was education. They had looked at the financing and it was now the perfect time to do it.

There were some differences of opinion regarding the importance of improvement in the buildings affecting the way students learned.

One thought was that learning how to read, write and do math had nothing to do with having a sink or phone in the classroom. Mr. Hennessey felt that in the grand scheme, the facility was the smaller and the teacher, curriculum and math coach were so much more important than the block on the wall. Mrs. Padua spoke about how wonderful these things were and how they would help.

There was discussion on how parents played the most important part in the success of their child's education. In today's age, children were at home playing video games as compared to many years ago. Mr. Meoli stated he did not disagree with what was said and felt that the most important factor in education was people not buildings. Right now they needed to improve their hiring practices to retain their good people and counsel others who were not cut out for this progression to leave their employment. If these beautiful buildings did come to fruition, they needed people to make them meet their potential.

Mayor Capone Almon said that one of her goals was to increase efficiency in the buildings that would help lower operational costs so they would have more resources to put into education. There was some discussion that followed regarding the efficiency and cost of the older buildings in the district compared to the newer high school per student.

Mr. Hammell commented that the focus of the meeting was not buildings -- they were not discussing the buildings per se. Mr. Hennessey stated he must have missed the whole point. Mrs. Padua felt that he had missed the point. Mr. Hammell stated they had only discussed cafeterias and gyms and their focus had been on what children's needs were for education. Mrs. Padua stated they had talked about realigning the grades and combining the resources with teachers working together. They could share resources of reading and math coaches. This would improve the education of kids and the resources for them. Mr. Hennessey felt he must have missed the whole point because they had already done all of these scenarios in this town.

Some other suggestions the administrators had were as follows:

- An alternative program at the Middle School complex would provide a hands-on approach. This would help to expand the tech ed. department from one class to maybe three or four. The possibility of three or four academies or wings which would house the Pathways, Special Ed, Regular Ed and Regular Ed Alternative programs was proposed. If the kids were involved in what they wanted to do, it would cut down on discipline problems. Eliminating the field was suggested as an area where they could expand.

Mr. DeNuzzo spoke about the NESDEC report and the different options. He felt that education was their first and foremost responsibility – it was a moral and developmental responsibility for their kids. He wanted to know if co-mingling was an advantage or not for a 12-year old to be in the high school. Mr. Prato responded that it was not healthy because some of the 7th and 8th graders that were more mature could start to date 12th graders. Some were very immature and would not do well around the older kids.

There was further discussion on co-mingling. Mrs. Acquarulo spoke about her concern about people and what they think about students that attend other facilities. They were people's children and have needs that they needed to meet in a different way. They didn't need to be in a different place to do that and they had to provide for them. It could be done if it was done carefully and right and students then would not have to be so separated.

Some further discussion and ideas from the administrators:

- Several academies within the Middle School complex such as a Writing Academy, a Math & Science Academy, History Debate Area, Special Performing Arts Academy

There was discussion on mixing the 5th to 8th grade students. Currently there were 1st graders with 6th graders. Mentoring of younger students was discussed. At the Academy, upper students were role models for younger students and they did a lot of inter-grade work and they worked on academic projects together. This way they got to know each other and built a sense of community. They did not have a lot of disciplinary issues. This approach

provided opportunities for the kids working together to know one another. Mr. Hammell stated that one of the biggest advantages they had at the Academy was parental involvement.

There was some further discussion on full-day kindergarten and how much was expected from the kids in such a short period of time. The two and half hours were jammed packed. It was felt that this was needed because there were academics, but they had no socialization skills with each other because of time.

Services provided to the schools were spread too thin. There was a need for more social workers in the buildings and right now they shared those as well as reading specialists and psychologists. The importance of foreign language was brought up again. Mr. Hennessey felt it was not as important as reading, writing and math. Mr. Grimm stated that 10-15% of their parents were speaking only Spanish.

Mr. Finkle asked Mr. D'Albero if he knew what the square footage of the '36 wing was at the old high school. There was discussion on the different wings at Tyler Street. Mr. Finkle would like to know what the square footage of the '36 wing was to the 8th grade wing at the middle school. Mr. D'Albero stated he thought that buildings did do a lot for education. He felt they should take down the Middle School and put up a nice big school. Mayor Capone Almon stated that Crisafi Field was used a lot by youth football and youth soccer and other residents of their town used the facilities as well. It was not a deal breaker.

All-day kindergarten was discussed further and it was not recommended to have a full-day kindergarten for the purpose of providing daycare. The Family Resource Center had a full-day program for their 15 kids and it prepared the children for either kindergarten or 1st grade because of the numeracy and literacy experience they received. They also had the time for socialization and learning to deal with each other to solve problems.

Mr. Meoli explained the two proposals that they had come up with during their meeting. They reduced the number of buildings they currently operate from 11 to 6 or 7. One of them retains the Early

Learning Centers and the other does not. They were K-4 and a building for Pre-K and the Little Jackets. There was discussion on how busing effected the population at the schools and how this plan would make things equitable or balanced.

Mr. Finkle mentioned there were some advantages to sitting on the ACES Board, one being that they were more in tune with the State than we were here. The last number he heard was there were 15,000 projects in front of the State for funding under the reimbursement. He thought they should be very clear when they go to the State saying this was Phase 1 of a 4-phase project. They had to be sure they were going to get a commitment, not only on Phase 1, because if they didn't it would mess up the whole pie. It should be a sequence over a 4- or 5-year period which allowed taxpayers/parents of kids in school who don't like to see things happen next year but could adjust to something 4 years from today.

Mayor Capone Almon stated that as far as the importance of planning that was absolutely right. This was just the first step in a massive process that was going to take years and they were going to have many, many more details than they had on these pieces of paper. This was just the starting point, but as they got further in the planning process, the details would be narrowed down.

Mr. Hammell stated this was a great start and the administrators had done great work over the last few months. Mrs. Vitale stated the parents would listen to them and they could convince them that this was a great educational plan.

Mayor Capone Almon wanted to mention, before they closed the meeting, that there was a Town Council meeting with a bi-partisan presentation with Senator Fasano, Candelora and Lawlor. They would be talking about what was going on at the State. They had been lobbying hard for ECS funding and working with the Administration and the Superintendent's office to work with alternative plans. They were going to get, straight from the top, a first-hand view of what was going on at the State. She wanted to personally invite everyone. The meeting was next Tuesday at 7:30 p.m. in the Senior Center.

Mr. Meoli explained that the next step was to work with the Board to refine these and where they were headed and to have it at a level of specificity to have an ED049 for June 30th.

3. ADJOURNMENT OF SPECIAL BOARD MEETING

A motion to adjourn the meeting was made by Mr. Hammell and seconded by Mr. Finkle. There were no objections or abstentions to the motion. Motion carries.

Meeting adjourned at 8:30 p.m.

RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED,

**MARILYN VITALE, CHAIR
EAST HAVEN BOARD OF EDUCATION**