

**MANCHESTER BOARD OF EDUCATION  
REGULAR MEETING  
Wednesday, December 12, 2007**

**MINUTES**

Lincoln Center  
7:30 p.m.

PRESENT: Crockett, Edwards, Hackett, Moran, Pohl, Rizzo, Small-Miller, Stafford

ALSO

PRESENT: Superintendent of Schools Dr. Ouellette, Assistant to the Superintendent of Finance & Management Brooks, Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum & Instruction Richardson, Director of Student Support Services Jenifer S. Tait

ABSENT: Marcano

A. OPENING

A.1 Call to Order

Ms. Hackett called the meeting to order at 7.30 p.m.

A.2. Pledge of Allegiance

Manchester Boy Scout Troup #25 led the meeting in the Pledge of Allegiance.

A.3. Minutes

Ms. Hackett asked for a motion to approve the Minutes of November 26, 2007.

Mr. Stafford made the motion which was seconded by Mr. Rizzo.

MOTION: Stafford/Rizzo s.v. the Manchester Board of Education approved the Minutes, as printed. 8/0/0

B.1. SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT

Dr. Ouellette proudly announced the spotlighting of Highland Park Elementary School that evening. Principal, Mrs. Kate Colavecchio explained that the school focus that year had been to help the students make reader text connections in both reading and other content areas.

Mr. Michael Pearce, Reading Specialist for Highland Park introduced students who individually shared their brief essays which illustrated reader text connections. The students were Carina Rosa, Nati Schunemann, Winona Keeney, Grade 3; Thomas Fitzgerald and Nathan Procaccini,

Grade 4; Brandon Fox and Nykia Walton, Grade 5, Julia Tremblay and Rachel Caldwell, Grade 6.

Ms. Hackett thanked Mrs. Colavecchio, Highland Park Elementary School staff and the students who had obviously put a lot of time and effort into preparing their presentations. They had delivered them wonderfully, with much poise and enthusiasm and she thanked them for sharing their work.

## B.2. Teacher of the Year Recognition

Dr. Ann Richardson introduced Manchester's Teacher of the Year for 2008, Mr. Stanley Bebyn, who was being recognized for his outstanding efforts and accomplishments.

Dr. Richardson read a glowing list of Mr. Bebyn's many accomplishments which alluded to his life's dedication to teaching students for thirty-four years, eleven at Bennet Middle School, twenty-three at Manchester High School - eleven teaching AP Physics and thirteen years AP Chemistry. During that time he also coached Boys' Cross Country for thirty years. His Teams had been highly successful. He received an outstanding Science and Engineering Award from the University of Connecticut Department of Mechanical Engineering. Mr. Bebyn had established a fine record.

Dr. Richardson concluded by remarking that Mr. Stanley Bebyn, Manchester's Public Schools Teacher of the Year for 2008, would be forever remembered as the 'Babe Ruth of Teaching.'

Mr. Bebyn was applauded as he stepped forward to acknowledge the recognition saying it was truly an awesome privilege to be the recipient of this award which was especially meaningful to him at the conclusion of his teaching career. He emphasized that his coaching experience over the years had played a most important part of his teaching career; contributed to students' learning and added to their growth and development. He accepted the honor in the name of so many great teachers who had not been selected for the honor but were nonetheless wonderful and inspiring teachers. They were all owed a wealth of gratitude.

Mr. Bebyn reminisced that it had always been clear to him that he wanted a job where he could help people and inevitably became a teacher. His father had been a mentor and role model not only to him but to many others. He was frequently asked if he had to do it over again would he become a teacher and his answer was always yes. He had no regrets and was grateful he had had the opportunity to guide eager young minds of our country's future.

Mr. Bebyn concluded with two quotes "A teacher affects eternity. He, or she, can never tell where his or her influence ends." and "More beautiful than the minting of a King's Gold Crown is a well kept memory of a lovely thing."

Ms. Hackett added her congratulations to Mr. Bebyn.

C. PUBLIC COMMENTS

Mr. Scott Aiken, 92 Laurel Street referenced an article in the Journal Inquirer which challenged Mark Twain's book "Huckleberry Finn". This made him nervous and he suggested that the local school boards and district superintendents remove the book from mandatory reading lists considering it to have psychologically damaging effect on the self-esteem of African/American children. Mr. Aiken commented that the book was the fifth most challenged in America.

Ms. Hackett suggested that Mr. Aiken might wish to either make his written comments available to the Recording Secretary or email them to Board members.

Ms. Pamela Cranford, of Manchester declined to print her name and address on the Signup Sheet, but gave her perspective on Mark Twain's book which concurred with Mr. Scott Aiken's views.

Ms. Cranford stressed it was important to look at Manchester's School Mission Statement which talked about promoting the self-esteem of students and studying in an environment that was healthy for all students. She felt that Mark Twain's book offended people of color, not individually but as a community, with the repetition two hundred times of a certain 'n' word. She urged the Board of Education to stand by its Mission Statement.

Mr. Tom Stringfellow, 183 Hillstown Road, talked about various issues.

Reference to 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C.

Movie "The Quiet American" published 5 years ago about Vietnam.

Vietnam – "The 10,000 day war" – a documentary series that came out in the 1980's, narrated by Richard Basehart. History Channel Classic Series

December 10, 2007 - Human Rights Day. "Amnesty International Magazine" printed quarterly talked about Iraqi refugees and types of government. There are still problems around the world, i.e., children being forced into slavery or soldiers, sweatshops, exploitation. Things had not really changed in fifty-nine years.

Mr. Stringfellow mentioned the question of steroid use which was being talked about in the News Media;

NY Times, story about teenagers who could buy steroids by browsing the web.

News Week Magazine, Nov. 19, 2007. Book - a "History of the 1960's" by Tom Brokaw, retired NBC TV Reporter.

Intelligence Report Magazine, fall 2007 dealt with Racism and a rise in Fascism.

Mr. Stringfellow viewed Mark Twain's book was racist. He did not like the repetitive word used in the book – it hurt. Sometimes a strong stand was needed. He felt we were achieving and making some strides with regard to racism.

Ms. Stephanie Knybel, 138 Bobby Lane, was against banning "Huckleberry Finn". She believed it was a classic and if it was taught and explained well the word being in the book two hundred times should be just glossed over. Ms. Knybel displayed, and read out the titles, of a series of books based on a 4<sup>th</sup> Grade reading book her children had read in which the same word had been used. The author was Mildred Steen Taylor.

Ms. Knybel emphasized that we could not go through every book in our libraries and schools looking for every word that was offensive. Her children had read the books she had listed; they were history, good books, even read throughout Black History Month. Children were reading literature. Ms. Knybel thought that sometimes things could be taken a little bit too far. If “Huckleberry Finn” was being read by students at the High School, she would hope those students were mature and participated in the discussion that followed. She would also hope that the teacher who led the discussion could handle the situation. She accepted it could be looked upon as a derogatory word but if we were going to nitpick books we would have to look at other books that might be derogatory toward other races, e.g., Jews, Polish, Germans, etc. Where would it stop? We want our children to read Literature; we should not be taking out words in books. We have a good group of teachers who would teach these books properly.

#### D. PTA PRESIDENT’S REPORT

Ms. Jackie Madore reported it had been a slow month for PTAs, due to the policy regarding Bingo nights at schools. Many had had to cancel their November Bingo events because the State of Connecticut was enforcing a rule that Bingo Permits are required. The PTA had been unaware of the policies, and due to the lengthy process to get permits, Manchester students and families were losing out on a lot of fun. Ms. Madore hoped that all the PTAs would hang on in there for future events and for the sake of the children.

Spring fundraisers would be on everyone’s agendas and one of the challenges was complying with the State of Connecticut Nutrition Wellness Policies. The PTAs were working hard to get the kinks out and hoping everyone would do their part in overcoming these obstacles so they could let the children have some fun during their school days. It was, after all, for the children and everyone should be working together.

If anyone was interested in learning more about the Wellness Policy, Ms. Madore mentioned they were forming an Overview Committee, together with the Board of Education, to get the guidelines agreed so they could work as a team.

This concluded the report.

Ms. Hackett suggested Ms. Brooks talk about the relevancy of this issue, specifically Games of Chance. These came under special revenue under the State Department of Connecticut and there were procedures that needed to be followed if these games occurred, especially in a school district. Ms. Madore, Dr. Ouellette and Ms. Brooks had had discussions and were going forward with it. Schools wishing to continue with these games would have to file the necessary paperwork.

In addition, there had been a directive from the Board of Education the previous year to meet the Certification Standards to allow the Nutrition Department to receive an additional ten cents for every meal served to students in the school district. This meant the Board having to comply with Public Act 06-63, the “Healthy Food and Beverages Act.” They would meet with all the PTAs the following week. There were three governing policies outlining what they could do, Public

Act 06-63; “Wellness Policy” and also the Department of Health and Safe Food Handling. As much information as possible would be shared with the PTAs to enable them to go forward.

Ms. Brooks clarified for Ms. Madore that the extra ten cents provided by the State went towards benefiting parents to help keep lunch prices down. The reimbursement went directly to the Nutrition Department, a separate entity under the Board of Education. It was not within the Board’s budget.

Ms. Hackett said work with the PTA on this issue would continue.

Ms. Madore entertained a variety of questions from Board members.

Mr. Edwards questioned if Bingo nights extended to raffles. The answer was yes and Ms. Madore gave him a complete picture of the cumbersome process they needed to go through. The raffle issue arose where money was exchanged.

Mr. Edwards said he was appreciative of her efforts and asked that our Administration would do whatever it could to help stay within the letter of the law, also talk to our legislators and let them know this was a hassle and something the State was doing to stop everyone having fun.

Ms. Madore said they were putting restrictions, not only on PTAs but towns themselves. Any type of organization would be discouraged by having to file all this paperwork at a time when they were all working hard to close achievement gaps, and attract more parental involvement. The State mandates were just getting out of control.

Mr. Edwards and Ms. Madore discussed the Nutrition Policy. He felt the Board had not been fully aware of the impact of this policy and should reconsider its stand as it was so far reaching into the PTAs. He singled out specific restrictions with which he disagreed to discuss.

Dr. Ouellette reminded the Board that it was on record that earlier on she had cautioned about moving in that direction because of the support they had within the PTAs. Dr. Ouellette and Ms. Brooks could certainly not act as ‘snack police’ within the schools, neither had they the right to order parents as to the content of students’ lunchboxes. If the Board chose to revisit this policy she would like some directive from them.

Mr. Pohl observed that the issue went back to the policy about obesity and recreation that had been visited on the subject of wellness. That was the hard part for him and he was concerned. If the Board decided to go back and take another look at the policy the original intent had to be kept in mind.

Dr. Ouellette mentioned the Wellness Policy and the Nutritional Standards which was a whole different issue. Ms. Brooks commented on the Wellness Policy that was mandating the compliance issue and explained that the three things were interrelated.

Ms. Brooks discussed the safe handling of food being prepared in the home by uncertified people, which would ultimately be shared with others. The Board of Health had suggested to the

PTAs and other school groups that they could not sell food that was not prepared under safe food handling conditions. Ms. Brooks said they would continue to have discussions with the PTAs on how to continue to hold fundraisers that did not involve food.

Mr. Edwards queried whether or not apple pie fell into the category of something that would be disallowed under the policy. Ms. Brooks responded it would be allowed if it met the nutritional standards, similarly to meals served in the schools.

Ms. Brooks said she had a note of the requirements. If anyone was interested they could send their requests via email. The information is also on the State Department of Education website.

#### E. CONSENT CALENDAR

Dr. Ouellette sought Board approval for the seven items listed on the Consent Calendar.

##### E1. Personnel Action

Details and information had already been provided to the Board

##### E.2. Appropriation of Education Special Projects - \$68,935

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) 619 Grant. Details had already been provided to Board members.

##### E.3. Appropriation of Education Special Projects - \$1,579,348

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) 611 Grant. Details had already been provided to Board members.

##### E.4. Budget Transfers

In accordance with Policy #3160 transfer between categories. Details had been provided and Ms. Brooks could provide additional information.

##### E.5. Extended Field Trip Request – Washington, D.C. 1/31/08 – 2/3/08

Manchester High School Student Activities Club – National LEAD Conference  
These had already been endorsed by the Board.

##### E.6. Extended Field Trip Request – Wesleyan University, 3/28/08 – 3/29/08

Manchester High School Student Activities Club – State Leadership Conference  
These had already been endorsed by the Board.

##### E.7. Board of Education Meeting Schedule Revision

In order to highlight the new Bailey Auditorium the Board was being asked to consider moving the Spring Student of Education Awards to the Auditorium, instead of Illing Middle School. The dates are Thursday, April 24, 2008, from 6:00-9.00 p.m. for the elementary program and Wednesday, May 14, 2008, from 6:30pm.-9.00p.m. for the secondary.

Ms. Hackett asked for a motion to approve the Consent Calendar.

Mr. Stafford made the motion which was seconded by Mr. Edwards.

Mr. Rizzo asked for the reason behind the budget transfer for the Washington School and was told by Ms. Brooks that the school had found a need for additional office supplies and Language Arts supplies. She confirmed that this was not for a new reading program but something that was already ongoing.

MOTION: Stafford/Edwards s.v. the Manchester Board of Education approved the Consent Calendar as presented by Dr. Ouellette. 8/0/0

## F. SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT – Part II

### F.1. Community Service/Graduation Requirement

Dr. Richardson explained that Mr. Kevin O'Donnell would present an update on the Community Service/Graduation Requirements. The request had originated from a previous Board meeting.

Mr. O'Donnell outlined one of the requirements that had already been put in place, i.e., a service learning requirement. Not all districts had this requirement but in discussions with the State Board of Education were on the table for the entire state. This was the first year in Manchester that students would meet the service learning and graduation requirements. It was imbedded in three senior years' Social Studies courses – Participation in American Society, Law and Order and Law in American Society. A number of students from the High School Law and Order classes were in the audience. Mr. O'Donnell pointed out that the purpose of this requirement for graduation was to build stronger partnerships with the community, explore career paths, promote active citizenship and provide real life experiences for students. Projects they would be involved in would be completed either individually or in groups, under the leadership of the Social Studies teacher. The presentation of the project at the completion would be done in each of the Social Studies Classes. Projects would be evaluated according to a rubric developed by the Social Studies Department. Examples of the kinds of projects in which students were involved were tutoring projects at elementary schools and organization of donations for the food pantry.

The requirement for graduation was consistent with expectations and proposals from the State Board of Education, which stated "Learning opportunities that extend into the community." It was also consistent with two elements in the Manchester High School Mission Statement, (1) Academic Expectations, Apply prior knowledge, abstract thinking, curiosity, imagination and creativity to solve problems, and (2) Civic Expectations "Students should demonstrate active participation and positive contributions to the community." It was also consistent with NEASC Standard 3.

Mr. Pohl affirmed that he had asked for the item to be put on the agenda and thanked Dr. Ouellette. He wanted to know the number of hours spent on community service, and was informed there was no specific number. What was required was that students identify a problem and develop a project that would begin to address it. Ultimately they would make a presentation in class on what they had accomplished. It had to relate to a problem or issue in the community that would be addressed through the project. This could be done individually or collectively.

Mr. Pohl and Mr. O'Donnell discussed choices of possible projects which would have an impact on the number of hours required for completion. In response to Mr. Pohl's question if this might extend to more than a senior year, Mr. O'Donnell said at this point, he would say the State Board of Education would give them some leadership on this. This was the first time they had requested a graduation requirement.

Mr. Pohl wanted to know if there was a way we could list the various completed projects and Mr. O'Donnell said he could provide that. Mr. Pohl felt that this would have an impact on the Manchester community providing a learning lesson as to what can happen when students collectively helped solve its problems.

Mr. Rizzo wanted to know if Social Studies is required of all seniors and was told it was. Could a student come up with his/her own project outside of school?

Mr. O'Donnell said the project could be done in the community outside of the school but ultimately the presentation was done in the course. The planning for the research would be done through the course.

Mr. Edwards wondered if the requirement could be met through Eagle Scout or Boy/Girl Scouts of America. Mr. O'Donnell thought that could be a possibility.

Mr. Stafford asked about parameters and wondered if students actually ran a mock election at the High School after the debates that would fit into the parameters. Mr. O'Donnell said it would.

Mr. Moran wondered how participation could be measured as a lot of the services were performed in groups and some children get frustrated. How the whole group could be fostered to participate in the projects. Mr. O'Donnell informed him that all of the projects occurred under the supervision of the Social Studies teachers and they met with the children and monitored them throughout the semester and the entirety of the project. There would always be differences in the degree of participation. All students were involved in the reporting out at the end of their projects.

#### F.2. New Horizons Update

Mr. Bruce Thorndike, Manchester Regional Academy Director gave an update on the New Horizons program, now in its second year.

Mr. Thorndike pointed out that the previous year had been a pilot year and it had been a successful year, with continuing success in the current year. They had thirty-seven students last year and currently there were thirty-two students. Mr. Thorndike reiterated the aims and objectives of New Horizons and was glad of the opportunity to help students turn around in their school careers.

Mr. Thorndike issued an open invitation to Board members to visit and eat dinner with the group. Dinner was family style at 5:45 pm. This would provide a Board member insight into the work being done there. The Board could be very proud of the resources they had put into the program.

Mr. Rizzo wanted to know how successful we had been with students. Had we kept track? Mr. Thorndike said the criteria for exiting the program was for students to be held accountable for their behavior and earn their way out. It was designed to be a short term program, one or perhaps two quarters, but depend on how successful they were, how quickly they developed skills and changed behavior patterns.

Mr. Rizzo asked about data on students after leaving the program. Had any students come back? Had they gone back to the High School? Had any dropped out? Mr. Thorndike told him that out of the thirty-seven students they had last year, sixteen had transitioned out, i.e., gone back to Illing or Manchester High School. A number had gone to the MRA Day Program at Bentley School. They had lost some students, i.e., four had been incarcerated because of past histories. They have quite a shifting population for various reasons; the program was designed to be temporary.

Mr. Rizzo was told the program's capacity, on paper, was twenty-five to thirty. The peak last year was twenty-four and could go back up there again. The hours are 4:00-8:00 pm. Mondays through Thursdays and staffed by members from Manchester High School, two from Manchester Regional Academy, one from Bentley, and staff from Illing. No one worked more than two nights.

Mr. Pohl thanked Mr. Thorndike and his staff for all the hard work they do for students who really needed them. He asked if New Horizons had a waiting list and was told the current population during the day was seventy-five and there was a waiting list there. Mr. Pohl asked for the number on the waiting list and was told there were six or seven children in Manchester and he could take five from surrounding districts if he had the room. Mr. Pohl recalled he had had the privilege of coming along to view the program and intended to pay another visit.

Mr. Crockett wanted to know how many out-of-towners the program had and was told there were no out-of-district students in the evening program but were looking to possibly develop that.

Dr. Ouellette interjected that surrounding towns had been asking about the New Horizons Program and they were being cautious wishing to ensure they were very successful before they offered their services. Ms. Brooks had been working on an inter-district partnership with various business managers throughout the area and there was a need for auditioning students into such a program. Mr. Thorndike and Ms. Brooks would be introducing the program to the CREC committee in January in an endeavor to help supplement funds.

Ms. Hackett thanked Mr. Thorndike for his update on this exciting program which could prove successful for our students and it looked as if this was already happening. She asked Mr. Thorndike to keep them informed. This would return to the district as a cost saving and was a very smartly designed program.

## G. OLD BUSINESS

### G.1. Achievement Gap Task Force

Dr. Ouellette recapped that a written draft proposal, tabled prior to the commencement of the November 26, 2007 Board meeting, to create an Achievement Gap Task Force, had been debated at length and was on the agenda under Old Business for further discussion and possible approval. Ms. Diane Kearney, K-12 Equity Programming Supervisor, was present to act in the capacity as Task Force Administrative Advisor to the Committee and suggest a possible framework should the proposal be approved.

Ms. Kearney tabled handouts, “Manchester Public Schools Grade 4 CMT Comparison – Math”, Manchester Public Schools District Initiatives and “Equity is”, some of which the Board was already familiar.

Ms. Kearney commented that when the first idea had been formulated about forming a task force she thought it was a good idea because it would ensure more support for Equity in the district. However, she had not thought about the full meaning and now believed that how the task force unfolded, and the focus of the agenda on the task force would determine its ability to succeed. She proceeded to share her thoughts on how she saw the task force attaining success should it go forward. She also shared how she thought we, as a district, knew how to move forward in addressing the gap and therefore why it was important that the task force follow the lead of the Superintendent, the Office of Curriculum & Instruction and the Office of Equity. If it did not follow that lead, then she thought we might be stepping backwards and even challenging the state schools in expectations. They needed to embrace her thoughts on the subject.

Ms. Kearney talked about the Mission Statement which was based on the Equity Plan and was Board approved, and our belief in equity for all children. Ms. Kearney read aloud from the document on Equity for the benefit of the audience, “Equity is raising the achievement of all students while narrowing the gaps between the highest and lowest performing students and eliminating the racial predictability and disproportionality of which student groups occupy the highest and lowest achievement categories.”

Ms. Kearney asked the Board to view a color coded slide hand out, in bar graph form, setting out a Grade 4 CMT Comparison in Math over the last seven years. She elaborated on the two most salient points which one could elicit from the document.

As she reviewed the data she felt we had actually made some gains as it pertained to children of color even though we were not yet where we should be. Ms. Kearney considered they had made gains under the leadership of Dr. Ouellette. Ms. Kearney commented that the Achievement Gap was not new, what was new was that we were finally talking about it and including subgroups in the conversation. Candid conversations were now taking place and had provided a great measure of comfort to all.

Ms. Kearney mentioned the three year equity framework that was Board approved on September 24, that Manchester was the only district that had a plan, and talked about adaptive solutions instead of technical solutions also Courageous Conversations. She considered we were ahead of the curve which was why Manchester was to be used as a role model.

Ms. Kearney reiterated that she was for the proposal so long as it followed our vision and supported everything that had already been started to ensure the closure of the gap.

A full and frank discussion followed with an exchange of views.

Mr. Crockett commented that Ms. Kearney appeared to have a handle on the problem and he did not see the need to create another committee; it would be a waste of precious time and resources. He asked her directly "Do you feel you could achieve results without the proposed committee as he personally did not want to give up another forty nights and waste time doing something that was already being done. If this was the case, so far as he was concerned, he would be more than happy to say "Go do it!" Ms. Kearney said she did believe she had a handle on it. Dr. Ouellette had been 100% supportive of any issue or challenge brought forth, financially and professionally, as they tried to address the problem. She recalled that on one occasion Mr. Edwards had asked her if she knew what she was doing and if her answer was yes he was going to take and use resources she wisely provided. Ms. Kearney respected his remarks wholeheartedly because this was her job.

Mr. Pohl was in favor of the proposal and gave the reasoning for his decision. He applauded Ms. Kearney for everything she had done and would continue to do. He had listened to Mr. Crockett's question which begged him to look at the results which had been tabled. The results were taken over a period of seven years and revealed that in some cases we were in an even worse situation than before. He applauded Courageous Conversations and all the other initiatives that had been undertaken. When the question of talking to professionals had cropped up it was not meant to be a slate against our own professionals. However, there were districts across the State of Connecticut that looked like Manchester. He was not asking us to compare ourselves to Greenwich, Darien or somewhere in the northwest corner, towns that we did not look like with different demographics than us. There were towns out there that had programs that had shown success that we are not simulating. He felt we should have the opportunity to hear what these programs were all about and to ask Ms. Kearney if she thought this was something we were not doing. His theory was if we were doing it completely right and were there we would have no achievement gap at all. He made this statement whilst still recognizing that efforts were being made. We were still the leader and he wanted this leadership to continue. For us to put together a Sub-Committee of the District Improvement Committee that would actually look at the best practices when it came to closing the gap was important to retain our leadership at community and State level.

Mr. Pohl continued that it was important for this committee to understand what programs we had because he thought, as a Board, we did not fully understand the programs ourselves. As a publicly-elected official he had been confronted with a moral issue which he considered the achievement gap to be. When students of color did not perform the way their white counterparts did, it was a moral issue and needed to be addressed. It needed to be addressed by the Manchester Board working with, not leading, not directing, but working with the Superintendent and the Equity Director to move this district forward. He was not convinced that all the initiatives outlined in the document tabled had been implemented throughout the district. If certain initiatives had worked then we should be carrying them out in all our schools. This would be something for the committee to take a look at. Although we had already done a lot we

would not be finished until there was no gap. This was a critically important undertaking wherein he felt the Board had an obligation to show the students that we were doing everything we could to guarantee success.

Mr. Pohl thanked Ms. Kearney for her efforts thus far and hoped the Board would move forward with this task force.

Mr. Moran commented that as a new Board member he had spent the last month making visits to some local principals and heard about the proposed task force during the campaign season and at the Board meeting. He had sat down with several of the principals and this was their first topic of conversation. They were so proud of the initiatives being put forth to close the achievement gap and talked about steps they themselves had initiated in the school in very different ways. He was confident that the principals were passionate, very proud of their teachers and were doing workshops etc. He made particular reference to Ms. England and a discussion on Literacy at Nathan Hale where she had been very informative and had done the Board proud. If the Board decided to go forward with this task force he was glad to see we would be looking at what was going on in town, which was most important. There were initiatives being put in place that although they might not see results tomorrow they would in the future. There were confident passionate administrators and teachers in our community and if we continued to keep our faith in them then we would see the closing of the achievement gap.

Ms. Small-Miller commented that initially when they talked about the task force she was 100% for it. She had since taken another look at it and carried out some research over the previous few days, including conversations with NEASC staff. She learned that Manchester was leading. Ms. Small-Miller quoted, as one example, an article in the U.S. News, December issue listing the top one hundred schools that actually prepared children for college and had no achievement gap. Connecticut was not included on that list. She was not happy to read that because we have gaps all over Connecticut. There were schools out there, e.g., Texas and Oklahoma that had no gap.

Ms. Small-Miller reaffirmed she had a big interest in closing the gap but what was wanted should not be something that was short-lived. If we were going to have a task force she thought individuals on that committee should work closely with the Administration and go out there and uncover the facts. She did not believe we needed a large scale committee. She thought it would be a very good thing to form a task force that would put more emphasis on closing the gap.

Mr. Stafford had given the proposal a lot of thought and listened to what everyone was saying. He repeated that we needed to throw as much as we possibly could at closing the gap. He could not see how this could be a bad thing and why it should not do well. He would hope it would not be just another 'feel good' committee. He hoped that everyone on the Board and everyone invited to be on the task force would have the same goal in mind, i.e., to do everything to close the achievement gap. He referred to Ms. Kearney's comment that the Commissioner applauded us for what we were doing and had acknowledged us for doing good things. Mr. Stafford offered to everyone that if we were the people he was talking about we should continue the trendsetting, put together the task force, and work hard to create trends that other places in Connecticut would look up to. He did not think the task force was a frivolous idea. He had looked at the eighteen initiatives set out and thought they were incredible and pertinent and could see them across the

whole school district. They were not in all of the schools; he liked the coherence, which we needed. They did not all address the achievement gap and he wanted to have something that addressed this solely; the task force would be doing that which was why he thought it was very important. He hoped the Board would pass it.

Ms. Kearney suggested we had introduced all of the initiatives across the district; each in some way did address the gap. Positive Behavior Support (PBS) was being rolled out and they had a plan that would ultimately include all schools. Resources were needed in order to do this all at once. If an initiative was not going on at one of the schools it was because there was a roll out plan. Mr. Stafford agreed – PBS was not at every school yet and he wanted to see this rectified. Ms. Kearney affirmed they were on target to roll out PBS, and know that by the year 2012 PBS would be in all schools.

Mr. Stafford explained what he meant by saying that we looked at culturally responsible teaching not being in every classroom in Manchester, and that he wanted to see it going there. The classrooms which did have that were making a difference but not at all. We had initiatives that were working but in a microcosm here and there. He wanted the gap closed. He had eleven months more to serve on the Board and he would like to see the Board making progress before he left.

Ms. Kearney asked that Mr. Stafford understand we had a timeline for all of the initiatives and programs and, as an example mentioned that where culturally responsive teaching was concerned we had a 4-year plan that was dependent upon resources. In every school in Manchester it had become more aesthetically culturally relevant. She concluded by saying that she could not disagree with Mr. Stafford's statement that the setting up of the committee could not hurt.

At Dr. Ouellette's suggestion Ms. Kearney talked about how closely she had been working with the Administrative Team and professional development and her work to date. Ms. Kearney mentioned a number of the speakers who had visited this year, among whom were Dr. Kenneth Hardy, a Licensed Psychologist, Philadelphia, who had talked about Invisible Wounds; Jamie Almondzon conducted a Workshop for the Illing Staff in August; Glen Singleton had been a guest speaker.

All Administrators went through Beyond Diversity or Courageous Conversations; all staff had an Equity Team, an Equity Plan and thirty staff members had attended a Workshop that day. Ms. Kearney emphasized there were three components, i.e., Parental, Staff and Student.

Ms. Hackett called for a motion for approval to set up a task force.

Mr. Pohl MOVED the creation of a Best Practices Sub-Committee to the District Improvement Committee consisting of bipartisan co-chairs and two additional members of the Board of Education or designees of the Board, and not more than twelve members of the Manchester Community, to be identified by the committee and to include residents, elected officials and representatives of stakeholder organizations interested in closing the achievement gap.

FURTHER that this Board encourages the Superintendent of Schools to appoint the Manchester Public Schools' Equity Director as the Administration's liaison to the Best Practices

subcommittee. FURTHER, that by June 1, 2008, the Sub-Committee shall develop a report of current successful initiatives and programs utilized by Manchester Public Schools and also identify programs used in other school districts that may support the critical task of closing the achievement gap.

Mr. Stafford seconded the motion.

The Motion was on the table.

Mr. Edwards appreciated the opportunity to ask questions but waited until the motion was on the table to ask some more. He recapped on his previous conversation with Ms. Kearney and asked “Will the task force help you and your colleagues close the gap, or potentially be a distraction from what you are already doing? Ms. Kearney responded that it would be somewhat of a distraction but she liked the idea. To a certain extent it could become a distraction if only because she really felt that the Board did not have the advantage of knowing what she knew. Mr. Edwards pointedly asked “What do you think of this?”

Ms. Kearney echoed his question “Do I support the task force?” She reiterated that if it followed the mission, vision and the tenets of the direction in which we were heading then her answer was yes. If not, then she was very nervous and concerned because it could hurt us. She could not give a clearer answer.

Mr. Edwards questioned Dr. Ouellette if the task force would be “free”. If not, what the hard or soft costs were and if we had those resources available this year.

Dr. Ouellette does not have a budget for this in the current year and certainly would not ask Ms. Kearney to look at her Equity Budget. Secondly, there was a possibility they could provide experts without knowing the definition of experts. Ms. Kearney is an expert and had expressed concerns about who could relate to what Manchester had been going through with regard to the gap. No scenario was exactly the same. As far as free cost, she did not have any numbers available that evening. She knew that they had sold the idea of professional development to Ms. Brooks and that was not free. Dr. Ouellette regarded those people as experts in the field. Dr. Ouellette believed that our Deputy Commissioner and Commissioner at times had graced Manchester Public Schools with their presence in supporting the Young Men’s Black Leadership Academy, as well Women’s and had been very supportive. She was unsure if they would do this on a continual basis. She would have to concur with Ms. Kearney’s answer in that it would have to depend on the circumstances.

Mr. Edwards asked pointedly if the Superintendent had a recommendation on the proposed motion. Dr. Ouellette said she did; she had a concern with calling it a Best Practices Sub-Committee, a word that was floated around at the State Department. It would be helpful perhaps to give it a name something more unique to Manchester. She agreed with Ms. Kearney that she wanted her to continue with her work and her vision of closing the achievement gap. She felt that if this were to prove a distraction she would have some concerns. The staff was already working hard on eighteen initiatives and she would not want to take them away from that course of action. If they worked in collaboration with Administration it would certainly be wonderful to have

them come out and have stakeholders who would be advocates for the Board in helping to find additional resources and mentors. She would like to have Ms. Kearney define the meaning of experts for the committee.

Mr. Edwards thought Dr. Ouellette had given a good answer and was right to have concerns. However, he insisted that he would still like to hear her recommendation. Dr. Ouellette responded that she was recommending that she had concerns with regards to the task force not continuing to work with them in leading them in the right direction. She had concerns about another sub-committee as she thought the Board of Education and her staff was already over extended; there were many committees to be served; the Board of Education Sub-Committee meetings were extensive. She was aware that Ms. Kearney had many other evening commitments throughout the State and she would just be safeguarding and preserving her time and energies as she was an integral part of the administrative team in closing the gap. If the task force did not go in that direction then she would not recommend it.

Ms. Hackett called the question.

MOTION: Pohl/Stafford s.v. the Manchester Board of Education approved the Motion to create a Best Practices Sub-Committee to the District Improvement Committee. 6/2/0.

Mr. Pohl inquired of the Chair if it would be appropriate if the Motion called for the Board to have Co-Chairs and two members of the Board, or designees. Ms. Hackett agreed that it could be discussed at this time and Mr. Pohl offered the names of Mary-Jane Pazda and Bethany Silver as the designees of the Board to the Best Practices Sub-Committee of the District Improvement Committee.

Ms. Hackett clarified that the two individuals were members elect who would start their official term the following November.

## H. NEW BUSINESS

### H.1. Revision of Bylaws Policy #9000

Ms. Hackett announced this was the first read of the new Bylaws which the Board's Policy Committee had worked on for almost a year. Board members had received copies of two documents in their agenda package, e.g., the first version showed the track changes to the existing Bylaws and the clean version showed the new proposed Bylaws.

Ms. Hackett outlined, as background information, that Articles 1, 2 & 3, represented existing language that was revised to add either clarity, comply with Connecticut Statute or represent Best Practices. The specific areas enhanced were the Powers and Duties section and the Definition of a Meeting, and brought better distinction in the various types of meetings the Board of Education may have. The document talked about recording of the minutes, the process of adoptive policies and clarified the process for removal of Board officers. There were other minor references to changing a word here or there. However, the biggest new component of the Bylaws was the Code of Ethics, which was now Article 4 of the Bylaws. This was entirely new language and resulted from the Ad Hoc Committee on Ethics that the Town of Manchester

convened some time ago with members of the community. Ms. Hackett and Mr. Rizzo had been on that committee. The panel looked at coming up with a code of conduct, an ethics code for elected officials, and the Charter Revision was looking at exactly how to place this important code into the Town of Manchester. The discussion to follow would be on whether it would be implemented as an ordinance, a new language or revised language in the Charter.

The Board of Directors took the Mission of its Committee seriously and decided they would add this code into their version of the Bylaws, which were their Rules of Operating Procedures. In turn, Ms. Hackett, together with the Policy Committee, believed it would be ideal to include the Code of Ethics in their Bylaw language until such time as there was a formal recommendation and direction from the Town as it affected the Charter.

Ms. Hackett called upon Staff Attorney O'Neil to give the Board the highlights, the thought process and the rationale for some of the provisions in the article and also take questions from Board Members.

Attorney O'Neil stated that currently public officials of the Town, including the Board, were subject to the ethical standards set forth in the Town Charter. Those ethical standards had been established over thirty years ago, in the post Watergate area. Only six of them contained six standards of official conduct, were quite broad and vague. They had worked to a certain extent over the years but during the past ten years there had been a heightened awareness of ethical responsibilities of public officials. The Board of Directors had discussed this at meetings for the last couple of years and decided that the Town should have a more rigid set of ethical standards for its public officials to follow so an Ad Hoc Committee was formed. A Charter Revision Committee was convened but the Board of Directors strongly felt that those standards should be adopted in the interim to guide their conduct and so they became part of the Board of Directors Rules of Procedure. Now the Board of Education was considering adopting a form of the work product as part of their own Bylaws as they more accurately defined the standards as opposed to the six which were in the Town Charter.

If the Board chose to adopt the standards, they would be implementing and policing those standards between themselves because they would be part of their Bylaws. Attorney O'Neil thought they had a good working document.

Ms. Hackett said that first of all the standards had been revised once they were adopted by the Board of Directors for their Bylaws. They had taken the text and spent a lot of time on it so it would reflect the Board of Education, as opposed to the Board of Directors or the Town of Manchester. There should be no remnants pertaining to these other bodies. It might still not be perfect so if they required any revisions Ms. Hackett asked that they be forwarded to her.

Attorney O'Neil referred to his copy of the Bylaws pointing out that a section dealing with conflict of interest applied to the Board of Directors as they were the body that passed legislation. That might be irrelevant to the Board of Education for its purposes. He would take a further look at the document to see if there were any other instances of irrelevancy.

Ms. Hackett pointed out that she was looking at a more recent copy and would make sure Attorney O'Neil received a copy.

Mr. Crockett said he would like to see a couple of things changed, e.g., if somebody gave a gift as a political contribution they should not be able to sit and vote on something that concerned them. This should apply not only to the individual but to a party. They really wanted to be above board. Attorney O'Neil and Mr. Crockett debated the question of conflict of interests and matters of propriety in depth. Mr. Crockett concluded by expressing the view that he felt people should not accept political contributions and still be able to vote upon them.

Ms. Hackett interjected to recognize members of the Policy Committee who had worked on the document with her, namely Mr. Edwards and Mr. Stafford. Ms. Hackett called upon Mr. Edwards to give his comments.

Mr. Edwards and Attorney O'Neil further debated the question of the interpretation of political contributions and gifts. Mr. Edwards quoted that the document stated that a gift could not be accepted as it constituted a conflict of interest. Attorney O'Neil agreed with Mr. Edwards this was an inconsistency that he had not picked up and said this was something that needed to be reconciled. Mr. Edwards wanted to know how this could be changed so that it would cover Mr. Crockett's issue about gifts and affirmed that they would delete political contribution from the listing of what did not constitute a gift.

Mr. Edwards talked about endorsement being freedom of speech but yet political contribution was not viewed as freedom of speech. Attorney O'Neil responded that obviously there was a monetary aspect to a political contribution. A number of discussions had taken place on the Ad Hoc Committee about that type of situation and Attorney O'Neil elaborated further on this. They continued to debate the subject.

Attorney O'Neil commented that these were the Board's rule; however they chose to implement them and were free to include whatever provisions they wanted. It was more a policy than a law.

Mr. Pohl asked if the section in the Bylaws dealing with standards of ethical conduct and endorsements would be applicable to him personally and bar him from voting and participating on certain issues.

Attorney O'Neil's first response to the question would be the thought that since Mr. Pohl had raised the question they would need to specifically address this issue. He did not think political contributions applied to endorsements. They continued to debate the question of what constituted free speech.

Attorney O'Neil urged caution and to tread lightly when they started to step over the line of political contributions and endorsement as this would raise a lot of issues and needed to be given careful thought.

Mr. Moran wanted to know if the Board would be forwarding any questions to the Policy Committee. Ms. Hackett informed him that everyone benefited from hearing both the questions

and the answers so generally they tried to centralize that by collecting all questions and a copy of those was published to everyone.

Attorney O'Neil asked that the latest version of the Bylaws be made available to him together with a list of any questions or issues. He would try to assist the Board to come up with a rational set of standards. He further cautioned that the more issues they tried to address and the more detail they tried to get into, the more complicated things would become. The Board could get itself into a dilemma as to how to apply and interpret things.

## I. COMMUNICATIONS

Ms. Hackett referred to a document that was tabled outlining Standing Committees. They should inform her of any errors or corrections.

Ms. Hackett received a communication from Ms. Jodi Huyler, a former Board member, asking to share the fact that the Martin School community was embarking on a new initiative where they were coming together to develop a plan and a program for honoring students and/or family members that had passed away. Many people were getting together to make this happen and Ms. Hackett thought that the school would be taking the initiative on this and hopefully the Board would get some feedback.

## J. COMMITTEE REPORTS

### J.1. Policy Committee

Mr. Stafford reported that the Policy Committee had met on November 29, 2007 and discussed the following issues:

Since the new committee appointments were not yet confirmed they postpone the vote for the chairperson and discussion of meeting dates until the next meeting.

Mr. Thorndike provided a brief summary of a current issue related to tuition students at MRA and whether they are also entitled to participate in extra-curricular activities in Manchester, particularly pertinent to MHS activities. The consensus of the committee was to go forward with developing a policy and procedures related to this situation. This would be brought to the Policy Committee once it was developed.

The Committee discussed Policy #9000. The next revision would be on the agenda for the next Board of Education meeting.

The Committee discussed the draft of Standards of Ethical Conduct related to elected officials and Policy #8250 Conflict of Interest related to employee conduct. There was discussion about blending these policies. In the interest of time, the committee decided to finish work on the By Laws first and then take more time to review the Conflict of Interest Policy.

Policy #6140 Curriculum was still being reviewed by the Curriculum and Instruction Committee.

Policy #6141 Physical Education (Independent Study) was still being revised.

J.2. Personnel & Finance Committee

Mr. Rizzo reported that the Personnel & Finance Committee met on December 4, 2007 and the first item discussed was the Graduation Ceremony venue for the coming year. Ms. Brooks reported out the cost of the Dodge Music Center which had increased considerably and they had a discussion about other venues. Ms. Brooks was doing some research on this and would report back to the Committee at a future date.

Mr. Frost was at the meeting and presented the Committee with the estimated costs and some obstacles regarding the establishment of a Lacrosse Program at Manchester High School for Boys and Girls. Also the implementation of a Boys' Volleyball Program at the High School and a Middle School Girls' Volleyball team.

Lengthy discussions were held regarding the costs and benefits of those two programs among others. The general consensus of the Committee at that time was that it was a good idea and they would proceed with finding out what needed to be done to bring this about.

The next meeting of the Committee was scheduled for January 22, 2008.

K. PUBLIC COMMENTS

Ms. Melissa Dumont, 9 Hendee Road commended the Board on the adoption of the Achievement Gap Best Committee. The issue would take a collaboration of minds working together toward the common goal of closing the gap in its entirety. Manchester could certainly be proud of areas in which it took the lead even with the addition of this task force. Let us focus on the positive and wait for what was to be.

Mr. Tom Stringfellow, 183 Hillstown Road expressed his support for all items on the Consent Calendar.

He recommended various articles as under:

Attitude Magazine, January 2008 talked about Teens and ADHD also alternatives to medication such as Neuro feedback, Fish Oil, Nutrition, Exercise and working memory training etc.

He thought Mr. O'Donnell's presentation dealing with students and community service was good and would make students aware of what was going on in their local community.

Bank of America put out a recent guide to money management called "The Student's Financial Handbook" – how to manage credit and cash accounts, etc.

Re the Achievement Gap, Mr. Stringfellow supported the formation of the task force.

He looked forward to feedback about students' achievement. He thought nutrition and penmanship was important.

A web site called "learnandserve.gov" dealing with student volunteerism.

He recommended Glen Singleton's Program.

Mr. Stringfellow expressed the hope that when the Commissioner visited we would get some Press coverage.

Mr. Stringfellow wished everyone a good holiday.

L. ITEMS FOR FUTURE AGENDAS

Mr. Stafford asked that at some point the Administration report on the feasibility of having an All Day Kindergarten session at all the remaining elementary schools and the cost involved.

Dr. Ouellette respectfully asked if that could await the upcoming Budget Workshops in January when they would be happy to look at this.

Mr. Pohl mentioned it was Mr. Moran's birthday.

Mr. Pohl wanted to know if we could look at making money available for an Efficiency Study to be carried out. Could we find out the probable cost?

Mr. Pohl asked Ms. Hackett to ensure that as a Board member the book commented on that evening "Huckleberry Finn" by Mark Twain stayed in use. He would like to find out what the protocol was behind the challenge to the book; what was the process, and would the Board be given the opportunity to voice its opinion in terms of its continued use in our district.

Ms. Hackett stated that some years ago the Board of Education had developed a policy to handle parental inquiries and complaints about selected literature and for the time being this issue had not yet reached that stage. The Curriculum & Instruction Committee would be briefed on that the following week.

Mr. Edwards added that any Board member or member of the Public was welcome to attend any of their Curriculum & Instruction Committee meetings to give their input.

Ms. Brooks announced that the Building & Sites Committee meeting scheduled for December 13, 2007 had been postponed because of inclement weather.

M. ADJOURNMENT

Ms. Hackett called for a motion to adjourn.

MOTION: Pohl/Edwards s.v. The Manchester Board of Education approved the motion to adjourn at 11:00 p.m. 8/0/0

Respectfully submitted,

Enrique Marcano, Sr., Secretary  
Manchester Board of Education