

**BOARD OF EDUCATION
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES
AUGUST 23, 2022**

A regular meeting of the Enfield Board of Education was held in Council Chambers on August 23, 2022.

1. **CALL TO ORDER:** The meeting was called to order at 7:00 PM by Madam Chair LeBlanc.
2. **INVOCATION OR MOMENT OF SILENCE:** John Unghire
3. **PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE:** John Unghire
4. **FIRE EVACUATION ANNOUNCEMENT:**
5. **ROLL CALL:**

MEMBERS PRESENT: Jean Acree, Dr. Gerald Calnen, Janet Cushman, Joshua Hamre, Jonathan LeBlanc, Amanda Pickett, Scott Ryder, John Unghire and Tina LeBlanc

MEMBERS ABSENT: None

ALSO PRESENT: Mr. Christopher J. Drezek, Superintendent (participated remotely) & Mr. Andrew B. Longey, Assistant Superintendent

6. **BOARD GUEST(S)**
7. **SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT**
 - a. **EPS Update**

Mr. Drezek stated unfortunately, he was unable to attend tonight's meeting in person. He has not heard about tonight's community conversation and looks forward to hearing about it from Board members and community members.

Mr. Drezek stated we are excited and welcome our students back on Tuesday, August 30th. We have been preparing for our students to return all summer. Our staff are also excited for the students to return.

Mr. Drezek stated COVID is still here, and we will do everything possible to keep everyone safe. There will still be outbreaks. He asked parents to keep your child home if they have symptoms. We have test kits to share if any family needs them. Our goal is to keep everyone safe and keep our schools open. Please notify us if your child experiences any symptoms. If you have any questions, please contact your child's school nurse.

Mr. Drezek stated we are working to make life look a bit more normal for our students. Our cafeterias will be open, and our students will not be required to eat lunch in their classrooms. We will allow visitors in our schools again. If anyone is interested in going to their child's school, be prepared to show identification. You will also need to follow our security protocols. If you are not willing to show an ID, you will not be permitted to enter. As a reminder, It is always a good idea to inform the school prior to arriving if you plan to attend.

Mr. Drezek stated we will be serving students free lunch for a limited time. When the State funding runs out, we will need to return to paid lunches for our students that do not qualify for free lunches. We expect this funding to end at the end of October. We will notify families when this program ends.

Mr. Drezek added he will wait to give an update on our Alliance status at a meeting so he can explain this better in person as well as data from last year.

Mr. Drezek stated today, Mr. Longey attended our new teacher orientation. He welcomed our new 47 certified staff members to the EPS family. He cannot wait to meet you all.

Mr. Drezek addressed the incident that happened to one of our EHS students last week. What happened is deplorable and he is sorry for what this young man endured. He also commended him for showing such dignity, grace and courage to walk away. He set an example for all of us.

Mr. Drezek added he realizes that as a board, district and community, we have a lot of work to do around equity and inclusion. His priority is always making sure our kids are safe. For any students watching tonight's meeting, we are with you, and we will continue to be for as long as it takes.

8. AUDIENCES

Madam Chair read a prepared statement about expectations for audience participation. We will continue to utilize a 4-minute time limit for audience participation tonight. She added that you will need to sign up to talk and she will not call up anyone from the audience to speak. Thank you.

Liz Davis, North Maple Street – Ms. Davis wished everyone a great school year. She would like to see us focus on education. She addressed the incident last week that involved a 14-year-old. We need to watch our actions and lead by example. Changes are needed. Actions speak louder than words. Her heart breaks for this family, all children, every day. She reminded Board members about the oath they took. She thanked the Mayor, Madam Chair and the Town Manager for tonight's community conversation. Every child deserves to be safe every day. This child and parent handled this situation with grace. She is very proud of them. God brings love. Thank you for all your time you put in for this community. She also thanked the superintendent and staff have a wonderful year.

Kelly Jackson, Mead Lane – Mrs. Jackson stated it is sad that it took this to happen in order for us to have a meaningful conversation. This conversation is long overdue. She has been coming here over 4 years about the racial issues in our schools and town. Several Board members attended the community conversation tonight. She wished that Mr. Unghire could have stayed longer to hear the courageous conversations. It is frustrating and horrifying that this happened to her child in order for anyone to pay attention. We need to do better.

Alyssa Switter, Prospect Street – Ms. Switter stated she just moved back to Enfield. She has seen some progress but more needs to be done. She is also furious about the racism in this town. An athlete was threatened. You have failed our youth. Being silent shows your complacency. Equity and inclusion is needed for all children. Black and brown children have felt this always and change is needed. How do you think this 14-year-old child felt when he was called names and was threatened? You cannot sugar coat racism. Listen and do something. You need to listen to black and brown people and get uncomfortable. The truth hurts us all. We all grew up in a systemic society and it is time to do better.

9. BOARD MEMBER COMMENTS

Mrs. Acree welcomed back students and staff for the 2022-23 school year. She looks forward to being back in our schools, attending school events and performances. She also looks forward to working with the Board and decision making. She also looks forward to discussing issues like tonight's racial incident and resolving them. She is also looking to discuss bullying, curriculum items that parents are concerned about and teaching our children kindness and tolerance and how this will go a long way with acceptances of each other. She is

hopeful this will happen with our parent advisory committee that Mr. Unghire and Mrs. Pickett are starting to form.

Dr. Calnen stated tonight's discussion at the community conversation about racism brought back memories from when he lived in Georgia in 1960. Words were used to hurt when he was in school. These ugly words were used by teachers and students. The events from this past week indicate that we have a long way to go. We cannot sit back and rest. We must always be vigilant about racism in our community and be prepared to address it promptly. Health and learning go to together.

Dr. Calnen added health and learning are intertwined. We are in a childhood mental health crisis. For this school year, he is confident the Board will place a top priority our students mental health needs. This can be obtained in a fully school-based health center.

Mrs. Cushman also welcomed back students and staff. She hopes everyone had a restful summer. She also attended tonight's community conversation. She went in support and encouragement of our youth in our town. She appreciated the superintendent's comments. She knows he is sincere when he expressed his concern and the safety of our students. She agrees with the comments that have been made. We are putting a priority for every child in every school.

Mrs. Cushman stated she had concerns about planning this event at the high school that the entire Board objected too. These concerns were expressed at a leadership meeting that were fully supported by the Board since there might be a chance that students would be at the school during the community conversation. These objections were made for the safety and privacy of the students if this became a volatile event. It was encouraging to see the turnout for this event. We must always protect the safety and privacy of our youth. The position of this Board should not be so lightly disregarded.

Mr. Hamre disagreed with Mrs. Cushman about the location for the community conversation event. It was not a unanimous decision.

Madam Chair asked audience members to refrain from making comments.

Mr. Hamre stated at the Fourth of July Parade, the entire Board was invited to attend and march in the parade. He supports the Enfield Pride organization. He has said this before, everyone has a place in this town, and all are welcome. He was sitting with his family and with members of the Pride organization waiting for the Democrats and members of the Board of Education to pass by. They are now confident and proud enough to represent themselves as a group that is protected under the constitution. Mr. Unghire asked another Board member if he was gay. He responded to Mr. Unghire by e-mail about this and added this is something you should never ask, and it is never appropriate. Mr. Unghire responded to select Board members with an excuse to discuss this before or after our meeting tonight. Mr. Hamre would like to discuss this now. He would not have been offended if he were asked this question directly. This question should have been asked to him directly and it is no one's business if he is gay.

Madam Chair asked audience members to refrain from making comments again.

Mr. Hamre stated tonight's event was made very quickly and we needed to leave early to attend our Board meeting. He commended the Town Manager, Town Council and leadership for making this event possible. He wished he could have stayed there longer. This was an opportunity that was just starting when we needed to leave to get to our Board meeting. Kamora did a great job facilitating this conversation. She had a lot to offer on this subject matter. The entire town, citizens, teachers, staff, students, residents, voters and administration benefited from this event. His only fear is the people that needed to be there to benefit from this conversation were not there.

Mr. Hamre commends the student involved with this confrontation. He rose above the situation and responded in a way he wished everyone would in that confrontational moment. It is something he was trained to do. This is a survival instinct for him. LGBTQ members needed to hide themselves in order to protect themselves. Girls were taught to hold keys in their hands to protect themselves. This conversation has been a long time coming.

Mr. Hamre added that he has received no follow-up from Mr. Unghire since he emailed him. He has been spearheading the route cause analysis and parent advisory committee over an issue that has been addressed by our administration and has been handled.

Mr. LeBlanc stated this is an exciting time of year. He has gone to all of the orientations we have held for our students. He wished all students great success this school year. He urged them to keep up the hard work in and out of school and with all your extra-curricular activities. He looks forward to this school year. Go eagles!

Mrs. Pickett stated she has so many emotions tonight. She also attended the community conversation and was sad to leave. She has many different roles in her life. She agrees with Mrs. Jackson that this conversation is long overdue. She relates to what happened to the Enfield high school student and added, this could be her son who is also bi-racial. She is passionate about equity and inclusion. She started coming to Board meetings as a kindergarten parent. She spoke about racial equity. She would like to see something done by those in power.

Mrs. Pickett read her comments she made from January 26, 2021. Not much has changed from 2021. Hard work is needed. She is committed to see our equity policy come to fruition. She is committed to support Enfield Public Schools and Mrs. Cox-Blackwell develop a sustainable and comprehensive plan that will lead to long term outcomes and success. Tonight's community conversation was a step in the right direction and the hard work follows. She commends our town leadership for putting this conversation together tonight. She also had a lot of questions and concerns. She wished the conversation wasn't held on a Board meeting night. She plans to hold our Board of Education, Superintendent, Town Council and Town Manager accountable and to remain committed to this needed work. She thanked the student, his family, coaches and staff for their response. No one should ever need to experience this. Unfortunately, incidents like this are not uncommon.

Mrs. Pickett would like our schools and athletic director to review policies and protocols around fundraising and game day procedures. We need to do our best to prevent or minimize the impact. We cannot solve racism alone or in a day. We need to be willing to do our part.

Mrs. Pickett is excited to hear about us offering free lunch or until the funds run out in October. It is a best practice to feed our kids. It makes more sense when they are all receiving lunch and there is not a stigma around who gets free lunch and who doesn't.

Mrs. Pickett thanked everyone for the back to school events. She thanked our teachers, secretaries and nurses. She welcomed the new 47 teachers to Enfield. She hopes you all stay. She agrees with Mr. Drezek that our kids are our number one priority, and we need to stay committed to this work. She also thanked all of our staff and bus drivers that supported the summer programs we offered. Her children participated in the summer programs and had an amazing time. She knows you all need a break. Thank you for showing up for our kids during the summer.

She thanked our town staff that helped with parking lots at Enfield Street, Henry Barnard and roof repairs at Eli Whitney and Hazardville Memorial. Our schools are important town facilities. These pieces are part of the Town side of the budget. Prioritizing our school buildings and facilities is something we should be advocating for.

Mrs. Pickett is anxious to hear more about our Alliance State update from Mr. Drezek and what we are planning to do with our American Rescue Plan monies.

Mrs. Pickett stated she attended the Enfield Street orientation for her kindergartener. It was amazing being back in the school. This was her husband's first time being in our schools. She thanked everyone that was involved with the planning for this event. Enfield Street is planning a back to school event in September for families in September. She is not sure of the exact date. Check the school newsletter that comes out on Fridays.

Mrs. Pickett added happy back to school wishes and she remains committed to the hard work ahead of us.

Mr. Unghire stated Hazardville Memorial held their kindergarten orientation yesterday. He met the new assistant principal Nick Flynn. He welcomed Mr. Flynn and knows he will do great things at Memorial.

Mr. Unghire stated he hates racism. Mr. Unghire stated he has a black friend that is a pastor in Hartford. He asked his wife Lori and him to help start a new church in the north end of Hartford with him. We agreed to be the youth leaders for this church. We met for three years, three times a week on Blue Hills Avenue in Hartford. We were the two church youth leaders in this completely African American church.

Madam Chair asked audience members to refrain from making comments.

Mr. Unghire stated we met in various locations like garages and auditoriums. We worked very hard and saved our money to purchase the old Phillips church on Blue Hills Avenue. It is now the Apostolic Church of Hartford. This was a labor of love for us to help these people in North Hartford. He hates when people say you are racist. I hate racism with a passion. He wouldn't have done this for 3 years if he were a racist.

Mr. Unghire stated people use the term systemic racism. He does not really understand what that term means. Show me a rule, regulation or law that supports racism in America or endorses it. He cannot find any. He sees a lot of anti-discrimination laws and equal opportunity laws. These laws are part of our system and are there to prevent racism. There are a lot of stupid people that say stupid things. What happened here in Enfield on August 13th was exactly that. He does not believe Enfield is a racist community. It is a shame that our young people were subjected to this.

Mr. Ryder thanked our town leadership for this community conversation on cultural humility. He was concerned about the safety of our kids holding this event at Enfield High School due to media coverage and protecting the privacy of our youth.

Mr. Ryder welcomes our new 47 staff members to Enfield Public Schools. He welcomes all of our students back as well as principals, administrators, bus drivers and all staff. He welcomes everyone that has a hand in shaping our children's day in our schools.

Mr. Ryder stated Eli Whitney will hold an orientation for all new students tomorrow from 6-7:30 PM. They have all kinds of events planned for the new Whitney Wolves. This will help our newest Whitney Wolves to be comfortable in their new school. Moving up can always cause apprehension.

Mr. Ryder added his kids are moving on to JFK & EHS for the first time. So he understands what you are going through. We have great staff in all our buildings, and they will be there for your kids and you.

Mr. Ryder is also happy to hear about breakfast. He has seen a lot of questions about lunch costs and how to reload their child's funds on their myschoolbucks account. He shared

information on the enfieldpto.com website about this. Bus schedules will be posted on the website on August 24th. Masks can be worn at your own comfort level. Masks are not required to be worn. If you have any symptoms, get checked out. The virus is still around and could spread. We do not want to shut down any schools due to staffing issues. If you have any questions, please contact your school nurse.

Mr. Ryder wished everyone a happy school year. This year, he will be an EHS parent as well as a JFK parent. The EHS orientation held helped his daughter out with her anxiety about going to a new school. They had a great orientation day. We now have an Eagle in the house. He thanked the staff at EHS for the Freshman orientation. The students also were able to ride the bus, so they know where to go. This will be the bus route for your children at EHS. The bus routes that are posted have a start time. You will need to factor in travel time to your bus stop.

Mr. Ryder urged drivers to look out for buses and students walking. If the bus has a stop sign out, please stop. He also wished his son a happy birthday.

Madam Chair also wished Elliot a happy birthday.

Madam Chair stated Board leadership met on Friday and many of the members expressed concern about the location for the community conversation at a school since there would be a chance that students could be there. She also received concerns from Mrs. Pickett and from other Board members about this. She apologized if Mr. Hamre mistook her words saying the entire Board was concerned and she apologized to Mrs. Cushman also. We all have a concern for the safety of our students in mind. This was really about the safety of our students. Our football team had already been dealing with a lot. We wanted to make sure they had the privacy they deserved. That was a general consensus of the Board. We also felt strongly about this event not being held on a Board meeting night so that any Board member that wanted to attend could attend without any interruption. She had a hard time leaving the conversation to come to the Board meeting. The event was very powerful.

Madam Chair spoke about her journey and educating herself about racism and systemic racism. She also spoke about this in a prior meeting back in 2020 like Mrs. Pickett. She had a life changing event when her mom passed away in 1998. She was pregnant with her daughter. Everyone kept saying I know how you feel. How did they know how I was feeling. They still had their mothers. She never wanted to be the person to say this to anyone.

Madam Chair stated she learned that her silence was doing damage. She educated herself by reading and attending webinars about racism, systemic racism and civil unjust. She was able to see what our students are seeing and feeling when a black person is hurt. They are putting their father's, uncles, brothers and cousins faces on those individuals. They are scared and are hurt. She is not black.

Madam Chair stated she has raised her 3 white children in Enfield. She has had children that were on the EHS football team. They would Saturday blitz and fundraise in our community. They did this for 6 years. They never experienced this problem. They were never called ugly names. Think about this student that was on that driveway, you put your child's face on that student. This image is very sad. Nobody should ever speak to a child that way.

Madam Chair stated her main concern is just like Mr. Drezek, is that our kids are okay. School starts next week, and they need to know they are okay, and we are here for them.

Madam Chair stated one of the former football players that was with them on August 13th immediately called the head coach. This showed how much this former player cared and immediately called the coach about what occurred. She commends them all. Her heart is breaking for what occurred.

Madam Chair added she cannot fix what is happening in our country or with systemic racism. I can educate myself so I can become an ally and fight with you. You might not always know what to say, but if they know you are there fighting with them whether you are a black or brown student and your parents, they will know they have an ally. She is an ally for all our students. She does not like what happened. She is on a journey to help. This is her promise to our students and parents in our school district. Our parents also need to feel supported. She hopes other people will join her on this journey.

Madam Chair stated during covid she had asked if there was a way since we do not have staff that adequately reflects our demographics if we could have our older black students mentor younger black students. This could be empowering for our students so they could have someone they could relate to because of the color of their skin. She is hoping now since things are settling in with our Director of Educational Equity Mrs. Cox-Blackwell, we can continue with our long term journey of equity. She looks forward to Mrs. Cox-Blackwell to attend one of our meetings to follow up on what she has been doing for the district this far.

Madam Chair stated her next step in learning is about cultural humility. She appreciates Kamora Herrington and her tenacity and her ability getting people to reflect.

Madam Chair extends her deepest apologies to what happened to this student on August 13th.

Madam Chair welcomed back all students and staff. It is exciting to hear we have 47 new staff members. Thank you for coming to Enfield. We are starting a new school year. She is wishing everyone an enjoyable and healthy school year. This is the first time she will not have a student in our school system, and this is sad for her. She will be taking time to volunteer in our schools so she can still remain connected.

10. UNFINISHED BUSINESS:

11. NEW BUSINESS:

a. Appoint Board of Education Elector to the Joint Facilities Committee

Mr. Hamre moved, seconded by Mrs. Pickett to open up the discussion to appoint a Board of Education Elector to the Joint Facilities Committee.

Madam Chair stated we have an open position on the Joint Facilities Committee for a Board of Education elector. We have received two applications. One if from Melissa Everett and the other is for Walter Kruzel.

Mr. Unghire stated there is a republican open position for the Joint Facilities Committee. The Town Council would like to appoint Walter Kruzel to this committee. With this understanding, he supports appointing Melissa Everette to the Joint Facilities Committee as the Board elector.

Madam Chair stated there are two openings for this committee. This will give both the Board and Town Council the opportunity to appoint electors to this committee. The Town Council will appoint Mr. Kruzel and the Board can appoint Mrs. Everett.

Mrs. Pickett stated she is excited to hear there are two people that will be appointed to this committee. She would like our public schools to be a priority. Mr. Kruzel has experience as our former Board Chair and the Town Council will appoint him is good news. She is excited to hear that Melissa is interested in supporting the Board. She is just asking for them to make us a priority.

Mr. Hamre supports Melissa Everett because she has a reputation for supporting various committees like the Energy Conservation Committee. She will be a great addition to this committee. He appreciates that she is willing to get more involved.

Madam Chair closed the discussion for appointing and elector to the Joint Facilities Committee.

Dr. Calnen moved, seconded by Mr. Ryder to appoint Melissa Everett as the Board Elector to the Joint Facilities Committee.

A vote by **roll call – 9-0-0** passed unanimously.

b. Appoint Board of Education Liaison to the Enfield Cultural Arts Commission

Mr. Ryder moved, seconded by Mrs. Pickett to open up the discussion to appoint a Board Liaison to the Enfield Cultural Arts Committee.

Madam Chair stated that Councilor Santanella brought this to our attention that the Board did not have a liaison on the Enfield Cultural Arts Commission (ECAC). The Town Council recently approved amending the resolution to add a Board of Education liaison to this committee.

Mrs. Cushman asked if the ECAC has ever hosted any events at our schools?

Mr. Hamre stated the ECAC has made many efforts over the past few years to host events, but it has not happened. They usually hold events at the public library. There has been a long standing challenge to find the appropriate facility to host events at. The ECAC has been temporarily sidelined while they find and appoint new members to this commission. The Town Council has been actively pursuing this endeavor for entertainment/cultural arts in Enfield. We are in the process of promoting Enfield's Cultural Arts and to bring outside cultural arts to Enfield. This initiative is moving forward with the assistance of the Town Council and Representative Tom Arnone to bring more events to Enfield.

Mr. Hamre added the Enfield Woman's Club Art's Festival is not handled with the ECAC. There are several other organizations that do things similar to the Enfield Woman's Club. When the ECAC has attempted to do some things, we have learned that it is already being done by another organization. This has been something we have been struggling with.

Mrs. Pickett stated they were present at the art show and had a table there. They also partner with the schools. The ECAC hosts our students artwork at the public libraries in town. There is some blending of education and cultural arts happening. We just do not have a Board liaison to this commission.

Mr. Hamre added the ECAC will sponsor events they are aware of. This is exciting for the ECAC to have support from both the Board and Town Council.

Madam Chair closed the discussion for appointing a Board liaison to the Enfield Cultural Arts Commission.

Mr. Ryder moved, seconded by Mrs. Pickett to appoint Joshua Hamre as the Board liaison to the Enfield Cultural Arts Commission.

A vote by **roll call – 7-2-1** passed with Mr. Unghire and Mrs. Cushman in dissent and with Mr. Hamre abstaining.

12. BOARD COMMITTEE REPORTS:

Curriculum – Mrs. Pickett reported the Curriculum Committee will meet on September 15th at 5:00 PM.

Finance – Dr. Calnen reported the Finance Committee will meet on September 12th at 5:30 PM.

Policy – Mr. Ryder reported the Policy Committee will meet on September 20th at 5:30 PM.

Leadership – Madam Chair reported Board Leadership met on August 19th. We will try to meet at least once each month.

Joint Facility – Mr. Ryder reported the Joint Facility Committee met. We have new roofs at Eli Whitney and Hazardville Memorial. We also have new parking areas at Enfield Street and Henry Barnard. There is still some site cleanup going on at each of the buildings. They should be out of the way for the opening up of school on Tuesday.

Mr. LeBlanc stated the fields at JFK need some attention. He looks forward to seeing what can be done. Our athletic fields at this brand new school should also look great.

Joint Security – Mr. Ryder reported the Joint Security Committee meet on September 7th at 8:30 AM.

Enfield Mental Health Wellness Workgroup – Dr. Calnen reported he met with Mr. Drezek about our mental health initiative in our schools. This mental health committee has not been very active. We need to address this now and cannot wait until something happens. We do not want to be in a position where there is another suicide, and we are left scrambling. Mr. Drezek will work with us, and we will assess the status of our resources. Then we will decide about our next steps. We will have some guest speakers at an upcoming Board meeting to address this initiative.

JFK Building Committee – Mr. Ryder reported they held orientations for incoming students today and they will have another one on Wednesday.

Mr. Longey added they moved the date for the Wednesday orientation to Thursday due to a conflict.

Mr. Ryder stated they are on track with our new JFK middle school. We will invite the members from the JFK Building Committee and Randy Daigle to attend an upcoming Board meeting so they can show us pictures of the school.

Madam Chair would also like for us to have a tour of the new building.

Joint Insurance – Madam Chair stated this committee can be removed from our list. They will now meet once a year. They have accomplished what they set out to do with this committee.

Enfield Cultural Arts Commission – Mr. Hamre stated it will be a while before they fill the vacancies for this commission.

13. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Dr. Calnen moved, seconded by Mrs. Pickett that the Regular Meeting Minutes of June 14, 2022, be approved. A vote by **show-of-hands 9-0-0** passed unanimously.

Mr. Ryder moved, seconded by Mrs. Pickett that the Special Meeting Minutes of June 22, 2022 be approved. A vote by **show-of-hands 9-0-0** passed unanimously.

14. APPROVAL OF ACCOUNTS AND PAYROLL - None

15. CORRESPONDENCE & COMMUNICATION - None

16. EXECUTIVE SESSION - None

17. ADJOURNMENT

Mrs. Pickett moved, seconded by Mr. Hamre to adjourn the Regular Meeting of August 23, 2022.

All ayes, motion passed unanimously. Meeting stood adjourned at 8:23 PM.

Jonathan LeBlanc
Secretary
Board of Education

Respectfully Submitted,

Kathy Zalucki, Recording Secretary