



Monthly Meeting
Avon Board of Education
34 Simsbury Road, Avon, Connecticut

Mission Statement

Our mission is to inspire in each student a joy and passion for learning and a commitment to excellence, personal integrity, and social responsibility.

Tuesday, September 26, 2023, 7:00 pm

Avon High School, Library

Avon High School
510 West Avon Road
Avon, CT 06001

Minutes

Attendance

Board Members Present: Jackie Blea; Debra Chute, Board Chair; Jeffrey S. Fleischman, Board Secretary; Lynn Katz; Nicole Russo; Thej Singh, Board Vice-Chair; Sarah Thompson; liz Sommerkorn; Laura Young

Board Members Absent: None

Administration Present: Dr. Bridget Carnemolla, Superintendent of Schools; Jess Giannini, Assistant Superintendent; Roberto Medic, Assistant Superintendent; Susan Russo, Business Manager

- I. Call to Order
Ms. Debra Chute, Board Chair, called the meeting to order at 7:02 p.m.
 - A. Roll Call
- II. Pledge of Allegiance
- III. Mission Statement
- IV. Recognition - Go Avon! The High School Orientation Committee was recognized for their hard work volunteering during the summer to show the incoming freshmen the school and the ins and outs of the high school. Anna Baran, Gretta Ek and Sarah Thomas were the student leaders of Go Avon day for 2023, training and leading the other volunteers to ensure an inspiring day for all the freshmen. The 3 student leaders shared a wonderful presentation on what the student volunteers do on Go Avon day, including a building tour, activities fair and student panel for incoming freshmen to ask questions. The themed day also included some games and fun for all included. Avon High School's PTO was a major contributor, helping with the t-shirts and costs for the Go Avon day, the Go Avon leaders wanted to express their thanks to the PTO. Over 40 students volunteered their time to Go Avon! with the help and guidance of Todd Dyer who oversees this committee.

V. Approval of Minutes

A. Board of Education Regular Monthly Meeting Minutes of August 22, 2023

***Ms. Blea made a motion to approve the BOE Regular Monthly minutes of August 22, 2023, Ms. Thompson seconded.
Motion Passed 9-0-0***

VI. Communication from Public- There was no communication from the public.

VII. Items of Information and Proposals

A. Student Representative Report – Lillian Peng and Nikolai Meltser

Chair Ms. Deb Chute welcomed Nikolai to the Board Meetings.

Lillian started with AHS, mentioning that Niche had ranked Avon High School as 6th in the state and #1 in the Greater Hartford area.

Fall sports are in full swing, along with the clubs and the rehearsals for the fall play.

Open House at the High School drew many parents as well as many student volunteers.

The Cammarata performed at the Firehouse on September 11th.

AMS:

AMS had their first Town Hall Meeting where Responsibility was their theme. The middle school is focusing on trying to ‘catch someone in the act’ of being responsible and reward them for the behavior.

The middle school also had a successful open house as well as an assembly on Internet Safety and Social Media Responsibility.

TBS:

TBS had a successful open house and all of their fire drills and lock down drills were successful.

RBS:

RBS had an open house on the 31st of August;

Picture days took place at RBS

Students and families donated generously to Gifts of Love of Avon

PGS:

PGS had a beginning of the school year popsicle social

School Photos have been taken

PTO sponsored a Family Movie Night

PTO also sponsored a summer reading under the sea event

B. Financial Report – Susan Russo, Business Manager

Ms. Russo began with the Financial Report with the unaudited balance from the 2022-2023 school year, which was \$100,588.14. Transfer 2023-059 allocates year to date expenditures.

Certified staff salaries saw fluctuating numbers due to hiring at higher or lower steps than anticipated. Non Certified staff had some variances due to movement. All of these savings and deficits due to movement and hiring and resignations/retirements of certified teachers and non certified staff was offset in a transfer (2023-59)in tonight's packet to balance out the salary lines.

The Facility Use budget of \$142,182 was used for finishing the stage floor at the high school and the Computer Protection Plan came in at about \$1,600, which was used for buying new Chromebooks and repairs of existing ones.

Ms. Russo went on to discuss the other expenses which include Insurance, Utilities and Supplies/Equipment. There are always variances in these from what is budgeted to what is

encumbered, but budget transfers from where savings were incurred are made to offset the deficits.

Special Education is still in motion with contracts still out for outplaced students, therefore amounts for transportation and other expenses are not finalized.

General Funds:

Start of 23-24 School Year, \$16,868,296 or 25.27% unencumbered

Start of 22-23 School Year, \$ 12,146,827 or 18.87% unencumbered

VIII. Committees & Liaison Reports

A. Committee Reports

- Curriculum & Professional Practices – First Meeting will be in October 24, 2023
- Finance – Lynn Katz, Chair - Ms. Katz stated the Finance Committee met on September 19, 2023, the minutes are included in tonight's packet as well as the Financial Highlights and Transfers to be approved tonight. The next meeting is on October 10th.
- Negotiations – Deb Chute, Chair - No meetings set to date, as no new contracts are up at this time
- Policy – Laura Young, Chair - First meeting was September 12, 2023, draft of the minutes are included in the packet., as well as the 5 policies that were discussed will be discussed and voted on this evening.

B. Liaison Report

- Capital Region Education Council – Jackie Blea, Board Representative
Ms. Blea mentioned the first meeting was September 20, 2023. Back to school information was discussed, smooth opening for the 23-24 school year, especially with transportation.

IX. Chair's Report –Ms. Debra Chute, Board Chair

- A. Board Chair Update - Ms. Chute recognized the amazing performance at the Firehouse for 9/11 by the AHS Cammarata. They always do a beautiful job, and thanked Mr. Brochu for having them ready every year at this time to do such wonderful work. Ms. Chute also wanted to acknowledge the Internship showcase. She commented on how many there were, filling the hallway as she walked in. Ms. Mascoli told Ms. Chute that 11 different fields were represented tonight. Ms. Chute is very proud of the program. The students did a fantastic job. She is honored they do it for the Board before a meeting so it can be attended and seen by the Board.

X. Superintendent's Report – Dr. Bridget Heston Carnemolla

Dr. Carnemolla started by welcoming Nikolai Meltser as the new student representative; she has heard nothing but positive things about Nikolai and is excited to have him on board. Dr. Carnemolla then passed to Mr. Medic for the hiring report.

A. Hiring Report -

Mr. Medic started by stating that our last certified staff was hired just after the August Board meeting, making us 100% fully staffed on the certified side. We continue to have staff openings on the non-certified end, but are continually interviewing to fill these positions. Mr. Medic finished by recognizing Ms. Kim Birge, who will be retiring after 31 years as the Cook Manager at Thompson Brook. Ms. Birge has served thousands of meals to the kids at TBS and she looks forward to a well deserved retirement.

- B. Enrollment Report- Dr. Carnemolla stated we are only up 15 from where we were last year, holding steady at close to the same number as 22-23. We went out to recruit more PreK students, which was successful and brought the number up slightly.
- C. Strategic Plan Update - Dr. Carnemolla started by saying the goals they made for last year were to Dream Big and "if we want to be the ideal public school system, what do we need to do?" Dr. Carnemolla was happy to report that they achieved these goals as you will see outlined by tonight's presentation.

Dr. Carnemolla went on to discuss the 4 focus areas, the first one being Student Learning-Building our Instructional Capacity.

At this time she turned it over to Mr. Jess Giannini.

Focus Area 1- Student Learning- Building our Instructional Capacity

Mr. Giannini began with stating there was much to be excited about this coming school year: a relaunch in the Curriculum Professional Development Council where the focus was Professional Development and Portrait of a Graduate; The 5th and 6th grades had new units implemented; all K-6 Administrators, Coaches and Reading Consultants participated in a year long Science of Reading Masterclass; There were new course offerings for Grades 9-12; Almost 100% of the Curriculum is online; K-5 Math is piloting 2 new programs; There is a new Bike Safety Program starting for K-4; and Co-teaching Professional Development for 9-12 grades.

Mr. Giannini moved to the Performance data, which included the two types of assessments; curriculum based and mandated state assessments. Mr. Giannini then went on to point out the successful scores from the Aimsweb testing (curriculum based) in Reading and Math. The Smarter Balanced and NGSS results (state assessments) were shown in a chart compared to the state and the surrounding districts. CT School SAT Day results were very encouraging, showing Avon well above the State average as well as higher than the surrounding towns in both English and Math. All of the assessments help set goals and focus areas for the next year.

Mr. Fleischman inquired about the 5th grade numbers being much lower; mentioning that he has seen this trend in 5th grade numbers in the past. Mr. Giannini answered that 5th grade tends to be a low point across the state, as the content is quite challenging. He stated that with the K-5 Vertical Math work being done that some answers will be forthcoming.

Ms. Singh asked if the Co-teaching for PD had Special Education teachers included, and Mr. Giannini told her yes, they are also involved in the Co-teaching.

Ms. Young posed a question about other districts 'teaching to the Smarter Balanced test'? What are they doing differently in the surrounding districts? Mr. Giannini answered that the Smarter Balance is just one test/one assessment and we need to be mindful of how much is spent on preparing for it.

Mr. Fleischman asked if there is specific internal data used as a guide, and if so, can the Board see the data of the Curriculum Based testing done by the teachers. Mr. Giannini mentioned that the Aimsweb testing results shown here are a good indication that we are doing quite well with students understanding content, but it is a goal of the committee to find the disconnect between the curriculum based assessments and the state standardized assessments.

Ms. Nicole Russo asked what the next steps were to get our kids to where they need to be. Mr. Giannini confirmed that was one of the main goals, to get the results for the state testing closer to the results of the Aimsweb and Curriculum based assessments.

Mr. Fleischman inquired about the help given to those students who require more assistance and Mr. Giannini affirmed that the many resources that we have are available and used to aid the student population that is in need.

Ms. Blea stated that she was excited and pleased to see the School Day SAT scores.

Mr. Giannini went on to talk about the key takeaways from the data presented on assessments, stating that the goals are to figure the disconnect between the Aimsweb/Curriculum based testing vs. the state assessments, as well as identifying early those students who fall just below the ‘meet expectations’ level to give them the help they need and finally, what can they do next for this year’s testing.

Mr. Giannini then gave the floor to the Building Administrators to discuss the next steps for preparing for the state assessments.

Dr. Stephanie Lockhart, Principal of Avon High School started by introducing the Board to the Collaborative Learning Time (CLT), a time carved out of every teacher's week to plan, look at data and work together to make decisions based on the data. A form was made for all teams to fill out for the Administration to follow along and be aware of what each team is focused on. This time will be beneficial to work together to bounce ideas off of each other and work collaboratively to better the assessment scores.

Mr. Noam Sturm, Principal of Thompson Brook continued with the new K-5 Math curriculum, and the piloting of 2 programs. Mr. Sturm stated that regardless of what program is chosen, all the teachers K-5 will be receiving Professional Development to improve practices holistically, making a positive impact on the K-5 math curriculum.

Ms. Susan Horvath, Principal of Roaring Brook School went on to discuss Interim Assessments, which are tests that are given on a more focused content area. One of the many benefits of this will be that the tests are done in real time and be able to give immediate results on the children’s comprehension of the content area. Another benefit will be to correlate it to the larger state assessments, and finally this will help the younger students become familiar with the testing platforms used in state assessments.

Ms. Katz questioned if the Interim Assessments are new this year. Mr. Giannini stated that they are not new, but have not been a regular part of the practice, but this year, since the ones that have been done have seen great results, we will be implementing them universally. Ms. Katz went on to ask if when the specific K-5 math program is chosen, how will it be implemented. Mr. Giannini stated that it would be up to the Math Council, whether to go all in and start with all grades and classes or to phase in the new program.

Ms. Singh asked if the CLT’s included Special Education Teachers. Mr. Giannini answered that all SPED teachers are in a CLT team where they would be the best fit.

Focus Area 2- Personal Growth and Relationships

Dr. Carnemolla began this section with important questions regarding students and the climate of the school: does each child have an adult they connect with in the building; do all students feel comfortable at school. A larger comprehensive climate survey was conducted last year, with focus groups, to the families of grades 3-12. Generally speaking the numbers were extremely positive, all over 90%. Dr. Carnemolla stated that they ask themselves, “How do we get to 100% of all students feeling comfortable, supportive and in a positive environment at school?” That is the commitment Avon has to its students, striving to get all students to feel a climate of comfort and personal growth.

Mr. Fleischman spoke about one population that stood out as being disconnected from school from last year's survey, and if that population was addressed. Dr. Carnemolla answered that the curriculum has been revised to help the disconnect with the students, but since the results were just from last spring, we are still in the works of drilling down what other reasons this particular population felt less supported. Mr. Fleischman went on to discuss the literature/courses available to the students of the population that felt less supported, and asked if Avon was running the courses and supplying the literature available. Dr. Carnemolla said yes, they are being integrated into the curriculum.

Ms. Blea made a comment that she is grateful to have this information about the climate of the schools, along with academic performance. Not feeling supported and comfortable can really gray someone's experience regardless of how they are doing on tests so Ms. Blea was happy Administration is able to talk to the students and hear how they feel, as it is all not about academics.

Dr. Carnemolla said there is a hierarchy of needs, feeling safe, connected, comfortable is important, which connects to how they overall perform in general in school.

Ms. Katz said the end of year data is so important, would we do a mid-year survey? Dr. Carnemolla said yes, the schools have done quick one question surveys that are done throughout the year.

Ms. Amy Borio, Principal of Pine Grove Elementary spoke to the revised second step Social Emotional Learning Lesson, which is where the 5 principals go together to review the scope and sequence of Social Emotional Learning. The state framework of SEL was looked at, specifically how the lessons were similar or different to what Avon had in place already. The Second Step lessons have been created to support the teachers on how to inspire a positive mind set, problem solve and much more to create personal growth in the students.

Ms. Kristina Wallace spoke about the Student Led Conferences for 8th graders, which is a pilot program to demonstrate a student's growth. Each student presented their strengths at conference time last year, to their parents and teachers, promoting confidence and pride within themselves. The focus will be to expand this to the whole middle school, for it gives the student a chance to share their voice with us.

Ms. Nicole Russo commented that the word she heard the most is “growth”, and she is very appreciative for the work that is done socially, emotionally and academically within the schools.

Ms. Chute also mentioned that this reminded her of Portrait of a Graduate where we are building the student from day 1 here at Avon, and loves to see the passion everyone has to grow our students and how Avon tries to connect with all students. Ms. Chute said she was very appreciative of all the work being done.

Focus area 3: Communication and Partnerships

Dr. Carnemolla started this section with the Avon Achieve Internship Program. The Achieve program is one of Avon's largest points of pride and has grown considerably over the past year. The Superintendent feels this program connects to all pieces of student learning and connects to the community and families as well. Dr. Carnemolla commented on how she loved to hear the fabulous internship stories from the students, some of them being from very intricate and difficult fields. Dr. Carnemolla went on to say the high school now offers 46 courses, many college level, as well as manufacturing and engineering courses.

What is next for Avon is always trying to improve without overwhelming ‘the system’; expanding the internship program; piloting new methods of communication to the community; continuing to highlight achievements at the Board of Education; continue communicating via weekly newsletters from the principals, the happenings in each school; provide more opportunities for pk-6 grade students to engage in after school activities/clubs/sports. These are only some of the ways Avon will stay in touch with parents and the community.

Focus area IV: Systems:

The end of year funds (22-23) were used for various items including:

- 2 Tech labs at the high school
- Social Studies Textbooks for 6th grade
- BenQ Boards
- Chromebook upgrades and replacements
- Musical instruments
- Playground and Tennis court repairs

Dr. Carnemolla also wanted the Board to know how much work was done over the summer on Capital Improvement projects, as well as the very large lift the IT department did updating all laptops of ALL staff as well as the Schoology implementation and upgrading our backup servers. The superintendent expressed her thanks for the IT department and the very large workload they took on this summer.

Finally, Dr. Carnemolla stated that we are currently in budget mode for the 2024-2025 school year, along with several facility projects in the works like the roof at the high school, the playground equipment at TBS and the generator at RBS.

D. Updates -

Dr. Carnemolla wished to thank Ms. Susan Horvath and Mr. Michael Renkawitz for stepping up and being the Interim Principal and Assistant Principal respectively.

XI. Consent Calendar -

- A. 23-24/5 - Budget Transfers
- B. 23-24/6- AHS Europe Trip

Mr. Fleischman motioned to approve consent calendar as presented, Ms. Katz seconded Motion passed 9-0-0

XII. Old Business -

XIII. New Business

- A. 23-24/7 - Policy 4112.5 - Security/Credit Check (recommendation to adopt S&G policy *Employment and Student Teacher Checks*)

Dr. Carnemolla asked to replace our existing policy with the model policy from Shipman & Goodwin as a result of the law for employee background checks. There was too much to change and adopting the model policy from S&G would make us compliant. The existing regulations we did have are also covered in the policy being adopted from S&G, so no regulations are needed anymore as the policy itself is comprehensive and compliant.

Ms. Young made the motion to adopt policy 4112.5, Employment and Student Teacher Checks, as presented, Ms. Nicole Russo seconded Motion Passed 9-0-0

- B. 23-24/8 - Policy 5144 - Discipline

Dr. Carnemolla stated that this policy is continually updated as the law/regulations change, but this change is due to an added definition of ‘Protected Class Harassment’, and the clarification that it could lead to disciplinary action. There was also a change in legislation on the amount of Cannabis a student could be mandatorily expelled for having and/or selling.

Ms. Katz inquired where these changes can be found, to inform the students and parents, and Dr. Carnemolla mentioned that these changes can be found in the Student Handbook and the HS Program of Studies.

Ms. Young made the motion to adopt revised policy 5144, Discipline, as presented, Ms. Katz seconded

Motion passed 9-0-0

C. 23-24/9 - Policy 5131.911 - Bullying

Dr. Carnemolla indicated that this update includes the revised definition of Discrimination and Harassment.

Ms. Young made the motion to adopt revised policy 5131.911, with revision, Ms. Blea seconded
Motion passed 9-0-0

D. 23-24/10 - Policy 6146.1 - Basis for Grading, Weighted Grading and Calculation of Grade Point Averages

Dr. Carnemolla stated that the revisions to this policy was the addition of the CAAP, the Connecticut Automatic Admissions Program, a legislation from the state requiring all boards of education to have this verbiage in their policy and follow the CAAP guidelines for calculating GPA for eligible students.

Ms. Blea asked if this was in the Student Handbook and Dr. Carenemolla replied that it was as well as in the high school Program of Studies.

Ms. Young made the motion to adopt revised policy 6146.1, Basis for Grading, Weighted Grading and Calculation of Grade Point Averages, as presented, Ms. Katz seconded

Motion passed 9-0-0

E. 23-24/11 - Policy 6146 - Graduation Requirements

Dr. Carnemolla stated that this change was necessary based on the changes already made in the Program of Studies. New State Law states that a student in high school needs 25 credits to graduate, our policy needed to update the minimum amount of credits per year to reflect the increased number of credits required by the state to graduate. The high school had already been doing this, the policy is catching up to the practice.

Ms. Young made the motion to adopt the revised policy 6146, Graduation Requirements, as presented Ms. Thompson seconded

Motion passed 9-0-0

XIV. Communication from Public

There was no communication from the public.

XV. Communication from Avon Board of Education Members

Ms. Thompson wanted to acknowledge the clear impression of how hard everyone is working on individualized programs for our students. She thanked them for all the hard work they are doing.

Ms. Nicole Russo mentioned that when she talks to students, like tonight at the Internship Showcase, it is clear they understand what they are doing and why. She commended the Administration for their work on communication skills with the students.

Ms. Blea was happy about being number 1 in the Greater Hartford area, speaks volumes to what everyone is doing to make that happen. That number speaks to the academic rigor, and the overall experience we have at Avon. She thanked them and congratulated them on making that happen for our children.

XVI. Adjournment

***Ms. Lynn Katz made the motion to adjourn the meeting, Ms. Sarah Thompson seconded
Motion passed 9-0-0***

Minutes prepared by Christine Sardinkas, Board Recording Clerk

Minute respectfully submitted by Jeffrey S. Fleischman, Avon Board Secretary