

Weston Public Schools
 Board of Education Meeting
 Weston Middle School Library Resource Center
 February 25, 2013

Attendance:

Philip Schaefer, Chairperson	Dr. Colleen Palmer, Superintendent
Ellen Uzenoff, Vice Chairperson	Dr. Kenneth Craw, Assistant Superintendent
Richard Bochinski, Secretary/Treasurer	Lewis Brey, Director of Human Resources
Nina Daniel	Dr. Jo-Ann Keating, Director of Finance & Ops.
Dana Levin	
Sonya Stack	Absent: Denise Harvey

I. CALL TO ORDER, VERIFICATION OF QUORUM
Philip Schaefer, Chairperson

II. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

III. EXECUTIVE SESSION – moved to item XI
Motion to move executive session to item XI by Mrs. Uzenoff, second by Mrs. Levin, all in favor. (6-0)

IV. RECOGNITION – no report

V. APPROVAL OF MINUTES
Motion: Moved that the Weston Board of Education approves the minutes of the January 15, 2013 Executive Session; the January 22, 2013 Executive and Regular Sessions; the January 24, 2013 Special Session; and the February 19, 2013 Executive Session. Motion by Mrs. Stack, second by Mrs. Levin, all in favor. (6-0)

VI. PUBLIC COMMENT

Dr. Palmer opened up the public comment with a statement regarding the resignation of boys basketball coach Michael Hvizdo. Dr. Palmer reinforced that students’ best interests are at the heart of the matter and, while it is not customary to do so, provided the community with key facts pertaining to the decision:

- Mr. Hvizdo was serving his second year of probationary employment. As with any probationary coach, the Weston Public Schools would need to invite him to serve as coach for a third year after a thorough review of his performance during the previous year. The employee is not entitled to appeal rights if employment is not continued.
- It was brought to the attention of administration that Mr. Hvizdo appeared in a 10-minute film containing explicit sexual content, vulgarity, and demeaning remarks against certain groups of individuals. Mr. Hvizdo’s participation in the video demonstrates poor judgment, undermines his ability to serve as a role model for all his players, crates an unnecessary distraction for his team, and disrupts the educational process of coaching.
- When Mr. Hvizdo met with Dr. Palmer, Mr. Berkowitz, Ms. Wolak, and Mr. Brey on February 6 to discuss the content of the video, he apologized for making it and expressed remorse and embarrassment for doing so.

- During his meeting with administration, Mr. Hvizdo was offered the ability to leave of his own accord before the district commenced the process of terminating him. At that time, Mr. Hvizdo tendered his verbal resignation and Dr. Palmer accepted it, on behalf of the district.
- On the same afternoon of his resignation, Mr. Hvizdo and Mr. Berkowitz met with the varsity basketball team, as was Mr. Hvizdo's wish, so that he could speak personally with the players about his decision to resign. Mr. Hvizdo explained to his team that he resigned for personal reasons and that he had done something in his past that prevents him from continuing as their coach. He acted on that resignation by not attending any practice or games with the team since that date.
- Since then, Coach Hvizdo has indicated a desire to return to his position, and the district has responded to this in writing. The district also offered to elaborate on the performance issues related to his coaching if he requested that information.

Dr. Palmer recognized that times like these are full of emotion, and that Weston is a caring and supportive community that appreciates those who are passionate in what they do. The issue at hand does not diminish the passion but focuses on appropriate professional standards.

As the boys basketball team faces playoffs, Dr. Palmer stressed to the community that we can best serve the team by cheering them on and celebrating the final leg of the season. They are outstanding examples of commitment and the core beliefs of Weston High School spirit, and we are proud of them.

Mr. Schaefer recognized that the issue of the boys basketball coach is one that the community cares deeply about, as does the Weston Board of Education. However, as this is a personnel issue, the Board cannot comment publicly.

Mr. Schaefer provided instruction pertaining to the public comment session to ensure an orderly and civil session is conducted. Weston residents were provided the opportunity to speak first.

**Philip Hover
Beaver Brook Road**

His son is an eighth-grade basketball player who was taught by Mr. Hvizdo over the summer. Mr. Hover stated that our country was founded on a right to free speech and expressed that because the film was a nine-minute ten-year-old art film, it was not X-rated, and there was no nudity or sexual insinuations involved, there seemed no reason Mr. Hvizdo could not teach the children how to play basketball. He felt that a miscarriage of judgment had occurred as everyone in the room has uttered some form of vulgarity in their lifetime. He asked that Mr. Hvizdo be reinstated at the earliest opportunity should he reapply. He expressed that the original decision to hire him was the correct decision.

Ed Hutchins

Requested to yield his time to another speaker.

**Kay Spencer
Lyons Plain Road**

She asked that the Board of Education: (1) request that the superintendent offer Mr. Hvizdo re-employment and apologize for the mistake and any harm that has been done to his reputation; and (2) review the authority delegated to the superintendent and re-evaluate all the levels where the decision, termination, and communication processes failed. Mrs. Spencer called the letter that was sent out to parents by the school a misrepresentation of the film and thus a slanderous attack on Mr. Hvizdo. She stated that the community disagreed with the administration on the following points: the movie is not porn - it has been produced by a well-known producer/writer/actor that has never been associated with the porn industry; the statute of limitations is up – by state and district rules, five years is required for a

background check and furthermore, nothing in Mr. Hvizdo's past is illegal; and the decision process was flawed. Mrs. Spencer questioned whether Phil Schaefer, as a member of the Screen Actors Guild, would resign from his position as Chairman of the Weston Board of Education to play any questionable television roles and suggested that there are few roles available that would be acceptable by district administration standards.

Keith Watanabe
Georgetown Road

Mr. Watanabe questioned whether the superintendent exceed her authority in unilaterally making a decision based on a personal judgment of the content in an artistic work, and in doing so suppressed freedom of speech and violated the first amendment of the Constitution. He also questioned a violation of the fourteenth amendment – the right to due process. Because of these questions concerning the protections of the first and fourteenth amendments, Mr. Watanabe stated, the superintendent and counsel should have conducted an investigation to determine the validity of the accusations and then brought the results of that investigation to the Board of Education before taking any action against Mr. Hvizdo. If this matter isn't resolved today, and it is resolved in another forum, and the Town loses.

David Levy
Davis Hill Road

Mr. Levy expressed that he feels the administration and the Weston Board of Education have failed the community, because the community members often rely on the Board and administrators to protect them from themselves. Mr. Levy feels that there was a lone individual who took action against Mr. Hvizdo who should not have had such a large impact. One of the justifications for Mr. Hvizdo's firing was the desire to provide a psychologically safe environment for the children, and in trying to prevent creating a psychologically unsafe environment one may have actually been created. In closing, Mr. Levy expressed that there needs to be a message sent to the community that this kind of tampering with people's lives will not be tolerated.

Terri Clevenger
Old Easton Turnpike

Ms. Clevenger read a letter she wrote the day after the February 11 parent meeting, wherein she stated that she felt the decision to terminate Mr. Hvizdo was without thought of investigating first, based on the administration's personal repulsion to the film, and made with administration's own agenda in mind rather than the boys' best interests. Furthermore, she feels that the actions of the administration show that they do not believe that families can police their own children with regards to morality. She shared with the Board what her eighth grader has learned from this: the decision was not made with the basketball team in mind; if you make a mistake it is unrecoverable; nice/good guys finish last while the bad guy always wins; to get ahead you need to be a bully and a bad guy.

Don Chase
Treadwell Lane

He has no children on the team, but helped form the Weston Basketball Association and the Fairfield County Basketball League, and previously coached a number of the juniors on the Weston basketball team. He is also an attorney. Mr. Chase stated that although there is the right to terminate a coach at-will, terminating two weeks before the end of the season in the manner and timeframe that is was done created a controversy. He feels that if the coach had finished the season, his termination could have been a quiet affair, but now the feedback from the basketball community is a negative one that will result in a difficulty with other coaches wanting to come to Weston. It is a terrible message to send that "one mistake and that's it." You do want coaches to be role models but everyone is flawed and you don't need coaches to be role models because parents are role models.

Matt Gurman
Old Easton Turnpike

A player on the basketball team, Mr. Gurman expressed that he felt someone the team looked up to and enjoyed seeing every day had been taken away. He commented that those in the room during Mr. Hvizdo's explanation of resignation to the team could see he was upset and that everyone sitting at the Board table ruined his life. He feels that Mr. Hvizdo had been a good role model.

Laura Watanabe
Georgetown Road

She went to the February 11 meeting and she still cannot get over it as a parent, as a member of the Weston Community, as an attorney, and as a human being. Mrs. Watanabe has been an employment lawyer for 20 years and feels an investigation should have occurred, including the questioning of parents and students, to evaluate the complaint that Mr. Hvizdo was not fit to be a coach for Weston. She stated that if anyone in the room had been asked, it would have been shown that he is.

Mrs. Watanabe quoted a response to Mr. Hvizdo's email in which he requests to clarify the record that he did not voluntarily resign. She further stated that Mr. Hvizdo could not be at the Board of Education meeting because the letter also prohibited him from entering school property for any reason.

She requested that the Board do the right thing by getting the coach back, trying to clear his name after the movie he acted in was repeatedly referred to as porn, and making sure this doesn't happen again.

Charlie DiPasquale
Pheasant Hill Road

He is a senior captain for the basketball team. He agrees with what his teammate, Matt Gurman said, but he also feels that, on the day Mr. Hvizdo broke the news to the team, Mr. Hvizdo might have been extremely shocked and did not know how exactly to react. He does not believe that Mr. Hvizdo himself thought his ability to coach the team was compromised. Just before that practice, Mr. Hvizdo told the team that he loved them and would never quit on them. He feels that Mr. Hvizdo deserves to be reinstated as coach.

Daniel Gerroll
Bradley Road

He agrees with everything that has been said previously, including some of what Dr. Palmer said at the beginning. He was unable to access the movie to watch it for himself, and therefore has to take on faith that it is in no way justifying the action taken by the Board. He expressed worry over who would use a nine-minute movie from over 10 years ago in a way that is so dangerously destructive to the personality of what is still a very young man. He is in the entertainment business and if he were to be held accountable for all the roles he played he would not be allowed near his own children. He stated that this sort of situation lends itself to a tremendous amount of hyperbole and he can sympathize with those in positions of responsibility, that when something seemingly egregious is put before them, they want to make the decision that seems morally right – that seems they are standing up to the highest principles that they can possibly find within themselves. In this case, a horrible mistake was made. He prayed that the administrators will understand that they were hasty and make retribution.

Joe Galvin
Wampum Hill

He has been part of the Weston basketball community for many years - both his children graduated from the Weston High School system, and had incredible experiences courtesy of excellent coaches and the systems of support they had in place. He commented that the basketball players are the ones who truly

lose in this. The decision regarding Mr. Hvizdo has altered their experience for life. It is the Board's responsibility to do something right, and to understand what is in their best interests and that their opportunity to experience what high school basketball can teach has now been changed.

Amy Sayegh
Old Hyde Road

She finds it ironic that the Board Chairman is an actor. She appreciates Dr. Palmer's well-prepared address; however she wishes that Mr. Hvizdo had been afforded the same time and effort prior to making such a rash decision. Ms. Sayegh has looked at Mr. Schaefer's extensive IMDB reels and believes the roles that he plays are not who he is personally. She wants Dr. Palmer teach the students that it is okay to admit you made a mistake or that you are wrong by admitting that she was hasty in firing Mr. Hvizdo, that she was wrong, and reinstate the coach.

Our artistic community is very small, and in defaming Mr. Hvizdo's character the administrators have defamed the other actors, the producer, and the director of the film. As a Weston resident, she doesn't want to use tax money, but feels the situation needs to be rectified. Ms. Sayegh then read statements from an actresses and the director of the film.

Gail Compton-Flynn
Lords Highway East

Her son is one of the junior captains of the varsity basketball team – there are actually seven juniors on the team this year and Don Chase was a past coach of theirs. The unfortunate part of this situation is that the families received an email the night of Mr. Hvizdo's leaving that did not have a lot of content to it and that got everyone upset. Afterward, families heard about a movie that they had no access to, so they could not decide, with their children, whether the decision made had been the right one. While some children still had the movie on their phones, it was not available for those in a leadership position to view it, which was a disadvantage. For her son as a co-captain – he didn't have the information he needed to make the leadership of the team the right thing. The communication piece was a large miss in terms of how the parents and players would be able to deal with this and move forward next year as leaders.

Keith Werwin
Selwyn Rd; Norwalk, CT

He has known Mr. Hvizdo for many years and has been best friends with his father since grade school. Mr. Werwin stated that Mr. Hvizdo is an upstanding young man – he has never been arrested, is a successful business owner, is married to a wonderful young woman, and loved the kids on the Weston team. He wanted nothing more than to see them succeed and enjoy themselves in the game of basketball.

Joe Pantoliano
Wilton, CT

Mr. Pantoliano knows Mr. Hvizdo from *The Stand*. He expressed that Mr. Hvizdo has been a moral coach for him in terms of body, mind, and spirit. Based on the article he read in *The Hour* – he feels that this is the worst case of being bullied. It feels like the Board was bullied and then the fear was transferred onto Mr. Hvizdo. Mr. Pantoliano thinks it is such a wonderful opportunity for this Board to teach the kids and community that we all make mistakes and reinstate his position.

Nate Balogh

Bridle Trail; Fairfield, CT

Mike Hvizdo is his step-brother. Mr. Balogh has known Mr. Hvizdo for 25 years and has seen him make mistakes, be a big brother, work through tragedies, and love the basketball team that he coached. He calls on the Board to realize that the only mistake here is that made by the district. He also calls on the Board to correct the mistake, reinstate Mr. Hvizdo, and set an example for the kids.

Fred Lawrence

Pilgrim Lane, Weston

Mr. Lawrence has coached football in the Town for a long time, and thinks it would be impossible to find a more informed and intelligent group of parents than you will find in Weston. He has heard a number of parents speak in support of Mr. Hvizdo, yet he has not heard anyone come up and defend the other side. We don't need to be the moral police for the parents in the Weston community. They do a pretty good job themselves.

Neil Horner

Catbrier Road

While he feels his comment is important, it has nothing to do with the situation tonight so in the interest of the community, he has decided to withhold my comments on an entirely different subject at this time.

Dr. Palmer offered some closing comments. She thanked the community for sharing their thoughts and concerns, and let them know that the Board listened very intently. High school athletics is an integral part of the high school experience. As a former high school principal and member of the CIAC, she values a strong athletic experience that provides opportunities of leadership and ways for kids to grow that you just don't have during the school day. A lot of things have been said at the meeting, and the Board is going to process all that feedback. There were certain points that were not totally accurate that Dr. Palmer sought to clarify: she never referred to the movie as porn, but rather that others may interpret it in his way. There are parents who have come forth with concerns about the coach and there are areas of concern about inappropriate language and demeaning comments shared with athletes. It is the body of work. Dr. Palmer would like to step and back look at system and ask "How do we improve the athletic program as a good school system?" Sometimes coaches come in and do not have the same training or outlook in dealing with adolescents. We are going to step back and look at all of this with our athletic director and school principal. We will debrief on this to make sure we have the best interests of our students at heart. This is not a clear-cut issue, as with any personnel issue. We will work as a team to make sure we continue to have a strong athletic program.

VII. NEW BUSINESS

1. Resignation

Motion: Moved that the Weston Board of Education notes and records the resignation of Carinne Mossa, Weston Intermediate School Grade 4 Teacher, effective June 30, 2013.

Motion by Mrs. Levin, second by Mrs. Uzenoff. All in favor. (6-0)

2. Summer Enrichment Program for the Arts

Dr. Craw discussed the Weston Performing Arts summer program proposal, which addresses the need to offer a local program for the theatre arts and music. It would be a self-funded program (a fee would be charged). One option would be a three-week theatre camp that would culminate in a production for students entering grades 4-8. Other options would be one-week half-day camps for band and orchestra. This will extend some of the enrichment opportunities that we currently have, while also addressing an area of our strategic plan, which is to look for opportunities that are in line with our mission that bring in revenue for the district to offset the budget. There is a lot of

potential here and it is perhaps a test-case for other academic enrichment areas. A benefit of this program over other area programs is that, since we have an internal interest, the teachers at the camps would be the same teachers the students would have during the school year, which allows for the building of relationships and a greater opportunity to assist students in reaching their potential. We are looking to begin in March as this is typically when families begin looking for summer opportunities. There should be a caveat that if we do not reach the level of participation we are anticipating, we would let parents know as we need to self-fund the program.

3. Second Quarter Financial Report

Dr. Keating reviewed the Second Quarter Financial Report with the Board object by object, in preparation for presenting the Budget to the Selectmen February 26. The report is run through February 20 and reforecast as of December 31 so that it is as current as possible. The largest variance in the report is certified salaries, which shows a favorable variance.

Internal Services Fund for Health Benefits Program Statement of Revenues and Expenditures was handed out prior to the Board meeting. It was also distributed to the Board of Selectmen for their February 26 meeting.

Motion: Moved that the Weston Board of Education approves the Second Quarter Financial Report. Motion by Ms. Daniel, second by Mr. Bochinski. All in favor. (6-0)

4. Carryover Budget Account

Dr. Keating reviewed a law that went into effect last year, which states that the Board of Education, with the approval with the Board of Finance may carry over up to one percent of their budget to subsequent years. It was requested that funds be carried over from the 2012-13 operating budget for a contingency teacher in the FY 2013-14 budget.

Motion: Moved that the Weston Board of Education formally requests the Board of Finance to authorize the deposit of \$61,824 from the School District's FY 2012-13 operating budget into a carryover budget account for the purpose of funding a contingency teaching position in the FY 2013-14 operating budget should it be needed to comply with the Board of Education's class size guidelines. Motion by Mr. Bochinski, second by Mrs. Uzenoff. All in favor. (6-0)

5. Update on District Security

Some Board members had an opportunity to attend a training by Allan Garcia that was provided all staff on how to identify and prevent an intruder, and what actions could be taken in the event of an intruder to ensure everyone's safety. Mr. Garcia was also invited to an Executive Session meeting of the Board on security that was attended by public officials, which was very productive. During the two days spent with us, Mr. Garcia was also able to walk to schools and advise us on potential infrastructure changes to consider. He applauded us on the hiring of additional security and spoke to the need of having a very low police response time.

Dr. Keating discussed how we hardened the perimeter our buildings via a lock-out initiative. We have hired six new security guards – all highly qualified people with impressive resumes. We are happy to have them on board. Having a fresh set of eyes, they are seeing things that have been very helpful to us. We continue to have a strong partnership with the police department. We have two officers on campus through the end of the school year. We are putting together a district-wide security and safety committee, and school-based security and safety committees that feed into the

district committee. There will be a plan assembled for the Board by mid- to late April with implementation and project schedules, and costs associated.

6. Police Coverage of School Road

Sergeant Ferullo, Police Chief Troxell, and Police Commissioner Jess DiPasquale discussed requesting a “special appropriation” for additional police coverage of School Road for the Mile of Safety patrol in the aftermath of the Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting. From the beginning of the school year through December 17, \$39,800 was spent, \$28,800 of which is already covered by the Mile of Safety budget, leaving \$11,000 in overtime for that period to recoup. It has been forecast that two full-time officers on school road for the remainder of the school year would require an additional \$70,300. In total, the amount would be \$81,300.

Revised Motion: Moved that the Weston Board of Education formally requests a supplemental appropriation for additional police coverage of School Road for the Mile of Safety patrol in an amount not to exceed \$85,000 for the 2012-13 fiscal year. Motion by Mr. Bochinski, second by Mrs. Levin. All in favor. (6-0)

VIII. OLD BUSINESS – no report

IX. SUPERINTENDENT’S REPORT

1. Next Board Meeting: Monday, March 18, 2013

2. Principals’ Report

WHS – Ms. Wolak reported that the high school has been designated as an SAT site by the College Board so that our students will now be at comfortable familiar rooms during the exam. March 9 is the date of the first test at the high school. Code is 7666.

WMS – Mrs. Watkins reported on the first round of the National Geography Bee. Winners are outlined in the February Principals’ report.

WIS – Mrs. Falber reported on the all-school assembly focusing on the “R” of P.R.I.D.E., which stands for respect. Also, over 80 students are participating in the March school musical.

HES – Kim Kus reported on the first and second grade working on Math in Focus along with AM units. Connected to that, Carolyn Vinton held another workshop on Bar Modeling, which is a strategy used by second graders in the new math program, to teach parents how to help their children.

3. District Update

Dr. Palmer reported that the Board of Education would be presenting their budget to the Board of Selectmen the following day. The Board of Finance will queue up on March 13.

X. COMMITTEE REPORTS

1. Communications Committee - Dana Levin

Next meeting is Wednesday, February 27 at 8:00 a.m. in the Central Office Conference Room to discuss budget communications, security and safety communications, and realtor communications.

2. Curriculum Committee - Ellen Uzenoff

Next meeting is March 13 at 8:00 a.m. in the Central Office Conference Room.

3. Finance Committee - Ellen Uzenoff

The meeting discussed the guidance proposal for the high school and some points for executive session.

4. Facilities Committee - Sonya Stack

Discussed the following issues:

- Shared facilities with the Town for Parks and Rec adult classes in the morning
- Parks and Rec field reservation procedure
- Ongoing security issues updates
- Revson Field signage to be designed by WHS junior for Eagle Scout project
- Cost avoidance report
- Safe Routes to School – sidewalks on School Rd
- Tennis court repairs discussed with Board of Finance members at the Board of Finance meeting

Next meeting is March 13 at 4:00 p.m.

5. Policy Committee - Dana Levin

Site visits to various schools with SROs have included New Canaan and Wilton. Visits to Darien and Ridgefield are scheduled. Next regular meeting is March 6 at 8:30 a.m.

6. Negotiations Committee - Richard Bochinski

Nothing to report.

7. CES - Sonya Stack

There was no meeting in February. In January:

- CES is doing a pilot of their online assessments and suggested a check of bandwidth to ensure the technology can accommodate the curriculum.
- Discussed the possibility of a phase-in process for the teacher/administrator evaluation plan.
- Had a walking tour of the magnet school

8. CAFE - Nina Daniel

Day on the Hill is March 6. Also, CAFE is looking for talented students to be featured in their Friday and Saturday programs on November 15 and 16. Shared letter from CAFE that French government intends to abolish homework for primary and middle schools.

9. Weston Education Foundation – Philip Schaefer

They approved a grant request from Amanda Quaintance for Creative Connections. Trivia Night is being planned for the fall. Individuals interested in joining the Board of Weston Education Foundation, please contact Maria Kalivas.

XI. ADJOURNMENT to executive session

MOTION: Motion to adjourn to executive session by Mrs. Uzenoff, second by Mrs. Stack, all in favor. (6-0). Meeting adjourned to executive session at 10:20 p.m.

Minutes prepared by Jennifer Markov, Board of Education Clerk.

Minutes reviewed/approved by Dr. Colleen Palmer, Superintendent.

Chairman

Secretary

Approved by the Board of Education: March 28, 2013