

**DATE:** March 22, 2011  
**WHERE HELD:** Middle School

**KIND OF MEETING:** Regular  
**PRESIDING OFFICER:** John Blowers

**MARGINAL  
NOTATIONS**

**MEMBERS PRESENT:**

**John Blowers**  
**William Farmer**  
**Elizabeth Herkenham**  
**Patre Kuziak**  
**James Maughan**  
**Lee-Ann Mertzlufft**  
**Joe Pericone**

**MEMBERS ABSENT:**

**OTHERS PRESENT:**

Jim Schultz, Jacqueline St.Onge, Rick Evans, Christy Multer, and 75 others.

There was an executive session to discuss negotiations at 7:00 PM.

President John Blowers called the Board meeting to order at 7:30 PM.

Reciting of the Pledge of Allegiance

Ms. Herkenham moved and Mr. Farmer seconded the approval of the consent agenda, which included the minutes of the March 8, 2011 regular meeting of the Board of Education.

Motion carried 7-0

**Privilege of the Floor –**

Tom Wheeler, a BH-BL graduate lives in the district and runs a business in the community. He spoke in support of a tax increase that will protect the education of our students and preserve the BH-BL traditions and programs.

Cheryl Bach, a resident, parent and teacher in the district spoke. As a resident she's concerned if we don't have a 2.4% tax increase property values will go down. As a parent, her daughter has been provided with many valuable opportunities in this district. Her son is already being impacted by loss of electives. From a teacher perspective she hears her students complain about the loss of choices. She's also concerned that if programs are lost they will never be brought back.

Jordan Armstrong, a senior and SGO president, thanked the Board members for meeting with 80-90 students to discuss the impact of last year's budget cuts on the students. He also thanked Board members Mr. Pericone, Ms. Mertzlufft and Mr. Blowers for attending a class today to see the impact of cuts to program offerings. He feels the cuts will impact students' ability to get into colleges. In closing he asked Board members to consider having a tax increase of 2.4% or higher.

Shauna DeBonis, a parent, said that our number one priority is our children and the Board needs to always keep this in mind. She attended the last forum and felt that the community's voice was in support of an increase above 2.4%. At last week's finance meeting a 2% or lower percent was being discussed. She asked the Board members to hear what she believes the community is saying to them.

Alison Cuyler spoke regarding the tax rate. She is a 20 year district resident, her son attended BH-BL and she has been a district employee for 14 years. She has always supported the school budget and asks the Board to keep the high standard of education. She supports an increase of 2.4% or higher. She calculated her tax impact and it would be approximately an \$80 increase in taxes for her house in Glenville. She feels it's worth it.

Catherine Snyder has a daughter in BH-BL. She teaches at Union and has a PhD in Education. She is concerned about the impact of cuts on her daughter's education and feels the budget cuts are too deep and not in the long term interest of our District. As a professional educator and parent she implores the Board members to listen to the community.

Melissa Armstrong, an employee, a coach, and a volunteer in the District, has two children who have been educated in BH-BL. She feels we cannot afford to lose the things that we have built in this district and asks the Board to consider at least a 2.4% or higher tax levy increase. In the Bronx where she came from things that were cut during the 70's have never been restored in the schools.

Chris Lombardi, a resident and teacher in the District, doesn't like paying certain taxes when he doesn't know where the money is going. But it's different when he pays his school taxes because he can see the results in the students, programs, and achievements. From a teacher perspective he is involved in drama club productions and has seen many cuts. He talked about the impact of losing tremendous productions and imbalances in class sizes. He feels that whether you're a parent or a teacher, you will feel the impact of budget cuts. He feels that a budget below 2.4% is not acceptable. It's not asking a lot to get the education that our students deserve.

Linda Banach, a parent who has two daughters attending BH-BL, is angry about the negativity that she's heard regarding our teachers and administrators. She's proud of our student ranking, of our students, of our productions (art, music, drama), and proud of this district. She gave numerous examples of teacher and staff dedication and asks for us to support them. She attended the forum and feels the community will support more than 2.4% based upon the feedback that was received. She'd rather have a tax increase than see property values decline.

Kate Gurley, a parent and vice president of the varsity swimming booster club spoke about the other hat that she wears in the District. Kate is the staff development coordinator and a kindergarten teacher in the district. Her summer hours would be cut as part of the Superintendent's recommended Tier 2 cuts. Professional development is crucial to making a school district work so well. The district had a longstanding staff development program that was a full time position. It was reduced to half time. Kate described various duties associated with her position. When the position was cut in half she still continued to do those activities. She talked about the need for so many of the duties of the position to happen during the summer, such as Power School training and new staff orientation.

Dorie McArthur served as a board member for the District for nine years and she knows how difficult it can be. Board members are elected to represent and serve the community. Their primary goal is to support the best possible educational program for the students. Dorie also spoke about the BH-BL Education Foundation which she started to support the school by offering grant opportunities.

Matt Shell, a district resident, physical education teacher and coach in the district, began by reminding us that tonight's meeting is being held in a structure named after former Board member Bob Speck who has supported students for more than forty years in this community. We talk to students about excelling and working to succeed at the highest level and he is asking the Board to do the same. He talked about the support that his family received from the community when his son Jacob was sick. He discussed how much they pushed his family forward and he would like the Board to push in the same way to have BH-BL continue to excel in providing opportunities for students.

Richard Evans, a district resident and retired teacher, provided a handout to the Board with some specific questions that he would like answered. He spoke about his first teaching job in Albany which was a very tough environment. He believes that teachers need to produce successful students and provide quality education. He wants to see this district improve but doesn't believe it requires a higher price tag.

Carl Thurnau, a district resident for 45 years who has had children graduate and has grandchildren currently attending BH-BL addressed the board with his concerns. He believes the Board needs to use a lot of restraint in dealing with contracts during this negotiation session. He told the Board last year that they should go for a zero percent increase because it's only going to get worse. He also talked about the Schumer money which will go away after next year and the impact of government debt and deficit spending.

Kurt Semon lives in the community, has kids in the district, and is also an employee of BH-BL. He and his wife made the move to this district because of the educational opportunities in BH-BL. He is asking the Board to protect these programs and cited reasons for the quality of the educational experience that included faculty, board, administration, and community.

Kevin Stone, a parent in the district spoke about working together to find solutions to address some of the issues raised in recent editorials regarding teacher pay and collective bargaining agreements. He believes they need to be reformed at a state level. A 2.4% tax increase will still require significant cuts and we need to appeal to real solutions due to dire economic times. He appealed to the Board and teachers to reach a compromise that includes bargaining unit concessions and a tax increase above 2.4%. He does not want to see the academics of our community further eroded.

Mia Scirocco Rhodes spoke regarding a head lice situation at Charlton Heights. She's a parent of two kids in the District and a thirteen year teacher at North Colonie school district. She is concerned about the safety of our students due to a situation with head lice at Charlton Heights that began last fall and has gone on for six months. A committee was formed to develop an Administrative Regulation (AR) to formalize procedures for dealing with the problem. She believes there are inconsistencies with the handling of the situation and the recommendations of the AR. She is requesting intervention by the Board to develop a no nit policy. She wants her kids to have a healthy environment to go to school in and she provided handouts of the AR to Board members for them to read.

Krissy Jackson supports the school district and echoes Mia's comments on the severity of the lice problem at Charlton Heights.

Liz Keyes, a teacher in the district and a parent whose son is a senior, spoke in support of the educational opportunities and the quality of teachers. She gave some examples of teachers who regularly go above and beyond to provide opportunities for students such as offering AP Java outside of the regular day because the class was cut. It will enable her son to go to the college that he wants to since he now has this course.

John Kelch who has been a resident in the district for 35 years and has had kids in the school addressed the Board. He spoke about his prior job with Time Warner Cable which allowed him to help school districts with their technology

needs. He believes bargaining units need to make concessions and that everything needs to be on the table. He believes the general community is apathetic. We need participation to find common ground and the pain has to be shared by all.

Joey Crawford, a special education teacher assistant in the District feels it's important that BH-BL hold on to the teacher assistants because they are so important to the teachers and the students.

David Besozzi, a teacher at the High School, spoke to the Board and said that they visited the wrong classes to witness the impact of budget cuts. They need to visit his learning lab to see the real tragedy. His learning lab meets in the Blue Room on the A C E block scheduling days because there are 42 students and they cannot be accommodated in a regular classroom. Every other day he sees these students sit there with no classes for them to go to as a result of last year's cuts. He's asking the Board to please consider these students.

High School senior Brianna Hadcock spoke about how classes are opportunities for students. These classes and staff cuts will have a huge impact. Students spend more time with their teachers than their parents. She feels that some kids won't know what they want to do with their lives without the opportunity to discover themselves and their passion through these class offerings.

Stephanie Andreczjak, a teacher at BHBL, quoted former High School Principal Jennie Pennington who said "We're not in the business of **not** educating.

Glenn Jones, a district resident for 31 years and a parent of two BH-BL graduates, spoke about how he went to a district with a graduating class of 42 and he did not have the opportunities provided to our students. A few of his teachers really had an impact on him and encouraged him to further his education. His children have been provided with opportunities that he did not have due to the quality of teachers here at BH-BL.

#### **ACTION ITEMS:**

Ms. Kuziak moved and Ms. Herkenham seconded the acceptance of the Financial Reports.  
Motion carried 7-0

Mr. Kuziak moved and Ms. Herkenham seconded the approval of the substitute teacher/nurse appointments of Melissa Antonini, Christin Lewis, Karen Quinn, Emily Regan, Elisa Santangelo, Andrea Townsend, Dan Wehle, Rose Wetmore; and the approval of the spring volunteer coaching assignments of David Bach, Girls Varsity Lacrosse and Scott Emerle, Girls Varsity Softball.  
Motion carried 7-0

Mr. Kuziak moved and Ms. Herkenham seconded the approval of the civil service personnel action as recommended by the Superintendent of Schools.  
Motion carried 7-0

Ms. Kuziak moved and Ms. Herkenham seconded the approval of the Recommended Bid Awards for Energy Bond Construction Projects.  
Motion carried 7-0

Ms. Kuziak moved and Ms. Mertzlufft seconded the approval of the Special Athletic Competition requests for:  
a. Girls JV & Varsity Lacrosse Teams  
b. Boys Varsity Baseball Team  
Motion carried 7-0

Ms. Kuziak moved and Ms. Herkenham seconded the acceptance of a \$500 Grant from Stewart's Holiday Match Program to Charlton Heights to purchase a xylophone for the music classes.  
Motion carried 7-0

Ms. Herkenham moved and Ms. Mertzlufft seconded the approval of the recommendations from the Committee on Special Education.  
Motion carried 7-0

#### **NYSSBA Lobbying Day Update**

Last week was NYSSBA lobbying day in Albany and Lee-Ann Mertzlufft and John Blowers met with legislators. They met with Senator Farley along with another school board. They were informed that NYS would see 10% across the board cuts. They are asking for education aid restoration, but did not get a sense of more positive news from Albany. They gave some information on the LIFO (Last In First Out) discussion which has to do with teachers being cut based upon seniority versus performance. BH-BL is not interested in how to let teachers go, but rather how to keep them. They did not meet with Tedisco, however they did meet with his aid.

## **Budget– Review Tiers, Budget Forum, Newsletter Input**

James Maughan, Board Finance Chair, gave a brief update of last week's finance meeting with input from Administration. We are trying to fill a \$3.6M budget gap and balance program cuts with fund balance and tax levy. He reminded the Board that we need to keep a multi year perspective as we consider use of one time funding sources such as fund balance and federal money. The Board had asked Superintendent Schultz to come back with another \$100,000 in cuts and James asked the Superintendent to give the Board a brief update. Assistant Superintendent Jackie St.Onge went over the energy cost savings and provided a handout that demonstrated a net zero budget impact. Christy Multer went over responses from the community on budget questions and gave percentages of respondents regarding the level of proposed tax increase that they would support. There was discussion about how the next forum will be conducted and that tonight might serve as a model for the next forum. It was suggested that we allow people who attend to have the opportunity to speak within a certain time limit. A suggestion was made to have a brief introduction followed by an overview of the Superintendent's recommended budget and then provide time for community input. There was discussion about a need for some ground rules and to set the stage with a state of the school district overview. We need for the community to understand the impact of the use of one time revenue sources such as fund balance. As a Board we have been passionate about using a multi-year perspective and we may be facing a difficult time ahead with lack of support from the State. Board members discussed an open forum, time limits, and asking speakers to tell us whether they are residents, employees, taxpayers, etc. Christy reminded us that we do provide input opportunities beyond speaking publicly and we would still like to give attendees a piece of paper with questions to answer or opportunities for comments.

James talked about after the budget is proposed the next step is the community outreach and how do we accomplish the process. Some of the upcoming events include building meetings, newsletters, PTA meetings and communications, BH-BL Business and Professional Association, Charlton Seniors town meeting, etc. Christy already has a budget communication plan and the BH-BL Business and Professional Association will be coming to the High School as they have in the past. Jim has already scheduled the meeting with the Charlton Seniors and some faculty meetings with staff. Christy will put the plan in Friday's packet. Elizabeth asked Christy to include a piece on the long term impact of fund balance use and multiyear perspective as a focus of the Q & A in her newsletter. Christy is working on the theme and title for the budget newsletter. Next meeting will be the April 5<sup>th</sup> finance meeting. James went over future important budget dates and asked the Board to reevaluate if they are meeting their Board goals with regard to the development of the budget.

## **Reports & Communications**

- Elizabeth Herkenham had a meeting with key administrators to explore some grant opportunities. They are looking both short term and long term, as well as tying into the 21<sup>st</sup> century framework plan. She met with HVCC and NERIC representatives who are starting a program with pilot schools that will have a university professor at one site and look to have a representative at each school to support the initiative. The objective is a university and high school connection. She mentioned they are also looking to RPI's summer program for teachers looking to learn more about nano technology. She asked if Superintendent Schultz would like Board members to help present the budget and state of the school message.
- Rick Evans mentioned that Bill McQuay will be exploring some STEM opportunities. The recent professional development day was very successful. Fifteen staff members have recently been trained in a spin off of Capturing Kids Hearts called CREST. The objective is to establish connections with kids to enable them to thrive. This is another example of doing it better ourselves for a lesser cost. The committee is seeking parent members and he asked for suggestions from Board members. He also announced that we have a BH-BL senior who will be attending West Point that we should celebrate.
- Joe Pericone attended a High School class and really enjoyed the experience.
- Patre Kuziak and Joe Pericone met with the BH-BL Education Foundation at which they had a great exchange of ideas. She will share a write up for the next packet.
- Lee-Ann Mertzlufft followed up with Legislative contacts for her taskforce. Kevin Stone would like to discuss co-chairing the task force and she will follow up with him. She shared her classroom experience which was a pre-calculus class taught by Ms. Litynski. The teacher had great energy.
- Jim Schultz talked about the study circle programs at the High School and O'Rourke Middle School. He talked about the great interactions between Schenectady City School District and BH-BL students. He's forming an action plan that will support anti-bullying task force objectives. The SGO meeting had a great turnout and representation from the Board.
- John Blowers has been receiving emails that represent varying points of view regarding the budget and tax impact. He has been sharing them with other Board members. He attended the PTA Council meeting along with Jim Schultz. They talked about the challenges of the budget. They announced that Monopoly Madness is for sale and the proceeds will go to benefit PTA. He felt great ideas were generated at the SGO meeting. Policy 9120 addresses the question of Board member and employee relationships which was raised by another Board member.
- Will Farmer mentioned policy updates that have been given to Mrs. Martini for finalizing. Jim is working on cell phone and truancy policy followup. Will reported that the Middle School PTA's fundraising is suffering

and there are less volunteers.

Ms. Kuziak moved and Ms. Herkenham seconded a motion to adjourn.

The meeting was adjourned at 11:17 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Jacqueline St. Onge  
Clerk of the Board