

Cassopolis Public Schools
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Board of Education
Minutes
Regular Meeting
February 9, 2015

Welcome: This regular meeting of the Cassopolis Board of Education was held on Monday, February 9, 2015 in the Board meeting room at Squires Educational Center and called to order at 7:01 p.m., as President Ward welcomed those attending.

Roll Call: Members Present: John Bright, Deb Deubner, Lisa Cutting, George Calvert, Sue Horstmann, Scott Ward

Members Absent: None

Also present: Tracy Hertsel, Becky Smith, Dee Voss, Dave VanLue, Cindy Martynowicz, media, community members and staff members

Deb Deubner led the Pledge of Allegiance.

Approval of Agenda - Moved by George Calvert, **supported by** John Bright to amend the agenda by removing item XIII, Expulsion Hearing. **Motion carried** 6-0, as follows: Horstmann, yes; Calvert, yes; Cutting, yes; Deubner, yes; Bright, yes; Ward, yes.

Moved by George Calvert, **supported by** John Bright to approve the amended agenda. **Motion carried** 6-0, as follows: Horstmann, yes; Calvert, yes; Cutting, yes; Deubner, yes; Bright, yes; Ward, yes.

Approval of Minutes: **Moved by** George Calvert, **supported by** Lisa Cutting to approve the minutes of the January 26, 2015 meeting, as written. **Motion carried** 6-0, as follows: Cutting, yes; Deubner, yes; Horstmann, yes; Bright, yes; Calvert, yes; Ward, yes.

Communications or correspondence – None.

Reports, Information Items from School Staff – None.

Public Comment – None.

Interviews for Board Vacancy – Mr. Ward explained the interview process. A series of questions is to be read to each of the candidates. Following this, Board members will be given an opportunity to ask follow up questions but he said that questions asked are to be asked of all candidates, not specific questions to a specific candidate. On Thursday at 7 p.m. there will be a special Board meeting to appoint the new Board member and that person will take a seat at the Board table at that time.

Candidates were asked questions in a rotating manner, alphabetically, as follows: Jesse Binns, Lucienne Lafontant-Lee and Lori Whitmyer.

Question #1 Tell us a little about yourself:

Binns – Was born and raised in Cassopolis, is 25 years old, has a residence on Happy Drive, has been a Trooper with the Michigan State Police for the past two years. Prior to that he worked in Cassopolis as a 911 dispatcher, is on the Fire Department, and he has worked with ambulances.

Lee – Was born and raised in Chicago but has lived in Cassopolis the last 20 years. Was with Patriot Homes for many years, has worked at the Council on Aging for the last 4.5 years. She is very active and is interested in being more involved in the community.

Whitmyer – Works at Community Mills, has two boys in Kindergarten and 1st grade, would like to get more involved with their school like she was before.

What are the top three reasons you want to be a Board member?:

Lee – Feels the quality of education is very important, wants Cassopolis to excel and be competitive with neighboring areas. Feels it important that people get involved in the school, new people. Important to see how money is spent.

Whitmyer – Would like to participate more because of her children. Is highly involved in the community, lives and works here, wants her kids to go here until they graduate. She is invested in the community and wants to see us do better.

Binns – Has no children now but would like to one day. Would like to be a part of building the schools future. Also feels that being a part of how the district spends money is very important as well as every day academics.

The Board's #1 goal is student achievement. What do you believe are the most pressing issues for the Board to make this happen?:

Whitmyer – Raise our bar higher, all around – teachers, students and the community. If we set the bar higher everybody will achieve more.

Binns – With the budget tightening, a lot of things need to be looked at without losing the main focus of academics. A lot of cuts will have to be made in addition to cuts already made and we need to be focused on making these cuts in the right areas.

Lee – Agrees with both of her fellow candidates, thinks the bar and expectations need to be set high on teachers and kids, and thinks kids will tend to meet them.

How knowledgeable are you on the school Board's recent business over the last three months and can you give any examples?:

Binns – Is not 100% sure but knows there have been several cuts in the budget and with state funding more cuts are yet to come. Otherwise he is not real familiar with recent business of the Board.

Lee – Is in the same boat, is not cognizant of what has been going on, which is why she wants to get involved, she would like to know.

Whitmyer – Has read minutes from past Board meetings, is familiar with Board policy, and can't give specific examples but keeps up on Board actions.

What experience have you had in budget planning?:

Lee – Has done corporate budget planning when working at Patriot Homes as she was the litigation manager, but does not have experience in school budget planning.

Whitmyer – Is very familiar with budgeting due to her past experience on the Board, plus she has her home budget and owns a business.

Binns – Purchased his first house at 17 years old, has been steadily keeping his personal budget. Is working on a courtesy fundraiser for families in need also.

Over the past couple of years, the Board has had to make difficult staffing and financial decisions. What decision that was made would you change, and why?:

Whitmyer – The Board is faced with difficult decisions, she wouldn't change any. Until you are in those shoes you don't realize how difficult it is.

Binns – Can't think of specifics, until you are in those shoes you don't know but has faith that those appointed and elected are following laws and procedures.

Lee – Would agree, when you look at cuts unless you know the full story and have all the numbers, it is not fair to criticize the decisions that were made.

What are the top three priorities you see facing the Board?:

Binns – Academics, budget, general operation of the school, what cuts can be made and making the school operate with lower funding.

Lee – Academics and funding but also thinks morale and community support, thinks that changes should be taken to the community to get their support.

Whitmyer – Enrollment, retaining those children enrolled and providing a great academic and safe environment for our kids.

As a point of explanation there are a series of classes to introduce new Board members to school leadership. The first is a six hour class that is more of an introductory level. The other eight classes are three hours each and discuss items such as: school law, curriculum, community relations, labor relations, legislation, policy, school finance and school budgets. These classes total 30 hours. The classes are offered in various towns and also online. Would your schedule allow you to secure these 30 credits?

Whitmyer – Has already taken the classes and is already Board certified.

Binns – Has never been known to turn down any training or educational class. Is more than willing to volunteer any hours that are required.

Lee – Can do the same thing. Went back to school in 2008 and got her Associate's Degree which she earned with honors at SMC.

Mr. Ward said that concluded the prepared questions and asked if Board members had any questions for all candidates.

Mr. Bright said he had follow up questions for some candidates. He asked Mrs. Whitmyer if it is true that she is Board certified. She said that she completed level 1 classes during her time as a Board member. Mr. Bright asked Mr. Binns what cuts he sees coming as he referenced more would be. Mr. Binns said everything is getting cut state wide with state budgets. Mr. Bright asked Ms. Lee what she meant by saying she wants to know how district money is spent and wants the community to know, as that is already public information. He asked if she had trouble getting that information. Ms. Lee said that there is always a lot of publicity whenever cuts are discussed. As far as spending money she doesn't think information is the easiest thing to find and it would be nice to make it easier for the public to find and understand.

Dr. Calvert's question for all three candidates was about time. In the past, the Board has had state police officers, business owners, etc. and it is a big time commitment. He asked if they were going to have enough time to fulfill the obligation to the Board.

Mr. Binns said absolutely.

Ms. Lee asked what kinds of meetings other than regular and special meetings. Dr. Calvert said the new Board member would also be on committees which usually meet in the evening and they can be time consuming. Ms. Lee said she has the time and doesn't see that being a problem.

Ms. Cutting asked how they would personally handle some situations when asked very directly in public, or about being confidential when needed and yet giving the public an answer, how you would deal with confrontation.

Ms. Lee – Not sure you would know that until it happens. Confidentiality is not a problem at all and she expects some situations would be highly emotional as they involve children. You would need to be highly understanding but firm.

Mrs. Whitmyer would have no problem with confidentiality or with any confrontational situations.

Mr. Binns said he deals with this on a day to day basis, stays professional and deals with situations when they arise and confidentiality is a given.

Mr. Ward said that as a sitting Board member, the time and commitment necessary to do the job properly is usually under expected. A lot of people in the community think it's an easy and high paying job which it is not. One thing he feels is that almost everyone who wants to be a part of the Board has an agenda, personal or community driven, but has some reason why they want to be on the Board and asked what the candidates underlying reason is for applying.

Mr. Binns said that every day is changing and he wants the future to be the best. He wants to keep kids living in Cassopolis in Cassopolis and keep the ones that are coming here from other districts.

Mrs. Whitmyer said she wants to see the district do better, wants her kids to be proud like she is that they attend Cassopolis and wants to make it better.

Ms. Lee said that she has six grandchildren and only one of them graduated from Cassopolis. The others attend in Edwardsburg and Brandywine. She doesn't understand why they don't stay here. She lives here and wants to see the school system do better. She herself went through a private school system her entire life. She doesn't understand in a community this size why kids don't excel. She wants to see her grandchildren attend school in Cassopolis again.

Mr. Hertsel said that sometimes it is challenging to make time and there are tough decisions to be made. At times this takes time and confidentiality and he thanked the candidates for their interest.

Mr. Ward said that if the candidates have any questions the Board members would be glad to answer them at the conclusion of tonight's meeting.

New Business – Discussion Items

NEOLA fist readings, Volume 28, No. 2 – Mr. Hertsel apologized for behind in this arena. This is the first packet of updates, another is coming after this one is approved; and, in March we will receive the current update. This shows how things are changing at the state level. He asked Board members to please call him with any questions. Some of these proposed changes are mandated while others have some latitude.

Request for overnight Ranger Robotics trip – Mr. Hertsel said that Mr. Chapman has left the district but did a very good job of delegating mentors and parent volunteers. Mr. Hertsel has been talking with Mr. Chapman and the first competition will be in Howell, MI and is an overnight trip for six students, those that are on the drive team. They will stay with mentors and school representatives. If any Board members want to attend please let him know. The kids have worked very hard and the robot is coming along well. There will be other members of the team attend but they will come for the day and not stay overnight.

New Business – Action Items

Hirings – **Moved by** Sue Horstmann, **supported by** John Bright that the following positions are awarded: Secondary Level Math & Physics Teacher – Steven Mammel; FFA Coaches – Kerrie Bass, Rachele Ward and Teresa Wellman; and, Boys Varsity Track Coach – Steve Green.

Mr. Ward asked what expense this will be to the district. Mr. Hertsel said that the figures are already included in the budget and are contractual positions.

Motion carried 6-0, as follows: Calvert, yes; Horstmann, yes; Bright, yes; Cutting, yes; Deubner, yes; Ward, yes.

Accept donations from Valerie Minnix-Pompa – **Moved by** Sue Horstmann, **supported by** George Calvert to accept the generous donations from Valerie Minnix-Pompa in the amounts of \$1,500 for Robotics and \$1,500 for the elementary library, with much appreciation.

Mr. Hertsel said that the money is being donated again this year by a former student who is very gracious and giving back to her school and community.

Motion carried 6-0, as follows: Horstmann, yes; Cutting, yes; Bright, yes; Calvert, yes; Deubner, yes; Ward, yes.

Old Business – Action Items

2014-15 Budget Revisions – **Moved by** John Bright, **supported by** George Calvert that the revised 2014-15 budgets for the General Fund, Food Service Fund, Sinking Fund and Debt Service Fund are approved as presented and are included in the attached resolutions. **Motion carried** 6-0, as follows: Deubner, yes; Horstmann, yes; Calvert, yes; Cutting, yes; Bright, yes; Ward, yes.

Awarding of Audit Services – **Moved by** John Bright, **supported by** George Calvert that the bid from Abraham & Gaffney is awarded based on a base audit and two single audits per year at the following costs: 2015 audit \$15,000; 2016 Audit \$15,500; 2017 Audit \$16,000; 2018 Audit \$16,500. The following hourly rates also apply. Principal \$140-205; Manager \$100-135; Senior, \$80-95; Accountant \$60-75; and, Administrative \$40-65, is approved. **Motion carried** 6-0, as follows: Deubner, yes; Bright, yes; Cutting, yes; Calvert, yes; Horstmann, yes; Ward, yes.

Request for Overnight Ranger Robotics Trip – **Moved by** Lisa Cutting, **supported by** John Bright that it is hereby resolved the Ranger Robotics request for an overnight trip on February 26-27, 2015 to Howell, MI is approved. **Motion carried** 6-0, as follows: Calvert, yes; Bright, yes; Horstmann, yes; Deubner, yes; Cutting, yes; Ward, yes.

Superintendent's Report – Mr. Hertsel reported as follows:

- We are currently having problems with the web site which started last week. We have requested a message be put on the site today to let people know of this issue. We are working with our provider to get this resolved.
- To answer questions on our recent Act of God days with the state ruling now this school year districts must have both a certain amount of hours and days. We need to have 175 school days and 1,098 hours. Before, districts could use teacher professional development hours but we are not allowed to do that this year. As of now we are a day short, and that is if there are no more Act of God days. There will be an appeal period but the state will not allow districts to add time at the end of the school day to recoup the time. When making the call about an Act of God day he works on the safety side for kids, usually talks to Superintendents and area Transportation Supervisors by 4 a.m. and also has to see when the County Road Commission will head out to start plowing.
- Reminded the Board of tomorrow's 6 p.m. meeting at the ISD. This is more of a workshop, and a light meal will be provided. The Board does not have to hold an official meeting, this is more like attending a conference. He encouraged Board members to attend.
- Thanked the mentors and parents that have stepped up to help Robotics after Mr. Chapman left.
- President's Day is Monday and per contractual language the district will be closed.
- Thanked Mrs. Smith for a job well done with the budget revisions and said the detail provided was very helpful.

There being no further business to come before the Board of Education it was **moved by** George Calvert, **supported by** Lisa Cutting to adjourn the meeting at 7:44 p.m. All in favor.

Susan Horstmann, Secretary