Chairman Mark Holden called the Regular Meeting of the Board of Education to order at 7:03 p.m.

Roll Call:
Mark Holden, Chairman                      Jose Goncalves
Thomas Minotti, Vice Chairman               Amanda Kilmartin (excused)
Kate Kutash, Secretary                      Darlisa Ritter
Anne Gaydos                                 Kathleen Yolish
David Gioiello

Final Quorum – 8 present; 1 absent

Board of Education Administration present: Dr. Christopher Clouet, Superintendent of Schools; Kenneth Saranich, Assistant Superintendent; Carole Pannozzo, Human Resources Director; Rick Belden, Finance Director

(1 tape on file in City/Town Clerk’s office)

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

Approval of Agenda
Thomas Minotti moved to amend the agenda to move III.B. Innovative Educator Award after IV. Public Hearing; motion seconded by Kate Kutash and passed unanimously. Kate Kutash moved to approve the amended agenda; motion seconded by Thomas Minotti and passed unanimously.

Presentations and Recognitions
Tenured Teachers - Superintendent Clouet read the names of newly tenured teachers and those in attendance were recognized.

Public Hearing
Jessica Scerbo, 42 Laurel Heights Rd., and Suzanne Tortora, 2 Jenyfer Court, discussed class sizes at Sunnyside School and requested an additional classroom for grade 3.

Several parents and members of the NAACP were present to express their perception of bias, lack of diversity on board and teaching staff, and dissatisfaction of Shelton Public Schools’ response to a recent blackface incident. President of the Ansonia & Valley NAACP Branch, Greg Johnson, presented a list of demands. The following speakers were those who signed in: Reona Dyess, 32 Broad St., Apt. 4, New London; Jordan Harris, 300 Boston Post Rd., W. Haven; Akia Callum, President, CT State Conference NAACP Youth & College; Kristine Brown and husband, 100 Parrott Drive; Nadia Rivera, Parent, and daughters Aniya Greene and Alani Greene, SHS students, 137 Division Ave; C'erra Baird; Jasmin Rivera-Robles, 26 Orange Ave, Milford; Cameron Cooper, President of Eastern CT NAACP; Carolyn Smith, parent, 55 Bruce Drive; Gene Kierce, former BOE member, 120 Thoreau Drive.
Superintendent Clouet made the following comments:

“I welcome everyone gathered here tonight. My comments tonight are for the community, meaning the Board of Education, those watching at home, and our friends from the NAACP.

Although we are in the first month of the school year, this has been a long journey to get to this place, this night. I see eye-to-eye on the issues and ideas reflected in the mission of the NAACP. Truth be told, I have been a member for many years. Why? Because I believe we can do better, as a society and as a community. I believe the high ideals that inspired the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag have been improved and more fully realized by the resilience, bravery and heart of African Americans because, as noted by James Baldwin and others, that’s the truth.

This post-rally gathering tonight is partly about an incident of pre-teens posting images on a social media platform of the racist trope of 19th Century and early 20th Century ‘black face’, hardly understood by many Americans today, but still a painful reminder of injustice past, and the sad reality of insensitivity and bias we still confront today. When I say WE, I mean Black, White, Latino, new immigrants from Asia and from the Middle East and from Africa; I mean gay, straight, the entire spectrum of LGBTQIA members of the community, the affluent and those struggling to make ends meet. We are all diminished by racism and bias.

I recognize that while it is a fact that we are all diminished by racism, especially considering we are humans occupying a small, fragile planet in the vast universe, but African Americans have suffered more in this country, much more than others –perhaps an exception being Native American people (a subject for another day). Yet ‘black face’ continues--in Virginia, in Canada, in Guilford...and here in Shelton. This cannot continue! This cannot continue!

I am the chief educator in Shelton. It’s my job to facilitate the education and preparation of all of our students, all of our students, for their future lives as adults. The future they will inherit, the future they create will be quite different from the past, and quite different from today. Preparing the young people for the future, that, my friends, is a duty we all share. Every parent, every grandparent, every teacher, every coach, every community leader!

As educators, our job is to teach. This painful moment is an opportunity for us to teach...to teach why ‘black face’ is wrong, why racism is wrong, and why discrimination in any and every form does not help us to build a stronger and just planet for all of us to share.Racism, bias and stereotypes must be part of the past, a sad past, and it must be wiped out in the present and not carried on into the future!

As an educator, I take that heavy challenge seriously. Liberty and Justice for all means something to me and must have meaning to my students. I know many of you gathered here tonight have a different point of view on what specific actions a school district should take in situations like these. I know you want what is best for your sons and daughters so they can grow into beautiful adults who will realize their dreams. I hear that!

I think an important dialog is underway, one that will result in a sharing of ideas about the role of education in the service of eliminating racism and bias in our communities, in our schools, and in our homes and hearts. I do not pretend I know all of the answers. I think finding the answers is about working together.
In closing, I paraphrase John Lewis, member of the Congress of the United States, brave civil rights leader, and friend of the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.: “Whether your ancestors came to these shores on the Mayflower ship, or the slave ship, or on a steam ship that docked at Ellis Island – we are all in the same boat now!”

We cannot do this separately. We cannot do this in anger. If we are to turn the page to the next chapter of what it means to be human, and as artificial intelligence becomes prominent, we need each other more than ever before to define that core humanity. We must enter into dialog, and together plan and educate our youth at home, in school, at church, on the athletic playing fields and through social media that racism cannot be part of that future! Cannot! Must not!

Words matter, but so does action. Our action steps include working with our Anti-Bias Committee and community leaders on the training of a high school-based Diversity Ambassadors group to work with our younger students. It includes having meetings with parents wanting to have support for their children grappling with these issues. It includes my working with superintendents from around the state on how to make certain our students of color and all students understand how they relate to our history and how they can be allies in building the future; and, it includes designing restorative justice practices when things do not go right. We can do better. We will! We must!

God bless you all. I appreciate you all.”

Innovative Educator Award - Superintendent Clouet announced Maria Zampano and Christine Butler as the monthly Innovative Educators. He said they are doing things beyond just the normal in their work with our English Language Learners and have a set of techniques that really make a difference for all learners. Maria and Christine gave a presentation showing their creative work with students, teachers and parents including Project ExcEL, Parent University, Design Studios, Student Ambassador Program, Capstone Café, Microcredential courses for teachers, Summer Institute, as well as sharing their work in San Diego and at an ASCD Conference in Boston. Maria and Christine were given awards and received congratulations.

Approval of Minutes
Thomas Minotti moved to approve the minutes of the Special and Regular Meetings held on August 28, 2019; motion seconded by Kate Kutash and passed unanimously.

Superintendent’s Reports & Action Items
Superintendent Clouet said the opening of schools went well. Relative to the budget, he stated progress is being made on making adjustments as to how we report. Mr. Belden said the Finance Department has continued dialogue with the Board of Aldermen Finance Subcommittee and the City Auditor, and we were commended for our format. Dr. Clouet said transportation has been an ongoing issue in town that is slowly showing some improvement. With more bus drivers being hired, we are cautiously optimistic that they will be functioning as a normal bus company fairly soon. Superintendent Clouet discussed the Eastern Equine Encephalitis scare in Connecticut, noting there have been some schools primarily east of the river that have made adjustments to holding sports activities at dusk when mosquitoes are prevalent. Athletic Director John Niski has been in contact with the Naugatuck Valley Health Department, as well as the State’s organization for athletics. At this time we are not canceling practices or games but are monitoring conditions and making sure students have access to bug spray at their events. If the situation changes, the board will be alerted, we will get advice from NVHD and necessary changes will be made. Dr. Clouet discussed concerns about class sizes, as mentioned earlier by parents and by principals at elementary schools. He said he was
contacted by Kate Kutash to discuss and express her concerns as well. Enrollment numbers are included in the packets, but the October 1 enrollment is the official date the State looks at. He said we will be looking at some options as of October 1. Kate Kutash asked what type of options will be considered given the budget constraints? Superintendent Clouet said the budget constraints are very serious. In spite of what we might hear, it’s not the case that we have boatloads of money and special line items. The budget has been cut year after year, and this past year with a zero percent increase or flat funding, we just don't have the money to add staff members as we might have in the past. Classes that have lower enrollments are being looked at for consolidation, which doesn't come without disruption. We are also looking at positions and will have to prioritize. The board has been very clear, and I am in agreement, in having our test scores increase. With the lack of funding and the need to prioritize, do we cut some of the specialists we have that support math instruction in order to lower class size? Kenneth Saranich discussed the enrollment report for the first four days of school and specific schools with large enrollment in some classes. David Gioiello requested information on vaccination rates, specifically schools with less than 95%.

Communications to the Board
There were no communications.

Approved Field Trips
Board members were apprised of the following approved requests:
  ● SIS trip to Amish Country and Philadelphia, April 24-25, 2020
  ● SHS trip to Providence, RI, JSA Regional Conference, November 23-24, 2019
Darlisa Ritter raised concerns about the form for SIS, which she felt had errors and was incomplete. Kenneth Saranich discussed the approval process and the new Field Trip form. Dr. Clouet will address the new form at the next meeting and encouraged board members to submit questions such as this in advance of the meeting to allow ample opportunity to research and provide answers at the meeting.

Items Presented for Vote
Thomas Minotti moved to approve the 2020 schedule of meetings for the Board of Education as presented; motion seconded by Kate Kutash and passed unanimously.

Anne Gaydos moved to approve the request of Sunnyside School PTO to seek sponsorships from local businesses to help fund a new playground; motion seconded by Kate Kutash. Mrs. Kutash commented that concerns about sponsor logos expressed by board members at the last meeting were resolved. Motion passed unanimously.

Anne Gaydos moved to take from the table consideration of the board to approve the request of Shelton Intermediate School PTO to conduct fundraising activities during 2019-2020 school year; motion seconded by Kate Kutash and passed unanimously.

Kate Kutash moved to approve the request of Shelton Intermediate School PTO to conduct fundraising activities during 2019-2020 school year; motion seconded by Darlisa Ritter and passed unanimously.

Thomas Minotti moved to approve the request of Sunnyside School STORM to conduct fundraising activities during 2019-2020 school year; motion seconded by Kate Kutash and passed unanimously.
Anne Gaydos moved to approve the request of SHS Cheer Athletic Club to conduct fundraising activities during 2019-2020 school year; motion seconded by Jose Goncalves and passed unanimously.

Kathy Yolish moved to accept a grant donation of $1,000 from Walmart to help defray the purchase of new SHS Boys Basketball uniforms; motion seconded by Kate Kutash and passed unanimously.

Comments by the Board Chair
Chairman Holden stated racism is an affront to human dignity, a cause of hatred and division...a disease that devastates society. The recent reminder of racial bias in our city serves as a wake-up call to remind us we all need to work to eliminate the scourge on humanity. Mr. Holden said student transportation still isn’t what it should be, but things are improving. We are facing many challenges this year and they are directly related to the fact that our budget increase was less than one tenth of one percent this year. He said every day parents are sharing positive comments with him about our staff. Our team of employees is doing an amazing job with the resources we have.

Reports of Standing Committees (Complete minutes are posted on our website.)
Teaching & Learning – Anne Gaydos reported on the topics discussed at the September 17 meeting, including a presentation on Professional Learning and approval of the committee’s meeting schedule as presented. There will not be a meeting in October and the next meeting will be announced.

Finance Committee – Thomas Minotti gave an overview of the meeting of September 18, which included Rick Belden’s complete financial report for the period ending August 31, 2019 and John Calhoun’s facilities report. Rick Belden discussed the leasing of 800 Chromebooks for grades 5-8, which will complete the District’s 1:1 Program. A summary of bid responses and I.T. recommendation was included in board packets.

(Note: Tape 1; Side B at 8:36 p.m.)

Thomas Minotti moved to award Chromebook Bid 40-02 to low bidder Wholesale Computer Exchange and authorize the leasing of Lenovo Chromebooks to be equal to or less than $71,373.12, as recommended by the Finance Committee; seconded by Kate Kutash and passed unanimously.

David Gioiello moved to increase the substitute pay rate to $80 per day beginning October 1, 2019, as recommended by the Finance Committee; motion seconded by Kathy Yolish and passed unanimously.

Policy Committee – Kate Kutash reviewed the agenda items for the meeting of September 17 including discussion of building use fees, mileage reimbursement protocol, and approval of committee’s meeting schedule. Sunnyside PTO President, Suzanne Tortora, was in attendance to discuss the advertising policy in regard to banners and permanent plaques. The next meeting has been rescheduled to October 17 at 4:30. Agenda items will include Advertising Policy 1325; policy development on conducting police investigations; New Board Member packet.
Public Relations & Outreach Committee – Anne Gaydos stated no meeting was held.

Reports of Special Committees
CES – Thomas Minotti said CES Representative Council held its first meeting for the school year to review their calendar for 2020-2021, which will be on the October 3 meeting agenda for approval. He noted CES summer school will start July 1, 2020, which will affect the Shelton district. He discussed a resolution recommendation that the Council adopt the CT Statewide Drug and Alcohol Testing Consortium Policy regarding first termination as a result of any DOT prohibitions outlined, as well as the Second Chance Policy allowing employees to complete the return to duty requirements, if the employer so chooses. Full DOT Consortium Policy is available for review at CES. Mr. Minotti discussed legislative changes that impact school districts. He said Dr. Michael McGrath is the new Director of Special Education. The next meeting is October 3 at 3 p.m.

Unfinished Business
None

New Business
None

For Your Information
Chairman Holden noted the attachments in the packet including Tenure Report, Vacancy Report, Staff and Stipend Actions, and Opening Enrollment Report. The remaining back to school nights were noted.

One Positive Comment
Kate Kutash said the back to school nights have been well attended. Jose Goncalves encouraged members to attend sporting events. Rick Belden commended John Calhoun’s staff for a great job in getting schools ready and said the upgrades over the summer have made a significant difference. Mark Holden said it is encouraging to see our Superintendent, Assistant Superintendent, Finance Director, our STEM and Literacy people, and other staff out in the district and said it improves communications.

Adjournment
Chairman Holden adjourned the meeting at 8:49 p.m.

Diane Luther
Secretary to the Board of Education
October 3, 2019