

January 8, 2020

Report to the Sharon Board of Education

By: Bob Whelan – Region One Board of Education representative from Sharon, Connecticut

At the January 2020 Board Meeting, these initiatives and presentations were the key focus:

- New Board Members and Officers
- Student Programs – Lori Bucco, HVRHS Student presentations regarding Personalized Learning and the new Special Education Transition Coordinator (Job “Coach”)
- Janet Carlson of 111 Group – current marketing efforts
- Regionalized Middle School Sports Program
- Graduation Tent
- Resignation

New members of the Board were introduced, and elections took place for officers. Pat Mechare assumes the role of Board Chair, Brian Bartram as Vice-Chair, John Sanders as Secretary and Jenn Duncan as Treasurer. Given that Ms. Mechare is also the chair of the Canaan Board of Education, an alternate was named to serve on the ABC Committee. Jenn Duncan will assume that role, with Stacie Weiner as alternate.

Lori Bucco spoke extensively regarding the Exploration program, and particularly regarding its popularity among boys! As Ian Strever pointed out, this type of self-guided learning in conjunction with a coach/mentor is the future of education, and subscribes to the premise of not necessarily following your passion, but rather staying curious and letting passion develop. This was echoed by presentations from students of their personalized learning quests – one young man is pursuing a business model, and a young lady is doing a deep dive into the science and treatment of concussions. Seeing young people develop these programs independently and speak cogently of their goals and progress is what makes it all worthwhile.

Janet Carlson of the 111 Group made a follow-up presentation regarding progress to date. The new website has been introduced, and the click-rate has been very gratifying. Also, attendance at the first open house was better than expected. Importantly, most all of the districts of Region 1 are now approaching 111 Group to facilitate the construction of both individual websites, as well as an “umbrella” site that allows potential homebuyers to explore the “why” of the entire region for education excellence and a vast array of opportunities for intellectual pursuit.

In a surprising turn, and despite the 4-2 recommendation of the ABC Committee Board Chairs (the Chairs of each of the 6 town districts), the Region 1 Board voted against having the Regional Middle School Sports program be an element of the Budget for the 20/21 school year. This move, a reflection of the no votes of Mr. Bartram of North Canaan and Ms. Weiner of Salisbury (both town BoE’s supported the measure) creates a situation that will require the Region 1 Board to meet with the ABC to attempt to reconcile the difference. As Sharon had supported the program, I voted for it, as did John Sanders of Cornwall.

Graduation in June of 2019 was done very successfully under a very large tent. Done mostly as a contingency, the use of the tent worked out so well that after discussion, a motion was made and approved to include a tent in the budget for at least the next graduation. Having a predictable venue for the graduation certainly makes planning and execution easier as there are fewer contingencies.

In early October of 2019, I had forwarded to Superintendent Vogel and Mary Robertson my decision to not seek the office of Region 1 Board representative from Sharon due to health concerns. As it turned out, the ballots had apparently already been printed, and the town would have incurred a cost to have them reprinted. I was asked to stay on to facilitate the transition to the new Region 1 Board post-election, and am now tendering my formal resignation. I will continue to serve as a member of the Budget Committee in this cycle to facilitate the transition, if that is permissible as it is not common.

It has been a privilege to serve as the Representative from Sharon to the Region 1 Board over these last 4 years, and I see the time as a very positive experience with numerous highlights. I encourage others to consider the opportunity, and carry on the good work on behalf of our children in the Region. It's a rapidly changing world and education needs to be nimble in its response.

Thank you all again for your support!

Best regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Bob Whelan", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Bob Whelan

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