

**Portland Board of Education**  
**Regular Meeting**  
**Minutes of Tuesday, November 12, 2024 @ 7:00 pm**  
Portland High School Media Center

Board Members Present:

Laurel Steinhauser  
Angela Hammond  
Tim Lavoy  
Dave Murphy  
Kim Nagy-Maruschock  
Meg Scata  
Sarah Spear

Board Members Absent:

None

Administration Present:

Dr. Charles D. Britton, Superintendent of Schools  
Stephanie Fragola, Assistant to the Superintendent for Business and Financial Affairs  
Eric Martin, Director of Curriculum, Instruction, and Technology  
Sara McLaughlin, Director of Student Services via zoom

Student Representative:

Caitlin Walsh  
Liam Rowe

**1. Call to Order and Roll Call**

Laurel Steinhauser, Chair, called the meeting to order at 7:15 pm

**2. Pledge of Allegiance**

**3. Approval of Agenda**

L. Steinhauser requested to remove agenda item #9.A. Class of 2025 Graduation Date

**T. Lavoy moved to approve the agenda as amended, seconded by M. Scata. Unanimously approved. MOTION CARRIED.**

**4. Approval of Consent Agenda**

A. Approval of October 15, 2024 Board of Education Meeting Minutes

**M. Scata moved to approve the consent agenda, seconded by S. Spear. Unanimously approved. MOTION CARRIED**

**5. Audience of Citizens - none**

**6. Portland Public Schools Spotlight – Butterfly Unit, Grade 3, Gildersleeve Elementary**

Gildersleeve Principal Ms. Graff shared that the life cycle unit is implemented in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade and is aligned with the NGSS standards. While this is a third-grade subject, its impact extends throughout the entire school and beyond. Third-grade teachers Ms. Breed Ms. Bankoski, were present to answer any questions.

Third-grade students Mara Coronella, Thomas Morico, Emelia Morales, Gianluca De Rosa, Lanea Peaselee, and Lucas Zacharias presented a slideshow showcasing their work.

## **7. Student Representative Report**

Caitlin reported that on November 7<sup>th</sup>, the National Honors Society inducted new members. On November 8<sup>th</sup>, Social Studies students hosted a US History and Veterans Day program.

Liam reported the music department attended the 41<sup>st</sup> Annual Charter Oak Music Festival Concert. Later this month, students will audition for regional competitions. On November 28<sup>th</sup>, the music department will host a Fall Concert, and DECA will be selling poinsettias beforehand. The sophomore and senior classes held a bake sale on Election Day. DECA will also be going on their annual Power Trip to North Carolina. The Student Senate will hold their annual food drive next week.

## **8. Communications and Updates**

### **A. Superintendent's Report**

Dr. Britton reported he received a resignation from paraeducator Taylor McPherson.

The enrollment report was submitted, and enrollment remains stable.

The minutes from the October 23<sup>rd</sup> Ethics Commission meeting were submitted for Board review.

Dr. Britton shared information on the Fair Labor Standards Act with the Board, noting that school administrators and teachers are exempt from that category.

The new paraeducator position at Valley View has been posted, and Dr. Britton will be interviewing candidates soon.

On October 28<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup>, the high school hosted the NEASC committee. Dr. Britton congratulated Principal Lawson and the entire high school faculty for their efforts. He will share the results with the Board once finalized, and explained the NEASC process going forward.

Dr. Britton will be joining the NEASC committee to visit Harding High School in Bridgeport from December 1<sup>st</sup> through 3<sup>rd</sup>, where he will serve as assistant chair.

Last Wednesday, Dr. Britton attended the Teacher of the Year Induction Ceremony at the Bushnell with teacher Jenna Ford. He described it as a wonderful celebration of teaching.

Dr. Britton thanked the Board for attending the NHS induction ceremony and expressed his pride in hearing about the amazing accomplishments of Portland students. He congratulated all the inductees.

This Friday, November 15<sup>th</sup>, Dr. Britton will attend the CAFE conference in Mystic. Board student representatives Liam and Caitlin will attend the student session on Saturday.

The district has begun work on the budget, which will be planned based on the current grade configurations. Dr. Britton met with the leadership team and presented a timeline for budget meetings, scheduled for December 10<sup>th</sup> through 13<sup>th</sup>. S. Spear inquired whether the Capital Improvement Plan will be part of the district's general budget. Dr. Britton confirmed that it will be a separate budget. There was discussion among the Board regarding their involvement in the budget process. M. Scata suggested reviewing numbers in December to be prepared when the budget is presented in January. There was also discussion about holding a special meeting or retreat in December for budget discussions. Dr. Britton's assistant will work with the Board on securing a date for this meeting. T. Lavoy reiterated his opinion that having a budget or finance committee would be advantageous to gather input before the budget gets formally presented to the Board.

### **B. Assistant to the Superintendent for Business and Financial Affairs – S. Fragola**

The Board reviewed the authorized spending report. S. Fragola informed the Board of the change to the excess cost threshold. Questions were answered regarding the purchase of the van, magnet school tuition and the allocation of funding. M. Scata will follow up with CREC regarding payment for magnet schools.

**C. Director of Curriculum, Instruction, and Technology – E. Martin**

The Director of Student Services report was reviewed. Questions were addressed regarding the ERate funding release date, feedback on Magic School AI, cyber security insurance, and the Chromebook reimbursement list.

**9. New Business (Discussion/Possible Action)**

**A. 2025 Board of Education Meeting Dates**

Discussion on Passover dates.

**M. Scata moved to approve the 2025 Board of Education meeting dates as amended for the April date to be moved from April 1 to April 8, seconded by S. Spear.** Discussion. Passover starts on April 12, therefore the original stated date of April 1<sup>st</sup> is fine.

**M. Scata moved to amend the motion to approve the 2025 Board of Education meeting dates as presented, seconded by T. Lavoy. Unanimously approved. MOTION CARRIED.**

**B. M. Coleman Leave of Absence Request**

**M. Scata moved to approve the leave of absence request, seconded by T. Lavoy. Unanimously approved. MOTION CARRIED**

**C. Discuss Occupational Therapist Position**

Dr. Britton stated that the district currently uses Cheshire Fitness as a contractor for this position. However, the current contractor has retired, and the replacement will cost a higher hourly rate. This cost is higher than hiring an internal employee. Dr. Britton expressed full support for the plan to hire internally. S. Fragola provided an overview of the costs the district would incur if it continued with the contractor. S. McLaughlin shared a comparison of costs, explaining that hiring internally would save money upfront and offer a safeguard against volatility. Questions were raised regarding Medicaid reimbursements and excess cost grant funding. It was noted that there were no other occupational therapist currently on staff. L. Steinhauser explained the shift in need, which makes hiring internally a priority. The salary range for the position will be approximately \$75k, excluding benefits. S. Fragola provided a rough estimate of benefit costs. S. McLaughlin also explained the assistive technology evaluation process. She noted that the person hired for this position may also provide this service, resulting in additional cost savings. Overall, implementing an in-house employee could save the district approximately \$5k.

**M. Scata moved to accept the position for occupational therapist as described and approve the related job description, seconded by S. Spear. Unanimously approved. MOTION CARRIED**

**10. Old Business (Discussion/Possible Action)**

**A. Ratification of CEA-Portland Bargaining Unit Agreement 2025-2028 (*discussed in executive session*)**

**11. Committee Reports**

A. Curriculum – K. Nagy-Maruschock– no report

B. Policy – M. Scata – next meeting 11/13/24

C. Personnel – L. Steinhauser – met on 10/31/24, discussed the OT position

D. Buildings and Grounds – M. Scata – no meeting scheduled, proposed scheduling a meeting. Dr. Britton’s assistant will coordinate a meeting.

#### E. Liaison

1. CREC – M. Scata – next meeting 11/20/24
2. Selectmen – D. Murphy – discussed the referendum at the last meeting
3. Youth Services Advisory Board – M. Scata – tree lighting and parade scheduled for 12/7/24
4. Equity and Inclusion Coalition – S. Spear /T. Lavoy – next meeting 11/21/24, Mr. Martin sent out the November happenings to the district.

**12. Audience of Citizens** – Beth Anderson, Cotton Hill Rd. – addressed the Board’s current policy of not responding to citizens comments during meetings. She requested that the Board reconsider this policy and provide answers raised by the public. She emphasized the need for a response to the budget and called for action to “stop the bleed.” Also discussed the administrator structure at the middle and high school, and expressed her support for moving 6<sup>th</sup> grade to the middle school.

L. Steinhauser reminded citizens that they are encouraged to email the Board and the superintendent with any questions, and those inquiries will be addressed in a timely manner.

#### **13. Board of Education Member Comments**

Angela Hammond – attended the NHS induction and enjoyed it. Appreciated the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade presentation. Spoke regarding the referendum results and how the cost may now be higher to improve buildings.

Tim Lavoy – thought the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade presentation was phenomenal. Thanked Dr. Britton for the discussion on the budget, and thinks a committee would be a good move.

Dave Murphy – spoke regarding the referendum results and how he doesn’t think the no’s were purposeful, rather a lack of information. Should prepare a capital budget for urgent needs.

Kim Nagy-Maruschock – expressed gratitude for all the hard work put into the school consolidation plans. She emphasized the importance of getting accurate information out to educate voters and advised everyone to keep an open mind as they move forward. Attended the NHS and Veterans Day events.

Meg Scata – expressed gratitude to Dr. Britton and L. Steinhauser for their leadership and stated that she hopes the best plan will be a collaborative effort between both Boards.

Sarah Spear – congratulated Principal Lawson and the high school faculty for a successful NEASC visit. Enjoyed the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade presentation. Thanked Dr. Britton and L. Steinhauser for their dedication and hard work since June to bring us to this point.

Laurel Steinhauser – notified the group that the Fall PHS Band and Chorus concert will be held 11/20, and the PMS Band and Chorus concert will take place on 11/21.

Caitlin Walsh, student rep– no comment

Liam Rowe, student rep – stated he thought the meeting was very informative. He enjoyed the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade presentation. Extended congratulations to NHS inductees. He also appreciated the joint meeting.

#### **14. Executive Session – for the purpose of the CEA-Portland bargaining unit agreement**

**M. Scata moved to enter into executive session for the purpose of CEA-Portland bargaining unit agreement and invite the superintendent, seconded by K. Nagy-Maruschock. Unanimously approved. MOTION CARRIED**

**Entered Executive Session: 9:07 pm**

**Exited Executive Session: 9:28 pm**

#### **15. Executive Session Action**

**T. Lavoy moved to approve the CEA-Portland Bargaining Unit Contract 7/1/2025-6/30/2028, seconded by S. Spear. Unanimously approved. MOTION CARRIED**

**16. Adjournment**

**M. Scata moved to adjourn the meeting at 9:29 pm, seconded by K. Nagy-Maruschock. Unanimously approved. MOTION CARRIED.**

Respectfully Submitted,  
Tricia Dean  
Executive Assistant to the Superintendent/Board Clerk