

## AFT CT PreK-12 Council

### Minutes

February 16, 2017

#### Minutes by Patti Fusco

**Locals in Attendance:** Bristol 1464; Meriden 1478; Middletown 1381; New Haven 933; Newtown 1727; Waterford 2038; West Haven 1547

**Full Time Officers and Staff in Attendance:** Teri Merisotis, Jennifer Benevento

- Welcome and minutes
- Equity in Education—Janice Pawlyk told us about a forum that she went to in Meriden last weekend. It was put on by a consortium and the focus was on engaging parents, community members and labor in championing for the public schools and against charter schools. The group was very helpful and there are plans to possibly get together again. They had demos on how to get people involved, how to talk to legislators, how to write letters, make calls, etc. They are focused on Senate Bill 137. In attendance were people from Bridgeport, Middletown, New Britain, Waterbury and Shellye Davis from Hartford paras. It was a very diverse group. Many locals at this meeting felt that they would have liked more info (and an earlier invite) about the groups involved. There was concern about who the different players were and whether it was going to be an adversarial gathering. Janice will keep us in the loop for future meetings.
- ESSA Forum – Jennifer Benevento pointed out that there is a PowerPoint explanation of the CT ESSA in our packets. CSDE is conducting an online survey that is open until February 27. Those in attendance were asked to encourage members to fill out the survey. She will send the link to Patti who will distribute it. She said that there are multiple resources on the CSDE website to help people understand ESSA.
- Program for Expelled Students-Mary Yorden gave us an overview of the new state statute that goes into effect in August 2017. The law requires districts to have an educational plan in place for each expelled student that provides 900 hours annually of instruction. The program should mirror the regular school calendar—5 days a week, 6 hours a day. Mary gave us handouts from two different law firms that explain the requirements of this new law. It seems to indicate that every student who is expelled must be tested for Special Education, but there is little or no guidance yet from CSDE on this. This is problematic as districts must budget for it now without fully understanding what is required. Some districts are planning to use their Adult Education programs, Middletown for one, but are not sure that it will satisfy the requirements of the law. Meriden has already got a plan in place for the elementary and middle school students who are expelled.
- Other concerns about this law is that they are removing the Families With Service Needs (FWSN) provision. As a result of this a student's truancy, habitual truancy or continuous and overt defiance of school rules and regulations will no longer be ground for a school official filing a FWSN petition

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- Also all parents of students in Grades K-8 whose students are absent two or more days in a month must be sent a letter. Parents must submit a note for each absence or it will count as an unexcused absence.
  - Powerschool does have the capability to generate this information, but it still is going to be another thing that teachers have to do.
  - In most districts the subs do not have access to Powerschool so this could cause issues. Watertown has a Powerschool log in for subs that they can use to log absences.

\* It is recommended that local presidents share the legal interpretations of the law with their Superintendents. There are big changes that are complicated and require systems to change.

- Youth Homelessness—Erin Benham talked about a program that they had in Meriden and provided materials. There are lesson plans included. This was handled in Advisory periods. Many students who are homeless are reluctant to share that information because they may then be forced to go live elsewhere and change schools. Some move from friend's home to friend's home to avoid this. The lessons are excellent—share with your staff.
- Special Elections and Legislative News –Teri Merisotis went over the bills being proposed and gave us a spreadsheet of the proposed bills that affect teachers/education. This will be emailed as well so that it is more searchable. She pointed out that the bills that are likely to go forward have hearings scheduled or to be scheduled. For example, SB 27 has a hearing date. There are three bills being proposed by Mike Winkler that are CEA initiatives— they are bills we support. Decoupling test scores, removing bias from the Mastery exam, and equitable funding of education. HB 6110 concerns funding for Wethersfield High School. There are several bills having to do with the Student Data Privacy Act—this bill passed last session and set up a Task Force which has never met. The bills proposed by the Leadership of the House and Senate are generally the Governor's bills—7034—School Construction; 7035 ECS—31 towns get more money; the rest get less; and 7050 –Municipal Funding and Accountability. This sets up a four-tier system, which could lead to towns being taken over by a “review” board to oversee all aspects of contracts, budgets, etc. He also has provisions for shifting the teacher pension costs partially to the municipalities and for towns to tax hospitals in those towns. There is a proposal that temporary teaching certificates be extended from 90 days to 180 days provided the candidate is enrolled in an ARC program. We discussed this and are in favor of it. It may be helpful to our paras who are trying to get certified. The budget has a built-in deficit, and no one is talking about increasing revenue. Teri will send out the budget to us electronically. There are bills proposing changes to professional development requirements—which require districts to offer more personalized opportunities based on evaluations and what the teacher's job is. We support this.
- Hearings scheduled:

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- Labor Hearing—February 21  
HB 5552 An Act excluding Retirement Benefits from Collective Bargaining By State and Municipal Employees. The purpose is to bring state and municipal collective bargaining agreements into line with neighboring states by removing retirement benefits as a subject matter for bargaining.
- Appropriations Committee Budget Hearing—February 21  
Elementary and Secondary Education (Room 2 C)  
10-10:30 Teachers' Retirement Board  
10:30-11 State Library  
11-12 Office of Early Childhood  
12-1 PM Lunch Recess  
1-2:30 PM State Department of Education  
4 PM Public Budget Hearing
- Regional Meetings
  - Flyer with dates was given out—please try to attend as these are very effective
- Legislative Conference—February 25  
There will be some general sessions and then some breakout sessions based on constituency groups
- Stefan Keller from CT Students for a Dream spoke about a bill that is in draft right now, SB 17. This bill will give undocumented students access to Institutional Aid. Institutional Aid is money that is set aside from Student Tuition and is given to students based on Need. Currently, undocumented students who are paying tuition, are not able to fill out a Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and are ineligible for any tuition relief as a result. This bill would not give students any tax dollars—only dollars that are generated by tuition—that they contribute to as students. He also spoke about the College Access Program for Immigrant and Undocumented Students. This “serves as an educational training and organizing resource that challenges the current systems of education that marginalize undocumented students.” The program has tools for educators and resources for students. Go to [www.ctadream.org](http://www.ctadream.org) for more information. Questions were asked about Sanctuary Schools and Sanctuary Cities. These are not places where ICE can't go there. What it means is that they will not receive support from local police sharing info, etc. If someone commits a crime, the information is automatically shared and the person is deported. Schools are the safest place that students can go to. ICE usually does not go after undocumented there. If they do come in, there should be chain of command or system of policies as to what will happen.
- Skyrocketing costs of Special Education -Tom Kuroski spoke about a forum he attended and shared information. The cost of Special Education is increasing rapidly even though the student population is decreasing. Currently the burden of proof is on the schools to prove that a student

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is eligible (or ineligible) for Special Ed services and/or testing. Many more students have 504 plans which have IEP like components that the regular ed teacher has to comply with and where the regular education teacher is the case manager. There are laws that there can be no greater than a 50% regular to special ed ratio in each classroom. This causes inequities in class sizes and in workloads for teachers. Classes must constantly be monitored and numbers adjusted so that they are in compliance. Currently Hartford is being charged with violating special ed laws. We will have to wait and see what happens there and what the true story is.

- Professional Development—Jennifer Benevento reported that they are slashing the budgets of the RESCS and as a result much of what they used to do for the TEAM program, mentoring and cooperating teacher training is being put on line in the form of podcasts. This is watering down the program and there is concern that this will mean our new teachers will not be receiving the support they need to be successful. There seems to be a push for Teacher Leaders—which many felt was an attempt to get teachers to do the principal's work with little or no compensation.
- Jennifer reported that AFT CT is conducting Student Debt Loan Forgiveness Clinics which is helping our members who work in public service to lower their student loan obligations. You have to have Direct loans from the Federal Government and have to be on a payment plan to qualify.
- Professional Development Task Force Report—packet in materials distributed this evening. This task force had much consensus and therefore there are many proposed bills that create language that will fulfill what they came out with.
- Discussion on SBAC presentation
  - Date set for April 12, 2017 in the concourse—probably from 10-12:30
  - Plans for the event will be our first order of business next meeting (March 1)
- Marianne Maloney shared the FMLA form from the Department of Labor that her district is requiring teachers to fill out. This asks for personal HIPPA protected information to be shared with the district. She has asked Eric Chester to look into the legality of this and will share with the group what he says. Other districts seem to also be using this form.
- Tom Kurowski asked if there is anything the union can do if a building seems to have a high rate of breast cancer or other illnesses. He described issues that one of their buildings has and the illnesses that have resulted in staff members. After a discussion and sharing of what has been done in other districts, it was suggested that he seek legal advice. Many other locals contacted OSHA or the Safe Schools programs.
- Good and Welfare

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- Tom Kurowski is going to be meeting with Betsy DeVos sometime in March along with his Superintendent.
- Patti Fusco is going to be on NPR's program, *Where We Live*, tomorrow (2/17/17) morning. The topic is the appointment of Betsy DeVos.

**Next meeting**

- **Wednesday, March 1, 2017**
- **Monday, April 24, 2017**

All meetings will be held at 5 PM at AFT CT, 35 Marshall Road, Rocky Hill, CT