

RTM Education Committee Minutes  
October 17, 2016  
Room 119 Town Hall

Special Meeting with Darien Schools Superintendent Daniel Brenner

In Attendance: Lucy Fiore, Susan Morrison, Dennis Maroney, Barbara Thorne, Jay hardison, Janet Grogan, Young-Sup Lee, Susan Kwun, Pam Sparkman, Lois Schneider, John Sawitsky, Derek Lublin, Sandy Savage.

Absent: Ed Washecka, Stan Buchesky & Emily McDermott

Guests: Daniel Brenner and administration members & members of the Darien Board of Education

8:02 Meeting called to order by Chairman Dennis Maroney

Question #1 on AC & Heating Policy Discussion ensued. Dr. Brenner says there is no solution right now to excessive heat days except to say he monitors the situation closely.

Question #2 On Lights. Brenner said the plans have been sent to PZ&H  
Question #3 Member asked for update on facilities. Difficult for Brenner to answer completely as Mike Lynch was not here so it was understandably a struggle to get to specifics but lengthy discussion ensued.

Question #4 Curriculum questions. Administration told the committee that all significant changes come thru the BOE. Vice Chair Lois Schneider requested specifics on how new curriculum is vetted & why the new curriculum sub committee no longer exists. There is no longer a forum for people to ask important questions. Discussion ensued but no answer given as to why the committee was disbanded. Lois Schneider requested that the committee be put back in place.

Question #5 Are tests driving curriculum. Brenner responded that tests should not drive curriculum but there is pressure to perform well on tests. There is an expectation that our kids will do well on tests.

Question #6 Back to the disbanded Committee. Assistant superintendent says she wants teachers to feel they can take risks and committees tend to make teachers uncomfortable. The administration says there is no need for this committee as they have internal meetings all the time.

Question #7 Chrome Books Implementation. Mark Marin discussed the transition and reported that it's going well. 1-1 deployment in grades 5,6,7 and grade 4 has carts in the classroom. In December books will go home with students. Administration is working hard training and preparing teachers. They have technology Tuesdays, & professional days. All of this is done before or after school not during which not all teachers appreciate but administration feels teacher training shouldn't impact students.

Dennis Maroney commented about Google Classrooms and that kids seem to really like it. Google classroom will be fully into DHS next year.

Question #8 Concerns and challenges of the budget. How are we doing budget wise for the second and third year and how is the district coping with this challenge. Discussion Ensued

Question #9 How many new students does the district anticipate from new developments in downtown Darien.

100-150 . Which is at least 5 classrooms. Dr. Brenner says this will stress the elementary schools and he can zone the new students where there is room, which will be helpful. Oxridge is where they will more than likely send the kids based on enrollment.

Middlesex will be the most stressed of all the schools and with all the new developments we will need to consider our options. Dr. Brenner discussed how to build a new classroom costs run around 350K per room.

Brenner discussed how there are 7 computer labs at DHS and he wants to retire them. When every child has their own device the district can reclaim that space and help ease the stress on the school.

Brenner says his administration is operating nicely inside the current budget.

Question #10 What concerns does the district have about the CCJEF v. Rell Superior Court Ruling. Dr. Brenner says it's impossible to figure out how this will play out. He felt it was too early to weigh in but stated that the whole country will be watching this case.

Question #11 Discussion & numerous questions about number of teachers departing. The district lost 68 teachers this year, which is about 15-19 higher then in previous years. Apparently the district lost a lot of special education teachers. Dr. Brenner says folks are not all thrilled with the changes his administration has made and some are stressed by all the changes. When asked if there was a morale problem in the district Dr.

Brenner didn't think so. He says they counseled out a few teachers but the majority left on their own. Brenner says we have high expectations for our teachers and his message is clear and the adjustment has been hard for some. He said that some teachers are resistant to all the professional development and his administration recognized that and are pulling back because he doesn't want to overwhelm anyone but they need to get moving calling it a push and pull situation.

Question #12 The paperless policy. Roll out has been hard but the district will save 60-80K

Question #13 Will Darien ever allow the children of teachers to attend Darien Schools. Dr. Brenner says the district is not set up to do this and the cost too high.

Question #14 Class Size? Dr. Brenner thinks elementary schools need to have smaller classes and the optimal is 22. Short discussion ensued.

Question #15 SRBI. The assistant Superintendent responded that the district is working extremely hard. Says teachers have clear dates and there are serious procedures in place. Brenner says he is proud of the way his team is working and of the changes that have been made. Says it's a big change for the teachers but great for the kids. Shirley Klein commented on training of teachers and she is confident the town is in compliance and there are new systems that monitor students & teacher progress.

Closing remarks: Dr. Brenner says he is impressed with both the teachers and the students in Darien. Music & Art Departments the best he has ever seen. His biggest shock is how stressed the kids are here and he would like to make that better. Brenner wants to be fully digital and he is working to make that happen.

9:45 Approval of minutes . Approved unanimously.

9:50 Frank Kemp came to discuss the blight ordinance and discussion ensued.

10:00 Dennis Maroney Adjourned the meeting.

Respectfully submitted by Lucy Fiore

