

OXFORD SCHOOL COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF SPECIAL MEETING

February 27, 2020 - 5:00 p.m.

Central Administration Office

EXECUTIVE SESSION

School Committee Members Present in the Conference Room: Daniel Coonan, Chairman; David Cornacchioli, Vice Chairman; September Forbes, Secretary; and Palmina Griffin, Member

School Committee Member Absent: William Spitz, Member

Others Present in the Conference Room: Attorney Marc Terry, Legal Counsel; Helen Coffin, Recording Secretary

Dr. Elizabeth Zielinski and her attorney, Michael Long, elected not to be present in the meeting room.

Attorney Terry explains that he has spoken with Chairman Coonan on various occasions in connection with concerns expressed about Superintendent Zielinski. He has also spoken with Dr. Zielinski's legal representation. Mr. Terry questions the members as to their thoughts and what resolution they are looking to reach this evening. The members unanimously stated their desire is to exercise the 120-day termination provision in Dr. Zielinski's employment agreement effective immediately. Discussion ensues in connection the reasons for this which include, but are not limited to, overall dissatisfaction with Dr. Zielinski's leadership and lack of direction as well as no improvement since past discussions. Each of the Committee members indicates that they have been contacted by either staff or community members with various concerns about Dr. Zielinski providing various examples. Additionally, there appears to be a pronounced concern about the poor morale. Further, the Committee does not feel that Dr. Zielinski has owned her mistakes or produced at the level expected for a Superintendent. The Committee feels it would be in the best interests of the District at this time to release Dr. Zielinski of her duties so the District can move forward.

Mr. Terry exited the meeting room to inform Dr. Zielinski's counsel of the Committee's intentions.

Mr. Terry returns to the meeting room and advises that Dr. Zielinski's counsel proposes that the Committee delay exercising the 120-day provision until May 1st to allow Dr. Zielinski additional time to secure a new position. The Committee members state they do not wish to entertain this proposal. Mr. Terry again exited the meeting room to inform Dr. Zielinski's counsel of the Committee's position.

Mr. Terry returns to the meeting room and advises that Dr. Zielinski's counsel proposes that the Committee delay exercising the 120-day provision until Monday, March 9th. Mr. Terry informed the Committee that Dr. Zielinski's counsel asserted that he believed the vacation leave provision in the Termination without Cause language was unlawful under the wage act. Attorney Terry stated that he did not agree with Dr. Zielinski's counsel's argument, but the Committee should be aware of the issue and that Dr. Zielinski might make an issue of it at a later date. Discussion follows regarding whether this proposal should be entertained. In making this determination, Chairman Coonan reads aloud, for the record, a prepared statement from School Committee Member Spitz who could not be present tonight:

"Chairman Coonan,

I will not be able to attend Thursday night due to work responsibilities. I want to include my thoughts in the minutes. I would like this formally read so that it will be part of the permanent record.

I feel we are jumping too quickly on Dr. Zielinski's performance. Any need to address any performance shortcomings should be addressed in the review process. If the committee feels she is not the person to represent the district then the process should be handled through normal disciplinary channels and not rush decisions based on sheer emotions. Positive things have occurred under her leadership such as town/school committee relations have dramatically improved. We have had two budgets presented to the town that reflected no additional staffing cuts and have maintained our present service levels.

The problem with this district is constant change and no stability for the staff to rely on. This is yet another example of the committee creating an environment not conducive to learning and I feel we should tread lightly. Bill"

After further discussion, the Committee is in agreement that the vote should not be delayed and should be taken this evening. However, as a courtesy, the Committee is willing to delay a public announcement until the March 9th regular School Committee meeting since Dr. Zielinski is taking a sick day on Friday and can use vacation time next week. The announcement and next steps will be discussed at the March 9th regular meeting.

On a motion by Cornacchioli, with second from Griffin, the Committee votes unanimously by roll call vote to exercise the termination without cause provision in Superintendent Zielinski's employment agreement effective immediately. {Roll Call: Coonan, YES; Cornacchioli, YES; Forbes, YES; Griffin, YES}

On a motion by Griffin, with second from Cornacchioli, the Committee votes unanimously by roll call vote to place Superintendent Zielinski on pay in lieu of notice pursuant to the termination without cause provision in Superintendent Zielinski's employment agreement, such that she is relieved of her duties effective immediately. {Roll Call: Coonan, YES; Cornacchioli, YES; Forbes, YES; Griffin, YES}

On a motion by Forbes, with second from Cornacchioli, the Committee votes unanimously by roll call vote to exercise the School Committee's right under the termination without cause provision in Superintendent Zielinski's employment agreement, to place her on vacation leave commencing Monday, March 2nd, and continuing until all such vacation time has been exhausted. {Roll Call: Coonan, YES; Cornacchioli, YES; Forbes, YES; Griffin, YES}

On a motion by Forbes, with second from Cornacchioli, the Committee votes unanimously by roll call vote to exit Executive Session at 7:20 p.m. {Roll Call: Coonan, YES; Cornacchioli, YES; Forbes, YES; Griffin, YES}

Respectfully submitted,


Helen M. Coffin, Recording Secretary