

**FINAL MINUTES**  
**SOUHEGAN SCHOOL BOARD MEETING MINUTES**  
**September 1, 2011**  
**Souhegan High School Annex, Room A222**

Present:

Souhegan Cooperative School Board: Howard Brown, Steve Coughlan, Chair Chris Janson, Jeanne Ludt, Mary Lou Mullens, Fran Harrow and Pim Grondstra

Administrative Team: Karen Chininis, Nicole Heimarck, Jon Ingram, Colleen Meaney, Betty Shankel, Renea Sparks, Bob Thompson, and Peter Warburton

Public: Patrick Ahearn, John and Adriana Blume, Mike Boehm, Patricia Cauchon, Cathy Doyle, Amy Facey, Shannon Hogan Galinson, Kim Gowell, Scott Gowell, Bobby Graham, Maria Heaney, Mike Heaney, Wendy Hunt, Dina Karon, Marty Karlow, Betsy Kelladorfr, Alexander Kempf, Jackie, Kempf, Mary Mahar, Peter Maresco, Dawn Massa, Tom Mortimer, Ronald Nelson, Lisa Petrie, Jeff Rettig, Andrew Rowe, Jacob Ruthig, Lisa Smith, Pete and Nan Stearns, Jennifer Stover, Frankie Straccia, Nancy Tichanuk, Kim Tighe, Susan Vamos, and Brian Wasso.

Minutes Recorder: Lyn Jennings

**ATTENDANCE**

Chris Janson called the meeting to order at 6:03 p.m.

**I. CALL TO ORDER**

Chris Janson thanked the administration, board members as well as meeting attendees for being at the Decile Appeal.

**II. DECILE APPEAL**

Chris explained the reason for holding the meeting in the High School Information Center was so that they could televise the meeting.

Chris explained the board was at the appeal this evening to

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hear Mr. Heaney.

Mr. Heaney was requesting the board overturn the decision by Community Council to eliminate the Decile system at Souhegan High School.

Chris said the board would not engage in a discussion.

Chris asked meeting attendees who wished to speak use the sign up sheet to indicate they would be speaking. Chris said all speakers would be given three minutes to speak.

Chris said the board would deliberate immediately following the Decile Appeal and they expected to reach a decision here this evening.

Also present during the appeal was Principal Jon Ingram and Karen Chininis, Director of Guidance.

Chris Janson provided meeting attendees with some ground rules prior to the Appeal being heard.

Chris told meeting attendees they checked with the districts legal counsel and Mary Lou Mullens, a Souhegan Board Member and the board liaison for Community Council sat through all the meetings as well as the appeal process and has read letters of appeal, etcetera and the counsel agreed she could sit at the board meeting this evening to discuss this topic as a board member.

Chris explained Community Council is made up of community members, faculty members, a school board member and high school students.

Mary Lou told meeting attendees to reference Sect. 4 Article 2 for grading and GPA decisions.

Principal Jon Ingram told meeting attendees as well as board members it was a pretty proud moment that this meeting was taking place, as it brings to light the strength of the democratic process at Souhegan.

Jon told meeting attendees a great deal of time, effort and research was done on both sides of the “argument.”

Jon said a group of students identified their concerns with regards to the Decile system and brought forth a proposal in a thoughtful and respectful manner.

Jon said another group did the same in response to keeping the Decile system.

Jon said as soon as Community Council passed this, the administration had some work to do in lieu of the Decile system.

Jon said the administration met over the summer and believe they have a system they feel comfortable with and plan on bringing it to Community Council in September and then to the board in October.

Chris Janson invited Mike Heaney to speak since he was the one that was appealing the decision to eliminate the Decile system at Souhegan High School.

Mike told board members there were two reasons he was appealing this decision.

- 1) The primary reason for his appeal was he thought the research involved was sparse, and it really didn't make a case for a true need for change.
- 2) One of the strongest reasons for getting rid of the Decile system was due to the strong support by the guidance department.

Mike said he was surprised the guidance department got behind the proposal because they did not have another plan in place. Mike said he is relieved to hear a plan is coming, however, he was also surprised to hear there was no plan in place in the spring.

Mike said there is too much decision-making allowed with the students and not the parents.

Mike told meeting attendees as well as board members to read *Standards of Mind and Heart* he said it was a must read for any parent of a child at Souhegan.

Mike said at Souhegan they have a mission statement, which emphasizes respect and trust.

Mike said by removing the Decile system, it is like the students work is no longer respected. Mike said changing the rules in June at the end of her daughter's junior year was simply wrong.

Mike said the authors of the proposal went through the appeals but he questioned where were the checks and balances from the board.

Mike said this issue is very important and he knows and trusts the principal and administrators.

Mike strongly suggested whatever plan, goes into effect that it begin with the incoming class this year, the class of 2015.

Mike asked that board members respect the commitment to academic excellence. Mike said taking away the Decile system from his daughter was wrong, changing the rules three years into a four-year high school career was wrong.

Maria Heaney said she attended most of the meetings by Community Council.

Maria said she brought up questions throughout the process, she questioned the data throughout the process, but there was never any elaboration.

Maria said she paid for a document from the NACAC. Maria said the document shows that 74% of the schools regularly provide merit rank for students. 66% use a weighted graded average. Maria said by taking away the Decile system we are putting our students in the minority.

Kim Galows said she wanted to echo everything the Heaney's have said. She is a parent of two Souhegan high school students.

Kim said there was never any time to collaborate as the proposal was heard in March for the first time and a decision was made in June.

Kim said parents raised concerns over scholarships and there was very little time given with regards to the issue and then the vote was taken the next week.

Kim said she didn't want our kids not getting scholarships, and not getting into good schools.

John Blume said he had a different opinion. He believes the grades are inflated. John said A's are given for effort rather than for a thorough understanding of the material.

John said it hurts his daughter to have the Decile system.

Jennifer Stover said her daughter attended St. Paul's Advanced Studies Program this summer.

Jennifer said she spoke to a college representative at St. Paul's and they said by eliminating the Decile ranking at Souhegan, her daughter would not be eligible for some scholarships.

Jennifer commented she didn't see any other students at the meeting except for Community Council Members that were in favor of eliminating the Decile system.

Wendy Hunt said she has twin boys at Souhegan and they visited a lot of colleges over the summer and the number one consideration by colleges was the rigor of the curriculum.

Frankie Straccia said the mistake Souhegan made was they should not have eliminated something (Decile system) until they had something else in place.

Betsy Kelladorfr said she has four daughters of which three have graduated from Souhegan. When she asked the three daughters who graduated how they felt about the Decile system being eliminated, their first reaction was that it was completely against the Souhegan philosophy and they questioned how this could be done, and asked how are they are challenging the students?

Betsy said it is not fair to change the rules in the middle of the game, and if you eliminate something, you should have something else in place.

Betsy said in Superintendent Warburton's opening address to the faculty of SAU39, he spoke about is good enough, good enough? Betsy said she thinks they need to keep the Decile system because good enough is not good enough in the education system.

Scott Gowell said he spoke about his concerns at the Community Council Meeting, about the research that was done and how they planned to implement a new ranking system.

Scott said he was told 11 schools made the transition, and dropped ranking. Scott also said some schools provide ranking when requested and some added additional recognitions for something that was taken away.

Scott said none of the schools have done it the way we have done it. Scott said the rug was pulled out from our top performing students right now.

Scott asked that the board support the appeal, put the Decile system back in place until they have a new system.

Andrew Rowe said he doesn't have any students at Souhegan yet, but has one at Wilkins and one at the Amherst Middle School.

Andrew said changing the system midstream is demotivating for everyone. Andrew said a lot of parents of younger kids are concerned and are watching what's going on at the high school.

Tom Mortimer said he supports the return of the Decile ranking. Tom said he supports peer ranking, as it prepares them for the real life that is coming.

Ron Nelson said he supports Mr. Heaney's appeal. Ron said the decision to eliminate the Decile system should be made by who has the best interest of the students in mind and in his case; it is he and his wife. Ron said life is a ranking, and in every day life, you are ranked.

Jeff Reddig said he is the proud parent of one of the

Community Council Members.

Jeff said of the colleges they spoke with, they have found by weighing the grades rather than using the Decile system, it makes the college take a broader look at the student.

Jeff said the Council Members have done a great job over the last six months, they identified what was wrong and they worked to change it.

Jeff said the Council Members have done a lot of research and talked to a lot of people over the past six months.

Karen Chininis, Director of Guidance at SHS, spoke about the SHS Profile. She said the profile describes the community, special programs and statistical data – including grading systems, SAT's, # of AP Courses, etcetera.

Karen told meeting attendees they have revised their school profile and it was approved by the administration, now it will be presented to Community Council and then to the School Board.

Karen showed a copy of a profile used by Wellesley High School in Wellesley, MA. Karen said a profile accompanies each and every transcript that leaves the high school.

Mary Lou Mullens told meeting attendees Souhegan went from a ranking to a non-ranking school and some schools have never had ranking. Mary Lou said Bedford doesn't rank and neither does Bishop Guertin. Mary Lou said the non-ranking students reported positive results especially for scholarship opportunities for students.

Chris Janson asked if students would be disqualified from

scholarships if they require the Decile system or ranking.

Karen Chininis said of the many, many colleges they spoke with, said whether or not the Decile system or a ranking system is used, they were told it is not a mandatory requirement, students have the same opportunity whether they come from a ranked school or not.

Mary Lou asked if this was the main change they were looking at for the school profile. She also asked if they planned on providing the highest GPA and the median GPA in the school profile.

Karen said they have made some editorial changes to the school profile and they have also changed the way they've listed the GPA information.

Karen told board members and meeting attendees they would not be providing rank.

Peter Maresco of the Amherst School Board said to come out and say ranking is not important he believes is not accurate.

Karen said they meet with hundreds of colleges every year as well as financial aid organizations and they found schools that have unranked students have just as much opportunity as those that are ranked.

*Public Comments were closed at 7:25 p.m.*

Fran Harrow said the Decile system could be a detriment to students if grades are not weighted. Fran said there was quite a lengthy discussion at the time the school was founded.

Fran said college's look at students' transcripts and they

are able to get a sense of the rigor of the school. Fran said she could see where the Decile system can be detrimental to some students and help other students.

Jeanne Ludt said she keeps going to Community Council meetings because she can't stay away.

Jeanne said Council Members convinced her things had changed and research was done and by keeping the Decile system it would not be beneficial to the students.

Jeanne said she appreciates all the concern shown for eliminating the Decile system however; students still have the GPA, which will make them shine.

Jeanne said in some ways, the Decile system is misleading because it doesn't indicate the amount of work involved or the rigor of the course.

Mary Lou Mullens said she agreed with what Fran and Jeanne have said. Mary Lou said she doesn't believe the Decile system helps the top 10%, she believes it changes from year to year and believes it's a moving target.

Pim Grondstra thanked Community Council for doing a really good job but said he thinks there are some flaws. Pim said out of 800 students at Souhegan only 300 students signed the petition, why only 300 students in only 3 days?

Pim said as presented there is no other option, drop the Decile system or not. Pim said they need to look for a solution for students that work really hard, AP students and where they reside compared to other students.

Steve Coughlan said he has never been a fan of the Decile system.

Steve said they must educate each and every student to the best of our ability. Steve said they should have some sort of ranking system since it motivates students.

Steve said he is a little concerned since he has heard so much about the fact that by eliminating ranking, they may be putting students at a disadvantage for scholarships.

Steve said he would like to make sure we pay attention to the scholarship issue and he is not sure if he likes changing the rules of the game in the middle.

Howard Brown asked what the voting results were by the Community Council.

Howard was told there was only one dissenting vote, which was from the salutorian that didn't think it would be the right time.

Chris Janson said she worries about a student being penalized for something they need by a college and not being given it. She thinks whatever a student needs to get scholarships they should be given.

**A motion was made by Fran Harrow to uphold the decision to accept the recommendation of Community Council to eliminate the Decile system. Howard Brown seconded the motion. All board members voted in favor of the motion and the motion passed unanimously. (6-0-0)**

Pim requested the administration have some kind of plan in place, goals set for the next board meeting.

Chris Janson said her concern would be for just this senior class because they will be applying for colleges very soon.

Steve Coughlan asked that the guidance office look at the impact of ranking.

Discussion amongst board members followed with regards to future reporting.

John Ingram told board members Community Council would be reviewing the School Profile and the final draft would be completed prior to the next Souhegan board meeting.

John agreed to send the board a copy of the School Profile prior to the next board meeting.

**A motion was made by Fran Harrow by the next board meeting to have a proposal from the administration/Community Council with what will be in place this year as to what will be in the school profile for the colleges and any exceptions if any that might take place this year as well as a report as to implications of class rank or scholarship eligibility. Pim Grondstra seconded the motion. All board members voted in favor of the motion and the motion passed unanimously. (6-0-0)**

The board discussion concluded at 8:10 p.m.

Chris Janson called the Regular Board Meeting to order at 8:21 p.m.

## **I. CALL TO ORDER**

A. Principal's Report – Jon Ingram told board members they recently held their annual staff retreat, which frames their work for the year ahead.

## **II. ANNOUNCEMENTS**

Jon said in August staff attended the Math Institute with Mahesh Sharma which was a great experience for all staff who attended. Jon said the Math Institute was the kickoff to

the 3-year Math Initiative to improve the Math Curriculum. Jon said the staff attended the four-day Math Institute from Monday through Thursday and then on Friday, the teachers/staff worked with Mahesh to institute changes in Math instruction.

Jon said they had 857 students for first day of school at Souhegan High School. Jon said since school started, they have an additional 30 students at their doors, and just today they had 2 more students.

Jon said they held Freshman/Senior day on Wednesday and it was a great success.

Jon said the new cafeteria space seemed very well received by the students.

B. Community Council Report – Board members were told the next Community Council meeting would be held on September 12, 2011.

C. Committee Reports – There were no reports by Committees.

Chris Janson asked if there were any comments from the public however, there were none.

### III. PUBLIC TIME

The A. Minutes 1. August 18, 2011, and C. 457 Plan were pulled from the Consent Agenda.

### IV. CONSENT AGENDA

**A motion was made by Howard Brown to approve Consent Agenda Item B. 1. Treasurer's Report. Jeanne Ludt seconded the motion. All board members voted in favor of the motion and the motion passed unanimously. (6-0-0)**

**A motion was made by Mary Lou Mullens to approve**

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**Consent Agenda Item A. Minutes 1. August 18, 2011, as amended. Steve Coughlan seconded the motion. All board members voted in favor of the motion with one abstention, Fran Harrow. The motion passed. (5-0-1)**

Steve Coughlan recommended a few changes be made to the 457 Plan document.

Steve asked the title of the document be changed to read Amendment 002. He also asked the first line include “This Amendment 002.”

Also suggested was to remove the words Lease Employees from the Second Purpose.

**A motion was made by Pim Grondstra to accept the 457 Plan as amended. Howard Brown seconded the motion. All board members voted in favor of the motion and the motion passed unanimously. (6-0-0)**

A. Wellness Space – Jon Ingram told board members the Wellness Staff and Athletic Staff met to discuss goals and the vision for the new Wellness space.

## V. PRESENTATIONS

Jon said Ken Bigley did a really nice job of articulating the goals, etcetera.

Jon said they discussed what would help their curriculum needs and co-curricular needs. Jon said they came up with a list of recommendations and plan on coming up with a list of costs and will bring the recommendations as well as the costs before the board in October.

Mary Lou Mullens suggested they get input from the non-athletic students with regards to the Wellness Space.

Steve Coughlan asked if when the students aren't using the

Wellness Space, they look at letting the community at large use the space.

Jeanne Ludt asked if the staff has discussed expanding the training room at all.

Jon said he thinks it will be part of Ken's assessment. Jon said Ken is looking at the small space issues and they will most likely be in the report in October.

B. Facility Upgrade Cost Planning- Board members received copies of the Gale Report Phasing Funding Recommendations dated September 1, 2011, in their board packets.

Betty Shankel told board members she met with Jon Ingram, Bob, Jim Miner and Peter Warburton on the premise they knew they had two bonds, which were to expire shortly. Betty said they would not have taxpayer impact to put into the facility. Betty said they met to discuss what they wanted to do going forward.

Betty said it appears building aid is gone and they don't see it re-appearing any time soon.

Board members reviewed and discussed the proposed FY 12 Gale Report Items as well as recommendations for FY13 - FY17.

Also presented were additional FY12 Expenditure Recommendations totaling \$99,000. Betty asked that the board approve these items for this year. The items included \$15,000 Wellness Equipment, Parking Area lights and cameras - \$60,000, Locker Cluster 3 - \$12,000 and Locker Cluster 4 - \$12,000.

Steve Coughlan said he doesn't think the track is going to

make it.

Betty agreed and said she had it higher up on her list but when she heard the HVAC systems wouldn't last she had to move the track down on the list. Betty said they did resurface the track four years ago and she thinks another resurfacing will need to be done.

Betty said they have a Trust where private funds can be placed which is something they could look at to fix the track.

Board members discussed the need for parking area lights and cameras this year.

Bob Thompson said adding the parking lights and cameras will make it easier to manage the property before and after school hours.

Jeanne Ludt said they should think about floating a bond for things that are only going to get more expense over time.

Chris Janson said there has been a lot of concern with regards to the Locking System. Chris asked how often do the locks break. Jon Ingram said they fix about six a year.

Board members asked how the administration came up with \$15,000 for new Wellness Equipment.

Jon said they didn't budget for new Wellness Equipment and recognize the \$15,000 purchase is not going to be the only cost for new equipment.

Jeanne Ludt suggested they use future surplus funds towards some of these expenses in future years.

Betty said she agrees with what Jeanne is suggesting however, this year they had the pension issue hanging over them.

Peter Warburton suggested they look at the issues brought up tonight at the meeting and bring back the list of recommendations at the next meeting.

C. Policies –

1. KCD – Gifts to the School District and High School –
2. GCOG – Evaluation of Administrative Staff –
3. CFB- Performance Review and Professional Development for Administration –

The board asked that the above referenced policies go through the policy committee and then come back to the board when appropriate.

A. Professional Nomination – Peter Warburton told board members he met with the administration this past Friday with regards to the Math Teacher position. Peter said there is a small group of students from the Middle School that have a need in Math therefore, he is requesting the position be changed from a proposed .5 position to a .75 position.

## VI. ACTION ITEMS

Board members expressed concern over changing the position due to the need of a small group of students. They were concerned this would set precedence for future student issues.

Peter told board members the administration is working with Principal Ingram in regards to Math Programming and staffing for next year.

Peter said they are trying to correct a problem they are seeing this year by increasing the proposed position to a .75.

Peter told board members by changing the position from a .50 to a .75 position it is an extra \$1,905.52 for the year.

Peter said they need to look at the kids a lot earlier than before they get to Souhegan.

Mary Lou said she is worried about setting a precedent. She said she is worried they will be asked to placate everyone that can't fit into a team.

**A motion was made to nominate Jessica Bartling as a .75 Math Teacher. Pim Grondstra seconded the motion. Three board members voted in favor of the motion Howard Brown, Steve Coughlan, Pim Grondstra, and Chris Janson with two abstentions, Jeanne Ludt and Mary Lou Mullens. The motion passed. (4-0-2)**

**A motion was made by Steve Coughlan to adjourn the meeting. Pim Grondstra seconded the motion. The board voted unanimously to adjourn the meeting. (6-0-0) The meeting adjourned at 9:56 p.m.**

## **VII. REVIEW OF MEETING/ADJOURN**