

TORRINGTON BOARD OF EDUCATION
REGULAR MEETING
December 3, 2008

CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order by Mr. Cavagnero at 7:18 p.m.

ROLL CALL

Members Present: Mr. Broverman, Mr. Cavagnero, Miss Laus, Mr. Lyons, Mr. Mattiello, Mr. Nargi, Mrs. Raymond, Prof. Royals, Mr. Rubino, Dr. O'Brien, Dr. Campbell, Ms. Haynes, Miss Cavagnero, Mr. Wright, Mr. Robinson

Members Absent: Mr. Oliver, Mayor Bingham

Mr. Cavagnero reported that Mr. Oliver had an operation yesterday and is not in attendance tonight.

PUBLIC HEARING – *C.G.S. Section 10-238 – Petition for Hearing by the Board of Education. The board of education of any municipality, upon written petition signed by one per cent of the electors of such municipality or fifty such electors, whichever is greater, the signatures thereon to be verified by the clerk of the municipality, shall hold a public hearing on any question specified in such petition. Such hearing shall be held at a time and place to be designated by such board, not later than three weeks after receipt by the board of such petition.*

Question: *Is it in the best interest of the Torrington Public Schools that Dr. Susan W. O'Brien remain in the position of Superintendent of Schools?*

Dr. Barbara Douglass, Park Place East, Winsted, CT 06098, spoke in support of Dr. O'Brien. She has known Dr. O'Brien since she began her tenure as Superintendent in 2005. She is the President of Northwestern Connecticut Community College. She is not speaking for her Board of Trustees or the state community college system, but as a lifelong professional educator who recognizes expertise, dedication, and integrity when she sees it. She believes Susan possesses all these qualities exponentially. Tough decisions are always difficult and often controversial. Recently, there has been controversy surrounding a personnel decision rendered by Dr. O'Brien. She knows enough about Susan and the difficulty of removing employees to state emphatically that she is certain she did what was absolutely necessary and in the best interests of THS. Dr. O'Brien is not one to excuse unacceptable behaviors which may harm students and the entire district, and ultimately, she believes the Board of Education accepted her decision. Susan has one priority which is the best possible education for all of the young people. As such, she has partnered with Dr. Douglass to provide more postsecondary opportunities to students at THS in their junior and senior years through a high school partnership. She serves as a volunteer and board member for many community organizations which serve or are based in Torrington. As such, she has come to know

many people in the area. These people praise Dr. O'Brien and her dedication, forthrightness, creativity, high standards, and even higher ethics. She is a team player and as head of her team, she has earned the deep and abiding respect of many. Susan is charming, smart, and eloquent; some would say charismatic, but she is also a no-nonsense woman and administrator who will always do the right thing for the young people and the district. She believes that those in the Northwest corner are fortunate to have her in this important leadership capacity, in charge of the education of the young people. She is privilege to count her as a trusted colleague and fellow educator, and she urged the Board not to act precipitously and possibly lose one of the finest school leaders in the State of Connecticut.

Lucille Paige, 25 Auburn Way, Torrington, CT 06790, stated she was there on behalf of Dr. O'Brien and the students of the Torrington school district. To the question, is it in the best interests to retain Dr. O'Brien, she gave a few reasons why she emphatically believes so. The Superintendent has the fiduciary responsibility for the fiscal overall well-being of the entire school district to a budget of approximately \$63 million dollars. In her responsibilities, it is her direction that got the principals, and other staff and administrators through the accreditation of the THS. She does not believe that is a small matter. It takes several years of planning and working to reach those standards, and the evaluation by NEASC concerns the teaching and learning standards, mission, expectations for student learning, curriculum/instruction, assessment of student learning, support of teaching and learning standards, leadership and organization, and school and community resources for learning. She fears that a double standard may be being taught to the students in Torrington, in that if students get caught on the computers with inappropriate messages or language or what have you, they will be punished with detention, but if the principal does, he or she is not? This would not happen in her school district. If someone is using the computers, which the taxpayers have paid for, for inappropriate use, that person will be reprimanded if not worse. The students cannot be taught a double standard. She also stated if any principal in her school district was caught fudging the numbers in the budget, they would not be working there either. She has worked in her school district now for 18 years; she is not a novice. Are the students being taught when they get other jobs beyond high school it is okay to fudge the figures? She doesn't believe that is what they should be teaching the students. If there is corruption and dishonesty in the budget that is put forth to the school board, something had better be done about it and she lauds Dr. O'Brien for having the courage to stand up and speak out. She encouraged Dr. O'Brien to hang in there as there are many people behind her.

Cheryl Kloczko, 365 Locust Road, Harwinton, CT 06791, spoke in support of Dr. O'Brien. She stated that in a past position she had the opportunity to report to 7 superintendents, executive district manager of magnet schools, and a president of a university. In that capacity, she came to understand what educational leadership looks like. For the Torrington public schools, she believes an educational leader is needed who believes and puts into practice the philosophy that the education and welfare of the students comes first; someone who demonstrates deep knowledge of pedagogy and how to implement theory to practice; someone who has a progressive vision that takes into

consideration the needs of all students in the town and district; someone who can focus on results, process, and relationships to achieve those results; someone who can design pathways to make things happen; someone who demonstrates fiscal responsibility and can make changes and implement new programming when funding is not available or is limited; someone who strives to employ individuals who are highly qualified educators and bring optimum benefits to the students within the Torrington public schools; someone who is dedicated to the community, participates and collaborates with several community organizations in order to ensure a positive impact upon the education of Torrington students. She believes Torrington has that educational leader in Dr. O'Brien.

Maria Cravanzola, 177 Torrington Heights Rd., Torrington, CT 06790, spoke in support of Dr. O'Brien, educator, and from her perspective as a teacher of Spanish for THS for 45 years. THS, under the administration of Dr. O'Brien as the CEO of the Torrington Schools, continues daily to provide students with a comprehensive education through its excellent faculty and staff, many of whom have been hired in the past few years under Dr. O'Brien's tenure. Students continue to be successfully involved in plays, sports, community service activities; all of which make us proud of them and make them proud of the THS. In the area of world languages which is her field, significant work has been done in curriculum to coordinate the program between the TMS and the THS, so that there would be a seamless transition when a student moves from one school to another. The intent of the middle school world language program has always been to be a feeder program for THS. When the program was put together for the Torrington school system, some 20 years ago, the intent was a seamless transition. However, it never lived up to that until recently with the introduction of a specific program for those students who struggle with English, so that they would have an extra class in English rather than taking a modern language, and with the writing of curriculum that coordinates the THS and the TMS, students can now enter the THS and successfully complete the second level which was the intention all along, and continue on with success to advanced levels if they choose to. All of this has happened under the firm administration of Dr. O'Brien.

Ms. Cravanzola also shared that because of Dr. O'Brien and Pam Dzurilla, principal of Vogel-Wetmore School, the THS class of 1958, was able to meet at Vogel-Wetmore School, which was high school at the time, for their 50th reunion.

Mary McVerry, 37 Damson Lane, Naugatuck, CT 06770, spoke in support of Dr. O'Brien. She stated that she has been teaching in the THS English Department for 40 years and she has been the Director of Drama for 39 of those years. She has lived through countless administrative changes and survived it all. Five years ago, she remembers the district to be under the leadership of another superintendent with the high school in a downward spiral. She believes this was because of a lack of vision on the part of the then superintendent. He disseminated areas of curriculum, created requirements that many students could not fulfill, and generally looked at Torrington as a backward school system that couldn't possibly be viable in the 20th or the 21st century. Then the Board had the foresight to hire Susan O'Brien. She brought with her a vision for a better school district. She looked and talked to community members, she looked for financial support, and convinced the community to back the school district. She then did the 4 x 4

block schedule, which worked under the premise of get them in and get them out, and created a mentality of less work is best, and began to instill in her staff and her students a belief that the school is a place to learn fulltime. She had administrators working under her who believed in her vision and who worked on a day-to-day basis to fulfill it. During her tenure, scores have went up, students look at the school as a place to learn, not just high school subjects but also college subjects. THS students have the opportunity to leave high school with over 30 credits from the University of Connecticut and have opportunities in other areas to take a wide variety of advanced placement courses and courses that are connected with NCCC. The improvements were not limited to the brightest students. Dr. O'Brien has also encouraged development of courses for those students who are not college bound, something her predecessor totally ignored. Foods has been reinstated which had been brutally cut and CWE courses and career pathways are being worked on diligently so students can either take that knowledge and go to college or go directly into the work force. This has not happened in the past 10 years. She believes Dr. O'Brien has done many wonderful things for the district. Dr. O'Brien has an awareness of those who work under her who are doing the best possible job they can and she rewards those who do. She tells those who are working hard that they are doing a good job. Ms. McVerry also believes this year has been one of the smoothest openings the high school has ever had, though one would assume it would be the worst. John Pelchat was wonderful at the beginning of the year. The current administration team which Dr. O'Brien has put in place is truly a team which is ready to lead and also aware that the rest of the staff needs to feel included in the process of change. A leadership team has been reinstated for any teacher who wants to be part of it. These teachers can come the 2nd Tuesday of the month and share with the administrators issues that they have and then work together to resolve them. This had not been done under the previous administration. The teachers know there needs to be change and the staff feels that they are included in the process. The current administration teaches each staff member with respect, both as professionals and people, which make coming to school a pleasant experience. Dr. O'Brien has a vision that has made THS ready to move forward in a positive way as the students are prepared to face the challenges of the time. Everyone should be aware of what might have been if she hadn't come and the downward path had been continued. She hopes that the BOE would look and see the positive changes that Dr. O'Brien has put in place and then do the right thing.

Margaret Beecher, 70 Suncrest Ct., Torrington, CT 06790, spoke in support of Dr. O'Brien. She has known her for more than 11 years and has worked closely with her when she served as Assistant Superintendent for West Hartford public schools. When they met, Ms. Beecher had just become the principal of the lowest performing school in the district, and her most significant challenges were to transform the school into a magnet school and to improve student achievement. As she and staff began their work, Dr. O'Brien became their strongest supporter and advocate. Her depth and breadth of knowledge of the change process and of curriculum and instruction were invaluable, and her presence in the school became commonplace. Her love of the children and desire to see them succeed was frequently noted by the teachers. The teachers were bolstered by her belief in them and the ability to help each and every child succeed. The school's ultimate success in becoming an interdistrict magnet school, improving student

achievement, and dramatically reducing the achievement gap can be in large part attributed to her leadership and her support. Dr. O'Brien also brought her skills and talents to bear upon all of the work in West Hartford and her remarkable efforts resulted in the development of an outstanding curriculum in all curricular areas, implementation of innovative and effective teaching practices, and district-wide improvement in student achievement. She never deferred challenging tasks to others, but stood shoulder to shoulder with administrators and teachers, and did the hard work that needed to be done. She was unwavering in her response to injustice and embodied the strength, wisdom, and integrity of a true leader. Thus, she garnered the respect and admiration of her fellow administrators, teachers, students, and parents. There was much sadness when she left West Hartford to become Superintendent of Schools in Winsor-Lochs, but the loss proved to be their gain as positive changes in teaching and learning were made and difficult challenges were addressed directly and honestly. Ms. Beecher was enthusiastic when she learned Dr. O'Brien would be coming to Torrington as their Superintendent of Schools, and she has not been disappointed over the past 4 years as she learned the improvements that were made with Dr. O'Brien's leadership and the hard work of teachers, paraprofessionals, and the entire school community. The following is just a sampling of some of these improvements: Establishment of an alternative middle school program, expansion of the gifted and talented program at the elementary school and development of the Apple or TAG program at the middle school; implementation of a new K5 math program that has already improved student achievement; changing the block schedule at the high school which increased instructional time by 20%; changing the schedule at the middle school and adding valuable instructional time to the school day; restoring instructional area leaders at the high school in order to keep pace with the necessary improvements in curriculum and instruction; decreasing the dropout rate from 21% to 12%. In regard to NCLB, the middle school reached safe harbor after being labeled "in need of improvement" for 4 years. And as everyone knows, the high school has received NEASC accreditation. These and other improvements have had a positive impact on all of the schools and, thus, every child in the public school system. They also are examples of Dr. O'Brien's effectiveness as Torrington's Superintendent of Schools. Ms. Beecher believes it is now time to resolve or set aside differences and hold steady the course that has been set by the BOE and Dr. O'Brien over the past 4 years. It is time to continue the good work of addressing the ever-growing needs of Torrington's children. As one of many lifetime residents of the city, she asked each and every Board member to listen closely to the facts, to review all of the data available, to question all sources of information, and to distinguish between fact and opinion when making decisions that will change the course of the educational system and the lives of the children. The Board is the voice of all the residents of Torrington; those that signed petitions and thousands more who did not sign. She knows the Board takes their charge very seriously, and she thanked them for their service to the community.

Noel Croce, 155 Sycamore Dr., Torrington, CT, spoke against retaining Dr. O'Brien as the Superintendent of Schools. She is a taxpayer of the City of Torrington, but has no children, grandchildren, or relatives that either attend or work in the system. Ms. Croce sent out a letter to all the members of the Board expressing her concerns last week and the week before. She thanked the Board for their service and recognized that they have a

very tough job. She admired and respected their dedication to the citizens of Torrington, and appreciated their careful and deliberate consideration of this matter. As she stated in her letter, she has been watching with great sadness what has been unfolding these past months regarding the Torrington public school systems. It is clear to even a casual observer that the relationship between Dr. O'Brien, the Torrington public schools, and the citizens of Torrington is extremely strained and, in her opinion, irreparable. She realizes that when Dr. O'Brien came to Torrington, she faced many challenges. She has done some good things for the system including seeing THS through the NEASC accreditation process. However, she doesn't believe the cost, both emotional and financial, is worth the results. She believes 2 things are the most important and irreplaceable: Family and reputation. What she has seen from Dr. O'Brien over the last few months has been an attack on both of these things. She watched the tape of the October 1st Board of Ed meeting a number of times as she was having a hard time believing what she was seeing. She was appalled at the treatment of Mr. Carbone and saddened to hear student talk of their fear of retaliation for expressing an opinion, and another student belittled by Dr. O'Brien. Incidents such as the inappropriate contact with students, the press, and misuse of the system to send off staff news clippings on Dr. Metallo, public accusations of Dr. Lambour, and misuse of power by Dr. O'Brien were noted. She believes a truly effective leader leads with respect, not intimidation and fear. Torrington needs a school leader who not only commands respect, but is respectful, a leader who will effectively work with and not against faculty, students, parents, and citizens, and who is up for the challenge that is Torrington. To her, Dr. O'Brien has proven that she is not that leader. She was relieved when she heard the Board vote last week. She is saddened that it has come to this point, and she is confident that the Board will see this through for the betterment of the children and the citizens of Torrington.

Dr. Michael Menard, Campus Director of the UCONN-Torrington, wrote a letter in support of Dr. O'Brien. The letter was dated December 3, 2008. Dr. Menard stated he considered himself fortunate to have worked with Dr. O'Brien since his arrival at UCONN-Torrington 4 years ago. He believes her to be an innovative and thoughtful educator and an enthusiastic advocate for the students in her charge. Whenever they have worked together, he has always found her to be a generous colleague and a selfless collaborator. Without her support, the pilot program for the student support services program at the Torrington campus, a program that seeks to attract students from nontraditional backgrounds and supports them in their transition to university life, would not have been possible, and the results of that partnership have benefited students greatly over the past few years. While he knows that Dr. O'Brien is facing some difficult challenges, he feels an obligation to convey his respect for her energy, dedication, and collegiality.

Doug O'Connell, resident and former Board member, thanked the Board members for all the time devoted to the district. He stated that he is not here to focus on Dr. O'Brien or the unsubstantiated allegations levied by her against others and himself while he was serving on the BOE. He stated instead he was present to focus on a concern he has heard expressed over the last few months; namely, that the actions of the Board as they related to Dr. O'Brien will make it difficult, if not impossible, for this Board to attract quality

candidates to succeed Dr. O'Brien as Superintendent. He asked the Board to please not let that concern paralyze their decision or their decision-making process. Their process for considering the Carbone, Metallo, and Todor matters to mention a few, has gone on longer than most would like, and certain aspects of the process have played out more publicly than no doubt the Board would have preferred. However, he believes the Board should be commended for conducting an orderly, fair, respectful review of some extremely serious matters and allegations. Worthy candidates to be the next superintendent will understand the seriousness of the allegations before the Board, and they will respect them for the fairness of the process that has been followed. Worthy candidates to be the next superintendent will understand the Board's need to assure that Board policies, the City charter, and State statute are followed. They will respect the Board's right to protect the rights of Board members to ask questions, and hold the Superintendent accountable for student achievement and for taxpayer dollars. They will understand the Board's desire to engage all stakeholders and their insistence that staff, students, city officials, and Board members be treated with respect. Achieving their own personal goals and promoting their own agenda through fear and intimidation will not interest worthy candidates. Instead achieving the Board goals, enhancing morale and student achievement will motivate worthy candidates to apply. These worthy candidates are the people wanted for application to be the next superintendent, and the people that Torrington deserves, and he truly believes that these are the people who will be candidates for the next superintendent. All others are no longer welcome and need not apply. The Board's process and actions will not frighten away worthy candidates, rather the fairness of their process and actions should entice worthy candidates to apply for they will know that this Board will treat them fairly and with respect, and that will also ensure that the next superintendent will emulate the characteristics that have been championed through this process. If the Board decides to allow Dr. O'Brien to remain in the position of superintendent, do so because they believe she emulates these important characteristics, but please do not allow her to remain superintendent because they are afraid that they will be unable to attract worthy candidates to succeed her..

Bruce Cornish, 189 Oakbrook Lane, Torrington, CT, spoke in support of Dr. O'Brien. For 5½ years, he was a member of the Torrington BOF; his term expired last December 2007. During a little more than 4 of those years, he was the BOF liaison to the BOE, and spent a great deal of time with the Board and with the 2 permanent superintendents and 1 temporary superintendent going through budget development and budget processes. Two of those budget developments were with Dr. O'Brien. During his little more than 3 years of contact and experiences with Dr. O'Brien and her staff, he was met with nothing but open dialogue, honesty, and frank sharing of information, and he credits Dr. O'Brien for the bringing of the budget process to the public and opening it up, and in this past year, certainly, generating an unprecedented public involvement in the public hearing on the school budget. Going to the question at hand, he would say yes wholeheartedly; one of the reasons is because he was met with nothing but open, frank dialogue, and no question went unanswered, and that was a very positive experience in generating information about the budget process, the needs of the district, and the priorities of the Superintendent and of the district. He thinks he is emboldened somewhat by the Board's action earlier this year to extend Dr. O'Brien's contract. He thinks she knows the district, the needs of

the district, the students in the district, and the priorities of the district. He thinks with the potential for serious budget issues coming down the pike, given the State's financial forecasts and the budget deficiencies, it would be a grave error to change horses at this point in the stream, putting someone in a position with a learning curve to develop priorities, and start to understand the vast diversity of students that the district has. He thinks Dr. O'Brien should be endorsed and continue in this role.

Wendy Fox, 136 Ford Lane, Torrington, CT, spoke against retaining Dr. O'Brien as Superintendent of Schools. She thanked the Board for the opportunity to speak. She stated she is a taxpayer and a parent of 2 children in the Torrington public school system. She is an active parent in her children's school, and she also actively attends BOE and budget committee meetings. She believes every parent should take an active role in their child's education. She is a strong proponent that as citizens they need to take a role in their local government, which includes the local school system. Having attended many BOE meetings throughout the years, she can personally say that this meeting is long overdue. She says this without knowing Dr. Metallo, Mrs. Todor, or Mr. Carbone. She has never met them in the past or have yet to personally meet them to this date, but what she has witnessed is a pattern of behavior by Dr. O'Brien. That pattern has been on public display for the past 4 months. What many of the Board don't hear are the parents. These parents have quietly been talking about their personal experiences. The rudeness, dismissive, and utter lack of respect is in every story that she has heard. Many of these stories the Board may never hear. Those parents have been so intimidated by Dr. O'Brien and/or her staff that they have feared retribution. Not only does she sit before the Board having signed the petition, but she also went door to door asking for signatures. Most signed, but there were a handful of parents who declined to put their names on it. It wasn't because they were supporters of Dr. O'Brien, but they believed that the children would be intimidated. So she doesn't sit there for herself, but for those parents who couldn't have a voice. She strongly agrees with the Board in proceeding with the dismissal of Dr. O'Brien, and she urged the Board to continue in this direction.

Fiona Cappabianca, 3 Stoneridge Dr., Torrington, CT, spoke against retaining Dr. O'Brien as Superintendent of Schools. She thanked the Board for their time and dedication spent over the last few months getting to the truth. These last 4 months have been incredible. It is really unbelievable that this point has been gotten to. She is sure she speaks for many when she says no one wanted to be in this situation. No one wanted their schools dragged through the mud, and certainly no one wanted their staff members dragged through the mud. But with that said, she also believes strongly that the community did not put themselves in this position. They are at the Board meeting because members of their community opted to not air all of the issues in the media, but rather relay their concerns to the BOE member for consideration. She wishes others had also taken that avenue. The task presented to the Board to listen to all the testimony and examine all the evidence and make a decision in the best interests of the Torrington public schools and their handling of the circumstances was commendable. She believes this was not an easy task and the right choice is never easy. She believes strongly that the Board has made the right choice. When an administrator puts their personal agendas and motivations ahead of the needs, safety, and care of the students, they have lost their

ability to manage the district. The trust has been broken. If this process is not followed through to closure, what will happen in the future if an accusation is made against another staff member? What message will be sent to staff if there are not repercussions to the heinous act against Mr. Carbone other than reimbursement of his legal fees? Some of the staff had the ability to talk tonight because they were saying positive things. There are many staff members out there that have never had that ability, and she hopes the Board will also consider their voices that remain unheard. Once a superintendent makes a conscious decision to bring elementary and high school students into an adult disagreement, there is no turning back. It is the Board's obligation to ensure that the superintendent is acting in the best interests of the students, and these transgressions are certainly not in the best interests of any of the students of the Torrington public schools. The success of a school system results from the dynamic interweaving of 5 equally important forces: The superintendent, the BOE, principal in the buildings, the teachers, and the parents. If any of these groups are weak or disengaged, the schools will falter, and that is what is being seen. A lackluster superintendent has the potential to disenchant the staff and parents and ultimately the students in the school system as a whole. The quality of the schools is contingent upon the personal and professional relationships between all its stakeholders. Good communication about priorities and respect for each other's roles makes for a strong partnership. Any form of partnership is certainly lacking. They need to put this behind and move forward to create a vibrant learning community for teachers, students, and parents based on high expectations, teamwork, and collaborative decision-making. Everyone in the community should be welcome to bring their comments to the table without retaliation and consequences because it is simply that, an opinion. She hopes blame and failure will not be part of the district's future equation. She hopes they are never in this position again. She has unfailing confidence in the decisions that the Board has made. She hopes that through the next phase of this process, the Board will consider that a superintendent, BOE, and staff that work together can solve problems, disagree, and be respectful of each other while doing it. This and only this will provide both the foundation and the catalyst for any struggling school's success. She believes strongly that unless all members of the community are authentically valued as significant stakeholders in a school, regardless of their race, ethnicity, education, and income, these same members may feel unintentionally excluded resulting in a school culture that is segregated, and that is where they are today, a school culture that cannot be successful. It is important that the superintendent respects the community he or she work in. This has not been the case for several years in Torrington, and this is the outcome of that. The next superintendent needs to have respect for the diverse community they are serving. Many of us have chosen to raise their families in Torrington not out of despair but desire. On more than 1 occasion, she has heard this administration refer to Torrington as an "urban pit." There is nothing that could be farther from the truth. Torrington has and will continue to be a tight-knit community that cares what happens not only to themselves, but also to their neighbors. When attacks on staff happen, it is an attack on all of us. If you cannot respect the community and its members, it is not possible to effectively lead the school system. She stated that she believes this did not begin with John Metallo, Mr. Carbone, Mrs. Todor, nor will it end there. This goes way beyond these incidences. She thanked the Board and stated that she hopes they will continue in the same direction.

Mary Coutant, 214 Frederick St., Torrington, CT 06790, spoke in support of Dr. O'Brien. She apologized for being late as she was attending her granddaughter's Christmas concert in Canton. She has known Dr. O'Brien through their mutual service club membership in the Torrington Rotary Club, and through some academic issues regarding students, diverse and high risk, whom they serve in the summer, and through some requests and dialogue in dealing with some serious public relations issues that were existent prior to Dr. O'Brien's arrival in Torrington, which she handled quickly, and each case, she has found Dr. O'Brien to be open, honest, professional, thorough, and extremely helpful. It is her belief and that of many with whom she has discussed the subject, that they are fortunate to have a person of Dr. O'Brien's caliber leading their schools. Judging from the Board's most recent evaluation of 3 or 4 months ago, they also believe that; a raise, a multi-year contract, what could say it better? She thinks what is happening is very similar to what happened some years ago involving another beloved superintendent, a witch hunt. Then, as now, the BOE felt they knew what was best for the children of Torrington and the educational system. For reasons unknown to most, he was denied the opportunity to serve as superintendent. What happened? A great educator, a visionary, a brilliant person, a mover and a shaker was denied the community, and region 1 was all the better for it as they hired him. Now they have a superintendent who is a great educator, a visionary, brilliant, a mover and a shaker, and she is on the brink of being denied the opportunity to serve the children. She implored those who have told her that they support Dr. O'Brien, to have the courage of their convictions, be strong, step up and say enough is enough. She asked them not to let this witch hunt go on any longer or waste one more minute in this mean-spirited, name calling, which is undermining their fine school system. What has happened to civility? What kind of example is being set for the children? That might makes right? She asked that the Board move forward with conviction to serve the children. She doesn't think the children deserve any less.

Mary Bucaccio, 108 Auburn Way, Torrington, CT, spoke against retaining Dr. O'Brien as the Superintendent of Schools. She thanked the Board for the opportunity to speak. She speaks as a parent and as a teacher in the Farmington public school system where she has the privilege of working for Bob Vilanova, who is the Superintendent of the Year for the State of Connecticut. She feels that she knows and understands good educational leadership. This Board and the entire community has wrestled with the problems surrounding the handling of personnel matters, communication with Board members, and relationships within the school system, the parents, and the students. Should the approach of the Superintendent and her staff take be accepted or should a replacement be found? She thinks they answered that question last week when they voted 9 to 1 in favor of sending a notice of intent to terminate the Superintendent. This vote has renewed her confidence in the Board and in its work. She knows that decision must have been hard to come to, but she thinks they have shown their willingness to hear both sides of the story and make a rational decision about the best way to proceed. When she first heard of problems related to the Metallo resignation, the Carbone accusation, and the other issues, she was shocked. She had always been a Susan O'Brien supporter. It was hard to think of her as anyone but the perfect person for the position, but as the allegations and the

evidence of wrongdoing increased, she became resigned to the fact that some of the things that were happening within the schools were so fundamentally wrong that she had to speak out. No one will deny that Dr. O'Brien has made contributions, but her credits have been eclipsed by her most recent actions. So she is requesting that the Board stay the course and remain confident that they can and will find an outstanding candidate who will serve as the next superintendent. She thanked the Board for their commitment to the schools and to the City, and she hopes that very soon full attention can be returned back to the business of educating the students.

Tammy Royer, 135 Alision Drive, Torrington, CT, spoke against retaining Dr. O'Brien as the Superintendent of Schools. She stated she is speaking primarily as a concerned parent, but she also plays a role as the PTO Co-President of Torrington Elementary School and the Co-Chair of the PTO Council. She started by thanking the BOE for volunteering their time and energy in being part of the Board. She knows they have given up much quality time with their families in order to attend this meeting and others like them. She believes the Board has taken great care with the handlings of the questionable performance of Dr. O'Brien. The Board has her respect and gratitude for showing perseverance in obtaining all the facts in the case. She is concerned for the well-being of her 2 children, the schooling and their education, as well as that of many other students that have been directly affected by Dr. O'Brien's inappropriate conduct. The Board has sat behind closed doors for countless hours discussing the issues at hand. It is a shame that all this unnecessary time has had to be taken to get to this point, and she hopes to get back to business very quickly. However, she feels compelled to inform the Board of other additional facts that they may not have been informed of previously. The PTO Council consists of the PTO Presidents and Vice Presidents from the Torrington Public Schools. It is on this board that she serves as the Co-Chairperson. The function of the council is to discuss current issues and brainstorm new ideas on how to best serve the students. It is their mission to provide activities to students within the school community to help strengthen the school morale. They hope to contribute by showing them positive ways to have fun in a safe environment while being with other students and their parents as a whole. Currently, the council remains as their own entity and they hold their own insurance coverage. They were told by Dr. O'Brien last year as a direct order that they were no longer allowed to participate under the schools tax-exempt status; thus requiring each of the school's PTOs to obtain their own insurance coverage at a very high price. They have now learned that since they are no longer tax exempt or underneath the umbrella of a nonprofit organization as they once were that they would be required to file taxes as a 1099 organization. Why does this matter? The fee alone to file as a 1099 organization will cost each of the PTOs around \$1,200 just to file as this status, not to mention the amount of money it will cost to hire an accountant to prepare tax returns. This money could have provided more coats for the children during this cold weather or toys for underneath their Christmas trees. In addition, the PTOs are now required to pay for their own custodian to be present at their events which is an additional \$150 taken out of the profit for each event held. These funds are used to buy clothes, holiday meals, and toys for the children in need at the schools. Other monies raised go to pay for curriculum enhancement, items such as having a local author read stories to the children or bus fees for field trips. The funds raised support school activities that otherwise student would not

be able to have due to budget constraints. These unnecessary costs that the council is now required to pay are only because of the direction given by Dr. O'Brien. In the bylaws it is stated that the PTO is to meet at a designated location to be decided on by the council. They may have invited guests at these meetings periodically, of which Dr. O'Brien decided to discontinue. Dr. O'Brien herself should be one of those invited guests, not someone who dictates how the organization is run. The other invited guests would ordinarily be a Board of Education liaison, so they may be privy to what concerns and achievements the council has made. Neither of these guests have any voting power. However, this is not how the council is currently operating because Dr. O'Brien dictates to them when and where they meet even sending them a schedule for the year and then canceling the meetings when she cannot attend. Dr. O'Brien even dictated that the meetings be held at the Migeon Avenue office so she can intimidate the council and use her "home turf" as influence. She feels this has to change. The PTO Council must be taken back or forced to live by Dr. O'Brien's rules which she has no legal ability to force upon them. She gives this information to inform the public of who the council is and as a prelude to several inappropriate and manipulative actions made by Dr. O'Brien at their first meeting. First the meetings are scheduled from 6:30 p.m. until 8:30 p.m., but the first meeting they have had this year, they never left the building until 10 p.m. The reason behind this was because Dr. O'Brien started the meeting by saying she would take questions regarding the current scandal at the end of the meeting. She conveyed that she wants to use the meetings as a means of conveying her position and ongoing at Migeon Avenue to the families and the schools, that they would act as her liaison. She used intimidation by lashing out at a middle school PTO member when she expressed concerns made by parents about the APL, the Apple, and the Upward Bound programs. Dr. O'Brien's demeanor was angry and accusatory. She stifled this individual from talking in the midst of her conversation even though Dr. O'Brien said she could have 10 minutes to ask questions. This became a very uncomfortable and hostile environment as conveyed by several PTOC members. They then spent 15 minutes discussing her newly furnished conference room at Migeon Avenue and the details behind her shopping experience. She personally reminded her that they were there to discuss school issues not her newly done space. The council members are volunteers and much like Board members, their time is also valuable. This was not the venue in which to discuss this. The PTOC members had several items on the agenda to discuss, as well as several new members to bring up to speed. They did not need to hear her boast about the cost of the items she found nor of another comment she made about her picture would be of the first woman superintendent on the wall in that conference room. In the meeting, the most disturbing point to Ms. Royer was when Dr. O'Brien spent 45 minutes informing them of news articles provided to her from a New York newspaper. She claimed that they were reporting Dr. Metallo to have lied and tricked his former BOE into keeping lifetime medical coverage for himself and his family. She went on to say that he is currently a used car salesman in New York because that is the only job he could find. Does she need to express the level of inappropriateness that this was? Dr. O'Brien attacked his character and Dr. Metallo was not there to defend himself. She was very cruel and callous to have made these unsubstantiated stories about Dr. Metallo. Later in her conversation as she continued to degrade Dr. Metallo, she obviously felt compelled to share her opinion publicly of Mrs. Todor. Dr. O'Brien summarized for the council, Mrs.

Todor's inappropriate and humiliating emails. As she stated, her opinion was that Dr. Metallo and Mrs. Todor's relationship went far beyond colleagues and Mrs. Todor should be ashamed of herself. Dr. O'Brien then went on to say that Mrs. Todor had better learn to choose her friends more wisely. Dr. O'Brien also added there is much more to come and then she had a 2-inch thick report in the back seat of her car that had more information that would change all of their opinions of Dr. Metallo and Mrs. Todor. There are more situations that she will not share because she has been asked to keep them confidential; however, she thanked the Board again for listening. She urged them to continue on the path they are on, to continue to seek the facts as they are and not as Dr. O'Brien would lead them to believe. She has confidence in the Board that they will terminate Dr. O'Brien for the good of the students, and the faculty, and for all the evidence and testimony that has been brought before them. Is this the behavior of a qualified superintendent? Is this the message they want to send the children, that belittling individuals, bullying, and deceitfulness are okay? What gives her the right to do all these atrocious things? How long can her poor performance be allowed and unpunished?

Jeff Taker, 309 Patterson Drive, Torrington, CT, spoke against retaining Dr. O'Brien as the Superintendent of Schools. Speaking as a parent, Mr. Taker stated he has been in battle for his daughter's education since middle school. It has been going on for about 3 years now. He has crossed paths with Dr. O'Brien a few times to no avail. She gives a glimmer of hope, but a few weeks later she will just pull the rug right out from underneath you. He stated he and his wife go to the State of Connecticut for his daughter, but get no help from Susan O'Brien or her staff, or anyone down at the BOE. The only way he got any results was through the State of Connecticut. He and his wife and daughter have been put through the mill for 3 to 4 years with the problem ongoing. The professionals the parents were supposed to seek out never gave them any results. When the State stepped in it still turned out to be a bit of a nightmare for all his family, and he is still battling at this time. He and his wife have a hard time getting his daughter to go to school, and they get very little help from the staff or the BOE. He is hoping some of this will change and he is hoping more parents will come forward and see they can fight the power so to speak from time to time, but you cannot do it without standing up for your rights. He has had to have a legal battle for a short period of time just to get his daughter attention. Some of Dr. O'Brien's accusations and phone calls get twisted around and everything goes in her favor. She will not talk about stuff against her, only anything that will benefit her case, but nothing that will benefit the parents or the child. In his opinion, Dr. O'Brien does not have respect for the children unless it is somebody of her descent.

Sheila Carbone, 105 View St., Torrington, CT, spoke against retaining Dr. O'Brien as the Superintendent of Schools. She asked the Board to please stay the course. The Board has heard from the community through emails and letters and meetings. She asked that they do the right thing, they have voted 9 to 1, and she asked that not change.

Julie Fabiaschi, 196 Sycamore Dr., Torrington, CT, spoke against retaining Dr. O'Brien as the Superintendent of Torrington Public Schools. She stated that she sent an email a

few weeks ago to Board members and she reiterated some of the points. She is speaking as a longtime advocate for Torrington public schools. Since 1986 when her oldest entered the Torrington public school system, she has been involved countless hours volunteering for the system that she loves very much. Throughout those years, hard times and disagreements came and went. A former superintendent once said that for every parent who speaks out represents at least 20 parents with similar views. She has never in all her encounters with parents, teachers, taxpayer association seen anything like this situation. What type of school system have they become that people are nervous to use their freedom of speech or to sign a petition for fear of retribution from the Superintendent, where false accusations are made against one of the finest gentleman in the city who is also a great teacher, coach, and citizen, and where you no longer hear talk of the students and the great public schools but only of lost faith in their top administrator? The Board's work is not easy and she thanked them for their service to their community. She thanked them for sending the message to the community that this misuse of authority will not be tolerated. She feels the mistrust is irreparable and it is time to move on to the business of educating the children. She supports the Board's decision and their thoughtful consideration to move Torrington public schools forward in a positive direction.

APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA

Prof. Royals moved and Mr. Lyons supported a motion to approve tonight's agenda as amended. The motion carried. The vote was unanimous.

The action item of approving the Dollars for Dreams Partnership was taken off the agenda.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Miss Laus moved and Mr. Mattiello supported a motion to approve the expulsion hearing minutes from November 20, 2008. The motion carried. Mr. Mattiello, Mr. Nargi, and Miss Laus were in favor. Mr. Broverman, Mr. Cavagnero, Mr. Lyons, Prof. Royals, Mr. Rubino, and Mrs. Raymond abstained.

INFORMATION SHARING

Student BOE Representative Reports

Mr. Wright, Miss Cavagnero, and Mr. Robinson spoke regarding upcoming events and current news at Southwest, THS, Torrington, and Vogel-Wetmore schools respectively.

Superintendent's Report

Dr. O'Brien thanked all the citizens, both pro and con, who stepped forward to demonstrate their interest in the schools. She is particularly grateful for those folks who spoke in her support who were also worried about retaliation and retribution. At question was her effectiveness in the position of Superintendent, and she shared a few facts from this fall which demonstrated her effectiveness despite the tumultuous and difficult situations everyone faced.

Dr. O'Brien also addressed 2 comments made in the public hearing. The first was that she was accused of not being committed to the community. She would like the Board to remember that she received the United Way Community Commitment award for the year 2007, based on her 3 years of service to the United Way Board, and over that time the Torrington school district raised over 18,000 cans of food to feed the hungry in Torrington and set record goals of contributions with various donations to United Way. The second comment was that made about the PTO council. There is a set of secretary minutes that went along with that meeting, and she thinks the Board would get a different impression if they read the minutes of that meeting. The requirements for insurance for the PTOs comes from the insurance carrier. Heretofore, PTOs were not covered, but they didn't realize they weren't covered. She also commented that she is very proud of the new room at Migeon. Historically, the PTO council had been disbanded by Dr. Richio, but she reestablished it because she felt it was very important that the PTO leaders have a forum for direct contact with her, and she has found it to be a very useful and helpful body especially at budget time, and she specifically refutes many of the comments claimed against her in that particular presentation.

CONSENT AGENDA

Miss Laus moved and Mrs. Raymond supported a motion to approve tonight's consent agenda. The motion carried. The vote was unanimous.

Coaching Appointments

Barbara Beebe, Asst. Girls' Basketball-HS, eff 2008-2009 Winter Sports

Contract Addenda

Henry J. Marchand, Coordinating Teacher for Special Education-MS,
eff 2008-2009

Notice Received to Home School: INFJAM09

EXECUTIVE SESSION – Personnel Matters to discuss legal matters related to the discussion of the performance of Superintendent O'Brien

Miss Laus moved and Mr. Nargi supported a motion to move into Executive Session. The motion carried. The vote was unanimous.

The Board moved into Executive Session at 8:45 p.m.

Miss Laus moved and Mr. Broverman supported a motion to come out of Executive Session. The motion carried. The vote was unanimous.

The Board returned from Executive session at 10:10 p.m.

Mr. Rubino moved and Mrs. Raymond supported a motion for Chairman Paul Cavagnero send a notification letter to Dr. Susan O'Brien as directed by Board attorney, Vic Muschell, and discussed in Executive Session on 12-3-08, in a manner consistent with the Superintendent's contract. The motion carried. Mr. Mattiello, Mr. Nargi, Mr. Broverman, Mr. Cavagnero, Mr. Lyons, Mr. Rubino, Mrs. Raymond, and Miss Laus were in favor. Prof. Royals was opposed.

DISCUSSION ITEMS

8.1 Strategic School Profiles – 2007-2008

Miss Laus moved and Prof. Royals supported a motion to table this item until a future meeting. The motion carried. The vote was unanimous.

ACTION ITEMS

9.1 Approve Process Timeline – Appointment of THS Principal

Mr. Lyons moved and Miss Laus supported approving the process timeline for the appointment of the THS principal as modified. The motion carried. The vote was unanimous.

The Board and Dr. O'Brien discussed the Board role in the appointment of the new THS principal. Mr. Cavagnero suggested that the Board become involved earlier in the process, and Miss Laus and Mr. Nargi volunteered to be part of the interview committee. The Board will also be included in the focus groups on the week of January 19th and the second round interviews.

9.2 Receive IRS Required Plan for 403B Retirement Plan Document

Mr. Lyons moved and Mr. Rubino supported receiving the IRS required plan for the 403B retirement plan document. The motion carried. The vote was unanimous.

Ms. Haynes explained the 403B plan as the public sector/nonprofit equivalent of a 401K. It is a retirement plan with payroll deduction. A fair amount of the teachers currently contribute to a 403B that they have selected; however, there are new rules that the IRS has put in place effective January 1, 2009, which now require that the BOE have a written plan document. The Omni group, a third party administrator, will do the actual remittance into the teachers' individual accounts at no cost to the district.

Administration was instructed to run the plan by Board Attorney, Vic Muschell, prior to the Board's next meeting.

9.3 Receive Proposed Regular Meeting Schedule for 2009

Miss Laus moved and Mrs. Raymond supported receiving the proposed regular meeting schedule for 2009. The motion carried. The vote was unanimous.

SCHOOL/COMMUNITY SESSION

None given.

COMMENTS FOR THE GOOD OF THE ORDER

None given.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

Mr. Rubino reported the budget committee will have a meeting next week on December 10th at 5:30 p.m.

Mr. Cavagnero stated they will have 2 grievance hearings on December 10th at 7 p.m. for the Todor grievance and 7:45 for the second grievance. Another grievance hearing will be held on December 17th before the regular Board meeting at 6 p.m.

Mr. Lyons reported that he has asked members of the school improvement committee to send him some dates, and if they could send those before December 20th, he will arrange a meeting.

Mr. Broverman reported that the policy committee has had 2 meetings, and he requested that the minutes from those 2 meetings be in the Board's next agenda. Their next meeting will be on Thursday, December 18th at 7:30 p.m.

ITEMS FOR UPCOMING AGENDA

Dr. O'Brien stated that for December 17th, there will be a celebration for the THS Chamber Choir as they have been chosen to sing at Carnegie Hall. For discussion items, the update on the Charlotte Hungerford Hospital partnership, the TAG 5-year plan update, and the preliminary discussion of the SSP via executive summary plus any additional questions raised by the Board. For action items, there will be several policies to receive including the student dress code policy, the proposed revision to the by-law, and the use of public facilities; the approval of budget transfers and receipt of the monthly financial report for November; and the approval of the IRS required plan for 403B.

The Board and administration discussed the format in which they would like to see the SSP. Mr. Cavagnero suggested they revisit this at a subsequent meeting, but for now do an executive summary trying to incorporate some of the data in the format provided earlier in the fall. Mr. Mattiello agreed to resend the format he discussed to the Board and administration.

ADJOURNMENT

The Board moved to adjourn at 10:55 p.m. All were in favor.