

**MINUTES OF THE REGULAR MEETING OF THE
BOARD OF EDUCATION, ZION-BENTON TOWNSHIP HIGH SCHOOL
DISTRICT 126, LAKE COUNTY, ILLINOIS
TUESDAY, AUGUST 27, 2024 – 6:00 pm.
ZION-BENTON TOWNSHIP HIGH SCHOOL
SOUTH CAFETERIA**

The Board of Education of Zion-Benton Township High School District 126, Lake County, Illinois, met in Regular Session in the ZBTHS South Cafeteria, One Z-B Way, 3901 W. 21st Street, Zion, Illinois, commencing at 6:01 p.m.

Board President Nordstrom presided.

ROLL CALL

Members present: President Nordstrom, Secretary Stephen, Vice-President Benitez, Member Scott, Member Cook, and Member Champine.

Members excused: Member McNeal

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

STAFF, STUDENT, AND COMMUNITY CELEBRATION

Dr. Pawelczyk stated the meeting will start with community recognitions. Moving forward, recognitions will alternate between highlighting community members and recognizing staff and students from various buildings. Next month, building principals will lead the recognitions, followed by community acknowledgments the month after.

Dr. Nieto said he was sorry he was unable to attend in person, and expressed that serving on the board has been a great pleasure. He appreciated the opportunity to contribute to improving student outcomes, faculty and staff environments, and community impact. He also said he was grateful for the support and collaboration from colleagues and felt honored by the recognition, viewing it as a fulfillment of his commitment to give back to the community.

Dr. Rodriguez acknowledged the Dr. Nieto's dedication to education, emphasizing his focus on data-driven decision-making, visionary leadership, equity, accountability, and community engagement. He highlighted his influence on resource-driven leadership and good governance since 2019. Dr. Rodriguez thanked the recipient for setting goals and guiding the administration, expressing appreciation for their partnership and impact on the community.

President Nordstrom thanked Dr. Nieto on behalf of the board for his dedicated, knowledgeable, and passionate service. He acknowledged his valuable advice and support, both for District 126 and other school districts, expressing deep appreciation for his contributions and ongoing commitment to education.

Included and made part of these minutes:
EXHIBIT "A", Zee Bee Pride Board of Education Recognition

COMMUNICATIONS FROM STAFF, GUESTS, AND DISTRICT RESIDENTS

Larry Stephens addressed the meeting to express appreciation for Mr. Cook and to congratulate him on his appointment. He also thanked the board for their attention during the interview process and indicated he would be observing from the sidelines moving forward, with this being his only opportunity to speak.

President Nordstrom stated his appreciation of his interest in the candidacy for the position.

George Foster congratulated Dr. Cook for his service and emphasized the importance of transparency through video recordings of meetings. He praised Steve Angelos and his media team for their excellent work on a community video project and suggested using funds from franchise utility fees to support similar initiatives.

Chris Szymanski echoed the need for video recordings of board meetings, stressing that transparency is crucial for community trust and engagement. He expressed frustration over the lack of response to previous requests and urged the board to address this issue and communicate any obstacles openly. He welcomed Mr. Cook and hoped he would support this transparency effort.

Ruth Davis addressed several concerns during the meeting. She pointed out that key documents, including special meeting minutes, the personnel report, and the MOU with the ZBFT, were missing from the board packet online. She stated that despite prior assurances from Mr. Nordstrom to address this issue, it remains unresolved. Davis also questioned the board's policies on administrators working from home and how they ensure administrators are present during student attendance times. She inquired about the number of administrators receiving individual retirement contributions, aside from the Superintendent and Executive Director of Human Resources. Additionally, Davis raised concerns about teacher overloads and the effectiveness of competitive compensation strategies mentioned in the HR Director's contract. Lastly, she criticized the handling of salary errors for new hires, questioning how such mistakes occurred and whether the district is trying to recover back pay from staff. Davis called for clarification and corrective measures on these issues, emphasizing the need for accountability and transparency.

OATH OF OFFICE

President Nordstrom introduced the next agenda item, which involved administering the oath of office to a new board member, Mr. Vincent Cook. The process required Mr. Cook to repeat a formal oath affirming his commitment to faithfully discharge his duties as a Board of Education member for Zion-Benton Township High School District 126. The

oath included pledges to adhere to the U.S. and Illinois Constitutions, protect the district's assets, respect diverse opinions, recognize the board's collective decision-making authority, and pursue ethical changes in board decisions. After Mr. Cook completed the oath, President Nordstrom congratulated him and acknowledged the support of his family.

ELECTION OF BOARD OFFICER

President Nordstrom announced that, with the board now fully complemented, it was time to nominate and select a new Vice President to complete the term previously held by Dr. Nieto. He outlined the nomination process, noting that any board member could make a nomination without requiring a second.

President Nordstrom nominated Chris Benitez for the position. With no additional nominations received, President Nordstrom declared Chris Benitez elected as Vice President by acclamation and instructed the Secretary to record this decision in the minutes.

ORGANIZATION OF BOARD COMMITTEES

President Nordstrom outlined upcoming changes to board committee assignments. He noted that a detailed document would be provided later but wanted to first communicate key changes verbally. Miss Stephen will join the Finance Committee, replacing Dr. Nieto. Mr. Cook will be added to the Curriculum Committee, and Mr. Benitez will become the chair of the Personnel Committee, with Mr. Cook also joining that committee. The Long Range Planning Committee's composition will remain unchanged. Nordstrom invited any questions and indicated that the board would proceed with these updated assignments.

CONSENT AGENDA

A motion was made by Member Benitez, seconded by Member Scott, to accept the Consent Agenda. Member Champine inquired about an open position in the Activity Positions. There was not a sponsor listed for GSA. Dr. Pawelczyk clarified that the name had been changed to SAGA and there is a sponsor. A roll call vote of members approved the motion present voting 6-0. Included in the Consent Agenda are the following:

- Minutes from the Regular Board of Education Meeting - June 25, 2024
- Minutes from the Regular Board of Education Meeting - July 23, 2024
- Minutes from the Special Board of Education Meeting of August 15, 2024
- Activity Report – June 2023, **EXHIBIT "B"**
- Bills Paid Report – 2nd half July, 1st half of August, **EXHIBIT "C"**
- Bills Payable Report – August 2024, **EXHIBIT "D"**
- Treasurer's Report –, **EXHIBIT "E"**
- Revenue & Expenditure Report – **EXHIBIT "F"**
- Contractor Payout Request- **EXHIBIT "G"**
- FOIA Requests- **EXHIBIT "H"**
- Disposal Request - **EXHIBIT "I"**

- Overnight Field Trip NJROTC - **EXHIBIT "J"**
- 24-25 Advisory Positions - **EXHIBIT "K"**
- 24-25 Activity Positions - **EXHIBIT "L"**
- 24-25 Coaching Positions - **EXHIBIT "M"**
- 24-25 Overloads - **EXHIBIT "N"**

SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT

Dr. Rodriguez reported a successful start to the school year despite various challenges, including numerous changes and ongoing construction projects. He praised students and staff for their adaptability and effective adjustments, expressing pride in their efforts and the overall progress made since the summer.

Bonnie Felske, the new principal at Zion Benton Township High School, provided her first board report detailing her initial observations and goals. After 60 days in the role, she emphasized a focus on improving school culture and climate, highlighting the importance of compassion, clear communication, and consistency. Felske plans to target chronic absenteeism and student proficiency, and she outlined her priorities for the year, including enhancing the attendance office, advisory programs, and student engagement. She also reported smooth operations with scheduling, ACT planning, technology rollouts, and safety protocols. Celebrating the start of the school year, she noted a successful freshman orientation and expressed enthusiasm for future progress.

Kevin Wiland, the new principal at Zion-Benton East, reported a successful start to the 2024-2025 school year. He highlighted the district-wide focus on compassion, communication, and consistency. Wiland emphasized the positive reception of the incoming Class of 2028, noting their enthusiastic welcome and introduction to school activities. He described his active engagement with students and staff, including classroom visits and involvement in school events.

Wiland introduced a new mantra for the school, emphasizing the importance of making positive choices and valuing attendance. He discussed the significance of passion and the impact of student decisions on their future. The principal also highlighted the successful first school assembly since the pandemic, where new staff were introduced, and key topics like safety and student conduct were discussed. Wiland expressed excitement for the year ahead and a commitment to fostering a supportive and dynamic learning environment.

Dr. Rodriguez discussed the progress and future direction of the school district. He reflected on the success of the previous strategic plan, which focused on improvement in operations, social relationships, and resources. Looking ahead, the district will concentrate on leading and managing systems change, emphasizing technology integration and systems of learning for both adults and children.

He expressed pride in the achievements of the past years and the results that will be shared in an upcoming report card. He highlighted the district's commitment to addressing high-cost, low-impact issues and ensuring a return on investment. The focus

for the next three to five years will be on enhancing proficiency through technology and creating new opportunities in the community.

Vice-President Benitez stated he went to the Freshmen Zero Day at both campuses and saw the enthusiasm of students and wanted to applaud the staff for welcoming students and doing a good job.

REPORTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Principals' Report

As noted above, the principal's report was combined with the Superintendent's Report above.

Included and made part of these minutes:

EXHIBIT "O" and "P", ZBTHS & ZB East Principal Reports

BOARD COMMITTEE REPORTS

Business/Bid/Finance Committee

President Nordstrom reported on the BBF Committee's meeting on August 20th, where they discussed several important matters. They received updates on the IMC music and art classroom renovation project and reviewed the tentative budget for 2024-2025. Additionally, the committee addressed the CEJA Grant, focusing on the management of the 2025 allocation and plans to collaborate with officials on adjusting fund allocations and providing property tax abatements. The meeting also covered general capital improvements, including ongoing and completed work at MTS and other facilities. President Nordstrom welcomed any questions from the board on these topics.

NEW BUSINESS

ZBTHS Club Name Change- My Brother's Keeper

Dr. Pawelczyk announced a proposed name change for the district's longstanding "Brotherhood of Extraordinary Young Men" club to align with the national organization "My Brother's Keeper," which was initiated by President Obama. This change reflects a partnership aimed at enhancing the club's mission of mentoring and supporting young men of color. Dr. Pawelczyk emphasized that the foundational principles of the club—providing mentorship, support, and inspiration—will remain intact and are expected to be strengthened under the new name. He also indicated that a similar change might be considered for the Zion East Campus in the future, pending further development. Dr. Pawelczyk welcomed any questions about the transition.

A motion was made by Vice-President Benitez, seconded by Member Champine, to accept the Superintendent's recommendation to change the ZBTHS Club name from Brotherhood of Extraordinary Men to My Brother's Keeper as presented. A roll call vote of members approved the motion present voting 6-0.

Included and made part of these minutes:
EXHIBIT "Q", ZBTHS Club Name Change

2024-25 District Crisis Plan

Dr. Rodriguez provided an update on the district's commitment to maintaining a safe and secure environment for both students and staff. The new Executive Director of Safety and Security is tasked with enhancing safety measures through personal development and collaboration with the Safety Committee, administrators, and students. This year, the focus will be on assessing current practices, making necessary updates to the crisis plan, and exploring new ideas and systems in partnership with other school districts. The goal is to evaluate and improve safety protocols, considering what practices should be continued, modified, or discontinued. Dr. Rodriguez expressed confidence in the ongoing efforts and the value of learning from experienced professionals in shaping the district's safety strategy.

Mr. Hernandez addressed the board and community, emphasizing the importance of safety within the school district. He acknowledged the crisis plan as a solid foundation but noted that it is a "living document" that will be continually assessed and updated. Since starting on July 1st, he has reviewed the plan, which has mostly involved updating names and dates. Moving forward, he plans to collaborate with staff, administration, and students to make necessary improvements. Mr. Hernandez has already presented the plan to staff and new teachers and is committed to working together to enhance safety measures across the district. He invited questions from the board and community.

A motion was made by Member Champine, seconded by Vice-President Benitez, to accept the Superintendent's recommendation to approve the 2024-25 District Crisis Plan as presented.

President Nordstrom asked Mr. Hernandez about his process for reviewing and improving the crisis plan. Specifically, he inquired how Mr. Hernandez plans to engage staff and students in suggesting changes or areas for improvement, and how he will ensure their input is incorporated into the process.

Mr. Hernandez responded by emphasizing that while he values feedback from staff, students, and the community, he also needs to balance this with practical considerations and research from other districts. He mentioned that although not all suggestions can be implemented, he is committed to gathering input and working with school leaders to refine practices, such as drop-off and pick-up

procedures. He believes incorporating feedback and leveraging institutional knowledge is crucial for effective improvements.

A roll call vote of members approved the motion present voting 5-0.

Included and made part of these minutes:
EXHIBIT "R", 24-25 District 126 Crisis Plan

OTHER BUSINESS

Capital Improvements Updates

Dr. Wilkinson provided an update on the Phase Two renovations for the MTSS and IMC areas. He reported that the new study halls with dividing walls are nearly complete, and the library renovations have addressed previous discipline and safety issues. The library is now expected to open ahead of schedule, in the second week of September. Additionally, new bleachers are being installed and will be ready soon. The project, which is under budget and ahead of schedule, includes temporary doors that will be replaced with permanent ones by the end of September. Dr. Wilkinson expressed satisfaction with the progress and impact of the renovations, and is prepared to discuss upcoming projects.

Dr. Wilkinson outlined the upcoming Phase Three renovations, which will focus on extensive upgrades during the summer of 2025. This phase includes a complete overhaul of the libraries at Zion-Benton and Zion-Benton East, with new furniture, lighting, and fixtures. Additionally, music and art classrooms will be modernized to meet 21st-century standards. The renovation project will be bid on in late September, with awards expected in November, and construction will span eight months, causing temporary relocation of art and music classes for the first semester. Dr. Wilkinson also mentioned the purchase of electric buses, installation of charging stations planned for 2026, and the development of a facilities master plan to guide future improvements over the next decade. This plan will align with the district's strategic goals and include community input through open houses and public forums.

Dr. Rodriguez expressed pride in the progress and quality of the music and art programs, highlighting that these projects align with long-standing goals and investments. He emphasized the importance of creating a comprehensive facilities master plan that aligns with the budget and involves collaboration with the board, administration, faculty, staff, and the community. Dr. Rodriguez mentioned recent meetings with architects and construction managers, reinforcing the need for a strategic approach to developing 21st-century classrooms while maintaining fiscal responsibility.

Included and made part of these minutes:
EXHIBIT "S", Capital Improvements Updates

CLOSED SESSION

Member Champine made a motion, seconded by Member Scott, to adjourn to closed session at 7:06pm for consideration of the appointment, employment, compensation, discipline, performance, or dismissal of specific employees and collective negotiating matters between the public body and its employees or their representatives, or deliberations concerning salary schedules for one or more classes of employees. (5 ILCS 120/2(c)(1,2). The motion was approved by a roll call vote of members voting 6-0.

RECONVENE IN OPEN SESSION

A motion was made by Member Champine, seconded by Member Scott, to return to open session at 8:05pm Motion was approved by a roll call vote of members present voting 6-0

PERSONNEL APPROVALS

A motion was made by Member Champine, seconded by Member Scott, to approve the personnel approvals as amended. Motion was approved by a roll call vote of members present voting 6-0. Included in the amended personnel approvals were:

Employment

- Lang, Jennifer is recommended for a benefits adjustment as a Director of Special Education of Zion-Benton Township District 126 for the 2024-25 school year aligning to executive director contracts. Ms. Lang's annual salary for this 12-month administrative position is \$130,416 plus TRS.
- Stone, Robert is recommended for hire as a Zion-Benton Township High School Special Education Teacher. Mr. Stone will be assigned to the Zion Alternative Program (ZAP) located at Zion-Benton East Campus. Mr. Stone start date is August 26, 2024. Mr. Stone will be placed at the salary of MA00, Level 18.
- Medina, Carlos is recommended for hire as a Zion-Benton East High School Freshman Seminar Teacher. Dr. Medina will start on September 03, 2024. Dr. Medina will be placed on the salary of MA60, Level 1.
- Caswell, Teagen is recommended for hire as a Zion-Benton Township High School Art Teacher. Ms. Caswell start date was August 12, 2024. Ms. Caswell will be placed on the salary of BA15, Level 1.
- Hussein, Khemani is recommended for hire as a Zion-Benton Township High School English Teacher. Mr. Hussein start date was August 12, 2024. Mr. Hussein will be placed on the salary schedule of BA15, Level 2.
- Gonzalez, David is recommended for hire as a Lead Maintenance Technician for Zion-Benton Township High School District 126. Mr. Gonzalez's start date was July 29, 2024. Mr. Gonzalez will be paid at an hourly rate of \$32.17.
- McKim, Catherine is recommended for hire as a Executive Administrative Assistant to the Superintendent and Board of Education for Zion-Benton

- Township High School District 126, with a start date of August 19, 2024. Ms. McKim will be paid at an hourly rate of \$43.07.
- Poulsen, Terri is recommended for hire as a Temporary Zion-Benton Township High School Student Services Secretary due to a leave, with a start date of August 05, 2024. Ms. Poulsen will be paid at an hourly rate of \$22.00.
 - Paredes, David is recommended for hire as a Bilingual Instructional Aide for Zion-Benton Township High School. Mr. Paredes' start date is August 26, 2024. Mr. Paredes will be paid at an hourly rate of \$21.65.
 - Harper, Shannece is recommended for hire as an Instructional Aide for the Specialized Services Department for the Transitions program housed in Zion-Benton East. Ms. Harpers' start date is August 26, 2024. Ms. Harper will be paid at an hourly rate of \$21.15.
 - Torrez, Gabriela is recommended for hire as an Instructional Aide for the Specialized Services Department Zion Alternative Program housed in Zion-Benton East. Ms. Torrezs' start date is August 26, 2024. Ms. Torrez will be paid at an hourly rate of \$21.15.
 - Bennett, Dylan is recommended for hire as Maintenance Technician for Zion-Benton Township High School District 126. Mr. Bennetts' start date was August 12, 2024. Mr. Paredes will be paid at an hourly rate of \$21.15.
 - Ondo, Robyn is recommended as the Student Assistance Program Tri-Chair @ Zion-Benton East High School. Ms. Ondo will receive a stipend from the Extra Duty Pay Schedule, Category E, step 1.
 - Wilson, Lemar is recommended for hire as a Boys' Basketball Assistant Coach for School Year 2024-25. This position is a Category D Step 1.
 - Vargas, Osvaldo is recommended for hire as a Boys' Soccer Assistant Coach for School Year 2024-25. This position is a Category D Step 1.
 - Gonzalez, Marco is recommended for hire as a Girls' Volleyball Assistant Coach for School Year 2024-25. This position is a Category D Step 1.
 - Nunez, Zoe is recommended for hire as a Girls' Volleyball Assistant Coach for School Year 2024-25. This position is a Category C Step 1.
 - Mobile, Joy is recommended for hire as a Girls' Volleyball Assistant Coach for School Year 2024-25. This position is a Category D Step 2.
 - Resendiz, Alexia is recommended for hire as an NJROTC Rifle team coach for School Year 2024-25. This position is a Category B Step 1. II.

Transfers

- Lahare, Nancy is recommended for transfer from a Zion-Benton Township High School Special Education Teacher to a Zion-Benton Township High School Special Education Self-Contained Supported Instructional Program Teacher. Ms. Lahare will retain her current salary.
- Luckey, Andrew is recommended for transfer from a Zion-Benton Alternative Program Special Education Teacher to a Zion-Benton Township High School Special Education Teacher. Mr. Luckey will retain his current salary.
- Waters, Chris is recommended for transfer from a Zion-Benton East High School Academic Success Coordinator to a Zion-Benton Township High School Behavior Interventionist. Mr. Waters will retain his current salary.
- Hutchison, Matthew is recommended for transfer from a Zion-Benton East High School Freshman Seminar Teacher to a Zion-Benton East High School

Academic Success Coordinator. Mr. Hutchison will retain his current salary. Johnson, Amber is recommended for transfer from a Zion-Benton Township High School Special Education Transitions Program Instructional Aide to a Zion-Benton Township High School Special Education Job Coach.

- Ms. Johnson will be paid an hourly rate of \$24.49.

Leaves

- Villalobos, Crystal is requesting an intermittent leave of absence beginning approximately August 09, 2024 through November 09, 2024. The request is recommended to be approved as it is in accordance with board policy.
- Sponenburg, Amanda is requesting a leave of absence beginning September 25, 2024 through October 11, 2024. The request is recommended to be approved as it is in accordance with board policy.
- Cardenas, Kathy is requesting a leave of absence beginning August 19, 2024 through August 23, 2024. The request is recommended to be approved as it is in accordance with board policy.

Resignations

- Wilkinson, Matthew is resigning his position as Chief School Business Officer of Zion-Benton Township High School District 126, effective September 29, 2024
- Miller, Michelle is resigning her position as MTSS Coordinator, Zion-Benton Township High School, effective August 05, 2024
- Tunik, Zhanna is resigning her position as Math Teacher, Zion-Benton Township High School, effective August 20, 2024
- Kolinek, Amanda is resigning her position as Art Teacher, Zion-Benton Township High School, effective July 25, 2024
- Wynn, Tiffany is resigning her position as Job Coach, Zion-Benton Township High School, effective August 09, 2024
- Pagan, Nora is resigning her position as FT Paraprofessional, Zion-Benton Township High School, effective August 16, 2024
- Poyer, Christopher is resigning his position as Assistant Freshmen Football coach, Zion-Benton Township High School, effective August 12, 2024

Retirements

- Bhargava-Massa, Renu Anne (teacher) will retire from her position as a ZBTHS math teacher at the conclusion of the 2034-35 school year in accordance with the terms of the current Collective Bargaining Agreement with the Zion-Benton Federation of Teachers.
- Valerugo, Brian (teacher) will retire from his position as a ZBTHS Physical Education teacher at the conclusion of the 2026-27 school year in accordance with the terms of the current Collective Bargaining Agreement with the Zion-Benton Federation of Teachers.

Included and made part of these minutes:
EXHIBIT "T", PERSONNEL APPROVALS

APPROVAL OF MOU WITH ZBFT

A motion was made by Vice-President Benitez, seconded by Member Champine, to accept the Superintendent's recommendation to approve the MOU with ZBFT as presented. A roll call vote of members approved the motion present voting 6-0.

Included and made part of these minutes:
EXHIBIT "U", PERSONNEL APPROVALS

ADJOURNMENT

President Nordstrom adjourned the meeting at 8:08 pm.

JERRY NORDSTROM, President

ATTEST:

PATRICIA STEPHEN, Secretary

JN/PS/kr: MNJul2523R