

**MINUTES OF THE REGULAR MEETING OF THE  
BOARD OF EDUCATION, ZION-BENTON TOWNSHIP HIGH SCHOOL  
DISTRICT 126, LAKE COUNTY, ILLINOIS  
TUESDAY, JULY 23, 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. 21<sup>st</sup> Street, Zion, Illinois, commencing at 6:03 p.m.

Board President Nordstrom presided.

**ROLL CALL**

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

Members excused: Vice President Nieto and Member McNeal

**PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

**2024 SUMMER SCHOOL GRADUATE and SCHOLARSHIP RECOGNITIONS**

The Board recognized ten of the summer school graduates who completed their high school requirements.

**COMMUNICATIONS FROM STAFF, GUESTS, AND DISTRICT RESIDENTS**

Larry Stephens- The Superintendent stated he would contact him and he said he never heard from him. He also reviewed the BBF minutes and there's no roll call. Concerned that only 2 people from the board make decisions resulting in millions of dollars. From a different district, he watched their board meeting. He observed the board was in charge, not the superintendent. All of the board should be involved. There's a mention the previous executive assistant to the superintendent resigned so there's a question of who is reviewing and receiving the resumes for the open seat.

Nordstrom; It's the superintendent's office.

Roger Whitmore- Been in business for 53 years and graduated. The city has lost more businesses to the levy. He asked the board about their plans and strategies related to two key issues: what actions are being taken to help seniors stay in their homes without increasing their tax burden, seeks to understand how the board can enhance efforts to attract new businesses to the area, and requests suggestions on how to improve business recruitment strategies.

Nordstrom- The board indicates that they are open to listening to comments from the public but will not engage in immediate back-and-forth discussions during this time. Instead, they will provide responses or additional information about financial management and budget-related matters as needed after the comments are heard.

Brett Enright- a community member from the class of 2012, expresses concern that certain documents from the last school board meeting, including a slideshow presentation and meeting minutes, are not available online. He requests that these documents be posted in the future.

Nordstrom- The board acknowledges the issue and agrees to look into providing the requested documents and ensuring they are available moving forward. They also mention that the minutes from the June meeting will be approved and made available at the August meeting.

Chris Szymanski- He expresses frustration with the lack of transparency from the school board, specifically regarding the absence of recorded and posted board meetings online. He reminded the board of the Code of Conduct for board members, which includes principles such as representing all constituents honestly, avoiding conflicts of interest, and participating in meetings respectfully. The speaker emphasizes that board members are accountable to the entire community, including students, parents, staff, and local businesses, and expects the board to adhere to these standards moving forward.

George Foster- As a long-time resident and retired police officer, addresses the board, expressing concern over the lack of recorded or live-streamed board meetings. He notes that other large school districts have successfully videotaped their meetings for years. Foster emphasizes that live-streaming or recording meetings would greatly benefit the community, especially for those who cannot attend in person due to work schedules. He believes that increased transparency through such measures would foster a more informed and engaged community.

Nordstrom- In response, the board member encourages the public to attend committee meetings, noting that these meetings often involve in-depth discussions and work that inform the full board meetings. The board member emphasizes that the committee structure has been a long-standing practice, allowing board members to focus on specific areas of interest and engage in detailed conversations with the administration. This approach helps to ensure that board members are well-informed when they participate in full board meetings.

## CONSENT AGENDA

A motion was made by Member Champine to strike prior minutes and FOIA, seconded by Member Stephens, to approve the Consent Agenda. The motion was approved by a roll call vote of members present voting 5-0. Included in the Consent Agenda are the following:

- Minutes from the Regular Meeting of June 27, 2023
- Activity Report – June 2023, **EXHIBIT "A"**

- Bills Paid Report – 2nd half June and 1st half July 2024, **EXHIBIT "B"**
- Bills Payable Report – Closeout June 2024, July 2024, **EXHIBIT "C"**
- School Treasurer's Report –, **EXHIBIT "D"**
- Revenue & Expenditure Report – **EXHIBIT "E"**
- Contractor Payout Request, **EXHIBIT "F"**
- FOIA Requests
- Disposal Request **EXHIBIT "G"**

Nordstrom noted that the completed minutes from the June meeting are not available and will be deferred to the August meeting for approval. Additionally, an item related to the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) was mistakenly left on the agenda.

#### SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT

Dr. Rodriguez provided an update focusing on academic progress and attendance initiatives. Key points include:

1. **Academic Gains:** Preliminary data shows positive trends, though final reports will be available around October or November. The data highlights areas of success and areas needing improvement.
2. **Attendance Initiative:** The district is actively working on improving attendance through a community-based approach, addressing chronic absenteeism, and collaborating with families to support students.
3. **Tax Relief and Financial Concerns:** The superintendent emphasizes ongoing efforts to address tax relief issues, including meetings with city officials to find common ground and solutions. There is a commitment to using grant funds effectively and ensuring financial relief.
4. **Commitment to Improvement:** The district remains focused on enhancing educational outcomes and operational effectiveness through continued efforts and partnerships.

The superintendent concludes by acknowledging the contributions of other district leaders and looks forward to further updates on these initiatives.

Dr. DiGangi added the student growth report covers updates on six strategic plan indicators, with one pending until September or October. Here's a summary:

1. **9th Grade On-Track:** The metric, tracking students' progress, shows improvement over the years, despite a slight dip from 2023 to 2024. The district's current rate of 87.2% is higher than pre-pandemic levels.
2. **Graduation Rate:** The district's graduation rate stands at 88.2%, maintaining last year's level. Efforts continue to support student success and increase this rate towards the 90% goal.
3. **Chronic Absenteeism:** Although chronic absenteeism remains a challenge, with rates improving slightly from 34.6% last year, it is still a significant issue. The district is committed to addressing this through various support mechanisms.

4. **Post-Secondary Plans:** An internal metric shows that 90% of students have a definitive post-graduation plan, reflecting increased planning and support for students' future paths.
5. **Proficiency Data:** Preliminary data indicates incremental gains in proficiency since the implementation of the Pathway Proficiency Plan in 2020. However, full data is pending, with ongoing efforts to address learning loss from the pandemic.
6. **Industry Certifications:** The number of students earning industry certifications has increased significantly from 71 in 2020-2021 to 360 in 2023-2024, highlighting the district's success in vocational training and readiness.

Overall, the report highlights progress in several areas, ongoing challenges, and the district's commitment to continuous improvement.

Dr Bridge added three upcoming additions:

1. **New Public Website:** Launching August 1st, this modern, user-friendly site will feature automatic translation options to accommodate diverse languages and improve navigation.
2. **Parent and Student Tech Site:** This new resource will offer quick links, app tutorials, and guides to help families and students stay connected with school technology.
3. **Teacher Academic Site:** This site will centralize district curriculum, instructional resources, and professional learning opportunities for teachers, streamlining access to academic information.

Each addition aims to enhance communication and resource accessibility for students, families, and teachers.

Nordstrom- inquired about the significance of industry certifications for students, specifically how these certifications contribute to graduation and their alignment with earning a diploma. He also sought to understand how the district's efforts with its tech campus and industry certifications compare to other high schools. The question aimed to evaluate the impact and effectiveness of these certifications in supporting students' academic and career goals.

DiGangi highlighted that industry certifications, such as the Microsoft Office Specialist certification, were chosen based on their relevance and demand in the job market. The district selected these certifications because they were among the top in Illinois, aligning with job opportunities and enhancing students' employability.

## REPORTS AND DISCUSSIONS

### Principals' Report

#### Principal Reports:

Included and made part of these minutes:

**EXHIBIT "H" and "I", ZBTHS & ZB East Principal Reports**

## **The 2023-24 Year-End Financial Report**

Dr. Wilkinson reviewed the 2023-24 year-end fiscal report with the Board. For the 2023-24 fiscal year, the district's financial health is reported as strong, with revenues exactly meeting the budget at \$77 million, 100% on budget, and expenditures at 95% of the budget, totaling \$72.9 million. The district has successfully reduced the tax rate from \$5.30 in 2015 to \$3.40 through levy and abatement processes, saving over \$15 million in tax relief. Looking ahead, the district plans to continue its tax relief efforts and facility enhancements, despite not receiving the anticipated property tax relief grant, with a detailed financial plan to be presented at the September board meeting.

Included and made part of these minutes:

**EXHIBIT "J"**, The 2023-24 Year-End Financial Report

## **TIF Report**

Dr. Wilkinson reviewed TIF report with the Board. On July 8th, a TIF meeting at Zion City Hall reviewed two applications. The Zion Park District requested \$300,000 for the David Park construction and renovation, with half of the funds allocated for tax abatements and the other half for park improvements. Additionally, 701 Automotive sought an extra \$10,775 to cover increased costs due to state project requirements affecting their sewer and water line work. Both recommendations were forwarded to the Zion City Council for final approval.

Included and made part of these minutes:

**EXHIBIT "K"**, TIF report

## BOARD COMMITTEE REPORTS

### **Business/Bid/Finance Committee**

President Nordstrom reported that the Business/Bid/Finance Committee met on July 16th to discuss several key topics. They reviewed the 2023-24 year-end financial report, prepared for a public hearing on the 2024-25 budget, and addressed various financial and grant matters, including regular expense reimbursements and a grant for heavy-duty vehicles. They also discussed the cheerleading camp, capital improvements, and ongoing efforts with the seizure grant and the district's attendance initiative. Additionally, they provided updates on the budget process and a revived school construction grant.

## **NEW BUSINESS**

### **Public Hearing Notice 24-25 Budget**

Dr. Wilkinson stated, as mandated by the Illinois School Code, a 30-day public hearing notice must be issued for approving the district's budget. This notice will be published on August 22nd, detailing the proposed date, time, and location for the public hearing. The budget serves as a financial plan and flexible document to manage revenue and expenditures, and approval is sought to publish this notice prior to the hearing for the next fiscal year.

A motion was made by Member Champine, seconded by Member Scott, to accept the superintendent's recommendation to conduct the public hearing for the purpose of approving the 202425 budget at the September 24th, 2024 Board of Education meeting. A roll call vote of members approved the motion present voting 5-0.

Included and made part of these minutes:  
**EXHIBIT "L"**, Public Hearing Notice 24-25 Budget

### **Approval of School Board Resolution to Regulate Expense Reimbursement**

Dr. Wilkinson explained that annually, the board adopts a resolution to regulate dispensary reimbursements, and this year's resolution was included in the packet for review. A question arose during the committee meeting about a \$1,000 daily gas allowance, which is allocated for long-distance trips by the NJ ROTC program to cover expenses for multiple vehicles without needing further amendments. The resolution, with this clarification, is recommended for approval as presented.

A motion was made by Member Benitez, seconded by Member Stephen, to approve the superintendent's recommendation to approve the resolution to regulate expense reimbursement for 2024-25. A roll call vote of members approved the motion present voting 5-0.

Included and made part of these minutes:  
**EXHIBIT "M"**, School Board Resolution to Regulate Expense Reimbursement Report

### **Intergovernmental Agreement with Illinois Department of Healthcare and Family Services**

Mr. Wilkinson explained this is an annual agreement that we do with the department to ensure our students with special needs have access to services and reimbursements that the district uses.

A motion was made by Member Stephens, seconded by Member Champine, to approve the intergovernmental agreement between the Illinois Department of Healthcare and Family Services in Zion Community District 126 as presented. A roll call vote of members approved the motion present voting 5-0.

Included and made part of these minutes:

**EXHIBIT "N"**, Intergovernmental Agreement with Illinois Department of Healthcare and Family Services Report

### **Approval of Revisions to the 24-25 Public School Calendar**

Dr. DiGangi stated that due to ongoing changes in assessment procedures, the district proposes minor adjustments to the public school calendar. These changes aim to accommodate benchmark assessments and extend the testing window in the spring, especially since the science assessment will be integrated rather than separate. Overall, these calendar adjustments are intended to enhance the use of assessment data for informing instruction and class placements.

A motion was made by Member Benitez, seconded by Member Champine, to accept the superintendent's recommendation to approve the 2024-2025 school calendar revisions as presented. A roll call vote of members approved the motion present voting 5-0.

Included and made part of these minutes:

**EXHIBIT "O"**, Revisions to the 24-25 Public School Calendar

## **OTHER BUSINESS**

### **Capital Improvements Updates**

Dr. Wilkinson shared that the phase two renovations of the NTSS and IMC areas are nearing completion. Finishing touches like door frames, paint, and ceiling tiles are being added, with carpets and bathroom fixtures also installed. The renovations, including updates to the IMC with safety glass walls and a fully painted gymnasium with new bleachers and a digital scoreboard, are on track for a September 3rd completion. Temporary occupancy permits will cover unfinished items, but key areas, including the gym and IMC library, will be available for use soon after the school year begins.

Member Scott- What is NGSS? Wilkinson- Multi tiered systems.

Included and made part of these minutes:

**EXHIBIT "P"**, Capital Improvements Updates

## **CLOSED SESSION**

Member Benitez made a motion, seconded by Member Champine, to adjourn to closed session at 7:14pm 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 5-0.

## **RECONVENE IN OPEN SESSION**

A motion was made by Member Scott, seconded by Member Stephen, to return to open session at 8:09pm Motion was approved by a roll call vote of members present voting 5-0

## **PERSONNEL APPROVALS**

A motion was made by Member Benitez, seconded by Member Champine, to approve the personnel approvals as amended. Motion was approved by a roll call vote of members present voting 5-0. Included in the amended personnel approvals were:

### **Employment:**

Williams, Syncere is recommended for hire as a Zion Benton Township High School English Teacher

Arrington, David is recommended for hire as a Zion Benton Township High School Special Education Teacher.

Adde, Romell is recommended for hire as a Zion Benton Township High School Science Teacher.

Linn, Lauren is recommended for hire as a Zion Benton Township High School ZAP Counselor.

Matthews, Kayla is recommended for hire as a Zion Benton East High School Counselor.

Woolard, Tina is recommended for hire as a Zion Benton Township High School Mathematics Teacher.

Brown, Gail is recommended for hire as an Instructional Aide in the Specialized Services Department.

Peterson, Cole is recommended for hire as an Instructional Aide in the Specialized Services Department.

Quebrado-Altamirano, Brenda is recommended for hire as a Health Office Secretary

McClure, Reginald is recommended for hire as a Girls' Basketball FH Coach for School Year 2024-25.

Williams, Ira is recommended for hire as a Boys' Basketball VA Coach for School Year 2024-25

Vazquez, Kayla is recommended for hire as a Girls' Assistant Volleyball Coach for School Year 2024-25

### **Transfer/ Status Change:**

None

### **Resignations:**

Jacobs, Neil is resigning his position as Driver Education Behind the Wheel Teacher

Hutchison, Matt is resigning his position as Student Assistance Program Tri-Chair

Nelson, Eric is resigning his position as Lead Maintenance

Saed, Sama is resigning her position as School Counselor



**Retirements:**

Vargas, Patricia. is announcing her retirement as Paraprofessional.

Meyer, Tina (teacher) will retire from her position as a ZBE Physical Education teacher

Ledman, Michael (teacher) will retire from his position as a ZBTHS English teacher

De Caprio, Scott (teacher) will retire from his position as a ZBE P.E. / Drivers Ed teacher

Ruggles, Michelle (teacher) will retire from her position as a ZBE Health / Digital Ed teacher

Mitchell, Ryan(teacher) will retire from her position as a ZBTHS Social Studies teacher

Ray, Krista(teacher) will retire from her position as a ZBE Science teacher

Johnson, Carrie (teacher) will retire from her position as a ZBTHS Physical Education teacher

Patterson, Jill (teacher) will retire from her position as a ZBE Spanish teacher

Cuttill, Drew (teacher) will retire from her position as a Health teacher

Included and made part of these minutes:

**EXHIBIT "Q"**, PERSONNEL APPROVALS

**EXHIBIT "R"**, Letter of Agreement with ZBFT

**EXHIBIT "S"**, Memorandum of Understand with ZBFT VIT Program Coordinator

**ADJOURNMENT**

President Nordstrom adjourned the meeting at 8:11 pm.

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JERRY NORDSTROM, President

ATTEST:

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PATRICIA STEPHEN, Secretary

JN/PS/kr: MNJul2523R