

**BOARD OF EDUCATION
SPECIAL ORGANIZATIONAL MEETING MINUTES
NOVEMBER 21, 2023**

An organizational meeting of the Enfield Board of Education was held at the Enfield Town Hall in Council Chambers, located at 820 Enfield Street, Enfield, CT on November 16, 2021.

1. **CALL TO ORDER:** The meeting was called to order at 7:00 PM by Tina LeBlanc.
2. **PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE:** Tina LeBlanc
3. **NATIONAL ANTHEM:** Evan DiPietro, Sandhya Sowrirajan, Kyrah Spruill & Lucas Wachtel
4. **OATH OF OFFICE FOR THE NEWLY ELECTED BOARD MEMBERS:**

Town Clerk, Mrs. Sheila Bailey administered the Oath of Office for the 2023-25 Board of Education Members – Jean Acree, Dr. Gerald Calnen, Janet Cushman, Peter Jonaitis, Philip Kober, Tina LeBlanc, Amanda Pickett, Scott Ryder and Charlotte Riley.

Mrs. Bailey congratulated Board members and wished them a successful term as Board of Education members.

5. **ROLL CALL:**

MEMBERS PRESENT: Jean Acree, Dr. Gerald Calnen, Janet Cushman, Peter Jonaitis, Philip Kober, Tina LeBlanc, Amanda Pickett, Scott Ryder and Charlotte Riley.

MEMBERS ABSENT: None

ALSO PRESENT: Christopher J. Drezek, Superintendent and Mr. Anthony B. Longey

6. **ELECTION OF OFFICERS:**

Mrs. LeBlanc opened the floor for nominations for Chairperson.

a. Chairperson of the Board of Education

Mr. Kober nominated Charlotte Riley as the Chairperson for the Enfield Board of Education, seconded by Mrs. Acree. Mr. Kober read a prepared statement regarding his nomination for Charlotte Riley.

Mrs. Cushman moved, seconded by Mrs. Pickett for Charlotte Riley to be the 2023-25 Chairperson.

Mrs. LeBlanc called for a roll call vote for the Chairperson for the Enfield Board of Education.

A vote by **roll-call 9-0-0** passed unanimously in favor of Charlotte Riley as the 2023-25 Chairperson for the Enfield Board of Education.

Chairwoman Riley thanked Mrs. LeBlanc for her kind words. She appreciates your commitment and time served on the Board of Education and to our school system. She looks forward to what we can accomplish together.

b. Vice Chairperson of the Board of Education

Chairwoman Riley opened the floor for nominations for Vice Chairperson.

Mr. Kober nominated Peter Jonaitis as the Vice Chairperson for the Enfield Board of Education, seconded by Mrs. Acree. Mr. Kober read a prepared statement regarding his nomination for Peter Jonaitis.

Mrs. Cushman moved, seconded by Mr. Kober to close the nominations for Vice Chairperson. All ayes, motion passed unanimously.

A vote by **roll-call 5-4-0** passed with Dr. Calnen, Mrs. LeBlanc, Mrs. Pickett, and Mr. Ryder in dissent for Peter Jonaitis as the 2023-25 Vice Chairperson for the Enfield Board of Education.

c. Secretary of the Board of Education

Chairwoman Riley opened the floor for nominations for Secretary.

Mrs. LeBlanc nominated Scott Ryder as the Secretary for the Enfield Board of Education, seconded by Mrs. Pickett. Mrs. LeBlanc read a prepared statement regarding his nomination for Scott Ryder.

Dr. Calnen moved, seconded by Mrs. LeBlanc to close the nominations for Secretary. All ayes, motion passed unanimously.

A vote by **roll-call 8-0-1** passed with Mr. Jonaitis abstaining for Scott Ryder as the 2023-24 Secretary for the Enfield Board of Education.

7. SERVICE RECOGNITION AWARDS TO OUTGOING BOARD MEMBERS:

Chairwoman Riley stated we will now present service recognition awards to the outgoing Board members.

Chairwoman Riley recognized John Unghire with gifts of appreciation from the Board. She thanked him for his commitment and service to Enfield Public Schools. We wish you well with your future endeavors.

Mr. Unghire congratulated the 2023-25 Board on being elected. He trusts that you will all work hard together for the good of Enfield, our students, staff, administration, parents and our residents. Thank you all.

Chairwoman Riley presented Mr. Hamre with gifts of appreciation from the Board. She thanked him for his commitment and service to Enfield Public Schools. We wish you well with your future endeavors.

Mr. Hamre thanked his fellow Board members who he had the pleasure of serving with over the past two years. It has been his honor and privilege working with you all. He also thanked those who supported him throughout this process. He truly appreciates you all. He encouraged residents that are concerned about the future of our district, to attend Board meetings and get involved. Thank you.

Chairwoman Riley stated Mr. LeBlanc is not present to receive his gifts of appreciation.

8. COMMENTS, IF ANY, FROM THE NEWLY ELECTED CHAIRMAN:

Chairwoman Riley stated it is appropriate this is Thanksgiving week, she has a lot to be thankful for. She is thankful to the voters of Enfield, her family, the RTC and for Kelly Hemmler's support. She thanked her colleagues on the Board for their vote of confidence in her. She is excited to begin the hard work.

Chairwoman Riley added the role of the Board is to ensure the education system has acceptable purpose, direction, plan and policy. Board members are to exhibit civility, integrity and willingness to apply themselves wholeheartedly to support and govern the school system. It is her hope that after tonight, we can put personal politics to the side and join our dedicated staff, parents and children of Enfield Public Schools to ensure that all, each and every child gets a fair shake at a quality education that meets their needs.

Chairwoman Riley stated her goals for this term are the same as Enfield Public Schools to prepare students to become productive, lifelong learners and instill in them a curiosity and love for learning. Let's find out what captivates our students in 2023 and makes them want to come to school and be active learners in every level.

Chairwoman Riley would like to empower our staff to reimagine and collectively leverage current talent to make serious strides in building today's effective learning environments and putting the most effective teaching strategies with the right tools in place. She believes we can move the scale together and show the State of Connecticut that Enfield Public Schools can be their next rising star. Thank you.

9. COMMENTS, IF ANY, FROM THE NEWLY ELECTED BOARD MEMBERS:

Dr. Calnen congratulated Chairwoman Riley on her appointment. He thanked his wife for her support. He also thanked the voters of Enfield for giving him this honor to serve on the Board for a second term. He will do his best to not let you down. It has been an honor to serve along with his fellow board members during the last term. He will miss Mr. Hamre. Thank you.

Mr. Kober echoes comments made. He thanked the voters for putting their faith in him and his entire team to lead Enfield Public Schools for the next two years. He thanked the ERTC, and his family for their support. He also hopes to put politics aside and do what is best for our children. We need to work on common sense goals and hit the ground running. We need to look at our policies, curriculum and budget. He looks forward to fostering an environment conducive to learning and elevate our school district out of being classified as an Alliance District. We need to learn from past mistakes like pizzagate, and the lack of common sense used during Covid. We can and must do better moving forward. He looks forward to working together with his fellow Board members. Thank you.

Mrs. Pickett congratulated Chairwoman Riley. She would also like to move forward in a productive path for Enfield Public Schools. She is mad, sad and disappointed from this election cycle. There was a difference of 90 votes. Only 28% of registered voters came out to vote. She is urging that Enfield Public Schools family and staff pay attention and watch Board meetings because important decisions are being made. She urged residents to come to meetings and e-mail us about what you need.

Mrs. Pickett explained her reason why she voted no for the vice chairman. It was not political but was made for the care of our students and staff. She is hopeful for some bi-partisan productive work ahead. She believes our support for humanity should provide us with a shared value to start from. We are here to uphold the mission of the Board of Education. Her children will be impacted by the decisions we make. She wants what is best for her children and all of Enfield's students. She wants to work with the other side to support Enfield Public Schools and to increase our math and literacy scores, family engagement and creating support

and strategies for students and staff needs. She does not want to fight or battle. She would like us all to pledge to ground our decisions and do what is best for all our students. We need to take care of each other regardless of our differences. Her hope is the new majority will remember that together we can work to support our staff and students and take the time to truly understand the needs of our schools and address those needs without judgement. We need to stand for everyone. There is no magic wand to fix the mess we are in, but with commitment and remembering we are better together, and we can move forward.

Mrs. Pickett thanked the residents that are involved and show up in so many ways and for voting. She also thanked our staff, students, families and students that participated in Youth Vote. She thanked her fellow Board members, friends and family members. Someone told her the democrats lost because we were not listening. She takes offense to that comment. She takes pride in every relationship she has. She does her best to represent our families, residents and community members. She is honored to be part of her fellow democratic team. She thanked her family for everything they have done. She will continue to advocate for an inclusive and affirming Enfield where everyone gets what they need.

Mrs. Acree thanked her family for their continued support. She also thanked the ERTC and the residents that came out and voted for her. It is an honor and privilege to serve on Enfield Board of Education for another term. She looks forward to working with new and current Board members, Mr. Drezek, Mr. Longey and the administration. She hopes together as a Board, we will make the best decisions for Enfield students and staff. Thank you.

Mr. Ryder stated he is a parent that has proudly served on the Board for 6 years and has worn many different hats as a Board member, Minority Leader, Vice Chairman, Subcommittee Chair and Secretary. He has served on several joint subcommittees with our Town Council members and was also a parent volunteer. He is invested in our town and school system. He hopes we can all survive and excel in this term together. With our superintendent, assistant superintendent, and our staff, he is hopeful that we can all get on the same page regarding a vision for the future of our schools and facilities. He will continue to volunteer here and in our schools. He will continue to promote our schools, events, concerts, fundraisers, plays, and arts as he has done for the past 10 years when his daughter started kindergarten here in Enfield. He will always be present and support Enfield Public Schools, our staff and administration in any way possible. He hopes this is in the center of each of our hearts and we are not putting blinders on.

Mr. Ryder thanked his family and friends for their support. At times it has been stressful, but a lot of light has come from the journey he has been on. He loves visiting our schools, volunteering, mentoring or DJing events and fundraisers. These events all bring him light. He loves seeing how proud his children and their friends are about our schools. This gives me perspective. He is proud of his children and their friends, and we have a lot of great kids out there. He enjoyed going to Parent Teacher Conferences last week and hearing how well his daughter is doing and hearing how amazing his son is doing and hearing about his creative writing project. This is why he is here for the good days and the light they bring him and for the challenges. Thank you for supporting him.

Mr. Ryder added the Enfield's PTO PJ day will be held on Friday, December 8th. Flyers will be coming home with students and posters will be displayed at all our schools. You can make online donations at enfieldpto.com or at Enfieldpublicschools.org. He wished everyone a happy Thanksgiving. Thank you.

Mrs. Cushman stated that she appreciates the opportunity to serve another term and to serve our community, children in our schools, and the staff. It is really such an honor. She thanked so many people that have been alongside her for their support and encouragement. She thanked her campaign team, her family, and friends. She is thankful for this opportunity to sit

here with this board. Each member brings their strengths, skills and great backgrounds to this Board with a commitment to our schools, families, and students. She is honored to serve with them and looks forward to what we can do together. Thank you.

Mrs. LeBlanc explained her reason for not supporting Mr. Jonaitis as Vice Chairman was based on his actions over the past two years. She is not saying that she will refuse to work with Mr. Jonaitis and the majority party. She cannot support him in a leadership role. She respects the voting process and the people that voted for him. It was important for her to share her rationale for not endorsing the Vice Chairman of the Board of Education. We have a job to do, and she will move forward.

Mrs. LeBlanc stated going forward we have job to do. Chairwoman Riley will be a strong and fair chair for the Board. She is a mother, daughter and fierce community member. She thanked her family for their continued support. She thanked Ian Graves and the voters. She has been one of the top candidates for receiving votes. She hopes she has represented you well and will continue to represent the voters of Enfield for the next two years. Her sentiments match the other Board members about working together and the role of a Board member. She does not want this term to be contentious. She has no intention of bringing chaos or dissension among her fellow Board members. She will be the same Board member she has been for the last 12 years no matter what chair she is sitting at. She is here to support, advocate and help when needed.

Mrs. LeBlanc stated as mentioned by Chairwoman Riley and Mr. Ryder there is hope and light and she hopes we can all work together moving forward. Thank you.

Mr. Jonaitis thanked Mrs. Pickett and Mrs. LeBlanc for their kind words. He thanked Donna Dubanowski and Jason Jones for all their hard work being our campaign managers. He also thanked Sandra Hayward, Walter Kruzal, Rob Anderson, Kelly Hemmler and the ERTC members. He thanked the voters of Enfield for giving the Republican party both the Town Council and the Board of Education a chance to bring changes in how things have been done during the past 2 years. This election showed that this town is divided, and this was a very close election. We will see how things play out over the next two years when we receive our report card in 2 years.

Mr. Jonaitis added some people were not happy with how the election turned out and that he is back on the Board of Education, and some are happy he is back. He taught in Enfield Public Schools for 38 years and accomplished many great things with his students. He has served on the Board of Education previously for 3 terms. Being back is the last thing he wanted to do. There are so many things he will miss like traveling with his wife, spending time with his children and grandchildren. A lot of changes need to be made on the Board of Education and it is his hope to help facilitate some of these changes in a positive manner that will be in the best interest of our students and parents.

Mr. Jonaitis stated he would now like to address the teaching staff, ETA and members on the Executive Board. He loved teaching and it was a passion for him. There is no one way to reach all the students. His concern is coming from the interference with the Federal and State Government with education that do not know anything about education and have passed laws that handcuff good creative teaching. He believes the Department of Education along with the AFT and NEA are not serving the needs of public education. Mandates and curriculum interference have eroded local decisions that affect communities, students and districts. Education has become big business. Previously, he has negotiated 3 ETA contracts with some of the best golden health insurance plans that was envied by the State of Connecticut at one time. He was also a building representative at JFK. He would also mentor younger teachers. He will always have the backs of our teachers. There might be some disagreements at times,

but when it comes to students in our classrooms, he will always be there for the students and teachers.

Mr. Jonaitis added Enfield's demographics are changing. Enfield ranks 145 out of 169 in the State of Connecticut with the ability to pay for education. We are not a wealthy town. We can only spend what we can afford. The State of Connecticut has short changed Enfield out of money we were supposed to receive especially since we became an Alliance district which has added to our financial problems. He hopes one of the top priorities of the Town Council will be to get into our elementary schools and make the repairs that are desperately needed or take Prudence Crandall, Eli Whitney and Edgar H. Parkman and turn them into K-5 buildings and build like new like we did at Enfield High and John F. Kennedy. Thank you.

10. ADJOURNMENT

Mrs. LeBlanc moved, seconded by Mr. Kober to adjourn the Special Organizational Meeting of November 21, 2023.

All ayes, motion passed unanimously.

Meeting stood adjourned at 7:42 PM.

Scott Ryder
Secretary
Board of Education

Respectfully Submitted,

Kathy Zalucki, Recording Secretary