

**UNIONVILLE-CHADDS FORD SCHOOL DISTRICT**  
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**SPECIAL SCHOOL  
BOARD MEETING  
Minutes  
June 27, 2005**

A special meeting of the Unionville-Chadds Ford School Board was held on Monday, June 27, 2005 in the Unionville High School LGI. Mr. Wandersee, President, called the meeting to order at 7:04 p.m.

Mr. Wandersee requested that the group stand for the Pledge of Allegiance to the flag.

The following members were present: Edward Wandersee, Keith Knauss, Kathleen Brown, Curt Baker, Stephen McClaskey, Edward Murray, Bruce Swayze, Dr. Corinne Sweeney, and Timotha Trigg. Also present were Dr. John Kenney, District Superintendent, Dr. Brenda O'Hern, Jim Fulginiti, Rich Hug, Thomas Marinelli, Dr. Jim Price, Lexi Crampton (new student representative), John R. Merrick, Esquire (District Solicitor), community residents, faculty members, members of the press, and Denise Miller, recording secretary.

Mr. Wandersee stated that we would begin with comments from residents with a limit of three minutes per person. He would like to get as many comments in as we can in a total of 20-25 minutes but will close them when they become repetitive.

Carey Dickman, East Marlborough Township resident, commented that she supports whatever decision Dave Dickens makes in this matter. There is not a malicious bone in his body. The problem is not with the action but with the process. At 2:00 p.m. this afternoon, she came to the District Office and asked for an agenda. She was told that she could not take a copy home with her and asked to speak with the Superintendent who was not here. She was also unable to speak with the Assistant Superintendent who was not here. Mrs. Dickman stated that there was no reason it should not have been published on a door. She received an e-mail back from one Board member which speaks a lot to communication. Mrs. Dickman stated that the kids lose by losing Dave Dickens and by losing communication. The parents who move into a district that is open to their needs also lose.

Mr. Wandersee stated that he did not know what happened in that communication. He asked that she not lambaste the school district on this and he does not appreciate it personally. Mr. Wandersee commented that he never received an e-mail from Mrs. Dickman.

**CALL TO  
ORDER**

**MEMBERS  
PRESENT**

**RESIDENTS'  
COMMENTS**

Jay Bostwick, Pocopson Township resident and UHS alumnus, commented regarding whether there were several breakings with the Freedom of Information Act. No one should get hostile over her voicing her opinion on that and we should work out this communication problem. He commented that they cannot hear personnel information but thinks some of that should be given to them because the Act states that they should be informed. They have a right to know. Mr. Wandersee stated that he appreciated Jay's comments and asked that Mr. Knauss make his comments.

Mr. Knauss stated that he was the person who responded to Mrs. Dickman since the e-mail was sent only to him. Other Board members did not receive it. The Board recognized that questions from you have not been answered to your satisfaction. He has had numerous phone calls but has had to stop because of legal and ethical concerns. It leaves the person on the other end hanging and can lead to a breakdown in trust.

The situation concerns us deeply. There are some areas of confusion we can clear up. For instance, the performance evaluation, correction and disciplinary processes are covered under Pennsylvania state laws and our district policy. The district policy is already on the web site and we can make the applicable school law available on the web too.

Mr. Knauss commented that the Board had voted on motions both last week and this week. We could explain the reasoning behind those motions and why other options were not pursued. We could explain why the Board does not get notified of unsatisfactory evaluations and does not have the full details of any employee's evaluation. Due to the sensitive nature of the topic and legal and ethical concerns, the Board and legal counsel would have to review some sections of the material before it could be posted. Mr. Knauss also made it clear that there is some information that can never be made public. If the Board agrees, he volunteered to generate the initial material and act as editor. Mr. Wandersee thanked Mr. Knauss for this offer.

Gary Senese, Birmingham Township resident, stated that he supports what was said before regarding inconsistencies. At the last meeting, a motion was passed to investigate the situation with Mr. Dickens. He asked if that was still in effect.

Mr. Wandersee stated that our legal counsel is here but if in fact we approve the two motions before us, then that resolution is moot. Mr. Senese asked whether it would be the Board's responsibility to investigate if any employee of the organization said he was forced to resign. Mr. Wandersee responded that the Board did exactly that. That is why we passed a separate resolution to a motion to suspend Mr. Dickens with full pay, pending a hearing to resolve the issues.

**RESIDENTS'  
COMMENTS  
(Continued)**

Mr. Senese commented that there has not been an investigation. Mr. Wandersee stated that there would not be a hearing at this point if the two motions are approved. Mr. Senese asked the question if an employee is forced to resign, is that the kind of organization you want to have? Mr. Wandersee stated that we are investigating that and addressed it at the last Board meeting by having an outside agency look into the causes.

John Olsen, East Marlborough Township resident, commented that he felt kind of let down tonight. Everyone wanted to rally around Mr. Dickens as a reflection of how they felt about him but feel that the deed is done. That is why he thinks there seems to be a disconnect between the administration and the community. When we judge things, we look at respect. The kids, the parents and the teachers respect Dave Dickens and by the commitment he puts out and part of the reason they respect him is that he is at sporting events, etc.

Mr. Olsen stated that he can personally attest that he is an honest man and respects the way Mr. Dickens treated him. If he were looking for a principal, he would want someone like Dave Dickens. He understands that there are some issues that cannot be disclosed, but given the circumstances surrounding this he thinks there has been an erosion of trust. He is glad that there will be a study and hopes it will be open and transparent. If it is determined that people in this administration acted inappropriately, he hopes there will be accountability. There has to be an open accountability process to restore the trust in the community.

Mr. Wandersee stated that he appreciates Mr. Olsen's excellent comments. No one on the Board disagrees with him and we are moving forward to make sure we build trust in the community with the School Board, the administration, and the parents. We will work toward that goal. We also have great respect for Mr. Dickens and his past accomplishments.

Karen Bacci, Birmingham Township resident, commented that we should go ahead with the process that needs to be done in an appropriate manner, one that will be fitting of what we want to teach our children as an honorable process. We have many teams in our community who have been awarded for good sportsmanship and she challenged us all to go forward with that in mind. Mr. Wandersee thanked Mrs. Bacci for her well thought-out comments.

Vic Dupuis, East Marlborough Township resident, asked whether it would be incumbent upon Mr. Dickens to retire a year from now if the Board passed the motion to approve his leave of absence. Why is he put in a position to submit a letter of retirement now? Could it be tabled? Mr. Wandersee responded that it has been recommended by Mr. Dickens' counsel and our counsel to proceed as we are tonight.

Carol Catanese, Pennsbury Township resident, commented that replacements and additional staff at the assistant principal level have not been addressed in tonight's agenda. Mr. Wandersee stated that he would address it to the best of his ability. The motion is to reclassify Jim Fulginiti from Assistant Principal to Acting Principal. If this motion is approved, we will conduct a search for a principal. He cannot answer the other question regarding the assistant principal positions at this time.

Dr. Sweeney commented that she has read every e-mail that has been sent, watched the video from last week's meeting, and has spoken with many of the residents. She knows the Dave Dickens that you have described. He is a wonderful person and has always had her support. She had written to the selection committee (unsolicited) that he has the ability to listen and – a rare trait – and is a person who likes children. He continues to have her strong support. So many people have stated what Mr. Dickens has done for their children.

Dr. Sweeney stated that she voted no last week and still felt we needed to listen and not rush. A week has passed and she has spoken to Dave Dickens a number of times. She is confident that he wants them to vote yes for this motion. This is what he wants us to do at this point. She will vote yes and asked her fellow Board members to do the same.

Mrs. Brown stated that she is tempted to vote no because she would like the public to know everything that she knows. She also has spoken to Dave Dickens and also knows that this is in his best interest.

Mr. McClaskey stated that he created a decision matrix and when he looked at it, the first thing he noted was the truth be known. This is probably the only area where a public hearing would answer people's questions. In the area of legal costs, it could be substantially more than the one-year leave of absence that is being advised here and outcome is unknown. What we have in front of us here is a known factor. We were also told that this is what the administration, counsel on both sides and Mr. Dickens want us to do. He will vote yes for the motions.

Mr. Baker commented regarding an image in his head since the last meeting from the Superman movie series. The scene depicted Superman finding that Lois had been injured, got angry and turned back time to make a decision that he otherwise had not made. With 20/20 hindsight, all of those involved in this situation would have made different choices. He is deeply conflicted with regard to this outcome. Dr. Sweeney's comments have had a significant impact and if this is Dave Dickens' wish, he will support it.

**RESIDENTS'  
COMMENTS  
(Continued)**

**BOARD  
MEMBERS'  
COMMENTS**

Mr. Murray stated that he was also grateful for Dr. Sweeney's comments. He considered not accepting this resignation because also Dave Dickens lives here as a member of this community. He didn't feel we could move forward as a community. Having heard Corinne Sweeney and knowing she has spoken to him, for selfish reasons he would like it to come out as well but he will also vote yes.

It was moved by Dr. Sweeney and seconded by Mr. Knauss to approve the administrative leave of absence dated June 22, 2005, as submitted by High School Principal, Dave Dickens. A roll call vote was taken:

Mr. Baker --	Yea	Mr. Murray -	Yea
Mrs. Brown -	Yea	Mr. Swayze -	Yea
Mr. Knauss -	Yea	Dr. Sweeney -	Yea
Mr. McClaskey -	Yea	Mrs. Trigg -	Yea
		Mr. Wandersee -	Yea

Motion carried (9-0).

It was moved by Mr. Knauss and seconded by Mr. Swayze to approve the letter of retirement dated June 22, 2005, as submitted by High School Principal, Dave Dickens, with an effective date of June 30, 2006. Mr. Wandersee read the following excerpts from Mr. Dickens' letter:

*I am writing to inform you that I will be retiring from public education and from my position as high school principal effective June 30, 2006. In leaving, I will miss the staff, students, families, and colleagues with whom I have had the distinct privilege and pleasure of working over the many years I have spent in public education and, most especially, here at Unionville High School.*

*I thank the district for the opportunity to serve as assistant high school principal for eight years and high school principal for the past three years. I wish you and the district continued success as the district strives to be the "best of the best."*

A roll call vote was taken:

Mr. Baker --	Yea	Mr. Murray -	Yea
Mrs. Brown -	Yea	Mr. Swayze -	Yea
Mr. Knauss -	Yea	Dr. Sweeney -	Yea
Mr. McClaskey -	Yea	Mrs. Trigg -	Yea
		Mr. Wandersee -	Yea

Motion carried (9-0).

**D. Dickens –  
Leave of  
Absence**

**D. Dickens –  
Retirement**

Mr. Wandersee commented that it has been a very difficult time for the Board. He apologized to Mrs. Dickman if he had been a little short. He believes this is a good move for Dave Dickens. If Corinne Sweeney supports it, with that in mind, he will also vote yes.

It was moved by Mr. Knauss and seconded by Mr. McClaskey to approve the reclassification of Mr. Jim Fulginiti from Assistant High School Principal to Acting High School Principal, effective July 1, 2005 at an annual salary of \$112,000, pro-rated, and under the terms and conditions in the current Act 93 Agreement between the school district and the district administration. A roll call vote was taken:

Mr. Baker --	Yea	Mr. Murray -	Yea
Mrs. Brown -	Yea	Mr. Swayze -	Yea
Mr. Knauss -	Yea	Dr. Sweeney -	Yea
Mr. McClaskey -	Yea	Mrs. Trigg -	Yea
		Mr. Wandersee -	Yea

Motion carried (9-0).

Mrs. Brown commented that she hopes members of the public will help Jim. It is a difficult time at the high school and he will need the help and support of the parents. He is a great guy and did not want to be in this position.

Mr. Wandersee stated that after knowing Jim for a number of years, he respects his judgment immensely. He has always used good judgment and logic and is very strong in his support of his administrative colleagues. It gives him great pleasure to be able to vote yes for Jim and he looks forward to working with him. Mr. Wandersee thanked Jim for agreeing to do this.

Mr. Wandersee announced that this concluded the agenda items.

Mr. Baker thanked Mr. Olsen for his comments. He agrees wholeheartedly that as a Board we need to have a process that restores community-wide confidence in the district. He is extremely proud that we have accomplished being the number one district in the state but he also believes there is a world of difference between one-time success and sustained Success. In the weeks ahead, he hopes we can all work together to focus our efforts on what sustained success means for Unionville-Chadds Ford and then determine how we get there. In his view, the result should be an outcome that rises to that high standard as the only one that fits on students, parents, and the community at large.

Mr. McClaskey echoed Mr. Baker's comments to restore confidence in the administration and everyone else.

**J. Fulginiti –  
Acting Principal**

**BOARD  
MEMBERS'  
COMMENTS**

Mr. Knauss stated that he would be proud to put the first edition of the questions on the web in the next few days. He asked that Dr. Kenney get back to him and stated that they would be as thorough as they could be.

Dr. Sweeney stated that Mr. Dickens asked her to read a letter to the Unionville High School community as follows:

*Dear Members of the Unionville High School Community:*

*I thank you most sincerely for the overwhelming show of support I have received from the UHS Community. It has been humbly and graciously received. As the decision has been made regarding my future employment at Unionville-Chadds Ford School District at this school board meeting, I was advised by my attorney to avoid attendance to protect that agreement.*

*Please know that I have ALWAYS kept the health, safety, and welfare of my students and my faculty as my priority and my decisions have always reflected that. At this time and under this administration, this agreement is necessary for the well being of all involved.*

*The outpouring of love and concern for my family and me during this most stressful of times will be forever appreciated. To the students, I send my continued love and support and – remember – YOU ARE UNIONVILLE!!!*

*Gratefully,*

*David R. Dickens, Sr.*

The audience applauded.

Mr. Swayze stated that we have lost several good administrators for which he is deeply regretful and saddened. Much of this could have been avoided. We have a process to go through now to determine where the malfunctions were and will proceed with that process and try to avoid any future happenings. It is a process, it's in place, and it will be transparent to every extent possible and Mr. Knauss will assist with that process. There is nothing the School Board fears to hide. It's strictly a goal to heal the wounds and avoid such losses in the future.

Mrs. Trigg thanked Mr. Dickens for touching so many lives and wished him well in the future.

**BOARD  
MEMBERS'  
COMMENTS  
(Continued)**

**Letter from  
Mr. Dickens**

**BOARD  
MEMBERS'  
COMMENTS  
(Continued)**

Mr. Wandersee commented that he has always made certain that we make available the information that we can on an appropriate legal basis. He hopes we can work together in the future. The support you have shown is most appreciated and he is highly proud of it.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:42 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kathleen M. Brown  
Secretary

**BOARD  
MEMBERS'  
COMMENTS  
(Continued)**

**MEETING  
ADJOURNED**