

Board of Education Minutes
May 4, 2020

DRAFT

A special meeting of the North Stonington Board of Education was held on Monday, May 4, 2020, via Zoom meeting platform meeting ID 3204613531. Present were Mrs. Wagner, Mr. Karpinski, Ms. Welborn, Dr. Robert, Mr. McCord, Mrs. Mastroianni, Dr. Potemri, and Mr. Mendolia. Also present were Mr. Nero, Mrs. Martin, Mrs. Costa, Mrs. Wilkison, Mrs. St. Germain, Mrs. Reyes, Mr. Pont, and Mr. Boucher. Chairperson Wagner called the meeting to order at 6:04 p.m.

2. Pledge of Allegiance – The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

3. Public Comment on Agenda Items with Students Speaking First – Heidi Mehringer-Macina, parent and teacher, spoke on the special education position that was not going to be filled in the budget. She voiced her concerns about not filling that position. She explained that cutting that position is a big deal and she elaborated. She said it takes a lot of time and research to become a good teacher. She wanted to voice her concerns regarding that position.

4. Finance - a. 2020-2021 Proposed Education Budget – Mrs. Wagner said the only thing on the agenda is the budget. They went to the Board of Finance meeting last week. They are in a tough spot but we are responsible for the education of our students. She elaborated. We tried to have them look at 2.85% but they couldn't agree. The last budget we looked at and brought forward was 3.27%. She wondered how we get these things back in the budget once they are gone. She questioned if we could purchase diesel fuel ahead since the price is so low. She wondered about pre-buying supplies out of next year's budget to try to save some of those positions. Mr. Nero explained how our diesel fuel is costed out. He elaborated. He said we could look at that. There was further discussion on diesel fuel. She asked if Mr. Nero could talk to Mr. Hill (highway foreman). Ms. Welborn wanted to know if we had to send students out-of-district and having to sacrifice our students for that. Mrs. St. Germain commented on starting our own Vo-Ag program; we still had to send them there if they choose. Mr. Nero had comment on that. Mrs. Wagner said we should look at those numbers again. Mrs. St. Germain said we are having more students stay. She said it is important to note how many are staying here because of our programs. Mrs. Martin commented and said we have been able to re-coup money if a student leaves mid-year. She explained what else is in that tuition number. Questions were asked and answered. Ms. Welborn asked if we are legally bound to send these students there. She was told yes. Mrs. St. Germain had comment on the grade levels of students at Ledyard. There was further comment. Mr. McCord said the state says if a student wants to go there or a tech school, we are obligated to send them. Mr. McCord also had comment on the fuel price and that it is usually contracted for a year and he explained. He said it is up to the town to make that contract. Mr. Nero said he and Mr. Hill have an agreement about how the fuel will be charged to the school. Mr. Mendolia asked about getting money back from those schools and he was told they are doing distance learning as well. Mr. Karpinski asked about the central office costs regarding utilities, etc. Mrs. Wagner said we agreed on \$1.98 per square foot for this coming year. There was discussion on that. He had questions on what that included. Mrs. Wagner said we need to

determine that. She said the 2.85% budget is not going to work out. A lot of the taxpayers do not want these cuts. She mentioned supplies because we may have money. Mrs. Wagner asked where we should go with this. Mr. Karpinski mentioned the Board of Finance couldn't decide on a number. Mr. Nero said we were looking at a 3.27% budget and he elaborated. He said they couldn't decide on 2.85% or 2.1%. Mr. Karpinski said we did say we would not do a 2.1% budget. Mrs. Wagner said if we can fund those instructional supplies that would be the way to go. She said this is the only place we can go for cuts. We cut technology and now we need to cut supplies. She doesn't know how we will get those back. She talked about the non-lapsing account and hoped they would consider it again at this meeting. There was discussion on supplies. Mr. Nero said at their last meeting they brought up that Stonington was giving back \$300,000. He said they would have twice that amount left if they are returning that amount of money. Mrs. Wagner said people need to get away from comparing us to Stonington. She had further comment. Mrs. Mastroianni said she can't place a number. Can we make a concerted effort to make additional cuts? Was there a number Mrs. Wagner was looking at to cut the supplies? Mrs. Wagner asked how much of next year's supplies can we get this year. Mr. Mendolia said he doesn't agree with going below 2.85%. Mrs. Wagner said that number was voted down twice. She said our best bet would be to get what supplies we think we can comfortably fund this year without zeroing out the lines so we don't shoot ourselves in the foot for next year. Mr. McCord mentioned Mr. Pont's comments about technology and the condition it will come back in. Mr. McCord said we need to pick a number and force-fit it. There was discussion. Mr. Nero said he talked to the administrators about prioritizing items to help for next year. He said we are still looking at 3-4 weeks before we know better where we are. Mr. Nero had further comment. Mrs. Wagner said it wouldn't be responsible to cut those programs. Mr. Karpinski asked about the negotiations fund and if it was just attorney fees and he was told no. Mr. Nero said that he understood that the Board was trying to bring another number forward, but we will be hearing, "see they can bring it down further." Dr. Robert asked about remaining funds and if that had number had changed. He was told April's statement is not out yet. He preferred to start the one-to-one program now. Mrs. Wagner commented on what can we lower in the instructional line and pay for this year. Mrs. Martin said it is about \$47,800 to cut to get to 2.5% and that number comes from a lot of different places. Mr. Mendolia asked if there were some other place to take it and he was told no. Mr. Nero commented on our diesel costs. He said the commissioner will be making a decision on summer programs. Mrs. Martin spoke on the cost. Mrs. Wagner said if it gets saved in fuel we can make it up to supplies. Mr. Nero said if it's the Board's desire is to get to 2.5% let them meet and we can tell you where to get it from. Dr. Robert asked about taking it out of transportation. There was discussion. Mr. Nero had comment. He said for \$48,000 let us figure this out tomorrow. Mr. Mendolia said he agrees with Mr. Nero. Mr. McCord had a question about taking it out of instructional supplies. Mrs. Wagner had comment. She didn't want to take it out of fuel costs and explained. Mr. McCord said they may not go with a 2.5%. Mrs. Wagner had comment. She said if they go to a 2.1% it's on the Board of Finance. She said it would be their number not our number. They would be cutting the programs, not us. There was discussion. Dr. Potemri thought 2.5% was fair and it split the difference. She is concerned about how to make it work. Cutting supplies directly impacts kids. She wants to see if there is anywhere else to take it. Mr. Nero said he will meet with his administrators. Mrs. Wagner said we are not cutting supplies but hoping to get them this year.

Dr. Potemri said she would prefer something closer to 2.65% because that would be closer to 2.85%. She is concerned about what our savings are. Mrs. Wagner said we are already cutting it in half knowing that they will ask for more. Dr. Potemri asked if there was another place to cut. Professional development was discussed. \$6,400 will be cut out of professional development. Mr. Karpinski said we can't go into a freeze – we have to protect ourselves. Mr. Karpinski asked if we can just make the cut. Mrs. Wagner said we can just give a number. Mr. Mendolia asked if we could save more on building and grounds. Mrs. Wagner said they have been in talks with the town. Darren thought it was a bad idea to give up the grounds-we have been there before. Mrs. St. Germain said if we cut conference and travel completely and go with the one-to-one program, they will need to have some training. She said we have been zeroed out on that many times and elaborated. Teacher training supports students too. Mrs. Wagner said if we go to a one-to-one program would they offer us some training. Mr. Pont said Google does have an extensive library. He had further comment. Dr. Robert made a motion that was seconded by Mr. McCord to cut \$20,000 from supplies, \$20,000 from transportation, and \$7,800 from student activities. Dr. Robert explained his reasoning for his motion. Mrs. Wagner said the reason student activities went up was because of football and now we are cutting those programs. She said the discussion had been on supplies. Mr. Nero commented on the motion. We have already removed \$6,400 from professional development. He had further comment. Dr. Robert modified his motion which Mr. McCord seconded to cut \$21,400 from transportation, \$20,000 from supplies, and \$6,400 from out-of-district workshops. Ms. Welborn asked about the medical insurance line and how close are we to that number. Mrs. Martin replied that is based on what each person is taking now. Mrs. Wagner explained. Mrs. Wagner asked what the percentage is now. Mrs. Martin said that would bring it to the 2.5%. The motion passed with six voting in favor and two opposed. Mrs. Wagner and Mr. Karpinski opposed the motion. Mrs. Wagner clarified where it was coming from. Mrs. Mastroianni asked what was being kept in. She listed the positions still in and asked if the special services teacher was out and she was told yes and it was explained. Ms. Welborn asked if she could ask why they voted no. Mrs. Wagner said it is too low; she was concerned. Mr. Karpinski said he also thought it was too low. He said we will be going through the same process next year. He doesn't want to jeopardize the school-of-choice. Ms. Welborn had comment. Mr. Karpinski asked if we can articulate that and he elaborated. He said the school-of-choice would be great. Mrs. Wagner said there are a lot of people in support of our budget. Dr. Potemri asked Mr. Karpinski if he were the deciding vote on 2.5% how would he have voted and he said it would have been the same. Dr. Potemri commented that we need to have something that the Board of Finance will pass.

5. Calendar – The next meeting is May 13th.

6. Public Comment –None.

On a motion by Mr. Karpinski, seconded by Dr. Robert, the Board voted unanimously to adjourn the meeting at 7:13 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Roberta T. McCarthy, Secretary to the Board of Education