

Board of Education Minutes
July 22, 2020

DRAFT

A special meeting of the North Stonington Board of Education was held on Wednesday, July 22, 2020, at 6:30 p.m. via ZOOM meeting platform meeting ID 811 6836 6642. Present were Mrs. Wagner, Mr. Karpinski, Ms. Welborn, Mr. McCord, Mrs. Mastroianni, Dr. Potemri, and Mr. Mendolia. Also present were Mr. Nero, Mrs. Martin, Mrs. Wilkison, Mrs. St. Germain, and Mrs. Reyes. Chairperson Wagner called the meeting to order at 6:35 p.m.

2. Pledge of Allegiance – The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.
3. Public Comment on Agenda Items with Students Speaking First – None.
4. Old Business – a. School Re-Opening Task Force Update – Mrs. Wagner said we just had a task force meeting. Everyone has been working hard on this. Mrs. Reyes put everything together in one document. Right now, the governor said we are back to school in person. Mrs. Wagner explained the different plans, back fully, hybrid, and complete distance learning. She said none of the distance learning model will look like what it did in March and she elaborated. The distance learning piece will be different and more robust. In-school will also look different. Sub committees will meet next week. The communications piece is being worked on so the parents have the information. We want one place for parents to go. Staff and parents will be surveyed hopefully by next week. She would prefer the Board reads through the plans before they ask any questions. Ms. Welborn said she is so pleased with M&J that they are trying to work with us. She also recommended the Board look at the plan. Mrs. Mastroianni said we don't have a lot of choice in what we do but our choice is how we implement those things. She said we have a little more flexibility in how we implement. She said maybe we need to look at making distance learning a little more fluid. She thought we need to be more flexible with it and she gave examples. She wants to see us more flexible and welcoming as to what parents think is right for them. Mrs. Wagner said what you have to consider is that this is a working nightmare for teachers and administrators. She explained why we can't keep changing various students with distance learning and being at school. Mrs. Mastroianni said we are going to have kids bouncing in and out of school and explained. We have to think of other options. Mr. Nero said we don't want the students in and out. He said we are going to have sick students. We will be hitting the cold and flu season. The in and out factor complicates things. We know we will have parents holding their kids out. Mr. Nero said for sure we don't want to confuse the illness factor in this. There was discussion of children being sick with a fever as an example and not being able to go to school. Mrs. Wagner said she can't imagine that being managed. Mrs. St. Germain said the plans are fluid for when the students are sick. She said there is still accountability and explained. Mrs. Wilkison said to provide the best for our students, we want them in

school. She had comment on when a student is sick. To have them back in school is the most important thing. We are going to improve what we are doing. Mrs. Wilkison said we want to encourage them to come. The parents that decide to distance learn - that is right for them. Mr. Mendolia said he is more concerned about kindergarten through third grade with students coming in and not knowing anyone. They will need more help. He questioned about whether we could handle all the students being dropped off at once if they are not taking the bus. Mrs. Wagner said we are looking at that and will know more when we hear from the parents. Mrs. Wilkison also commented on that; she said a plan is to be determined based on the number of kids being dropped off. Mrs. Wagner said she will send the plan out to everyone later this evening. Mr. Karpinski asked if there were more of a cost. Mr. Nero said we are trying to keep it as reasonable as we can. Mrs. Wagner said the PPE and anything COVID-related is separate. There was discussion. Mr. Karpinski asked about personnel and bussing. Mr. Nero said there is no added cost for bussing. We are bringing in some extra help and beefing up our per diems. Mr. Mendolia asked who is paying for that and Mr. Nero said we are. Ms. Welborn commented on the children coming back. She said she has been able to do things to keep her family safe. How can we convey to the parents to feel better about that? Mr. Nero said we are doing everything in the CDC and state guidelines. He said the health, safety, and welfare of our students is the most important thing. He said three months ago we received the guidance of having 55 passenger busses with only 8 students on it. In June they said we could do full capacity. Mr. Nero said we are doing the best we can. Mrs. St. Germain commented and said a lot of good came out of the last meeting. She said the state has opened in full and that is why we are being told to open in full. She had further comment and said they want to know we are ready for fall and that is why we have to make sure we are. Dr. Potemri said she completely agrees with Kristen with the expectation that the governor's order is what it is. We have to look at the fluidity. Dr. Potemri said parents need to hear we are ready in North Stonington. The effort and attention to detail will go a long way but it will come down to personal choice. She said the reality is we are all concerned about the same thing. We have to communicate clearly to parents. She said this is what we are expected to do. Mrs. Wagner said the governor made the decision on June 25th to reopen school. A lot of work has been done on this. We don't want to put something out that we have to pull back. There was further comment. Dr. Potemri asked if there was an option to come back with up to grade two coming in a couple weeks later. Mr. Nero said it was 100% and he had further comment. There may be some discussion on that. Dr. Potemri talked about the approval process in Rhode Island where Connecticut doesn't have the approval process. Mr. Nero had comment about the health district not approving the plan and not the state either and wondered why the state wants the Board of Education to approve it. There was discussion. Ms. Welborn asked about considering early dismissal for the younger students and

have it considered full return. Mr. Nero asked the administrators about how that would work. Mrs. Wilkison said it would be doable. She said it is going to be difficult for these young children. She said they can always be flexible and move things around. Mrs. Wagner commented. Ms. Welborn asked about switching out students mid-day. There was comment on that. Dr. Potemri commented. Mrs. Wilkison said there are districts that still had the half-day Kindergarten so those districts could do that without ramifications. Mrs. Wagner said we will continue to look at the models.

5. New Business – None.

6. Student Success – None.

7. Community Relations – None.

8. Finances and Facilities – None.

9. Policy Votes – Ms. Welborn wanted to review polices 5144.4 and 6111. Her goal is to check a few things off the list. Mr. Mendolia made a motion that was seconded by Mr. Karpinski to approve policy 5144.4, Physical Exercise and Discipline of Students. There was discussion. The motion passed unanimously.

There was discussion on policy 6111 regarding the school calendar. On a motion by Mr. Karpinski, seconded by Dr. Potemri, the Board voted unanimously to approve policy 6111, School Calendar.

The next meeting is August 5th.

10. Public Comment - Courtney Gumbiner, parent, thanked everyone for their hard work but was a little dismayed that no surveys were sent out during this process to get the parents' feelings. She elaborated. She said it didn't sit comfortably with her that they couldn't voice their concerns. She commented on Ms. Welborn's comment on how to make the parents comfortable. She said her son has a medical condition that could harm her son being in school and distance learning would be their only option. Her six year old first grader would be required to sit in front of a computer screen all day. She truly hopes the Board focuses on how the "littles" can learn virtual. She doesn't want to be a teacher again. She understands you are being forced to open 100% yet tonight's meeting is via ZOOM but yet you want our students to be in school at full capacity. She had further comment and felt this was her opportunity to be heard. Mrs. Wagner said they talked a lot about surveys and watched what was happening in other districts. She explained that was why they felt it was important to have parent voices

on the committees. She had further comment. Mrs. Wagner said to feel free to reach out to Mrs. Wilkison with any questions. Mrs. Sheri Tardiff, teacher, commented that she would be very curious to hear what the superintendents' meeting talks about. She said in-committee was discussed that maybe they could go a shortened day and elaborated. She was interested to learn what other superintendents are thinking about. Mr. Nero talked about kindergarten being mandated versus not. He had further comment. Mrs. Wagner had further comment.

On a motion by Mr. Karpinski, seconded by Ms. Welborn, the Board voted unanimously to adjourn the meeting at 7:34 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Roberta T. McCarthy, Secretary to
The Board of Education