

Board of Education Minutes
October 14, 2020

DRAFT

A regular meeting of the North Stonington Board of Education was held on Wednesday, October 14, 2020, at 6:30 p.m. via ZOOM meeting platform meeting ID 894 4934 3899. Present were Mrs. Wagner, Mr. Karpinski, Ms. Welborn, Mrs. Mastroianni, Dr. Potemri, and Mr. Mendolia (6:34 p.m.). Also present were Mr. Nero, Mrs. Martin, Mrs. Costa, Mrs. Wilkison, Mrs. St. Germain, and Mrs. Reyes. Chairperson Wagner called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m.

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

On a motion by Mr. McCord, seconded by Mr. Karpinski, the Board voted unanimously to move Item 3, Proposed Executive Session, to Item 12.

3. Public Comment on Agenda Items with Students Speaking First – Amy French, citizen, read a letter with some questions that she had regarding the new administrators’ contract regarding the special services director/associate principal position. She stated her concerns and had some questions that she would like answered. She will email the letter to Mrs. Wagner. Mrs. Wagner will answer her questions and this position will be discussed at the next meeting.

4. Administrators’ Reports – Mrs. St. Germain wanted to make the Board aware of the PSAT tests. She spoke of spreading out the students for testing. Mrs. Reyes said all 12th graders took the SAT test. October 29th is a Thursday and grades 8-11 would come in to school; the full-distance students will be invited to come in as well. The testing times will be 7:45 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. She said they would offer a grab-and-go lunch at 12:00 p.m. She explained what the other grade levels will be doing. Mrs. St. Germain said this test is very important. On a motion by Mr. Karpinski, seconded by Mr. Mendolia, the Board voted unanimously to approve an early dismissal day on October 29th in order to accommodate PSAT testing. Mrs. Wilkison thanked all those that worked on the playground and said it is almost ready.

5. Administrative – a. Approval of Minutes – Mr. McCord made a motion that was seconded by Mr. Mendolia, to accept the minutes of the following meetings: September 9, 2020, September 23, 2020, September 30, 2020 Special Meeting, and the October 7, 2020, Special Meeting. Mrs. Wagner thanked Mrs. McCarthy for the excellent job on the minutes. The motion passed unanimously.

- b. Correspondence – None.

- c. Personnel – None.

6. Reports – a. Superintendent – Mr. Nero said we are still trying to get more per diems. He said we have been meeting every week and he is going to talk about some things when we get to the re-opening report.

- b. BOE Chairperson – Mrs. Wagner said school re-opening is main focus and she elaborated.
 - c. Committee Chairs – None.
 - d. LEARN Board of Directors’ Liaison – Mr. Mendolia said he has been attending the meetings but there is nothing new to report.
 - e. School Modernization Building Committee – Dr. Potemri said they are working through the closeout.
7. Old Business – a. School Re-Opening Plan – Mrs. Wagner said we have been working on this since March. We have had hours and hours of meetings and public comment. She had further comment. Mr. Nero said everyone is moving to go back in the coastal region. He said everything he has learned is that the kids are not getting COVID in school. He said we are preparing to go back to school. Wheeler will go back on the 9th of November and K to 6 will go back the following week. He said some things will be done extremely well but some things will need work. He said social distancing will be a problem but we will be wearing masks. We cannot teach our kids doing what we are doing in this environment. Virtual day will still be on Wednesday. Mr. Nero said he met with Ryan Mason of Service Master. He met with the entire custodial staff. He meets on the second Tuesday of the month with the teachers’ union. Mr. Nero said Mr. Mason explained the science of the cleaning. He told of some of Mr. Mason’s clients. He told us that we should be concentrating on the regular cleanliness of the building and he explained. He said for peace-of-mind if people want to use wipes they can and he explained. Mr. Nero explained the misting solution. He said we are changing our cleaning schedule and how we do things. He said we should still have the deep cleaning on Wednesday and high touch areas on Friday night, but by the time Monday rolls around, any evidence will be gone. He elaborated and had further comment. He further explained the misting process. Mr. Nero said we have to do this now. He said you can walk the halls and see all age levels with their masks on. Based on the data, he is recommending full-in with the middle-high school on November 9th and K to 6 back the 16th. Mrs. Wagner said distance learning is still an option. She had comment about not turning back in the technology. She had further comment. Mr. Karpinski asked if we can document the cleaning and who is going to schedule it. Mr. Nero said Mr. Mason said we are actually doing overkill. He had further comment on the cleaning. He told us a better way to handle it. He had further comment. Mr. Nero said we are documenting it when they clean the bathrooms and explained. We will continue to document it. He said Mr. Mason told him the most important thing is to wear masks. He had further comment. Teachers should not be spraying during the day. He had further explanation. Mr. Nero will provide a schedule. Ms. Welborn asked about the physical distance and said we should have a good plan for those distance learning. Mr. Nero commented that they have laptops and we don’t have any more to give out. In terms of physical spacing, Mrs. Wilkison was looking at tables today. We are going to try to do the best we can. Mrs. Wagner said they are continuing to look at the distance learning and they are doing better with that. Masks will be the main thing. She had further comment. Mrs. Wagner spoke of the lunch waves and the passing and they have worked on that. She said the schools that have gone back are not six feet apart. Mr. Nero said the schools that are full-in have Wednesdays off. He said it is not perfect but they are making it work. Mrs.

St. Germain listed the schools that have recently gone back full. She had further comment. She said everyone said it is going well. Mrs. St Germain said they looked at lunch and passing. She spoke of music and band and had comment about maintaining distance. Mr. Nero said everyone has to understand that it is the same protocol and elaborated. We will follow the directions exactly. He said Service Master is ready in case we need them to come in. Mrs. Wagner said Ledge Light came out with new protocols today. Mrs. Wilkison spoke of her lunch waves. They may have figured out a way to make it work. Mrs. Mastroianni spoke of the staffing concerns from last week. Does the staff feel more comfortable with this? Mr. Nero said they kind of had a clue yesterday that this would happen. We have an MOU (Memorandum of Understanding) with them. He understands those with the health issues; there are forms people can fill out with the different categories to see if they qualify. He had further comment. The reality is that they know we are not giving what the kids need. This is happening in other school districts. Mrs. Wagner said we are going to work with those that have health issues. She said the masks are so important. We need to get them back. We have discussed this and heard comment. Parents really want their children back in school. Mrs. Wagner said she feels if anyone can do it North Stonington can do it. She said you will see districts going in and out. There will be a population choosing to do full distance. It's not that we haven't heard we have to make a decision. Dr. Potemri was curious with staff involved and said she supports Mr. Nero's recommendation. Mrs. Wagner had further comment. She said we tried to address the survey concerns. Mr. Mendolia said he was nervous at the beginning but he has friends whose kids are back already. He doesn't mind the kids going back but he would still like Wednesday at home. Mr. Nero explained Wednesday is still a cleaning day. Mrs. Wagner explained that she has heard from people thinking of enrolling their students in private school to keep up with their education. She said it is a tough decision but we have to jump in. Mrs. St. Germain said our nurses have been amazing and she elaborated. They have been managing it very well. Staff can go to them as well. Mrs. Wagner said they are all amazing. Mr. Mendolia had comment on the old building. Mrs. Wagner had comment. She said the administrators felt they didn't need it. Dr. Potemri said her son attends a private school. They recently had a case where there was a person was positive and they were in the nurse's office so the nurse is out. What is our backup? Mrs. Costa explained. Mr. Nero had comment on the isolation rooms and how that should have been utilized in that situation. Mrs. Wagner had comment and said we have to deal with this as it comes. Mr. Nero had comment on some of the situations we have had. He elaborated. We have a plan in place; there is no panic. He explained the process. Dr. Potemri said she appreciates that and commented on the nurses. Mrs. Wagner said these three weeks will give us time to look at things closer. Mr. McCord wanted to make sure that our plan is a living document and we'll adjust it as needed. Mrs. Wagner said yes. We are working on a check sheet and she elaborated. She said if the numbers change drastically, we can pull back. She had further comment. She said it is happening due to social groups. The uptick is not in restaurants, or in schools, but from social situations. She had further comment. Mr. McCord said at some point we have to get the kids back to school and he elaborated. We have to make it as safe as possible for the students, faculty, and other employees and personnel. There is a responsibility that others have. Mr. McCord said the cleanliness is not only for the custodians but for the teachers and staff. Everyone has to be responsible for their part. Mr. Nero agreed and said that is so important. He

had further comment. He said the experts say we have to wear a mask. Mr. McCord had further comment. We have until November and if we need to adjust our plan we can. He is favor of going back in full. The kids really need to be in school if we can possibly do it. Mr. McCord said he realizes the teachers are apprehensive and he had further comment. Mrs. Wagner said the plan has been presented and she wants a motion. On a motion by Dr. Potemri, seconded by Mr. McCord, the Board voted unanimously to approve version 15 of the plan to return to school. Mrs. Wagner said we are going to watch this and make sure we are doing this right. She had further comment. She thanked all those that have worked so hard on this.

8. New Business – a. 2021 Meeting Schedule – Mrs. Wagner explained the reasoning of the two versions. Mr. Karpinski asked if there was someplace else we could go. Mrs. Wagner explained. On a motion by Mr. Karpinski, seconded by Ms. Welborn, the Board voted unanimously to approve version one of the 2021 meeting schedule.

9. Facilities and Finance – Mrs. Wagner said the finance information was sent out earlier by Mrs. Martin. Any questions can be sent to Mrs. Martin. This will be acted on at the next meeting. Mrs. Wagner asked about the Chrome Books from the state. Mrs. Martin said she hasn't heard from them yet and she will follow-up and continue to work on that. Mrs. Wagner said Mr. Nero is working with the bus company. Mr. Nero said he and Mrs. Martin met with them yesterday and elaborated. There was further comment. Ms. Welborn wondered if we had any feeling of winter sports. Mrs. St. Germain said they are looking at this but she is just not sure because this is indoors. They are listening very carefully to the health districts and there is not a lot out on that yet.

10. Calendar - The next meeting is two weeks from now. A special meeting will be held on November 4th. A regular meeting is on November 18th. We were talking about a Saturday workshop on the 24th at 9:00 a.m. for policy work and the strategic plan. The 24th will be in-person.

11. Public Comment – Roberta Curry, teacher, wanted to clarify that the teachers don't mind working harder. She would love them to not be a vector. She said they had a great meeting yesterday and she wanted to clarify for the public that the dividers are not Plexiglas and elaborated. We are going to need time. We will need shortened days or early dismissal days. Mrs. Curry said she would like them to come in and see the classroom sizes. Mrs. Wagner explained why she didn't come in because under the hybrid plan there are no visitors allowed and she elaborated. She said she struggled with breaking our own policy. Mrs. Curry suggested a video conference and elaborated. There will be a serious lack of space. She spoke of the children wearing masks. She thanked the Board for their time. Carolyn Bennett, citizen, wanted a summary of Service Masters' meeting. She had further comment. She asked what the numbers would be before we would have a shutdown. Mrs. Wagner had comment. Mrs. Bennett said she would like more information on the neighboring districts rather than districts 40 minutes away and elaborated. Sam Cherenzia, parent, thanked the Board and the teachers for putting this plan together. The kids need to get back to school. He realizes there is some apprehension but the kids need to get back. He thanked everyone. Lauren Powers(?), parent, had comment on the cleaning and felt the midday bathroom cleanings

should stay in place. She commented on going back full time and said it's early in the year; flu season hasn't started yet. She said Norwich has had a lot cases. She had further comment. It is inviting a lot of very negative things that could further disrupt what is happening now. She elaborated. We don't need to be quite so rushed. What we have been doing to keep everyone safe should continue. Mrs. Wagner said we are not downgrading our cleaning process and she explained. Mrs. Wagner said Westerly is full in and Ashaway is full in. If we want to look at more Rhode Island schools she can do that. She had further comment. We have looked at this and looked at this. If kids are distance you can still be distance. If you are not comfortable you can put your kids in distance. Courtney Gumbiner, parent, wanted to talk about the nursing situation. She had explanation. She spoke of allowing her first grader to go hybrid. She had explanation of her choice if we go back in person. One nurse between two schools is not sufficient. She elaborated. Please take a close look at the preparedness for those children who need to have that medical attention. Mrs. Gumbiner agreed with Mrs. Bennett about our surrounding towns and had comment. As a parent who has had children in the system for a number of years she has been able to form relationships with the teachers and to see their faces this evening is very disturbing. She feels their voices are not being heard. Mrs. Wagner said we are going to look at the nursing situation. Linda Coats, teacher, said she has gotten texts from parents saying they are too upset to speak tonight. She said the custodians do a fantastic job. She feels they have not been heard and she is so discouraged. Why do we have to rush into this? She spoke of the spacing. She spoke of mask breaks. She said everyone has been responsible and she gave examples and said we are doing the right thing. She asked about CDC 6-foot guidelines. She spoke of the dividers. Mrs. Coats said she is disappointed. She hopes you are right and that the cases won't grow. Heidi Mehringer-Macina, teacher, spoke of the significant change coming in July. She asked why the Board of Education decided to change the special education director to half-time position. She elaborated. She felt we will be in a pickle with more students possibly becoming to special education. Mrs. Wagner explained we are going to do a response to this and a detailed explanation at the next meeting. Mrs. Mehringer-Macina spoke of the extra time for the current high/middle school associate principal. Mrs. Wagner said duties have been reallocated; she will get answers to that. Mike Westgate, parent, sent letters regarding this and hasn't gotten an answer. Mrs. Wagner said she sent out an email asking for a phone conversation. There was discussion. Melissa Burdick, parent, said Griswold just went to full distance and NFA just expanded their distance learning. There was discussion. Mrs. Wagner said we looked at this and are still looking at this. We put out a plan that is weeks away. The re-opening plans have been out since July. We have filed them with the state. The Board is working toward bringing the kids back. We are going to continue to look at this. There was discussion. Mr. Mendolia had comment and asked if the kindergarten dates could be pushed back. Mrs. Wagner said it could and she explained. We have to listen to all. There was further discussion. She said we have made a decision. Mr. Mendolia thought it was just first and kindergarten that are complaining. He would hope they could meet with Mr. Nero. Mr. Nero said we have done surveys and elaborated. He gave a plan to the Board to vote on; if you want to adopt something else you can do that. Mr. Mendolia thought we could meet in the middle. Dr. Potemri wanted to hear from Mrs. Wilkison and assumes she has worked with her teachers. Mrs. Wilkison said they have been working on a plan to get the kids in as safely as possible. Teachers are concerned

about the classrooms. We will do our best to keep the kids safe. She said she has worked with Mr. Palmer on how to keep the kids separate at lunch. The kindergarteners sit at tables. We are going to do our best. We are concerned about them academically and we are concerned about their safety and health and will find solutions. Mrs. St. Germain said a plan needs time to develop. She had further comment. She had comment on the current trends. We need time to put things together. Mrs. St. Germain said we can't not talk about a plan because it makes people uncomfortable. It is not just the elementary teachers that are uncomfortable. She said she heard we can pull back but we are getting prepared. Dr. Potemri said that was her understanding as well. We heard in our last meeting that teachers were not heard. She said we still have an obligation to be prepared. She is not quite sure where the breakdown is with the teachers that are not happy. Dr. Potemri said as a Board, we asked for a plan. If we were in a position to go back, we would. Mrs. Wagner said at some point we have to move forward and she had further comment. She mentioned that as Mrs. St. Germain said, this is a place to start to bring our kids back. Stephanie Goodwin, teacher, asked if it were possible to get desks for the little ones instead of putting them at tables? We can try our best to separate them. Mr. Nero said the choice of the dividers at the elementary school was with the administrator. He had further comment. He said the best method is for everyone to wear their masks. We have been focusing on what is best that would work. He had further comment. Mrs. Goodwin said she is not trying to point fingers. Mrs. Wagner said she is perplexed as to why these suggestions have not been brought up. She said there are desks in the old building. She said the Board wants to give the resources that are needed. She said these things shouldn't be brought up in public comment. Mrs. Wilkison said the concern about the tables was brought up before. Mrs. Wagner had further comment. She said we are willing to listen. There was discussion. Mrs. Wagner said we have voted in a plan and let's see how to do this safely. She had further comment. Mrs. Wagner said let's look at what we can do and not at what we can't do. Dr. Potemri asked Mr. Nero to come to the Board with the resources they need; their role is to approve and finance the recommendations. Mr. Nero said there may have been one comment about Plexiglas. He asked the administrators to ask their staff what they need but to also be practical. He said that obviously, we want to keep everyone safe. We have been meeting. He said this Board has allowed a tremendous amount of public comment and they have given the opportunity to be heard. He said the percentage of people on the meeting don't want this to happen. He said Mrs. Wagner has given the public a tremendous voice and the teachers as well. Carolyn Bennett, citizen, yielded her time to Mike Anderson because he has not had a chance to speak. Mr. Anderson, parent, said this has been a great conversation and the teachers and administrators are doing a great job. With the younger children, maybe with them being able to see their peers, maybe the PTO can take that on (funding dividers). Maybe parents could contribute to the proper PPE and he elaborated. He said this is a time to listen to each other. There are a lot of people willing to work together. Mr. Anderson said he felt the vote was the right thing; now is the time to try to do this model. There are parents out here willing to work to help. Mr. Anderson said you are all doing a fantastic job and he is really proud of their town. Mrs. Martin said they have ordered all clear dividers and those are three weeks out. She said as part of their meeting yesterday with the union, she investigated purchasing them. Carolyn Bennett, citizen, wondered about the version of the plan that is on the web site. She spoke of the dead link of the survey. Mrs. Wagner said we put up

the plan that was sent to the state. She said now that it has been approved, it will go up. Mrs. Wagner said this is the first step to getting our kids back to school. Communication is important and we will continue to have conversations.

12. Proposed for Executive Session – a. Personnel – On a motion by Mr. Karpinski, seconded by Ms. Welborn, the Board voted unanimously to adjourn to Executive Session at 8:30 p.m. for the Purpose of Personnel and to invite Mrs. McCarthy into such session.

The Board came out of Executive Session at 9:04 p.m.

On a motion by Mr. Karpinski, seconded by Mrs. Mastroianni, the Board voted unanimously to adjourn the meeting at 9:04 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Roberta T. McCarthy, Secretary to
The Board of Education