

Board of Education Minutes
September 23, 2020

DRAFT

A regular meeting of the North Stonington Board of Education was held on Wednesday, September 23, 2020, at 6:30 p.m. via ZOOM meeting platform meeting ID 81068126579. 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, and Mr. Bryant. Chairperson Wagner called the meeting to order at 6:32 p.m.

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

3. Public Comment on Agenda Items with Students Speaking First – Dan Spring, citizen, and Board of Finance Chairperson, commended the Board of Education, teachers and staff for the great job getting school started. He said we have accomplished a lot; we have two new schools. His consideration for the Board would be to call it the Wheeler Campus. He suggested the Wheeler Elementary School and explained his reasoning for it. He thought it should be the Wheeler Campus. Marilyn Kiddy, third grade teacher, spoke on behalf of the third grade team. She thanked the Board. She said the staff is very hard-working. In these times, so much effort is being put forth. They have tripled their work load and she explained. They have to learn new technology as they go and she elaborated. She explained how lessons are put together and the work that goes along with it. She explained further. She spoke of the struggles parents and students have at home. She wanted to let everyone know about their struggles. She said it's not that they don't appreciate what you have done for them, but it is extremely difficult. Distance learning is very hard for the young children. Mrs. Wagner had comment and thanked her for coming forward. She said the Board appreciates all they are doing. Roseanne Salisbury, parent, said she has a fourth grader and a kindergartener. She wants the Board to seriously consider opening full time. She said the hybrid is really not working. On paper it seems like it's a piece of cake but it's not. There is no call-in live stream yet for assignments. She said if the science and data is there we should consider re-opening. She thanked the Board for their time. Jessica Zichichi, parent, echoed the comments of the prior speakers. She has a child in seventh grade and one in fifth grade. With respect to re-opening, she was initially a fan of the hybrid plan but seeing how it is playing out with very little live stream it's not working. She recognizes how challenging it is and explained further. She wanted to reflect both speakers. Mrs. Zichichi said it has not gone as well as she has hoped. If there is a way to return in person, we would be well-served to consider that. Will Barber, a fifth grade student, doesn't like that the name may be changed; he likes the name (North Stonington Elementary School). He said it would be weird for the school to have two different names. Louis Mastroianni, student, said he has a lot of trophies from drama with North Stonington Elementary School and thinks if the name is changed, it won't mean anything anymore. Anna Barber, student, agrees with Louis. She has a lot of awards with the North Stonington Elementary School. The school has a lot of them around too and what would we do with those? It won't be the same because of the name. Miss Barber said she has a lot of memories there too. Mrs. Wilkison, principal, said she is so proud of our students for speaking up about the school. We have many awards and have even been rated as a top elementary school. We would lose our history if we change the name. She is so proud of her teachers and all the North Stonington teachers

for the hard work they have put forth during this time. Mrs. Wilkison said there would be more online learning. Mrs. Wagner thanked her for her comments and said she is sorry we are losing her. Heather Sabolesky, parent, has a sixth and seventh grader. She wanted to echo the sentiments of the previous speakers. She is impressed with teachers and staff members. Her husband is a nurse at Yale New Haven Hospital which is an hour and a half away from New York City. She said there are no cases of COVID at that hospital. Local hospitals have no cases of COVID. We need to get our children back to school full time so parents can get back to work full time so they can pay their taxes. Mrs. Sabolesky said each parent should have a choice as to whether they go to school full time. She had further comment regarding distance learning and hybrid plans. She said the kids are doing well with distancing and wearing a mask. We need to at least try for a full return to school. Brett Mastroianni, citizen, wanted to follow-up on the name change. He doesn't feel we should change the name. He appreciates the history. With the recent school building, we should pay homage to those that helped get it built and keep the name.

4. Proposed Executive Session – a. Contract Negotiations – On a motion by Mr. Karpinski, seconded by Ms. Welborn, the Board voted unanimously to adjourn to Executive Session at 6:34 p.m. for the Purpose of Contract Negotiations and to invite Attorney Grello into such session.

The Board came out of Executive Session at 7:38 p.m.

5. Ratification of Tentative Bargaining Agreement between the North Stonington Board of Education and Local 1303-134 of Council #4, AFSCME, AFL-CIO – On a motion by Mr. Karpinski, seconded by Dr. Potemri, the Board voted five in favor, one against, and one abstention to ratify the tentative bargaining agreement between the North Stonington Board of Education and Local 1303-134 of Council #4, AFSCME, AFL-CIO. Mr. McCord voted against the motion and Mr. Karpinski abstained.

6. Ratification of Tentative Bargaining Agreement between the North Stonington Board of Education and the North Stonington Federation of School Administrators – On a motion by Mr. Karpinski, seconded by Mr. Mendolia, the Board voted unanimously to ratify the tentative bargaining agreement between the North Stonington Board of Education and the North Stonington Federation of School Administrators.

7. Old Business – a. School Re-Opening Plan – Mrs. Wagner said we are going to look at this again according to the timeline set by the task force. She is meeting with the administrators on Friday. A meeting with the task force is set for Monday at 6:00 p.m. They checked with Ledge Light and there are no cases in North Stonington. She said we need to look at the data and more will come on this. We will be revisiting it in the next couple of days. Mr. Karpinski asked what the transition time would be and Mrs. Wagner said that hasn't been decided yet. Mr. Karpinski asked in the time being can we do anything to help with the shortcomings. Mr. Nero said the shields came in today. He said the biggest problem is at the elementary school and explained why. He said we have been discussing how to do this. He reiterated to the parents about everything we have been doing at school and asked the parents to try to do the same as well. Mr. Karpinski had further comment. Mr. Nero said we have

the liaison meetings every month and elaborated. Mrs. Wagner said she sent out to the Board the information from Mrs. St. Germain about what they are doing to make this as smooth as possible. Mr. McCord asked about the shields and dividers and how are we going to be doing that. There was further discussion. She encouraged the Board members to attend the task force meeting on the 28th. Dr. Potemri explained the breakout of the task force and that she is impressed with what has been brought to the table. Mrs. Wagner had further comment.

b. Elementary School Playground – Mrs. Wagner said the PTO has done a fantastic job putting up a new playground and she elaborated. She spoke of the need for the woodchips and the situation they are in. There was discussion. On a motion by Dr. Potemri, seconded by Mr. Mendolia, the Board voted unanimously to approve the PTO's request for \$10,000 for woodchips to complete the playground. Beth Kimmse had comment and thanked the Board. She said that \$10,000 will get them open. She had further comment on the playground and the needs. Questions were asked and answered. She spoke of the rubber matting as compared to the wood chips. Mrs. Wilkison spoke of the hard work they have done to get the playground built. She thanked them and the community members.

c. Strategic Plan – Mrs. Wagner said during the committee meetings, the strategic plan was discussed. She said we need to get back to the strategic plan. We may want to get together for a workshop to discuss this. She elaborated. We need to go through it again and refresh ourselves. October 24th at 8:30 a.m. will be a special Board meeting to discuss policy and the strategic plan.

d. Stipend Review Committee – Mrs. Wagner explained the committee and that this needs to be done soon. Questions were asked and answered. Mr. Karpinski, Mr. Mendolia, and Dr. Potemri would be available.

8. New Business – Re-naming of the Elementary School – Mrs. Wagner doesn't think we should move on this at this point; it stirred up a lot of emotion. Mr. Urgo, First Selectman, said he didn't think this was controversial at all. During the project and now with the schools together it was a thought and he elaborated. Ms. Welborn didn't think we should just put it off. The Board all agreed that they are proud of these wonderful and beautiful schools we have now and don't see a need to change the name of the elementary school.

b. Technology Re-Location – Mrs. Wagner said the Board received the RFP. She had comment. Mr. Karpinski asked about moving it across the street. There was discussion. Mr. Nero said Mr. Pont should be the technical contact and Mrs. Martin should be the business contact. Mrs. Mastroianni had some questions reading through the email chain. Do we have a ball park figure of what we are looking at? Mrs. Wagner said we don't have a cost on that – the RFP does that. She asked if this was a fact-finding mission and she was told yes. Mr. Nero said that the first time Mr. Pont saw that RFP was this week. There was discussion. Mr. McCord asked where it is being moved to. Questions were asked and answered. Mr. Nero had comment and explanation. Mrs. Wagner had comment. Board members had comment. There was discussion. Mr. Nero had comment. Mrs. Wagner said we will meet on that.

9. Student Success – Covered above.
10. Community Relations – Covered above.
11. Facilities and Finance – a. July 2020 Financial Statements – On a motion by Mr. Karpinski, seconded by Mr. McCord, the Board voted unanimously to approve the financial statements for the period ending July 31, 2020.
b. August 2020 Financial Statements – Mr. Karpinski made a motion that was seconded by Mr. McCord to approve the financial statements for the period ending August 31, 2020. Mrs. Wagner said now that both contracts have been ratified that we move the items from the negotiations fund. The non-lapsing account was discussed. There was discussion. Dr. Potemri said the modernization committee is meeting on Monday and the transfer will be done. The motion passed unanimously.
12. Public Comment – Linda Coats, teacher, invited the Board of Education members to come in and see what it is like in the school. She explained how hard it is for the little kids to stay separate. We lose time with the heavy bathroom doors and washing hands but they are making it work. Mrs. Coats explained about teaching virtually and they are working on that piece too. She asked if they are looking at coming full-in and if they were it would be a mistake. It would not work with the number of students. Mrs. Coats explained. She feels they are starting to make gains. She understands the needs for parents to get to work but one parent, one child, one teacher getting sick is one too many. She spoke of am/pm groups and that it would be so much more effective. Mrs. Coats said if we go in full, how many parents would pull out and how many staff members would not return. She thanked the Board for the opportunity to speak. Heather Sabolesky, parent, said they all completely respect the opinions of the teachers; there should be talks about phasing in with the different age groups. There needs to be a referendum and a vote on this. She had further comment. Mrs. Sabolesky reiterated there should be a vote with a choice. Dr. Potemri asked about visiting the schools and she was told no visitors are allowed in the buildings. Mrs. Wagner said we would be there if we could. Kristi Williams, teacher, agreed with Linda Coats and is uncomfortable with a full return. She said Covid is moving closer. There is no more room for kids. Laura Mello, parent, wanted to mention she was a huge proponent of the hybrid. She said she is worried about when Mrs. Wilkison retires in December. We will still have full distance learners and she elaborated. She wondered if the Board has considered using some of the COVID dollars to bring in more support. She commented on her child's schedule. She said there is a need for additional support for this type of learning. She said she mentioned this before that we need more support not less. She elaborated. Mrs. Mello wondered what the plan is going forward in December when Mrs. Wilkison does retire. Karen Lungren, teacher, had a question about the task force and wondered if the information would be available to the members ahead of time and Mrs. Wagner said yes. Roberta Curry, teacher, thanked the Board for approving the wood chips. She said her students have been looking out the window at it. She commended Mrs. Wilkison for her hard work. The teachers are grateful to the Board for the PPE and their efforts to supply technology. She said we are making it work. Mrs. Curry said as difficult as it is, teachers are still concerned about students coming in for a full return because of the space. The fear of having more children and

having to keep that distance is a concern. Beth Kimmse thanked all the teachers. She asked if there was anything the parents could do to support the teachers. She had further comment on the hard work of the teachers and that there are many willing to organize on their end. Mr. Nero said there was discussion earlier about renaming the school. He spoke of the plaque on the wall with the wrong school name and said that had nothing to do with the renaming suggestion. Mrs. Wagner said we have a lot of hard work ahead of us.

On a motion by Mr. Karpinski, seconded by Mrs. Mastroianni, the Board voted unanimously to adjourn the meeting at 8:36 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Roberta T. McCarthy, Secretary to
The Board of Education