

Board of Education Minutes
September 30, 2020
Special Meeting

DRAFT

A special meeting of the North Stonington Board of Education was held on Wednesday, September 30, 2020, at 6:30 p.m. via ZOOM meeting platform meeting ID 84461221964. Present were Mrs. Wagner, Mr. Karpinski, Ms. Welborn, Mrs. Mastroianni, Dr. Potemri, and Mr. Mendolia. Also present were Mr. Nero, Mrs. Martin, Mrs. Wilkison, Mrs. St. Germain, Mrs. Reyes, and Dr. Hartmann. Chairperson Wagner called the meeting to order at 6:31 p.m.

2. Pledge of Allegiance – The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.
3. Public Comment on Agenda Items with Students Speaking First – None.
4. Presentations – a. COVID-19 Pediatric Cases – Current Data - Mrs. Wagner said the task force had a good meeting on Monday night. Dr. Dan Hartman will be presenting tonight. She gave his background information including his membership on the School Re-Opening Task Force and being director of emergency services for Yale New Haven Health. Dr. Hartman explained what his presentation was about. He said none of this is his opinion-this is strictly facts and data. He explained the data came from a recent study. He went over the number of cases involving children. The next slide broke out the number of cases by state. He reviewed the numbers for Connecticut. He said we know that children get COVID but the question we need to answer is how severe is it in children. They base that on how many children need to go to the hospital. He said 1.7% of the children are sick enough to be in the hospital. He explained that .009% of children in Connecticut needed to be hospitalized. He spoke of mortality. He spoke of one of the tables and said this is a cumulative table and there have been 109 children deaths due to COVID in the United States. He said the flu took 188 children last year. He said this is the most useful information because it is up-to-date. He reviewed the breakdown of children needing hospitalization. Dr. Hartmann explained the low threshold facilities use for a child being admitted to the ICU. He went over MIS-C, Multisystem Inflammatory Syndrome in Children and said it is very rare and elaborated. He summarized his presentation. He said the children that catch COVID do very well. Mrs. Wagner thanked Dr. Hartmann and said it is very important that we have the facts. The presentation will be put on the web site.
5. School Re-Opening Plan - Ms. Welborn asked when the survey results will be back. Mrs. Wagner reviewed the results as of 5:30 p.m. today. She explained right now there would be 25% distance learning which would lower our class sizes. Mrs. St. Germain said the survey is due on Friday. Mrs. Wilkison said parents had passed along their concern that there wasn't a choice about hybrid. Mrs. Wagner said we have gotten that information and were looking towards a full return. The end of marking periods was discussed. Mrs. Wagner spoke of some schools that will be going back full. Questions were asked and answered including can we stagger the return. Ms. Welborn said she is a teacher in Colchester and said she absolutely does not want full-distance. Her

biggest concern is pushing forward too quickly on a full return may have us ending up all distance. She wanted to focus on the elementary school full time and see how that goes. Mr. Mendolia asked about sending the middle-high school back since they are older and more mature and able to handle the distance. Mr. Karpinski said we should look at the survey results and he was assuming the committee would meet again. He said we need a structured return. He had other questions. He would like a structured full return but we need to have everything in place. Mrs. Wagner said we are not going to do this overnight. We should do this around the grading periods and she elaborated. Ms. Autran, teacher, had an idea about the distance learners that are struggling and explained about bringing in those struggling. Mrs. Wagner said we have the space to bring in the students that are struggling. She suggested staying in the hybrid until November and asked what the Board thought about looking at that idea. Ms. Welborn asked what grade level the help for distance learners would be. Mrs. Wagner said we had talked about this a little bit; it would be problematic for the younger children. Mr. Nero explained the room spacing. Mrs. Wilkison said it would probably be grades four, five, and six but not the younger children and she explained. Mr. Nero said he was going to ask his superintendents' group about having volunteers in the school. There were questions asked and answered. Mr. Nero said it would be the same person that would be coming in. Mrs. Wilkison talked about the cohorts and keeping the kids in the same cohorts. Mrs. Mastroianni said she would rather see us put our resources into reopening. She would like us to have a good plan to return. She said as we have moved through the first month, we have had seen children mixed with other children through rec, etc. She said it is time to have us think about getting our kids back safely. She would like to have us take the time to try to help with the spacing needs. She wants to put our energy in to that. Mr. Mendolia asked about doing half-days. Mrs. Wagner said Mr. Nero is looking into that a little bit. She said our parents want our kids back in school. They wanted it in the first survey. Mrs. Wagner said if we bring the reopening task force back together, maybe we task each of the small committees and have them work on bringing back certain groups and then bring that back to the Board of Education. Questions were asked and answered. Mr. Mendolia would like the teachers' input. Ms. Welborn felt the administrators would be the ones to figure it out. She felt she would like to see K-3 do a full return first with a half-day and she explained. Mr. Nero asked for clarification. Mr. Nero explained the transportation piece and the cost. He thought if we went to something like that we would be hedging. He said he has been talking to superintendents that have been doing this from the beginning and he said they have their struggles but they work through it. He would rather have them go full-in. Questions were asked and answered. Mr. Nero said it would still be a Monday-Tuesday, Thursday-Friday week with Wednesday as a deep cleaning day. He asked if that was still the case and he was told yes. Dr. Potemri asked how long the deep cleaning takes and Mr. Nero said they work all day on that. He said on the other days it is important to get the high-touch areas done and he explained. Dr. Potemri spoke of the cleaning company they use and elaborated on the cleaning schedule. Mr. Nero had comment on that. There was discussion. Questions were asked and answered. It was brought up about teachers managing distance learners and those in the classroom and asked if there were any way we can join those distance students together. Ms. Welborn wanted to bring that up. Mrs. Mastroianni wanted to make sure we are taking a fiscally responsible approach. She spoke of the distance learning and how hard it is. She said we need to make distance

learning more seamless. Mrs. Mastroianni said we need to make sure our staff is supported. She gave examples. Mr. Nero said there is a national teacher shortage so trying to get extra support in that area will be hard. He spoke of sanitizer in the classrooms. He said he is not a scrooge on this but he has to be fiscally responsible. There was discussion. Dr. Potemri said we need to build a plan and if we are planning to do a full-in, how do we make that work and she elaborated. For those districts that are transitioning or are going in full, how are they doing it? Mrs. Wagner spoke and said we need to look at the data. We need to have a plan in place where people are comfortable. We need to have a timeline on that. She had further comment and said we need to start preparing for this. She had further comment and she said we at least need to start to plan. Dr. Potemri said we as the board may have our own suggestions but we don't know the numbers and hall passing. She said it's important that it comes from the schools as to what they can do and what they need. If they are part of developing that plan, that may help reassure them. Mrs. Wilkison wanted to state that if you bring 15 back in the classroom and have 5 distance learners that will be problematic. It is a lot and it is not going to ease the burden on the teachers and she elaborated. Mrs. Wagner said we really need to look at that distance learning piece and see if we can do it differently. Questions were asked and answered. Mrs. Wagner reiterated we do need to look at the distance learning. We really need to nail down this piece. Mrs. St. Germain said there is a plan in place for a full return. She said there is a full return plan in the plan already. She said her worry is when the staff gets sick. What do we do with the kids when we have teachers out? What will the impact be? She wanted to make sure we talk about that. She said the full plan is in your hands. Will we have the resources to pull off a full return? Mrs. St. Germain said we talk about the students a lot but we need to talk about the staff. She wants to make sure we have the resources in hand. She had further comment. Mrs. Wagner asked if it would be helpful to reach out to these larger districts to see how they do it. Mrs. St. Germain said we need the materials on hand to do this and wondered if that should be a priority and the first thing we look at. She said we are going through these materials at a high rate. Dr. Potemri said we do have the plan and we need to look at it again and look at that piece of it. If we are not complying with our plan, we are dead in the water. She spoke to another district today and she elaborated. Mrs. Wagner asked about student teachers and Mr. Nero said we do have some and are using them. Mr. Nero had comment. He spoke of getting direction from the Board on revisiting the plan and making it work for a full return. She had further comment. Mrs. Wagner had comment and said she doesn't think they can say we are going in at a certain date. We do need to look at that plan. She said unless the Board disagrees, we should have them review the plan and tell us how it will work. Mr. Mendolia suggested if we could have an answer in two weeks or less, could we get those questions answered. There was discussion. Mrs. Wagner said the administration needs to sit down and review the plan and tell us how we can do it. She said bring it to the next Board meeting with how we can do this. Mrs. Mastroianni said she would rather see us set a date so parents can have something to look to. She had further comment. Mrs. Mastroianni said we also have to set what would keep us from going back; we can't just be nebulous. We should be structured. We need a date and a real solid timeline. Mr. Karpinski spoke of the PPE shortage. Mr. Nero commented on the PPE issue and spoke of what we have on hand. He said he is not putting a block on anything but he is trying to be practical. Mr. Nero said we had a problem, it was challenging, and we got through it. Mrs. Wagner said her sense was that

Mr. Nero and the administrators would revisit the plan and tell them what obstacles they see with it, supply issues, etc. She was comfortable getting through the grading period and returning after each period. Dr. Potemri said maybe the date comes from them but with the expectation we do a full return. Mr. Karpinski thought the teachers and staff should weigh in on that. Mr. Nero said you have heard from the teachers. He said we will come up with a full-in plan. Mrs. Wagner said we should come up with a date or we will never be ready. She had comment. It's time to start looking at that. This is the direction we need to look at and start heading that way. She wants to look at the end of the grading periods and see how that looks. Ms. Welborn wondered if it makes sense to focus on what we need to do to get the elementary school back. At the high school level, we could end up being short staffed. She thought maybe work on the elementary first. Mr. Nero said that was his thought as well given the difficulty with the hybrid. Mrs. Wagner said their period ends in November. Ms. Welborn wanted to aim for the beginning of November. She suggested having the elementary school test the waters and see how things play out. Mrs. Mastroianni agreed with the elementary school coming back and also having this done before Mrs. Wilkison leaves. She elaborated. She didn't realize why it would be difficult having both schools return; she doesn't want to push the high school off. Mr. Nero said we could do a little bit in each grade level and he explained. Mrs. Wagner said why don't we target the first week of November as the return? We will be revisiting the plan at the first meeting in October. There was discussion. Ms. Welborn had comment that we have a plan and there was further comment. There was discussion. Dr. Potemri wants to make sure it's very clear to the parents. Ms. Welborn had further comment and said she would like to move along briskly. The Board will have a special meeting on October 7th at 6:00 p.m. There will be a plan to meet weekly. She summed up the discussion this evening.

6. Public Comment –Mrs. Wagner had comment. Helen Cassata, parent, commented that she would send her kids back but she doesn't necessarily want her kids to go back and spoke of the survey questions. She had further comment on the children getting sick. She wondered why Dr. Hartmann was speaking and she elaborated. Mrs. Wagner clarified that Dr. Hartmann was on our task force and why he spoke. Emily Noyes, parent, agreed with Mrs. Cassatta about the survey and how it was designed. Her only choice was full time but it was not her preference. Courtney Gumbiner, parent, spoke of the survey and didn't think the teachers had gotten their survey yet. She spoke of the July data in the report by Dr. Hartmann. She said we should have asked someone else to speak tonight. She doesn't think we are prepared to send our children back. She said the surveys are not going to be quite as accurate. She had further comment. Dr. Hartmann clarified that his data was as of September 24th – there was only one slide from July. Sally Timmons, parent, has said parents were commenting on the Ledge Light letter and read the portion that says it is up to each district because of circumstance. Kate Roschman, parent, agrees that the survey was too short to get an accurate picture. She didn't feel there were full options. She spoke of the health district and the numbers of cases. Mrs. Wagner clarified the survey. She said we can re-work the survey because we want accurate data. We want everyone to be safe at work. We are not going to push something that will put anyone at risk. Mrs. Wagner said she will resend the survey and elaborated. Melissa Burdick, parent, wanted to touch on the survey and said we are also near the Uncas Health District and they have also had a spike too. We need to watch those numbers as well. Sarah Nelson, parent, thanked the Board and the task force. This is

unprecedentedly difficult. She said Mrs. Mastroianni made a good point and asked what does it mean to be safe? We have to look at the data. Mrs. Nelson said when we are targeting a return we have to look at the numbers at that point and had further comment. She spoke of her situation and why she wouldn't be able to send her children. She had further comment. She thanked everyone again for their work. Mrs. Wagner spoke of the document from the state that we received which is now on addendum four. Jackie Pastrana, teacher, spoke of the survey of the teachers that was mentioned and thought that would be very helpful. Roberta Curry, teacher, asked Dr. Hartmann questions on his presentation. Mrs. Curry asked Dr. Hartmann if there were any studies on the effects on children. She asked about Ms. Welborn's thought about bringing in students. She said Mrs. Mastroianni was right about looking at different models and not doing one the right way. Mrs. Curry said they are not letting any parent volunteers into the building and she elaborated. Cynthia Lawton, parent, asked if there were any thoughts about having those students struggling to come in with their cohort. She said it is important to keep the education equitable. We do have resources to help them. Mr. Nero had comment. Brett Mastroianni, parent, wanted to mention that setting a date and sending kids back is a good option. He is also concerned about the cohorts and is that giving us a false sense of security and he gave an example. He asked what was the point about cohorts if the kids are mixing now. Mrs. Wagner said parents are mixing now and elaborated. Carolyn Bennett, teacher, explained the spacing distance now in class. She also spoke of cleaning products, the distance learners, children being silent spreaders, the lack of surveying the staff, students mingling, and schools closing because of cases. She had further comment. Questions were asked and answered. Dr. Potemri had comment. She said the Board does understand the safety issue. She is concerned about the statement that we don't listen to the staff. She did mention that on Monday and was told that the staff was weighing in. Dr. Potemri didn't want anyone to feel they are disregarding the staff. Carolyn Howell, citizen, said she doesn't have any students in school anymore but she has worked through this whole pandemic and she understood the fear of bringing something home to your family. She said everyone has to make sacrifices. She asked if others could comment on this. Mrs. Wagner said we have been working on this since March and we try to make the best decision for our students and faculty. Dawn Goralewicz, parent, commented on the risk to children is a little bit lower, if they are contracting it at this point in our town, they are not getting it from school. She explained. If we are responsible outside our school, we should be safe in school. Mrs. Goralewicz said she would feel safe sending her child to school. She would never put the staff at risk. If we all do what we are supposed to, we can get our kids back to the socio-emotional learning. She had further comment. She said her family is taking every precaution out of school. She said what she is hearing is that a lot of people what a full-in. She thanked everyone. Laura Mello, parent, said she has been on the task force. She felt it was unfair to ask that the plan be prepared for next week with a plan to return in-full. She had further comment. She said she is very careful what they do at home. She has one child that is transitioning to full time. She has a distance learner. She has a college student that is being quarantined. She had further comment. Mrs. Mello said to please continue to live-stream and explained. She reiterated that it wasn't fair to ask the administrators to do this in a week. She had further comment. Mrs. Wagner clarified that we are moving forward. We do have a plan already and they need to see what they need from us for support. She doesn't want it misconstrued that they want a new plan in a week. They

are not looking for a final plan. She said we are looking for the next steps. We have to listen to everyone. She elaborated. Mrs. Mello thanked her for the clarification. Mr. Nero had comment. Mrs. Wagner had further comment. Mr. Mastroianni said he knows the plan is to open but will the hybrid plan be tweaked and he elaborated. Mrs. Wagner said the hybrid is always being tweaked. Roseanne Salisbury, parent, had comment and said she agreed we do need a solid plan. She spoke of the hybrid plan and that her child only gets an education two days a week. Mrs. Salisbury said in the event we can't reopen, are we also actively working on the hybrid as well. Mrs. Wagner said we have heard how we need to tackle this.

On a motion by Mr. Karpinski, seconded by Mr. Mendolia, the Board voted unanimously to adjourn the meeting at 8:54 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Roberta T. McCarthy, Secretary to
The Board of Education