

Board of Education Minutes
September 9, 2020

DRAFT

A regular meeting of the North Stonington Board of Education was held on Wednesday, September 9, 2020, at 6:30 p.m. at the North Stonington Education Media Center for members of the Board of Education. Members of the public could participate via ZOOM meeting ID 88073540273. Present were Mrs. Wagner, Mr. Karpinski, Ms. Welborn (via ZOOM), Mrs. Mastroianni, Dr. Potemri (6:35 p.m. via ZOOM), and Mr. Mendolia. Also present were Mr. Nero and Mrs. Martin. Present via ZOOM were Mrs. Costa, Mrs. Wilkison, Mrs. St. Germain, and Mrs. Reyes. Chairperson Wagner called the meeting to order at 6:32 p.m.

2. Pledge of Allegiance – The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.
3. Proposed for Executive Session – a. Contract Negotiations – On a motion by Mr. Karpinski, seconded by Mr. Mendolia, the Board voted unanimously to adjourn to Executive Session at 6:34 p.m. for the Purpose of Contract Negotiations.

The Board came out of Executive Session at 6:55 p.m.

4. Public Comment on Agenda Items with Students Speaking First – None.
5. Presentations – None.
6. Administrators' Reports – Mrs. Wilkison said the students are excited about being back. They love the new school especially the gym. She said the small class sizes with the hybrid are a good way to get to know the students. Mrs. Wilkison said the students are doing great with the masks. The teachers are doing a great job having to teach in the classroom at the same time they are doing virtual. They are still learning Google. She said their goal is to make sure the parents are comfortable as well. She thanked Mr. Bryant and Mr. Pont for all their work. She thanked Mr. Boucher, Mr. Buck and all the custodians for all their hard work. She said they had to work on parent pick up and drop off and she explained dismissal. She explained that everyone is helping out. She is so pleased with their new teachers. She said Courtney Lauer has moved into the kindergarten classroom. She thanked the new staff members. Mrs. Wilkison said it has been quite a ride getting used to a new school and in the midst of a pandemic. Her staff is making it all work. She thanked the teachers, parents and students. Mrs. St. Germain wanted to reiterate that they have a lot of people to thank. She thanked Mr. Boucher and his staff and went over all the extra work they are doing. They have been tremendous. She thanked Mr. Bryant and Mr. Pont and said they couldn't do it without them. She said the first full virtual day was Tuesday and she said it was interesting to see the creativity of the teachers to make it work. She said she and Mrs. Reyes are very impressed. She said it was a good day and it was so smooth. Mrs. St. Germain gave kudos to the staff for being so resilient. She mentioned the new staff members and the long-term substitutes. She thanked the per diem substitutes and mentioned some of the things they are doing. She said sports are happening believe it or not but football is on a bit of hiatus for now.

Cross country and soccer are happening. The most exciting thing happening is the parent volunteers helping get the scoring table set up as well as the cameras because there will be no spectators. Our kids are really happy to be back playing. Lunch is going well. With all the waves they have it is going well. She explained the distance. Mrs. St. Germain said she is seeing more smiles. Today was the first virtual day and she explained the few snafus. They are working on the social and emotional of the students. She said overall it is a great start to the year. Mrs. Costa spoke of the Pre-K orientation and said the teachers were so creative and she explained the process. She thanked the special education teachers and staff; they have really stepped up to the plate. She thanked Mr. Boucher and his staff for all their hard work. Dr. Potemri thanked the staff.

7. Administrative – a. Minutes – On a motion by Mr. Karpinski, seconded by Mrs. Mastroianni, the Board voted unanimously to accept the minutes of the August 12, 2020, Special Meeting.

August 26, 2020, Special Meeting – On a motion by Mr. Karpinski, seconded by Mr. Mendolia, the Board voted unanimously to accept the minutes of the August 26, 2020, meeting.

b. Correspondence – Mr. Nero said the district is being sued as part of a class action suit with all the districts throughout the country. The gist is basically that due to COVID, IDEA has not been carried out. CIRMA is representing us and he has been in contact with their attorney. Mr. Nero read part of the suit. He said we are covered. Questions were asked and answered. Mr. Nero had further comment. He said we are doing fine with that. Dr. Potemri had comment. Mrs. Costa said she reviewed her service logs and all the services have been provided.

c. Personnel – Mr. Nero said an additional per diem, Austin Menta. He has been hired for the high school/middle school. Mr. Nero read a letter from Veronica Wilkison retiring from her position as elementary school principal with her last day being December 31, 2020. Mr. Nero said certainly the last four years there have been a lot going on. He wished her well. He spoke of going through a professional search company. Mrs. Wagner thanked Mrs. Wilkison and said she will be missed. She realizes the past few years have had their challenges.

8. Reports – a. Superintendent – Mr. Nero said based on the MOA with the teachers' union, we have been very fortunate that we had very few teachers with health issues. Two teachers had asked for a leave of absence and he explained. He thanked Mrs. Schacht for coming in to help with the setup of the elementary media center. We hired more per diems and he elaborated. We have some really good people. Jim Murano will be working at the elementary school helping out Mrs. Wilkison. He gave background information on Mr. Murano. Questions were asked and answered. Mr. Nero said last week he talked to Roberta Curry, NSEA president, about meeting every month with the teachers' union and he elaborated. He had comment about the cleaning products. We provide masks, shields, gloves, etc. to make sure they have the proper equipment when using the cleaning products. Mr. Nero had comment on the technology that is coming in. He is hoping to get the preferred cleaner and elaborated. Beginning on Friday, families will be getting a weekly letter from him. He spoke of the number of students riding

the busses. Questions were asked and answered. Transportation was discussed. The PTO meeting will be on Monday, the 14th, via ZOOM. Tomorrow is the first NSEF meeting via ZOOM.

b. BOE Chairperson – Mrs. Wagner said she has heard rumors that we are going full distance and that is not true. She said Mike Urgo, First Selectman, brought up about renaming the elementary school to Wheeler Elementary School. It will go on the next agenda. Ms. Welborn asked what the motivation was for renaming it. She spoke of the Wheeler family and wanted to preserve that history. Mrs. Wagner will speak to Mr. Urgo. Mrs. Mastroianni spoke of the ZOOM meetings and the difficulty in being able to hear everyone. She wondered if we should just go back to meeting with ZOOM. Mr. Karpinski liked the interaction in-person with the Board. Members will try to bring their laptops and login to see if that makes a difference. There was comment on the meeting format. Mrs. Wagner will speak to Selectman Urgo. They did get an email about capital needs from Boards and Commissions. She spoke of what she gave as the capital wish list.

c. Committee Chairperson – Community Involvement and Student Success will meet next Wednesday. Student Success will meet at 5:30 p.m. and Community Involvement at 6:15 p.m. Those will be via Zoom. The agenda will be posted.

d. LEARN Board of Directors' Liaison – Nothing to report.

e. School Modernization Building Committee – Dr. Potemri said the ribbon-cutting was held. It was a very nice ceremony and it went really well. She said the renaming of the elementary school has nothing to do with the plaque that is hanging at the school. She said the first selectman came up with this and it has nothing to do with the building committee. She said she thought he was very aware of the history. If he has made the request, we should discuss it.

9. Old Business – a. School Re-Opening Progress – Mrs. Wagner thanked the administrators for their hard work. She wanted to thank the parents as well. They are really doing a great job getting their kids on board. She is proud of the families in the town. She emailed the Board the Connecticut School Learning Model Indicators and hopes everyone reviews it. The document gives indicators as to when to return in person. She reviewed the numbers regarding cases in North Stonington. She wants to meet with Mr. Nero and the administrators on September 25th to see where we are at. She'll send an email to the re-opening task force to reconvene on the 28th. She would like a special Board meeting on September 30th to talk about where we are at. Questions were asked and answered. There was discussion. Mr. Nero had comment. Mrs. Wagner said our administrators spoke of the excitement of our students to be back in school. She said 69% of our parents wanted a full opening.

b. Technology Update – We have over 500 on order. Mr. Bryant said we have 13-14 more to loan out and then we are tapped out. The elementary school is short about 50. There are 165 on order from the state for a total of 595. Mrs. St. Germain said they are trying to get some back to redeploy and she explained.

c. Web Site Update – Mrs. Wagner said the web site looks fantastic; there is a lot of information on there. Mr. Karpinski about the elementary school schedule being online and asked how the information flows. Mrs. Wilkison said they have such a range of ability on the computers so the teachers are sending out information to the parents. She had further comment. The teachers are putting out schedules on Sundays for the learning expectations for the week. Mrs. Wilkison said we are just starting this and elaborated.

10. Finance – Mrs. Martin said we will get the vendor reports but they are still working on how to get what they need from the system. Mr. Nero said we have been having trouble with our email server which is very old. We have been down a couple of times and he elaborated. Mrs. Martin explained the items being requested from the non-lapsing account. Mrs. Martin had further explanation. Questions were asked and answered.

11. Policy First Reads – None.

12. Calendar – September 23rd is regular meeting. Everyone will bring a device to see how that works.

13. Public Comment – Mike Noonan, teacher, said they are happy to see the student but we are still in the middle of the pandemic and he gave testing statistics and had further comment. He just hopes they don't jump the gun and wants us to take our time and make sure we are being vigilant in watching what is happening in the news. Mr. Noonan thanked Mrs. Wilkison for everything she has done for the elementary school. She has fought for the students and teachers. Ashley Austin, parent, wanted to thank Sue Costa and special education for reaching out to them. As far as the rest of the elementary school, they have no direction. She is really concerned about that and would like to know when they will have a more set schedule. Mrs. Wilkison said she will get back to Mrs. Austin. She said teachers have sent information out through Google Classroom but she will check with the two teachers. There was further comment. Brett Mastroianni, parent, thanked the teachers, faculty, and staff. He was sorry to see Mrs. Wilkison go. He was concerned about the request to change the school name. He is concerned and so are his children listening to the meeting and he elaborated. He wishes the Board would give some deep, serious thought to this. Mr. Nero said we will look into any policy on this as well. It will be fully vetted. Mrs. Wagner appreciated everyone's comments. She said we will continue to look at science and data.

On a motion by Mr. Karpinski, seconded by Mrs. Mastroianni, the Board voted unanimously to adjourn the meeting at 8:05 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Roberta T. McCarthy, Secretary to
The Board of Education