

Board of Education Minutes
January 6, 2021
Special Meeting

A special meeting of the North Stonington Board of Education was held on Wednesday, January 6, 2021 at 6:30 p.m. via Zoom meeting platform meeting ID 834 5741 9272. Present were Mrs. Wagner, Mr. Karpinski, Ms. Welborn, Mr. McCord, Mrs. Mastroianni, Dr. Potemri, and Mr. Mendolia. Also present were Mr. Nero, Mrs. Martin, Mr. Pont, Mrs. Costa, Mrs. St. Germain, Mrs. Reyes, and Mr. Cillino. Chairperson Wagner called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m.

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

3. Introduction of Elementary School Principal – Mr. Nero had comment on events happening nationally. Mr. Cillino starts on Monday and he said Mrs. Wilkison will be in on Monday and Tuesday and he elaborated. He explained a schedule of events. He has already given Mr. Cillino a reading assignment and he explained. He explained the search process. Mr. Nero gave a short biography of Mr. Cillino. He introduced Rob Cillino. Mrs. Wagner had comment. Board members introduced themselves. Mr. Cillino had comment. He said he was humbled to be here. He had further comment.

4. Public Comment on Agenda Items with Students Speaking First – Carolyn Bennet, citizen, had comment on COVID numbers and pointed out Glastonbury’s COVID dashboard and she elaborated. She thought North Stonington could do the same and had further comment. Roberta Curry, teacher, welcomed Mr. Cillino to North Stonington and she introduced herself. She spoke of her concerns about a full return to school and elaborated. Mrs. Wagner had comment and clarified the re-opening plan and why it is always on the agenda. Mrs. Curry had further comment. Dr. Potemri asked a question and had comment and asked if we reach out to those families struggling and she elaborated.

5. One-to-One Program Update – Mr. Pont commented and said there are 300 Chrome Books out to the schools being distributed. The backorder is continuing and he is meeting with our representative virtually to talk about different options to get the one-to-one finished. Questions were asked and answered. Mr. Nero had comment. Mrs. St. Germain said they are starting with their freshman and she explained the distribution schedule. She said many students are bringing their own devices and opting to use them. Mr. Karpinski asked questions that were answered. Mr. Nero had comment and explanation. Further questions were asked that Mr. Pont answered.

6. Administrative – a. Minutes – Mr. Karpinski made a motion that was seconded by Mr. McCord to accept the minutes of the December 2, 2020, meeting, the December 16, 2020, meeting, and the December 18, 2020, Special Meeting. There was comment. There was discussion of a State-of-the-District as mentioned in the minutes of December 16th. The motion passed unanimously.

b. Correspondence – None.

c. Personnel – None.

7. Reports – a. Superintendent – Mr. Nero had comment on the vaccine schedule. He spoke of the meetings he will be attending. He spoke of reporting COVID cases and protecting confidentiality and he elaborated. He spoke of the discussions he has had with Mr. Mansfield about what information we can put out. Mrs. Wagner had comment. Mr. Nero said he is looking forward to having Mr. Cillino in on Monday. Dr. Potemri had a question about being a vaccine center and she elaborated. There was discussion.

b. BOE Chairperson – Mrs. Wagner spoke of keeping track of the addendums and quarantining. She spoke of the workshop on January 12th for parents' support put on by the department of education. Questions were asked and answered.

c. Committee Chairperson – Mrs. Wagner asked if Mrs. Mastroianni had a chance to look at the social media platforms. Mrs. Mastroianni said she had and elaborated and asked if it could be part of the workshop on Saturday. Mrs. Wagner asked if the finance committee could meet next week. Mrs. Martin had comment and explained the usual timeline for the financial statements. There was discussion.

d. LEARN Board of Directors' Liaison – None.

e. School Modernization Building Committee – Will be removed from the agenda.

8. Facilities and Finance – a. Old Building Expenditure Timeline – Mrs. Wagner explained they were listening in on the selectmen meeting a couple of weeks back. She said there was discussion of expenditures of the old building and reviewed a timeline of when expenditures were sent to the selectmen. She gave the dates the information was sent. Mrs. Wagner showed items on her screen and explained they were sent to the selectmen regarding costs. She said these costs were also sent to the re-purposing committee. She reviewed those costs. Mrs. Wagner spoke further of the costs associated with the old school. She had further comment. She said that was the information that was shared back and forth. Questions were asked and answered. Mr. Pont had comment. Mr. Nero said we are going to bid to move the fiber. Further questions were asked and answered. There was further discussion. Mr. Nero is going to look at some spaces with Mr. Boucher. He had further comment. There was discussion of the egress in the Gymatorium and if it could be used for storage. There was further comment. Mr. Nero had further comment. There were further questions asked and answered.

b. 2021-2022 Proposed Education Budget – Mrs. Wagner wanted to make sure everyone gets the same packet so we are all looking at the same thing. She spoke of the template from the Board of Finance and what they want to see. She had further comment. She said we have to present on February 17th. Mr. Nero said Mrs. Martin worked over the vacation on the budget and was almost done. Mrs. Martin explained where she was on putting it together. Mrs. Mastroianni spoke of a meeting date she noticed concerning the budget and she elaborated. She voiced her concerns about that and had further comment. Questions were asked and answered. Mr. Nero had comment on articles in the newspapers.

9. Policy – None.

10. Old Business – a. School Re-Opening Plan – Mrs. Wagner said we came back in the hybrid after break. She said we will be watching the numbers and elaborated. She gave the numbers of cases in the district and how many have quarantined. She spoke of the possibility of a 3-2 day scenario for the students. Mr. Nero said the administrators will be discussing that. Mrs. Wagner said she is concerned about the well-being of our students. She said it is not just about a working parent but the long-term effects on the child. Suicide rates are up. It is serious—it's not just about a math score or catching up learning. Mrs. Wagner said it is starting to become less and less easy to navigate. She had further comment. Board members had comment about adding the extra day. They asked the administrators to come up with some proposals. There was further discussion. Mrs. Wagner said we can't panic had further comment. Ms. Welborn asked if we should focus on one school first and she elaborated. Mr. Nero had comment. Board members had further comment. It was mentioned that we shouldn't move backwards; we are headed in the right direction. The 3-2 plan was mentioned again. We should talk about it and plan. There was further comment and discussion. It was commented that if we could get to the 3-2 day that would be a good start and hopefully we could get the vaccines to our staff. It is important to get back as quickly as possible. There was further comment. Mrs. St. Germain said her counseling department is working really hard with the students and she elaborated. She spoke about the group she brings in on Wednesdays and how it has made a difference for those students. She said bringing the students all back at the same time would be smoother. Mr. Nero spoke of the one week stagger in the last plan. He agreed we need to see what the next couple of weeks will be like. They will review the stagger plan and the full in plan.

b. School-of-Choice Projected Enrollment – Mr. Nero spoke of the projected enrollment. We have five students from Voluntown. He spoke to Mr. Seitsinger in Preston and he explained. He had further comment.

11. Calendar – The Finance committee will meet next week, a workshop will be on Saturday from 9:00 a.m.-11:00 a.m. We will do it via Zoom. The agenda will be on policies, web site updating, social media, and administration transition.

Mrs. St. Germain welcomed Mr. Cillino on behalf of the middle/high school staff and said they were very excited to have him on board. She elaborated. She praised Jess Kessler and Astrid Williams, our nurses, and she elaborated on the contact tracing. She said it goes up to central office; everyone is working to keep our staff and students safe and it is going very well. We had administrators buying PPE themselves when we didn't have it and now we do. Our goal every day is to keep our students and staff safe. She is looking forward to working with this team. Mrs. St. Germain said our nurses are incredible and she is very grateful for that.

12. Public Comment – Laura Mello, parent, spoke of the vaccine schedule. She spoke of the Google Read and Write that was added to our platforms that Mr. Nero, Mr. Pont, and Mrs. Costa put together. She said it has been a lifeline for her son. She wanted to highlight that for them and wanted to highlight the success. Mr. Nero said the credit goes to Mr. Pont and he elaborated. Ellen Anderson, student, said she doesn't struggle that much with

school. She said having the Wednesday classes start a little late is refreshing. She likes the way the hybrid schedule is and wanted to give a student's perspective. Courtney Gumbiner, parent, welcomed Mr. Cillino. She wanted to focus on distance learners. Her children are distance learners for health reasons. She has reached out to the staff and they were helpful. Many times the focus is on the students in the building and not so much the distance learners. She explained Wednesday has been a time for her children to meet with their teachers and she elaborated. She had further comment. She hopes in all the decisions to hear more discussion on the kids at home every day. Linda Coats, teacher, asked to take into consideration when the Board has their discussion of the 3-2 schedule, that Wednesday is the day she can catch up with her distance learners; it is the only time she can assess them and she elaborated. She can give them the individualized attention and that is her distance learner planning day as well. Roseanne Salisbury, parent, said she is in favor of the 3-2 plan and she elaborated. It will give them more time in school. She agrees we shouldn't lose sight of any student. The hybrid students really aren't doing anything on Wednesdays and she elaborated. There are kids that aren't being challenged this year and are getting lost in the shuffle on the other end. Her fourth grader doesn't have any schoolwork on Wednesday and she explained. She wanted to highlight that gap. Carolyn Bennett, teacher, thanked Mr. Nero for sharing those numbers. She had further comment and hopes the numbers are publicly shared and elaborated. She spoke about a general concern for student well-being. She elaborated. Classroom teachers are not mental health professionals and if a student is at risk of self-harm, school is not the place for them. She elaborated. School is not the place to remediate students to get them to the place of health and happiness. She elaborated on her statement. Mrs. Bennett spoke of adult mental health as well and explained. Advocating for them to heal by simply attending school can literally be life-threatening advice. She had further comment. Mrs. Bennett said if your child is in need of mental health please don't send them to school. Reach out to those professionals and send them to a doctor. She elaborated. She had further comment and said we need to make sure we are going to the right sources to support that goal in our community. Dr. Potemri said it was disturbing to listen to that. She wanted to make sure the message to all parents is we serve children. We want our children back in school. She had further comment. We are a resource for so many families and elaborated. You don't have to be a certified counselor to be able to nurture a child in need. That is a wrong message. She was horrified. She had further comment. That should never be the message that we are sending out to the community. Dr. Potemri had further comment. Mr. Nero had comment on students' needs and said he disagreed too and explained. He had further comment. We are part of the mental health. He elaborated. Mrs. Wagner had further comment and said teachers' influence in a child's life is significant and had further comment.

On a motion by Mr. Karpinski, seconded by Dr. Potemri, the Board voted unanimously to adjourn the meeting at 8:31 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Roberta T. McCarthy, Secretary to
The Board of Education