

Board of Education Minutes
January 27, 2021

A regular meeting of the North Stonington Board of Education was held on Wednesday, January 27, 2021, at 6:30 p.m. via ZOOM meeting platform meeting ID 850 1727 0480. 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, Mr. Boucher, Mrs. Costa, Mrs. St. Germain, Mrs. Reyes, and Mr. Cillino. Chairperson Wagner called the meeting to order at 6:32 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 add Overview of Re-Opening Plan as item #3.

3. School Re-Opening Plan – Mrs. Wagner said the Board voted to start having our students come back to school on February 22nd. She explained that Wednesday would still be a virtual day. She had further comment. We are continuing to watch the data. She explained the steps taken to keep the kids safe and she elaborated. She spoke of the CDC study that just came out. She reviewed the steps taken since the summer when the task force was put together. She had further comment and said kids really need to be back in the classroom. She had further comment. She asked people to limit their comment to one time and to two minutes.

4. Public Comment on Agenda Items with Students Speaking First – Courtney Gumbiner, parent, read a statement. She spoke of the teachers and what they have been asked to do and spoke of their mental health. She asked if that is being taken into consideration. She had further comment. Mike Noonan, resident, was disheartened to hear about the re-opening plan. He had further comment and voiced his concerns about students coming back in full before teachers are vaccinated. He elaborated. He spoke of the article in the Westerly Sun and quoted from the article. He had further comment on CDC recommendations. He had further comment. Britt Tella, parent, was anxious to get her first grader back to school. She understands the concerns of the teachers. She had further comment and made a comparison to her colleagues at Pfizer. She had further comment. She asked the teachers to ask for the support they need to get the kids back to four days. Kirsten Montgomery, parent, spoke. She was very encouraged by articles she has read. She quoted from one of the articles. She elaborated. She spoke of not being able to distance the students. She spoke of the survey and not being able to decide. She asked where the February 22nd date came from. She would like to delay the decision as to when it is safe for her children to go back. Sam Cherenzia, parent, wanted to show his confidence in the Board of Education that they will make the right decision. Laura Mello, parent, wanted to confirm and echo the concern about filling out the form. She elaborated and spoke of not being told they would be able follow distancing. That was her hesitancy and she elaborated. She is hopeful that will be discussed later when they go over the plan. Alyssa Kumpf, parent, read a letter to the Board. She spoke of being allowed to adjust her work schedule. She had further comment. She spoke about the choices the parents have regarding sending their children back. She had further comment. She said this way of learning was a

temporary fix and it has been almost a year. She elaborated. She said the district has been submitting their plan. It's time for her children to be educated full time. Joe Cassata, parent, spoke of the numbers and not being able to follow guidelines. He is totally against the February 22nd date. He had further comment. Niki Dean, parent, wanted to say she was going to say the same thing Mrs. Kumpf had. She spoke of her work situation and being called back to work. She wondered who was going to watch her youngest child and elaborated. Jennifer Hirschfeld, parent, said her child is struggling with this. She explained her work scenario. She spoke of her mother who teaches in Salem who has been back in full-time since the beginning of school. They should all be in school. She had further comment. Jamie Towle- spoke of the teachers and her concern for them. She had further comment. Mrs. Wagner had comment on the full-in return. She commented the Board is making plans because they don't want to just "flip the switch" with no notice. Ms. Welborn said she is a teacher in Colchester. She said the elementary school has been back. The high school is hybrid and she elaborated. She spoke of her time being at home when she was quarantined; it helped her understand the students' point of view.

5. Old Business – a. IT Discussion – Mrs. Wagner said we have an opening right now. It has always been the Board's position to look at openings and see if we can reallocate. She had further comment. Dr. Potemri said they had talked as a Board and doing an assessment of the IT department and she elaborated. She thought we voted on that but we got sidetracked. Mr. Nero said they talked to NESDEC. It would cost a lot of money and would come back with the results we already knew. He spoke of out-sourcing technology or do we handle it ourselves. The person leaving us is going to a situation which outsourced their technology which was a complete failure so they brought it back in. Mr. Nero spoke of a conversation they had about sharing resources and he elaborated. When you outsource you get a person that may come in once a week. He had further comment. He spoke of the generator that went down during a power failure on Christmas Day and he elaborated. You won't get the service that you need by outsourcing. He had further comment. Mr. Nero gave some history on the tech position. We have had a technical assistant since the 2013-14 school year and he elaborated. He recommended posting the position and doing it soon. Mrs. Mastroianni suggested putting together an RFP for an independent study and elaborated. Ms. Welborn asked about the turnover of the technician. She agreed with Mrs. Mastroianni and had further comment. Mr. Nero commented. He spoke of upping the ante somewhat; technicians in general want to learn the trade and he had further comment. He reiterated that we don't have that kind of time to do an assessment. He spoke further. He spoke of the reasoning to bring in a technician. Mr. McCord agreed with Mr. Nero. Now is not a good time. He has complete confidence in Mr. Pont who puts in a lot of time. He elaborated. He said it is not a time to mess with IT. He gave kudos to Mr. Pont. He said it is very poor timing trying to evaluate the department. Mr. Karpinski had comment. He said having the resource inside makes sense but we should do an analysis and he elaborated. He is in favor of continuing the conversation. Board members had further comment. Mrs. Mastroianni said we need to do an honest assessment and had further comment; we should always be looking at our resources. Mr. Nero said we don't have the luxury of time and he elaborated. He had further comment. He reiterated again recommending bringing in someone. Mr. McCord wanted to make sure everyone knew our IT staff is one. He had further comment. He disagreed about not bringing someone in and he had further comment. Mr. Nero said we need to

bring someone in and someone in good. We can always evaluate later. Mr. Karpinski said we should bring someone in but do an analysis and he elaborated. Mr. Nero spoke of the conversation from a few months back about sharing resources. He spoke again of staff coming in on Christmas Day. Ms. Welborn asked if we had Google people on staff. Mr. Nero said we do but they don't handle the hardware. He had further comment. Mrs. Mastroianni asked us what stops us now from asking the town about resource sharing. She had further comment. We have an immediate need. Mr. Nero explained what happened the last time we tried to share resources. He gave the background. He said we have already tried to do that and it didn't work. Mrs. Wagner asked when we changed the IT department and Mr. Nero explained again. Mr. Nero explained the upgrades to the department; we blossomed in technology. Ms. Welborn asked how we can integrate these concerns. We are obligated to look at how we manage this and she elaborated. She appreciated Mr. Nero saying we need to bring in more help. Dr. Potemri said listening to the conversation there are options such as sharing resources and outsourcing. She had further comment. Dr. Potemri said there is an immediate need and she elaborated. Mrs. Wagner asked about posting the position and doing an RFP at the same time. Mr. Nero had comment and there was discussion. He said we need to post that position. Mrs. Wagner said she agreed that we can't have our technology hanging out there. We do need to do an RFP and elaborated. She said it's critical that we can't have our IT department shallow. The Board gave their consensus to post the position. Questions were asked and answered. Mrs. Wagner asked to keep them in the loop. Mr. Nero will work on an RFP and had further comment. Mrs. Mastroianni asked about reaching out to Mr. Urgo. Mrs. Wagner will talk to Mr. Urgo. On a motion by Ms. Welborn, seconded by Dr. Potemri, the Board voted to put out an RFP to review the technology department. Mrs. Wagner gave an update that she got from Mr. Pont on the Chrome Books and she elaborated. Mr. Pont worked with his contact on an alternate solution but it will cost over \$18,000 more. Mr. Nero had comment. Mrs. Wagner had further comment. Mr. Nero had comment on moving the technology. He said we may need to do an RFP if there is discussion about moving the technology across the street. Mrs. Wagner had comment.

b. 2021-2022 Proposed Education Budget – Mrs. Wagner had comment. She said this was the first blush and elaborated. She asked why we don't have a flagpole at the middle/high school. Mr. Nero said one of the things they talked about was putting a flagpole between the two buildings and have one. He suggested we do it soon. There was discussion. Mrs. Wagner reviewed questions that were asked. She thanked Mrs. Martin for putting all this together and thanked her for all her hard work. Questions the Board had submitted included the associate principal salary, substitutes, library books, graduation expenses, regular transportation, and substitute management. Mrs. Martin explained how the zero-based budgeting was formulated; we didn't take the number from last year and add to it. They started all over. She spoke of some line items being moved in the budget. Mr. Nero had comment. Mrs. St. Germain had comment on the number of students that have applied. She elaborated. One has officially enrolled but they still have a little more time to accept. She said they are going to do an open house tour of the school for these students. Seven accepted with one currently enrolled. Mrs. Wagner said the playground committee asked for some help with the mulch and also asked for consideration of money for maintenance, repaving the blacktop and other items that she read. She said it is something to consider. Mr. Nero had comment.

Mrs. Wagner asked if we wanted to put anything in the budget. She had further comment. Mr. Nero suggested having them give a priority list. There was discussion. Mrs. Wagner said she would love to help with the playground but this budget year is going to be so tight. She can get behind this budget presented but she has a feeling it will be kicked back to us. There was comment and discussion. Mrs. Mastroianni said she is new to this and was concerned about the 4.3%. She had further comment. Mr. Nero had comment. There was discussion. Mrs. Wagner explained that this is where we start and she reviewed the process. There was discussion. There was discussion on what the non-lapsing account is for; it's not to supplement the budget. Dr. Potemri asked about the grant-funded positions. She asked about getting what the grants will pay for. Mrs. Martin asked what specifics she was looking for and Dr Potemri answered. There was discussion. Dr. Potemri asked about special education tuition. She also asked about how much revenue (tuition) will be generated or will it go to the town and she was told it will go to the town. Further questions were asked and answered. Mrs. Martin spoke of the 1.9% increase and said contractual obligations bring us to 1.8%. There was discussion and comment. Mr. Nero said we did zero-based budgeting this year and spoke of previous budgets. Mr. Nero said he has not chopped that 4.3% yet. Questions were asked on the technology equipment purchases and Mr. Pont reviewed his list. Further questions were asked and answered on technology. Ms. Welborn said the challenge is how we can be true to this planning on technology; we're between a rock and a hard place. Further questions were asked and answered. Dr. Potemri thanked Mrs. Martin for a job well-done. Mr. Pont said he can write up the thought on the five year plan so they can see his direction on that. Mrs. Wagner had comment. Mrs. Wagner asked for next meeting if we can see what types of savings we may realize. The administrators will give a five-minute presentation. The next meeting will be February 10th. There was further discussion. Mr. Nero said the administration will meet next Wednesday on budget.

Mrs. Wagner talked to Senator Somers who said she was offering a forum on the vaccine; we need to look at dates and times. She suggested maybe February 8th or 9th.

6. Public Comment – None.
7. Proposed for Executive Session – None.

On a motion by Mr. Karpinski, seconded by Dr. Potemri, the Board voted unanimously to adjourn the meeting at 8:23 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Roberta T. McCarthy, Secretary to
The Board of Education