

Board of Education Minutes  
August 11, 2021

**DRAFT**

A regular meeting of the North Stonington Board of Education was held on Wednesday, August 11, 2021, at 6:30 p.m. via Zoom meeting platform meeting ID 871 5010 7691. Present were Mrs. Wagner, Mr. Karpinski, Ms. Welborn, Mr. McCord, Dr. Towle-Weicksel, Mrs. Mastroianni, and Mr. Mendolia. Also present were Mr. Nero and Mrs. Martin. Chairperson Wagner called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m.

2. Pledge of Allegiance – The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.
3. Public Comment on Agenda Items with Students Speaking First – Mrs. Wagner said public comment will be limited to 2 minutes with one comment per person. None at this time.
4. Administrative – a. Minutes – July 14, 2021 – On a motion by Mr. Karpinski, seconded by Mr. Mendolia, the Board voted unanimously to accept the minutes of the July 14, 2021, meeting.

July 28, 2021 – Mr. Karpinski made a motion that was seconded by Mr. McCord to accept the minutes of the July 28, 2021, meeting. Corrections were made. The technology update will be put on the agenda for the first meeting in September. There was discussion for follow-up agenda items. The motion passed unanimously.

- b. Correspondence – None.
  - c. Personnel – Mr. Nero said we had another resignation. Cassidy Jenkins resigned from her position as special education teacher. We are dealing with teacher shortages. His concern moving forward is that we will be having teachers leaving. We are bringing people in and we can DSAP (Durational Shortage Area Permit) them and he elaborated. We have two teachers going on leave and he explained. If the ESSER funds are approved, we have personnel in those grant funds. Questions were asked on the length of the two teachers going on leave and the DSAP. Mr. Nero explained. He was asked if we are concerned because it is a teachers' market. Mr. Nero had comment and said he felt good that we will be in a pretty good position. He had further comment.
5. Reports – a. Superintendent – Mr. Nero said there is not much to report. They did a lot of work at looking at what the ESSER funds will look like. The buildings are getting ready to go. The Chromebooks are all ready to go. All the Chromebooks that went out as part of the state program were returned and are all cleaned and ready to go to the elementary school. We are good technologically and building-wise. Questions were asked and answered. Mr. Nero has already set up the liaison meetings with Mrs. Curry. Mrs. Wagner said they have talked about meeting with the union reps regarding the stipend positions. Dr. Towle-Weicksel asked about the teachers and technology and Mr. Nero said they are ready to go. Questions were asked and answered on the teachers' technology. Questions were asked about closing out June.

b. BOE Chairperson – Mrs. Wagner said she only got one Board of Education self-evaluation form back and would like the rest of those back. She would like to have a workshop with Board members. She received word from Mrs. St. Germain that the Westerly Education Center is offering a boat-building class and she elaborated. She has had feedback from board chairs across the state and she had further comment. She has sent out the legal information she has received.

c. Committee Chairperson – None.

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

6. Old Business – a. School Re-Opening Plan – Mrs. Wagner said everyone has a copy of what the state sent out with their interim recommendations. This document was put out on July 9<sup>th</sup>. It is in two parts and she explained one part is from the CDC and one from state. Finalized guidance will come later as we get closer to the opening. The goal is 100% full time and she elaborated. She said it's important our kids are in the classroom. She had further comment. She went over information in the document. She reviewed the vaccine information contained in the document and said she will cover masks last. One thing stressed is a layered approach. We are able to hit about all the layers. She reviewed distancing and cohorting and said three feet is adequate. Cohorting can still be used and she explained. Questions were asked and answered. The next section was on testing and Mrs. Wagner felt we didn't need to put the testing plan into effect. Questions were asked and answered about different scenarios regarding the three feet distance. Mr. Nero explained the lunches. Questions were asked and answered about the busses. Mr. Nero said they may be closer than three feet but they will be wearing masks on the bus. Mrs. Wagner had comment. Remote learning while in quarantine was discussed. Mrs. Wagner said those days will not be held against them as far as absences are concerned. The remote experience is only in a quarantine situation. Mrs. Martin said they have to be on for 50% of the day to get it to count as a day. Questions were asked and answered. There was discussion on students being home with COVID symptoms and those without. Mr. Nero said we are trying to follow the state guidelines as closely as possible. Mrs. Wagner had comment about remote and in person learning. She had further comment. Board members had further comment. It was suggested to just offer students the makeup work and not offer a remote learning option. There was discussion. Mr. Nero said we cannot offer remote learning unless it is COVID-related. There was further discussion on remote learning. Mrs. Wagner said it should be up to our administrators and teachers. She wanted to defer that decision to Mr. Nero and his administrators. There was further discussion. Mr. Nero said they met on this for a substantial amount of time today and they are putting together a plan. There was further comment. Mrs. Wagner said if the administrators and Mr. Nero have worked out a plan we should trust them and allow them to move forward. Questions were asked about the elementary level. Mr. Nero said we are not emulating what we did last year and had further comment. Mrs. Wagner continued reviewing the document and said we don't have any of the issues with ventilation they are discussing in the document. She said regular daily cleaning is all that is needed and she read the cleaning recommendations; we are going back to the regular cleaning. Mr. Nero said they will be disinfecting between the

lunch waves and disinfecting the bathrooms at the end of the day. He had further comment. Mrs. Wagner read the information regarding quarantine and vaccinated individuals and those three feet away. She continued reading the information on quarantining and the steps to take to determine whether it is necessary for certain individuals. As far as athletics are concerned, athletes that are fully vaccinated do not have to wear a mask. The higher the percentage vaccinated the more the chance they will continue to play their season. There was discussion about having coaches tested weekly if they are not vaccinated. There was discussion. There was discussion of re-visiting this if the Delta variant becomes more prevalent to see if adjustments need to be made. Mrs. Wagner read the section on school busses and said masks must be worn. She read the guidelines. Mrs. Wagner spoke of volunteers. Mr. Nero said we are limiting it as last year for now. Mrs. Wagner read the guidelines regarding physical education and the cafeteria guidelines. Questions were asked about volleyball and indoor sports and those guidelines. Mrs. Wagner said there is a sports meeting coming up and it will be brought up. Mrs. Wagner said we are still under the governor's mandate until September 30<sup>th</sup> that we must still wear masks in school. Mrs. Wagner read the Executive Order regarding masks in schools. She read part of the attorney's legal opinion on the executive order. Mrs. Wagner said it was pretty long but she wanted everyone to hear what would happen if we go against a mandate. She had further comment. Board members had comment. This is something that can be revisited when the mandate is lifted. This is something that changes as we move forward. There was discussion of consulting with Ledge Light Health District moving forward. Board members had further comment. There was comment regarding the mask rules and having to follow the mandate. Mrs. Wagner said what she is hearing from the Board is that we go with the mandate. She said the safety and health of our staff and students is foremost. We have a mandate in effect until September 30<sup>th</sup>. Board members had further comment and questions. Mrs. Wagner said we are good to go five days in. We will continue to be diligent and watch and get ahead of it.

b. ARP-ESSER Grant Funds – Mr. Nero hoped the Board was happy with what they laid out. We were a little bit over but with turnover we can make that up. Mrs. Wagner said we asked for a listing of where the money will be going. Mrs. Martin said she sent a copy of the grant to the Board. There was discussion. Mrs. Wagner asked if the social-emotional coach can be picked up through programming and current staffing and Mr. Nero said yes. Mrs. Wagner said we are doing programming and staffing to get kids caught up. Mrs. Mastroianni had comment and asked some funds could be used for tents or outdoor spaces. Mrs. Wagner said we could look at some of the non-lapsing account. Ms. Welborn said it has to be a thought-through process and we need to have some feedback from the administrators. Mrs. Mastroianni had further comment and said their role is to okay the money and get the ball rolling. Mrs. Wagner said we need someone to get the ball rolling on that. Mrs. Mastroianni said she could work with Mr. Nero on that. Mr. Nero said right now we are working on opening school and can't take the time right now to pivot to something new. He had further comment. Mrs. Mastroianni had further comment and said she would help work on it. Mrs. Wagner asked if it were okay to touch base with the administrators. Mr. Nero had comment and said we had a plan in place in the spring and he elaborated. Dr. Towle-Weicksel commented on a grant that was written. Board members had comment. Mr. Nero said the tents were going to be donated but that

never happened. He had further comment. There was further discussion. Mrs. Mastroianni and Dr. Towle-Weicksel will work on this. Questions were asked and answered on the positions after the grant funds run out.

7. Policy Review – Ms. Welborn reviewed the policies to be reviewed. She read Policy 5113 that Mrs. Reyes revised. She suggested we do the CAFE policy and explained the differences. There was discussion. Mrs. Wagner will forward those two CAFE policies to the Board which are Policies 5113 and 5113.2. She said we did reach out to CAFE to review streamlining our policies and asked the Board how much work they wanted to do before then. We do need these two policies. Ms. Welborn explained the two electronic device policies we have. She said Mr. Pont devised the Bring Your Own Device policy in 2014 and is more in place where we want to be. She recommends we pull both of those and go with CAFE’s Policy 5131.81. Mr. Pont will be asked to review the policy to make sure it is in compliance with our technology. Ms. Welborn spoke of the forms parents need to sign and we have some of those. Mrs. Wagner asked the Board to look at the five bylaws she sent by email. The one she wants to make sure we look at is the bylaw of filling a vacancy. Ms. Welborn said this is a first-read and we will look at this next time. Mrs. Wagner said from there we need to turn this over to CAFE. We will look at the electronic device policy, we will review Policies 5113 and 5113.2, and look at the bylaws and go from there.

8. Calendar – The next meeting is August 25<sup>th</sup>. There will be an executive session. The administrators will not have to attend the next meeting. They will just attend the first meeting of each month. Ms. Welborn thanked Mrs. Wagner for going through the policies.

9. Public Comment – Mike Costanza, teacher, spoke of mask-wearing and the governor’s mandate. He felt the Board should stand up to the governor on this issue. He had further comment on students wearing masks and was against it. Stanley Stefanowicz, parent, thanked the Board for getting the students back 5 days a week. He is in favor of masking the students and he explained. He had further comment and wanted to have the Board hear both parts. Trisha Gudbrandsen, parent, commented on the Board’s actions and suggested everyone pull their children out of school. Laura Mello, parent, said the Board and administrators have done a great job keeping our students safe and said this mandate is a standing order. She had further comment. She said we are talking about an entire elementary school that is not vaccinated and we need to keep that in mind. Will Mason, parent, read the governor’s press release where he is still reviewing the masking policy. He wants to know if he makes it our decision where you all would stand on that. Ms. Welborn asked that everyone keep their comments respectful. Danielle (did not identify her last name) asked to repeat distance learning. Will Mason, parent, said he didn’t get an answer to his question. Mrs. Wagner said they usually don’t answer a question right on the spot. They continue to look at it and try to make best decisions we can. Sam Cherenzia, parent, said they have done an excellent job. He understands about the mandate but if we can not have the masks before September 30<sup>th</sup>, he is all for it.

On a motion by Mr. Karpinski, seconded by Mr. McCord, the Board voted unanimously to adjourn the meeting at 8:21 p.m.

Respectfully submitted, Roberta T. McCarthy, Secretary to The Board of Education