

Board of Education Minutes
July 28, 2021

DRAFT

A regular meeting of the North Stonington Board of Education was held on Wednesday, July 28, 2021, via hybrid format with some audience members attending virtually via Zoom meeting platform meeting ID 874 4569 5796. Present were Mrs. Wagner, Mr. Karpinski, Ms. Welborn, Mr. McCord (6:42 p.m.), Mrs. Towle-Weicksel, Mrs. Mastroianni, Dr. Potemri, and Mr. Mendolia. Also present were Mr. Nero, Mrs. Martin, 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.

Mrs. Wagner asked to add 3b Superintendent's Report and 3c Board Chair Report to the agenda and to move public comment up to be after the school re-opening plan. On a motion by Mrs. Towle-Weicksel, seconded by Mr. Karpinski, the Board voted unanimously to add Items 3b and 3c and to move public comment.

3. Public Comment on Agenda Items with Students Speaking First – Mike Costanza, teacher, commented on having students wear masks in school. He read a statement and spoke in favor of having a choice to wear masks in school and he elaborated. Heather Sabolesky agreed with Mr. Costanza and had comment about not wearing masks. Colleen Cherenzia, parent, spoke in support of optional mask-wearing and she read statement. Kate Roschman, parent, thanked the Board for their work. She spoke of the changed in CDC guidelines for those vaccinated and unvaccinated. She strongly suggested that students, staff and teachers be required to wear a mask. Melissa Burdick, parent, agreed with Mrs. Roschman said. She spoke in favor of mask wearing. Ashley Austin, parent, gave her history of working with COVID patients. She had further comment and spoke in favor of not having the children wear masks.

b. Superintendent's Report – Mr. Nero had comment on being on target for the opening of school. He meets with department heads regularly. Next Thursday is the last day of summer school. We'll begin shifting our staff to get the elementary school prepared. Mr. Nero said they reviewed the process with the administrators for rolling out the Chrome Books. They are looking to hand them out on the Monday after school begins to the middle/high school students. The elementary school will be a different scenario because they are not one-to-one. Magnetic doors have been installed and he elaborated. He spoke of getting cyber insurance. Mr. Nero said Mrs. Martin has been in significant software training this summer. Mr. Nero said we got some good news this week. He said that Jessica Schultz has rescinded her resignation and he explained. He explained that if the ESSER funds are agreed upon that Rebecca Schilke will be coming back. He had further comment. Sarah Hines resigned from her position as kindergarten teacher and he explained the trickle-down effect of some of these postings. He had further comment.

c. Chairperson's Report – Mrs. Wagner said she sent a self-evaluation form to the Board and she explained. She would like to get the stipends committee to get together again. She has been working on the re-opening. She

said there is a constant flow of emails and information from CABE and other board chairs. She said things are rapidly changing.

4. Old Business – a. Strategic Plan – Mr. Nero said each administrator will report out on what they are doing now. He explained. Mrs. St. Germain had comment. She said they survey the stakeholders constantly. The surveys are mostly internal. She had further comment. She said they do continually reach out to their students. 37 staff members participated in the most recent survey. Mrs. St. Germain said they make it reflective of what they have done each year; they adapt it to what they are doing. She read the percentages of the answers. 78 parents responded to the survey; it was very low this year and she reviewed the percentages to each question. She said mental health issues are areas we need to look at. Mrs. Reyes read some of the student comments. Mrs. St. Germain said they will share all of that with the staff in the fall. Math support is at the top of their list along with mental health, maintaining Google training, and technology. She knows in the budget world, budget cuts are a reality but we need to look at technology because that's the world we live in. Board members had questions that were answered. Mrs. St. Germain said there is a big difference in what parents respond and what the kids respond. Mr. Nero said we have had two world athletes in the news regarding mental health and it's something we need to deal with it. Mr. Cillino said it is not uncommon to survey the stakeholders. They surveyed the parents and the staff. He read the staff responses. They had 105 responses for the parent surveys and he read the responses. He read what they pulled out from the survey. He said the focus needs are mental health, more enrichment opportunities, more math support, technology, increased camaraderie between grade levels, and more time to meet with colleagues. He said some of these things are being addressed and he explained. Mr. Nero commented that Mr. Cillino had instituted a school improvement team. Mr. Karpinski said they both administrators commented on technology. Everyone has laptops and he wondered what they are lacking. Mr. Cillino explained types of things they could use including software. Ms. Welborn asked if he was looking at a one-to-one program and he explained no but it would be helpful for grades 5 and 6. He had further comment. Mrs. St. Germain commented on the staff laptops. Mr. Nero said this survey was last year and elaborated. There was further comment. Mrs. Wagner said our technology budget is always cut to zero and explained. She wants to work with the Board of Finance to help them understand the need for technology. Mrs. Reyes explained what they are looking for in the grant funds and using the staff they have. They are looking at the programs they have in place and what they can do to improve it. Mrs. St. Germain said the professional development line used to be \$20,000 but it has been cut to zero for quite a number of years. She had further comment. Dr. Potemri asked them to consider a social-emotional learning coach and she explained. She had further comment. She said social emotional learning is really important right now and she had further comment. Mrs. St. Germain had further comment. Mrs. Wagner thanked the administrators and she had further comment. Board members had further comment.

b. ARP-ESSER Grant Funds – Mrs. Wagner said they met at 5:30 p.m. to go over that. Mr. Nero said we discussed this and we are about \$30,000 short from what we want. He thought we could make that up in the budget and he explained. He had further comment. He explained the administrators prioritized their needs. Mrs. St.

Germain said she worries that every school is going to be looking for a social emotional coach and she elaborated. Mrs. Wagner had comment. There was discussion. Mr. Nero said if we bring in another social worker it could be another \$70,000. Mrs. Mastroianni asked if they could pull out the professional development information and she had further comment. She wondered if we could bring in someone from the outside to cover all that. Mrs. Reyes responded and explained the breakdown of the program. Board members had further comment. Dr. Potemri had further comment about someone trained in restorative practice. Wagner said Mrs. Martin will get the list out to the Board. She asked the administrators to bring back what their real need is for the meeting on August 11th.

c. Meeting Format – Mrs. Wagner had comment and felt we will continue with the hybrid format at least for the next few meetings.

d. School Re-Opening Committee – Mrs. Wagner commented it has always been the goal of the Board of Education through COVID and beyond the health and safety of our students as well as the emotional well-being are important. She had further comment. We are taking all the guidance into consideration. A plan had been put in place and the most recent guidance we received was Monday. It is broken out into CDC guidance and recommendations from the state department of education and department of public health. She had further comment. It is really important that we listen to our parents and to review what we are given. We want to make sound, smart, safe decisions for everyone. It will be discussed in further detail on August 11th. We'll have much more guidance in the next few weeks. Mrs. Wagner read an email from Sean Ryan, parent. He wrote of being in favor of choice of wearing masks. Dave Sellins, parent, wrote in favor of choice for mask-wearing. Mr. Nero read a letter from Will Eddgerton, parent. He wrote in favor of choice for mask-wearing. He read a letter from Samantha Slocum, parent. She wrote in favor of choice for mask-wearing. Ms. Welborn wanted to clarify the comments that we are following the money. Mrs. Wagner said she has checked with CAFE and other sources about what happens if you don't follow a government mandate. She said it is illegal and had further comment. Licensures would be in danger. There was further comment. Further questions were asked and answered. Mr. Nero said he checked with our attorney and it would be against the law. If the governor made it a mandate, we could lose our funding and the federal lunch program. A few years ago when the NAEP test came out he checked on that as well. Mr. Mendolia had comment. Dr. Potemri said right now we are following our plan but it would change with a governor's mandate. Mrs. Wagner said part of it would and had further comment.

5. Public Comment - Sam Cherenzia, parent, appreciates the Board and their work. He spoke in favor of mask wearing choice. Laura Mello, parent, had comment on homework time and too much time is spent on it. Sarah Nelson, parent, thanked the Board for everything they have done to lead us through the pandemic. She said masking as an option is tricky and elaborated. She spoke of going into a wave with actual data to prove that we are. She gave statistics. She had further comment. It's important to understand we are still not passed the pandemic. She had further comment. Erik Caster, parent, gave his background. He came back to Wheeler specifically for the school. He had further comment. He appreciates the hard work the Board is doing. He hopes the parents continue

to be understanding with whatever decision is made. Will Mason, parent, gave his background. He had further comment about working together and coming to a consensus. He had further comment. Maureen Adams, former teacher, gave her history. She spoke in favor of having it a personal choice to wear a mask. She had further comment. Melissa Burdick, parent, said the CDC just classified New London County as an area of high community spread. She hopes everyone continues to look at these when making your choices. Patricia Gudbrandsen, parent, read a statement from Emily Seasin regarding mask-wearing and she wrote in favor of not wearing masks. Mrs. Gudbrandsen had comment about her children and wearing masks. She spoke in favor of choice to wear a mask. She had further comment. Amy Friend, parent, gave her background. She spoke in favor of mask-choice. She had further comment. Mr. Mendolia had comment and suggested they contact their senators and state representatives. Mrs. St. Germain had comment and clarified a statement that was made. She had further comment and said they would never intentionally harm their students. Dr. Potemri had comment regarding 504 accommodations. She had further comment. Mike Costanza, teacher, had comment on contacting the state officials and said he has. He had further comment. He hoped the Board makes the best decision for the students. Mrs. Mastroianni said Representative Greg Howard was on Zoom earlier but had to leave due to an emergency. Mrs. Wagner said this will be discussed further.

6. New Business – None.

7. Student Success – Ms. Welborn clarified the members on the committee now that Mrs. Towle-Weicksel is on the Board. Mrs. Mastroianni, Ms. Welborn and Mrs. Wagner make up the Student Success Committee.

8. Community Relations – None.

9. Facilities and Finance – a. June Year-end to Date – Questions were answered and sent out to Board member. Mrs. Martin said the final check run will be by August 15th.

10. Policy/Regulation Review – Regulation 4111 – Mr. Nero said Mrs. Towle-Weicksel made a suggestion that was incorporated into the document and he pointed out where it was in the regulation. Mr. Nero had comment on interview committees during the summer. He had comment and explanation. Board members had comment. Questions were asked and answered. There was discussion. On a motion by Mrs. Mastroianni, seconded by Ms. Welborn, the Board voted unanimously to approve Regulation 4111.

Policy 5114 - Mr. Nero said what they found was that the Board was the appellate in expulsion hearings. He explained and said we have an independent hearing officer and he explained. On a motion by Mr. McCord, seconded by Mr. Mendolia the Board voted unanimously to accept Policy 5114 as revised.

Policy 5113 – Mrs. Reyes provided revisions in red. Ms. Welborn said Policy 5113.2 covers attendance, absences, and truancy. CABE recommended the consolidation of both. Mr. Nero suggested leaving Policy 5113.2 for the truancy portion.

Mrs. McCarthy will send the Bring your own Device policy to the Board. The board will look at CAFE's proposed Policy 5131.81 for next meeting. Ms. Welborn gave out a list of regulations and proposed that the regulations be pulled out of the manual. She said we can discuss this at the next meeting. She had further explanation. She told the Board she talked to Vin Mustaro at CAFE about this and she reviewed his proposal. Board members had comment. Ms. Welborn made a motion that was seconded by Mrs. Mastroianni to bring CAFE onboard to review our policy manual at a cost of \$1,500. There was discussion. Mrs. Wagner wanted to make sure that we want what is by law. There was further discussion. The motion passed unanimously.

11. Proposed Executive Session – On a motion by Mr. Karpinski, seconded by Mr. McCord, the Board voted unanimously to adjourn to Executive Session at 8:48 p.m. for the Purpose of Superintendent's Goals.

The Board came out of Executive Session at 8:59 p.m.

On a motion by Mr. Karpinski, seconded by Mrs. Towle Weicksel, the Board voted unanimously to adjourn the meeting at 9:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Roberta T. McCarthy, Secretary to
The Board of Education