

Board of Education Minutes  
October 13, 2021

**DRAFT**

A regular meeting of the North Stonington Board of Education was held on Wednesday, October 13, 2021, at 6:30 p.m. via Zoom meeting platform meeting ID 878 6095 8237. Present were Mrs. Wagner, Mr. Karpinski, Ms. Welborn, Dr. Towle-Weicksel, Mrs. Mastroianni, Dr. Potemri, and Mr. Mendolia. Also present were Mr. Nero, Mrs. Martin, 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. Public Comment on Agenda Items with Students Speaking First – None.

On a motion by Dr. Potemri, seconded by Mrs. Mastroianni, the Board voted unanimously to add Item 7b, Re-Opening Plan to the agenda.

4. Administrators' Reports – Mr. Cillino said the community-wide open house was held and was very well-attended. He said the teachers had the rooms set up very well and the building looked great. He thanked Mr. Nero and Dr. Potemri for being there. He elaborated. The beginning of the outdoor classroom is starting to get into place. He had further comment. The math coach has started. Mr. Cillino said they have had a number of COVID cases and he elaborated and said it is taking a toll on everyone. He commended the staff for stepping up. He had further comment. He said our school nurses take the brunt of this all the time. Mr. Cillino explained a program that is being donated and he explained. Questions were asked and answered about students quarantining and getting COVID. Mr. Nero said we have had one case of contact-to-contact. Dr. Potemri said Mr. Cillino did an amazing job at the open house and she elaborated. Questions were asked about having an open house for Preston and Voluntown. Mrs. St. Germain explained they are doing a virtual presentation tomorrow and explained. She said they have been to board of education meetings and they will continue to do that when they are able. An in-person open house is the best way and she explained. Mrs. St. Germain explained what they did last year. Mrs. St. Germain said they are not seeing the amount of quarantining like the elementary school because they have a large vaccinated population. She said there is really a decline in student behavior. We started the year strong and made this a priority. They meet with the students regularly. They are re-teaching things to the students and she explained and said it is going in the right direction. She had further comment. These past few weeks they have worked with a local organization to write a grant and she explained what is being written in the grant. We are in a much better place than others because what we put into place last year. Mrs. Reyes said the counseling department has put together advisories for the students and she explained. The students in grades 9-12 took a needs' assessment and they are reviewing those now. She elaborated. It is starting next week in the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade classes. The Sandy Hook Signs of Suicide program is being integrated into our health curriculum. The counselors will come into the health classes and co-teach that with Mr. Bailey. Mrs. Reyes said they have started their student support group again and she explained that group. Next week is spirit week. Friday night is a middle school dance and outside

activities. Saturday is the homecoming dance and bonfire on the same night. They have invited all the staff to come. Mrs. St. Germain said PSAT day was today and she explained. Everyone is really working together. The focus is moving forward and staying positive. She is optimistic we are moving in the right direction and she elaborated. Questions were asked and answered on student behavior and parent notification. Mrs. St. Germain had further comment. Questions were asked about the screening tool in advisory to which Mrs. Reyes responded. Questions were asked and answered on “Second Step.” Mr. Cillino said they will be able to purchase one year. Questions were asked and answered on the cost of the program. There was further comment. Questions were asked and answered on the process of the needs’ assessment with the students. Mrs. Reyes had further comment on the process. Mrs. Wagner thanked the administration team.

5. Administrative – a. Minutes – September 8, 2021 – On a motion by Mr. Karpinski, seconded by Dr. Potemri, the Board voted unanimously to accept the minutes of the September 8, 2021, meeting.

September 21, 2021, Special Meeting – On a motion by Mr. Karpinski, seconded by Dr. Potemri, the Board voted unanimously to accept the minutes of the September 21, 2021, special meeting.

September 22, 2021 – On a motion by Mr. Karpinski, seconded by Dr. Potemri, the Board voted unanimously to accept the minutes of the September 22, 2021, meeting.

b. Correspondence – None.

c. Personnel – Mr. Nero said the social worker resigned and he explained. Mrs. Costanza may be coming in to fill in during the interim. Questions were asked and answered. Mr. Nero had further comment. There was discussion.

6. Reports – a. Superintendent – Mr. Nero spoke of the loss of Jim Patton; he was a wonderful person and his loss is great. Mr. Nero said there are a number of building issues they are trying to resolve. He spoke of the irrigation system they are looking into. He spoke of having an assessment of the well done and explained the process to find the well. Mr. Nero said the assessment was done and we are good to go if we want to put in a sprinkler system. He said it may be smart to do an RFP now if we are going to do anything with the athletic fields. He elaborated and had further comment. Questions were asked and answered about how to get a ball park figure. There was further discussion. Questions were asked about needing to do field work before a system is installed. Mr. Nero had comment. There was discussion of going out for an RFI (Request for Information).

b. BOE Chairperson – Mrs. Wagner said she attended the last Board of Finance meeting because the non-lapsing fund was on the agenda and she wanted to be there in case there were questions. She said she wanted to be in attendance when they review our financials and she elaborated. She said we have some Board of Education members leaving and new members coming on and she has been reaching out to the new members. She asked about meeting in person again. She would like to do the workshop on the 23<sup>rd</sup> in person and she would like to do

the next meeting in person on the 27<sup>th</sup> and do hybrid. Mrs. Mastroianni asked about the early dismissal of the sports teams and wondered if it was because of a shortage of drivers. Mr. Nero explained we have been meeting with our bus coordinator and elaborated. He said we have been doing the best we can to accommodate this. We have met with Mrs. Turner, the administrators, Mrs. Martin, and Mrs. Buchanan. Mrs. Mastroianni asked if this would be an all-year happening. Mr. Nero said there is no way to know what is going to happen. He had further comment. Mrs. Mastroianni said she didn't get any communication of this happening and asked if there was a communication sent out. Mrs. St. Germain said they are literally going day by day and in real-time on this sometimes. She said they will try to keep up with alerting the parents. There was discussion on driver shortages. Dr. Potemri commented on a Board of Finance liaison attending our meetings and nobody has been doing that. Mrs. Wagner said it came up at the meeting and it was said that it was a lot to ask their members but they wanted us to come to their meetings. There was comment on candidates attending our meetings. There was further discussion. Questions were asked and answered. Mrs. Wagner had further comment. Mrs. Mastroianni commended Mrs. Wagner on her comments at the board of finance meeting and felt it was very effective for her to be there. She elaborated. There was further discussion.

c. Committee Chairperson – Mrs. Wagner said the self-evaluations were sent to CAFE and they will be putting them together for us. Mrs. Mastroianni, Ms. Welborn, and Mrs. Wagner will meet before the workshop.

d. LEARN Board of Directors' Liaison – Mrs. Wagner received the information from Mr. Mendolia and will try to listen in to the meeting tomorrow.

7. Old Business – a. Superintendent Search – Mrs. Wagner said the RFPs were due today and were opened. A packet is ready for pickup at central office. On a motion by Ms. Welborn, seconded by Mr. Mendolia, the Board voted unanimously to appoint the North Stonington Board of Education as the Executive Search Committee for the Superintendent of Schools. Mrs. Wagner said they had a workshop with CAFE about the process and the Board decided to go with a consultant to assist in the search. She explained some of the process. Questions were asked and answered. A search committee meeting will be held at 6:30 p.m. on October 21<sup>st</sup> and a Board workshop will be held at 8:30 a.m. on October 23<sup>rd</sup>. They will meet in the high school media center.

b. School Re-Opening Plan – Mrs. Mastroianni said she knows Mr. Nero has been talking to Representative Howard. He called her and said he has heard from a lot of parents about the detriment of quarantine. He is asking the DPH (Department of Public Health) to look at data from neighboring states on quarantine. She spoke of testing and the cost. Grants are available and he is working on that. Mrs. Mastroianni said it looks like 77 kids are quarantined at the elementary school. There is no streaming and there is posting of assignments. She said there is no real teaching because of the model of no streaming this year. She spoke of the academic time being lost. She had further comment and wondered if there were any way we can leverage any of our resources to help with this. Mr. Nero said we had to close two kindergarten classrooms but the teachers were able to stream because they have no students in front of them. He elaborated. Mr. Nero said this is the plan the Board agreed on. He had further

comment. Mrs. St. Germain said an issue now is privacy and she explained. There was discussion. Mr. Nero explained some of the cause is spacing and he explained it is 3 feet in the classroom but 6 feet elsewhere. Mr. Nero said when we talk about vaccines it is controversial but near the end of October it could be available for the younger students. He spoke of the difference in numbers between the high school and elementary school quarantining. Mrs. Mastroianni said we can control the educational process for these kids. Mr. Cillino said the sixth grade team met and have worked out a solution. He explained it works in this situation but not all. He had further comment. Mr. Nero said when we have a situation of large numbers like that it is the best solution to be able to free up a teacher to do virtual. Board members had further comment. Mr. Nero had comment and said we don't have enough staff to do what we need to do and elaborated. Mr. Nero had further comment. Dr. Towle-Weicksel appreciated Mr. Nero's emails and wondered if they could get a rolling count maybe on a Friday. Mr. Nero will send it out to the Board on Friday. There was further discussion. Questions were asked about the behind not streaming when kids are quarantined. Mr. Nero said this is something that the superintendents have discussed and it is very difficult to do. Board members had further comment. The question was raised are we denying them by not having them stream. Mr. Nero reminded them that this was a Board decision. There was discussion amongst Board members. Mr. Cillino had comment. He said Zooming in on a class is not always going to work. He had comment. He said it is difficult to attend to the students at home and in class. The students in the lower grades would be provided work. He said some of the upper grades have videos that go along with lessons and he explained. Mrs. St. Germain said teachers are opening up their classrooms to students when they feel there is something the student needs to watch. She said there is not that engagement back and forth but the classrooms are open. Board members had further comment on opening up classrooms to students virtually. There was further discussion. Dr. Towle-Weicksel said it was incredibly difficult to have her first grader sit in front of a screen all day. She said streaming with students in class is incredibly different and she didn't want her child on all day. There was further discussion. Mr. Nero had comment. There was discussion. Mrs. Wagner had comment. She asked Mr. Nero to go back to the administration to figure out the best way to do this. She wants them to continue to look at it and re-visit it again. Mr. Nero said he would get it done. Board members had further comment about having open classrooms with students having access to education. Ms. Welborn said she has been listening to this and doesn't agree that livestreaming is necessarily the best model. She would like our administrators to evaluate the various parameters. She doesn't want to legislate across the board. Board members had further comment. Mrs. Wagner asked the administrators how difficult it is to set up to stream and gave some examples and asked if you could give them a choice to stream all during quarantine or not. She elaborated. Mr. Cillino said the bigger challenge they are going to face is they are not a one-to-one school. They will have to provide devices to those that want to stream. He had further comment and explanation. In the upper grades it's easier to post things for the students and he elaborated. He said it's different at different levels. Mrs. St. Germain said the engagement on the other end is the hard thing. She explained. Dr. Potemri said all she is asking is the access and then it is up to them. She had further comment. Mr. Cillino had questions on loaning out equipment. He explained their issues. Board members had further comment on ways to keep our kids in school and the funding to do it. There was further

comment. Representative Howard will be invited to our next meeting. There was further comment by Board members.

8. New Business – a. 2022 Meeting Schedule – Mrs. Wagner reviewed the meeting schedule. On a motion by Mr. Karpinski, seconded by Mrs. Mastroianni, the Board voted unanimously to approve the 2022 meeting schedule.

9. Facilities and Finance – a. August 2021 Financial Statements – Mrs. Wagner explained some of the line items that were questioned. Mrs. Martin answered questions on the electric and solar invoices. Mrs. Wagner continued to review items that were questioned. Mr. Karpinski made a motion that was seconded by Mrs. Mastroianni to approve the August 2021 Financial Statements. Questions were asked and answered. The motion passed unanimously.

10. Policy – Mr. Nero said the Board had given direction to Anne Littlefield on some policies. He had further comment. A conference call was held with Attorney and he explained. He spoke of the anti-discrimination policy as well which the attorney said we need to include as well. Questions were asked and answered. On a motion by Mr. Karpinski, seconded by Dr. Towle-Weicksel, the Board voted with six members voting to approve Policy 5000 (Non-Discrimination-Students) substituting titles in lieu of names. Dr. Potemri was absent for the vote.

Policy 5131.912 (Bullying Prevention and Intervention) – On a motion by Ms. Welborn, seconded by Mr. Karpinski, the Board voted unanimously to accept revised Policy 5131.912.

Regulation 5131.912 (Safe School Climate Plan) – On a motion by Ms. Welborn, seconded by Mr. Karpinski, the Board voted unanimously to accept Regulation 5131.912.

Mrs. Wagner gave a recap on the policies just approved.

11. Calendar – October 21<sup>st</sup> at 6:30 p.m. is the search committee meeting and October 23<sup>rd</sup> at 8:30 a.m. is the workshop. There is a regular meeting on October 27<sup>th</sup>.

12. Public Comment – Brett Mastroianni, parent, thanked Mrs. Wagner for coming to the board of finance meeting. He thought it would be great if she could attend during the transition. He commented about what is happening in the news and appreciated Mr. Nero's letter and asked if there were anything on the school level that might happen with the students to lead the discussion to understand what is happening and perhaps give it an educational aspect. Mr. Nero said we can't reveal anything more than what we have because it is an ongoing process. He said any conversation that is held could lead to specifics and could cause a problem. There was further discussion.

On a motion by Mr. Karpinski, seconded by Dr. Potemri, the Board voted unanimously to adjourn the meeting at 8:48 p.m.

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