

Board of Education Minutes
January 3, 2022
Special Meeting

DRAFT

A special meeting of the North Stonington Board of Education was held on Monday, January 3, 2022, via Zoom meeting platform meeting ID 847 1549 7416. Present were Mrs. Wagner, Mr. Karpinski (6:04 p.m.), Ms. Welborn, Mrs. Mazzella, Dr. Towle-Weicksel, Mrs. Mastroianni (6:01 p.m.), Mr. Stefanowicz, 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 6:00 p.m.

2. Pledge of Allegiance – The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.
3. Public Comment on Agenda Items with Students Speaking First – None.
4. Old Business – a. Review of Quarantine Guidelines – Mrs. Wagner explained the meeting was called before vacation and since then, updated guidelines have been issued. Mr. Nero explained the changes that have occurred. He reviewed the new quarantine guidelines and the other guidelines that have changed. He clarified the guidance for those that are vaccinated. Mr. Nero will post the three-page document from the State. Mrs. Wagner gave the highlights of that document. Mr. Nero said he can email it to everyone tomorrow and post it on the web site. Mr. Stefanowicz commented that he found out this information from Board members in other districts and he elaborated. He felt we should have put something out to our parents earlier and felt uninformed as a parent and a Board member. Mrs. Wagner said this came out on December 31st and she couldn't have called a meeting. She explained the communications from the superintendent and said the new guidelines have come out rather quickly. We hadn't gotten information on how to implement this. She had further comment. Mr. Nero said he wanted to make sure he had all the information before something was put out. He explained. He said we still haven't gotten information from CIAC on our athletes. He had further comment. Dr. Towle-Weicksel had comment. She was concerned about the lack of contact tracing. She wanted to be clear that the contact tracing is a DPH mandate and not the CDC and she would like to see some tighter regulations on this. Mrs. Wagner said we have always followed the DPH guidelines. She had further comment. She explained when this first started the CDC would come out with guidance followed by DPH guidelines. Dr. Towle-Weicksel had further comment on the contact tracing. Mr. Nero said since we opened school in the 2020-21 year and this year, we have had 4 cases due to close contact in school and a couple more at the high school. He reviewed some of the quarantine numbers. He believes that is what drove the data on this. There was further comment. Mrs. Wagner said we shouldn't say that is the guidance but we are not going to follow it. She had further comment and said we have always followed their guidance and she asked the Board wouldn't follow it now. Ms. Welborn said this is different. She saw this as Listen to recording. Mr. Cillino had comment as did Mrs. St. Germain. Board members had further comment. Ms. Welborn commented that it sounded like the elementary school had buttoned it up. Mr. Cillino responded. There was further discussion. Mrs. St. Germain explained her lunch waves and had further comment. Mrs. Wagner had

comment. Ms. Welborn asked what we gain by continuing contact tracing. Mr. Nero had comment. He commented on the elementary nurse's other duties and how much time contact tracing takes up. He had further comment. He said the nurses were happy that the contact tracing is ending. Mrs. Wagner said we have already traced in the cafeteria and commented that we haven't traced it back to that. Mr. Nero had further comment. Mrs. St. Germain pointed out that just because somebody is vaccinated doesn't shorten the tracing time and she explained. She had further comment and said this will benefit our other students that are waiting for the nurse. Board members had further questions that Mr. Nero answered. Mr. Nero had further comment. Ms. Welborn read a statement in the new guidance and asked how parents are notified. Mr. Nero explained that process. There was discussion of alerting the parents as to the grade level or club so parents can be aware. Mr. Nero explained he can do that and elaborated. Ms. Welborn was concerned with privacy versus need to know. Mr. Nero had further comment on that issue. Mrs. St. Germain said that could be a little tricky at the upper level because of mixed grades. Mr. Karpinski asked about the bus and what the rules were on that. Mr. Nero said they have to wear masks on the bus. Mr. Nero had further comment and said it doesn't change much. Mr. Stefanowicz said at the high school the kids tend to talk a little more and so they would know a little more about what was going on and he elaborated. He understood the point about moving beyond contact tracing but he felt uncomfortable about this and he explained. He said at some point we have to trust the CDC. He had further comment. Mr. Nero said every step we have made we have had a tremendous amount of anxiety. He explained. He said a lot of conscientious thought went into this. He had further comment and said he thinks we will be fine. Mrs. St. Germain said today was day one and parents were very helpful relaying positive test results even all through vacation. If parents and guardians continue to do that we should be okay; it was a good start. She had further comment. Mr. Stefanowicz asked about students' work while they are quarantined and are we going to adjust for any delayed work. Mrs. St. Germain explained and said they have been able to stay on top of this. The five days is going to help and she explained. Mr. Cillino said we do have to get work together for the elementary students so it usually takes about a day for that. He elaborated. He agreed the five days is going to be helpful. Dr. Towle-Weicksel asked who is monitoring the students for those other five days. Mrs. St. Germain explained their process at the middle high school. Mr. Cillino had comment on that as well. Mrs. Wagner commented on day five and day six having to be fever-free. Mrs. Wagner said the big changes are the quarantine being down to five days and no more contact tracing. Mrs. St. Germain said they are no longer hosting visitor guests for games through the month of January and explained. Mrs. Mazzella said she is on board with this and commented that the document is so straight forward. She spoke of the administrators being pro-active and she elaborated. She feels by following this guidance we can decrease the quarantining and the loss of class time. Ms. Welborn clarified if a student tests positive, they isolate for five days and then wear a mask when around others. She asked about lunch and what does that really mean. Mr. Nero said they wanted to be clear that the students should only take their mask off just to eat and then they have to promptly put it back on. He understands kids may try to make decisions on their own and the adults will have to make sure they comply. Mrs. St. Germain said when a student comes back they send them students to study hall rather than chorus and band. Mrs. Wagner asked about our staff that has to test. Mr. Nero said they are in the moratorium at

least until the sixth. He said we got some tests today and they will be given to those staff members. We have a fixed number of test kits and may be getting more. Mr. Nero said we don't have a lot that get tested weekly and we'll help them out. Dr. Towle-Weicksel asked about our staffing and if we were in good shape. Mr. Nero said we are down two bus drivers and he explained. Staffing was tighter at the high school today than it was at the elementary school. We are doing pretty well. Mr. Nero relayed the conversation Mrs. Martin had with Mrs. Buchanan, our bus coordinator. Mrs. Wagner said hopefully this reduction to five days helps with staffing as well. Mrs. Wagner said Mr. Nero sent out a communication and an email regarding this. She said he'll send out the document from the state and post it on our web site. Ms. Welborn asked about percentages for vaccinated students. Mr. Nero had comment. Mrs. St. Germain said we had a higher number that were eligible but there are still a lot that aren't. Mr. Cillino said the vaccination cards are just starting to come in now for them. He doesn't think they have a very high percentage right now.

Mrs. Mastroianni said they are holding a Community Conversation on January 8th regarding the building at 298 and also the recovery funds.

- b. Review of Screen-to-Stay Program
- c. Review of Test-to-Return Program
- 4. Public Comment – Nicole Porter, parent, said she is a nurse by profession. She explained in the hospital setting when someone is positive and if they are wearing their mask, it's not even termed an exposure. She hoped it would help them feel a better about that. She had further comment. She explained a true exposure is someone within 6 feet without masks on for 15 minutes. She said she has been on calls all weekend, and within a week the state could see a positivity rate of 40% with Omicron. She said the number of sick staff and bus drivers could be impacted within the next couple of weeks. She had further comment. She thanked all of them for the incredible work to keep our kids in school but we may very well be in for a couple of bumpy weeks. Melissa (no last name mentioned), parent, commented on the narrowing down of those impacted and if you are narrowing it down to a sports team why can't you narrow it down to the class. She explained. She would like to know she has to be a little more careful.

On a motion by Dr. Towle-Weicksel, seconded by Mr. Karpinski, the Board voted unanimously to adjourn the meeting at 7:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Roberta T. McCarthy, Secretary to
The Board of Education