

Board of Education Minutes
January 12, 2022

DRAFT

A regular meeting of the North Stonington Board of Education was held on Wednesday, January 12, 2022, via Zoom meeting platform meeting ID 841 5097 7273. Present were Mrs. Wagner, Mr. Karpinski, Ms. Welborn, Mrs. Mazzella, Dr. Towle-Weicksel, Mrs. Mastroianni (6:10 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 6:07 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. Towle-Weicksel, seconded by Mr. Karpinski, the Board voted unanimously to add “COVID Update Report” as item 8b.

4. Presentations – Leadership Profile – Dr. Mary Broderick of CABE (Connecticut Association of Boards of Education) said she spent time in the schools in December and received a lot of information. She said 22 individuals participated in focus groups and 110 people participated in the survey. She went over the strengths as seen by the participants. Being a small district was the highest identified strength and she reviewed the strength highlights including the staff, the close-knit community, and programs. She reviewed the comments made. Sports and climate and culture were also mentioned as a strength. She continued to review the highlights. Dr. Broderick reviewed the challenges of the district as seen by the participants that included a constrained budget, budgets needing to be transparent and equitable, district size, and insufficient IT staff. COVID was mentioned as putting a strain on staff with staffing shortages. Communications and political climate were also mentioned as a challenge as well as leadership due to long-standing people leaving. She continued to review the highlights. Dr. Broderick reviewed the desired expertise in a new superintendent and well as the desired qualities. She said people want someone that can build a trusting relationship and value North Stonington as a small community as well as build relations with town boards. Someone who communicates and collaborates effectively was also mentioned. She reviewed the comments. Someone who shares the district-wide vision of excellence, is trustworthy, honest, respectful, accessible, approachable, and visible were qualities mentioned. The list continued with keeping students’ growth and well-being the primary focus, decisive, confident and being an objective problem-solver. Dr. Broderick suggested they use this profile to use in selection of candidates and to go further down the applications to sort out the candidates. Board members thanked Dr. Broderick and commented that she summed up the type of leader they are looking for and hoped they can find a candidate that fills all those expectations. Ms. Welborn was surprised to hear about the potential candidate valuing our history and what makes us unique. Dr. Broderick said it was really important and that each candidate will see that profile. She had further comment. Questions were asked regarding parent answers aligning with the Board’s responses and Dr. Broderick said it was consistent. The next

steps were outlined. Dr. Broderick said the deadline is Friday. They did send out the vacancy posting again; the applicant pool across the country is lacking. She said they have a decent pool now and she will see what happens on Friday. They will need to schedule a search committee meeting. There was discussion. Questions were asked and answered. On a motion by Mrs. Wagner, seconded by Mrs. Mazzella, the Board voted unanimously to accept the superintendent search profiles as presented by Mary Broderick. The search committee will possibly meet on the January 27th at 6:30 p.m.

5. Administrators' Reports – Mrs. St. Germain said it has been a rough week and a half but thinks it's getting better every day. We are trending in the right direction. First mid-year assessments start this week. She explained they have been identifying students' academic expectations and are assessing for the first time their individual expectations. Mrs. St. Germain said we are ahead of the curve on that and she explained. They will have the ability to show them the school wide rubrics and she elaborated. The CIAC finally spoke and gave some guidance regarding athletes and she explained the protocols. Mrs. Reyes gave the number of cases in the New Year; there were 26 students and 2 teachers reported to them. There are some kids being close contacts outside of school and she explained there are 8 in that situation. She said last Wednesday, they did a virtual presentation from the Sandy Hook Promise and she explained. They had an in-person presentation when she first started as associate principal and she explained. The second program, signs of suicide, was implemented this year and she explained. It will be done in grades 10 and 11 in health and in conjunction with the counseling department. "Say Something" was the last part of the program and she explained. Each advisory group watched the program and it was very interactive. She elaborated. They have now done all three parts and she explained when each of the programs will be conducted during the school year. Mr. Cillino thanked Chris and Sarah Nelson for the luncheon they provided for the staff and also for the SEL program. The Rotary Club of the Stoningtons donated more masks. Teacher Renee Bennett's sister's company donated hand sanitizer and Rebecca Schilke's husband's company donated a case of children's masks. Mr. Cillino said 30 people have either tested positive or are in quarantine with 23 out now. He said 20 people gave notice over the break. He said with the latest changes, they have been working on separating everyone during lunch. The school improvement team is meeting tomorrow. He explained how the lunch waves work and which classes eat in their classroom. They are trying to get everyone in the cafeteria at some point which would need schedule modifications and he explained. Mr. Cillino said they are reaching the mid-point of the year and will be starting their assessments and he explained. They are in the process of rolling out the program "Second Step" to the staff and he explained. He explained parts of the program and had further comment. Mrs. Costa talked about staffing. She especially wanted to thank the paraprofessional staff; they have gone above and beyond with shifting to classes. She said they hired another paraprofessional and will have an intern starting on January 18th. Mr. Nero said just before the break he received word that Mrs. Costa will be retiring. He thanked her tremendously; she has taken the department to a new level since he has been here. He wished her well in her retirement. He had further comment. Mrs. Wagner thanked Mrs. Costa and said she has been amazing to work with.

6. Administrative – a. Minutes – December 1, 2021 – On a motion by Mr. Karpinski, seconded by Mrs. Mazzella, the Board voted unanimously to accept the minutes of the December 1, 2021, meeting.

January 3, 2022 Special Meeting – Mr. Karpinski made a motion that was seconded by Mr. Mendolia to accept the minutes of the January 3, 2022, special meeting. Questions were asked and answered. These minutes were tabled to the next meeting.

b. Correspondence – None.

c. Personnel – Mr. Nero said we hired a paraprofessional and are bringing in an intern. He said we work closely with Eastern and Sacred Heart. He has spoken to them about having interns that have been in our district. We will be talking about hiring a facilities director. We have a number of custodial resignations this week. He staffing is an issue everywhere. As a result of COVID, people are not going back to their jobs. Mr. Nero said the guys (custodial staff) have been great to get the job done. He had comment. He is hoping to fill a couple of those positions in the next couple of weeks.

7. Reports – a. Superintendent – Mr. Nero thanked Mrs. St. Germain and Mrs. Reyes. They wrote the grant for the Sandy Hook Promise and despite moving with the building project and then with COVID hitting, we have all three parts of the program completed. He said there is also an app that goes along with it. He had further comment. Mr. Nero said thankfully the CIAC came out with a ruling. Mrs. St. Germain, Mrs. Reyes, and Mrs. Turner are working on the guidelines. Mr. Nero said we sent a driver to pick up our test kits. He reviewed the types of kits for students and staff. He spoke with Ledge Light about those staff members that are not able to get tested and we can use those staff kits for them. He said we also got 19 kits from the town for essential staff. He said if a child is sick in school and exhibiting symptoms, they will be sent home with a test kit. He had further comment. We will have the rest of our kits on Friday. He said we are documenting every time we give out a kit. Mr. Nero spoke of his superintendents' meeting. He said we a few cases today but felt we are moving in the right direction.

b. BOE Chairperson – Mrs. Wagner said it is getting to be budget season. January 25th the Board of Selectmen is having a budget discussion. February 10th the Board of Education will present revenue and contractually where we fall. We will be presenting our budget March 9th. She had further comment. Mrs. Martin said she has two out of the four departments' budgets. For the custodial and maintenance budget they are working on that. Mrs. Wagner said February 9th will be heavy on the budget. A workshop will be held on February 23rd. March 1st or March 3rd will be a budget meeting. Tuesday, March 1st will be a budget meeting at 6:00 p.m. The Board of Finance is meeting a lot of Wednesdays so we'll have to figure out that meeting. During budget time, depending on what the Board of Finance asks, budget meetings could be called at any time. We are able to meet virtually all the way through April due to executive order and that may happen due to meeting space. Mrs. Wagner said she, Mr. Nero, and Mrs. Martin are meeting with the first selectman to talk about resources.

c. Committee Chairperson – Mrs. Wagner said Dr. Towle-Weicksel will be moving from the Facilities and Finance Committee to Community Relations and Mr. Mendolia will be moving to the Facilities and Finance Committee.

d. LEARN Board of Directors' Liaison – Meetings have not been attended.

8. Old Business – Finalize 2022-2023 School Calendar – Mr. Stefanowicz made a motion that was seconded by Ms. Welborn to accept the 2022-2023 School Calendar. Mrs. Wagner clarified the staff development days at beginning of the year. The motion passed unanimously.

9. New Business – a. Board Meeting Reorganization – Mrs. Wagner said we have been on a two meeting schedule for a long time now. We have work to do and need to collaborate and get that work done. A business meeting will be held the first meeting of the month and the second meeting will be workshops. For the second meeting in January, Student Success will meet from 5:30 p.m. to 6:30 p.m. and then Community Engagement from 6:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. They will try this format to see how it works for January.

The Board returned to Old Business, item 8b.

8. Old Business – b. COVID Update Report – Dr. Towle-Weicksel asked about staffing and busses. Mr. Nero said it has been a challenge but he didn't think there has been a situation where we haven't been able to open school. He said it's tough because substitutes are hard to get. We had a situation last week and cancelling school due to the snow was a blessing and he explained. He said we can't do virtual on a snow day. He had further comment and said you do the best to make it work. Mr. Nero said we are down one driver. We had a driver out for COVID and we had to change some of the runs but the students got in on time. Mrs. St. Germain explained other scenarios besides teachers in quarantine and said some of the issues are their child care. Mrs. Martin said we do have some drivers in training so that is about 6 weeks out and she explained. Mr. Stefanowicz asked if we have a threshold or do we play it day by day. Mr. Nero said if that happens and one school could open, it would. He explained. Mrs. Wagner had comment on a flat threshold and explained why that wouldn't work. Mr. Nero said if the health, safety, and welfare of the students were at risk it would be another story. There was further comment. Dr. Towle-Weicksel asked Mr. Cillino to speak to the lunchroom situation and she explained. Mr. Cillino said if they are eating in the cafeteria, there is not quite enough space for 6 feet apart and he explained how the seating works. He explained the spacing in the classrooms and had further comment. He said they are not capable of getting a full 6 feet in the cafeteria. There was further comment. Questions were asked about the testing kits for the adults being used for staff that get tested weekly. Mr. Nero said that won't necessarily be the case and explained. He said a person cannot come in and say, "I want a test." Mr. Nero explained the process and protocol for the testing kits. He had further comment. Dr. Towle-Weicksel spoke of Project Detect that the governor spoke about. Mr. Nero said he is not that familiar with it. Mrs. Wagner said she can speak to that and said this program

only works when you can test everyone and she explained. Mr. Nero said he has to follow all the rules and he explained. He said there are all sides to this and you have to know your history and understand it. We do have people that are on one side of this and you are on the other side of it. Dr. Towle-Weicksel said it is for the unvaccinated and explained. She can send out more information and said this is just another tool to make sure we don't shut down. She said she appreciates the emails from Mr. Nero. She said they are intense and maybe they should not be listing all the grades. She explained. Mrs. Wagner said they had specifically asked for that last meeting. Mr. Nero was concerned about drilling that far down and he elaborated. There was discussion on the purpose of wanting all that data. Board members had further comment. Mrs. Wagner had comment and said we are doing everything we can to keep our kids safe and she explained what we are doing. She said there are going to be cases of this new variant and she's not sure drilling down to a specific number of students is going to serve a purpose. There was discussion. Mr. Nero worries about how far they are drilling down. He said he will put out the aggregate number.

10. Facilities and Finance – a. September 2021 Financial Statements – Mr. Karpinski made a motion that was seconded by Mrs. Mazzella to approve a consent agenda for the September 2021, October 2021, and November 2021, Financial Statements. Mr. Karpinski said there were three items he was concerned about – special education costs, solar expenses, and the educational center and looking at ways to reduce the utilities at 298. He said special education and the utilities were his concern. Mrs. Wagner said last year for the budget, we only put in what we knew and she explained those costs have changed and we are in deficit on those accounts and she elaborated. The motion to accept the financial statements passed unanimously. Mrs. Mastroianni asked about the non-lapsing account. She thanked Mrs. Martin for the report. She had questions on some of the expenses. Mrs. Wagner said we did discuss the plumbing issues and about taking it out of non-lapsing. She said there has been an on-going plumbing issue and she explained. Mrs. Mastroianni asked if there was never an emergency would it be expended from this account and Mrs. Wagner said not without the Board's approval. She had further explanation. Mr. Mendolia said he thought that was the purpose of that account and he elaborated. There was further discussion. Mrs. Mastroianni just wanted to be clear about how we use the account; she wanted to understand how it's used and asked whether the Board would have the discretion about whether to vote on it. Mrs. Wagner said not unless the Board feels we should vote on every expenditure. There was discussion on the transparency of the account and voting on the expenditures from the account. Mrs. Wagner clarified that any expenditure from that fund will be voted on. There was discussion. Mrs. Martin had comment and said it is not just something that we spend out of without approval. Board members had comment. Mrs. Martin said we didn't just start spending out of the account but due to some of the approved back-ordered items, the billing just came in. She said the town has been very prompt in their payments. Mr. Nero said he has the authority to make decisions on spending in emergency situations and he had comment. He said there is a provision about emergency spending and alerting the Board Chair of the situation. Mrs. Wagner had further comment. She said the technology purchase was one large amount but the way it came in was broken out. She said there should be a procedure in place that every item from the non-lapsing account is voted on. If everyone is in agreement, all expenses from the non-lapsing will be voted on. There

was agreement as long as it didn't impede on Mrs. Martin or Mr. Nero. Moving forward, the Board will vote on any expenditure from the non-lapsing account.

- b. October 2021 Financial Statements – Covered in item a.
- c. November 2021 Financial Statements – Covered in item a.
- 11. Policy First Review – None.
- 12. Calendar – Previously discussed.
- 13. Public Comment –None.
- 14. Proposed for Executive Session – a. Personnel – On a motion by Mr. Karpinski, seconded by Mrs. Mastroianni, the Board voted unanimously to adjourn to Executive Session at 8:03 p.m. and to invite Mrs. Martin into such session.

The Board came out of Executive Session at 8:40 p.m.

On a motion by Mr. Karpinski, seconded by Mr. Mendolia, the Board voted unanimously to adjourn the meeting at 8:41 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Roberta T. McCarthy, Secretary to
The Board of Education