

Board of Education Minutes
June 15, 2022
Special Meeting

DRAFT

A special meeting of the North Stonington Board of Education was held on Wednesday, June 22, 2022 at 6:30 p.m. in the North Stonington Education Center using the hybrid meeting format. Those attending virtually used Zoom meeting platform, meeting ID 854 2978 8101. Present were Mrs. Wagner, Mr. Karpinski, Ms. Welborn, Mrs. Mazzella, Dr. Towle-Weicksel, Mrs. Mastroianni, Mr. Stefanowicz, and Mr. Mendolia. Also present were Mr. Nero, Mrs. St. Germain, 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 – Brett Mastroianni, selectman, commented on the staffing item on the agenda. He spoke of the statute that allows town and board of education services to be combined. He read from the CASBO white paper on combined services. He had further comment. He told the Board he has talked to multiple towns that have combined and it has worked out. Mr. Mastroianni will give the information he had to the Board. He had further comment. Mr. Nero had comment.

4. Presentations – Mrs. Wagner recognized Mrs. McCarthy for her 33 years of service to the schools. She recognized Mr. Nero for his 10 years as Superintendent. She said his guidance has helped her tremendously. She thanked him for his years of service. Mr. Nero commented on his years in North Stonington. He has been meeting with the new superintendent. He thanked everyone and had further comment. Mrs. Mazzella said it has been a real pleasure to work with him. She had further comment. Mrs. Mastroianni wished Mr. Nero luck and a wonderful retirement.

5. Administrators' Reports – Mrs. Wagner said the administrators are here but they are on vacation. Mrs. St. Germain said the end-of-the year was a real whirlwind to June 10th. Everything went phenomenally. We had three juniors certified at the Westerly Education Center. She said times are changing and she is really glad the Board of Education listened and changed their graduation requirements. She had further explanation. We have 9 more incoming Voluntown students coming in so we will have 15 kids in our hallways (tuition students). Mrs. St. Germain thanked Mr. Nero and said he taught her a lot about leadership. She spoke of Mrs. McCarthy and had further comment. They have one more position to fill. She is hoping for some calm after the last two school years. Mrs. St. Germain thanked her staff and said she loves her admin team. She had further comment. Mr. Cillino said it's nice to get back to normal at the end-of-the year. Field day was held and it was a great day. He elaborated. The grade six chorus concert was held with it being Mr. Noonan's last concert. Mr. Cillino said the grade 6 promotion was held inside due to weather and it turned out very nice. He had further comment. Those end of the year things were good. He thanked the Board for their support and was hoping to get volunteers back in the building. He thanked Mrs. McCarthy. He told Mr. Nero that he will always be "his" superintendent and he elaborated. He has been a friend and mentor and whatever he needed he was there. He thanked his staff. He is

hoping we will be back to as normal as we can. Mr. Nero spoke highly of his administrative team and had further comment. They have been great. He spoke of Mr. Macrino coming in and they mentored each other. Mr. Nero thanked everyone.

6. Administrative - a. Approval of Minutes – April 27, 2022 – On a motion by Mr. Karpinski, seconded by Mr. Stefanowicz, the Board voted unanimously to accept the minutes of the April 27, 2022, meeting.

May 9, 2022, Special Meeting – On a motion by Mr. Karpinski, seconded by Mr. Stefanowicz, the Board voted unanimously to accept the minutes of the May 9, 2022, special meeting.

May 11, 2022 – On a motion by Mr. Karpinski, seconded by Mr. Stefanowicz, the Board voted unanimously to accept the minutes of the May 11, 2022, meeting.

May 18, 2022, Special Meeting – On a motion by Mr. Karpinski, seconded by Mr. Stefanowicz, the Board voted unanimously to accept the minutes of the May 18, 2022, special meeting.

May 25, 2022 – On a motion by Mr. Karpinski, seconded by Mr. Stefanowicz, the Board voted unanimously to accept the minutes of the May 25, 2022, meeting.

b. Correspondence – None

c. Personnel – We hired a paraprofessional to replace someone that resigned. Talita Stackpole was hired and will also be working summer school. She will be in grade six. A teacher was hired for grade 3; Corinne Burnett is currently in New London. He gave her background. She was hired at step 4 bachelors. Kathryn McGuire was hired for the high school language arts position. She is at step 6 bachelors. Mr. Nero gave her background. He said we have one vacancy left which is chemistry/physics at the high school. He said we are in a much better place this year than last. We are a very appealing place to work and he elaborated.

7. Reports - a. Superintendent – Mr. Nero said he, Dr. Towle-Weicksel, the groundskeeper and the facilities director met. They located the playground equipment and he explained. Playground Medic will come in to do the annual inspection. Dr. Towle-Weicksel had comment. Mr. Nero has been emailing and talking to Mr. Hopkins and he elaborated. He spoke of the two votes we have with the healthcare consortium and had comment. Mr. Nero said whatever Mr. Hopkins needs, he is willing to help. He wants everyone to be in a good place.

b. BOE Chairperson – Mrs. Wagner said she has an 11:00 a.m. conference call with the CAFE board chairs. She said a new chairperson has been elected. She will also be meeting with board of finance chair, first selectman, and the new superintendent tomorrow morning at 8:00 a.m.

c. Committee Chairs – We haven't done any committee work lately and decided to work on that in July. There was discussion on a meeting date. July 26th is a possible date for the strategic plan workshop. There was further discussion.

d. LEARN Board of Directors – Nothing to report.

8. New Business – a. Central Office Staffing – Mrs. Wagner thanked Mr. Mastroianni for sharing the information. She said we always want to try to collaborate. She had further comment. They will be meeting tomorrow. She wanted the Board's feelings on that. She had comment. Ms. Welborn said it is a balance between what the Board of Education and schools can get done what needs to be done to be efficient. She had further comment. We may need to toss out what we have done in the past. She had further comment. Dr. Towle-Weicksel said there needs to be a balance. Her biggest concern is that Mrs. Martin's position has a lot of responsibilities and we honor those responsibilities and we set Mr. Hopkins up for success. We have to make sure everything is being met and we may not meet that in a shared position with the business manager but maybe another position such as the bookkeeper. She had further comment. Mr. Stefanowicz said he had looked into this himself. He had further comment and said he spoke to his director of finance. He referenced Mr. Nero's comments from a previous meeting regarding Preston's shared services. They have a transportation director and share food services with Griswold. If there is a problem with transportation it goes to the director and he explained. Here it goes to central office. The same thing happens with food service. If we are contracted out, there are more hoops to jump through for food service and transportation. He had further comment. Each school district is incredibly different and he elaborated. We need to look at the work that needs to be done and where it doesn't create a hostile work place where people are desperately trying to get things done. He had further comment. He said they are not apples to apples comparison. He had further comment. The better path is that we need to look at what needs to be done. We have been told by Mr. Nero and Mrs. Martin that the workload is incredible and it is extensive. We need to value that and understand that position. He had further comment. He agreed that a lower position would be worthwhile to look at. It's hard to compare districts because every school district has their own idiosyncrasies. Mrs. Mastroianni said it has always been clear what side of the fence she is on and that is we should be having these conversations all the time especially with a position in a higher echelon. She agrees that every district and town is different in their needs and how they do things. She has seen Mr. Mastroianni's research. She had further comment. She said this should not be an effort to take our position and say let's give it to one person. She had comment. She thinks this is an opportunity to best set up Mr. Hopkins for success and to create something innovative and unique for our town and municipality. She had further comment. We have to work hard for our funding and our positions. She elaborated. She would like to see better efficiencies. She had further comment. She believes the people in this town and district can do it. She had further comment. She hopes everyone goes into these conversations with the idea of what can we get that is better than what we have. She had further comment. Mr. Mendolia thought it was a great idea. He had comment. We need to look at each position. He had mixed feelings. It should be Mr. Hopkins' decision. He had further concerns about responsibilities. He had further

comment. He asked if we had to do this right away and Mrs. Wagner said we do not. Mrs. Mazzella said she sees the value in having a discussion and to vet whatever scenario there is. Our first commitment is to the students and the district. We should also be mindful of the taxpayer. She has an open mind to the discussion but she would really need to know what Mr. Hopkins thinks and what Christine Dias (at the town) thinks. She would need to know what it would look like. She would need more information. Mr. Karpinski said he is open to it. He had further comment. It's not always the grass is greener but there are always two sides on what is best to do. We tried a little of this with the IT help but it didn't go very far. Maybe it's an opportunity to start we can try it with the bookkeeper or IT. Maybe it could match what the municipality is looking to achieve. He would like Mr. Hopkins to weigh in a lot of the benefits and his vision of the district. He had further comment. He would like to see the process. He would need more information on what this will look like; we need to understand the roles and responsibilities. He understands the urgency but a decision doesn't need to be made right away. Mr. Karpinski said we may need to hire another person. Mrs. Martin is here on Saturdays and early in the morning. He had further comment. We need to do our homework. Mrs. Wagner said tomorrow's conversation is a good place to start. She had further comment. Mr. Stefanowicz said he is 100% in favor of communication. It would be wonderful to open up more communication. He doesn't necessarily think it needs to be in this position. It can be found in a variety of ways. The trust needs to be built. He finds it hard to look at a position that is full in terms of responsibility and share it. He had further comment. We need to make sure we keep all the responsibilities in central office. He had further comment. Mr. Nero said he understands what Mr. Stefanowicz was saying about food service and transportation. He had further comment and explained scenarios between self-op and contracted services. He said as much as we try to communicate on both sides. He said we need to bring in a business manager and they have to trade off their skills with one another. He had explanation and spoke of different scenarios. If there are skills that can be traded back and forth now we may be able to help each other out. He had further comment. He spoke of maintenance of effort with the grants. He spoke of deficits the town has run. He said we have had to cover our special education deficits the last couple of years and had explanation. The town uses the ECS funding. He had further comment. We come under more federal regulations. He had further comment. Mrs. Mastroianni had comment and wanted to correct the statement about the deficits the town has run; we incurred special education funds and we had to take it out of our insurance funds. She said as a Board we made that decision to cover the costs and not go to the town. She spoke of the special education shortfall. Mr. Mendolia asked if it were just the business manager position they were looking at. Mrs. Wagner said they are looking at a place for collaboration. She said as a Board Chair she is feeling mistrusted and she is not sure where that is coming from. We have been nothing but forthcoming. She had further comment. She spoke of the recent budget process. She had further comment. She wants to go to a place of understanding and how do we work together instead of questioning. Questions were asked and answered. There was discussion. Mrs. Wagner said more than likely there won't be a huge savings to our taxpayer. She had further comment. Let's get the open lines of communication going. She had further comment. Her concern is Mr. Hopkins. Do we want to put restructuring on his plate or education? She had further comment. The Board needs to focus on what path to put Mr. Hopkins on. Her first

concern is always the students. She had comment. She wants to have this first meeting and not rush anything. Ms. Welborn asked if there was a model for towns like ours. She asked about where the process is now for the business manager. There was discussion. Interviews are scheduled for next Wednesday and she explained. Mrs. McCarthy's replacement has come in and she explained. We need to be in a place of support. Everyone in the office has been supportive. Mrs. Wagner doesn't want to be in a position two months from now where the Superintendent says this is not what he was told it would look like and she had further comment. There were questions asked and answered about the upcoming meeting. Mrs. Wagner had further comment. She said there is a lot open for discussion. Board members had further comment. Mrs. Mastroianni referenced CASBO's white paper. It has a lot of helpful information in it. She had further comment. Mr. Mastroianni explained the paper he handed out to the Board. Ms. Welborn said the opportunity is tantalizing but making sure Mr. Hopkins has a concrete base is important. Mrs. Mazzella said she didn't want it to appear we weren't supporting Mr. Hopkins by having these discussions. She needs to hear from the players as to what this would look like. There was further comment. Mrs. Wagner said she appreciated their feedback.

b. School Safety – Mrs. Wagner said in light of recent events in Texas, she had a parent touch base about school safety. Mr. Nero said seven years ago they changed the all-hazard plans and he explained what that is. He has kept Mr. Hopkins in the loop because it is due November 1st. He explained the drill sheet logs. Nobody will ever see a copy of that plan because it is confidential. He explained the drills. The state did a weather drill a few weeks ago. They need to have these drills for more types of events. The new windows are projectile resistant 7 feet up. The doors are solid doors. He had further explanation. Questions were asked about the windows on the Gymnasium. Mr. Nero spoke of the grants we have received previously. Dr. Towle-Weicksel spoke of the drills and the focus is on hiding. She spoke of the run, hide, fight, scenario. She asked what we focus on and Mr. Nero explained it is hiding. He had further comment and explanation. A lot of what we do is in an instance at the time. Mrs. Wagner said she will ask at the CABA meeting she has coming up. Questions were asked about the doors. Mrs. Wagner spoke of the most preventive thing you can have in your school is a vestibule. She had further comment on that. She asked the Board if it is time to think about staffing a resource officer. Mr. Nero said it should be someone willing to lay down their life. Mrs. Mastroianni spoke of Norwich moving to the new model. She is in favor of a model moving to a resource officer. She had further comment. There was discussion.

9. Facilities and Finance – a. Non-Lapsing Account Discussion with Administration – Mrs. Wagner said the administrators said their priority is to get the cameras installed and the curtain replaced. There was further comment.

b. Year-end Budget Discussion/Purchase Orders – Mrs. Wagner said we just got this information for the most recent finance information and would like the finance committee to review this before the next meeting. There was comment. June 29th will be the next meeting with the finance committee meeting at 5:45 p.m.

10. Policy – Ms. Welborn said Mrs. St. Germain said the administrators were okay with the first two policies but Ms. Mullane had comment on the gifted and talented policy. She spoke of the suggested deletions identified by CABE. There was comment. On motion by Mr. Stefanowicz, seconded by Mr. Mendolia, the Board voted unanimously to eliminate the 177 policies identified by Ms. Welborn through the CABE audit due to redundancy. Ms. Welborn made a motion that was seconded by Mr. Karpinski, to approve Policy 6141.51, Advanced Programs or Courses, Eligibility Criteria for Enrollment, and Policy 6141.52, Challenging Curriculum Policy (Criteria for Identification of Eligible Grade 8, 9 Students). These are mandated to begin in the 2022-2023 school year. The motion passed unanimously.

11. Calendar – There was discussion about meeting dates.

12. Public Comment – Mr. Mastroianni clarified some of the questions raised by Board members regarding restructuring staffing. He had a question about the way the schools' doors open. Both open at the same time. He had further comment. There is quite a delay when they shut. He asked if there was any way student IDs can be issued again. Mr. Nero said the photographer supplied those and he explained. He will ask about that. Mr. Mastroianni said there was concern in the grounds RFP there was a section that stated the town would maintain the equipment. He had further comment on that. Mr. Mastroianni explained his next issue was going into executive session to discuss the RFP. He said a citizen had asked about getting a copy of the RFP. Mr. Nero explained to Mr. Mastroianni that until the Board approves it, it is confidential. He had further explanation. Mrs. Wagner read a section from the School Law Book regarding going into executive session which allows the Board to discuss the RFPs in executive session. Mr. Mastroianni read a statement from Mr. Hennick from the Freedom of Information Commission regarding certifying an RFP as confidential. He had further comment and explanation. Mr. Nero had comment. Mr. Nero said we have done every RFP the same way since he has been here. Mr. Nero said it appears there has been a lot of public discussion on this RFP. No one has questioned him on the transportation RFP or the food service RFP. Mr. Nero said we follow the law. There was discussion. Mrs. Mastroianni had comment. She started the questions because she saw it was going to be discussed in executive session. There has been talk about us not having supporting information before we go in executive session. She had further comment. She spoke of the number of executive sessions the Board holds. She had further comment on her research and the RFP process. She had further comment. There was discussion. Mr. Stefanowicz said he feels out of his depth at the moment. Mrs. Wagner said we'll have our attorney present at every executive session from now on. Mr. Nero said he feels there is discussion going on about this RFP in the public and he elaborated. We have never had that before. Mrs. Wagner explained her reasons for wanting this in executive session. There was further comment. Mrs. Wagner said we need to pull this. Mr. Nero said he will tell the person presently in the position to do it month-by-month. Mrs. Wagner said her concern was confidentiality at this point. Mr. Karpinski asked if the concern was the process for executive session and Mrs. Mastroianni said yes and elaborated. Board members had further comment. There was discussion. Mr. Nero had further comment and said he wasn't comfortable making a recommendation. Board members had further comment. There was discussion. Mr. Nero said he has been hearing from the public about

certain bidders and elaborated. Board members had questions. Mrs. Wagner will get legal opinion on this before moving forward. Further questions were asked and answered. She explained what she will be discussing with the attorney.

13. Proposed for Executive Session – a. Discussion of Grounds’ RFP – Not acted upon.

14. Awarding of Grounds’ Contract – Mr. Stefanowicz made a motion that was seconded by Dr. Towle-Weicksel to pull the current grounds RFP. Mrs. Mastroianni felt pulling the RFP was premature and that Mr. Nero has conflated the two issues. She was concerned about going into executive session. She had further comment. The question was whether it belonged in executive session. Mrs. Wagner said it was called to our attention that we did not certify it properly as confidential. Mrs. Mazzella wished we could have discussed this matter beforehand. There was discussion. Mrs. Wagner had further comment on the process. The way to correct this is to back away from this and do it correctly. The motion passed with seven voting in favor and one against. Mrs. Mastroianni voted against the motion.

On a motion by Mr. Karpinski, seconded by Mrs. Mastroianni, the Board voted unanimously to adjourn the meeting at 8:42 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Roberta T. McCarthy, Secretary to
The Board of Education