

Board of Education Minutes
February 9, 2022

DRAFT

A regular meeting of the North Stonington Board of Education was held on Wednesday, February 9, 2022, at 6:00 p.m. via hybrid format via Zoom meeting platform meeting ID 846 8160 5627 for those attending virtually. 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. Martin, Mrs. Costa, Mrs. St. Germain, Mrs. Reyes, and Mr. Cillino. Chairperson Wagner called the meeting to order at 6:05 p.m.

2. Pledge of Allegiance – The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

3. Public Comment on Agenda Items with Students Speaking First – Sam Cherenzia, parent, spoke in favor of unmasking the students. He had further comment. Emily Sisson, parent, spoke in favor of unmasking the students. Alyssa Kumpf, parent, spoke in favor of removing the masks and following the governor’s mandates. She had further comment. Colleen Cherenzia, parent, spoke in favor of removing the masks and had further comment. Amy Friend, citizen, spoke in favor of parents having a choice. She read a statement regarding mask-wearing. She had further comment. Danielle Steele, parent, was in favor of not removing the masks right away saying we need to ease into it. She had further comment. Mrs. Wagner read an email from a parent wishing to remain anonymous regarding the mask mandate. This person was in favor of removing the mask mandate.

4. Presentations – a. Senior Project Proposal – Will be presented at a later date.

b. FinalSite – Mr. Nero explained Adam Reiser of FinalSite had given a presentation previously. He had further comment and asked Mr. Reiser for highlights of his previous presentation. Mr. Reiser reviewed the proposal. They are working with over 40 other Connecticut districts and over 1000 school districts nationwide. He said any questions the district has would be supported by FinalSite. They are an easier platform to use and he explained. Mr. Reiser said they did come down on the pricing and he explained. He said they can be flexible with how it can be broken down. Mr. Nero said they had asked Mr. Reiser what the cost would be if we wanted to pay it off in one lump sum. Mr. Nero said we already had a “curator” in place to be trained and he elaborated. He reviewed the process of how items from the schools and classes would get posted on the web site. The big thing is that posting in Word Press you have to change numerous locations for one item. He explained further how the web site would work and other features of the site. Mrs. Wagner said we have been talking about the deficiencies of our web site. She had further comment. She had questions on how the process works. Mr. Reiser gave the calendar as an example and explained how it would work. Questions were answered regarding the contract term, which is five years. Mr. Reiser explained the pricing breakdown can be worked out differently. Mrs. Wagner explained this is software and that is why the cost is so high. She commented on some of the support items and had questions. Mr. Reiser explained the launch process. Mrs. Wagner asked about the timeline on this and Mr. Reiser said for theme designs it is usually 3 months but they will work on the district’s timeline. Typically it is recommended to spend at least five hours a week to work on the web site. Questions were asked about the cost of the yearly fee and if it were

that cost for the life of the web site. Mr. Reiser said you would pay them for use of the web site—it's a service you pay for each year. Questions were asked and answered about an increase in year six and it was explained the cost could go up. Mrs. Mastroianni commented on the appearance of the site (Final Site examples) and wondered how far along we are in the process; she knows we have options. She said she has some "sticker shock." Mr. Reiser will resend the presentations to Mr. Nero who in turn will send it to the Board again. This will be discussed during the budget workshop.

5. Administrators' Reports – Mrs. St. Germain said she and Mr. Cillino worked on their building budgets together since they were similar. Mr. Cillino reviewed where his increases are and the reason for those increases. School wide supplies, a language arts program, a mathematics program, Second Step SEL program (This is reflected in the technology budget but Mr. Cillino wanted to mention it.), and a reading program also account for part of the increase. He reviewed each of these programs and went over the benefits of them. He reviewed the budget impact. Mr. Cillino said they want to promote unity and common language, common planning time and the shift to restorative classroom practices. Mrs. St. Germain said it is really nice to see people in person. Her budget is a little different. She started with their school wide instructional supplies and reviewed them. She said another NEASC visit is coming up in 2023 and she explained. They have used up their supply closet and they need to replenish that. She reviewed other items in that line. Dues and memberships increased and she explained what is included in that. They want to align the middle school science program with the NGSS curriculum and she elaborated. The Art program is taking off and they increased the consumables. Sports offerings have increased and she listed all the co-op opportunities that are offered to our students. She had further explanation and comment. Mrs. St. Germain went over the budget impact for their school. She spoke of the first pathway internships, our students from Voluntown will double next year and we will also have Preston students, the science alignment, and the "vision of the graduate" will require training. She reviewed the district improvement work Pre-K through Grade 12 in 2021-2022. She listed the work they have done and mentioned the restorative training and she elaborated on that. Mrs. St. Germain spoke of the ECC Diversity Council. At the elementary level, Mr. Cillino reviewed the improvement work at their school. He spoke of restorative training, the SEL program, intervention, math and ELA program supervisors, the movement to a school-wide writing program, and the report card committee. Mrs. Wagner thanked Mr. Cillino and Mrs. St. Germain for the work in these difficult times. Mrs. Wagner said last year we were able to allocate \$12,000 to supplies and only \$3,000 to textbooks so they have done amazing work. Mrs. St. Germain said it is really nice to work like this (with a team). Questions were asked and answered about the writing program and the shift away from the PBIS program. Mr. Cillino explained the country is getting away from the rewards-type programs and he elaborated. Mrs. St. Germain had comment as well. Mr. Karpinski asked how many were participating in the co-op programs and Mrs. St. Germain answered. She said Mrs. Turner has worked really hard to find those co-ops. Mrs. Costa spoke in support of the elementary and high school budgets and she explained. She highlighted the changes to the special education budget. She said that is driven by the students they service. Purchased services did go up and she explained what that constitutes. There has been an increase in students needing those services. Tuition also increased. We still have students requiring

vocational services and she explained. Transportation has gone up significantly as well. Mrs. Costa said the other areas remain the same. We have had a lot of grant funding and she explained. Tuition and transportation are the big ones. Mrs. Wagner said last year, Mrs. Costa gave the Board what she thought they would need and they cut her. Those costs did come to fruition and Mrs. Wagner explained. She said we are short in tuition because we cut significantly. Mrs. Costa said this is where the budget starts for us based on all the meetings that will be coming at the end of the year.

6. Administrative – a. Minutes – January 12, 2022 – Mr. Karpinski made a motion that was seconded by Mrs. Mastroianni to approve the minutes of the January 12, 2022, meeting. Questions were asked and answered. The January 4, 2022, minutes will be reviewed at the next meeting. The motion passed unanimously.

January 20, 2022 Special Meeting – On a motion by Mr. Karpinski, seconded by Mrs. Mastroianni, the Board voted unanimously to approve the minutes of the January 20, 2022, special meeting.

b. Correspondence – None.

c. Personnel – Mr. Nero introduced Mr. Willie Quiñones as the new Director of Facilities. He will start February 22nd. Mr. Nero said Mr. Quiñones is on vacation this week and has spent time with us. Mr. Nero said he has had management meetings every week and Mr. Quiñones will be there tomorrow for those meetings. Mr. Nero said they advertised on Indeed and received some applications. Chris Stackpole was hired for the elementary school custodian position and Darryle Hill for the second shift position at the high school and he started last Monday. He elaborated. Mr. Nero said Ken Stephenson was hired for the other high school night position and gave his background. He had further comment. Mr. Nero said we have a full complement of persons. He explained. The Board went back to correspondence.

b. Correspondence - Mr. Nero explained the Board of Education ad for the yearbook. He had further comment.

7. Reports – a. Superintendent – Mr. Nero said we have been pretty much working with the rec department to schedule events at the schools. Mr. Nero said he has to give his official notice to the Board that he will be retiring as of June 30, 2022. He said he will be retiring as of June 30, 2022. Mr. Nero said the budget is the big thing right now.

c. Committee Chairperson – Mrs. Mastroianni said the Community Relations Committee met two times and they have discussed how to better engage the public. She said the committee put together a plan and she elaborated. Ms. Welborn said we got the report back from CAFE on the policies and she explained. She will be distributing a pdf copy to the Board and they will tackle these after budget season.

d. LEARN Board of Directors' Liaison – Nothing new to report.

The Board went back to BOE Chairperson Report.

b. BOE Chairperson – Mrs. Wagner said the Finance Committee met to look at the budget. They met with the selectman to talk about items, the superintendent search is coming along and she explained the steps involved in that. She said the Board approved the leadership profile that was put together and the posting was put out. A good pool of applicants was put together and interviews have started. She said the process is very confidential and she explained. They are getting excited about the process.

8. Facilities and Finance - a. December 2021 Financial Statements – Mr. Karpinski made a motion that was seconded by Mrs. Mazzella to approve the financial statements for the period ending December 2021. Mr. Karpinski explained he asks questions on the financial statements that Mrs. Martin answers. He reviewed the questions he asked and the answers given. Further question were asked and answered. The motion passed unanimously.

b. Transfers Requests – On a motion by Mr. Karpinski, seconded by Mrs. Mastroianni, the Board voted unanimously to accept the budget transfer requests. Mrs. Wagner explained the shortfall in special education. She explained the savings in health care costs and elaborated. Mr. Nero read a statement explaining the savings experienced by the health care consortium. He told the history of the consortium and why we are experiencing the savings. He had further comment.

c. Non-Lapsing Purchases – Mr. Nero reviewed the items requested from the non-lapsing account. Mrs. Martin explained the remaining items on the request list. Mr. Stefanowicz made a motion that was seconded by Mrs. Mazzella to approve the purchase of the requested items from the non-lapsing account. Board Members had comment on the items on the list. Questions were asked and answered. There was discussion. Further questions were asked and answered. The motion passed unanimously.

9. Old Business – a. School Re-Opening Plan – Detect Testing Program – Mrs. Wagner said in the current plan we had gone through some of the mitigation factors. She said we had determined we are not going to do the testing program. Dr. Towle-Weicksel spoke of the governor’s information and said we can add it to our mitigation strategies. It is free with no cost to us. She explained how the program works and said it’s an extra layer of safety. She said it would be worth it to see if there is interest. She had further comment. Mrs. Wagner said the nurses were not in favor of this because there needs to be a school contact. There was further discussion. Mr. Stefanowicz said he looked into this more. He explained this can be looked at as a testing service and he elaborated. It is federally funded. He had further comment. Questions were asked and answered. Board members had further comment. Mr. Nero had comment and said we don’t want the program in our schools. He said we are at the point where we need to move on. He explained the amount of testing kits we have and he explained. He had further comment and said our cases are way down. He has to look at his staff and where we are and what we have done. Questions were asked and answered. Mr. Karpinski asked about the extra duties the nurses had due to COVID.

Christine explained. There was further discussion and comment. Mr. Nero had further comment on the program. Mrs. Mastroianni supported the nurses and administration in not wanting this in the schools. She asked about the tests the school has and could there be some middle ground with them. Mr. Nero explained the procedure to get one of the tests from the schools. There was further discussion and questions were asked answered. Mr. Stefanowicz made a motion that was seconded by Dr. Towle-Weicksel to implement the Detect testing program. Questions were asked and answered. There was discussion and further comment. The motion did not carry with three voting in favor, four voting against the motion, and one abstention. Those voting in favor of the motion were Mr. Stefanowicz, Dr. Towle-Weicksel, and Ms. Welborn. Those voting against the motion were Mr. Mendolia, Mrs. Mazzella, Mrs. Mastroianni, and Mrs. Wagner. Mr. Karpinski abstained.

b. Governor's Mandates – Mrs. Wagner said the mandate came out (regarding mask-wearing) and we could debate both sides. We have always followed the mandates. She said the social-emotional welfare of our children is forefront. Dr. Towle-Weicksel suggested waiting until we hear from the department of public health. Mr. Nero said he got an email from the superintendent's group that the DPH was okay with removing the masks. Mr. Nero read a statement regarding making masks-wearing optional for students and staff. His statement gave a history and timeline of the pandemic in the schools. Mrs. Wagner had questions for Dr. Towle-Weicksel which were answered. There was further discussion. Mr. Nero had comment. Board members had comment. Mrs. Mazzella made a motion that was seconded by Mrs. Mastroianni to make masks optional as of March 1st. Board members had further comment and questions. Mr. Nero had further comment. Mrs. Wagner said we always follow the recommendations of our administrators, nurses, and superintendent. There was further discussion about having a plan in place and to think about this before we act. Ms. Welborn had comment and said we haven't come to a consensus on this and we should have a little time to look at it. There was discussion. Mrs. Mazzella rescinded her motion and Mrs. Mastroianni rescinded her second of the motion. Mrs. Wagner said she is very disappointed but she can wait a week for this. There was discussion. Mrs. Wagner said she is disappointed because we have always followed mandates and now we are not doing that. There will be a meeting next Wednesday via Zoom at 6:00 p.m. This will be the only thing on the agenda. She wants us to not make decisions on "what ifs." Mr. Nero said we are looking at what the governor is going to issue regarding guidelines. There was further discussion. Mrs. Mazzella asked about making her motion again and she was told she could. On a motion by Mrs. Mazzella, seconded by Mrs. Mastroianni, the Board voted five in favor and three against making masks optional as of March 1st. The motion carried. Those voting in favor were Mrs. Wagner, Mr. Karpinski, Mrs. Mastroianni, Mrs. Mazzella, and Mr. Mendolia. Those voting against the motion were Mr. Stefanowicz, Dr. Towle-Weicksel, and Ms. Welborn. Mrs. Wagner said this can always be revisited; we are not done discussing it. Questions were asked and answered about providing work to students in quarantine. There was further comment.

10. New Business – a. Give Back Club Trip – Mrs. Wagner sent the Board the proposal for the Giveback Club trip that was originally proposed back in March of 2020. Mr. Mendolia made a motion that was seconded by Mr.

Stefanowicz to approve the Giveback Club's trip. Questions were asked and answered. The motion passed unanimously.

b. Grounds – Mr. Bruce starts back up with us March 1st; he would like the Board to consider going to an RFP as a sub-contractor instead of being an employee of the Board. There was discussion of an RFP timeline. There was discussion of a timeline if this works out to go to a contracted service. This will be looked at for July 1st.

c. 2022-2023 Proposed Education Budget – Mrs. Wagner said the Board will get their copies after the meeting. Mrs. Martin gave some highlights of the budget including some of the increases. Mr. Nero had comment on some technology budget items. Mrs. Martin continued reviewing budget highlights. A budget workshop will be held on Saturday, February 26th, at 8:00 a.m. There is no Board meeting on the 23rd. Mrs. Wagner explained the meeting schedule.

11. Calendar – Already discussed above.

12. Public Comment – Laura Mello, parent, asked the Board to re-implement the volunteer policy and let the volunteers back in the schools. She was concerned about the teasing that may go on with children wearing masks. She spoke of the choice to get testing for the students. She elaborated and said she was disappointed the Board didn't vote for that program. She had further comment. Mrs. Mello wanted to publicly thank Sue Costa for her years of service and she elaborated. She wants to see parents back in the schools to support the teachers. Mike Costanza, teacher, commented on the Board's action to remove masks March 1st and thanked the Board for that. Shawn Murphy, citizen, asked about the 2.78% budget increase and what it would be if you took out special education costs. Mrs. Martin gave the breakdown without tuition, without tuition and transportation, without other services. The number was a 1.48% increase without special education costs. Mr. Murphy had further comment on this being a selling point. Questions were asked and answered about outside tuition students.

On a motion by Mr. Karpinski, seconded by Mrs. Mastroianni, the Board voted unanimously to adjourn the meeting at 9:05 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Roberta T. McCarthy, Secretary to
The Board of Education