

STONINGTON BOARD OF EDUCATION REGULAR MEETING October 11, 2018 - Page | 1

Alexa Garvey, Chairwoman called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. in the Stonington High School Commons. Members present were, Candace Anderson, Deborah Downie, Jack Morehouse, Farouk Rajab, and Craig Esposito.

Member Absent: Alisa Morrison

Also, present were Dr. Van Riley, Superintendent of Schools, Ana de Oliveira, Recording Secretary, Caroline Morehouse, Student Government Representative, members of the staff, and interested citizens.

Board Presentation:

Alexa Garvey, Chairwoman explained the presentation would be postponed to the November Board meeting. Mr. Friese is waiting for more information for the presentation.

Communications and Recognitions

Alexa Garvey, Chairwoman welcomed Peter Anderson, to the meeting and added he is our new Director of Operations and Facilities.

Comments from Citizens

Christina Fullerton spoke on the changes to the proposal of curriculum for the band in the elementary and middle schools. She spoke of the implications of changing the music and band program. Ms. Fullerton feels a strong arts program in Stonington will help retain students, rather than go to a Magnet schools nearby. She asked that the Board not destroy the quality of the music program in our schools.

Bobbie Doherty comment on the chorus and band as a necessity in lives of middle schoolers. She stated music touches every part of academic success. She also spoke on statics of students who took music had a higher grade averages. She feels one year is not enough time to learn music; you need two years to master it. She spoke on her personal experience at Mystic Middle School in music and about her peers at first not wanting to do music and now are in select choir. She would like to see music mandatory in grades 5-8.

Julie Holland thanked the Board for their service; the Board is put in a difficult position to make these decisions. She feels we need to engage in teachers, parents, and community, have conversations, and keep children engaged. She fears we are putting this together piecemeal. Our music program is phenomenal; it starts at a young age. We should be talking to parents who have successful students and we need to hear them and engage with them. She ended by saying this is your future and this is about the future of Stonington Pubic Schools, and is proud of what we have in Stonington.

Milly Donovan spoke of her students in music and band. She continued by quoting Albert Einstein: "I know that the most joy in my life has come to me from my violin". Spoke on how it is difficult to be a kid these days. It would be wonderful if we continue teaching the joy of learning, of being present, listening to good music, and hearing different languages. She commented that her own students would not be academically inclined if it were not for the music teachers in elementary and middle school. When you are part of a group you win as a whole, feeling as a part of a team is healthy and keeps students' self-esteem alive. She implored the Board to continue to have ensemble opportunities.

Christian Donovan commented he has been part of the jazz band for four years. He spoke of his own experience in the middle school with the jazz band. He thinks band is a valuable resource that the school has that puts them above many others. He feels there needs to be this push towards music, so kids can be the best they can be.

Karen Hansen commented she feels education is challenging the mind in a new and innovative way. Feels that if you give students an opportunity to have music they can have creative thinking and spoke on her personal experience in Stonington. She added music has always been a part of the Stonington culture. She voiced her opinion on the new proposed music program and encore classes.

Trevor Fornara spoke on what the Board's duties are and how they should be advocating for one of the strongest programs in our schools. He feels the community is not being heard. He voiced his opinion regarding the new proposed music program and what he feels is not adequate in the program.

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Ray Jones, Jr. thanked the Board for their service. He spoke on his and his children's personal experiences at Stonington Public Schools with the music program. He voiced that he is disturbed about the changes in the music programming and questioned the logic behind the proposal. He voiced his concern on the direction that our education is headed and asked the Board to listen to community regarding the music program.

Krista Jones spoke on the talent that has grown in the years at Stonington Public Schools. She spoke on the structure of the four years of music instruction, and feels this proposal is an insult. She spoke on the repercussions of changing the music program.

Eliza Gilbert spoke on her own experience with the music program in Stonington. She commented on the effects of music on test scores and the brain. She spoke on the success of the existing music program. There will be many unhappy students on hand if you take away the music program.

Hannah Lamb commented on her experience in the middle school band under the direction of Mr. Hilbie. She spoke of almost leaving to a Magnet school but did not because of the band. She feels we need to invest in students through band and music.

Lori Jones thanked the Board and Superintendent Riley for allowing to make comments on the music program. She spoke on behalf of retired teacher Ms. Pam Young regarding the changes of the music program proposal. Ms. Young voiced her concern of starting band at 6th grade. She also commented on what other area schools do for band instruction at the K-5 level. She voiced her ideas on how to address the music program. Ms. Jones spoke on her own experience at the elementary schools in music, as she has substitute in the past in music. Ms. Jones spoke on the 5th grade move to the middle school and the move back to the elementary school and their needs.

Melissa Lin Monte spoke of her own experiences with her three students in music. Her push for music is for the scientific side. She feels if it is not broke do not fix it. She shared data that showed the importance of music in middle and elementary schools. She spoke on various studies done about music and academics. She added she is happy that 5th graders will go back to the elementary schools, but would like to continue to see the curriculum we have now, music to once week is not enough.

Harriet Statchen commented she does not know why we are changing the jewel in Stonington Public Schools. She feels if we have issues with math and reading then we should address this and not touch the music program. She spoke about the area schools who begin instrumental teaching in 4th grade. She questioned why write a proposal before the curriculum is written. She would like to see principals and staff meet to figure this out.

Jim Hilbie clarified the idea of not wanting to go to the recent music meetings. He feels the district needs new music curriculum. He thanked the community for speaking, as well as Ms. Gilbert for her hard work. He offered his solution for the 5th grade instrumental program.

Susan Fornara commented she supports the wonderful music program we have now. She added art, technology, and PE, they are important too. She voiced her ideas on how to change the schedule in order to accommodate the music program and add 5th grade lessons. She asked the Board to listen to the staff and community.

Rachel Marseglia spoke of her experience with music and band. She added this brings people together. She spoke on her views of what music brings to students. She supports the existing music program. She spoke on behalf of her sister Lora, who feels the music program proposal will reduce the quality of ensembles in the high school and the future of the music program.

Alisson Marseglia commented she is discouraged by the music program proposal. She spoke on the achievements of the music students in Stonington Public Schools and feels we all benefit from taking music. She added the band contributes a lot to the community.

Nellie Horvath spoke on her personal experience with music and drama both at Stonington and her previous school. She asked to continue to better the music program for the sake of her younger brother and all the kids out there. She asked the Board please make this right.

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Amanda Bury commented on her experience in band and jazz at middle school. She spoke joining the jazz was the best decision she made because it is like a second family who care about each other. She feels it is a great program and is glad for the opportunity.

Filip Aubrecht spoke about the awards hung up in the middle school and high school band and chorus rooms, are awards that were earned by the music program, He is confused why we want to destroy it and not add on to it. He feels band should be mandatory at 5th grade or earlier. He feels it is wrong to take that right away from students.

Brian Biddle voiced he attended the June meeting and spoke he is not happy that the Board did not take action at the spring meeting on this issue. He gave his opinion and voiced his concern on both the elementary and middle school proposed music program and their effects. He would like to see music mandatory.

Trey Jones spoke on his career in band at the middle school and now at the high school. He commented on how music has changed his life and feels giving music in earlier grades would be good. Taking music away in earlier grades will be an irrational decision. Making music mandatory gives students an opportunity to see if they want to continue with it.

Brendon Fullerton spoke of his experience while being part of the band and jazz in middle school and high school. He spoke of the impact and influence the music program has had on his life. He voiced his opinion on how music can change lives. He feels keeping the music program the way it is now or better will affect students and benefit them even more.

Elizabeth Fauerbach spoke that her students are in jazz and say it is the highlight of their career. She asked what the Board's goal is going forward with the music program, is it to have excellence and rigor, if so we have this now why would we change it. She spoke about other families wanting to leave the district and those wanting to come into district. She commented that she feels we will lose students to Magnet schools and that is money out that will affect our bottom line. We want to keep kids here.

Anthony Marchigiano spoke of his experience in middle school band. He commented on the proposed music program. He voiced his concerns on the effects that cutting 5th grade band will do to the test scores, drama, chorus and high school pep, jazz and marching bands. He spoke on the math classes at the middle school last year. He added cutting 5th grade band would have a ripple effect on every student.

Sam Agnello commented on his own passion for music and experience. He voiced what his thoughts are about the music program and the effects on students' confidence and learning. He spoke about his tenure on the Board of Education and the responsibility of each Board member. He asked that the Board visit the schools to see the music programs, get input from the music department teachers, and set up a subcommittee to have at least three meetings with Mr. Hilbie and Ms. Gilbert. He also asked that 2-3 Board workshops be added so that every member hears the same message and invite Mr. Hilbie and Ms. Gilbert to these workshops and ask them who they think should be involved in the workshops. He asked that the Board listen to the professionals and make a decision based on information from them.

Amy Hambly thanked the Board for allowing all to speak, taking time to serve on the Board of Ed and sitting through all the comments. She is surprised the Board is ok with the proposal. She voiced her opinion on the proposed program and schedule. She commented she feels she was misled and lied to in the proposal.

Wendy Canty would like to see the data used to consider this proposal, and asked it be available on the Board website.

Rob Marseglia spoke on the benefits his own students have had with the music program. He spoke on the different performances through the music program. He also spoke on the 5th grade moving to the elementary buildings and the accommodation for this addition in the new building specs. Mr. Marseglia spoke on the adequate band and music room space at the new buildings. He questioned the benefits of some of the new classes that are proposed in the new proposal. He asked the Board to think long term because the decisions will last long beyond this administration. He asked we preserve our award winning music programs.

Dan Kelly thanked the Board for serving. Mr. Kelly used the theme “we roar” while expressing his views on ways the parents come together and their commitment to the community. He spoke about his personal experience with the Stonington school system. He asked the Board to listen to the community, listen to us “roar”, and make the changes to make the music and chorus program better than it is now, do not weaken it.

Tracey Strelczuk spoke on her personal experience of going through the Stonington school district, and taking part in the music program. She added she did drama, chorus and band. How wonderful it is to hear comments about the program, the awards that were won and to know her star is still on the wall in the auditorium.

Consent Agenda

- A. Minutes – September 13, 2018 (Regular Meeting)
October 1, 2018 (Special Meeting)
- B. Checks and Bills
- C. Personnel Report

The following motion was made by Craig Esposito and seconded by Candace Anderson:

Motion 1: To add the ED099 Agreement for Child Nutrition Program to the consent agenda.
All: Aye

The following motion was made by Jack Morehouse and seconded by Deborah Downie:

Motion 2: To remove the minutes of September 13, 2018 from the consent agenda for further amendment.
All: Aye

The following motion was made by Candace Anderson and seconded by Craig Esposito:

Motion 3: To approve items B, C, and ED099 Agreement for Child Nutrition Program on the consent agenda.
All: Aye

Jack Morehouse asked that the minutes from the September 13, 2018 Board meeting be amended per the audio as follows:

Jack Morehouse would like to see a proposal that would include band during the day at least in the 5th grade if not in both 4th and 5th grades. He feels we can have a successful band program and have great academic success. He feels he can find other middle schools in the state that have both. Mr. Morehouse would like to see band included in the elementary school and beyond and would like to see this included in the superintendent's proposal.

First Read – Science 6, 7, and 8 Curriculum

Chairwoman Garvey reported the curriculum was part of the Board packet and asked if the Board had further questions to reach out to Mary Anne Butler, Assistant Superintendent, or Jennifer Bausch. The Board had no questions on the curriculum, which will be brought back at the November Board meeting for approval.

Report of the Superintendent of Schools

Superintendent had no comments to add at this time.

Monthly Reports

Board had no comments on the monthly reports.

Committee Reports

Board had no comments on the committee reports.

Middle School Consolidation Report

Dr. Riley noted the Board directed him to bring back a report that included all K-8 programs not just music. Dr. Riley added all teachers were involved especially the middle school for their input. He spoke on the balance of offerings and a number of items that were included in the proposal for the elementary and middle schools.

Alicia Dawe, West Vine and West Broad Street Schools, Principal, gave an overview of her tenure at Stonington Public Schools. She shared information on the programs at the elementary schools. She also explained the proposed programming in grade five and the idea of more choice. The proposed program was developed by our highly qualified music and classroom teachers. Ms. Dawe spoke on the music opportunities in each grade. Jenn McCurdy, Deans Mill School Principal, thanked all the parents for coming out. Ms. McCurdy spoke that there has been several conversations with teachers regarding programming. We have spoken at PTO meetings on the grade five programming and have not been approached by parents about their concerns. We are fortunate to work with both our highly qualified elementary music teachers. We believe this plan will build a strong foundation to future music instruction.

Emily McClenahan thanked the Board, Dr. Riley and administration for giving them the opportunity to speak to you tonight. Ms. McClenahan added she loves what she does and works hard to make sure the Pawcatuck students have a quality and exciting music education. Ms. McClenahan spoke about the misconceptions about the plan and cleared up some of these misconceptions. She added that both music teachers at the elementary schools would be happy to meet with parents to answer questions. She also spoke in regards to the accommodations in the new building for the music program. Ms. McClenahan noted these are all positive and exciting things and excited to offer other opportunities. Emily McMinn, music teacher for Deans Mill School spoke she is excited to have 5th grade stay in the elementary schools. She explained that the music program allows for students to be exposed to many things at the elementary level, and by the time they leave to middle school they will be well rounded and be able to make their decision about music in middle school, since they have been exposed to many things in the elementary level.

The following motion was made by Craig Esposito and seconded by Farouk Rajab:

Motion 4: To continue the Regular Board of Education meeting past 10:00p.m.

All: Aye

Dr. Riley explained the different ideas in the proposal came forward from our teachers. He explained that all teachers were included in the proposal not just music teachers. Dr. Riley added that there were requests from music teachers that we incorporated in the proposal. This proposal is about all programs. Dr. Riley explained further how the proposal was derived as it relates to programming and scheduling. Tim Smith, Pawcatuck Middle School Principal, further explained the middle school programming and schedule for the upcoming consolidation. He also shared some of the high-level courses that will and are now offered. Mr. Smith explained the sports, music, band, and encore offerings and cleared up misconceptions with regards to mandatory band and music in the past.

Jack Morehouse commented he feels Dr. Riley has listened to parents and students but as a Board member, he has not been heard regarding the proposal to include band in 4th and 5th grade. Mr. Morehouse consulted the National Association of Music for information on an elementary and middle school music program and reported if we don't start strong and early it will hurt the high school program. Mr. Morehouse gave examples of area schools that have band starting in 4th grade. He added he does not think our scores will go down if we put band in our elementary schools. We are very proud of this program, it is a crown jewel. He feels fix what is broken and leave our award winning program alone.

Deborah Downie asked for a clarification that there would be music including ensemble in 6th through 8th grade, that we are not cutting it, students will still do band or chorus. She also asked would students also get just as much art as they do music. Dr. Riley replied yes to both questions. Ms. Downie said Glastonbury schools do band before and after school, I know we talked about having before and after school band, she asked was that something you would consider. Dr. Riley explained if you would like us to consider we can bring a plan back. Dr. Riley added we have many afterschool programs now. Ms. Downie says in listening to parents this might be something parents might be looking at but agrees we would need transportation.

Caroline Morehouse thanked Mr. Smith for his report and appreciated the advisory class, and appreciated they are mixing up the PE classes. She spoke that she took saxophone in 5th grade and feels it is critical that you start at an early age. She feels it is too late at 6th grade and strongly supports 5th grade program in elementary school. She spoke on her personal experience in her years taking band. She asked how the encore classes would work and how do you decide who gets to opt out of chorus and band? Dr. Riley explained all students would take regular band and then they can take an encore class during their elective period. He also explained how students would opt out of the chorus and band.

Candace Anderson commented on some of the comments spoken by citizens and how the attendance was mostly from the Mystic Middle School community. She spoke on her own personal experience regarding band. Mrs. Anderson explained it is our mission to meet the needs of our students and provide the best opportunities for all children. Mrs. Anderson gave her input on the proposed program. Mrs. Anderson added this is a change and trusts the judgement of the professionals to improve the program. She commented about the elementary survey, transparency, exit surveys, and some of the Board goals.

Farouk Rajab commended Mr. Dumas, a retired band teacher from Pawcatuck Middle School; he is a fantastic person and did a great job in developing our children. He added he has a son that plays in the high school band. Mr. Rajab explained we are here to listen, I am new to the Board, and my intent was not to cut the music program or make it less but make it better. There are things I agree and those things that I do not agree with. Mr. Rajab asked that he be afforded the opportunity to spend more time with the Board, with Dr. Riley, and the music teachers and principals to understand the elementary program better.

The Board had a discussion regarding which part of the proposed plan could be moved forward or have further discussions on the entire plan or just the elementary portion of the plan. Craig Esposito asked for clarification of the motion. Dr. Riley asked for clarification whether to move forward with the plan, for staffing and budget purposes. Dr. Riley will develop a committee to discuss the elementary music program and move forward with the entire plan. Deborah Downie understands we can move forward with the plan since we will not be changing it but just adding to the elementary plan. Jack Morehouse communicated that he believes the motion on the table stemmed from the comment from citizens regarding holding meetings to further discuss the elementary music program. Farouk Rajab clarified he would like the opportunity to meeting with Dr. Riley, all the music teachers and principals to talk more about the elementary music program, we can move with plan and always come back and change course on the plan. Jack Morehouse believes we cannot move forward with the plan because one of the things people are concerned with is the time students will have to learn an instrument, if students start in 4th grade this would change his opinion on how the middle school program should look, feels we need to look at this as a whole. He would like band included in the elementary school in 4th and the 5th grade or at least in the 5th grade. Alexa Garvey, Chairwoman, noted that we would be moving forward with the K-8 plan and clarified the motion; to look at the elementary music program with all the musical instructors, administrators, and the Board, so that all can understand the plan. If that happens, through those conversations and meetings, if there is a change to the elementary plan that portion of the plan can be amended.

The following motion was made by Farouk Rajab and seconded by Jack Morehouse:

Motion 5: To meet with the Superintendent, all principals and all music educators to further discuss and understand the elementary music program.

All: Aye

K-12 Building Committee Update

Deborah Downie reported construction is still moving forward and on schedule, Gilbane is doing a great job. She commented there is ongoing issues with furniture, and are moving ahead with the playground but not voting yet to start construction until we are 90% of budget, the intent is to get the playgrounds in and how the district want.

Comments from Citizens Relative to Board Action on this Agenda

Rob Marseglia commented there were misconceptions because we did not get out of reading the report what the administration intended us to get out of the report. He believes it still cuts band at the 5th grade level nor gives the opportunity in the 4th grade level. I would encourage you to revise the proposal to clarify what you would like the public to understand. He also spoke on state requirements. Mr. Marseglia appreciated the elementary music teachers speaking but wondered why the middle school music teachers did not. Mr. Marseglia spoke on equity of the elementary schools. Dr. Riley added the elementary music teachers asked to report tonight, and the middle school teachers did not ask to bring a report to speak on.

Sam Agnello spoke he would of liked the reports from Mr. Smith, the elementary administrators and the two music teachers at the beginning of the meeting. He added having this explained first would have eliminated some of the comments from citizens. He applauded and thanked the Board for the motion to having a meeting. He recommended flipping the order of the agenda, reporting first then comments from citizens.

Anne Marseglia commented on the consolidation and the reduction of a half time teaching position, would like to see this position be brought down to the elementary level to deal with the chorus, music and band needs. She also added we are also losing a PE position. She would like to see consultation with all teachers on the proposed program because it is a K-8 program. Mrs. Marseglia would like all the middle school band and chorus teachers and high school teachers develop a program.

Items for Future Agendas

- Alexa Garvey reported that the subcommittee memberships would be brought to the November meeting.
- Candace Anderson asked for information regarding later school start times in relationship to school achievement and mental health, and what would be the implications to move the high school start time up.

Board Comments/Concerns

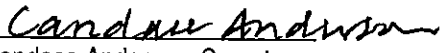
The Board had no comments or concerns at this time.

Adjournment

The following motion was made by Craig Esposito and seconded by Jack Morehouse:

Motion 6: To Adjourn at 11:36 p.m.

All: Aye


Candace Anderson, Secretary