

Alexa Garvey, Chairwoman called the meeting to order at 6:30p.m. in the Stonington High School Commons. Members present were, Candace Anderson, Jack Morehouse, Farouk Rajab, and Craig Esposito.

Late Arrival: Deborah Downie – 6:50pm

Member Absent: Alisa Morrison

Also, present were Dr. Van Riley, Superintendent of Schools, Ana de Oliveira, Recording Secretary, music, and band teachers from each building level along with administrators and interested citizens.

Alexa Garvey, Chairwoman noted that since this was a special meeting that only the elementary music program could be discussed. She thanked teachers and administrators for their participation and added this meeting is being held per the request of Board Member, Farouk Rajab to learn more about the elementary music program. She thanked everyone for participating in the meeting last week with the music teachers and principals to gather more information on this topic. Chairwoman Garvey explained the format of the meeting, and noted there are changes to the elementary music program that were generated from the meeting that took place last week. She also added Dr. Riley would present his elementary music program plan, teachers would give a short overview, and then discussion would be opened to the entire group.

Dr. Riley shared a summary of his plan with the Board of Education, teachers, and administration that was generated after the October 24 meeting with music teachers and administrators. He gave a complete overview of his options to include instrumental band and music in the elementary level. He explained budget, potential enrollment challenges, facility, and staff implications if the plan is approved. Dr. Riley noted he met with Board members, music teachers, and administrators of each grade level to come up with the proposed plan. An outline of the plan, which would include general music to be offered to all students in grades K-5 on a four-day rotation, students would be exposed to many music concepts including composition, notation, rhythm, movement, dance, voice, chorus and others. He explained in addition, we plan to move recorders to 3rd grade, introduce ukulele in 4th grade, and in 5th grade will add ORFF and world percussion. Dr. Riley noted that all music teachers voiced that starting band instrument instruction in 5th grade was important for students, some teachers voiced that having it voluntary was acceptable. He commented that teachers would prefer during the day instruction rather than an before or after school program. He mentioned that administrators made note that band or music should not be a pullout from other academic classes. Dr. Riley spoke on the effect of split schedules.

Teachers from each level shared their ideas for the elementary program and what they thought what would be best for students. Administration also gave their comments on band and music. Dr. Riley noted we would have to hire a 0.4 band teacher, who would be split between West Vine Street School and Deans Mill School with this plan.

Emily McMinn, spoke on differences of the existing elementary music program compared to the past. She added students are not only singing but also performing instruments, playing recorders in 4th grade, dancing folk dances, learning how to read music in first grade and creating their own music patterns. Students learn a lot and are having a lot of fun.

Emily McClenahan commented on the proposed plan and cleared some confusion. She added we are working with schedule, space, and staffing issues. If students were coming to music once every 4 days for 50 minutes, the best use of the time would be another year of general music. She added she still believes in that, but respects the opinion of the band teachers, and using ukuleles are ways to enhance what we have now. She still has concerns with the plans being put forward but supports what is best for students. She supports moving recorders to 3rd grade, this is a move in the right direction, and it is a great opportunity to enhance what we already are doing.

Katrina Gottlieb offered a joint perspective, from Chris Stanley, Ellen Gilbert, Rich Manning, and Andrew Kohanski on band and chorus. She added that maintaining band and chorus in the 5th grade will keep Stonington aligned with area schools in our DRG but noted we would still be behind those that start in the 4th grade. She spoke there are space and scheduling issues, but believe there are solutions for these issues. She spoke on reasons why a vibrant arts program is important to a school district and what role they play in test scores. Ms. Gottlieb commented on what the music and band programs currently look like. She and the group believe that band and chorus should begin in 4th and 5th grade. She explained an option that the group came up with, which was to have a middle school band teacher travel back and forth to the elementary schools to provide band lessons and adding the part-time position would help in making this work. She is excited for the middle school consolidation and is looking forward to continued discussion with Mr. Smith on incorporating lessons and ensembles.