

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 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, introduce ukulele in 4<sup>th</sup> grade, and in 5<sup>th</sup> grade will add ORFF and world percussion. Dr. Riley noted that all music teachers voiced that starting band instrument instruction in 5<sup>th</sup> 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 4<sup>th</sup> 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 3<sup>rd</sup> 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 5<sup>th</sup> grade will keep Stonington aligned with area schools in our DRG but noted we would still be behind those that start in the 4<sup>th</sup> 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 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> 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.

Rich Manning shared his idea for 5<sup>th</sup> grade band and chorus. He suggested that at the end of 4<sup>th</sup> grade, students would choose either band or chorus and in 5<sup>th</sup> grade during the special blocks, students would be split into four groups. There could be two sections of each and students would rotate based on whether they are in band or chorus. He added that we have a similar model at Pawcatuck Middle School. Mr. Manning explained his thoughts regarding scheduling and his willingness to travel at the end of the middle school day to one of the elementary schools to teach band and rotate between each school on opposite chorus days. He shared his thoughts regarding the additional part-time teacher.

Andrew Kohanski voiced he is willing to travel to each school at the end of the day also. Mr. Kohanski agreed with the comments and statements from his colleagues. He also agreed with Mr. Manning's idea of a split position between elementary and middle schools would be one of most optimal situations to continue band in 5<sup>th</sup> grade despite the logistics.

Robin Aubin had two suggestions; one there should be a plan for a curriculum for music, the second administration should consider instead of an addition of a 0.4 teacher consider making this a 0.5 teacher which includes benefits. He feels 0.4 position would be more of a revolving door of staff.

Chris Stanley agreed with both of the suggestions from Mr. Aubin. He added it has been a difficult road not having music curriculum. He feels this is the best time to start to line up things from school to school it makes a huge difference when you know what is being done on the level before and after you. He suggested having a professional development day to focus on music curriculum.

Ellen Gilbert spoke on the equivalence of band and chorus and the importance of both. She also spoke on the importance of small group lessons for 5<sup>th</sup> grade and the importance of the assessment piece.

Dr. Riley commented on the idea of split staff and how that would work. Jenn McCurdy, Deans Mill Principal, commented on her concern of class sizes in each group. She voiced her opinion on the pullout method and how this impacts instruction. Alicia Dawe, West Vine and West Broad Street Schools, Principal, spoke on the scheduling of academic classes, instructional minutes and feels the second proposal would make more sense. Dr. Riley noted if the Board decides to move in this direction we need to keep the half time position. He shared enrollment and staffing changes from 2010 to 2018. A list of area districts and what types of music programs are offered was also shared with the group. Mary Anne Butler, Assistant Superintendent noted that Waterford and Montville schools have been looking at pullout lessons but are still not satisfied with models that are currently in place. She added she does not advocate for pullouts. Ms. Butler commented on existing curriculum, we have a person on board who will be working on curriculum development and now has a revision cycle.

Craig Esposito had questions on curriculum development, whether we have outcomes or objectives in the music program for different grades and schools. Ms. Butler explained teachers are operating with old curriculum for the arts; framework is available but is not aligned. Chairwoman Garvey asked about the timeline for the music curriculum. Ms. Butler will get some curriculum information to the Board.

Chairwoman Garvey reported she looked at schools in the area and some started recorder in 3rd grade and some are adding ukulele. She asked the elementary teachers what is the purpose for adding the proposed instruments to the program and what are the benefits of having them. The elementary music teachers explained the purpose and benefits of using a variety of instruments in the elementary music program and how they are used to perform and create music. Ms. McClenahan noted the idea of adding these instruments was also to instill the love and lifetime commitment of music in students.

Chairwoman Garvey noted she had communication with a 5<sup>th</sup> grade parent about being overwhelmed about picking an instrument at this grade. She asked the group what would be their opinion and ideas on making this less overwhelming. She added that some schools have introduced having a petting zoo of instruments, and asked the group for their thoughts.

Alicia Dawe spoke on her own personal experience with her students, in music and band and when they were introduced band instruments. She also has had experience with the petting zoo format and older students presenting to the elementary level.

Andrew Kohanski explained his own experience with petting zoo formats. He feels this is a good format for those who are not sure in what direction they want to go. He explained that this gives time for students to switch during the summer if they want to do so.

Deborah Downie would like to see students from the middle and high schools visit the elementary schools and have them do a presentation or a mentoring type of thing for students at the elementary level.

Mark Frieze spoke on the culture of the elementary schools now and the concept of 4<sup>th</sup> graders having to choose between chorus and band in 5<sup>th</sup> grade. He feels that will be hard for those students to make that choice.

Jack Morehouse voiced that his main concern is how we compare with other schools. He is worried about starting out strong so we finish strong and feels the most recent proposal is better than the last proposal. He is concerned with the vocal component. He added that his hope is to figure out a way to do something similar as we have now. Mr. Morehouse would like to see a proposal that would give students an option in 5<sup>th</sup> grade. He asked about scheduling and class sizes of band and music in the elementary level, and how it will impact the other classes. He asked if it would be possible to try it for one year and then if it did not work out we can reassess.

Dr. Riley suggested trying the proposed program presented tonight which meets everything people asked for. He also feels to change all the other classes would be very disruptive and would like to try this and see how it goes.

Jack Morehouse asked if with the current proposal would lessons be a small group, private, or semi-private. Would they have the opportunity to play together as a whole? Principals Dawe and McCurdy explained students would not necessarily play together; it would not be an even number of students in music and band and shared how the scheduling would work for both. Mr. Morehouse wondered if they don't have an opportunity to play or sing together would that directly impact in a negative way deciding whether they will want to stick with it and move forward in the middle and high school.

Andrew Kohanski in his opinion the first half in whatever year you start instrumental whether 4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> grade full ensemble piece is not as critical. He feels that the smaller the group when you are first starting the more affective the instruction will be. He feels a smaller group instruction is critical and more affective. He gave options that could be taken to get the ensemble feel.

Principal McCurdy talked about how to best utilize the teacher going between two schools. She what the schedule would be for this teacher in order to travel between schools.

Emily McClenahan asked what number of students is considered a small group. Mr. Kohanski stated he feels 10-22 students, but feels 20 would be a good number. Principal McCurdy added it would never be that big of a group. Ms. McClenahan voiced her concern about teaching band to that large of a number, and did not feel that 20 was a small group number. She added it is important to look at the different options and what is actually going to be executed next year. She commented that the only way to keep what we have now for the 5<sup>th</sup> graders is to put them on a completely different schedule. She also feels that the 4<sup>th</sup> graders will be conflicted when having to choose between music or band in 5<sup>th</sup> grade. Dr. Riley explained there would never be an entire class participated in band or music at one time.

Ellen Gilbert noted she is also concerned about the choice students need to make. She feels we need to maintain the equity between art, music, and band. She added small group instruction is very important, 5<sup>th</sup> grade is a great age for them to sing by themselves and added that in 6<sup>th</sup> grade, they are not as willing to sing by themselves and voices start change.

Katrina Gottlieb gave kudos to the middle school teachers for being able to teach such a large group and spoke on the size of group lessons. She agreed that we need ensemble time, we are compromising due to scheduling, but in the ideal world we would want ensemble.

Chairwoman Garvey noted there is no one-way to do this, she added some districts do pay to play; some elementary schools have lessons before and after school. She would like to see band instruction as optional.

Principal Dawe added that no matter what we do we need to evaluate, reflect, and assess this program at the end of the year.

Farouk Rajab summarized that with this proposal we do have instruments introduced at the end of 4<sup>th</sup> grade and continued in 5<sup>th</sup> grade. Dr. Riley added we would add the petting zoo, the assessment at the end of 4<sup>th</sup> grade, and students can choose which direction they want to go at the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> grade. Mr. Rajab asked teachers and principals how they felt about the proposal.



Principal Dawe spoke about the potential of an increase in enrollment in the next year and the need to revisit the program. Principal McCurdy spoke she supports the Board adding a part-time music teacher but also will have other academic needs in the future that the Board will need to consider.

Both elementary music teachers spoke on their particular music and voice instruction in their elementary schools. Ms. McClenahan commented everyone feels music is really important and we want to do what is best for the kids. The elementary music teachers support all instrumental instruction, all our colleagues are successful and added she supports the program as it is right now. She

Ellen Gilbert added it is hard to let go of the schedule students have had for over 20 years, would like to make sure that we are equal however that program looks.

Candace Anderson commented how helpful it is to have all the staff present. She spoke on her own personal experience with band, and music, the shift in philosophy, and the idea of starting at a younger age. She spoke on the differences of music now and in the past. She would like to adopt the plan that the elementary teachers put together. Ms. Anderson noted this issue has become personal to everyone. She feels the plan is building up to be ready for something different.

Principal McCurdy extended an invitation to Jack Morehouse and other Board members to visit Deans Mill School during a music class.

Farouk Rajab thanked all the music and band teachers. He asked what the difference would be if we added instrument instruction in 4<sup>th</sup> grade. Dr. Riley answered we would need additional staffing and space. Principal Dawe added we would need to provide instruments to those students.

Robin Aubin encouraged everyone to make changes and try different things. Mr. Aubin added how can we make what we have better and save what we currently have. Mr. Aubin would like to see drama offered in 5th grade.

Chairwoman Alexa asked the Board if there is a consensus to bring this plan to the Board to next week's meeting and look at the .5 position and look at this as a pilot program. She thanked all the teachers for coming together. She asked for the Board's input as to what will be brought back for next Thursday's meeting.


Jack Morehouse stated he thinks this plan is better than what we had a month ago, but it is really a step in the wrong direction. We are known in this town for having an award-winning program. When people are evaluating and making a comparison with schools those decisions factor in when looking at a school system. This is an opportunity to do better for our students, not worse and while this proposal is better than we have seen it is not a step in the right direction. Candace Anderson stated she rather see the first proposal be brought forward. Craig Esposito added this program outlines a good step forward and provides a lot of what people are asking for. He feels it is worth trying and seeing how it works and people would want the opportunity to access it. He feels it gives students more in some ways then what we had before; we do not want to go backwards. Deborah Downie agreed to bring this proposal forward, but wants to make sure the elementary teachers are comfortable with it. She added the logistics will need to be worked out, but wants to see this piloted and see what happens. She is glad to see instruments in 5th grade. She also agreed with Mr. Aubin to increase the .4 teacher to a .5 feels will get a better selection. Farouk Rajab would like to see this plan brought forward to the next Board meeting, and appreciates Dr. Riley's efforts. Chairwoman Garvey commented she will look to see if it fits all logistically and will bring the plan back at Thursday's meeting. Dr. Riley will include costs for both the .4 and .5 teaching position with travel in his proposal.

#### Adjournment

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

**Motion 1: To Adjourn at 8:34 p.m.**

All: Aye

  
Candace Anderson, Secretary