

Alexa Garvey, Chairwoman called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. in the Stonington High School Commons. Members present were, Candace Anderson, Board Secretary, Jack Morehouse, Farouk Rajab, Deborah Downie, Alisa Morrison and Craig Esposito. Also present were Dr. Van Riley, Superintendent of Schools, Ana de Oliveira, Recording Secretary, members of the staff, and interested citizens.

Chairwoman Alexa Garvey explained the meeting was requested by Alisa Morrison on Saturday, July 28th to discuss the current issues at the high school involving teacher Tim Chokas and how the Board needs to proceed and to include the Board's attorney Nick Grello. She also spoke on the timeline of events leading up to tonight's Special Board Meeting and noted that the Board had not received the Child Advocacy Report. She explained the meeting agenda, the meeting will go into executive session and then open the meeting to review the process of the OCA report and then give the community time for public comment.

The following motion was made by Craig Esposito and seconded by Alisa Morrison:

Motion 1: To enter into Executive Session and invite Dr. Riley and Attorney Nick Grello.

All: Aye

The Board of Education entered into Executive Session at 7:04pm

The Board of Education exited Executive Session at 7:51pm

Process of receiving and response to Office of Child Advocate Report

Chairwoman Alexa Garvey reviewed the Connecticut General Statute 46A-131 which explains the role of the Office of Child Advocate and reviewed their process. She shared that the district continues to work with a representative at the Office of Child Advocate and have provided all documents requested before the deadline of July 19th. This report will be received by the district's Title XIX attorney at Shipman and Goodwin who will then contact Dr. Riley and the Board Chairwoman Alexa Garvey. Chairwoman Alexa Garvey noted there could be more requests and a need to meet with staff. She added the OCA report will provide recommendations and then the district can then make an action plan to those recommendations. During this process we will make sure the community will be involved, administration and students. We will continue to check with the OCA and pass along any updates as soon as they are available.

Chairwoman Alexa Garvey made all aware that the news media is present and are recording the meeting.

The following motion was made by Jack Morehouse and seconded by Alisa Morrison:

Motion 2: To increase the amount of time of public comment to two hours.

All: Aye

Noreen Kepple shared she was an educator for 38 years and has had four children go through Stonington Public Schools. She spoke on what it means to be a mandated reporter. She questioned why when girls spoke out that DCF was not contacted initially. She voiced and questioned why the district could not communicate to the community that the issue was reported. She questioned the teacher's behavior and how it was not appropriate in his role as teacher. She commented on if the roles were reversed how quickly would that of been reported. She spoke that the girls that came forward were brave and strong and thought measures would be taken to stop the behavior but it continued to put more young women at risk. She asked the Board to look for answers and transparencies and do what those young women did, the right thing.

Faith Leitner thanked the Board for having this meeting because this is serious matter. She commented on the number of people that were affected and that there could be many more that did not report this. She commented she commended the ladies and was so glad they did come forward, this is a "me too" movement. She added she is thankful they had the courage to report these inappropriate acts. Ms. Leitner voiced that she thought the district's Mission Statement was spot on but was missing something and went on to read the statement aloud. She noted that she did not find the word "safe" in the statement. She feels the students need to know that we will provide a safe environment and this should be stated in the mission statement.

Jaclyn Paride commented she believes there is one voice that has not been heard and that is the voice of Tim Chokas. She spoke of her experience in Mr. Chokas' classes. She added that if the teacher knew he was doing things to make people uncomfortable he would not have done them. She shared he was a caring and loving man and saw him as someone that looked out for her best interest, and would go out of his way to help students. She feels that in her generation and younger ones they take things in a different way than they should have be taken. She voiced her concern about how the community is portraying the teacher to something he is not. She shared Mr. Chokas' many positive attributes and commented that for every student that has been uncomfortable with his actions there is a student that he has changed their life.

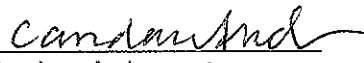
Jennifer Paride commented on her experiences with Tim Chokas as a teacher. She spoke he was always there for her and her family. She understands that there were people that were uncomfortable but that was not his intentions, he is a very genuine person and a sweet man.

Chairwoman Alexa Garvey thanked all for attending. She added we intend to keep the community involved in this process and look forward to hearing from everyone, noting the Board's emails are on the website. She asked the community for input on how they can be part of the process, and action plan and how to better include the community and students in the process.

The following motion was made by Farouk Rajab and seconded by Candace Anderson:

Motion 3: To Adjourn at 8:11p.m.

All: Aye


Candace Anderson, Secretary