

STONINGTON BOARD OF EDUCATION SPECIAL MEETING December 12, 2019 - Page | 1

Alexa Garvey, Chairwoman called the meeting to order at 7:01 p.m. in the District Office Board Room, Pawcatuck, CT. Members present were, Candace Anderson, Board Secretary, Jack Morehouse, Alisa Morrison, Farouk Rajab, Craig Esposito and Heidi Simmons. Also present were Dr. Van Riley, Superintendent of Schools, Ana de Oliveira, Recording Secretary, Alexandra Kapell, Student Government Representative, members of the staff, and interested citizens.

Election of Board Officers – Board Chair – Dr. Van Riley, opened the meeting with the election of the Board of Education chair and asked for nominations.

Alisa Morrison asked that a motion be made to move the item Election of Board Officers to after item eleven Discussion and Possible Action Regarding Initiating an Independent Investigation. Craig Esposito asked if there was a rationale for moving the agenda item and questioned the difference between doing it now or at the end of the agenda. Heidi Simmons explained she would like to know how our new officers are invested in team building, transparency and the private investigation. She explained further that if an officer were elected before the discussion of item eleven she would not feel as comfortable with her commitment. Candace Anderson, Secretary and Alexa Garvey, Chair explained the protocol of the term of each existing officers. Alisa Morrison also commented on when the officers' term expires.

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

Motion 1: To move the agenda item Election of Board Officers to after agenda item eleven Discussion and Possible Action Regarding Initiating an Independent Investigation on the agenda.

Alexa Garvey – Opposed	Candace Anderson – Opposed	Craig Esposito – Opposed	
Farouk Rajab – Opposed	Jack Morehouse – Yes	Alisa Morrison – Yes	Heidi Simmons – Yes

Motion did not pass.

Dr. Riley began the election of the Board Chair and accepted nominations for the Board Chair. Candace Anderson recommended Alexa Garvey to continue as Board Chair. Farouk Rajab also nominated Alexa Garvey.

Candace Anderson – Yes	Craig Esposito – Yes	Farouk Rajab – Yes	Jack Morehouse – Yes
Alisa Morrison – Opposed	Heidi Simmons – Opposed	Alexa Garvey – Yes	

Nomination passes

Alexa Garvey, Chair asked the Board for nominations for Board Secretary. Craig Esposito nominated Candace Anderson for Board Secretary. There were no other nominations for Board Secretary.

Alexa Garvey – Yes	Craig Esposito – Yes	Farouk Rajab – Yes	Jack Morehouse – Abstained
Alisa Morrison – Opposed	Heidi Simmons – Opposed	Candace Anderson – Yes	

Nomination passes.

Board Presentations

School Start Times – Mark Frieze, SHS Principal, Alicia Dawe, WVSS Principal – Principal Alicia Dawe and Principal Mark Frieze shared their research regarding school start times. They reviewed the impacts of change in start times at each school level. A PowerPoint presentation was shared. (See Attached PowerPoint Presentation)

Jack Morehouse had questions regarding if the elementary and high school times were flipped how much more time would students have to sleep. He also asked if these were switched is there research that shows high school students stay up later. Mrs. Dawe answered, the high school students would have more hours to sleep and yes research shows these students do stay up later. Mr. Morehouse asked how flipping the times would affect the really young kids. Mrs. Dawe explained how the younger students currently function at the start of school versus towards the end of the day. Candace Anderson thanked administration for the researched information and feels it is worthwhile to start a committee to discuss this issue. She added all the information provided was beneficial and added there are many moving parts. Mr. Morehouse also expressed his interest in being part of this committee. Chair Alexa Garvey asked the Board those interested in being on the committee to contact her.

Student Government Representative Alexander Kapell she feels if we had later start times it would be a benefit to have that extra hour to have breakfast in the morning. Mrs. Dawe added in her home district they have a delay start time on only Wednesdays. Mr. Frieze added the changes need to be significant.

Manufacturing Program – Preparing Our Students for Work – Mark Friese, SHS Principal – Principal Mark Friese presented a presentation on the manufacturing program at the high school. He added the students in the program have an opportunity to start working after graduation. He shared information on the community partnerships with the Eastern CT Youth Manufacturing Pipeline Initiative. He spoke about the specific course content and schedule of the program. (See Attached PowerPoint Presentation)

State of the District Part III – Facilities and Infrastructure - Dr. Van Riley, Superintendent – Dr. Riley gave a report that covered information on facilities and infrastructure in three areas, District, School Sites and Technology. He reviewed the changes that have taken place at the district office and each of the school buildings. Dr. Riley thanked Rob Marseglia for two beautiful new buildings. A complete report can be found on the district website.

Communications & Recognitions

Jack Morehouse communicated he had the opportunity to attend the high school band concert, it was amazing. He added he looked at Mrs. Gottlieb's graduating class last year and thought she would struggle this year but the band sounded better than ever. He acknowledged that Mrs. Anderson's daughter did an amazing solo and congratulated her. He also finished by thanking Mrs. Gottlieb and the students who played their hearts out. Candace Anderson recognized the band concert by saying it was really fantastic, it seemed to go up this year and it gave her a lot of hope for the future, with so much stress going on it was so refreshing to sit and listen to the music. Mrs. Anderson also communicated she attended the CABA/CAPSS convention the morning was filled with an incredible speaker who spoke about diversity. Mrs. Anderson also attended the high school play Enter Laughing which was very well done and very impressed. She also was able to go on the New York trip and gave a shout out to her group and Leah Kennedy for arranging the trip.

Mrs. Anderson wished good luck to those students who are receiving college admission responses. Chair Alexa Garvey thanked the Student Government for always doing the veteran's dinner it was a great event.

Congratulation to West Vines Street School to the teachers and staff that won the fitness challenge. She thanked Mary Anne Butler for organizing the event and everyone who donated the surprises.

Comments from Citizens

Faith Leitner thanked the Board for allowing members to have comments at this time. She added every time she comes to these meetings she learns the great things that the school district is doing, however it is painful to talk about the negative things. She commented on the recent December 7th article in The Day paper regarding Mr. Chokas. She read the editorial that came out in The Day on December 10th. She asked again that the Board do an independent investigation since it has been almost a year since Mr. Chokas was terminated. She acknowledged that this will be expensive, but asked what is the price of a student's safety in the district and feels we need to do everything possible to get to the bottom of this, because these girls deserve this.

Consent Agenda

- A. Minutes – November 14, 2019
- B. Checks and Bills – November
- C. Personnel Report
- D. Transfers
- E. Revised 2019-2020 School Calendar

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

Motion 2: To approve the consent agenda items A-E as presented.
All: Aye

Approval of Educational Specifications for Stonington Middle School Roof Replacement

Dr. Riley explained this is required so that we can move forward with the Stonington Middle School roof project and receive reimbursement from the State of Connecticut.

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

Motion 3: To approve Education Specifications for Stonington Middle School Roof Replacement as presented.
All: Aye

First Read - Curriculum

K-5 Digital Literacy- (Grade K, 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5)

Encore Classes:

Books & Beyond

Fit for Life: Strength & Conditioning

Photography: Every Picture Tells a Story

Music Composition

Citizen Science

20th Century History through Sports

Chair, Alexa Garvey noted all the curriculum presented is for first read, asked that the Board review and if they had questions they can contact Mary Anne Butler. A community member requested more information, Chair, Alexa Garvey directed her to contact Mary Anne Butler for more information on the curriculum.

Report of the Superintendent of Schools

The Den – update – Dr. Riley reported we had a meeting regarding the Den our proposed childcare program for our staff and had a very enthusiastic group at the meeting. The concern is to start the program in February we need 17 children. The deadline to sign up is next Wednesday and if we are short we may need to postpone it awhile. The group looked at curriculum and visited the room that will be used for the program and parents were all excited, we hope to move forward with the program as soon as possible.

EMCOR project – Peter Anderson presented the project at the last meeting and we are moving forward with the EMCOR group and the analysis at no charge to the District.

School Messenger – Dr. Riley explained there was an issue with the system on the snow day, we now have all contacts in the system and is now working well.

District Office Facilities Status Report – Dr. Riley reported we are ready to have the Recreation Department and Town start using the gym and the stage area starting winter break. We will also be doing some construction in the coming months.

Board Questions – Dr. Riley noted he was asked by the Board to prepare answers to three questions. He noted that he and Mr. Friese, Stonington High Principal worked on the following questions and answers together.

Q: When were you first alerted to student complaints about a high school technical education teacher?

A: Contrary to a recent news article, we take all complaints, concerns, comments by students seriously. We investigate and act to support our students and to maintain a safe and secure environment for them. The first student complaint occurred in April 2017. The next complaint was in January 2019.

Q: To date, how many student complaints have been made to the district in regards to the technical education teacher?

A: Two reports as stated one in April 2017 and the other in January 2019.

Q: When you learned of these complaints, did you contact the proper authorities (Department of Children and Families), and if so when did you contact them?

A: In 2017, based on the information gathered during the investigation, the School Resource Officer was notified. In consultation with the SRO, no DCF report was made. In 2019 based on the information gathered during that investigation, the Stonington Police Department was notified and a DCF report was filed. It should be noted that the DCF did not pursue this case in 2019. In addition to the actions mentioned above, the district has begun a process of codifying how student complaints/concerns are recorded to make sure student statements are recorded properly for subsequent investigations and potential actions toward perpetrators. These revisions began last August and will continue with the pending OCA report that is expected in January or February.

OCA Update – Dr. Riley reported administration was interviewed on Friday by two members and they will be putting together the report and an update will be available January or early February.

Discussion and Possible Action Regarding Initiating an Independent Investigation

Chair Alexa Garvey noted this item was placed on the agenda per the request of Alisa Morrison she received that request on Monday night and put that on the agenda on Tuesday. Alisa Morrison commented she wanted this on the agenda because it could be something we want to talk about now that we have a new Board member and not just the process of starting an investigation but possible starting the process of the process, timeline, cost getting more information between the OCA report and a private investigation to see what that would look like. The Board had a dialogue regarding whether to move ahead with the private investigation or wait for the OCA report results. The Board had questions regarding who was interviewed by for the OCA reporter. Candace Anderson shared a statement and her thoughts of the situation. Heidi Simmons commended the hiring of Ms. Eagan from the Office of Child Advocate as an important remediation step. She also hoped that the Board could give current and former students, allegedly impacted by sexual harassment, an opportunity to express their concerns and complaints to a private investigator. Chair Alexa Garvey asked the Board how they would like to precede whether it be with a special meeting or workshop. The Board was all in consensus and a workshop will be scheduled.

CIP Approval

Dr. Riley thanked Peter Anderson, Gary Shettle and Ana de Oliveira for working on the CIP. He asked for the Board's approval so that they may move this onto the Board of Finance. The Board had various questions on some of the items. Dr. Riley and Peter Anderson answered their questions.

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

Motion 4: To approve the CIP as presented.
All: Aye

2020-21 Budget and Staffing Preview and Direction

Dr. Riley gave a preview of the 2020-21 budget and staffing. He explained the issues with enrollment as it affects staffing. The Board will be receiving a report that explains staffing issues for 2020-2021. He also shared we are looking at centralizing the registration process. He explained each staffing need and justification. He will also be looking at how to prioritize Title I funding. The Board shared their concerns and questions.

Monthly Reports

The Board had no questions on the monthly reports.

Committee Reports

The Board had no questions on the committee reports.

Comments from Citizens Relative to Board Action on this Agenda

Jennifer Manfredi commented on the issue with Mr. Chokas. She added that the girls who complained have not been contacted. She also commented that parents were not contacted at the time, because she was a parent of one of the girls involved in 2016 and did not know until several years that it had happened.

Items for Future Agendas

Candace Anderson requested an update on the Annex.

Board Comments and Concerns

There were no comments or concerns.

Closed Session: SEA Contract Negotiations

The Board entered into closed session at 9:11 p.m.

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

Motion 5: To enter into closed session to discuss the SEA contract negotiations and invite Dr. Van Riley, Mary Anne Butler and Gary Shettle.
All: Aye

Alisa Morrison exited the meeting at 9:11 p.m.

Discussion/Action – SEA Contract

Board Exited Closed Session at 9:22 p.m.

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

Motion 6: To approve the agreement between Stonington Public Schools and the Stonington Education Association.
All: Aye

Jack Morehouse – Abstained
Heidi Simmons – Yes

Alexa Garvey – Yes
Farouk Rajab – Yes

Candace Anderson – Yes
Craig Esposito – Yes

Motion Passes

Adjournment

The following motion was made by Craig Esposito and seconded by Heidi Simmons.

Motion 7: To adjourn at p.m. 9:25 p.m.
All: Aye


Alexa Garvey, Chairwoman