

**GROTON BOARD OF EDUCATION  
SPECIAL MEETING  
MARCH 26, 2020 @ 5:30 P.M.  
REMOTE MEETING**

**MEMBERS PRESENT:** Kim Shepardson Watson-Chairperson, Andrea Ackerman-Vice Chairperson, Jane Giuliani, Getchen Newsome, Liz Porter, Rita Volkmann, Jay Weitlauf, Lee White

**MEMBERS ABSENT:** Rosemary Robertson

**ALSO PRESENT:** Mike Graner, Susan Austin, Sam Kilpatrick, Ken Knight

I. CALL TO ORDER – Chairperson Kim Shepardson Watson called the meeting to order at 5:35 p.m.

II. STUDENT REPRESENTATIVE REPORT – Addie Clark reported that the class of 2020 is going ahead with ordering the graduation robes and regalia. Information will be sent out via email to senior families soon and will also be available on the school website. She stated that there will be a student-run virtual talent show hosted by the Falcon Theater Club called the *Crystal Geyser Show*. The show is scheduled for April 3 from 6:00 p.m. to 7:55 p.m. Students will be able to be interviewed, show off their talents, lip sync, talk about their clubs or activity, etc. It will be on Instagram live through the Falcon Theater instagram (@fitchfalcontheatre). Addie shared the following concerns/questions from students:

- What will happen to senior activities?
- How will attendance and grading work?
- Are the quarters still the same length?
- How will graduation work?
- How will in-school SATs work?
- If seniors buy their cap and gown and then graduation is cancelled, will there be any refunds?
- Will there be final exams?
- What will happen (in terms of grades) if students can't return back to school?

Addie discussed how colleges have implemented virtual school tours instead of on site college tours. In response to a question regarding if teachers have been doing video lessons/chats, Addie responded that the teachers have only been contacting students through email or Schoology.

III. SUPERINTENDENT AND ADMINISTRATION REPORTS

A. Superintendent Report

1. Update re: Preparedness and Response Plan to the Coronavirus

- Updates from the Commissioner of Education – Dr. Graner stated that the Governor has closed the schools through at least April 20, 2020. In response to the Governor's edict, the staff assembled packets of school work on March 13<sup>th</sup> for students to use while at home. On the evening of March 13<sup>th</sup>, the Governor issued the "stay at home" order beginning on Monday, March 16<sup>th</sup>; staff came in on Sunday, March 15<sup>th</sup>, and handed out 1,300 computers to parents and students between 10:00 a.m. and 2:00 p.m. We have put in a rush order for hot spots for Internet access. The State Department of Education suspended all statewide testing for this year (i.e.: SBAC, SATs, NGSS), and teacher evaluations have also

been suspended. IB testing has been cancelled for the rest of the year and AP will try to do something remotely. Dr. Graner stated that we are monitoring student participation daily; however, we are awaiting guidance as to how to report attendance to the State Department of Education. We're also awaiting guidance regarding grading.

- School Calendar Adjustment – Dr. Graner stated that continuing distance learning through spring vacation would make the 181<sup>st</sup> day June 12, 2020. Liz Porter stated that the high school has already notified its parents/students via a letter stating that spring vacation has been removed. Rita Volkmann suggested that students could go back to school earlier in August, thus having a refresher before the regular school year starts. Dr. Graner stated that he would need to discuss that option with the Groton Education Association. Gretchen Newsome expressed concern with the suggestion of opening school early as Groton Middle School may not be ready in time.
2. Update re: Groton Teacher Association MOU – Susan Austin stated that the MOU was signed by Dr. Graner for the Board of Education and Beth Horler for the GEA.

B. Reports and Information from the Staff

1. Assistant Superintendent

- Distance Learning – Susan Austin stated that Board members received a brief on phases of learning and a phases of learning plan for distance learning. She stated that the school district is also providing professional development for teachers and an on line resource site for parents and teachers. The resource site contains a hot line number for calls regarding technical issues. Susan continued by saying that all students, no matter their needs (i.e.: 504, IEP, gifted, receiving intervention), will have access to distance learning via curriculum compacting.
- Special Education Services-Remote Delivery – Special Education teachers can modify their student's assignments and will reach out to families to make sure their students can access the curriculum. A letter will be sent to parents of special education students who receive services such as OT, PT, and speech for permission for their child to work with a therapist in a one-to-one type of session or small group session. GEA has requested that these small group or one-to-one sessions get recorded.

2. Business Manager Report

- Object Code Summary – Ken Knight stated that this evening's object code summary was prepared on March 4, 2020, and at that time, we were projecting an unexpended balance of \$84,561.
- Health Insurance Report – For the month of January, we are at 89% of the budget and 84% of the budget year-to-date. Ken further stated that we are trending well with health insurance, and even trending better now as compared to last year at this time.
- Alliance Grant Report – Ken Knight stated that we have not finalized our budget with the Department of Education. We can, however, move forward even though funds have not been received and, with Susan Austin's help, are starting our requisition process. Dr. Graner stated that phase one of our distance learning includes all students having access to the internet/computer, and just about 100% of our students now have computers. Desi Nesmith of the State Department of Education said we can use Alliance funding to replace purchasing additional Chromebooks for our students during distance learning.

3. Director of Buildings and Grounds
  - Groton 2020 – Sam Kilpatrick stated that Groton Middle School is moving forward as planned with no delays at this time. The site manager said that they have had some reduced numbers of workers due to childcare issues and that wash stations have been put in place for construction workers' use. The elementary schools are also on time and contracts for the site work and steel work will be signed very soon.
  - Update re: Food Service Meals Program – Sam Kilpatrick stated that the grab and go meals are continuing on a daily basis-averaging 1,600 meals a day at the three sites, West Side Middle School, Mary Morrisson Elementary School, and the Groton Library. The meals are scheduled to be handed out between from 9:00 a.m. to 9:30 a.m.; however, the staff remains past 9:30 a.m. until all students are fed. Social distancing is also being observed at the sites. We have begun, on Fridays, to hand out weekend bags which consists of three breakfasts and three lunches, and we will continue to do so every Friday. Sam met with Ernie Koschmieder who stated that we are the recipient of the Winston Foundation Kitchen Grant. There were 850 national entries, and we were one of four districts awarded \$65,000 for a new kitchen at Charles Barnum Elementary School, which we hope to complete over the summer. Dr. Graner will send the grant to the Town Manager for approval, as per the grant procedure.
  - Update re: Cleaning of School Buildings – Our custodial staff has been working non-stop to deep clean and disinfect all classrooms and offices. When staff come into the buildings, the custodians re-clean high touch areas. They have also been powerwashing lavatories with disinfectant.

#### IV. COMMITTEE REPORTS

- A. Policy – Susan Austin reported that this committee has not met.
- B. Curriculum – Gretchen Newsome reported that this committee has not met.
- C. Finance/Facilities – Jay Weitlauf reported that Finance/Facilities met on March 2. The deficiency with the cafeteria at Claude Chester was corrected, the banner display rates were reviewed, the proposed enrollment study by Mike Zuba was discussed, the FY21 CIPs were reviewed as well as the MYP multi-year implementation process, and the Treehouse summer program rates were discussed.
- D. Negotiations – Kim Shepardson Watson reported that the meetings have been cancelled.
- E. LEARN – Rita Volkmann reported that the last regular meeting was held on March 12, 2020. She stated that 30 applications were received for the principal position at Marine Science Magnet High School. She stated that LEARN is going to continue paying its hourly workers while schools are closed. She also stated that work is continuing on the Ocean Avenue Learning Center.
- F. BoE/TCC/RTM Liaison – Kim Shepardson Watson reported that next week's meeting has been cancelled.
- G. BoE/AGSA/GEA Liaison – Kim Shepardson Watson reported that the next meeting has been cancelled.

- H. Trails Liaison – no report was given.
- I. Groton Scholarship – no report was given.

V. ACTION ITEMS

- A. Consent Agenda – all matters listed under the Consent Agenda are considered to be routine and will be enacted by one motion. Points of clarification will be allowed.

**MOTION:** Watson, Volkmann - to approve the Regular Meeting minutes of February 24, 2020.

**MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY**

- B. Old Business – there was none.
- C. New Business

- 1. Discussion and possible action regarding the implementation of the Healthy Food Option.

Dr. Graner stated that the Healthy Food Option provides additional supplements with the meals program and has been done in the past few years.

**MOTION:** Watson, Ackerman - to certify, pursuant to C.G.S. Section 10-215f, that all food items offered for sale to students in the schools under its jurisdiction, and not exempted from the Connecticut Nutrition Standards published by the Connecticut State Department of Education, will comply with the Connecticut Nutrition Standards during the period of July 1, 2020 through June 30, 2021. This certification shall include all food offered for sale to students separately from reimbursable meals at all times and from all sources, including but not limited to, school stores, vending machines, school cafeterias, and any fundraising activities on school premises sponsored by the school or by non-school organizations and groups.

**MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY**

- 2. Discussion and possible action regarding food and beverage exemptions.

Dr. Graner stated that this allows concessions at games and plays, etc. for Boosters to raise funds and has been done in past years.

**MOTION:** Watson, Porter - to allow the sale to students of food items that do not meet the Connecticut Nutrition Standards and beverages not listed in Section 10-221q of the Connecticut General Statutes provided that the following conditions are met:

- 1) the sale is in connection with an event occurring after the end of the regular school day or on the weekend;
- 2) the sale is at the location of the event; and

- 3) the food and beverage items are not sold from a vending machine or school store. An “event” is an occurrence that involves more than just a regularly scheduled practice, meeting, or extracurricular activity. For example, soccer games, school plays, and interscholastic debates are events but soccer practices, play rehearsals, and debate team meetings are not. The “regular school day” is the period from midnight before to 30 minutes after the end of the official school day. “Location” means where the event is being held and must be the same place as the food sales.

**MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY**

3. Discussion and possible action regarding revision of the 2019-20 school calendar.

**MOTION:** Watson, Volkmann - to revise the 2019-20 school calendar to represent the last day of school as June 12, 2020, which would also serve as professional development for the teachers.

**MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY**

Dr. Graner left the meeting at 6:54 p.m. to attend a remote Town Council meeting. Kim Shepardson Watson stated that the Town Council will hold another meeting to discuss the education budget on Saturday, March 28, beginning at 8:00 a.m. and encouraged Board of Education members to attend remotely.

VI. INFORMATION AND PROPOSALS (Non-Action Items)

- A. Letters, communications, and comments by Board members on meeting items and any other items in their jurisdiction.
  - Kim Shepardson Watson stated that she attended a virtual meeting at CAFE with other Board of Education chairpersons regarding bus contracts. She also stated that other school districts have teachers who have refused to participate in virtual learning. She said that there is a help line for Groton families with technology issues which is located on our district’s webpage.
  - Rita Volkmann stated that she attended a community meal on February 2, 2020 at Fitch High School.
  - Jay Weitlauf, on behalf of the Board of Education, expressed deep appreciation to the administration for all their hard work during this time. He reported that he has received questions regarding what we would do if the district closed the schools until the end of the year. He stated that he wanted the school community to know that we are committed to following scientific, medical guidelines about whether or not to reopen the buildings and that we would do what the experts advise. Mr. Weitlauf also noted that some parents are receiving Dr. Graner’s robocalls but are not receiving all the updates from their school principal.
  - Liz Porter stated that Groton had two groups that were successful at the Regional History Day Competition. She stated that Nationals will be a virtual competition and is usually held around June 15; the State competition is on May 2. More information may be found at [www.historyday.org](http://www.historyday.org)
  - Jane Giuliani echoed Jay’s appreciation to everyone.

- Gretchen Newsome shared that parents who teach in other districts are impressed with how responsive Groton has been to the students/staff.

VII. ADVANCE PLANNING

- A. Future Meeting Dates and Calendar Items for Board Attention – Kim Shepardson Watson stated that she will try to set up a non-meeting on Monday, March 30, 2020.
- B. Suggested Agenda Items – Kim Shepardson Watson stated that Mike Zuba’s proposed enrollment study will be referred to the Committee of the Whole.

**MOTION:** Volkmann, Porter - to adjourn at 7:08 p.m.  
**MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY**