

**NORWICH BOARD OF EDUCATION  
Norwich, Connecticut**

**DRAFT MINUTES OF:  
May 12, 2020  
REGULAR BOARD OF EDUCATION MEETING  
VIRTUAL MEETING**

**PRESENT:** Heather Romanski, Kevin Saythany (entered meeting at 5:43 pm), Dr. Yvette Jacaruso, Aaron Daniels, Mark Kulos Patricia Staley, Carline Charmelus, Christine DiStasio, Swaranjit Singh Bhatia

**ABSENT:** None

**STAFF:** Dr. Kristen E. Stringfellow, Superintendent  
Athena L. Nagel, Business Administrator  
Jamie H. Bender, Director of Student Services & Special Education  
Amber Rutigliano, Executive Assistant to the Superintendent  
Jessica Dolliver, Manager of Media Communications  
Matt Warzecha, IT Director  
NPS Administrators & Teachers

**MEDIA:** The Day, New2

Heather Romanski called the meeting to order at 5:30 p.m. and a quorum was declared.

**APPROVAL OF MINUTES:**

**MOTION:** Made by Yvette Jacaruso (seconded by Aaron Daniels) to approve the minutes of the April 7, 2020 Regular Board of Education meeting. Motion passed unanimously.

**PUBLIC COMMENT:**

Mayor Peter Nystrom of 36 Laurel Heights Road said he is working with the Board to find solutions but that there are unknown costs for the school system that he is still trying to get a handle on. The amount of revenue at tax time is unknown at this time. He cautioned the Board to keep in mind that the City has other departments and is limited to what the taxpayers can handle, especially with the burden of so many residents currently out of work.

Alderman Mark Bettencourt of 129 Merchants Avenue, Taftville stated that the City needs options. He states that the current spending plan at 9.11% is not realistic nor is the 5.5% budget that the Board approved. The City and the Board will need to come to an agreement in the first few weeks of June and he says that the City Council needs to balance the Board of Education needs with those of the City. He is hopeful that there may be some relief from government entities.

**REPORT OF THE CHAIRPERSON:**

Heather Romanski reported on:

- Friday morning department head meetings with the Mayor, City Manager, Superintendent and Senator Cathy Osten

- Superintendent's evaluation will be moved until the June meeting
- NFA contract discussion update
- Ad Hoc Board/Council budget meeting scheduled for May 26<sup>th</sup>

**REPORT OF THE SUPERINTENDENT:**

Dr. Stringfellow reported on:

- Thank you to staff, parents and students during these difficult times
- 2019-2020 calendar change due to the primary election day
- Closure plan updates (employees, food services, distance learning, grading)
- Essential Staff Phase 1 Re-opening plan
- Update on pick-up of belongings for students and teachers
- Summer camp and summer school update
- NFA, NPS & NPD shared grant opportunity update
- Shared services with the City update
- Events attended
- Upcoming events

**REPORT OF THE BUSINESS ADMINISTRATOR:**

Athena Nagel reported on:

- **Food Service:** Providing meals to 27 community sites, using school buses for 24 of those sites, 3 days per week but supplying students with meal for 7 days. Month of April: 25, 303 breakfasts served and 25, 332 lunches served. Partnering with UCFS to hold pop-up drive up food pantry sites.
- **Technology:** 30 technical requested answered & resolved for April, technology department working on providing support for students and staff that are distance learning, successfully implemented GoGuardian on the devices that are deployed.
- **Facilities:** update on completed and on-going projects
- **Business Office:** Negotiations in progress for transportation agreements, complying with Executive orders and new COVID acts.

**MOTION:** Made by Mark Kulos (seconded by Aaron Daniels) to remove June 2, 2020 as a non-school day due to the primary election from the 2019-2020 school calendar and end school one day early. Motion passed unanimously.

**BUDGET DISCUSSION:**

Dr. Stringfellow updated the Board on the 2020-2021 budget, including:

- Presenting updated budget slides
- 9.11% was needed, the Board approved a 5.5% increase (\$85,496,145), which is over a 2.9 million difference
- The preliminary City Manager's budget included a 2.4% increase (\$82,983,936), which is over a 5.4 million difference
- All of the fixed increases for the 20-21 year are over 2.4%
- 93.8% of the budget is increasing more than 2.4% (the BOE has no control over many of these increases)
- 41.9% of the budget is tuition (BOE has no control over these increases)

- Budget reduction is easier when there are excess staff and buildings, NPS doesn't have any of this, there is nothing left to cut
- **Question:** How will providing summer school affect this year's budget? Is minority recruitment being considered with hiring on new staff? (Carline Charmelus)  
**Answer:** Awaiting summer school guidance from CSDE, ESY summer program funded by IDEA grant, summer camp is provided by the Norwich Recreation Department (not NPS) and summer school has been grant funded in the past; it is unknown at this time if this will be the case this year. CSDE has goals and trackers for minority recruitment and this is considered and followed when hiring for NPS.
- **Question:** How are parents able to contact schools during COVID closures (Swaranjit Singh Bhatia)  
**Answer:** There is a portal on the NPS web-site for COVID related questions that is monitoring and answered by Dr. Stringfellow (Back ups are Amber Rutigliano, Jessica Dolliver and Athena Nagel). Phone calls are being transferred to secretaries working from home and voicemail is being monitored. Kinolve program is being loaded currently and is available in 80 languages. There has been a lull in registration but parents were sent reminders this week and secretaries will be back in schools starting on May 13<sup>th</sup>.
- **Question:** How is the absenteeism rate for students and teachers during distance learning (Dr. Jacaruso)  
**Answer:** In some cases, our absenteeism rate has been better than in the past, there are still ups and downs as expected. Attendance is hard to monitor because what is considered "being present" is hard to quantify (for example, is this measured per assignment submitted, per session logged on to, etc. Student engagement numbers are high at this time.
- **Question:** What are the current savings with the transportation contract? How much are we not spending? What are the cost savings for the reduced usage of electricity, water and sewer? (Patricia Staley)  
**Answer:** There is a transportation cap of \$30,000 per day. There will be \$500,000 "less overspent" for transportation costs, off-set by unemployment costs. For utilities, there is an estimated savings thru June of \$235,231 (offset by unexpected costs due to COVID).
- **Question:** What is the fuels savings for fewer buses during COVID closures? (Mark Kulos)  
**Answer:** There is a \$111,644 expected savings on that line item.
- **Question:** On the Special Education Contracted services report, there appears to be a savings, is this correct? (Mark Kulos)  
**Answer:** This is not correct as there have been no unemployment invoices received yet.
- Aaron Daniels suggested that the Board go back to the table and look at the increase of fixed costs in relation to what the budget increase should be. This is as low as the Board can go to meet the increase in fixed costs that are beyond the Board's control.
- Christine DiStasio encouraged the Board to explore alternatives such as pay freezes, furlough days, etc. that should be brought to upcoming negotiations.

- Chair Romanski recommended a Board of Education Budget Subcommittee Meeting as a next step from the budget discussion. The meeting will take place on May 19<sup>th</sup> at 6:00 pm.

**MOTION:** Made by Kevin Saythany (seconded by Mark Kulos) to go into Executive Session.  
Motion passed unanimously.

The Board went into Executive Session at 7: 59 pm. The Board returned from Executive Session at 9:42 pm. There were no votes taken in Executive Session.

The Board recessed to a Non-Meeting at 9:43 pm.

The Board returned from the Non-Meeting to Regular Session at 10:16 pm.

**MOTION:** Made by Yvette Jacaruso (seconded by Swaranjit Singh Bhatia) to adjourn the meeting. Motion passed unanimously.

The meeting was adjourned at 10:17 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

*Carline Charmelus*

Carline Charmelus  
Secretary