

**GROTON BOARD OF EDUCATION
REGULAR MEETING
JULY 27, 2020 @ 6:00 P.M.
REMOTE MEETING**

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

ALSO PRESENT: Mike Graner, Susan Austin, Dennis Colclough, Sam Kilpatrick, Laurie LePine

I. CALL TO ORDER – Chairperson Kim Shepardson Watson called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

MOTION: Watson, Ackerman: To add the Comments from Citizens section to the agenda.
PASSED – UNANIMOUSLY

II. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The first order of business was the pledge of allegiance to the flag led by Beth Horler.

III. RECOGNITION AND PARTICIPATION OF VISITORS AND DELEGATIONS

NONE

IV. COMMENTS FROM CITIZENS

1. Mrs. Fran Whitney, 112 Deerfield Ridge Drive, shared her concerns regarding the measures being taken to make the reopening of school safe. (ATTACHMENT #1)
2. Mrs. Beth Horler, GEA President, thanked the staff and administrators on the various committees for their efforts and noted that science and safety should be the driving factor for safety in all decisions. Mrs. Horler noted that the staff was surveyed asking for the top 3 concerns.

V. SUPERINTENDENT AND ADMINISTRATION REPORTS

A. Superintendent Report

- a. Introduction of Vince Varrecchione, FHS Athletic Director – Dr. Graner stated that he received a call from Mr. Varrecchione today stating that his father had passed. Dr. Graner noted that Mr. Varrecchione will give an outline for playing sports at the August 17, 2020 COW meeting.
- b. Update re: Elementary School Naming Committee – Susan Austin stated that she will reconvene the Elementary School Naming Committee and she will broaden the committee and survey to include parents and the community.
- c. Update: Elementary Themes for New Elementary Schools and Charles Barnum – Susan Austin stated that according to data and surveys from parents and the community as well as teachers and staff, the Magnet Themes that emerged were:
 - Active Exploration: Play and Ingenuity
 - Environmental/Marine/Life Science
 - Discovery Academy: Nurturing Creativity and Curiosity

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V. SUPERINTENDENT AND ADMINISTRATION REPORTS – cont.

A. Superintendent Report

- d. Update re: Staffing – Laurie LePine noted that all new hires have been identified as a result of retirements and resignations. Mrs. LePine noted that a number of elementary openings as a result of retirements have replacements on a 1 year bases. At the end of the 1 year their situation will be reassessed.
- e. Presentation of Neighborhood Redistricting Alternative Plans by Mike Zuba and Pat Gallagher – Mike Zuba gave a PowerPoint presentation regarding several alternative plans for redistricting; Pat Gallagher addressed each scenario displaying a detailed map. Mike Zuba stated that the next step will be to develop a virtual platform, with the assistance of Dr. Graner, to present the plan to the public.
- f. Update re: School Reopening Plans – Susan Austin gave an overview of the fall reopening model including a hybrid model. Susan Austin noted that staff is working on curriculum for the reentry. Dr. Graner noted that the reentry plan will include:
 - Masks for all students and staff
 - 6 foot distances
 - Hand washing
 - Desk shields
 - Recommissioning of the ventilation system in all school buildings to ensure they are operating at their designed capacity
 - The hiring of daytime custodians to clean surfaces
- g. Update re: State Board of Education Revision of Required Number of School Days – Dr. Graner stated that the State has given permission for districts to go from 180 school days to 177 school days.

VI. COMMITTEE REPORTS

The Committee Reports were tabled.

VII. ACTION ITEMS

A. Consent Agenda

MOTION: Porter, White: To approve the regular meeting minutes of May 26, 2020 and June 22, 2020 and the special meeting minutes of June 8, 29 and July 13, 2020 and Gifts to the Groton Public schools.

PASSED – UNANIMOUSLY

B. Old Business

The items under Old Business were tabled.

C. New Business

1. Discussion and possible action regarding the transfer of Carl C. Cutler Middle School to the town of Groton, effective July 28, 2020.

MOTION: Watson, Volkmann: To transfer Carl C. Cutler Middle School, located at 160 Fishtown Road, Mystic, Connecticut, to the Town of Groton, effective July 28, 2020.

PASSED - UNANIMOUSLY

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VII. ACTION ITEMS – cont.

C. New Business

2. Discussion and possible action regarding the transfer of West Side Middle School to the town of Groton, effective July 28, 2020.

MOTION: Watson, White: To transfer West Side Middle School, located at 250 Brandegee Avenue, Groton, Connecticut, to the Town of Groton, effective July 28, 2020.
PASSED - UNANIMOUSLY

The first reading of policies were tabled.

3. Discussion and possible action regarding the addition of one full time special education teacher to support both the APEX Academy and the Transition Academy programs.

MOTION: Watson, Robertson: To approve the addition of one full time special education to support both the APEX Academy and the Transition Academy programs.
PASSED – UNANIMOUSLY

4. Discussion and possible action regarding the establishment of a full time student data manager.

MOTION: Watson, Giulini: To approve the establishment of a full time Student Data Manager.
PASSED - UNANIMOUSLY

The item regarding the Groton Public Schools reopening plan was tabled.

5. Discussion and possible action regarding modification of the 2020-21 school calendar to indicate that September 8 is the first day of school for students for a 177 school year.

MOTION: Watson, White: To modify the 2020-21 school calendar to indicate that September 8 will be the first day of school for students for a 177 school year.

MOTION: Volkmann, White: To amend the motion to read that the 2020-21 school calendar to indicate that September 8 will be the first day of school for students.
PASSED – UNANIMOUSLY

VIII. ADJOURNMENT

MOTION: Ackerman, Robertson: To adjourn at 8:48 p.m.
MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY

July 27, 2020

Dear Members of the Board of Education:

Thank you for the opportunity to speak tonight, and thank you for your service. I hope you and your loved ones are all well. I am sure this was not a year like anything you would have expected when you took on this responsibility. I know it has been challenging for everyone in education. I appreciate your time and full consideration as you plan for possible reopening of schools. What I am sharing here is a shortened version of a message that I emailed to the Board of Education and Dr. Graner earlier today.

I am a parent of children in the elementary and the middle schools, and I have great concerns regarding the measures being taken to make the reopening of schools safe. I hope plans will include 6-foot minimum for social distancing (the CDC criteria based on scientific studies), correct and consistent use of approved personal protective equipment by students and staff, meal services that meet state guidelines for restaurants, and frequent cleaning and sanitization. I am thankful that there are many fewer COVID cases in our area than in the Spring, but feel strongly that we cannot rely on rates to stay low into the fall, and we need a school plan that remains protective when cases increase again.

I urge Groton to only reopen schools in a way that will adequately protect our children, teachers and other adults in the buildings, and the loved ones they go home to.

Parents need complete details on Groton's plans for in-person and distance-learning in order to make informed decisions for their children and families. I hope this plan is available soon and will answer these questions:

1. Is there a plan for testing students and or adults in the building prior to reopening and at checkpoints throughout the year?
2. Will masks with at least two or preferably three layers be provided to students and teachers throughout the year and will there be training to make sure everyone wears masks properly? What are the plans for people who cannot wear masks?
3. Is 6-foot distancing going to be required in school buildings and on school grounds?
4. What about eating and drinking and meal services, as people cannot eat or drink while wearing masks?
5. Will there be tests and adjustments made to school ventilation systems to ensure air quality and rapid air exchange?
6. Have the ventilation problems at NEA been fixed and do they cause particular problems for students and staff?

ATTACHMENT #1

7. What are the plans for areas and activities outside of classrooms, including movement through halls, restrooms, physical education, recess, and class transitions?
8. Will the schools actually be able to acquire and maintain access to safe hand sanitizers and disinfectants that are proven effective against the virus that causes COVID-19?
9. Will attendance policies be modified to allow students and adults having any COVID symptoms, including congestion, runny nose, headache, upset stomach, fatigue, to stay home?
10. Will days be set aside to train teachers and do "practice runs" of protocols for attending a full school day (meals included, with the same spacing students will experience) prior to the students' return? Will the board of education members and administrators participate in trial runs for all spacing situations and procedures that accurately practice what the children will be doing prior to the children being put in these situations?
11. Will there be increased support provided for students' emotional well-being amid this pandemic and with the new way of school potentially causing stress?
12. How will parents, students, and staff be notified when COVID cases arise? At what level of infection within the schools or the community will schools close again to return to distance-learning? What are the plans if many teachers are unable to continue coming to work?
13. What are the plans for distance learning, or will it look like it did last year?

I know these questions are probably just the tip of the iceberg for some of the decisions that school leaders have been and will be making, and I appreciate your consideration. We parents need to know that you and Groton Public Schools are doing all you can to protect children, teachers, staff, and families from the spread of this terrible disease while supporting educational access for all students. I know this is a challenging task, but safety must be foremost. If you cannot say that all safety guidelines will be followed, then schools should not reopen until they can be.

Thank you for your time, consideration, and service. I wish you all well.

Sincerely,
Frances and Michael Whitney

112 Deerfield Ridge Drive
Mystic, CT 06355