

Frank Todisco, Board Chair called the regular meeting to order at 7:01 p.m. Members present were Heidi Simmons, Board Secretary, Alisa Morrison, Craig Esposito, Farouk Rajab, Jack Morehouse and Gordon Lord. Also present were Lily Haghpassand, Student Government Representative, Ana de Oliveira, Recording Secretary, Dr. Van Riley, Superintendent of Schools and members of the staff.

### Communications and Recognitions

All Board members recognized staff and teachers for their work on the smooth reopening of schools.

Dr. Riley recognized the following individuals for supporting Stonington Public Schools with the reopening of schools:

State Senator Heather Somers and State Representative Kate Rotella for their continuous support on listening to our needs resulting in relaxed certification requirements during COVID-19 allowing for flexibility in teacher assignments, Teacher Evaluation options related to social emotional needs to students not academic scores; Danielle Chesebrough for her support on our equity work and assisting with daycare options for staff, Darren Stewart, Todd Olson with coverage to assist with traffic flow and safety on the opening weeks of school;

Kerry Browning, SRO for supporting our student orientation programs and the planning for the expansion of VOICE; Beth-Ann Stewart, COMO for the expansion of childcare options for staff with satellite program at the District Office; Andrew Feinstein, Esq. for promotion of Stonington Public Schools special education supports in collaboration with the CSDE; Sharon Lynch and Peter Perenyi, SHARE for supplying masks, etc. for schools and exploring future ways to support; Stonington Education Foundation supplied water refill stations for Stonington Middle School and Stonington High School; Ye Old Mystic Village and PowerPosse Productions for helping with the 2020 graduation; YMCA Mystic branch for loaning school tents; Adam Bryant using the Eagle Scout project to create a cleared path in the wooded area around the garden for student and staff use; Katie Quinlan, DM PTO President with the Amazon Cart Campaign Drive-supply kits for elementary school classrooms; DMS PTO Outdoor Classroom Committee who installed a whiteboard, built picnic tables, and donated yoga mats for students; Jay Mellow who donated time to build the outdoor whiteboard for the outdoor classroom; Millie Donovan help with communications with the District Office and families and coordinated Staples supply bundles for Stonington Middle School and also worked with Stonington High School to streamline community questions; Tracie Georgetti who supplied over 100 masks for Stonington High School; Julie Holland and the Sensory Garden Committee at WVS who maintained the garden, created seating spots, organized parent volunteers throughout the summer for establishing and beautifying our outdoor learning space; Cheryl Haywood, WVS PTO President assisted with the Amazon Cart Campaign Drive supply kits for elementary classrooms, created PSA posters for WVS; Alumni for their contribution; Joshua Morrison, Pooja Patel, and Nirali Patel for providing feedback to improve equity work at SHS and programming in SPS.

Stonington High School Principal, Mark Friese introduced the new Lily Haghpassand the new Student Government Representative to the Board.

### Comments from Citizens

*Public comments were submitted through email. Public comments were submitted by the following citizen:*

*Tracy Swain – "I am starting to feel some folks in charge of this town, are in the 1800's when it comes to Women's rights and sexual assault. I guess with some of the socialist democrats that is understandable. Being under socialism, a woman's body is the communities not her own. We still seem to have the problem, that the board allows Van Riley to speak out of turn, as displayed during last night's meeting. He is not an elected official, and he is trying to cover up his wrong doing. Some of you members are still drinking the Kool-Aid he is still serving you. Remember about a month ago, Craig Esposito spoke up in concern for all the BOE members, and their legal liability in this matter, he was one hundred percent right, and your falling on the sword Riley has set up for you all. You board members, should pay attention to what Riley is doing not what he is saying. How come he is liquidating his personal property in town? Is he preparing to run, leaving you holding sole responsibility? It baffles me why you would give this attorney in last night's meeting, after she was caught lying, a second chance. Why was she so admit that when you all hired her, last night that she told you that she would not seek out any supposed victim, and they would have to come to her. Why would the board pay somebody who wants everything handed to them? Was she not supposed to investigate? "Definition, of Investigate is {Carry out a systematic or formal inquiry to discover and examine the facts of (an incident) so to establish the truth}, something she and some of you it seems don't know. When Residents make comments, and bring to you concerns, not a one of you responds to the questions. Why is that, you are elected to represent the residents, and when we ask you any question you have the obligation to answer us all. Thankfully, Jack and Heidi seem to be so far, the only exception to this. Nothing seems to ever get answered the way you are running things. Has Jack received the financial information he requested, what it now going on 5-6 months? Even after paying this attorney Chinni, \$20,000 dollars we are still right back to where we started from. Why, oh that's right you had CABA come in and give you an outline on what to ask her to do, so to cover the schools, infractions. Remember CABA the company you hire, with our tax dollars, that is a huge lobbyist group, not a state-run agency. Last night Riley presented a "Plan", in regards to sexual assault, and other subjects, which in the presentation was what 30 or so pages. He was supposed to have a plan in place. According to the STATE BOARD OF ED, they had to have a plan no later than July 2016, and no later than October 1, 2016, each local and regional BOE shall implement the sexual abuse and assault awareness and prevention program, Pursuant to State Statute 17A-101Q. It's funny how this program if in place would have prevented all of the Neanderthal's, who will come out and say these girls and others were looking for this type of attention. Well guess what no woman looks for this kind of attention and then complains about it, THAT'S A FACT!! So, it seems, if there was one in place it's not worth the paper it was written on for it did not protect the kids. Riley keeps feeding all members of the BOE, a new plan, it seems what he is doing is for the future, because he failed the students in the past. It also seems interesting, that he could not answer the questions regarding this program, he had to have another staff member attend the meeting to do his work. He does not know state statutes, he has failed our students, and he has failed the residents, and you all seem to*

*have him on some high pedestal, and his multimillion-dollar castle on the hill. With a he has done no wrong attitude. To Gordon, Alissa, Jack, Heidi and Frank, thank you for questions to the attorney on the report. I was very PISSED OFF that during a Board Motion, followed by Second, then a discussion, RILEY OPENED HIS MOUTH, during this discussion. Really, he is not a BOARD MEMBER, he had no RIGHT TO SAY A WORD. When are members of the board going to Stop this insanity, residents feel betrayed over and over. Then to have Heidi remove her motion, out of fear because of RILEY, that was so wrong on so many levels. Suggestions to the board First. set a DATE, no later than that Jack receives the Financial information he has been asking for. If he does not receive it by said date, then disciplinary action should be taken. Second, because the current BOE Attorney, was involved in the Chockas issues, and did not inform the BOE Members, all legal questions regarding this should go through another attorney, one who will represent, the BOE, and the Residents, and the students, not the Unions. Third, while you all are talking about curriculum, I think it would be very prudent, that we add, a budget class to all students, K-12, because if the students were to follow Riley's concept that money grows on trees, this town will be forever broke. Forth, it's about time you all started to pay attention to Social Media posts, and the comment section online from the Newspaper, residents are beyond upset, it is quite apparent, they don't send you letters, but they do have things to say, and it's not good. Sincerely, Tracy Swain"*

### Consent Agenda

- A. Minutes - September 2, 2020  
August 26, 2020  
August 13, 2020
- B. Checks and Bills – August 19/20  
August 20/21
- C. Personnel Report

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

**Motion 1:** To approve the consent agenda as presented.

All: Aye

### Monthly Reports

The Board had no questions on the monthly reports.

### Superintendent's Report

Update on Opening of Schools - Dr. Riley congratulated principals for the positive reopening of schools. Each principal shared an overview of the first day of school at their site. Jenn McCurdy, Deans Mill School Principal reported that attendance was very high, teachers came in with a positive attitude, working through some glitches, families are getting into a routine and have been supportive and spoke she is grateful for the PTO and all their help. Kathy Irvine, West Vine Street School Principal shared that the students and staff have been resilient, how joyful they were to come back to school. She added enrollment on the first day of school was high and are working with those families that had not participated, technology issues have gotten better. She reported arrival has been smooth in regards to traffic and is working with the police, afternoon dismissal is a challenge but parents have been really perceptive and are using a number system. There is a great outdoor space, the sensory garden is like a spa where kids have mask breaks. We are very appreciative of the PTO for their support. Tim Smith, Stonington Middle School Principal reported the same successes as the elementary schools. He is very impressed with the students, students are happy to be at school with other students and teachers. Teachers are doing a lot of interactivity with cohorts that are at home and in the classroom. He noted morning traffic flow is smooth despite the road work around the school, pick up in the rain was a challenge but is looking into a better system for parent pick up. He thanked the Technology Department for all their long hours to get students their Chromebooks in time. He received a lot of positive feedback regarding the three half-days at the start of the school year. Mark Friese, Stonington High School Principal and Alicia Dawe, Associate Principal reported a fabulous reopening with 98% attendance. The students are happy to see other people and are making sure connections are reestablished. He has worked on making sure routines are put in place. He was impressed at the congeniality of the teachers with each other and the amount of sharing of ideas to help each other is phenomenal. We want the high school experience to be as normal as possible and is working with the drama team to have a fall play. He is working on getting all the clubs started and would like to see sports be as normal as possible. He gave a shout out to the kitchen staff for passing out meals to those in school and at home.

Lily Haghpassand, Student Government Representative reported students are glad to have a routine back, even with distance learning the three days it feels like we are in school. It is important to maintain routine and keep the students and teachers morale up. She noted time will tell just how well it will go.

Discussion Regarding Full Reopening – Dr. Riley spoke that they are following different recommendations and groups on how we can return to full time and monitors this daily. He added we are using seven different items we are monitoring and recommendations from, Dr. Blefeld, CDC, Governor, State Commissions, Ledge Light, State Department of Health and monitoring neighboring towns and school districts. He added we also looked at our employees and where they reside to see how many lived outside of Stonington. He noted things change every day, and if it gets to the point it appears we can bring certain levels back or students we will discuss when that can happen. Jack Morehouse asked if students or parents are having problems with the online learning who they contact. Mr. Smith, Stonington Middle School Principal answered the

best thing would be to contact the homeroom or one of the student's teachers. Mr. Morehouse voiced with teachers having students in front of them and at home, if students at home have an issue with the computer will there be someone their along the way like a para to help manage this. Dr. Riley explained there is different situations in each class. We had EASTCONN at our Professional Development speak on this issue. He explained some classrooms have paras some do not. Mr. Friese, Stonington High School principal explained some classes there will be a student as a monitor to help and some classes students are partnering up with an outside student to assist in this issue. Dr. Riley spoke on status of costs related to COVID-19. Dr. Riley shared a copy of the list of costs which include personnel, PPE, etc., that were added to the expenditures that were needed to open schools in a safe condition. The list of items showed estimates of these costs; on August 25<sup>th</sup> the estimate was \$878,560 and now that we are into it and now how to control some of those costs it went down to \$646,000 which is over \$200,000 less than was estimated. He added we appreciate the Board of Finance's support of using some of the last year's ending balance to cover some of those costs. He also mentioned we had \$477,000 we returned to the town and our Chair and the Board of Finance Chair discussed this and reassured that if we have costs that we need out of those funds that they are available. Out of those funds on August 25<sup>th</sup> we thought we would need \$343,000 and now it is down to \$180,000 this may go up or down but we are heading in the right direction.

Funding of SHS Athletics – 2020-21 Budget – Farouk Rajab reported that at the Finance and Facilities Committee meeting the recommendation was to keep the funding for students high school athletics the same as what it was approved by the Board. Chairman Frank Todisco asked for a brief background on this issue. Mr. Rajab gave the history behind the funding for high school athletics as it relates to the assistant tennis coach. Jack Morehouse voiced his thoughts regarding the funding for the assistant tennis coach adding that for very little money it would make a large impact on many students. He added some students want to go to school because of sports. Gordon Lord spoke he agreed with Mr. Morehouse, adding that for students mental and social being he felt very strongly that we need to look at this issue again. Heidi Simmons spoke she supports the rowing program, funding to repair the truck and would like to see a committee to discuss some of these ideas. Alisa Morrison noted there was an Athletic Committee in the past comprised of parents, Board members, and principals who met quarterly. She also voiced that we need to look at funding for middle school sports as well and it needs to be a holistic discussion. Chairman Frank Todisco remarked if the Board feels that this warrants a revisit then he will ask the Superintendent to meet with the principals and have him come back with a recommendation for the next meeting. We will know more regarding fall sports and have a more informed discussion. Mr. Lord questioned if the Board went back to the Board of Finance for the \$15,000. Mr. Rajab explained how the Board voted to cut several programs and the process. Craig Esposito explained the budget we came to supported all these activities but the Board of Finance told us to cut more money. Dr. Riley spoke about the budget process and the \$1.6 million dollars of cuts in which staff, materials and programs were cut. He agreed with the recommendation from the Board to look at the programs again and bring a recommendation to the Board. Mr. Morehouse noted we are here for the kids and the school system and asked to revisit these cuts again. Mr. Lord voiced for a few thousand on the whole budget, he wants to make sure all the activities happen. Dr. Riley will look at funding of all activities at all levels, what was offered and what was reduced, rationale for the reductions and our priorities. Heidi Simmons requested to know how decisions are made on cuts and if there is some kind of criteria used.

#### Comments from Citizens Relative to Board Action on this Agenda

No comments.

#### Board Comments and Concerns

Alisa Morrison shared her items for future agendas, such as Items for the Board Retreat: 1) Board Retreat Agenda, 2) Board Goals, 3) Sub-Committee configuration. Chairman Frank Todisco request the Board share their items for the Board retreat agenda with him and he would prioritize them.

Jack Morehouse questioned if there was an in-between method of having comments from citizens here in person, where they can go to the podium rather than reading a letter that can go on and on and asked for a better way to approach comments from citizens. Chairman Frank Todisco noted he has had discussions with Dr. Riley to use technology in a more interactive way or opening our meetings to the public, adding we are in the process of looking into that. He added there are also different venues we can use in the district. Alisa Morrison spoke maybe have citizens come in one at time.

Farouk Rajab commented on his conversations with the Board of Finance regarding the money that was returned to the town which was earmarked for education and that money would come back in the 20/21 school year. He added this could help with the conversation with Dr. Riley with what programs can come back and other things we need for the kids. Craig Esposito noted the Board of Finance said they might give it back. Mr. Rajab noted he had their response in writing regarding these funds.

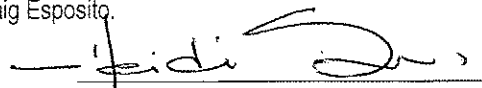
Heidi Simmons voiced that The Day newspaper reported that our Board agreed to move on regarding the Chokas issue, she wanted it made aware that she did not agree with this comment. Craig Esposito stated we did not vote on this.

#### Adjournment

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

**Motion 2:** To adjourn at 8:19 p.m.

All: Aye

  
Heidi Simmons, Board Secretary



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**Fwd: BOE meeting 9-10-2020**

1 message

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Jared Swain <jswain@comcast.net>  
To: publiccomments@stoningtonschools.org

Thu, Sep 10, 2020 at 3:54 PM

Begin forwarded message:

**From:** Jared Swain <jswain@comcast.net>  
**Subject:** BOE meeting 9-10-2020  
**Date:** September 10, 2020 at 3:48:44 PM EDT  
**To:** ftodisco@stoningtonschools.org, heidi.simmons@stoningtonschools.org, "JMorehouse@stoningtonschools.org" <JMorehouse@StoningtonSchools.org>, gordon.lord@stoningtonschools.org, "AMorrison@stoningtonschools.org" <AMorrison@StoningtonSchools.org>, FRajab@stoningtonschools.org, "CEsposito@stoningtonschools.org" <CEsposito@StoningtonSchools.org>

Please read the following in open comments from Citizens, thank you.

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BOE 9-10-2020.pdf  
29K

Tracy Swain  
Pawcatuck Resident

September 10, 2020

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