

Frank Todisco, Board Chair called the regular meeting to order at 7:09 p.m. Members present were Heidi Simmons, Board Secretary, Alisa Morrison, Craig Esposito, Farouk Rajab, Jack Morehouse and Gordon Lord. Also present were Ana de Oliveira, Recording Secretary, Dr. Van Riley, Superintendent of Schools and members of the staff.

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

Motion 1: To move both executive sessions to the first item on the agenda.

All: Aye

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

Motion 2: To move into executive session to discuss attorney-client privileged communications regarding pending legal matters

All: Aye

The Board entered into executive session at 7:11 p.m.

The Board exited executive session at 8:04 p.m.

Potential action regarding Executive Session

Frank Todisco, Board Chair noted the attorney provided an update and no action was taken.

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

Motion 3: To go back into executive session to discuss the Superintendent' evaluation and invite attorney Nick Grello.

All: Aye

The Board entered into executive session at 8:07 p.m.

The Board exited executive session at 8:24 p.m.

Potential action regarding Executive Session

Frank Todisco, Board Chair explained he will reach out to Ana de Oliveira to send out a Doodle meeting request with dates for next week where the Board can come together to talk on the tool used for the Superintendent's evaluation.

Communications and Recognitions

The Board had no communications or recognitions.

Comments from Citizens

Public comments were submitted through email. Public comments were submitted by the following citizens:

Tysen Anne Naughton – "Good evening, I understand how hard you have all worked on the school plans this year and how difficult the task is. Please let me first pass on my appreciation and gratitude for your efforts as there really are no 'good' options....just different risks for different t options. My ask is to consider a more flexible schedule for the remote learning options. My understanding is that remote learning will mimic a school day with 'bell to bell' attendance and live classes. This is ideal for families who have a parent or other guardian on hand to supervise, as well as the means to provide internet, devices, and dedicated work spaces for all children. However not all families have these luxuries. Many families have parents who work outside the home without the means to hire a guardian to supervise the children. Many families have parents that are now working at home who are not able to complete work responsibilities while adequately assisting their children. Still others will have to share devices among multiple children, and have to deal with internet capability of multiple school and work loads. A flexible schedule will allow even a tiny bit more help for families that may be able to bring children with them to work sites, and complete work during off hours,...or share devices and internet use during the day so the load is not so overwhelming all at once. A flexible schedule would allow older children to assist with the younger ones (with school work and supervision). Granted, this would be in lieu of the usual teen job, but could greatly help families. These are difficult times, so we must understand that the more options families have to provide a living as well as a quality education, the better the outcomes will be.Thanks for your consideration. Tysen Anne Naughton (mother of 3 children in 3 separate Stonington schools as well as 1 still in daycare) Sent from my iPhone" (email copy attached)

Jessica Morrissey – "What is the Current Status of Remediation for the Air Quality in the Closed Circuit HVAC Systems in our Public Schools? Has Peter Anderson researched the 2 Methods that were sent to Alexa Garvey on June 28th???"

Please see the Paper Trail below for information on the two Cleaning Methods: UV-C facts and Reme- Halo.

Thank you Jessica Morrissey, Stonington, Sent from my iPad" (email copy attached)

Ashley Couto-Tewell – *"I ask that this letter below please be read during tonight's meeting. Thank you for your time and attention to this matter. Dear Board of Education Members, We write again to you in regards to the essential re-opening of our schools this fall. When we received the email last week from Dr. Van Riley suggesting the Board vote for a Hybrid Model to start our school year off this fall, we were both shocked and disheartened. In conversing with others over our mutual feelings it has been suggested that this may have come from a region wide decision. If this is the case, then I strongly recommend the Board of Education make the decision for the Stonington Community, whom you represent, and let the other school districts make their decisions. Many of us reside in Stonington because of the school system and pay these taxes to ensure our kids have a great education in great schools. A hybrid model is going to push many parents to the brink financially. The survey showed that a majority of respondents had both parents working. Now parents will have an additional financial burden that will become costly as having a family member help watch the children may not be sufficient for the child's learning. No, our schools are not daycares, but they are a learning environment for our children that our tax dollars go towards. It has been proven that an in person learning environment is the best for children and crucial to their development. It is so important even Mr. Redfield said that it is a public health risk if schools do not reopen. He stated "I don't think I can emphasize it enough, as the director for the Centers for Disease Control, the leading public health agency in the world, it is in the public health interest of these K-12 students to get the schools back open for face-to-face learning." Dr. Fauci, during a recent public conference call with our Governor, said "There's always a risk, but depending upon the level you're in, my approach has always been the default position should be to try as best as you possibly can to open up the schools for in-person learning." He said Connecticut's infection rate has been hovering around 1% and suggested schools could and should reopen and noted it was crucial for parents to continue working. The facts show Stonington has had low numbers, having only a total 36 positive cases in a town of roughly 18,000 people, and there was a general understanding that schools would reopen if Covid numbers stayed good. Even in the Reopening Plan Options for School Year 2020-2021 under Plan 1C – Hybrid Model there is a note that "this hybrid model may not be optimal for re-opening given the current status of southeastern Connecticut as a low risk for infection" It is easily understood that we need to be ready for a change in plans should the numbers in the area start to rise, but if it isn't safe to reopen now, when will it be? This is absolutely a difficult decision to make but we implore the Board of Education to do what is right for our children and reopen our schools full time. Parents can choose a distance learning model if that is what works for them and we ask that those parents who would like to send their children back to school full time have the option to do so as well. This is a tough decision for parents to make as well but some of us have already watched our children struggle through distance learning and we know that they need an in person learning environment for their educational and social wellbeing. If the Board makes the decision for the hybrid model, we ask that you at least put a date, sooner rather than later, to revisit the topic and let us parents know what numbers you are looking for in order for our children to return to a full reopening of their schools. Sincerely, Nicholas and Ashley Tewell" (email copy attached)*

Jane Couto – *"Dear Stonington Board of Education Members, As a Grandparent I never thought I would have to be writing to the school board stating how essential it was to reopen our schools full time for the education of our children in Stonington, including my grandchildren. I understood when the schools closed and went to a distance learning module, as we were in unprecedented times and decisions needed to be made quickly. Since March though there has been time to develop safe reopening plans. We have watched Stonington and our surrounding areas do well in response to Covid. Stonington's numbers have remained steadily low and I and my family continued to watch these numbers closely so that we could ensure my grandchildren would be able to return to school this fall. After now hearing from my daughter and son-in-law that a hybrid model is being recommended by the Superintendent I felt compelled to write to you. My grandson, who is now 7, was bored and craved social interaction during the distance learning plan this past spring, while my granddaughter, who is 4, was defiant and tried her hardest not to do any educational work. I watched my daughter and son-in-law struggle with childcare, as they are both essential workers, while also trying to ensure their children did not miss a beat in their educational needs. It hurt to not be able to assist them as much as I would have wanted since I am also an essential worker who has been working through the entire pandemic. You consistently hear how important it is for children to have an in person learning environment, yet that doesn't even seem to be a factor in many of the documents and letters that I have been shown regarding Stonington's reopening of schools. Given the condition of our state and town right now, it would seem that that with the low number of Covid cases that this need for children to have in person learning would be a priority to our school district and schools would be reopening. I have always considered our schools to be essential, as I think anybody would, but apparently that is not the case. I hope everyone takes the time to really think about the educational and social implications this decision could be making. Our schools are not to be part of a political agenda and allowing it to be one would be in stark contrast to the best interest of our children. Sincerely, Jane Couto, Stonington Resident" (email copy attached)*

Steve Small – *"Dear Mr. Rajab I am concerned about the current plans to reopen Connecticut schools. Last week the Connecticut Interscholastic Athletic Conference (CIAC) announced its plans for restarting interscholastic sports in Connecticut. The CIAC's reopening schedule coincides with state school reopening plans. This does not make any sense. The state has phased in the reopening of stores, restaurants, beauty salons, etc. and now we are going to simultaneously reopen schools and restart sports? There are few sports that are contact-less and where social distancing can be practiced. Simultaneously opening schools and restarting interscholastic sports is a formula for failure. We are already seeing an uptick in cases in young people in rural Northeastern Connecticut. Across the nation young people are becoming the largest demographic testing positive for Covid-19. Across the state we have developed intricate reopening plans and are taking extraordinary measures to insure social distancing during the school day only to have students come in contact with one another on the athletic fields after school and on weekends. This is not rational.*

We should reopen our schools and get five- or six-weeks experience with the educational process and if all goes well, then phase in athletics. We are all seeing the negative effects of aggressive reopening strategies in other parts of our nation. I believe it is reckless to simultaneously reopen schools and restart interscholastic sports. Education and sports like other parts of our society should be a phased in process. I am asking you and the board to take a stand to "press the pause button" on interscholastic athletics and after-school athletic practices until we have some positive experience with the reopening of Connecticut's schools. Steven Small, 24 Riverbend Drive, Mystic, CT

Consent Agenda

- A. Minutes – July 21, 2020
July 24, 2020
July 28, 2020
- B. Checks and Bills – July 19/20; July 20/21
- C. Personnel Report
- D. Policy – P4000.1/P5145.44 – Personnel Certified/Non-Certified - Students – Title IX
- E. Policy – P5145.5 – Students – Sexual Harassment
- F. Policy – P5145.51 – Students – Sexual Harassment/Peer Sexual Harassment

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

Motion 4: To approve the consent agenda as presented.

All: Aye

Report of the Superintendent of Schools

Dr. Riley reported the paraprofessional association has reviewed the employment contract and will be sending it to the Board for approval. He also met with the SEA and noted a MOU has been generated to speak of ratifications of the reopening plan. Dr. Riley spoke he has had several meetings and is working very hard to make the safest and best reopening plan for our district. There will be another survey going out tomorrow to families and staff and will have results on Monday. Dr. Riley also reported the district will be rehiring of the elementary library media specialist.

School Reopening Plan

Dr. Riley shared all reopening plans with the Board members. He explained there are two models, hybrid model (two days in school instruction and three days at home distance learning), and the full distance learning model. He reviewed differences between each model, financial implications, schedules, safety measures put in place, transportation changes and after school activities outlined in each plan. He spoke about graduation requirements and options available at the high school for a dual enrollment option and early completion of graduation requirements. Dr. Riley recommended the Board approve both plans with the understanding that the Superintendent will need to make adjustments with recommendations as needed. He noted he will keep the Board updated of any changes to the reopening plans. Child care is an issue for some staff and he will be working with Beth Stewart from the COMO to see if there is a way to use classrooms at the high school and district office to help staff with daycare while they are working.

Frank Todisco, Board Chair asked how the financial implications are accounted for. Dr. Riley responded they are not, we would have to go to the Board of Finance for funding. We have CARE monies coming but still need to work with BOF for funding. Jack Morehouse asked about Wednesday cleaning day, have we thought of having an outside cleaning company. He added if we hire extra custodians and then after all this will they need to be gone. Dr. Riley answered there are some legal issues involved with an outside company but we are looking at that possibility, it would be deep cleaning on Wednesday and Saturday. Mr. Morehouse asked for an explanation of a typical day of a student who attends the hybrid model. Dr. Riley explained the curriculum team has been working on schedules, we are looking at options of how teachers will do this live. The expectation is that every student would be attending live with the class. Alisa Morrison had questions regarding how students would be grouped in a classroom setting. Dr. Riley noted it would be up to the teacher how she would like to arrange the students. Gordon Lord, as a member of the reopening task force acknowledged all the work that was put into the reopening plans. He asked what criteria will be used to pivot from a hybrid model to a distance learning model. Dr. Riley answered we will take direction from the State. Dr. Riley explained we will need to set a time maybe in October to reevaluate and will be looking at CDC recommendations regarding safety. Mr. Lord asked for clarification of the Wednesday for full day deep cleaning need. Dr. Riley explained we are disinfecting every section of every building. Heidi Simmons voiced and purposed something other than the two plan choices. She proposed a full in person five days per week model and why she supported this plan. She questioned whether the district was using the American Pediatrics Association model. She noted that East Lyme and Old Lyme have decided to go full time. Dr. Riley noted those districts have smaller class sizes. Farouk Rajab asked if the financial costs were annualized costs. Dr. Riley noted costs are based on half of a year. Mr. Rajab asked how substitutes will be handled. Mr. Rajab asked are we hiring custodial staff on a temporary basis or not and would we lay them off. Dr. Riley responded the district has hired full time permanent sub teachers for each building. Bus monitors will be hired by First Student. He explained things change every day and staffing will need to be adjusted. Mr. Rajab asked if the district will be doing temperature checks. Dr. Riley responded no we will not. Ms. Simmons asked if there is a way that parents can communicate whether the student is not participating. Dr. Riley noted we will make sure parents are aware of the

protocols and who to contact. Ms. Morrison voiced that parents need some assurance that we will not go back to a full time model from a hybrid model from a Friday to a Monday without notice and that we will revisit the plan. She suggested having a hard deadline to revisit this issue, suggesting maybe at the October Board meeting have a follow up and that we would keep them informed. Dr. Riley noted we will add this item to every Board meeting and bring an update. Ms. Morrison asked that we make a commitment to parents that we will not just jump into an all in model. Dr. Riley will be communicated this to families and staff.

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

Motion 5: Move to accept the hybrid plan as stated by the Superintendent.

All: Aye

Independent Investigation

Frank Todisco, Board Chair reported he had an email exchange with the attorney and was hoping to get it sooner. He noted she is behind due to issues with the past storm. She will get the report to the Board as soon as she can.

Call to Action

Mary Anne Butler, Assistant Superintendent addressed the Call to Action document that was generated on July 22nd. She spoke of the events leading up to the document generated by the Leadership team. She spoke of actions taken and those events that are coming forward related to this issue. She noted revisions to the staff handbook have been started. She also made known she will be participating in The Freedom Forum an event on August 20th at the Mystic Seaport Museum at 5pm and extended an invitation to the Board to attend. Frank Todisco, Board Chair expressed he believes it is important for the Board to discuss this item at their upcoming retreat and establish a Board goal that will translate to the district. Farouk Rajab noted he supports the Call to Action and will do all he can to support it.

First Read Policies

- A. Policy P4118.237 – Face Masks/Coverings
- B. Policy P6114.8 – Pandemic/Epidemic Emergencies
- C. Policy P6114.81 – Emergency Suspension of Policy During Pandemic
- D. Policy P6172.61 – Distance Learning

Jack Morehouse asked if we would be looking at Policy P6114.81 on a monthly basis or is it temporary. Dr. Riley explained the protocol and procedure. Dr. Riley noted the State would like these policies approved by tomorrow.

The following motion was made by Jack Morehouse and seconded by Craig Esposito.

Motion 6: To accept Policies A-D and waive the second read.

All: Aye

Monthly Reports

There were no questions on the monthly reports.

Comments from Citizens Relative to Board Action on this Agenda

There were no comments.

Items for Future Agendas

1. Date of Board Retreat

Jack Morehouse questioned how we get air conditioning put in at the middle school. How do we move this forward, do we need to have a discussion with the Board of Finance? Frank Todisco, Board Chair noted this item was probably on the CIP and did not move forward. He added we need to speak to the Board of Finance. Frank Todisco, Board Chair and Farouk Rajab will meet with Tim O'Brien to move this item forward. He also stated that the high school system is not working well either. He will reach out to Mr. O'Brien.

Board Comments/Concerns

The Board had no comments or concerns.

Adjournment

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

Motion 7: To adjourn at 9:53 p.m.

All: Aye


Heidi Simmons, Board Secretary