

STONINGTON BOARD OF EDUCATION REGULAR MEETING January 14, 2021 - Page | 1

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

Late Arrival: 7:12 p.m. - Farouk Rajab, Board Member Absent: Alisa Morrison

Communications and Recognitions - Jack Morehouse recognized Stonington High School employee, Janice Lamb. He added she is a great employee and does a really good job at the high school and thanked her for her work. Heidi Simmons recognized the Board of Education members who she added did a really good job at the last Board of Education Retreat on Tuesday. She was pleased with the constructive decisions that were made by all. Gordon Lord commented, it is great to have kids back in school and thanked the entire staff.

Comments from Citizens Relative to Items on the Agenda - No comments from citizens.

Consent Agenda

- A. Minutes - December 1, 2020
- B. Checks and Bills -- December
- C. Personnel Report

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

Motion 1: To approve the Consent agenda as presented

All: Aye

Superintendent's Report - COVID-19 Update – Heidi Simmons had questions regarding COVID-19 expenses listed on the COVID-19 update document of face masks and desk shields. Dr. Riley explained each expense listed on the spreadsheet. (COVID-19 Update attached) Ms. Simmons voiced her concerns regarding students that are falling behind and what the different ways we compensate for those students and asked are there also any open times for students who need help to visit the writing center. Dr. Riley noted some students are now attending four days a week and using Wednesdays for extra help time with students. Dr. Riley explained in the proposed budget there will be funding for a summer program and additional time to help students get caught up. Ms. Simmons asked if Bear Academy is where students can get extra help. Dr. Riley answered yes. Ms. Simmons asked what the "What I Need Wednesdays" program is at West Vine Street School. Principal Kathy Irvine explained the new program. Jack Morehouse asked about the use of space at District Office to help the most vulnerable students for extra help. He asked why not use the space for perhaps grade one and two students and has that been explored. Dr. Riley noted that option was looked at when the first hybrid proposal was created, we have building space but would require more teaching staff. Dr. Riley added the teachers are doing a phenomenal job and we are giving them all the support we can. Mr. Morehouse added from the outside looking in, if you brought them here you could split them up and have a para and teacher in each room. We have a lot of space here and seemed that that would make sense.

SHS Attendance/Grade Update – Principal Mark Friese explained the issue of attendance and grades at the high school as it relates to current COVID-19 situation. Craig Esposito what were the actual numbers and how much has this gone up compared to a normal year. Mr. Friese explained it has gone up about 10%, but are much better than other towns. He explains quarantine and connectivity is adding up for some students.

Discussion/Approval of 21-22 School Calendar - Dr. Riley noted the 21-22 school calendar matches the LEARN calendar. School would start after Labor Day, there are no build in snow days again similar to this year's calendar.

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

Motion 2: To approve the 2021-22 School Calendar as presented

All: Aye

2021-2022 Budget Preview - Dr. Riley stated he would entertain questions from the Board tonight or by email to him and Board Chair Frank Todisco. He would then bring answers to those questions at the next meeting and in the following weeks. Dr. Riley noted the philosophy and format has been the same since he started in 2012 and is the same format as the town. He spoke on the past two years and those increases. He added the Board of Education proposed budget for 2021-22 includes an increase of 8.94% which results in a three year average increase of 2.44%. He explained that we do not know what the special ed costs will be because we do not know when students will be out placed. Dr. Riley shared his budget narrative which explains district challenges, impact on programming, staffing and budget due to declining enrollment. He also explained areas of need and concern such as, Diversity, Equity and Inclusion/Culture and Climate (DEI), academic recover and program integrity. He shared proposed staffing requests at each school. He gave an overview of the proposed summer school program to help students with lost instruction due to COVID-19 impacts. Gary Shettle, Director of Finance reviewed each line of the proposed budget and explained increases and decreases. The Board members had questions regarding health insurance increase, tuition costs, funding for coaches, OPEB funds, summer school programming and logistics, COVID-19 funding, course credit funding, utilities expenses, declining enrollment and future staffing impacts. Dr. Riley answered the Boards questions. Board Chair Frank Todisco asked that the Board submit their questions by Tuesday afternoon. He asked the Board what their desire would be either have a live in person Budget workshop or virtual. The Board agreed to have a virtual Board workshop meeting for January 21st.

Monthly Reports - Heidi Simmons thanked Lily Haghpassand, Student Government Representative, for taking time once a month to represent all her fellow classmates. She asked that Ms. Haghpassand include in her monthly reports going forward a comment on Title IX impact on the student body. Such as their comfort level of safety in regards to sexual harassment and the understanding of process and procedure status when a student encounters any sexual harassments. Ms. Simmons also asked Ms. Haghpassand to give a status of the student climate committee and advisory committee and any related comments on this as she travels the halls for the month. Frank Todisco, Board Chair suggested revisiting Ms. Simmons list of items and will work with administration and get back to Ms. Haghpassand on these requests. Ms. Haghpassand agreed she will look at the list and get back to the Board. Jack Morehouse noted that at one time we had someone in Ms. Haghpassand's position who enlighten the Board on how students are doing in a general observation. He also spoke on the wellness project and how it was well attended. Ms. Haghpassand noted that we have done a wellness week for the past two years and we will put that on in March. We are working in coordination with the VOICE program also.

Committee Reports – Finance Committee Draft Minutes – December 10, 2021 -There were no comments on the draft minutes.

Items for Future Agendas -There were no items for future agendas.

Board Comments/Concerns - Gordon Lord asked Dr. Riley knowing that teachers will be part of the 1b vaccine distribution what impact will this have on the move from distance learning back to school. Dr. Riley noted the bottom line is districts want to make sure we are following the CDC guidelines. We monitor everything five or six times a day and it is really complicated and will let staff know when they can get vaccinated as soon as he knows. Allison Van Etten, Director of Special Services noted we have been told as our teachers get the vaccine, the mitigating protocols have to stay in place. Dr. Riley noted will bring students back when it is safe.

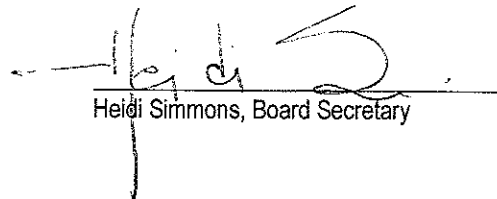
Board Chair Frank Todisco noted beginning in February the Board will be meeting on the second Thursday of each month in person and will have a virtual meeting on the fourth Thursday of the month for Policy and Teaching and Learning items. The community will be able to use the hand raise feature to verbally address the Board with their comments with a two minute time limit starting in February.

Adjournment

The following motion was made by Farouk Rajab and seconded by Heidi Simmons:

Motion 3: To adjourn at 8:36p.m.

All: Aye



Heidi Simmons, Board Secretary