

Special Virtual Meeting Minutes
Board of Education Advisor Council on Return to School (BEARS)
Stonington Board of Education – Stonington, Connecticut
District Administration Building
40 Field Street, Pawcatuck, CT
March 18, 2021
6:00 pm

The special virtual meeting of the Board of Education Advisory Council on Return to School (BEARS) was called to order at 6:03 p.m. on Thursday, March 18, 2021.

Members Present:

Gordon Lord, Board of Education Member, Chair of Advisory Council
Dustin Yaworsky, SHS Parent
Adam Linicus, WVSS Parent
Erin Janicek, DMS Parent
Dr. Kate Wagner, SMS Parent
Heidi Simmons, Board of Education Member
Dan Kelley, Classified/Paraeducator Representative
Bruce Yarnall, SHS Teacher/SEA Representative
Mary Anne Butler, Assistant Superintendent
AnneFay Sullivan, WVSS Assistant Principal

Members Absent: Dr. Van Riley, Superintendent

Introductions: The meeting started with introductions of each member on the council.

Review/Discuss Issues of Current Plan to Return: Chair Gordon Lord explained what the function of the advisory committee will be going forward. He spoke the job of the council is to listen, assist the administration and give feedback on what the administration is building upon. The council is not to make administrative decisions or involved in managing CARES2 act funds. The council members discussed meeting times and locations for all upcoming meetings. Meetings are set for Tuesdays in the Stonington High School Commons.

Mary Anne Butler reviewed the current updated return to school plan that Dr. Riley sent out to families and staff with direction from the Board of Education. She noted the district welcomed grades K, 1, 6 and 9 on Monday, March 15th. She reported everything seemed to have gone smoothly. Assistant Principal, AnneFay Sullivan also commented that West Vine Street School overall had a smooth transition. Mrs. Butler commented the district will continue to assess and watch for outbreaks. She shared that Allison Van Etten, Director of Special Services who communicates the COVID-19 cases with staff and families will begin to report these using a live link on the districts' website beginning Monday, March 22nd. Chair Gordon Lord suggested adding this link to each school newsletter. Mrs. Butler agreed and will work on that suggestion with the schools. Mrs. Simmons spoke that at the last Board meeting a parent suggested getting more information out to the origin of the cases. Mrs. Butler commented we do not give out specifics so that we can protect individual's privacy. Dr. Wagner voiced she feels this information is important to help everyone feel safer. Mrs. Butler noted teachers are excited to have kids back in the classrooms and the first phase was uneventful. The concern now is around lunch in the cafeteria. We have ordered more PPE and the configuration will be different depending on the building.

Bruce Yarnall voiced his concern as a teacher in the high school with moving ahead with April 5th for students to return. He shared concerns of the number of students in a classroom, distancing and lunch waves. Chair Gordon Lord asked if there were different plans for the lunch. Mrs. Butler noted there will be partitions at the lunch tables, so when students take masks off and will not be spaced as much as they have been. At Stonington Middle School, Principal Tim Smith has used some of the gym area for lunch. Mrs. Sullivan reported that at West Vine Street School some students stay in classrooms for lunch. Mrs. Butler noted that there have been parents who called inquiring how lunches are being handled with distancing; we are looking into it and doing the best we can. Mr. Yarnall had concerns about ventilation in the cafeterias at the elementary schools because windows do not open. Adam Linicus asked about the lunch lines at West Vine Street School and if students will be lining up. Mrs. Sullivan answered yes they will be lining up. Mrs. Simmons spoke about the CDC guidelines of 3ft which does not include lunches in the cafeterias. Mrs. Butler noted the direction of the Board was to

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have students return even at less than 6ft and at this time the kids are 6ft apart but once the next wave of students return that will not happen. Mrs. Butler explained you could add lunch waves at the high school but they already start lunch very early as it is. Dr. Wagner questioned if there will be plexiglass barriers for students that are at less than 6ft distancing. Mrs. Butler responded yes there are more on order. Dustin Yaworsky asked if anyone knew how other cafeteria situations are in other schools. Chair Gordon Lord, noted that in North Stonington 90% of students have returned but the class size average is around 14 students and they are less than 6ft apart and assumed that the cafeteria is also less than 6ft apart. Mrs. Butler and Chair Gordon Lord also commented that most schools have come back at less than 6ft and the CDC confirmed that 3ft is acceptable. Dan Kelley confirmed that at the middle school there are barriers and they have also taken over part of the gym for lunch. Students are taking more time to get their lunch, leaving less time to eat. The principal is looking into this and will be adding lunch waves for the 8th graders.

The council discussed what type of feedback they have heard from parents about the current plan. Erin Janicek asked if there were large or small pockets of students in each building coming back. Mrs. Sullivan noted the pockets vary by grades and teachers. She noted for some kindergarten students it was their first day in school and students were first given a tour of the school. Mrs. Butler reported that she has reached out to the state regarding the idea of a remote option for the fall but has not heard back. She will also be reaching out to Senator Somers. Chair Gordon Lord will also reach out to Representative Greg Howard to get that information as well. Mr. Kelley also commented for some of the 6th graders it was their first time in the middle school.

Dr. Wagner asked if there has been a date set for a 5-day full in-person return. She noted at the elementary level teachers will have fewer remote students and feels in-person learning is a priority. Mrs. Butler noted we would like to see what happens when everyone is back first. The reevaluation will be after spring break. She added efforts are being made to see what types of supports families need when students return in the fall next year and the year after. Chair Gordon Lord noted that the teachers really need that Wednesday right now as part of the transition. Mr. Yarnall also voiced as a teacher he needs more time to plan when you are teaching both in person and remote students at the same time. As long as there is still an option for remote we will need time to get ready. Mrs. Janicek asked if there will be summer school this year. Mrs. Butler explained the special ed extended year program will be the same and will start the first week of July and might be extended to six weeks. There will be an additional program with skilled instruction and encore type themed classes. Class will run for four hours per day for six weeks with Friday's off. The SEF through Blue Mondays will be supporting with extra funds.

Issues/Discussion Regarding Fall Return

Chair Gordon Lord noted we are waiting for a decision from the state regarding the full distance learning option for the fall. Mrs. Butler reported a plan is coming together and a recovery plan will be reviewed at the April Board meeting, and will include costs. Mr. Yarnall voiced students at the high school need to commit to either full distance or in person model. Mrs. Butler commented we are asking parents to commit to one or the other. Mr. Yaworsky asked if students would be required to be vaccinated. Mrs. Butler answered we cannot require that from students or staff.

Chair Gordon Lord commented that perhaps the council can visit the middle school and the high school to see first-hand how plexiglass dividers work. Mr. Kelly suggested taking pictures of classrooms during the day to see what it is like. Mrs. Sullivan voiced she can take pictures both in the cafeteria and classroom to share of West Vine Street School.

Chair Gordon Lord commented if anyone has any questions to send them along to him and noted the next meeting will take place in the Stonington High School Commons.

Adjournment: Meeting was adjourned at 7:25p.m.

Next Meeting: Tuesday, April 20th at Stonington High School Commons

Minutes Submitted By: Ana de Oliveira, Board of Ed Recording Secretary