

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

Communications & Recognitions

Gordon Lord communicated he had the pleasure of taking part in the Parent Advisory Council led by Mary Anne Butler. There are about seven or eight families also on the council. There are lots of good ideas shared and many different things are going on in the District. The council is looking to do small videos on diversity and inclusion, and curriculum and many more good things to come.

Heidi Simmons recognized the staffs for the current effort of communications such as, Jenn McCurdy and Tom Bousquet for the Deans Mill School newsletter which is so beautifully organized and details all the elements of curriculum and contains an overview of day by day teaching. She spoke of a new platform for parent involvement called Parent Square as a way to reach out. She also recognized Alicia Dawe and Mary Anne Butler for the comprehensive report on diversity and equity and inclusion. She spoke of the new way for students to communicate about bullying, drug use, violence, self-harm and other threats called Speak Up. She added the safety team is on duty 24/7, 365 days. She voiced that in a time when the pandemic is crippling our communication it is neat to see that Stonington Public Schools finds ways to stand up taller and reach higher.

Comments from Citizens

Bob Dimick spoke on the attendance policy for sporting events at the high school and elementary sports. He asked how the decision came to be not to have anyone in attendance. He spoke about the CDC guidance and DPH guidelines on attendance at sporting events. He spoke of his own experience of the importance of parent attendance at sporting events in an emergency situation and the role of a parent. He added that the Board is the checks and balances of the decision making. He asked if anyone knew about the decision beforehand and if the superintendent had it approved or ran his decision by the Board or a discussion in the Board about having people attend games. He added if no one knew this decision how can we go forward making sure that those decisions are brought to the Board. He spoke of other town Boards not knowing about the no spectator decision. He would like a discussion immediately how we can have one parent attend inside a stadium. He will be emailing his questions to the Board. He spoke regarding his experience with involvement in other outside basketball and football leagues and that there were no transmissions of COVID-19 in the leagues. He spoke of the measures that should be taken such as temperature checks as people go in, one guest, and have volunteers to help with COVID-19 waivers and use the auditorium. He added this way kids are protected mentally and physically. He feels there is tremendous liability, and would like to know how these decisions can be made by superintendents without representation from the people and what they need and what is in their best interest. He offered to assist with volunteers and safety officers that can over see this issue.

Wendy Cauty spoke she has one child at the high school and one at the middle school. She spoke on the reopening and concerns of the sake of a clear plan for the reopening. She read about why the superintendent did not want to reopen this year. She feels we did not need to re-invent the book. She noted if we look around at other schools they are figuring it out, we cannot be the only school with a staffing issue. There are schools next door and far away that have come together to deal with the staffing problem. She feels that the interpretation of the CDS guidelines has been erroneous and asked that the District speak to a medical expert for advice. She understands an issue is working with the union would like to see the district change to an all heads on deck pandemic mentality not a loggerhead mentality. She would like the district to have creative discussions on how to address the exploding mental health issues in young people in the community. She would like to know if we cannot reopen that the district has a way to address the issues of depression, anxiety, academic disenfranchisement and the widening of the academic achievement gap in the town that the closing or quasi-closing of the schools are adding to these growing problems. In closing she voiced that the image of a school district that brings back their sports full time and students back into the buildings five days a week and yet we cannot make it work to bring students back into the buildings five days a week or even four days a week that imagery does not sit well with her thinking that school is first and foremost for academics. She thanked the Board, teachers and all the staff for what they are doing for the system. She asked the Board how much does the school district pay for the new Parent Square program.

Peter Wagner spoke regarding the school reopening and is overall disappointed about what seems to be a unilateral decision to keep the schools in hybrid mode. He spoke even though told that we are not all virtual, 60% of the current model is virtual. He spoke to many parents in the community who said their kids are struggling in various ways, kids are becoming apathetic, developing eating disorders, depression, amount of admissions in pediatric and psychiatric units have skyrocketed. He spoke how many days each Cohort attended school in the month of January. Would like transparency with the data. Would like more information on how the COVID-19 cases in the school are transmitted and believes parents are being misinformed. He added if Dr. Riley says that the approach to COVID is dynamic that our policies are dynamic and that we don't unilaterally say that schools stay closed until fall. He spoke teachers need to feel safe to do their jobs, families need to trust their school protocols and students need both their academic and their psychosocial needs met and doesn't think they are mutually inclusive.

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Michael Evering thanked the teachers and noted these have been difficult moments for almost a year that we have been going through. He added that he, his wife and two children all had COVID-19 back in April along with both his parents. He voiced we cannot make policy based on the minority, it is by in large not making its presence in the elementary schools, in the younger people and feels any one at risk should stay home and stay safe. He noted he is a parent, business owner and taxpayer in this district. He voiced he did not think it is fair to parents to facilitate distance learning with their children. He challenges the Board and the administration to get the students back in school safely and as quickly as possible. He spoke other districts have done it along with private schools in Stonington. We need to look to Westerly and East Lyme who are working towards getting back to school in person in May and collaborate with other districts in order to bring our children back to school in person. We need to put what is best for our teachers and parents aside and do what is best for our children which is to get our students back to school in person.

Faith Leitner thanked the Board for allowing the public to verbally talk to all the Board. She asked about the status of the report from the Office of Child Advocacy. She spoke about the Student Government Representative's monthly report under the topic of Title IX where she notes there are current initiatives that are in school right now but seems like students are still not really trusting so much. She said administration should not only be aware but students should be able to trust action in response to these reports they submit and thanked Lily Haghpasand for the report and added it was enlightening. Ms. Leitner also spoke about the budget of January 14th and noted page 12 and 13 is extremely murky but would be helpful to have a clear copy of that on line. She looked and saw that \$352,000 will be used for summer school and wondered if you would be able to explain why it is that amount. Ms. Leitner spoke she was just informed a month or two ago that we now have three principals at Stonington High School, one is a head principal, one an assistant principal and one is an associate principal and wonders when did we get a third principal and was this already put into the 2019-20 budget.

Cheryl Hayward she noted she is the PTO president at West Vine Street School and thanked teachers and administrators to keep our kids as much as they can in this journey. She had three questions related to Dr. Riley's last letter in terms of the decision to remain in the hybrid model. She voiced concern about the number of staff that are absent and is concerned about what is behind the numbers and how are we apply the restrictions and the quarantining guidelines for teachers. Are we doing it different than surrounding school districts so that our teachers are experiencing more absences and is there something we can learn from those districts so we can get more teachers back in the classrooms and are we applying the restrictions differently? She spoke of a potential solution whether or not the high school classrooms are actually a larger size than other schools and have we considered moving both elementary school students to the high school instead and leaving the high school kids in a full distance learning model. Maybe swap schools so that we can get the elementary students back in the school full time. She feels it has been more of a priority to get kids back in sports than back to school and sounded like in Dr. Riley's letter much of the quarantining is associated with sports and COVID related transmission. It does not seem right to continue with sports and not schools, is it actually the case that majority of quarantining due to sports transmissions.

Ashley Tewell voiced she would like to see surveys go out to parents again. She added in the beginning parents expressed their opinions and risks they wanted to take for their children and the majority wanted students in school full time and teachers wanted to be in school full time. The Board voted to go back to school full time but then received a letter from Dr. Van Riley that we would go into a hybrid model. She voiced we are five months into and we need to move on from this and the Board needs to come up with a decision how we move forward. She added staying this way to end of the school year is unacceptable to Board members, teachers and many parents. She feels parents are doing what they can to make this work as full time working parents. She noted the data is there to support a full time return to school. She asked the Board to do what is right for our children and represent the parents. She spoke other schools in the area are opening. She noted those schools are smaller in size, buildings and classrooms are smaller but we have some amazing school buildings, some of the best in the state and still we are told we cannot open. She understands that we have staffing difficult. It is the schools job to be providing an education to our children and we as taxpayers are funding that right and they are not getting that. She spoke that parents voted last fall and it was ignored and it should not be ignored and asked the Board to do something and represent the people who voted them in. She asked the Board to do something to get our children back in full time and take some step and at this point any step is preferred rather than no step. She thanked the Board for their time and asked them to do what needs to be done.

Dan Kelly commented he is a parent of a high school junior and a para at the middle school and supports Dr. Riley's letter of last week that states we would like to get the kids back to school as soon as possible and full time but can only be done if done safely and he feels at the moment it cannot be done safely in his opinion. He added we cannot keep the social distancing where it needs to be and do not do enough testing of students, staff and teachers and 99% of people that work in the schools have not been vaccinated yet, we do not have proper ventilation in the schools. If and when that can be done then he said bring the back but not until it is safe and secure. It has all touched us in all different ways, let us do what is right and what it is safe and work with the model we have and what do we need to do for our students to learn better whether it is at home or in school. Let us keep working towards a solution. He voiced we should have school based testing and proper ventilation and facilities need to be big enough. He noted the middle school has been fantastic about keeping everyone update and the kids are fantastic about using their masks. The teachers are helping students do what they need to do and everyone is stepping up and now is not the time to step back. He thanked the Board for their service and said let us do the right thing. Mr. Kelly also read communications from the following two co-workers that were not able to attend:

Kim Harris communicated she has been a special ed para since 1998 and has seen many changes and experienced some challenges over the last 23 years. She noted she loved her job and loves guiding students socially, emotionally and academically. She spoke her personal connections with students, parents and colleagues are ones will last a life time. She spoke of the loss from the COVID-19 issues and spoke we want normalcy but not at the expense of more lives lost. She voiced for this reason she stands by Dr. Riley's and her colleagues to continue to use the hybrid model for as long as necessary until we are all vaccinated and science tells us that it is safe. She spoke it is important to stay on the path we are on.

Kim Brennan a para at Deans Mill School and parent of two children in the school system spoke she has been in the district for six years. She added this school year has been challenging but commended Dr. Riley for his decision to stay in a hybrid model. As a parent she understands the concerns of other parents with the current school schedule but the health and safety of our students and staff must remain at the forefront. She added it is difficult to keep elementary students six feet apart at all times and constantly reminded about mask safety. I don't think it is feasible at this time to abide by the CDC guidelines of six feet apart with every student back in school. She spoke of her current family situation with COVID. She feels it is important for each school to be equipped with testing and feels having testing available for staff and students will help. The faster we can get our staff and students vaccinated the better. She would like to get everyone back in school but until we can get vaccinated it does not seem possible. She also spoke about the para contract renewal and add paras love their jobs and students they work with and would like the pay to better reflect the demands of our positions they carry out every day. She adds paras provide as much learning for students daily as teachers do and are expected to do much more for the little they are paid. She ask that the Board keep this in mind when thinking about the budget and their contract.

Lisa Hoagland commented she has children in the system and voiced her concern about children's mental health. She noted she will be the voice for her children and shared her own children have been struggle and it is heart breaking. She added she wants what is best for the children and says when her hands are tied it is unacceptable when someone else is making the decision that her child cannot go to school or cannot play sports. She noted we have science and data to support that children are not the spreaders of COVID and schools are the safest place for children to be. She does not understand why other schools around us are getting prepared to go full time such as North Stonington, Westerly and East Lyme. There are many things we can do to be successful full time with the students in the school full time and does not understand why we cannot do that. She voiced what does it have to take, does it have to take one of our children to commit suicide for us to wake up and say we have to put our kids in full time. We do not know what the mental health and the toll it is taking on some kids. Some are speaking out and some are internalizing it. She spoke of her own personal experiences with her own children and the anxieties they are facing. She added should not be a money thing but putting children first and their mental health first. She voiced she would be prepared to stand outside in Mystic with a sign if that is what it takes for someone to say we should do something. She spoke of an article in the New York Times about the Governor and her priority to reopen schools. She spoke on the current situation with Westerly schools with full time in school for students. We need to be put our children back in school full time with masks, three feet apart and proper ventilation. She spoke of other buildings or trailers that we can use. She spoke it is the job of the Board to listen to all. Hopes that a survey can be done and take that information and move forward. She added her child will be losing 600 hours in a year of instruction and it is unacceptable.

Kris Fisher spoke he agrees with a lot of many other people with concerning to reopening the school system to more of an in-person model especially elementary and middle school levels. He voiced if grocery clerks can go to work teachers can do it too. He added three feet has been deemed as pretty safe and COVID is not affecting children as it is adults. One of the biggest issues is the mental health aspect is being ignored in practice not so much vocal. Dr. Riley has touched on the mental health piece in his emails but does not seem too concerned in practice because we are waiting until fall to go back in person or to have serious conversations about it. He voiced his concern regarding his five year old who is suffering from anxiety due to at home school. She loves going to school but struggles with at home learning and it is affecting her physically. The school observed her after two weeks and noted she seemed happy and fine. They have discussed her going to a four day a week model but were told it was not an option even though that is for other students who don't have an IEP. He is overall concerned about kids being at home more often and away from teachers where they can be observed more. He added when kids can go back to school whether this year or next year we will get kids coming back with stories of being abused and a lot of other horrific things teachers could have picked up on especially elementary teachers who are with students for a longer period of time. He voiced he is very concerned with that, since he is in the field where he deals with these issues often.

Cliff Jackson commented his son is in Cohort A and has not been in school for three weeks except for four hours. He does not feel he is getting a good education. He asked if there is some way to split the Cohort A and B so they get equal time. He added his wife has addressed this with Dr. Riley and he has not responded and has also spoken to other parents and feels that will be brought up more and would like that issue addressed.

Susie Flores commented she has two students at West Vine Street School spoke of the inequity of the situation with Cohort A. She spoke of her personal situation with the ability and means to pay to hire tutors or send her students to an outside facility to help with remote learning and the impacts this will have on her students in which they will be at a disadvantage when they return to school. She voiced her students will be in a position where they are getting less of an education because of the decisions that are being made. She spoke that between January 22nd and after February break Cohort A will have been in school for four hours and Cohort B would have 32 hours of in person learning. She added her kids are young and learning how to read and require a lot of support in terms of logging into the programs. The teachers trying so hard and doing their very best but don't have the proper tools or the time. It is difficult for teachers to focus on students that are at home while they tend to

things in the classroom. She noted she wants everyone to consider the equity of the students' education and whether or not we are delivering to our students an equitable opportunity. She would like our students to be afforded the same opportunities as our neighboring towns and it is not fair to kids and families. She would like some serious thought on how we can make this better, it does not have to be in person if that is something that cannot be sorted out but something has to be done.

Jacklyn Lagasse noted she is a nurse practitioner and college professor and is both familiar with the medical field as well as the educational models. She thanked all the teachers given the tools they are doing the best they can. She spoke on the mental health issue and noted the ER pediatric mental health visit rates are up. She spoke of her personal issue with having to choose other people care for their children because they work full time which increases the difficulty of contact tracing and the ability of their children picking it up and bringing it to the classroom. She added if we keep school in a four or five day model in school parents that work full time don't have to rely and put other people at risk to watch their children. She noted that elementary students learn by touching materials but we are putting kids on iPads and Chromebooks not for just the two zoom meetings but for assignments. She added we are not resorting to paper packets with pencils. We should be getting kids back into school and minimizing screen time, they need in person learning. Many of our local schools are doing it safely. Time we look into the benefit of our students not just mental health but also academic. She spoke on the policy No Kids Left Behind and will take time to get the kids where they need to be. She spoke on the recommendations of the Academy of Pediatrics. She spoke this is putting a toll on mental health of adults and children. She shared a school employee had to quit her school position to be able to support her children with in home learning, noting we did not take care of someone that works in the school system let alone her children. We need to start looking to the models and the science to get the kids back in the school safely. She thanked the teachers for what they are doing but as a district feels we can do better for our students.

Consent Agenda

Minutes – January 12, 2021

January 14, 2021

January 21, 2021

January 28, 2021

Checks and Bills – January

Personnel Report

The following motion was made by Farouk Rajab and seconded by Jack Morehouse:

Motion 1: To approve consent agenda as presented.

All: Aye

Report of the Superintendent of Schools

Graduation Date - Dr. Riley spoke that the graduation day is scheduled for June 18th, we have had one snow day, and we are into the next week. He noted parents have asked to consider having a real snow days and we will be looking at that. The reason why we are pivoting to remote day that would limit the number of days we have at the end of June. In talking to Mr. Frieze he is hopeful we can hold the graduation at the high school this year. Dr. Riley spoke that Cohort A has been affected more than Cohort B, as of today Cohort B has gone to school four more days. We are coming up with a plan to even out the number of school days through the end of this school year.

Gaggle – Dr. Riley thanked Chairman Frank Todisco for bringing this to our attention and added he believes students will benefit from this program. Chris Williston spoke on the new Gaggle platform that we currently use for our student safety model. He explained that the administration is alerted of potential bullying or drug use. Students can call, email or text to a hotline at Gaggle it is monitored 24/7, 365 days a year. The team at Gaggle job is for alert routing, they take the tips or reports and report to the administrators. This will also alert the Stonington Police Department.

Board of Finance COVID-19 Reimbursement – Dr. Riley noted that every month he gives an update on the costs related to COVID-19 funds and added have taken out federal and state funds. He added we waited until February to see what we need for the rest of this year. The request would be \$571,389 from the Board of Finance for reimbursement and as you know we have been spending those out of the budget and need those to be even at the end of the year. He asked the Board for direction to request that amount from the Board of Finance.

The following motion was made by Farouk Rajab and seconded by Jack Morehouse:

Motion 2: To request \$571,389 from the Board of Finance to cover the cost of COVID-19.

All: Aye

School Reopening Discussion – Gordon Lord thanked all community members that spoke on behalf of Dr. Riley and Administration as well as those that want to go back full time to school, he knows the administration wants to go full time back to school and thinks we all do, but there is definitely some realities. He added he had an opportunity to speak to Ledge Light as a result of what happened with the basketball team, he reached out in regards to his children and their participation in their club soccer team. He spoke to Commissioner Mansfield who left him feeling helpless. Mr. Lord noted the student on the basketball team and his son tested negative and his frustration with the advice from Ledge Light on this issue because of his desire to have his son back in school. He also shared he reached out and had a conversation with a Board member from North Stonington school district to understand how the schools are going back because we are all under the guidance of Ledge Light. They

are a smaller school but it all starts with data. We had some parents tonight that were very vocal of wanting to go back in school, but added he does not know what the right thing to do is. He thinks it is time we do a survey. He noted after speaking to North Stonington Board of Education their feedback was they have 90% of students that want to go back to school, the administration and town got together and figured out what to do. I am not saying we go full on or hybrid but I don't see CDC making any changes going into the fall. Mr. Lord would like to see the district survey the parents, students and teachers. He has seen responses on social media of teachers wanting to come back. He shared his son's 3rd grade school picture with 11 in his class and when he attends school every day there are no more than seven in the classroom and wonders maybe there are more pockets like this. He really thinks it is important to understand what the community wants. If we have many that want to come back he believes it is beyond this administration and we need to go to Danielle Chesebrough and the Board of Finance and let them know this is what the town is saying and cut through all the politics and figure out how we make it happen. We need to get creative this cannot go on much longer. What the teachers are doing is incredible and amazing. He spoke on his personal experience and the impact this has had on his children. He closed by saying let us start with the data and see what we can do.

Chairman Frank Todisco communicated that from last Friday to tonight he received 52 calls from parents, teachers and paras expressing what they want to see done, not everyone was in favor of going back, of those in favor not all were in favor of going back five days a week. He voiced he believes we need data and supports the concept of three separate surveys students, all staff and parents. He feels there should be Board involvement in formulated the surveys and three simple surveys we can get the data quickly and make some decisions when we get a complete data set. He added we have not done a survey since July or August.

Heidi Simmons commented about a recent email from Kate Wagner along with a survey she proposed another thing and she reminded us about the reopening task force which is more people to explore different resources. She gave a few links from the American Pediatric Association. We should look at other data resources particularly the APA. Putting together a task force that can collect ideas. She also noted she agreed with people speaking of the elementary school and getting them back not in the fall but as soon as possible and believes all the data shows there are safe ways we can go about doing it and there is space that we talked about and purposed in the Board meeting, whether in this building or mobile classroom. She feels repeating a grade or a robust summer school is really a poor substitute for lost learning of elementary school. She thinks a polling a task force with different views and beginning to open up for more diverse data is the main points we should head towards.

Farouk Rajab commented he shares with what many of the community members said and added it is important that what was discussed is acted on rather quickly. He would like the survey out rather quickly and results shared with the town. He noted not everyone in the town knows how everyone feels so would like the results shared with town. He also suggest a staggered approach to return to school such as K-4, 5-8 and 9-12 approach because the young kids have more impact. The psychological impact including the families, parents and teachers, everyone is tired, exhausted and have COVID fatigue. Mr. Rajab predictability is a big thing and people would like to plan their lives and work and if we don't give them a plan we are making it so much harder on everybody. We need to move quicker than the norm and share those results publicly so everyone knows where we are as a community. We are all parents and part of the community and we all feel your pain, your pain is our pain and we want to resolve it for all of us.

Jack Morehouse thanked all the parents who called in to speak. He added the situation is always changing and it is fluid. Dr. Riley and administration have done a really good job of navigating until this point but the fact is data is changing. He spoke of an article regarding how students are as likely to test positive studying remotely as in person or hybrid model. He also voiced he agreed with surveying teachers, parents and students and do some kind of phase in to have students go back to school. He suggested maybe doing a half day in kindergarten, 1st and 2nd grade, teacher stays a whole day and students rotate through. The administration will come up with the best approach. The elementary kids in particular are suffering but not to say high school and middle are not suffering too, if we start it should be at the elementary school. He hopes that after doing the survey we can move forward from where we are. He suggested the Board reconvene in a week or so because time is of the essence to come up with a plan.

Craig Esposito commented we should reach out to other districts find out if they were able to do this and overcome the obstacles and feel they could go forward. Perhaps get details on how they opened and particularly how they are dealing with the staff shortage.

Lilly Haghpasand agreed with Mr. Morehouse said. She voiced she does not know much about elementary school but as far as the high school and feels pushing the full in person is not the move to make. She added she has never experienced anything more hopeless than full distance learning and thinks but putting 600 kids in a building even at 70% puts us at risk to go full distance and is a bigger danger than keeping us where we are right now. She added she likes the current hybrid and being able to count on the same schedule. She thinks starting at the elementary level where they are most impressionable is where the resources should be put right now. She added hybrid model is better than nothing right now.

Dr. Riley also agreed a survey is a wonderful idea and need to getting that going as soon as possible. He would like to partner together with administration and Board members to meet soon and get the survey going. Then once we have it can get the information back to the Board to look at.

Chairman Frank Todisco asked the Board to get back to him by midday tomorrow if they have an interest in participating in putting a survey together and he will pick two Board members to work with Dr. Riley and the administration to formulate the surveys. At the latest we have two weeks from now the committee of the whole but if it is ready before that we can come together in a special meeting, if not we have a meeting and

address it at that point. The Board was all in agreement with Chairman Frank Todisco.

Eversource Project - Dr. Riley reported we had a presentation a few months ago and Peter Anderson and Gary Shettle took the lead on this and have come up with a way we can save over \$100,000 a year after a few years with a 0% loan. He added the Board of Finance has seen this and Mr. Anderson has talked with the town and this could be a wonderful project for us. This has to all be finished by June 30th and would like the Board's approval to move forward to the Board of Finance and Board of Selectman to consider. Chairman Frank Todisco asked if the Board had any questions and explained this needs a motion to approve then will go to the Board of Finance and Board of Selectman for a town meeting. We have a short amount of time so this needs to be accelerated. Heidi Simmons asked Dr. Riley if this has already been proposed to the Board of Finance and they know about this. Dr. Riley answered yes, Mr. Anderson has spoken to both Danielle Chesebrough and Tim O'Brien and they all seemed to be in favor, it is a long term plan to save some money for the district.

The following motion was made by Farouk Rajab and seconded by Jack Morehouse:

Motion 3: To approve the project as presented.

All: Aye

2021-2022 Budget – Dr. Riley addressed the Board noting he has made the change of adding the \$25,000 for the adding teaching sports stipend. The current request is for a 4.81% increase. That was the only change since our last discussion. He recommended the Board approve this and move it forward.

The following motion was made by Farouk Rajab and seconded by Jack Morehouse:

Motion 4: To approve the 2021-2022 budget as presented.

Vote: Alisa Morrison - Absent

Frank Todisco – No

Gordon Lord - No

Heidi Simmons – No

Craig Esposito - Yes

Jack Morehouse - Yes

Farouk Rajab – Yes

Motion: Fails

Gordon Lord voiced he wanted everyone to know in administration he really want stop support the budget but had two concerns; one is timing. He stated the budget as is and where the town is while hearing from small business owners on calls today, people are making less money. He spoke of his own experiences in taking a cut in pay. He noted Dr. Riley has helped him understand this better. He added he wants what is best for the town and kids but right now when he looks at what is in the budget, when he looks at contractual obligations versus the net incremental he is still not entirely comfortable. He thinks we can get there but as is he wants to keep working with Dr. Riley and administration to understand it a little bit better. He added he wants to look at the longer term and he believes things like teacher salary increases are necessary. He noted for a timing aspect we need to invest in our town but feels the budget needs a little more time before he can feel comfortable in approving it.

Chairman Frank Todisco voiced that in the last week it has opened his eyes on how this community is hurting. A number of people he spoke to have spoken about lost jobs, wages and increase of utilities and struggling to make ends meet. He commented in the seven plus years he has served on the Board, as a member he has the responsibility to balance the needs of the district and the burden on the taxpayer. He noted that the increase the way it is in the environment that we are in now is not something that many are going to afford when it results in a higher tax bill.

Heidi Simmons spoke she sees how incredible the teachers are with what they do, but it is not in person and that is where she decided the integrity of the philosophy of the budget is to generate a budget by a line by line review of what was necessary to provide a quality education for all students and the budget seemed to fall short of this objective because there are too many anxious, scared and frustrated and confused parents to justify that this budget was one that was generating quality education for all. She feels the elementary needs more scientific data and inspired effort of reopening that was her tipping point and why she voted no.

Jack Morehouse spoke as a small business owner he could not survive without increasing his rates this year, every time turns around expenses are up. We have not had an increase in a couple years and he does not want this to fall on the backs of our kids. He noted he pays a lot of money in taxes but does not want to pay a lot and have a substandard school system. He wants the kids to have everything other kids have and more, so therefore he supports the budget.

Craig Esposito noted we just heard from a lot of parents that essentially wanted us to spend more money and they were asking us do more. He added all of them acknowledged that money was a limitation so somehow it does not seem consistent that they want the district to do more but then say we will need to do it with less. We already do not have enough. He agreed with Mr. Morehouse and would support an increase especially since we have gone several years without one. He suggested might be interesting to get if the towns revenue have been on target maybe something to take into consideration but has not heard revenue has fallen yet.

Chairman Frank Todisco noted he will work with Dr. Riley on next steps and will follow back up with the Board to revisit the budget.

Monthly Reports

Lily Haghpasand addressed the Board on the change of format of her monthly report. She addressed three main things regarding mental health, Title IX, diversity, equity and mental health. She shared right now there are a couple things in place working towards the mental health of the students which includes Safe Schools an online platform that includes videos on mental health and voice activities led by Ms. Dawe and Ms. Houle. She noted she would like to see more peer discussions to help with the mental health piece and would like to see peer support groups as well. One of the biggest issue is isolation and Ms. Haghpasand is working with Ms. Dawe and Ms. Houle on this issue to create the peer groups. She also spoke that a lot people she talked to including the Student Government and really would like emphasize that remote learning is not a replacement for snow days. She added they use these days to catch up and believes the staff does as well. She stressed she wants to get out on June 18th as well but they are built in and it is nice to have them in the winter when people are already struggling and the burdens of shoveling and power outages is still a stressor even when we are remotely working. She spoke on Title IX and added that following the events that happened in years past that right now it is a bit hard to trust on actions because they do not see a lot of it and this is something moving forward this should start in freshman year. She noted reporting seems to be pretty stigmatized, there is not always the trust that something will be done if those actions are reported. She feels this is something that changes as new students come up to the high school and need to emphasize that reporting is not just a last resort but that can be done and the administration will take not and action and we will be able to see those results. We need to over emphasize that to compensate for what has happened in the past. She spoke about dress code and not as simple as getting rid of the dress code because it targets mainly girls, it winds up perpetuates the expectation for sexual harassment and believes need to start this younger than high school and make sure it is not just girls getting rid of the distraction but also that boys know it is not ok to use that as dress code issue as a distraction. She reported in the area of diversity and equity that there is an opportunity for students to discuss or report problems the issue is the majority of our population is white so it doesn't come up as much. She reached out to who was the vice president of Student Government who petitioned towards a more diverse curriculum and she said that she thought especially in Stonington students are not taught about negative stereotypes and how they can impact student mentally and sometimes not taught in school about different cultures and races. Ms. Haghpasand feels this needs to be very proactive and people have expressed they need more of the Safe Schools in diversity and having that exposure platform to beginning those discussions has been helpful. She thinks it is important to get a group of students together that are interested and making a point to start these conversations. Chairman Frank Todisco thanked Lilly for sharing her thoughts and those of her classmates. Heidi Simmons commented she is pleased that Lilly is part of the Board and noted the students are who the Board is working for. She added it is good to know what students think of what the Board is doing and helpful. Heidi Simmons asked Ms. Haghpasand to elaborate on the issue of more needs to be done to destigmatize the reporting of harassment and would like to know if it is by peer humiliation or by peer exclusion or does it happen with adults that student confide or during peer discussion. Ms. Haghpasand explained it is broader and it is not limited to the school system that the stigma comes from. She touched on what stops students from reporting and changing the stigma of reporting. Ms. Simmons asked if the new Gaggle platform would make more students comfortable with reporting. Ms. Haghpasand is not familiar with the platform and once it is rolled out will get back to the Board on what students feel about it.

Jack Morehouse asked Lilly what the pluses and minus are of the hybrid mode. Ms. Haghpasand spoke on her personal opinion and right now the hybrid model as cumbersome as it is for students it is the best model. For her being in a school with less students is appealing since she lives with high risk family members. She does not like full distance learning and likes to see people in person and gives her motivation, even though not perfect knowing she will return to school at the end of the weekend it is more of a drive than if she were at home.

Items for Future Agendas

There were no items for future agendas.

Board Comments/Concerns

Jack Morehouse asked for the rationale, where we have been and where we are for the restrictions on spectators at sporting events. Dr. Riley noted this was not a group of superintendent making these decisions, but the league made these decisions. He added a lot of discussions were had with principals, coaches, and the AD on how we can make this work and offer something safely indoors and is following the collective wisdom of athletic directors, principals and coaches. Jack Morehouse also asked Dr. Riley to report back on the number of cases in each school, elementary versus middle versus high school. He added he read an article that high school was experiencing more spread than the elementary schools. Dr. Riley said he will give the Board the information even though very complicated.

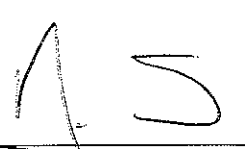
Heidi Simmons commented she would like to explore the idea of a task force for reopening to get more people to do research. She also commented on the guidance for winter sports and how fluid this is. She feels having a group to help Dr. Riley look at things that is part of the polling, are there people who are interested in becoming part of a task force. Chair Frank Todisco noted he does not think anyone is objecting in forming a task force and is ok with that idea but initially we need the data which is driving what our next step is. Jack Morehouse asked for clarification of the next steps with regards to the survey and data. Chairman Frank Todisco summarized get the survey out quickly and get the data back quickly and let us meet to discuss it and talk about next steps from there.

Adjournment

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

Motion 5: To adjourn at 9:14 p.m.

All: Aye


Heidi Simmons, Board Secretary