

might help us be more aggressive in the plan. He does agree with Mr. Rajab that it is all about predictability and some parents have reached out to him that they are managing shift changes to accommodate to be home with the kids, and some cannot afford to put kids in other places in community. Chairman Todisco noted this is the first time the Board is hearing what Dr. Riley's plan is and he will provide this in a written form to us. Chairman Todisco desire is to put a more holistic plan together. Jack Morehouse read a statement from Heidi Simmons who could not attend the meeting. Mrs. Simmons does not see the hybrid model as a good choice for the Stonington schools at this time but sees it as a non-commitment, hybrid is a state of ambivalence. She noted why should students and staff engage in a way of learning if the Board and administration cannot make up their minds on what to do. She believes the anxiety of conducting hybrid instruction can be as worrisome to students and teacher as the pandemic itself. She spoke of her own experiences with the remote learning model and the challenges that teachers face with technology of remote learning. She made note of an article in the New York Times titled *Where the Schools Stayed Open*, featuring Rhode Island Governor Raimondo and the Providence Public School system. She noted she wonders why Rhode Island schools remain open while we are not. She also commented on an article in The Day regarding Old Lyme schools remaining open during the pandemic. She reported that an editorial was also published titled *Get Kids Back In School Full-time ASAP* and Stonington was called out by name for pursuing the hybrid. She noted she spent her adult career teaching children in classrooms and this is what is best for students and what our teachers have been trained to do. She commented our town spent over 50 million dollars on new schools let us use them for the full time in person teaching and learning they are designed to accommodate and let us do it now.

Jack Morehouse reported we got letters from teachers and one of the concerns in coming back is taking all those kids back in the classroom and still continuing to do the distance teaching. He noted it is quite difficult and students often do not turn in their work, or they go missing, or they have issues and there is no way to address those issues because they are remote. Has the district had a discussion about using teachers that want to remain out, that don't want to come back, and use them for the distance learning? He voiced he thinks teachers would be more excited to come back if they did not have to deal with the distance teaching component and asked if there has been any discussion around that. Dr. Riley spoke that has been a discussion since this has started and understands teaching both remote and in school is difficult. Dr. Riley spoke on the issue of moving students out of their classrooms into other classrooms. He spoke to administration and looked about having one remote school or one remote teacher for each school. We talked to teachers and they said they don't want their kids taken out of their classes, they prefer finishing the year rather than disrupting classrooms. He noted if we have the capability of offering a remote model in fall it would be that way. If we had started out that way it would have been fine but to disrupt classrooms now they are not interested in that. We will not have the dual modality next fall no matter what we do it is not fair to teachers.

Gordon Lord thanked Dr. Riley and Mrs. Butler and entire staff, this is a big step forward getting K, 1, and 2 back. I don't think we thought we would be here two weeks ago. He does think we need do more and faster, be more aggressive. He voiced he reached out to North Stonington, Ledyard and Waterford schools and they are doing a staggered approach. He noted he has doctor friends who brought back feedback and would like to see us not wait until April. He would like to see a task force that brings in some doctors in the community that have kids in school not just parents that can bring more information. Mr. Lord appreciates that we want to look at CDC guidelines but they are not moving fast. They are not focused on mental health of these students and teachers. The parents concern is mental health more than CDC guidelines. We can do it less than 6 ft. and in a safe way and feels we have people in community that can help us tell that story. He noted K and 1 is a big step forward and is excited for teachers. He commented the Governor is prioritizing the teachers and hopes the teachers take advantage of that. Dr. Riley noted once we have the information from the survey and a meeting it will help us. He noted the other districts mentioned we have contacted are not following the CDC guidelines. The grades K, 1, 6, and 9 will have 6ft spacing in each classrooms. He added certainly mental health is critical but also is physical health. Dr. Riley expressed that at the next meeting we should talk not only about the survey results but when and how do we come up with a plan based on the direction from the Board and which of the different recommendations are we going to following, CDC, Ledge Light or American Pediatrics. Mr. Lord voiced if other districts have figured out a way so can we. If North Stonington, Waterford and Ledyard can do it, we need to challenge ourselves to find these answers.

Craig Esposito spoke that guidelines said less than 6ft if necessary is ok, and the Director herself said less than 6ft is permissible in elementary and middle schools. He feels CDC does not seem consistent on this. Other schools have had to violate the 6ft parameter to bring students back and it seems hard to bring students back if you don't deviate from the 6ft. He noted maybe we can get a clearer picture from the CDC that will help us make a decision. Dr. Riley noted CDC does not have enforcing power. Dr. Riley noted the two things that CDC says are important is masks and 6ft. distancing. Chairman Todisco asked that whatever information that Dr. Riley provides the Board with that it be done before the end of the day on Monday. He feels it is important that Board members are informed and we can have a discussion on Tuesday or Wednesday. We owe it to the community, teachers and kids. Jack Morehouse asked for an update on teachers and when they will be getting vaccinated and know how many of our teachers want to get vaccinated. He commented if they do it in March he can't see why we cannot open up. Dr. Riley shared we submitted all our employees names

Discussion/Approval 2021-2022 Budget

Dr. Riley noted an updated budget proposal was sent this afternoon to the Board. He appreciated both Chairman Todisco's and Gordon Lord's input into some items that we can reduce from the last proposal that the Board saw at the last Board meeting. He noted the further budget reductions that he recommended were in four areas; para positions that were due to the COVID-19 at an amount of \$100,001. If we need those positions we may be able to use CARSE2 funds depending on what happens in the fall, but recommended these be reduced out of this budget. There was a small amount of heat energy of \$8,000. One of the two largest items was the health benefit reserve. He noted he appreciated Gary Shettle, Director of Finance who had correspondence with Brown and Brown and are able to reduce the health care reserve by \$370,306. This still maintains the 20% and additional 5% that is required by the MOU and also gives another 5% cushion. Dr. Riley noted we have five and half certificated vacancies right now which totals about \$385,000. He suggested the Board not include this amount. He explained this does not mean any particular position will not be filled, once the referendum is past we will go line by line in the budget and bring options to the Board. It is the Board's responsibility to bring a budget to the Board of Finance by March 1st. Dr. Riley recommended the Board accept all these reductions totaling \$864,306 from the last proposal. This brings it to a proposed increase of \$934,495, which is a 2.5% increase down from the previous 4.81%. Dr. Riley recommended the Board approve this budget and pass it on to the Board of Finance and see where goes from there.

The following motion was made by Gordon Lord and seconded by Craig Esposito:

Motion 1: To approve the budget as Dr. Riley stated.

All: Aye

Family/Staff Survey Results

Chairman Frank Todisco noted that the family/staff survey has already been addressed in previous discussion of the agenda.

Return to School Proposal and Discussion

Dr. Riley noted he concurred with what many parents expressed earlier. He would like to make an initial proposal of some students return to in-person to a four-day program and will send a copy to the Board members either after the meeting or in the morning. He spoke of the recent news regarding staff vaccines by the end of April, but feels we do not need to wait until then to bring students back. He added no matter what, we will maintain a full distance option for students. The improving weather conditions will allow us to use outdoor spaces. He ask that the community use safety protocols and follow safety guidelines which would help bring more and more students back in. We will continue to follow the CDC guidelines. He asked the Board to consider the requests of teachers to keep Wednesday as a remote instruction day, for cleaning and planning time for teachers. His proposal is to keep Wednesdays as they are. He noted some parents would like to flip and flop between the types of learning, but added that principals would like a commitment from parents as to which model they prefer. We ask that families continue to drop off students. Dr. Riley's proposal for the elementary is for Kindergarten and Grade One students to start in-person on a four-day option on March 15th. This will give us time to find out from parents if students are staying remote or coming back in-person. We can do this by still maintaining social distancing and maintain all CDC distancing guidelines. At Deans Mill there might be a need to move some of the first grade classes to a larger classroom space such as a library or music room. He noted there will still be an option for full remote learning. He added after March 15th we will look at all other considerations, impact of vaccine, CDC guidelines, site capabilities, and the impact of when we can bring students back at all levels. He reported at the middle school there is a constraint due to the facility size. We will be able to offer all sixth grade students to attend in-person beginning March 15th. Some of the classrooms need to be moved to larger spaces. He noted sixth grade enrollment is smaller than seventh and eighth. We will access this again after March 15th. At the high school we will continue the hybrid and full distance models and will offer ninth grade an in-school option starting March 15th. The high school will implement a learning lab area if we have more students and cannot accommodate at a 6 ft. distance those extra students would go to the lab and attend on line. In summary Dr. Riley noted we will be inviting grades K, 1, 6 and 9 students to come back to school on March 15th and will still have an option for online if they do not want to come back.

Farouk Rajab asked why not start this March 8th because it is all about planning for the parents and predictability. When can we give the parents information on the rest of the grades, what is that date. Dr. Riley mentioned April 1st and believes that is a good time to see what happens with this implementation strategy and will know more about vaccines, and what staff will want. We had a lot of discussion with principals to see how much notice we need to do room moves and March 15th seems reasonable and gives us two weeks and for those parents who might have child care issues. Chairman Todisco, noted we are conducting another survey and will have the results and put those results together on Monday and put a special meeting on either Tuesday or Wednesday. We will then have critical data as to the number of kids by grade level and school that want or not want to come back. The Board will have sound data to look at this in a holistic manner. He added he would like to put a comprehensive plan based on data. He noted that one parent commented that the teachers responded before finding out they were going to get the vaccine and that was the case. The data

Frank Todisco, Board Chairman called the special virtual meeting to order at 6:00p.m. Members present were Farouk Rajab, Jack Morehouse, Alisa Morrison and Craig Esposito. Late Arrival (6:16pm) Gordon Lord. Board members absent: Heidi Simmons, Board Secretary. Also present were Dr. Van Riley, Superintendent of Schools and Mary Anne Butler, Assistant Superintendent.

Frank Todisco, Board Chairman opened the meeting by addressing the issue of the survey that went out today to families and the reasoning behind why the Board made the decision to resend it. He explained the first survey the intention was so that in the Board's decision-making process about going back to school, parents and staff were able to offer their thoughts on several different options and questions. He noted it became clear once the Board looked at the survey results that there was a data integrity issue with the parent survey, particularly in a few schools but across all schools. We made the very intentional decision to send out another survey out immediately and ask that one be completed per child and will track that through the name of the child, to insure that the data collected is sound. Chairman Todisco added they will use that data to form the decisions that will be made as we move forward. He explained the survey has a very short timeline. The survey went out around 1:30pm and asked that it be returned by end of day tomorrow. Chairman Todisco asked the administration to pull all the data together on Monday and will schedule a special Board meeting to discuss results immediately. He noted Board members have all received emails from community on both sides of the decision but believes it was the right decision to ensure that we were looking at data that truly reflected and representative of the parents.

Comments from Citizens

Mary Anne Voss commented she urges the Board to return to in-person the rest of the school year and this fall and understands that there are a lot of matrix to look at. As a parent she voiced that her kids are suffering with the hybrid model. She noted she has had conversations with other parents whose kids are also struggling and not showing up to virtual learning. She spoke of the Academy of Pediatrics and their guidelines. She commented on the fact that the vaccination at the schools are being rolled out and prioritized for teachers and staff. She believes there are risks but need to consider the social emotional and physical wellbeing and mental health of the young people is important. She is mindful of the health and financial responsibilities the Board faces as they consider what is best. She feels educators and communities must find ways to ensure that children get back to the schools and connections that are so important in their young lives.

Ashley Tewell comment she was happy to see discussion of a full opening. Many parents are afraid to speak up, afraid they will be judged for fighting for the reopening of schools. She noted the continued hybrid approach is not working and this is being reported continuously. She also spoke of an article that addressed the long-term side effects on students and the risks of COVID-19. She added opening is not easy but many schools have found a way to manage this and Stonington needs to figure it out as well. She noted a four-day in person is better to help people adjust and teachers have a day to help with the full distance learning students. She felt the survey did not gather any information to make these decisions regarding the number of days. She asked the Board to see what the parents are saying and what the children need, which is full in-person learning. She voiced that maybe a four-day would be the best way to start. She added many elementary parents have said that their children need to be back in school, they are falling behind. This will affect them today and tomorrow, and the decisions of the past year will affect them for years to come. She is happy that after five months of not hearing from the parents they are having an opportunity to say something now. She asked the Board to do what is right for the students of Stonington school district.

Ms. Ferrier thanked the Board for taking the time to have a special meeting and for sending out the survey. She voiced she was disappointed of the fact that the survey was going into junk mail and in particular was a very quick turnaround for when it was due. She added she did not understand why the use of robocalls were not used to alert parents of the survey, it would be great to implement that. She agreed with what others have said about the education lag for students in hybrid model or full distance. She noted that one of her students is struggling emotionally and is suffering greatly and is not getting the education that all kids deserve. She added the ability to focus on the Zoom meets is a disaster. She noted we can't guarantee everyone the safest situation and for those that are really concerned they can continue distance learning. Those teachers that are concerned can focus on the distance learning students and in-school teachers can just teach in-school students. She spoke of her personal experience in her work place where she teaches preschool and students are not 6ft apart and wear masks, which had one positive case which came from an outside source. She feels the need to have 6ft distance in order to have them safely learning is not true and if we wait for that we will never be back in school and if we wait for everyone to be vaccinated there might be those that do not want to be vaccinated. She voiced she feels for the difficulty and the enormity of the Board's decision but all factors need to be taken into consideration. She does not feel the hybrid model is any safer and studies have shown kids are safe at school that is where they need to be for their emotional, mental health and educational health.

including bus drivers and offered our school as a vaccinated site. If they do it during work hours we will support that. We cannot require it of a teacher or anyone and don't know what happens if they do not want it, we don't have all the answers. As of today we do not have a specific day or time for our staff to sign up but we hope to get it as soon as tomorrow or maybe Monday the latest.

Graduation/2020-2021 School Calendar

Dr. Riley noted we would like the Board to employ the one time flexibility which allowed us to put professional days at the beginning of the school year and with the Board's permission we can reduce the 180 to 179 to keep our graduation on Friday, June 18th and that would be our last day of school.

The following motion was made by Farouk Rajab and seconded by Alisa Morrison:

Motion 2: To employ the one time flexibility sanctioned by the Connecticut State Department of Education and change the instructional days for 2020-21 to 179 days ending the school year and holding graduation on Friday, June 18th.

All: Aye

Approval of Teaching & Learning Subcommittee minutes - June 25, 2020

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

Motion 3: To approve the Teaching and Learning meeting minutes of June 25, 2020 as presented.

All: Aye

Curriculum Review – First Readings

Chemistry/chemistry Honors, Pottery 1, Concept Choir/Honors Chambers Singers and Robotics 1 - Mary Anne Butler, Assistant Superintendent acknowledged Board members Heidi Simmons and Jack Morehouse for serving on the Teaching and Learning Committee and thanked them for their questions on the curriculum. Mrs. Butler gave a summary of each curriculum and answered the Board's questions submitted prior to the meeting. Chairman Todisco explained this is the first read and will be on the agenda again in March for approval.

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

Board Comments/Concerns

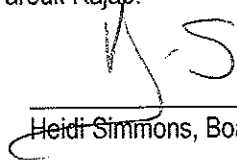
Chairman Frank Todisco noted we will have the survey results end of day tomorrow. The administration will pull results for Monday and he will work with Ana de Oliveira to set up a special meeting for Tuesday or Wednesday. He asked Dr. Riley to get all data to the Board by end of day on Monday. He also mentioned the Board presentation is the March 9th and will prepare a letter to accompany the budget to share with the Board before it is attached to the budget for Monday, March 1st. Jack Morehouse asked if we can list on the letter the accomplishments and that we have been headed in a positive direction. He added we need to point out the good things that are going on. Chairman Todisco said his mind set is different than in the past as far as the presentation. He voiced that more Board members need to be part of the process. He added once we submit the document to the Board of Finance we will go to Board members and see who wants to be part of that presentation. He added it does make sense to highlight the positive things that are happening in the school district. Farouk Rajab asked if the upcoming Tuesday or Wednesday special meeting could be virtual. Chairman Todisco answered yes it will be virtual.

Adjournment

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

Motion 4: To adjourn at 7:24 p.m.

All: Aye



Heidi Simmons, Board Secretary