

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

### **Communications & Recognitions**

Dr. Van Riley, Superintendent recognized Bogues Alley for their generous donation of gift cards to staff. He also recognized and congratulated Kristen Oliverio, who has been invited by the Connecticut State Department of Education and the Connecticut Council for Social Studies to assist in the development of the state model K-5 social studies curriculum. Dr. Riley explained that March is Board of Education month. He honored the Board of Education members with thank you cards made by students from both elementary schools and thanked the Board of Education for all their hard work.

### **Comments from Citizens**

Ashley Tewell thanked the Board for the opportunity to speak about the reopening of schools. She commented on guidelines from the CDC that are not required such as distancing, and vaccines to reopen. She spoke of other Connecticut schools and their timelines for in- person learning and compared that to Stonington schools. She asked where the disconnect lies in Stonington. She added there have been numerous meetings for something that other districts were working on and still we don't have some students going back until April 26th. She voiced she doesn't understand why other districts can and we cannot. She noted children are suffering in the long term and hoped the Board listens and does what is best for our children, what they need and how it is affecting them. She commented regarding the social and emotional skills being undeveloped due to all this.

Peter Wagner commented he agreed with the previous speaker and does not agree with the District's timeline. He spoke about the correspondence from Dr. Riley about the COVID-19 positive cases in the schools and feels it can be done a better. The correspondence has no information about the cases and where they are contracted, it would be nice to share with the community if you have the information. He noted it would be good to know where the cases are contracted and could there be a breakdown in procedures in school that could be contributing to these cases. He voiced sharing these emails does nothing but promote fear and spreading of misinformation. Other communities have published meetings between physicians, parents and Boards talking about the cases and feels that would be an important thing moving forward to help better inform the community. He commented that these cases are probably not transmitted in school but in the community. He voiced that the way the District is informing the community leaves something to be desired and feels parents need a meeting to better be informed. He commented that school is the safest place for students and teachers to be.

Paul Lagasse spoke of the reopening, and the disappointment and failure he felt when reading the reopening plan. He stated other districts reopen plans which includes Hartford and Norwich and much larger like Waterford, North Stonington or East Lyme have either a plan to come return in-person five days a week or they are in currently five days or at least by the first week in April. Rhode Island has been in for five days per week all year long. He voiced he appreciated the work done thus far but the lack of urgency by the leadership to return kids quickly and efficiently to school is disappointing. We will take over six weeks to return some of the school children and only to four days a week. He noted the plan does not address the return to five days a week which kids desperately need. He noted the plan shows return to school on April 26<sup>th</sup> which is six weeks away and two months after some towns have returned. He hopes the Board sends the plan back for reevaluation because it falls short for what the children need. It is about the children and we are failing them, and there is no need to reinvent the wheel he added. He would like the Board to look at and talk to other districts and reuse their plan and apply it in our District.

Heidi Ferrier spoke she is disappointed with the Board and the Superintendent. She noted Groton school district got a plan out on Friday and are going back to school. She voiced the Board needs to get kids back faster, and as a preschool teacher she has been teaching four days a week and no one has gotten sick. She added we need to do better and is heartbroken over the plan that has been submitted. She added this is unacceptable and doesn't understand how Groton is doing better than we are. She can't believe they are not going to school until April 26th. She hoped and begged the Board to do better and feels they are not doing nearly enough.

Feng Xure commented that the Board is doing the cautious thing, because if anything happens to any one child it will be a chain reaction. He understands the decision by the Board and Dr. Riley, who as a veteran superintendent, has been working from the west to east and trusts his judgement and integrity along with his experience and his leadership and the Board's support. We will give the children a safe environment to study and learn. He noted if we rush it we will run into a disaster. He spoke of his personal issues with the need to get day care to be able to accommodate the current hybrid model but helps keep his students safe. He voiced that one day you will regret it if they are not safe.

Lisa Hoagland felt it is necessary to hear from as many people as possible. She added it is emotional but it is also us following the science. We need to follow the science which we are and are not rushing into anything this has been almost a year. She noted she does not understand if we are moving to three feet distancing why the delay. She commented on the next package that was just past and the 300 billion dollars of funding given to schools to reopen schools. She does not understand why we are not reopening, why we are putting the children last and why the children are sacrificial lambs. She spoke the suicide rate in kids is far greater than deaths from COVID-19, less than 300 children died in our country this year. She commented of her friend in Westerly who is a teacher with children who continue to go to school and have not gotten sick, it is safe and successful. She spoke of her frustration of other people making decisions for her children. She added that the CDC said all schools need to be open ASAP and does not understand why we are waiting a month and half to get kids back to school. She would like the Board to reconsider the plan that was put forward it is not a good plan for the kids or the community.

### **Consent Agenda**

Minutes – February 11, 2021

February 25, 2021

March 3, 2021

Checks and Bills – February

Personnel Report

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

**Motion 1:** To approve consent agenda as presented.

**All: Aye**

### **Discussion/Approval Building Projects**

Dr. Riley noted the Building Committee has the three different projects, District Office Roof project, the West Vine Street School Building Project (additions and renovations) and the Deans Mill School Building Project (additions and renovations) for Board approval. It is up to the Board of Education to accept those. He voiced he feels we have wonderful buildings and the Building Committee did a wonderful job.

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

**Motion 2:** Board of Education March 11, 2021 Item: Discussion/Approval Building Projects Motion: Board of Education to formally accept completion of the District Office Roof, West Vine Street School building project (additions and renovations) and Deans Mill School building project (additions and renovations).

**All: Aye**

### **Second Read/Approval of Curriculum and Trade Book**

- A. Trade Book – The House on Mango Street/Grade 8 ELA
- B. Chemistry/ Chemistry Honors
- C. Pottery 1
- D. Concert Choir
- E. Honors Chambers Singers
- F. Robotics 1

Chairman Frank Todisco explained that these items were discussed at the recent Committee of the Whole meeting and asked if the Board had questions or wanted to discuss any of the times for approval. Heidi Simmons commented on her method of assessing the curriculum by using the four new goals that were set up by the Board as part of the Superintendent's evaluation served as a really good assessment. She reminded the Board what the four new performance goals were; student achievement, Title IX, diversity and inclusion and marketing and communication. She voiced that using the four goals is a good way of assessing the curriculum and gave an example of which curriculum would correspond to which of the four goals. She noted by doing this it shows that these are really good additions to our curriculum. Jack Morehouse asked if the middle school currently has a Robotics class. Tim Smith, Stonington Middle School Principal explained not at this time.

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

**Motion 3:** To approve the Curriculum and Trade Book as presented A-F.

**All: Aye**

### **Budget Update**

Chairman Frank Todisco thanked the administration for being present and personally thanked and appreciated what Gordon Lord and Jack Morehouse did to represent the Board. He also thanked Peter Anderson, Director of Operations and Facilities for taking the time to take Glen Frishman so he could see firsthand what we have been talking about for years. Mr. Frishman climbed up on the roof and was able to get under one of the trucks and saw it was rusted out. Chairman Frank Todisco explained he is Board of Ed liaison for the Board of Finance and he and I had a conversation this afternoon and are working on a plan and proposal that he will bring to the Board of Finance. I think tonight is the last meeting before liberations and I will keep the Board apprised of what he hears from the Board of Finance and will let the Board know of changes.

Dr. Riley thanked Jack Morehouse and Gordon Lord, noting they really impressed the Board of Finance. We all felt very supportive by all the positive comments. Budgets are always difficult but having two Board members brag about all that is going on meant a lot to everyone listening.

### **Report of the Superintendent of Schools**

Winter Benchmark Assessment Data - Principals, Tim Smith, Mark Friese, Kathy Irvin and Jenn McCurdy gave a presentation (see attached) on the winter benchmark assessment data. Each principal explained the data for their respective schools and comparisons with previous scores and what impact the current model because of the pandemic had on the scores. Gordon Lord asked about assessment data from other area districts. Mr. Smith noted we do not have access to other schools data because we protect our own data, the only time we see other district's data and comparisons is when the state publishes the state testing data. Jack Morehouse asked principals if they have the same confidence in Eureka as they do in Wonders. The elementary principals explained the difference in each and their success with the programs. Gordon Lord commented on the reading percentages and the gaps in some of the levels. He asked if the curriculum is the same why is there a difference? The elementary principals explained the need for more supports for students to maintain the growth. Chairman Frank Todisco asked Mr. Friese if it is possible to get first quarter versus second quarter grades in relation to the number of D's and F's. Mr. Friese will get the information to the

Board. Chairman Frank Todisco asked out of the 72 students how many are in school four days per week. Mr. Friese responded one third of students are in four days per week. Dr. Riley shared that he will be bringing to the April Board meeting a multi-year recovery plan for both academic and social and emotional to help our students get back to where they should be.

### **School Reopening Plan**

Dr. Riley shared his reopening plan and the issues with the new plan. He explained the timeline of when each grade was scheduled to return to school having it as safe as possible and as soon as possible. He spoke of the ventilation issues and concerns at each building. He added the phasing in is very important because it allows students and staff to have enough time to adjust and we will have more vaccinations. He shared that in the cafeteria students will have to sit closer so the district has ordered 80 plexiglass shields so lunch can happen without masks. The Board had questions regarding distancing, number of students that can fit in a classroom safely and how are students accommodated if they don't fit in the classroom safely. Chairman Frank Todisco asked how is it determined which students are moved to a learning pod where they attend remotely and which stay in the classroom. Mr. Lord asked if we can do pockets where we can bring back a class if we are not able to bring back an entire grade. Dr. Riley noted that the principal at the high school determines who is moved into a pod in a rotating basis. He also noted there is an equity issue if you bring back one class and not the entire class. Mrs. Simmons voiced she is not sure why we would wait two to three weeks to return when it is ok to be less than 6ft distancing. Mr. Morehouse spoke of the younger students and the hardship that exists. He commented administration did a great job with the plan but what is important is to get the younger kids back as soon as possible. He asked if there is any wiggle room to get the grades 4 and 5 earlier than April 26<sup>th</sup>. Dr. Riley explained you will not have staff fully vaccinated and ventilation issues resolved. Dr. Riley noted we have more remote students that want to come back now for the four days. Chairman Frank Todisco commented there is no perfect answer to this situation, but we need to get these kids back as quickly as possible. Alisa Morrison also voiced she would like to see them come back as soon as they can come back in, and get them back quicker. Craig Esposito agreed with Mr. Morehouse and would like to see the younger grades back sooner if possible. It creates challenges but other districts have adopted that approach too and it makes sense because the younger ones suffer more. He added the high school students are not as thrilled to come back. He asked if we can take any time out of the schedule a week here or there, we should take advantage of it and get people back ASAP. Gordon Lord noted that four out of the seven Board members are parents and have kids in school right now. We are as passionate and emotional as everyone else in town and want our kids back school. One of the reasons why we did the survey was to get data to tell us what the community wanted. We heard that our parents and kids wanted to be back in school. Mr. Lord noted you cannot ignore the data from the teachers, 87% of teachers wanted to stay in the hybrid until the end of the year but now we see that 80% of the staff has either scheduled or has received the vaccine so that tells me they are getting comfortable. We cannot ignore them they are part of the community and the kids' lives. Maybe we ask some of those teachers and make sure they are comfortable but we have to be patient about our teachers as well. We need to be looking at all data not just kids. Farouk Rajab noted he appreciated the administration putting together the plan but personally he was not happy and is disappointed with the plan. He voiced we have been talking about getting back to school faster and in his mind we would come up with a plan to get kids back before spring recess and now we are not having the kids back until after spring recess. The plan was always to get K, 1, 6 and 9 back on March 15<sup>th</sup> and now there is nothing between that and spring recess. He believes kids should be in school way before that. Heidi Simmons commented that in the plan she was not sure how much they considered the different buildings and student levels needs. She voiced that she thinks the elementary schools are very much ready with the HVAC and that we gave money to supplement the use of the HVAC. She feels that we can have the elementary go back faster and it could still be very safe. She spoke of the data supporting that young children don't transmit the disease as much, and none was transmitted in Deans Mill or West Vine, it was transmitted outside of school. She wishes the elementary school happen more quickly. Jack Morehouse spoke of a school district in Connecticut that has been back since November and that district cannot go to the cafeteria for lunch but the lunch is brought to them and they stay in the classroom. He asked if that is something we could do. Dr. Riley said the teachers need the room for what they are doing and to do that every day would not work.

Dr. Riley explained for all the reasons mentioned he came up with this plan but if the Board does not want him to keep 6ft distancing and want kids to come back prior to spring break we can do that. But we will be asking teachers to come back not fully vaccinated, we will not have plexiglass yet for the cafeterias and the ventilation will have issues. Dr. Riley voiced that if that is the Board's direction we can accomplish that but it is not his recommendation but understands. Gordon Lord would like to know if some of those other teachers have been fully or partly vaccinated then maybe if it is not all grades, could we bring pockets of grades back only if teachers are comfortable coming back. Chairman Frank Todisco further explained Mr. Lord's view and said if we have a 4th grade classroom and the teacher is coming back we would want to bring the kids back. He would like to do whatever we need to collapse the timeline to get K-5 students back in. He noted that you cannot get teachers vaccinated and there maybe teachers after that date that still don't have the vaccine and you cannot force them to come back. If a fourth grade class at Deans Mill and a third grade class at West Vine is ready to come back or whatever we can do to get kids back in a shorter period of time, and believes there is a benefit to that. Alisa Morrison agrees with Chairman Todisco. Farouk Rajab's recommendation is to use the week of March 22<sup>nd</sup> and we need to get all elementary kids in before spring break. Heidi Simmons feels the greatest concern is will we have enough teachers in the classroom for kids to come back and suggested using substitute teachers from the pool that we have. Jack Morehouse commented if most teachers have had the first shot then we want to be sensitive to our staff, if we want to have kids back a month from today, then at some point it is what it is you have to get back to work and we need to get kids back to school. He does not want to be insensitive to staff but it is important to get the 4th and 5<sup>th</sup> graders back even four days a week.

Dr. Riley summarized that we need to do whatever we can to bring the students back as soon as we can, the elementary K-5. He noted we will be doing this with some issues, ventilation, vaccines and distancing if we don't do this after the spring break. He added if this is the direction from the Board we will come up with a way to do that. Chairman Frank Todisco, Jack Morehouse, Farouk Rajab, Heidi Simmons all agreed to get K-5 students back. Gordon Lord agrees to do it in the pockets, not saying it's got to be third, fourth or fifth and look at where it can be realistically done. Mr. Lord asked when we look at spring break and families going out of town, and kids coming back is there policies in place around that or is it possible to get policies on that. Dr. Riley answered, yes there are state travel guidelines that people need to follow if they travel. We will not be doing the same thing after spring break as we did for the Thanksgiving holiday or winter break where we went full remote. Craig Esposito asked would it be helpful to give Dr. Riley a timeline for each grade. Dr. Riley explained the direction from the Board is to bring as many back as we can before spring break. The Board asked how the pods would work at the elementary level. The principals explained this idea and Dr. Riley noted the pods are only necessary at the 6ft level and not necessary if we go to 3ft. Dr. Riley noted it sounds like part of the Board's ask is for students to come back before spring break, is to look at less than 6ft which that is the only way we can bring back anybody. Dr. Riley will look at that and see what he can do. Jack Morehouse asked if we were going ahead in the process with the K, 1, 6 and 9 on March 15<sup>th</sup>. Dr. Riley answered yes.

#### **Board of Education Advisory Council on Return to School (BEARS)**

Chairman Frank Todisco said the council will have 10 members comprised of two Board members and parents from each school, there is a doctor, someone with a mental health background, and two people from the largest bargaining units. It is a diverse group there will be an administrator, superintendent and the two board members will be Heidi Simmons and Gordon Lord will be the chair of the council.

He explained the Board has a specific charge and they are not making any decisions, this is only an advisory board. We are looking to wrap it up by September 14<sup>th</sup>. He noted that a number of meeting dates have been established. Mr. Lord and Mrs. Simmons will keep the Board apprised of what information is discussed going forward not only spring but as we look to summer and fall. Gordon Lord explained he was part of the task force last summer. The administration has put a lot of time into the spring plan. We are getting ready for the fall and I hope we are in a position to be full in person and distance options and hybrid is a thing of the past. It is great to get input from everyone in town and this is the second advisory council that he is involved in and a lot of good ideas come from that.

### Monthly Reports

The Board had no comments regarding the monthly report.

### Items for Future Agendas

Dr. Riley noted he will have the Recovery, Academic and Mental Health Plan at the April meeting.

### Board Comments/Concerns

Heidi Simmons asked Dr. Riley when will he share new ideas and when will he be coming up with the new reopening plan. Dr. Riley noted he will share them with the entire Board as soon as he thinks through them, which is soon. He needs to meet with principals about many issues. He did note that he has talked to a number of teachers and some get their second shot around April 7<sup>th</sup> and a number want to come back after spring break and feel safe. There are some staffing issues. He will talk to principals to see what we can do with the 3ft distancing and bring the elementary back as soon as possible. Heidi Simmons commented she hopes the teachers understand that if they are not comfortable about coming back, there should not be any stigma about not coming back. She feels we can work around that and use the pool of substitute teachers that we have used. She does not want teachers to feel they are pushed into this, it has to be an agreement on both sides. Chairman Frank Todisco said it is the Board's role to put what their desire is and it is the administration to come back with a plan, recommendations or what is going to work and what is not going to work. He added the Board put it forward and will wait to see what Dr. Riley brings back. Mr. Lord said we are very passionate to get the kids back but also the needs of the staff and this is why he is suggesting the pockets versus the "peanut butter spread" the whole class. He understands there will be challenges with that but we need to talk about it as administration noodles through that. Mr. Morehouse asked if there will be a special meeting once there is a decision or plan. Chairman Todisco answered yes we can.

### Adjournment

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

**Motion 4:** To adjourn at 8:46 p.m.

**All: Aye**

  
Heidi Simmons, Board Secretary



# Academic Performance-Part II

March 11, 2021

Stonington Public Schools

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# Stonington High School

## The impact of COVID

	Semester 1 - 2020	Semester 2 - 2020	Semester 1 - 2021
#D's F's	204	328	419
% of Total	5.5%	8.2%	10.5%
#F's	65	126	160
% of Total	1.6%	3.1%	4%





## Grades 3-8 Reading 2020 vs. 2021

Reading -2020

Grades 3-8

Levels 3 & 4

(Met or Exceeded)

Reading -2021

Grades 3-8

Levels 3 & 4

(Met or Exceeded)

**69.9 %**

**74.4 %**

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# Reading Data by School

Reading 2021

Percent of Test 2 Benchmark Category

School	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 3&4 (Met or Exceeded)
SMS	7.0%	14.5%	54.5%	24.1%	78.6%
DMS	10.5%	11.8%	32.7%	45.0%	77.7%
WVSS	19.3%	21.7%	29.8%	29.2%	59.0%
Grand Total	10.4%	15.2%	43.5%	30.9%	74.4%

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