

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

The special meeting of the Board of Education Advisory Council on Return to School (BEARS) was called to order at 6:02 p.m. on Tuesday, May 18, 2021 at the District Administration Building.

**Members Present:**

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

**Approval of Minutes – April 20, 2021:**

**Motion was made by Bruce Yarnall and seconded by Gordon Lord:**

**Motion 1: To approve minutes of April 20, 2021 meeting. All: Aye**

**Remote Learning Issues for Next Year/Guidelines/District Decision/Quarantine Options:**

Dr. Riley shared that the state has given direction that remote learning is not required next fall but does not mean the we will not be having it. We are expecting further clarification and direction as to whether we should or can't. He added some districts have already made the decision not to offer remote some of them are waiting for direction from the state. We have not planned one way or another we will have to wait and see. The plan for the fall is in-school learning and everyone is welcome to come back five days a week. Our teachers will not have to teach in class and remote learning at the same time because this has been a challenge. If we have to do remote learning it will be a separate program and will have one teacher dedicated to remote. Gordon Lord, Chair asked for an update from Dr. Riley regarding the recent meeting with area superintendents regarding their thought on remote learning in the fall. Dr. Riley reported discussion was had regarding an offering of regional remote learning, but of the five districts three have already decided not to offer remote learning in the fall. Our district has some students who are thriving as remote learners but most students need to be in person, in school. He added that his concern is if we offer remote to families we will have students that would slack and try to disappear. We have added a couple of programs at the high school to help students who need extra help. He also stated that a full remote option will be resolved by the state in a few weeks. We currently have several students quarantined who were exposed from sports, and other outside events. He noted if we have to quarantine a class or grade the question is do we offer a remote option for those students, and does that teacher need to teach both which is not what we want to do but we have to accommodate the students in some manner. Gordon Lord, Chair commented that maybe we could combine with neighboring towns to use the same teachers for remote might be an idea. Heidi Simmons had questions regarding the learning hub and if the current curriculum was also being taught and how does that work. She voiced she would like to think that our district would offer remote because that is fair to the public, it is more compassionate and understands there is still a fear of parents to send children back. Dr. Riley explained there is a reason to keep the relationships with students and teachers going but we have students that seem to want to stay out and are avoiding the requirements of in school. Heidi Simmons added that perhaps we could screen those students, and maybe the district could choose to not accept them as a remote learner, that student would need to go in person. Bruce Yarnall shared he feels when we open up the remote option to parents and students it can open Pandora's Box. He stressed that students need to be in school because there is no way to make relationships and connect with students and teachers when they are all remote. Erin Janicek voiced there are families who have members with medical issues and might opt to either homeschool or remote. She is concerned for those kids and pulling that option away is putting those families in a bad situation. She believes there should be a plan for those who need a gradual emersion into the school building. Dustin Yaworsky agreed having the remote option for the vulnerable students and there needs to be a plan for remote. AnneFay Sullivan expressed that the need to have a plan but it is not a one size fits all. She added each level has

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different reasons to offer remote and perhaps we need to look outside the box. Dustin Yaworsky inquired if there has been any work on the teacher's side where maybe some need to be home and maybe those can take on the remote model. Dr. Riley answered yes, we have been looking at that for the past year and have teachers that would like to do remote. Dr. Kate Wagner asked if the district had a sense of how many students want remote learning moving into the fall and the size of the population at each level. Dr. Riley noted we know based on who came back now. He added the state will come up with some type of guidelines on remote learning or maybe they will say no remote. Dr. Riley shared we will likely have Prek-5 all in but if you have an issue the parent can ask for an exemption. Gordon Lord, Chair asked when does the district expect to have a plan for the group that needs to quarantine. Dr. Riley explained we plan to hire a building sub teacher dedicated to each building in the fall and that would be the start of the framework for the quarantining students. That sub can help with students on line that are out quarantining. Heidi Simmons asked what the vaccination requirements for students are. Dr. Riley said we cannot require the vaccine and it is up to parents. Gordon Lord, Chair noted his 12 and 14 year olds have just gotten their first dose and a lot of kids are getting vaccinated. Dr. Riley shared the number of students that are vaccinated at the high school. Dr. Kate Wagner commented kids do not transmit like adults do per the data and according to the UK and Israel data it shows numbers are dropping. Erin Janicek asked would the idea be to continue to use the google classroom or would it be more with zoom for the fall. Dr. Riley noted the long term teacher would follow the lessons left from the teacher. Dan Kelley reported that at the middle school the staff member that was out has come back after quarantine and receiving the vaccine. He commended the District Office for their work on this. He added all kids should have to be in school in person unless there is an IEP situation. He spoke teachers do not like it when they are not able to build the connection with students. He commented it is nice to see so many kids at the middle school and the 16 year olds talking about how cool it is to get the shot. The district and the parents are doing a lot in the right correction. He asked as for masks and barriers is that still on the table as to what is going to be done with that in the fall and which protocols are we able to get rid of. Dr. Riley noted that as of today they are requiring students to use masks in schools. Dr. Kate Wagner noted that on the CDC website the state is expecting to release guidance in the coming weeks for the summer. Dustin Yaworsky noted it sounds the desire for in person is starting to be the common theme and asked if a five day option is still an option for the remainder of the year. Dr. Riley answered no we made the decision not to until the fall. Gordon Lord, Chair explained the Board made the call not to because they listened to the teachers' requests and their desire not to five days.

#### **ARP Application and Community Input Procedure**

Dr. Riley summarized how the District is using the ESSER funds this year and the following years. He added that we will be spending some of the funding on SEL support and academics. A portion of the funding will also be used for air quality repairs at the middle school, high school and district office. Dr. Riley asked that the next meeting of June 1<sup>st</sup> be held at the high school. He added one of the requirements of the funding is to give the community a chance to voice their thoughts. The BEARS meeting is a good avenue for that. Dr. Riley will get a packet of information regarding the ARP application and assurances to the council for review for the next meeting. Gordon Lord, Chair asked before we spend the CARES2 dollars are we going to approach the Board of Finance for their ideas on funding. Dr. Riley suggested that Chair Gordon Lord reach out to the Board of Finance and get their ideas.

#### **End of the Year Activities and Events**

Dr. Riley shared a list of upcoming events at each school with the council. The council shared other events with each other.

Gordon Lord, Chair will contact Allison Van Etten, Director of Special Services for assistance with having a staff member for SEL attend the next BEARS meeting to talk about the social and emotional issues.

#### **Adjournment**

**Motion was made by Bruce Yarnall and seconded by Dan Kelley**

**Motion 2 – To adjourn at 6:51p.m.**

**Next Meeting: Tuesday, June 1st at 6pm in the Stonington High School Commons**

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