

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
June 16, 2021
6:00 pm

The special meeting of the Board of Education Advisory Council on Return to School (BEARS) was called to order at 6:00 p.m. on Wednesday, June 16, 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
Erin Janicek, DMS Parent
Dr. Kate Wagner, SMS Parent
Bruce Yarnall, SHS Teacher/SEA Representative
AnneFay Sullivan, WVSS Assistant Principal
Dustin Yaworsky, SHS Parent

Members Absent:

Dan Kelley, Classified/Paraeducator Representative
Adam Linicus, WVSS Parent

Guests: Mary Anne Butler, Assistant Superintendent and Allison Van Etten, Director of Special Services

Approval of Minutes – June 1, 2021:

Motion was made by Bruce Yarnall:

Motion 1: To approve minutes of June 1, 2021 meeting. All: Aye

Public Input on Safe Return to In Person Instruction and Continuity of Services Plan/Academic and SEL Update: Dr. Riley requested to open the meeting to public comment. He noted he has sent invites to parents and staff to give them an opportunity to comment on the ARP funding. We had about twenty letters and emails which will be included in the application. He voiced that our plan is to return five days a week in person in the fall. Dr. Riley asked Mary Anne Butler, Assistant Superintendent and Allison Van Etten, Director of Special Services to give an overview of the plan. Mrs. Butler noted that the plan has been developed around a template provided by the state. This will be reviewed periodically and we anticipate this will change continually. The plan may change over the summer and we will keep parents updated. Mrs. Butler explained how Title I funding is used. Mrs. Butler and Mrs. Van Etten explained the general ed and special ed summer school programs. They noted that enrollment for summer school at the elementary level is over 115 students and at the middle school level around 170 students. Mrs. Butler explained there will be opportunity for high school students to work over the summer towards getting additional class credits through the course recovery program. Mrs. Van Etten explained the life skills program available to students with intellectual disabilities for the summer. Heidi Simmons asked about mask and distancing protocols for summer school. Mrs. Butler noted the district will be following state guidelines, but there will be many opportunities for students to take masks off. Mrs. Van Etten noted the State Department of Ed guidelines are parallel with Ledge Light with the mask wearing guidance that is now in place. Mrs. Simmons asked if the district has decided not to have a remote learning option for the fall. She feels we need to offer this option because some parents may still be nervous to send kids back to school. Mrs. Butler reported that the State Department of Ed has left this option up to the districts, and has given no guidance or limitations at this point. She noted we promised our teachers we would not have a blended model and remote model might look different at different buildings. Dr. Kate Wagner asked if the summer school program was funded by ARP funds and how much of the funds have been booked to 2022 and beyond. Mrs. Butler noted that we might need to fall back on Title I funds also. Dr. Riley explained how the ARP funds are allocated now and for the next three years. Mrs. Butler explained the staff positions that are being added for next school year. Bruce Yarnall asked what type of mental health position has been added to West Vine Street School. Mrs. Van Etten noted this is a psychologist position to support parents and students. She also explained there will be a district Board Certified Behavior Analyst that will oversee the behavior technicians. Dustin Yaworsky asked if the district has collected data on academic and social needs from years past. Mrs. Van Etten explained the use of data from climate surveys from staff and students. Erin Janicek asked if the resources for academics are based on data. Mrs. Butler answered yes, and the academic data is on our website. Mr. Yaworsky asked when the last time

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the data was received and what time of year does it represent. Mrs. Butler explained the timeframe for the data collection. Mrs. Van Etten explained she will be adding a unified program coordinator which will get the unified events up and running for next year at the middle school level. She also spoke on the new programs at the high school for next year such as the Bear Academy. Mrs. Van Etten gave an overview of the professional development opportunities for staff next year such as the Bounce Back Training, Suicide Prevention Training and Anxiety Training. Erin Janicek spoke on the Child and Family Agency that will serve the Pawcatuck community which will be located at the District Office.

Public Comments

Andrew Feinstein commented and gave five examples on how the district can create a first century education system; apprenticeships, importance of students being outside every day, testing, teacher evaluations and sustainability. He spoke we need to move towards smaller class sizes. He commented on social and emotional issues. Mr. Feinstein voiced he does not feel the ARP funding should be used on infrastructure, that is the responsibility of the district to fund. He noted that the district should establish a task force that includes teachers and parents to develop plans and would provide a fresh outside look. He added the district should use this opportunity to build new and better the education.

Dustin Yaworsky asked if the Board could comment on the diagnostic screening. Dr. Riley noted we only offer the site and will not do the testing. Mrs. Van Etten explained we have COVID-19 testing sites at the high school and these go through Ledge Light. Mr. Yaworsky had questions regarding the authority in the agency if there are discrepancies in the policies and the June 23rd deadline for submission of the plan. Dr. Riley noted we follow Ledge Light and State Department of Ed guidelines. Dr. Riley explained that we will add the plan to our website by June 23rd along with the community input and then will need to submit the plan in August. Mr. Yaworsky asked if the community will have access to the plan. Dr. Riley answered yes along with a calendar with dates of each of the submissions. The review is done every six months until we are finished with the funding. AnneFay Sullivan asked when will there be a decision to have the July BEARS meeting. Chair Gordon Lord answered he will see if we have any updates to discuss if not we will push the meeting to August.

Adjournment - Meeting adjourned at 7:44 p.m.

Next Meeting: Tuesday, June 13th at 6pm in the Stonington High School Commons

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