

STONINGTON BOARD OF ED COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES June 24, 2021

Frank Todisco, Board Chairman called the special meeting to order at 7:01 p.m. in the District Office Board of Education Room. Members present were Heidi Simmons, Board of Ed Secretary, Gordon Lord, Craig Esposito, Jack Morehouse, Farouk Rajab, and Alisa Morrison. Also present were, Ana de Oliveira, Recording Secretary, Dr. Van Riley, Superintendent and Mary Anne Butler, Assistant Superintendent.

Music Program Discussion and Direction

Dr. Riley explained that he met with the elementary principals after the last Board meeting to discuss what the music schedule would look like if a half time instrumental teacher were added. He also explained the options of having a half time instrumental teacher or an after school club format. The schedule would be the same for both 5th grades. Jack Morehouse thanked Dr. Riley for setting this idea up. He spoke of the area schools and their current music programs. He also voiced he would like to definitely see a half time position and feels our band program needs this to kick start the program again. Mr. Morehouse feels if other schools can do this so can Stonington. He respectfully asked that we hire a half time instrumental teacher this September. Dr. Riley noted that the teacher is not currently budgeted in the current budget, but is hopeful that there will be funds to cover the position out of the general fund. Dr. Riley also suggested that if we cannot hire a half time teacher that it is possible that staff can be moved around from the high school to cover the instrumental class during the day.

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

Motion 1: To move forward with the 5th grade music lessons and hire a .5 music teacher.

There was further discussion on the motion:

Alisa Morrison voiced she would rather see what other staffing needs there are because there might be other needs. She added that maybe that half time teacher might be best needed for art, math or gym. She asked if no other principal needs any other staffing. Dr. Riley responded that the principals are all set with staffing. Heidi Simmons noted that it is important to listen to Lily Haghpassand former Student Government Representative, she gave importance to the half time teacher and the importance of the music program. Mrs. Simmons believes that a half time teacher should be given priority and is sure we can find monies for it particularly in the relief fund. Gordon Lord asked if we can keep the 5th grade music without hiring, if we can it would be great but if not then we hire the person. Dr. Riley explained one way is to take high school and middle school staff and split them between the elementary schools, or hire a half time teacher or have an after school club. Mr. Lord agreed to the half time teacher in the short term but in the long term we will need to reconsider it down the road. Dr. Riley noted that in December we will have a better idea of what is working and what needs to be changed. Alisa Morrison agreed to wait until December to add the teacher. Mrs. Simmons voiced if we continue to wait we might not have a large pool of teachers to choose from of high quality teachers. She agreed with Mr. Morehouse to do the hiring now. She added the district has two signature programs music and drama. Dr. Riley spoke on the high enrollment numbers in the music program were also attributed to the past Encore classes. He shared his thoughts about options in the community for students surrounding music. Mr. Morehouse spoke that there is a higher interest from students in instrumental music than general music but would like to see both offered.

Alisa Morrison – No

Frank Todisco – Yes

Jack Morehouse – Yes

Heidi Simmons – Yes

Craig Esposito – Yes

Gordon Lord – Yes

Farouk Rajab – Yes

Motion 1: Passes

2021-2022 School Calendar Options and PD Calendar

Dr. Riley shared two draft options of the 2021-22 School Calendar along with the Professional Development calendar. He recommended the Board approve Option A. He explained the rationale for both draft options, the similarities and the differences between each calendar option. Option A would keep with the 182 school days and Option B would have 181 school days. Gordon Lord spoke on the need to front load the professional development days and was surprised not to see more days in September and October. Dr. Riley also noted that there are more professional development days between September to December rather than January to June. Mr. Lord asked how the number of early release days in Draft A and B compare to previous years. Dr. Riley shared a spreadsheet showing the comparisons of other years.

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The following motion was made by Gordon Lord and seconded by Alisa Morrison:

Motion 2: To move forward with calendar Option B.

All: Aye

Dr. Riley noted he spoke with Mr. Freeman and will make up an MOU to go from 182 school days to 181 days. He added Mr. Freeman was ok with this idea.

Curriculum Discussion and Direction – Internship I and Food Science

Mary Anne Butler, Assistant Superintendent gave an overview on the Internship I and Food Science curriculum. Gordon Lord commented maybe we look at alumni and how we give students options to go out to the community for internships. Mrs. Butler added that Mr. Howe has a list of business that are used for internships and Mrs. Lamb is also a good resource at the high school. Farouk Rajab added that Mr. Friese had reached out to him previously on a business level about internships through his business. Mrs. Butler explained that the Food Science course is a semester long course and typically the enrollment are students 18-21 that are currently enrolled in the special ed program at the District Office. We currently have students in this program take coffee orders for staff at District Office and deliver and serve coffee as part of the program. Farouk Rajab asked if there is any formal certification in this program. Mrs. Butler noted we make this part of the Food Consumer Science course at the high school.

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

Motion 3: To approve the Curriculum for Internship I and Food Science as presented.

All: Aye

Discussion of School Opening

Dr. Riley noted that we are opening schools five days a week for all. We are waiting for guidance from the state for a remote program. The state has not said what the requirements are. There are a number of superintendents that have encouraged the state to let us know soon. We are putting together some ideas about having a distance option at the high school level and what criteria we would use for those students. Dr. Riley shared a document that spoke on the latest guidelines regarding mask wearing. He noted that the district will continue to follow the guidelines as they change and what is in place. Jack Morehouse spoke on the remote learning model at the high school and the number of students who elected to stay home. He spoke of the issues of a remote learning option, anxiety issues students have around going to the high school and whether the remote model is adding to the anxiety. Alisa Morrison agreed with Mr. Morehouse and also spoke about the issues of students staying home and how it affects them when they move away to college. She sees both sides and agrees it is a huge topic. Dr. Riley explained if we move in the direction of a remote option we will have clear criteria and will share that with the Board. We need to adjust to the needs of students so they can succeed. Gordon Lord noted distance learning is something that will be here and we should look to the state for guidance. He noted we are following what our local health authority is telling us and believes there is some confusion in the community regarding mask wearing and appreciated and thanked Dr. Riley for the clarification on masks. Heidi Simmons added we are lucky to have Alicia Dawe in the VOICE program that we are working with now, she is an outreach to students and it has been affective. This resource is really important for our school to have.

Executive Closed Session: Superintendent Dr. Van Riley's Evaluation

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

Motion 4: To enter into closed executive session and invite Dr. Riley to review the Superintendent's Evaluation.

All: Aye

The Board of Education entered into Executive Session at 7:47p.m.

The Board exited executive session at 8:24p.m.

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Frank Todisco, Board Chairman noted there was no action taken during executive session. The Board did review Dr. Riley's evaluation for 2020-2021 school year. The Board of Ed feels that the superintendent met the Board's expectations for the period of July 1, 2020 ending June 31, 2021.

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

Motion 5: To award Dr. Riley a 2.5% cost of living increase.

All: Aye

Frank Todisco, Board Chair noted this increase is in line with what the other administrators are receiving.

Adjournment

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

Motion 6: To adjourn at 8:26p.m.

All: Aye


Heidi Simmons, Board Secretary