

STONINGTON BOARD OF ED COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES August 26, 2021

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

Reports of Suspected Abuse or Neglect Policy 4118.31 - Dr. Riley explained that the three policies presented are very important. He added that policies 4118.31 and 5141.4 were reviewed by Attorney Rebecca Santiago from Shipman and Goodwin and policy 4218.51 was reviewed by Attorney Nick Grello. Dr. Riley noted some of the changes made to the policy and suggested these be part of the September Board meeting agenda for approval. Chairman Frank Todisco had questions regarding policy 4118.31 and noted that in the first paragraph of this policy it talks about all employees but added that in the definition section it defines what is meant by a school employee. He asked that in that description section he would like to make sure we are spelling out the employees and not leave anyone out of the definition but cover all employee types. Dr. Riley explained that in the "Statutorily mandated reporter" section it describes what the other group of employees are. He notes everyone is required to file under this policy. Dr. Riley commented we will bring this back for approval at the September Board meeting.

Child Sexual Abuse and Assault Response Policy 5141.4 – Dr. Riley explained this policy was updated by Attorney Rebecca Santiago. Allison Van Etten previously shared a link with the Board which includes a quiz that staff need to do every three years. Dr. Riley asked that the Board take a look at that training/quiz. Heidi Simmons had questions about one of the sections in the policy regarding strategies people can use for support and hoped that that same detail could be added to Section 1A on the first page of the policy so everyone could know where you could go if you were affected by sexual abuse or someone you know was affected. Dr. Riley noted that Allison Van Etten is our Title IX specialist. All administrators can be contacted expressing a concern. It can be written or verbal by a student or other individual. Craig Esposito shared his thoughts about the section 1A of the policy and required reporters. Heidi Simmons spoke of the Chokas incident where the students spoke they did not feel comfortable in speaking to certain people but would speak to another adolescent. She spoke that if there was an anonymous way to report, they would feel more comfortable. Craig Esposito voiced that idea makes sense but may not belong in this particular section of the policy, this is really about the policy manual for the Board and the District and felt it does not fit here. Dr. Riley explained the intent was to open it up where you could go to any employee. This does not preclude the voices the intent was to make sure students knew it was not limited. Heidi Simmons asked if the Safe Futures Counselor was considered an employee, she is not employed by the school but that would be a good person to go to. Chairman Todisco understood what Mrs. Simmons position is but we need to share that with legal and get an understanding on how those items and concerns get addressed; is that in the policy or in another document. Chairman Todisco noted the point is until there is actual communication with a District employee there is no action that can be taken. Craig Esposito added someone could go to Safe Futures and not tell us and this could be a liability to use as an appropriate channel. Mrs. Simmons expressed her thoughts of what is the most comfortable way for a child in this situation. She suggested that maybe part of the student handbook, can talk about where the students can go. Mrs. Simmons would like to take a look at the student handbook and would like to have the strategies listed in the handbook. Dr. Riley noted the statement any individual would cover Safe Futures.

Jack Morehouse asked if we have these discussions with students in orientation and do we suggest a higher archery or any employee? He added ideally you want them to talk to a principal or counselor. Mary Anne Butler spoke in regards to the climate survey and noted there is a link available to the climate survey. We want to make sure that every student can have those uncomfortable discussions but to have that high archery is not what we want. Heidi Simmons voiced she likes the idea of a peer support group that you can become part of anonymously and find its way to the right person.

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Social Media Policy 4218.51- Chairman Frank Todisco noted this policy was on the Board agenda two weeks ago and was moved to the COW agenda because Jack Morehouse had some concerns before it was addressed and approved. Chairman Todisco asked Mr. Morehouse if his concerns were addressed. Mr. Morehouse thanked Dr. Riley and Mrs. Butler for meeting with him and noted he feels comfortable with the policy. Dr. Riley mentioned that Attorney Nick Grello's office put the policy together and summarized the items that it covers. He thanked Mr. Morehouse for coming in to talk about the policy. Dr. Riley noted the policy gives proper guidance particularly regarding when we have people reposting things to their Facebook accounts. Chairman Todisco asked if all bargaining units had reviewed the policy. Mrs. Butler noted that only the teachers' reviewed it. Chairman Todisco voiced it includes more than that group and would like it shared with the other bargaining units. Dr. Riley will forward the policy for their review.

Updated District Improvement Plan - Mary Anne Butler shared the plan and reviewed each section with the Board. She shared information regarding student success, accountability report, scores and DEI. An informal family advisory group has been put together on DEI. We had conversations with the town and will be having a meeting in September to talk about working together on DEI. She and Allison Van Etten are working together to get speakers on different issues and hold informational parent meetings afterschool. She continued by reporting that we will also keep up the website and webpage on DEI updated. Each month in the school newsletters that go home there is a DEI corner and that is where information can be found for parents. Mrs. Butler reported we have published our fourth podcast and three of these focused on DEI. We will also be putting together a 20 year facility plan. She added we will be giving an update in December on ESSER and ARP funding. Mrs. Butler will also give an update on scores at the September Board meeting. Chairman Todisco suggested a retreat happen with the administrative team and the new Board members to speak about budget and other issues. He would like to see an orientation or meeting with principals and suggested it happen in multiple stages. He voiced he really wants the new Board to be engaged and productive. Dr. Riley reported we will be holding a candidate forum prior to the election and will have all the Cabinet members meet them. Dr. Riley also mentioned that the first meeting with the new Board is set for Veterans Day and asked if we want to keep it or change it to another day.

Chairman Todisco commented these policies are talking about child abuse and neglect, and added we talk about sexual harassment a lot and asked how is harassment being addressed. Mrs. Butler explained how it is being addressed and will send the link of the harassment policy to the Board. She also noted that the social media is a brand new policy.

Jack Morehouse shared that the previous forum on anxiety in which he attended was excellent, and agreed to bring more on that because it brings the community together. Mrs. Butler agreed.

Craig Esposito spoke the District Improvement Plan is excellent but it would be nice if there was another column called strategies which spoke about the rationale for some of the goals. Mrs. Butler explained the School Improvement Plans have those strategies and will share those with the Board

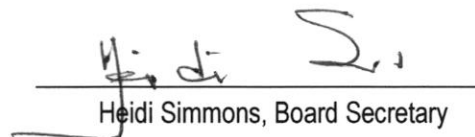
Chairman Todisco announced that the next regular Board meeting will be September 9th.

Adjournment

The following motion was made by Craig Esposito and seconded by Jack Morehouse:

Motion 1: To adjourn at 7:53p.m.

All: Aye


Heidi Simmons, Board Secretary