

Frank Todisco, Board Chair called the regular meeting to order in the District Office Board of Education Meeting Room, Pawcatuck, CT at 7:00p.m. Members present were Heidi Simmons, Secretary, Gordon Lord, Jack Morehouse, and Farouk Rajab. Members Virtual: Craig Esposito; Members Absent: Alisa Morrison. Also present were Ana de Oliveira, Recording Secretary, Dr. Van Riley, Superintendent of Schools, members of the administration staff and interested citizens.

Communications & Recognitions

Gordon Lord acknowledged Mr. Joe Ciriello a former Stonington High School coach who recently passed. Recognizing him for his team work on and off the field, friend, mentor and embodying everything the community stands for.

Jack Morehouse also echoed what Mr. Lord stated regarding Mr. Ciriello, adding he was his tennis coach, always a positive person who set the bar high, he will be missed.

Comments from Citizens

Melissa Collier thanked the administration for the coordination and care of back to school. She spoke the district has a responsibility to help students, with focus on academic and social supports. She voiced that intervention and tutoring matters as far as how students do. She added that anxiety and depression is increasing among students.

Marika Heughins spoke she has been in the district for twenty-five years. She thanked the Board of Education, Dr. Riley, Mrs. Butler and all the administration for doing a wonderful job keeping students safe over the last 18 months of the pandemic. She spoke of her personal experiences with regards to her health and advocates for wearing masks. She voiced we should support our administrators who have spent the last months working to keep everyone safe and thanked administration for standing by the CDC guidelines.

Meg Blanchette spoke on diversity and how impressed she is with all that is happening in the district with this issue. She thanked the Board for what they have been doing in regards to Critical Race Theory. She added keep doing the DEI work, adding she appreciates it.

Jennifer Evering spoke she opposes the masking of the children. She added the data is not there to support masking kids for eight hours a day. She shared data from Atkins regarding the effects of mask wearing. She asked that the Board and administration stand up for kids who don't have a voice and be the first district to make the call. She asked the Board to give parents the choice whether they want their kids masked.

Rosa Burger spoke of supporting the mask mandate. She noted other districts are having masks optional and the outcome of that decision. She spoke of her personal experience with her own child not being of age to get vaccinated and the need to be masked for protection.

Adam Linicus thanked the Board and administration for the work on DEI. He noted he is a parent of two black children and the lack of diversity in the schools. He also added the district and school leaders have had real conversations to move the district forward on diversity and equity. Mr. Linicus spoke of his personal conversations at home in regards to humility and kindness with his children. He voiced there is still a lot of work to be done in Stonington Public Schools but acknowledged that we have a community of humility and respect.

William Heughins thanked the administration for the statement that went out on DEI and added the district he works in is using it in their district also. He commented he wanted the Board and administration to know that the town is behind them and that they are doing a great job.

Ashley Tewell commented about the executive order regarding mask wearing in effective until September 30th. She would like the Board to make this an option for our schools. She spoke about Critical Race Theory and feels teachers could teach this but noted this is not happening at the middle school level. She also commented on how citizens were treated at a prior Board meeting and the need of respecting others. She shared each of the school districts philosophies, vision and beliefs.

Jeff Lewis commented on Critical Race Theory. He noted that the district does not teach about CRT but does endorse DEI. He asked that the community visit the school website to see what types of DEI initiatives are in place. He spoke of his teaching model and his obligation to students when they have questions related to these topics.