

STONINGTON BOARD OF EDUCATION REGULAR MEETING December 9, 2021 - Page | 1

Farouk Rajab, Board Chairman 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, Craig Esposito, Daniel Kelley, Kevin Agnello, Christopher Donahue, and Sara Baker. Also present were Ana de Oliveira, Recording Secretary, Dr. Van Riley, Superintendent of Schools, Student Government Representative Kyle Lowry and members of the administration staff and interested citizens.

Communications & Recognitions

Farouk Rajab, Chairman welcomed Representative Greg Howard who thanked the Board for their time and wished them luck as new members. Representative Howard also spoke on Frank Todisco's tenure during his time on the Board of Education and presented him with a citation acknowledging his years of service to the Town of Stonington. Mr. Todisco thanked the community for their support, adding it was an honor serving the community. He also wished the new members luck in their new role.

Dr. Riley recognized the boys' high school soccer team for their repeat state champions in 2019 and 2021, it was a wonderful game, great job. He recognized the girls' field hockey team for being the State Runner-ups for Class S. Dr. Riley also recognized the Learning Annex students for the weekly coffee hour and music shared by the District Office staff. He thanked all who took part in last night's Forum. He thanked the Wellness Committee for the staff challenges. He recognized Deans Mill School's Physical Education teacher Matthew Irvine who was selected for the 2021 Outstanding CT PE Teacher Award. He recognized Matt Binkowski, Stonington High School history teacher who contributed to a recently published book on the US presidents. He thanked Victoria Esser, Stonington High School Family Consumer Science Teacher for the Thanksgiving Pie drive and contribution to the fall Veterans Feast and the Student Government for the fall Veterans Feast. Dr. Riley communicated that he and Mary Anne Butler along with other EASTCONN professors were selected to present at the NSBA conference in April.

Dan Kelley communicated he attended the recent CABE Conference for new Board members, and it was very informative. He added he connected with people across the state and interacted with veteran members. He also hopes to attend the upcoming play at the high school. He also recognized Cole Horn a high school graduate who enlisted in the Navy and Jose Rodriguez who enlisted in the Marines. Mr. Kelley recognized Coach DeCastro for coaching the soccer team and soccer player, Sam Montalto who was named All American. He also communicated he attended the Forum virtually.

Sara Baker recognized the Wellness Team for their ongoing work with administration and students. She recognized and thanked those on the team, Meghan Winslow, Liz Spadaro, Lori Tavares, Karen Rollins, Carol Wollschlager, Marissa Longolucco, and nurse paras, Nikki Mills, Julie Tyron, Rachael Bucko and Elise Adcock for their time and energy and for the work they do with students and parents.

Farouk Rajab, Chairman thanked the Board members for their first twenty days on the Board, it has been a lot a work.

Comments from Citizens Relative to Items on the Agenda

Ashley Tewell thanked the Board for reaching out to her with responses to her questions. She commented on the issue with the audio piece during the recent Forum and during the Board meetings. She voiced her concerns and comments regarding the companies who submitted RFPs for the superintendent's search and asked that the Board make sure they choose a company carefully. She asked if there are committees that the Board could create that would tie back to the community for their involvement.

Discussion Regarding Executive Session and FOI Protocol

Chairman Rajab shared a printout of information regarding FOI and Executive Session from Nick Grello with the Board. He noted there will be a special meeting on February 3rd to discuss these topics and also discuss Board Goals and budget.

Consent Agenda

- A. Minutes – November 17, 2021/November 18, 2021/December 2, 2021
- B. Checks and Bills – November
- C. Personnel Report

The following motion was made by Craig Esposito and seconded by Chris Donahue:

Motion 1: To accept the consent agenda as presented.

All: Aye - Motion Passes

Monthly Reports

Heidi Simmons asked Student Government Representative, Kyle Lowry to speak on his monthly report. He reported on activities for the coming month, Veterans Fall Feast in which the students served 40-50 people. He spoke on the Alliance for Acceptance (AFA) which will meet to rework the dress code and to discuss the ability to use lockers again. He noted the Safe Futures is available in the school in the Guidance Department for students. Heidi Simmons commented on the AFA noting it was particular to the SHS. Mr. Lowry said that this is their own club and the focus on acceptance of all race, and sends out climate surveys regularly. Dan Kelley asked all to send positive vibes to Mr. Lowry for next Wednesday because he will hear if he has been accepted to Yale.

CIP Approval

Dr. Riley explained the Board needs a final approval of the CIP and will also share a copy of the Town's budget calendar. Kevin Agnello questioned the item Track Turf Replacement/Repair and why there was a note "remove" next to this item. Dr. Riley explained the item's status. Chairman Rajab asked about the repair on the high school roof, is there any water and is there something we need to invest in right now. Dr. Riley explained what the status is and the funding for the repairs. Dan Kelley asked for an explanation of the CIP process. Dr. Riley explained the timeline and process of the District's submission of the CIP and budget to the Town. Chairman Rajab noted the Board can ask questions on each item if they don't feel comfortable to send it to the Board of Finance or they can agree to remove an item. Mr. Agnello asked for an explanation of the priorities of each item and what that priority means. Dr. Riley shared an explanation of the priority of the items, adding the Board of Finance does not have to approve every line. He offered the Board an opportunity to see the backup documentation to each item. Mr. Kelley had questions regarding the BMS system and the status Stonington Middle School roof project. Dr. Riley noted the roof has been completed and signed off. He also explained the BMS system.

The following motion was made by Sara Baker and seconded by Dan Kelley:

Motion 2: To approve the CIP as presented.

All: Aye - Motion Passes

Report of the Superintendent of Schools

Budget and Staffing Updates - Dr. Riley noted the Board will see the budget for the first time at the next meeting. He spoke on the budget issues, such as staff reductions due to enrollment declining. He voiced he wants to continue to keep the programs for our students which the initial budget will show.

COVID19 Update – Dr. Riley reported on the increase of positive tests. He commented on the difficulty of finding substitute teachers with the current 45-47 absences. He noted we have raised our substitute rate by 25% last week to \$125 per day. Dan Kelley commented on the substitute rate and asked if feasible to raise it to \$150 or maybe have a bigger advertisement in the paper or in Indeed. He asked have we done anything to entice paras to come over to the district that is not contractual. He also asked if we have seen results with the screen and stay and do we have any news about the athletics events at the high school. Dr. Riley spoke about the test and stay program. He reported on the CIAC guidelines for winter sports. We cannot have any spectators on same side of the team and other side of gym can have only 50% max capacity. Mr. Kelley also asked about restrictions at other events at the high school.

Superintendent Search Update

Craig Esposito gave an update on the search, noting three firms agreed to do the interview next Wednesday, but CUBE cannot do it that night. He explained the process and schedule of the interviews. He noted this will take place through Zoom. The three companies that have agreed to be interviewed are CUBE, CES and NESDEC. Kevin Agnello voiced he does not feel they need to give a presentation, and would be OK to just ask them questions. Mr. Esposito said he thinks a presentation is a good diagnostic to assess their personality. Sara Baker agreed with Mr. Agnello but would be agreeable to do a short presentation. Heidi Simmons asked how we are going to keep others out while we are interviewing another one. Chairman Rajab asked if the Board was good with the next Wednesday starting at 7pm if so, he we will work the logistics of the interview process. Mrs. Simmons asked if Chairman Rajab will be putting together the questions that the Board has been sending him. Chairman Rajab explained the process.

The following motion was made by Chris Donahue and seconded by Sara Baker:

Motion 3: To set the meeting date for next Wednesday for interviews.

All: Aye - Motion Passes

Board Goals

Sara Baker commented she would like to add an item to the goals regarding working with our state legislative with a timeline on curriculum. Mr. Donahue agreed with Mrs. Baker. Mr. Kelley spoke on the CUBE workshop and what was reviewed regarding the legislative issues.

Subcommittee Structure

Chairman Rajab reviewed the subcommittee structure and meeting times. He shared the following subcommittee structure and which Board members are on each subcommittee. He noted the Finance and Facilities Subcommittee will meet on the second Thursday of the month before the regular Board meeting at 6pm. The Teaching and Learning Subcommittee will also meet that day at 5:30pm, noting the Board meetings start at 6:30pm. He explained that the Policy Subcommittee does not have a standard meeting time. Teaching and Learning Subcommittee members will be Kevin Agnello, Sara Baker, and Heidi Simmons. Finance and Facilities Subcommittee members will be Craig Esposito, Farouk Rajab and Chris Donahue. Policy Subcommittee members will be Dan Kelley, Kevin Agnello and Farouk Rajab. Craig Esposito will be the LEARN liaison and also on the Town Retirement Committee. Chris Donahue requested to be the liaison for the Board of Finance. Chairman Rajab will be the liaison for the Mystic River Boathouse. Craig Esposito, Dan Kelley and Farouk Rajab will take part in personnel and contract negotiations.

Items for Future Agendas

Kevin Agnello spoke about student mental health issues and feels it is time to speak on this. He would like an opportunity to give a presentation on mental health during a regular Board meeting, adding it is an important topic. Chris Donahue echoed what Mr. Agnello said regarding mental health. Dr. Riley spoke about the work that has been done on this issue and suggested using one of the scheduled budget deliberation meetings for this topic. Heidi Simmons supported Mr. Agnello's idea and added the earlier the better. Chairman Rajab requested a date to present be attached to each future item such as school start times in April or May. Dan Kelley spoke about the "Wait Until 8th" program and questioned what the Board can do in the school system or maybe through the Policy Committee on this issue. Chairman Rajab noted we have done some work with this but the families asked not to have the school make that decision. Dr. Riley explained parents want their kids to have phones at school. Dr. Riley noted that Alicia Dawe and Mark Friese have done extensive work on the school start times and we did not find a reason to make it viable. Mr. Agnello spoke on the "Wait Until 8th" program and researches that says no social media until high school. He spoke perhaps the Board can act as a catalyst on what the Board can do. Mr. Kelley feels the Board should revisit cell phones. Mr. Kelley would like to send the start times issue to the Policy Committee.

Board Comments/Concerns

Sara Baker thanked Dr. Riley and Mrs. Butler for hosting the Forum and the IT Department for the technology. She thanked all involved. Heidi Simmons thanked the citizens for coming and hopes that continues. Mrs. Simmons requested that the comments section of the Board agenda not be restricted to the items on the agenda. Craig Esposito explained the rationale around this, noting it can be too open ended, but typically if someone wants something discussed it can be done. Kevin Agnello asked if a citizen wants to make a comment, what is the protocol. Chairman Rajab suggested an email be sent to the Chairman with their concern and it will be put on the agenda. Chairman Rajab stated we have not every not let people ask other questions. Dr. Riley communicated the Technology Team enhanced the audio from last night's Forum and are looking at a change in the audio system. Christopher Donahue congratulated the Stonington High School soccer team and thanked Frank Todisco for all the hard work he did while on the Board. Chairman Rajab thanked Craig Esposito for all his hard work with the Superintendent search item. Chairman Rajab shared a flyer regarding the Stonington Veteran Monument Project with the Board. Chairman Rajab closed the meeting by stating the goal is to hear the community and we will look into family involvement and do our best to listen and to act.

Adjournment

The following motion was made by Sara Baker and seconded by Chris Donahue:

Motion 4: To adjourn at 8:29p.m.

All: Aye – Motion Passes