

STONINGTON BOARD OF EDUCATION REGULAR VIRTUAL MEETING January 27, 2022 - Page | 1

Farouk Rajab, Board Chairman called the regular virtual meeting to order at 6:30p.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.

Comments from Citizens Relative to Items on the Agenda

Devney Worsdale commented on the increase of mental health issues among students. She also spoke to what she felt was the Board's and administration's responsibility to this issue.

Farouk Rajab, Chair asked for the following motion:

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

Motion 1: To move the COVID-19 Discussion item up on the agenda before the Budget Discussion item.

All: Aye

COVID-19 Discussion

Dr. Riley addressed concerns from the previous meeting from the community regarding the gradual return of extracurricular activities. He shared programs and opportunities currently in place for students after school. He will be meeting with principals from the elementary and middle school to discuss an opportunity with the Westerly Chorus. He shared there are five additional club stipends at the elementary school and teaching staff are taking advantage of these. He reported he had a meeting with the principals this morning and the district is now opening outdoor curriculum based field trips. Dr. Riley also shared that the Board asked what the district could do about sub teacher and para shortage. He added this past Monday we started rewarding our employees with a \$500 referral reward when an applicant is hired the employees referred on the application receive the referral reward. Dr. Riley noted the Board wanted to increase the sub pay rate to \$150 per day, so starting tomorrow our daily rate will go to \$150. We have paras filling in for teachers and they will also receive \$150 per day. Heidi Simmons asked about the music position. Dr. Riley explained this position is for instrumental and is a half time position with benefits and is still in the budget. Dan Kelley voiced he was concerned we have had this position in the budget a long time and asked if we can make it a full time position to encourage someone to apply. Heidi Simmons shared she wants to look at that in another perspective and look at the elementary school as a feeder program for the middle school program and spoke about the investment in this program. She feels that what happens in high school depends on the foundation from elementary and middle school. Stonington is known for its music and arts. She added hiring a 1.0 band and instrument teacher prepares them for the middle school immersion. She voiced making it a 1.0 feels very right now for students' social/emotional reasons. Kevin Agnello agreed with Mr. Kelley and Mrs. Simmons. He feels moving it to 1.0 might further increase enrollment, adding these are all great points made by both Board members. Dan Kelley asked do we know when Encore classes will start at the middle school. Dr. Riley answered there are scheduling implications and will bring more information on scheduling and impacts.

Farouk Rajab, Chair requested that Dr. Riley talk to principals at the elementary schools and move that position to 1.0. There is a passion for art and music in our district and we can encourage it earlier, so let's support it. Craig Esposito asked if we had feedback from principals and take that into account. Farouk Rajab, Chair feels this would help the emotional and social aspect with students and give support in this area. Farouk Rajab, Chair asked for an update on the transportation surplus funds. Dr. Riley reported he did not have any proposal to use those funds for anything else and would like to keep it in transportation if we can. The Board voiced interest in looking at other staff members needs in the future. Dr. Riley will bring more information on this topic to the next meeting.

Dan Kelley thanked Dr. Riley for raising the sub pay and the referral program for employees. Mr. Kelley shared emails and comments from paras regarding their employment with the district, salary and daily responsibilities. Mr. Kelley spoke about the incentives for new hires and incentives for the current paras. Mr. Kelley asked for the Board's support to give a \$1,000 bonus for the current paras. Heidi Simmons commented on paras taking over as classroom teachers. Mr. Kelley noted many paras are not certified to take over a classroom as a sub teacher and his intent for the \$1,000 was to bring new paras off the street. Chris Donahue commented he is all for taking care of paras and enticing new ones to come in but questioned the legal ramifications of giving them a bonus and will this need to be negotiated. Farouk Rajab, Chair shared that yes it needs to be negotiated, and we cannot just think about one unit, what about everyone else in the system. We have to recognize all the staff and treat them all equally. He cannot support giving bonuses to one and not the other. If you open that door you are talking thousands of dollars. Dan Kelley asked can we consider this an incentive when you hire a new para, can this be rectified by calling it a hiring bonus.

The following motion was made by and seconded by Dan Kelley and second by Craig Esposito:

Motion 2: To amend the agenda to add the item – “Offer Resolution on Incentive Pay for New Hires for Paras”.

Vote:	Kevin Agnello – Yes	Heidi Simmons – Yes	Dan Kelley – Yes		
	Sara Baker – No	Farouk Rajab – No	Chris Donahue – No		Craig Esposito - No

Motion Does Not Pass

Dr. Riley noted that the District’s attorney communicated that any funds without a MOU is not legal. Dr. Riley suggested the Board meet in closed session to discuss this item.

Budget Discussion

Dr. Riley summarized the questions that the Board had submitted prior to the meeting. He spoke about equity and the formula used so that each school gets an equal amount of funding. He noted if the budget needs to be reduced he will bring back options. He explained the need for the HR Director. Chris Donahue voiced he is not comfortable with the teaching reductions. He added if you eliminate at West Vine Street School it is hard to bring it back and wants to keep class sizes at a comfortable level. He commented he would like to look at maybe doing a joint HR position with the town and asked when the last time Dr. Riley spoke to the town about that. Dr. Riley reported he spoke to town a couple months ago and they are not interested. Dr. Riley will look at the enrollment in Kindergarten and will look at bringing back that FTE and how to manage that in the proposed budget. Chris Donahue requested information regarding other area towns HR salaries in order to justify the proposed cost. Craig Esposito commented LEARN has recently hired an HR Director whom their superintendent communicated how much help it has been having someone to take over the HR functions. Heidi Simmons asked for the history of the districts previous HR Director. Dr. Riley noted there are many individuals who do parts of the HR duties. Kevin Agnello asked for a clarification of what the district foresees the new position doing. Would it oversee the others or would they do the duties themselves. He also asked about the need of the 092 certification and how great of a need this is now and is it possible to have this position without the 092. Dr. Riley gave an explanation of the position and the need for the certification. Farouk Rajab, Chair gave his justification regarding the new HR Director position. Heidi Simmons asked if we had a director in the past. Dr. Riley answered no we have not and explained it is something the superintendent has taken on. Craig Esposito commented some of the current issues of retention and incentives would not have surfaced if there was an HR person it would be helpful for the district and would like the district consider investing into this position. Farouk Rajab, Chair suggested looking at the budget line items while still staying at the 2.5% increase number. Dr. Riley will come back with suggestions of items to add to the budget and their impact. Kevin Agnello questioned the field trip budget for each elementary school and why it was different for each. He requested that line items on the budget document which have wiggle room be marked with an “x” so the Board can be aware of those and those that are untouchable. Farouk Rajab, Chair encouraged the Board to leave these decisions to the administration. He added he would like to see a 2.5% - 3% increase and also supports the middle school additions. Dan Kelley asked if the \$161,000 HR salary includes benefits. Dr. Riley said no it does not include benefits.

Mr. Kelley voiced we have survived all these years without one. He asked has the number of employees shrunk with the students or is staffing same. Dr. Riley noted the number of teachers have gone down, when we closed the two buildings we were able to consolidate some custodial positions and we have reduced some staff. Mr. Kelley had questions regarding the HVAC system at the middle school and where the funding is coming for for this item. He asked that Peter Anderson, Director of Facilities and Operations share more information on this item next week and perhaps have the Board get a tour of the middle school. Farouk Rajab, Chair noted the cost of doing these projects has gone up. Sara Baker shared a story from a student who came to a public meeting and offered a public testimony why there is a need for the HVAC at the middle school. She feels we have to listen to our students and added they are even aware of the need of this to the point to speak on it publicly. Chris Donahue agreed with Sara Baker and Chair Rajab for the need of the HVAC at the middle school. Dr. Riley will share a history of the cost of the system from when it was first requested compared to present cost of system. Farouk Rajab, Chair asked for the re-evaluation of teacher cuts, and where we stand with the number of paras in the schools and does this number meet the needs of students and administration. Chris Donahue requested information regarding HR salaries in other towns for the next meeting.

Board Comments/Concerns

The Board had no comments or concerns.

Adjournment

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

Motion 3: To adjourn at 8:04p.m.

All: Aye – Motion Passes