

Farouk Rajab, Board Chairman called the special virtual meeting to order at 5:30p.m. Members present were Heidi Simmons, Secretary, Craig Esposito, Daniel Kelley, Kevin Agnello, and Sara Baker. Also present were Ana de Oliveira, Recording Secretary, Dr. Van Riley, Superintendent of Schools, Mary Anne Butler, Assistant Superintendent, Student Government Representative Kyle Lowry and members of the administration staff. Late Arrival - Christopher Donahue - 6:08pm

Executive Closed Session: Discussion concerning strategy with respect to collective bargaining with the four AFSCME collective bargaining units, the teachers unit, and the administrators unit.

The following motion was made by Craig Esposito and seconded by Heidi Simmons:

Motion 1: To move into Executive Closed Session and invite Mary Anne Butler, Van Riley and Nick Grello.

All: Aye – Motion Passes

The Board entered into Executive Session at: 5:35p.m.

The Board exited Executive Session at: 6:05p.m.

No action was taken.

Comments from Citizens Relative to Items on the Agenda

There were no comments from citizens relative to items on the agenda.

COVID-19 Discussion

Dr. Riley commented on the bus hubs, while noting these are needed in order to keep school open. Dr. Riley and Peter Anderson, have been working on two groups, which include Town workers who currently drive the highway trucks to fill in temporarily at the bus company. These individuals are close to finishing their bus driver license to fill in temporarily. Dr. Riley also spoke on the upcoming mask mandates and COVID-19 testing for staff members. He noted it may be up to the towns to make a decision on masks. If that is the case the Board will need a special meeting and will be gathering information to make that decision. Craig Esposito asked about the new referral program and the increase sub pay and if those have had a positive response. Farouk Rajab, Chair reported he had a conversation with Greg Howard recently suggesting that elementary schools open 30-45 minutes earlier to help with drop off. Chair Rajab also spoke to Peter Anderson who reported the middle school is also problematic. Chair Rajab would love to consider this proposal but understood if we cannot do it due to staffing. Dr. Riley to look into this further. He noted while speaking to elementary and middle school principals, they feel this is not an issue in the morning because they already have staff coming in early, but that the afternoon is the issue. Dr. Riley will look at extending it at both ends and will let the Board know. Sara Baker asked if there has been a discussion of bringing lockers back into the student experience. Dr. Riley will find out and let the Board know. Dan Kelley asked what the District has done to promote the fact that we are paying \$150 for daily subs and asked if we have advertised this. Dr. Riley noted we have done as much advertising as we possibly could. We have also sent out the reward program information to all employees. Craig Esposito noted it was in the New London Day and feels it is very well known out there. Mr. Kelley asked how long it takes to get a sub off the street with background checks. Dr. Riley explained a lot of the paperwork is completed from home and the background portion can be done in a week or two, much quicker than it used to be.

Budget Discussion

Dr. Riley asked for the Board's direction on the original proposed budget. He added we will take your final direction and bring that back next week for your approval. Dr. Riley reported on the paraeducators, how many we currently have and how many vacancies at each school level we currently have. He explained his proposal is to gradually start increasing the part-time paraeducators to full time positions. He added he would take the existing paraeducators and have them apply to the full time positions. His proposal is to increase to four more full time positions in July. Dr. Riley explained the personnel director position and the need for the 092 certification for the position. He explained this position needs the ability to evaluate administrators and teachers. He shared other districts' salary information for the same position. He also shared the job description and suggested the salary for this position be set at \$152,450. Dr. Riley commented on the music elementary position. He added he and the principals' recommendation would be to keep the .5 split position because it worked fine and did not interfere with schedules. He shared information from the middle school in regards to the current music program. Dr. Riley reported on the HVAC system at the middle school, noting it is a legal requirement in the state of Connecticut that you have air conditioning in a renovated or new school. He shared his suggested changes to the original budget proposals. He suggested adding back the West Vine Street School kindergarten teacher position and the middle school specialist teacher. If we add those two back there will not be any layoffs. He suggested moving four 29 hour paraeducators to full time and fund that for two years out of the transportation savings. He noted the HR Director salary has been reduced by \$9,000. Chair, Rajab noted we are still staying at 2.38%. Chris Donahue asked how was it ranked, which teacher position is kept over the other? Dr. Riley explained he meets with principals, looks at class sizes, staffing, programs and retirements. He spoke we can make the financial reductions while meeting the educational needs. Mr. Donahue asked what the increase would be if we kept the two teachers at the high school, because with the climate we are in it concerns him with students coming back to school. Dr. Riley explained the enrollment and how it affects staffing. He explained one of the teachers are going on a leave of absence in world language class and feels we are ok with losing the two positions. Farouk Rajab, Chair explained we really are not cutting teachers, we are just not filling positions of teachers that are departing. Heidi Simmons spoke about the music class and the impact of music in younger children. She added we have social and emotional concerns now. She voiced she would like to have the 0.5 position moved to a 1.0 music position in the budget. Chair Rajab voiced we are continuously asking to increase the 0.5 music position. He believes that enhancing that position to 1.0 will allow to fill it. He understands there are scheduling issues, but notes we can offer the kids in lower grades this option and introduce this to more students. He respects the opinion of principals and Dr. Riley but disagreed keeping it at 0.5 in the budget. Dan Kelley also supports Mrs. Simmons in her efforts in pushing this forward. He voiced the reason it has not been filled is because it is 0.5. Mr. Kelley commented Stonington is known for the arts, music, drama and band and that brings a lot of families to town. Mr. Kelley would like to increase it to a 1.0, also noting when we had two middle schools we had four teachers and now we have three teachers. He is in support of a 1.0 music teacher. Dr. Riley explained to raise from 0.5 to 1.0 is about \$45,000. He gave options for funding the full time position; using the funding source for SEL or move only two part-time paraeducators positions to full time instead of four. Chair Rajab, explained it is not going to impact that much. He asked to raise the budget because social emotional learning is important to him and people on the call. We want the music and want it all. Dr. Riley said he would bring the proposed budget back next week with the music position added and increase.

Kevin Agnello commented on the job description for the HR director. He questioned the 28 essential duties and of those the four or five duties requiring a 092. He asked how many individuals have a 092 in the District and how many teachers in the district. Dr. Riley shared the number of 092 certifications and teachers in the district. Mr. Agnello was curious if dropping the 092 would the district still get a lot as it relates to lawsuits. If the position had no 092 could we drop the salary? Dr. Riley explained his own experiences in this type of position and the justification of why the 092 certification is needed in the position. Mr. Agnello questioned since there is 15 staff with a 092 in the district, why there is a need for this support and why this position would need that support. Craig Esposito voiced the savings is not a lot to go to a non-certificated person. It is a specialized area a lot of legal ramifications in school law and personnel. He noted he thinks it is good to have that type of person in that position. Chris Donahue voiced he was under the understanding the Finance Department

currently handled most of the HR things. Dr. Riley explained how many people are currently used in the HR process, noting it is fragmented. Dr. Riley shared when we hire this person we will move people around and the HR duties. Mr. Donahue asked what is the salary in other districts, in which the HR director is a non-certified position. Dr. Riley reported the closest is LEARN but that position does not evaluate at a salary of \$143,000. Mr. Agnello asked for district size comparisons. Sara Baker voiced she felt it is a good administrative hire and we do not have compelling evidence not to hire. She feels this is an investment in our school district, in our students and staff. Craig Esposito mentioned that survey results from the superintendent's search had HR mentioned numerous times as an area that support was needed. Mr. Agnello commented he generally supports the need for the position, but questioned the need for the 092. Heidi Simmons asked what the main purpose of the 092 will be used for and is it only for evaluating. She added all the other administrators with the 092 have other duties they are doing during the day. Dr. Riley explained all of the administrators have the 092 and their duties in the evaluating process. Heidi Simmons asked if the HR position had been requested before. Dr. Riley commented not at this level, but has been talked about with the Board chair before. He added this is a complex position. Farouk Rajab, Chair asked if we also could add the concept of marketing our schools as part of the responsibility of the new position. Dr. Riley suggested making that his or the new superintendent's task. He noted there are two items to consider, grant writing and marketing and this would be part of the direction of the new administration. Dan Kelley voiced he is not convinced for many reasons that the HR position is needed. He questioned the total cost of the position with benefits and where will the funding come from to cover benefits. Dr. Riley explained funds would be covered from the unfilled positions. Mr. Kelley noted we have done all this for many years without that position. Mr. Kelley also had questions regarding the ESSER funds as it relates to the 21-22 budget. Mr. Kelley voiced he is in favor of the 1.0 music teacher. Farouk Rajab, Chair asked for a show of hands from the Board members as to who is in favor of the HR position. Chair Rajab noted four Board members support the position. Craig Esposito explained this is only a preliminary budget and we might need to reexamine things after the Board of Finance meets. Chair Rajab noted if the Board of Finance says the budget is too high than we should let the administration find the funds that the Board of Finance is looking for.

Dan Kelley spoke about the HVAC system at the SMS and thanked Peter Anderson for the memo explaining the HVAC system at the middle school. Mr. Kelley feels that there is not a need for the HVAC system. Dr. Riley explained the Board has already approved the CIP and it has gone to the Board of Finance which includes the system. Dr. Riley explained Mr. Anderson every year has to move the air conditions from one room to another because we have medically fragile students, so by moving forward you are honoring the neediest students. Chair Rajab voiced he provided the information on the HVAC because the Board asked and we already voted on this. Chair Rajab stated we want the 1.0 music position back in the budget. Dr. Riley will bring the budget back next week for approval.

Board Comments/Concerns

Kevin Agnello thanked Dr. Riley, Mary Anne Butler, Gary Shettle, Peter Anderson and all who provided information the Board requested and for answering all his questions. He also thanked Board members for a lot of good questions and feels confident in what the Board is presenting.


Dr. Riley commented we absolutely love and appreciate questions. The more we can share the more options and rationale you as a Board have to answer questions. Thank you for this process, it worked well.

Adjournment

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

Motion 2: To adjourn at 7:35p.m.

All: Aye – Motion Passes


Heidi Simmons, Board Secretary