

STONINGTON BOARD OF EDUCATION REGULAR MEETING March 14, 2024-Page | 1

Complete Board Meeting can be heard on the Stonington Public Schools YouTube Channel at:

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCFXjoLYU1KT9YnO3SQSryQ/>

Farouk Rajab, Chair called the regular meeting to order at 6:33 p.m. Members present were Kevin Agnello, Secretary, Chris Donahue, Dan Kelley, and Katie Gauthier. Members Virtual Attendance: Meghan Blanchette, and Sara Baker. Also present were Mary Anne Butler, Superintendent of Schools, Student Government Representative Catherine Statchen, members of the administrative staff and citizens.

Communications & Recognitions

Mary Anne Butler, Superintendent wished the Board of Education members a happy Board of Education month. She commended Catherine Statchen and Evan Anderson for an amazing performance in War Paint. She recognized Officer Kerry Browning who will be taking a new position as a Family Relations Counselor in the Connecticut Judicial Branch. She also thanked Mrs. Mello at Deans Mill School and Mrs. Priest at West Vine Street School for inviting her into their classrooms for Read Across America as their guest reader. She recognized Mr. Smith who has been invited by the CSDE Center for Literacy Research and Reading Readiness Center to record a segment for their webinar series Infinite Possibilities Doing This Thing Together. Mrs. Butler shared news of Principal Kathy Irvine's announcement of her retirement and thanked her for her years of service, noting she will be missed. Ms. Statchen recognized the Stanley's for the musical. She recognized the guidance department for organizing both testing events for freshmen and sophomores. She spoke about the recent Jamboree and the upcoming Beetle Mania event. Mr. Kelley attended the matinee of the War Paint production and recognized, Ms. Statchen, Mr. Anderson, Owen, Peter, and the Stanley's for their work in the play. He also attended a couple of boys' basketball games. He congratulated Mrs. Irvine on her retirement. He received several communications from parents and others concerning the paras and graduation date, which include letters from Linda Lloyd, Greg Howard, Ebbie Young, and Kerry Phelan. He voiced he will be attending Beetle Mania. He asked that incoming eighth-grade students request to be part of Mr. Agins' class so that they could participate in the First Amendment Rap Contest. Mr. Kelley shared he was a para at the middle school and the para president and voiced he hears the paras and the Board is doing what they can for the paras and thanked them. Katie Gauthier thanked Mrs. Dawe for inviting her to the high school to attend Chris Herren's presentation. She was welcomed into West Vine and Deans Mill to read in Mrs. Gervasini's third grade and Mrs. Pescatello's fourth grade for Read Across America. She also congratulated Mrs. Irvine on her retirement, well deserved and sad to see her go. Farouk Rajab congratulated Mrs. Irvine on her retirement, adding well deserved. He attended the play at the high school adding it was amazing. Chair Rajab commented on para attendance at the Board of Finance meetings and requested their attendance at the upcoming March 26th public hearing. He reviewed the Board of Finance cuts to the proposed budget and the implications of those cuts.

Comments from Citizens Regarding Items on the Agenda

Kim Harris – Commented on paraprofessional wages and their job duties.

Zach Rogers – A former Stonington Public Schools student spoke on the importance of paraeducators during his school career.

Katherine Teixeira – Spoke of her typical day as a paraeducator at Deans Mill School. She also voiced that paraeducators are grossly and unconscionably underpaid.

Ebbie Young – Read an email she shared with the Board of Education in support of paraeducators.

John Denard – A teacher at Stonington High School spoke as a parent and teacher in the district. He shared his personal experience regarding the use and the importance of paras in the classroom. He commented on para requirements for an IEP plan and the Connecticut Education Data System. He shared his unified basketball coaching experience and the impact paras have in the program.

Jaicee Getchell – Shared correspondence from 5th-grade teachers at Deans Mill School, Tricia Lance, Daniel Barth, Heidi McGowan, and Jonah Salsich expressing their support for paraeducators and the importance and the impact they have in the education of students.

John Flaherty – Commented on his personal experience as a healthcare provider while servicing paras and special ed teachers for injuries that occurred during the workday, noting it is a disproportionately physical and injurious profession. He voiced that those that he services are very dedicated to their work. He also noted the expense that these injuries would cost the district if CIRMA were involved.

Connie Tassias – A paraeducator at the high school read a letter from parent Alexandria Fortin whose student has a paraeducator in school. Ms. Fortin expressed her concerns if her student were to lose her paraeducator and spoke on paraeducator wages.

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Michelle Pease – A Deans Mill School paraeducator read a letter from special education teacher Alicia Coombs, with whom she works closely on a daily basis. Ms. Coombs's letter expressed her support for the paraeducators.

Ashley Huesman – A Deans Mill School paraeducator read a letter from special education teacher Danielle McGuire. Ms. McGuire voiced her appreciation for the paraeducators working in the schools and the integral part they play in the success of the students, their daily duties, their work preventing crises, keeping schools safe, and the need to compensate paraeducators to retrain them.

Ashley Tewell - Ms. Tewell voiced that paras matter to parents and students. She noted that paras need to show up on March 26th and go to the Board of Finance so they understand more money needs to go into the education system. Ms. Tewell also commented she was happy to see the work that was put into the state-mandated Increasing Educator Diversity Plan. She also expressed her concern about the policy on the Use of Private Electronic Devices by Students.

Linda Lloyd – Attached Email Correspondence regarding paras

Kindergarten Teachers (Deans Mill School) Gina Hetu, Tori Hodges, Allie Romano and Anne Wade – Attached Email Correspondence.

Farouk Rajab, Chair called a five-minute recess.

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Board Appreciation Month - Mary Anne Butler, Superintendent presented the Board members with a bag of swag for Board Appreciation Month along with baked goods and handmade napkins made by the Life Skills students in the Annex and personalized thank you cards from students at the elementary schools. Mrs. Butler thanked the Board and Student Government Representative Catherine Statchen for being a great team to work with.

Project Mixtape – First Amendment Rap – Dan Agins, SMS Teacher presented a PowerPoint presentation on his First Amendment Rap project, which started in 2016. His goal for the project is for students to understand what the First Amendment is and what it is not. He also shared short video clip highlights of students' rap songs. Dan Kelley commented on the positive energy that comes with the project and student participation. He also noted that he feels this project is one of the reasons people move into Stonington. He also gave a shout-out to Mrs. Cassidy. Mrs. Butler thanked Mr. Agins, and also noted that the district encourages teachers to show evidence of learning in different ways, and commended Mr. Agins for the project. Chair Rajab thanked Mr. Agins for everything he does for the children. (PowerPoint Presentation Attached)

Report of the Superintendent of Schools

Set Graduation Date – 2023-24 School Calendar – Mrs. Butler reviewed the school calendar and noted that there have been two wind and flood days and one snow day which sets the last day of school and graduation day on June 19th. She encouraged the Board to keep this date in play. A new statute will allow the beginning of next year to set a firm date for the last day as long as there are 180 days of school. Mrs. Dawe reviewed the timeline of events leading up to graduation. Chris Donahue asked about making up days if a firm date is set next year. Dan Kelley asked if there is another snow day will graduation day stay on the 19th. Mrs. Butler confirmed yes it would stay on June 19th.

Food Service Outstanding Lunch Balances – Mrs. Butler reviewed the outstanding lunch balances that have not been paid for. Alisha Stripling, Director of Finance and Personnel explained the McKinney Vento Act and what part that plays in the outstanding lunch balances. She noted a letter would be sent out from her office to those families that are affected. Dan Kelley asked for clarification on the shaming of those students who try to get lunch. Mrs. Butler confirmed it is clear in the law that shaming is not allowed.

Innovative New Senior Project – Mrs. Butler shared that due to a reimbursement to the Food Service department as part of a junior and senior project, students will do a study on acquiring a food truck that would be available districtwide to deliver meals and could also be a catering truck used with the Annex students. This would need to be a self-sustained business, and students will work with Dan Rahl on the feasibility of the project to ultimately purchase

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Increasing Educator Diversity Plan – Mrs. Butler explained the report is a state-mandated report. The draft has been reviewed by the lawyers and is on the agenda for Board approval. The report will be submitted to the state for review and approval. Chris Donahue questioned if it was a state-mandated plan. Mrs. Butler explained that it was and the State requires the plan to represent an increase in the minority representation of staff and must also include measurable goals.

Consent Agenda

The following motion was made by Dan Kelley and seconded by Chris Donahue:

Motion 1: To approve the Consent Agenda items A-D.

All: Aye – Motion Passes

Approval Change in 2023-2024 School Calendar to Set Graduation Date

Mrs. Butler's recommendation is for the last day of school and graduation to be June 19th. Farouk Rajab, Chair noted he received an email regarding the last day of school. Ms. Statchen, Student Government Representative shared her thoughts on setting the date of graduation for June 19th, surrounding the holiday and the implications of holding the graduation ceremony on that day. Board members Dan Kelley, Meghan Blanchette, and Sara Baker shared their thoughts on holding the ceremony on the Juneteenth holiday.

The following motion was made by Dan Kelley and seconded by Kevin Agnello:

Motion 2: To approve the change to the 2023-2024 School Calendar as presented.

All: Aye – Motion Passes

Sub Committee Reports

Teaching and Learning Sub-Committee – Kevin Agnello reported the committee met and listened to student advocacy for the inclusion of a strings program into the districtwide music program. The committee will further discuss how to grow the music program. They discussed how to infuse play-based learning into the elementary school curriculum. He noted there are three curricula for vote on the agenda; Band 6-8, Computer-Aided Design, and Hospitality and Tourism.

The following motion was made by Farouk Rajab and seconded by Katie Gauthier:

Motion 3: To approve the three curricula as presented.

All: Aye – Motion Passes

Finance and Facilities Sub-Committee – Chris Donahue reported the Board of Finance is suggesting a 4.87% increase. Once they meet at the public hearing, the district will know what we will be getting. Mary Anne and Alisha will give different scenarios of what to do depending on how the vote turns out and what the budget ends up being. Mr. Carroll gave the committee a breakdown of the boilers, SMS lot, and different projects. Mr. Carroll shared a brief overview of these projects with the Board.

Policy Sub-Committee – Dan Kelley reported the sub-committee met and policy P5111 has a vote required and was also presented last month, which deals with the cut-off age deadline for kindergarten.

Policies for Second Read: P5111 Admission to Kindergarten

The following motion was made by Dan Kelley and seconded by Kevin Agnello:

Motion 4: To approve the passage of policy P5111 Admission to Kindergarten.

All: Aye – Motion Passes

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and her concerns regarding the policy Use of Private Electronic Devices by Students, he also had concerns but has been reassured by the Superintendent and the law firm that the content in the policy is legal. He added yes the phones can be confiscated and will take a look at who can actually do that at the school level. Mr. Kelley also reviewed the changes to the senior privilege policy.

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Retirement Board Report – Farouk Rajab noted the Board met and reviewed all the investments and moved one of the manager's changes.

LEARN Board Liaison Report – Sara Baker reported they had a special guest, Mary Anne Butler, who shared a presentation that inspired many people in the region to look at what is done in Stonington and see how they can bring that back to their home district. Ms. Baker noted the LEARN Board also approved the Increasing Educator Diversity District plan.

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Ms. Statchen reported that the NHS is doing a second blood drive because they broke the record with the first drive. She added anyone affiliated with the school district is allowed to donate on April 3rd.

Board Comments and Items for Future Agendas

Dan Kelley commented on the Personnel Report which is linked to the agenda and encouraged all at home to look at the linked information on the agenda. He spoke on the shortage of paras that the district has month to month. He also noted that the policy on the Use of Private Electronic Devices by Students would be discussed at future Policy Sub-Committee meetings if anyone would like to talk about the policy.

Farouk Rajab, Chair noted all sub-committee meetings are public meetings and are posted. He encouraged feedback and families to attend.

Adjournment

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

Motion 5: To adjourn at 8:43 pm

All: Aye – Motion Passes


Kevin Agnello, Secretary

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Motion 5: To adjourn at 8:43 pm
All: Aye – Motion Passes

Kevin Agnello, Secretary

----- Forwarded message -----

From: **LINDA Lloyd** <lindalulu70@msn.com>

Date: Thu, Mar 14, 2024 at 5:09 PM

Subject: Meeting regarding paras

To: frajab@stoningtonschools.org <frajab@stoningtonschools.org>, kevin.agnello@stoningtonschools.org <kevin.agnello@stoningtonschools.org>, daniel.kelley@stoningtonschools.org <daniel.kelley@stoningtonschools.org>, christopher.donahue@stoningtonschools.org <christopher.donahue@stoningtonschools.org>, sara.baker@stoningtonschools.org <sara.baker@stoningtonschools.org>, katie.gauthier@stoningtonschools.org <katie.gauthier@stoningtonschools.org>, meghan.blancette@stoningtonschools.org <meghan.blancette@stoningtonschools.org>

To the Stonington Board of Education,

My name is Linda Lloyd and I'm writing on behalf of the para professionals working in the Stonington School district. I'm offering my perspective as a parent of an 8th grader who has been working with Paras in various capacities every year since preschool.

Over the years, I've been proud to be part of this district because of the wonderful staff and services provided, to name a few. However, the fact that a meeting even has to be held to fight for better pay and benefits for Paras, when it's so obviously lacking, is just shocking to me.

All staff plays an important role in a child's education, and the fact that Para's are paid so little shows me that maybe there isn't a full understanding of the reach of their job and their true value. Children have unique and diverse needs that continue to grow and change as the years evolve, and it often goes beyond what a teacher can address in the day to day. I think we all can agree that teachers are already stretched beyond their limit and that they depend on paras for support. Students with an IEP, like my son, depend on paras for not only academic guidance, but also social, emotional and behavioral support and they need consistency in that relationship to have the best success. Sometimes they are dealing with medical emergencies, lockdown drills and all the things that come with working in a school these days. Paying below their value means high turnover of staff or difficulty hiring the first place. This in turn, means students aren't getting the quality help that they need and teachers are not feeling supported.

I have been in awe of the paras we have been lucky enough to work with over the last decade or so. In awe. Their dedication and amount of care they put into their work is beyond amazing. They have all made an impact on my son that equals the teachers themselves. The gains he has made in all areas wouldn't have been possible without them. My son is just one example, and I'm sure they help in ways that's I'm not even aware of on top of all of their other daily duties.

I understand there are budgets you have to work with and you have to assess how funds are distributed year to year. It's not an easy job, but this is a **NO BRAINER!** Don't skimp in an area that is so vital to the students of this district. Please do the right thing here.

I want to thank any paras present at the meeting tonight, those who are listening, and those who may have worked with my son in the past. You are so very appreciated by our family. You deserve better and I hope that tonight is a turning point.

Thank you

Sincerely,
Linda Lloyd

----- Forwarded message -----

From: **Hodges, Victoria** <victoria.hodges@stoningtonschools.org>

Date: Thu, Mar 14, 2024 at 4:48 PM

Subject: Letter to be Read at tonight's Board of Ed Meeting

To: Farouk Rajab <frjab@stoningtonschools.org>

Hello Mr. Rajab,

If allowed, we are asking this letter to be read at tonight's Board of Education meeting on behalf of the Kindergarten teachers at Deans Mill School. Thank you,

Hello,

We are the kindergarten teachers from Deans Mill School. We are writing today to offer our strongest support to the paraprofessionals of Stonington.

First of all, paras are essential to our school system and provide unbelievable support to ALL of our students. They are essential workers in every room. We literally could not run our school without them. Teachers rely upon them on a daily basis to ensure our classrooms can run well. With the para shortage, that consistency is often interrupted and is hard on everybody.

We have a unique privilege of working with a classroom para every day in our Kindergarten classrooms. These paraprofessionals assist in running academic small groups under our guidance, help manage the classroom environment, and build lasting relationships with our youngest students. We see daily the strong effort and dedication the paraprofessionals put in every day.

As parents and teachers, we know they continually go the extra mile and truly have the students' best interests at heart, including our own children.

Please provide the Stonington Public Schools paraprofessionals the best support we can. Thank you.

Gina Hetu

Tori Hodges

Allie Romano

Anne Wade

Project Mixtape

First Amendment Rap

- Students take a “pre-test” using Peardeck
 - Asked to define the 1st Amendment and the 5 freedoms it protects
 - Given a series of situations (some are made up, others are the basis of real supreme court cases) and asked to determine if that given situation is a violation of 1st Amendment rights
- No answers are given that day, this is the hook for the research
- We revisit the same peardeck one week later, after research, and they should be able to properly define it and know which of the situations are a violation and why

Project Mixtape Website



Project Mixtape VII

A few facts about Project Mixtape:

- Approximately 345 students have previously completed Project Mixtape.
- None have died as a result.
- All have have their comfort zone pushed and have created a lasting memory.
- No one will remember a random essay they wrote for my class as a freshman in college, however:
- Everyone will remember completing Project Mixtape with varying degrees of satisfaction
- Everyone will know what the First Amendment is, what it is not, and where it applies

Freedom of [religion](#)

Freedom of [the press](#)

Hip Hughes video: [The Constitution for Dummies](#) (bad title, and bad camera persona, but EXCELLENT information)

Try [this quiz](#) (not graded - just for your knowledge)

By the end of the research period you should be able to identify/know the following and explain in your own words with your own examples:

- When does the first amendment apply? When does it not apply?
- What are the limitations of these freedoms?
- Establishment clause
- Free exercise clause
- Pure speech
- Speech plus
- Symbolic speech
- You should be able to identify and explain at least 2 supreme court cases that deal with the first amendment
 - What was the case about? (which freedom?)
 - Who was involved in the case? (plaintiff and defendant)



Courts

The First Amendment and the Courts

VIEW VIDEO



17 Freedom of Speech Court Cases You Should Know

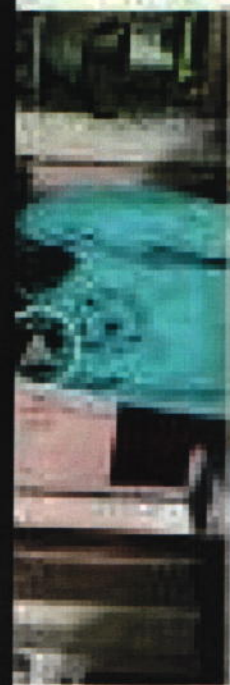
Read about the most important cases that have shaped the First Amendment.

More Info

What Is It?

Protects the right to free speech, which is protected by the First Amendment.



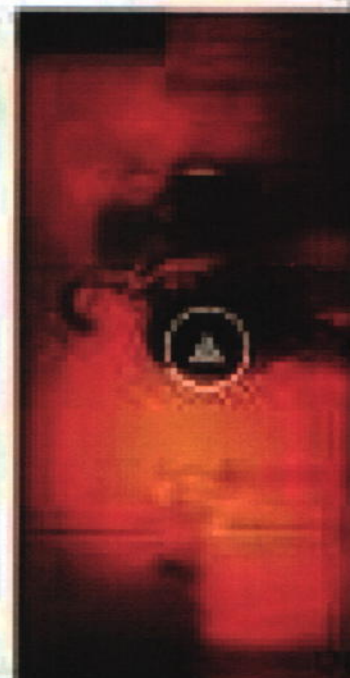


2016



Marshall (R. Hix)

2017



how to rap



