

# **WILLINGTON BOARD OF EDUCATION**

**November 9, 2021**

**7:00 p.m.**

**Minutes**

**Virtual Meeting**

Full video can be viewed here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fRiWAKbmzI4&t=8s>

## **Zoom recorded**

### **Members Present**

Herb Arico - Chairman

Elena Testa - Vice Chairman

Michelle Doucette Cunningham - Secretary

Ann Grosjean

Tracey Anderson

Donna Cook

Laura Rodriguez

(members all present remotely through Zoom)

### **Also Present**

Superintendent of Schools, Phil Stevens

Members of the public

#### **1. Call to order**

Chairman Arico called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

#### **2. Pledge of Allegiance**

Chairman Arico led the Pledge of Allegiance.

#### **3. Present to speak**

Peter Latinscics shared his gratitude and appreciation for the past Board for all their hard work and wished the new Board well in the future.

#### **4. Chairman's report**

Chairman Arico spoke about the many issues facing Boards of Education including government funding of education, safety, the quality of education, discipline policies, use of technology, the Common Core, teacher salaries, teacher evaluations and tenure, bullying, school lunch, mental health, etc. He also spoke about the structure of a K-8 school, stating the structure outperforms the elementary school model in areas of achievement, test scores, attendance and the physical building. Chairman Arico explained the process the Board and the town would follow to build a new school from developing building specifications, hiring an architect and funding the project including state reimbursement.

D. Cook requested adding Curriculum? to the agenda. Chairman Arico said we would add that to the new business.

D. Cook made a motion to add Curriculum? to the agenda under new business, 9c.

E. Testa seconded the motion

| <b>Vote:</b>  | Yes | No | Abstain |
|---------------|-----|----|---------|
| H. Arico      | x   |    |         |
| M. Cunningham | x   |    |         |
| D.Cook        | x   |    |         |
| T. Anderson   | x   |    |         |
| A.Grosjean    | x   |    |         |
| E. Testa      | x   |    |         |
| L. Rodriguez  | x   |    |         |

Motion passes

## **5. Communications**

Amy Redding, Michelle Christensen

## **6. Superintendent report**

### **a. 2021-2022 update**

Superintendent Stevens reported that we had our first positive COVID case in school in a month on Sunday. The regional numbers have decreased and we have seen the same thing in Willington. We have had some school community members identified as close contacts from events outside of school, but overall the school has done very well and I'm proud of our school staff, students and families. One of the issues we have been concerned about is community members being quarantined and missing school. As a result, DPH and the CSDE introduced the Screen and Stay program at the end of last week. The concept behind this program is to allow districts the opportunity for individuals, students or staff, who are unvaccinated and identified as a close contact, to remain in school as long as the individuals were masked and asymptomatic. Basically, anyone identified as a close contact through the school setting would be allowed to remain in school while monitoring for COVID symptoms. If they have any symptoms they would not be able to participate in the Screen and Stay program and would need to quarantine. Preschool students do not qualify for the program. Outside identification does not apply to the Screen and Stay program, meaning someone who was identified as a close contact from a family party, or something outside of schools, would not be eligible for Screen and Stay. I will be bringing this concept to the reopening committee for review and potential implementation in the near future.

The staff has been working extremely hard on their reading professional development. We have conferences coming up before Thanksgiving, and they will be held virtually.

We just heard that our bus company hired an additional driver so we will be able to get the route back that had been combined previously. This is important as a couple of the routes were lengthy and were closer to capacity.

Lastly, through collaboration with Chief Alex Moore of Willington Fire Department #1 and our First Selectwoman, Erika Wiczenski, Willington was identified as a HEART safe community by the CT Department of Public Health. This was the result of training staff in CPR and defibrillators, and providing access to defibrillators through various locations in town. Chief Moore spearheaded this effort and provided training to a number of our staff. We will be hanging our Heart Safe campus sign outside Hall School.



**b. BOF fund transfer update**

The Board of Finance approved the fund transfer from the 20-21 budget to the non-lapsing fund at their last meeting with the understanding that we will need those funds for an unbudgeted out of district special education placement. We will make the request to access those funds towards the end of the year once all placement costs have been invoiced.

**c. Enrollment update**

Center School has 200 students and Hall School has 185 students. We currently have 3 outplacements and have a total of 388 students. We have had an additional 3 magnet school students enroll this year. We have a total of 11 magnet school students this year. We will be sending letters to families inviting them to visit Center and Hall School to entice them to join our learning community. We also have 12 homeschool students that we are aware of at this time.

**d. CHC update**

CHC has the social worker position posted for the district, and currently has one of their certified staff filling in the role. The individual filling in is a CHC licensed clinician, and is also a parent in Willington. We currently have 4 students enrolled and will provide parents more info on the program once we have a full-time individual. I also wanted to share the social emotional learning curriculum that we purchased, Second Step, is reportedly going very well at both schools.

**e. Staffing**

We have a site visit at Center School tomorrow morning for a principal candidate. The committee will meet after the site visit to determine their next Principal. There have been some challenges for Erin Conley working as interim principal on Tuesdays and Thursdays, so I recruited and hired Nancy Larson as an interim principal for CES through the end of December. Nancy worked in South Windsor for 35 years as a teacher and principal. She also completed an interim principal position in Canton at their intermediate school after her retirement. This is going to free up Erin to focus on curriculum.

We also filled two paraprofessional openings we had. We hired Josh Look and Ben Trowbridge. Lastly, we hired Leslie Tillem as a 3rd grade teacher to replace Brynn Lipstreu. Leslie will be starting on Monday.

A. Grosjean asked about the status of the open art position. Superintendent Stevens that we are in the final stages of negotiations for the position.

Chairman Arico asked how much funding is in the non lapsing account.

Superintendent Stevens stated that there is approximately \$260,000 and after the outplacement of \$100,000, \$160,000 will remain.

**7. Financial Report**

**a. November financial report**

Attachment #1

Superintendent Stevens reviewed the November financial report.

**8. Committee Report**

**a. School building committee**

A. Grosjean reported that the school building committee is preparing a proposal for the Owner's Project Manager (OPM). Superintendent Stevens said that Colliers and CSG will review it at no charge to assist us. A. Grosjean stated that once the proposal is complete we would be able to hire a OPM who will then work with the Board to determine our educational needs to either renovate or build a new school.

**9 New Business**

**a. Approve minutes of regular meeting October 12, 2021**

Attachment #2

M. Doucette Cunningham moved to approve the minutes of October 12, 2021.

A. Grosjean seconded the motion

E. Testa asked who wrote the minutes. Superintendent Stevens said that we have not found a board recorder so he and Brenda have been preparing them by listening to the YouTube recording and adding the information where appropriate. He stated that we are writing so much information into the minutes that isn't necessary since there is a recording that people can listen to for complete information.

E. Testa stated that she believed the minutes are written with bias.

D. Cook stated that she'd like to clarify her comments in budget priorities on page 10, that she may have misspoke or it was miswritten if she said money or program. Chairman Arico said we have a recording to listen to.

M. Doucette Cunningham suggested making a friendly amendment to change the word from money to program.

D. Cook suggested removing the word money.

M. Doucette Cunningham accepted the friendly amendment.

| <b>Vote:</b>  | Yes | No | Abstain |
|---------------|-----|----|---------|
| H. Arico      | x   |    |         |
| M. Cunningham | x   |    |         |
| D. Cook       | x   |    |         |
| T. Anderson   | x   |    |         |
| A. Grosjean   | x   |    |         |
| E. Testa      |     | x  |         |
| L. Rodriguez  | x   |    |         |

Motion passes

**b. Review draft of 2022-2023 School Calendar**

Attachment #3

Superintendent Stevens reviewed the draft 2022-2023 school calendar.

M. Doucette Cunningham clarified that snow days are not built into the calendar.

Superintendent Stevens said that is correct. If we have a snow day, it will be made up in June. Also, depending on the winter, April vacation is also available to make up any snow days.

Superintendent Stevens will review the calendar with the unions and add it to the December agenda to



approve.

D. Cook stated she is happy about the long April break so families can get together for the Easter and Passover break.

**c. Curriculum?**

D. Cook stated that she was talking to somebody in town and we are not getting our students to meet the minimum standards, 50% of our students are not meeting the minimum standards. She said that when she moved to town our schools were Blue Ribbon schools. She did some research on Zillow and found that Center School is rated 3 out of 10 and Hall School is rated 6 out of 10. Someone suggested that we buy curriculum from schools around us instead of waiting 3 years to implement our own curriculum. She went on to say she looked at Great Schools and Annie Vinton is rated 10 out of 10, Mansfield Middle is rated 8 out of 10, Ashford is Prek-8 and is rated 4/10, Dorothy Goodwin is Prek-4 and is rated 9/10. She said she was heartbroken when she saw the scores and ratings.

Michelle Doucette Cunningham thanked Donna for the information and urged all BOE members to do their homework and suggested that we dig deeper into research because there are a lot of factors that go into these algorithms. She suggested the State Department of Education's EdSight website for useful information. M. Doucette Cunningham stated we need to have a deeper conversation regarding the specific questions to add to a future agenda and compare apples to apples. There are reference groups to compare factors and not just look at the curriculum. We should give our curriculum committee some time to see how our investment is doing.

T. Anderson said that she is on the curriculum committee and knows that Phil sent a calendar to everyone showing when Erin Conley will present curriculum information. It will take 3 years to complete the entire curriculum. The curriculum committee will send the curriculum to the BOE to approve. It is unfair to base student success on one set of data; that is only one piece of information. She urged Donna to broaden her research.

D. Cook asked what other data points we should be looking at.

Superintendent Stevens stated that Mansfield is in a different ERG than Willington, although Willington feeds into EO Smith. We have a lot of growth needed and the pieces of data we look at include attendance, the percentage of special education students, the number of students in intervention and leaving intervention, overall attendance, the number of free/reduced meals. For professional development in Willington we are doing LETRS training which is a research based program. So the balance of curriculum and professional development with a high quality intervention program are the things we are doing to improve. Where we were headed, it was going to take us 10-15 years and it just wasn't acceptable.

D. Cook heard about a poor performance district that set up Saturday study sessions for parents and students to make the parent familiar with the curriculum to help their student.

M. Doucette Cunningham agreed that providing more time for students, and that's why she's supported the WEALTH program because students lose some of the learning over the summer. Some of the successful models in Connecticut have incorporated more summer time with a combination of fun stuff and lessons to reinforce learning. It's expensive and a lot of families don't want it because they want to go on vacation. Saturday academies can be successful.

D. Cook reiterated the benefits of including parents in the curriculum process to help their child because they don't come home with a textbook anymore.

Superintendent Stevens stated there is significant research and we are looking at the top 100 instructional strategies while we write curriculum. The money in tutoring is where you get the most impact. So we are offering stipends for tutoring but we are pushing our staff so hard, nobody wants to do it and I don't blame them.

M. Doucette Cunningham agrees that this is the right time to bring this up as we start the budget cycle.

H. Arico said our schools have a lot of things going for them. I think the staff has worked double time to move them forward. The test scores we looked at were similar to what we had in the past, maybe a little lower, and I would blame it on COVID which had quite an impact the last couple of years on what's happening in our schools. I think the majority of our students are resilient. Most of our students go into EO Smith and do quite well there and our best students rise right to the top. I think we are giving them a great foundation here in Willington. Can it be improved? Sure and that's one of the goals of the Board, the superintendent, staff, community and parents. I'm proud of the schools in Willington and for a small town, we do a masterful job of preparing our young people for high school and the future. Most youngsters in town seem to be happy, seem to be enjoying what they are doing, and making good progress. The graduates we've turned out have done quite well.

Superintendent Stevens said we are looking at science and social studies right now and the EO Smith administration is collecting information for us around what percentage of Willington students take AP classes and how does that compare to other towns. What's the average GPA for Willington students in science class? How do the freshmen transfer in? What's their GPA compared to other freshmen from other towns?

D. Cook thanked everyone for the information and allowing her to ask questions. She wants to be sure everyone knows that she doesn't think our teachers are inept or lazy.

Superintendent Stevens agreed and stated we really need to identify criteria for success for our kids, and we haven't done that yet. SBAC and iReady are the criteria, so is good attendance, limited suspensions and referrals, and eventually the Portrait of a Graduate will be included. At some point we need to take time to determine the criteria for success to make sure we are churning out good individuals and that they are set up for success when they go on to high school. I think that is your point and that it is really valid.

D. Cook stated every student is different and they need to be able to read and write and I want to be sure that when our students leave us they have a strong foundation and they are not playing catch up.

#### **10. Old Business**

None

#### **11. Present to Speak**

Amy Redding read a letter from the HMS GSA extending their sincere and heartfelt gratitude for the support of The Gender Sexuality Alliance club at HMS. The club is dedicated to making HMS a safe, supportive, accepting environment where every student may live authentically in our school and in the community. We are beyond touched at the outpouring of love and kindness as well as the generous donations that have come pouring in from members of the community.

#### **12. Board Comment**

H. Arico stated his appreciation for the Superintendent's comprehensive report. He asked about the Veterans Day activities at school.



Superintendent Stevens stated that we still have restrictions in bringing people into the buildings, however, the HMS band will be playing at the Town's Veterans Day celebration at the senior center on Saturday and he will share more information at the December meeting.

H. Arico thanked E. Testa for her service on the Board and wished her well.

M. Doucette Cunningham thanked D. Cook for bringing up her questions about the curriculum.

A. Grosjean agreed it is good to bring up the curriculum. As a grandparent, watching what her grandchildren bring home every day, she is impressed with the quality of work they are doing. She stated that Erin Conley is moving everyone forward so parents can access curriculum on the website. She thinks the amount of professional development for staff is incredible. She appreciates the Second step information being sent home. She thanked E. Testa for her service.

T. Anderson expressed gratitude for the schools to soon be fully staffed and she thinks it is best for us to always think about how we can do better. She thanked E. Testa for her service and wished everybody a happy Thanksgiving.

L. Rodriguez expressed thanks to the collaboration of the First Selectman and Fire Chief for becoming a heart safe community which involves people to be CPR trained and have defibrillators. Test scores are only one data point. She expressed appreciation that Superintendent Stevens was collaborating with EO Smith and wished all a happy Thanksgiving.

D. Cook wished all a happy Thanksgiving. She asked Superintendent Stevens if they could see how students are doing report card wise. What percentage of students per grade are meeting the expectations?

E. Testa thanked everyone for the good words and it was an honor for her to serve this town for the last four years, and that she respects everyone on the Board, even though we can disagree. It involves a lot of time and commitment and work. She thanked everyone who voted for her. She urged parents to do all they can to make sure the curriculum becomes transparent. There are a lot of options for education now including homeschooling and online schooling. She thanked everyone and Phil for his respectful work. and wished everyone a happy Thanksgiving.

M. Doucette Cunningham moved to adjourn the meeting at 8:44 pm.

D. Cook seconded the motion

| <b>Vote:</b>  | Yes | No | Abstain |
|---------------|-----|----|---------|
| H. Arico      | x   |    |         |
| M. Cunningham | x   |    |         |
| D.Cook        | x   |    |         |
| T. Anderson   | x   |    |         |
| A.Grosjean    | x   |    |         |

|              |   |  |  |
|--------------|---|--|--|
| E. Testa     | x |  |  |
| L. Rodriguez | x |  |  |

Motion passes

Next meeting December 14, 2021

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TOWN CLERK