

# **WILLINGTON BOARD OF EDUCATION**

**April 12, 2022**

**Virtual Meeting: Zoom**

**7:00 p.m.**

**Minutes**

**Zoom Recorded**

## **Members Present**

Michelle Doucette Cunningham - Chair  
Herb Arico- Secretary  
Ann Grosjean- Vice-Chair  
Tracey Anderson  
Donna Cook  
Briana Ross  
Laura Rodriguez  
(members all present remotely through Zoom)

## **Also Present**

Superintendent of Schools, Phil Stevens  
Director of Curriculum and Instruction, Erin Conley and Literacy Coach Kristen Stevens  
Members of the public

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

Chair Cunningham called the meeting to order at 7:01 p.m.

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

Chair Cunningham led the Pledge of Allegiance.

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

James Bullick, 12 Laurel Drive, was pleased to hear there would be links available to view the curriculums but didn't see any posted yet. He was hoping to see them soon.

Ralph Tulis, 47 Village Hill Road, wanted to discuss the bus policy. He is part of the Land Evaluation committee and they are looking for the policy regarding ages on the bus. If they become a Prek-8 school what is the policy going to be regarding the ages of the students on the bus? He wanted to share some of his thoughts and concerns on this matter and ask for some input from the Board of Education.

Peter Latincsics, 97 Trask Road, stated a few concerns he had regarding the content of the curriculum. He could not find access to curriculums at the library, as it had previously been stated they would be available there. He also heard this was not even an option now and would like at some point during this meeting to have that discussed. Secondly, he wanted to know where the board was at with creating a policy about the public's correspondences being shared in the meeting minutes. He knows this has been discussed before and was hoping it would be addressed during this meeting as well.

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

Chairperson Cunningham shared that there have been many committee meetings being held. She explained how committees work and that they bring the full board information and they have a chance to ask committee members questions.

### **5. Communications**

The communications that came in last month were from Sara Reis, and Jenna Mitchell.

**6. Superintendent Report**

**a. Board of Education end of year projects**

Superintendent Stevens gave the board a few items that might be needed if funding is available at the end of the school year, including cyber insurance and staff laptops.

**b. 2022-2023 budget process update**

Superintendent Stevens explained the Board of Finance approved the budget as it was at a 1.26% increase. The town meeting is Tuesday, April 19th.

**c. 2021-2022 school year update**

Superintendent Stevens discussed that they have only had 4 Covid cases since the last board meeting. He also discussed how busy they have all been and listed items that they are working hard at including policy revision, Ed Specs, identifying after-school opportunities, and contract negotiations.

**d. Collaboration with regional schools**

Superintendent Stevens discussed how the regional superintendents started a collaboration together and are discussing areas of improvement in alignment. They are working on "Portrait of a Graduate" and also working on common language and expectations of their eighth-graders. From these discussions, E.O. Smith was able to come up with a common language and a process for class placement.

**e. Enrollment update**

Superintendent Stevens explained Center School has 211 students and Hall School has 185 students, which includes outplacements. We currently have a total of 396 students.

He also stated that they are monitoring the number of incoming kindergarten students. They currently are expecting 35 students as of today, which is actually higher than normal for this time of the school year.

**f. Staffing**

Superintendent Stevens shared they received a letter of resignation from the HSM band teacher, Tracie Canistrari. They also received a letter of resignation from HSM Spanish, Joany Alvarado. They hired Amanda Palotti as the secretary at Center School.

L. Rodriguez inquired about filling the foreign language position. She understood it was going to be hard to fill that position but explained that when she used to work at Hall School the Spanish teacher was here from Spain with a transfer program or something like that. Board members offered feedback on finding a suitable candidate.

**g. CES insurance claim**

Superintendent Stevens explained that all three classrooms at Center School that were impacted by the pipe burst have been retiled. Over vacation, they will be working on the asbestos work. The abatement cost is about \$18,500 and it's not covered by insurance but they do have money in the budget to cover it.

**7. Financial Report**

**a. April financial report**

Attachment #1

Superintendent Stevens shared the significant changes to the programs.

D. Cook wanted to know if the homelessness transportation that was discussed at the last meeting was resolved?



Superintendent Stevens stated that the program is still in the negative. They do discuss and collaborate with other towns as they are going through the same thing.

**8. Committee Reports**

**a. Policy Committee**

Superintendent Stevens explained the committee updated three policies for the board to review in the meeting later in the agenda. They also reviewed sexual harassment and discrimination, dress code, seclusion policy and meeting minutes and public participation. Then a few that he is bringing forward for review is; administering medication and updating the use of private vehicles used by employees. The next policy committee meeting is May 16th.

**b. Curriculum Committee**

Superintendent Stevens stated that at the last meeting they were reviewing set #3. They discussed a few other items that were later discussed on the agenda.

T. Anderson wanted to remind everyone that while they are reviewing the curriculum that the Willington Public School staff has put faith in them to put policies in place that are fair and appropriate and that the board needs to have the same trust that they are implementing what needs to give the students the best education.

**9. New Business**

**a. Nonrenewal notifications**

The board has to give permission for the superintendent to give this notification if necessary as it's a process that is guided by state statute. He needed the board to vote on this, giving him permission to make this communication if needed.

Chairperson Cunningham made a motion to allow Superintendent Stevens to issue any necessary nonrenewal notifications.

Herb Arico seconded the motion.

7 Yes Motion passes, unanimously

**b. Portrait of a Graduate overview**

Attachment #2

Superintendent Stevens shared his screen with a draft of their "Portrait of a Graduate". He shared the committee four attributes and indicators and stated rubrics would be developed next. Superintendent Stevens also shared a draft of a graphic that expresses the "Portrait of a Graduate."

A. Grosjean wanted to know if the other schools that they are collaborating with are similar.

D. Cook felt it was not concise enough and she wanted an example of what was under point 3B-critical thinking, and asked about divergent thinking. She suggested the word creative and citizenship be added.

Chairperson Cunningham wanted to know if the rubrics would be on report cards.

E. Conley stated that they would not be on report cards. She explained that this had been something they were working on before she joined the team. But as they were working on the curriculum these attributes naturally intertwined. This will not be an additional piece, they will be impeded into the curriculum naturally.

L. Rodriguez agreed with D. Cook that citizenship and working independently is important. She felt understanding numbers and data should be added.

H. Arico felt that some attributes were missing. He discussed items and sections where he thought attributes should be added such as problem solver and life long learner.

Superintendent Stevens explained there a lot of things that could be added but one thing they learned from other districts was to not put too many attributes in.

**c. Policy review**

**i. Policy 3171 Unexpended Education Funds Account**

Attachment #3

Superintendent Stevens stated the update policy now meets statutory language. He explained what this policy consists of, the point of having it and highlighted the changes that were made.

Herb Arico made a motion to approve the Policy 3171 Unexpended Education Funds Account.

Laura Rodriguez seconded the motion.

7 Yes Motion passes, unanimously

**ii. Policy 5131.911 Bullying**

Attachment #4

Superintendent Steven discussed the changes to this policy.

Herb Arico made a motion to approve the Policy 5131.911 Bullying.

Ann Grosjean seconded the motion.

7 Yes Motion passes, unanimously

**iii. Policy 4250 Reporting Child Abuse and Neglect**

Attachment #5

Superintendent Stevens reviewed all the changes to the policy.

Herb Arico made a motion to approve the Policy 4250 Reporting Child Abuse and Neglect.

Ann Grosjean seconded the motion.

7 Yes Motion passes, unanimously

**d. Approve minutes of regular meeting March 8, 2022**

Attachment #6

**e. Approve minutes of Policy Committee meeting March 3, 2022**

Attachment #7

**f. Approve minutes of Policy Committee meeting March 28, 2022**

Attachment #8

**g. Approve minutes of Policy Committee meeting April 4, 2022**

Attachment #9

**h. Approve minutes of Curriculum Committee meeting March 30, 2022**

Attachment #10

Chairperson Cunningham made a motion to approve the minutes of regular meeting March 8, 2022, minutes of Policy Committee meetings of; March 3, 2022, March 28, 2022 and April 4, 2022 and minutes of Curriculum Committee meeting March 30, 2022.

H. Arico mentioned that he thought they were receiving the minutes not approving as discussed earlier.

Chairperson Cunningham accepted the friendly amendment to say receive instead of approve.

Herb Arico seconded the motion.

L. Rodriguez stated her last name has a "g" not a "q."



Chairperson Cunningham repeated the motion to receive the minutes of regular meeting March 8, 2022, the minutes of Policy Committee meetings of; March 3, 2022, March 28, 2022 and April 4, 2022 and the minutes of Curriculum Committee meeting March 30, 2022

7 Yes Motion passes, unanimously

**i. 2021-2022 Willington Public Schools calendar update**

Attachment #11

Superintendent Stevens shared the updated school calendar that included the four snow days. He explained to the board they could consider the state minimum of 180 days of school and have the last day of school on Friday, June 17th.

D. Cook felt that the kids already are losing so much time because of the staff development days.

Chairperson Cunningham stated she believed there would be an issue for attendance when coming back for just a Monday and a half day.

L. Rodriguez stated she completely understood what D. Cook was saying. She also agreed that coming back for a Monday and Tuesday is an attendance issue, but she explained there will always be a "last day."

B. Ross stated that for students if they ended on the 17th they would have the weekend with their families then they would start a new schedule and routine on a Monday.

A. Grosjean wondered if they could vote on this in May after the snow if they have another weather event.

Chairperson Cunningham stated that they could discuss next month but it gives families less notice to have their summer plans organized, whether it's camps or daycare.

Superintendent Stevens discussed that there could be early dismissals due to heat during that time in June too.

No motion was made.

**j. Healthy Food Certification renewal**

Attachment #12

Superintendent Stevens shared what needs to be voted on and the exact wording. He explained this is what gives students reduced or free lunches and said to offer this they have to do it.

Chairperson Cunningham made a motion for all food items offered for sale in the schools in Willington School under its jurisdiction, and not exempted from the Connecticut Nutrition Standards published by the Connecticut State Department of Education, will comply with the Connecticut Nutrition Standards during the period of July 1, 2022, through June 30, 2023. This certification shall include all food offered for sale to students separately from reimbursable meals at all times and from all sources, including but not limited to school stores, vending machines, school cafeterias, culinary programs, and any fundraising activities on school premises sponsored by the school or non-school organizations and groups.

D. Cook made a friendly amendment stating that she thought this needed to read exactly as stated on the document Superintendent Stevens was sharing. It should be "Pursuant to C.G.S. Section 10-215f, the board of education or governing authority certifies that all food items offered for sale to students in the schools under its jurisdiction, and not exempted from the Connecticut Nutrition Standards published by the Connecticut State Department of Education, will comply with the Connecticut Nutrition Standards during the period of July 1, 2022, through June 30, 2023. This certification shall include all food offered for sale to students separately from reimbursable meals at all times and from all sources, including but not limited to school stores, vending machines, school cafeterias, culinary programs, and any

fundraising activities on school premises sponsored by the school or non-school organizations and groups. Chairperson Cunningham accepted the amendment.

Donna Cook seconded the motion.

7 Yes Motion passes, unanimously

Chairperson Cunningham made a motion The board of education or governing authority will allow the sale to students of food items that do not meet the Connecticut Nutrition Standards and beverages not listed in Section 10-221q of the Connecticut General Statutes provided that the following conditions are met: 1) the sale is in connection with an event occurring after the end of the regular school day or on the weekend; 2) the sale is at the location of the event; and 3) the food and beverage items are not sold from a vending machine or school store. An "event" is an occurrence that involves more than just a regularly scheduled practice, meeting, or extracurricular activity. For example, soccer games, school plays, and interscholastic debates are events but soccer practices, play rehearsals, and debate team meetings are not. The "regular school day" is the period from midnight before to 30 minutes after the end of the official school day. "Location" means where the event is being held and must be the same place as the food and beverage sales.

Laura Rodriguez seconded the motion.

7 Yes Motion passes, unanimously

#### **k. Curriculum materials for the website**

Superintendent Stevens explained the curriculum committee had met and he had shared that other districts rarely post their entire curriculum online. He stated that the curriculum is always available to look at through his office. He explained that most districts have an outline of their curriculum as it is more user-friendly for families. He showed the guides as examples from many different districts.

A. Grosjean wanted to be sure she understood that that curriculum is available for anyone that wants to look at it in his office.

D. Cook explained how she really liked how Mansfield's was set up but she felt websites and links to assist in understanding the curriculum is important to have online for anyone to do as they want in their own home. To ask families or community members to go into the superintendent's office when they want to review the curriculum is not easily accessible. Maybe a copy at the library would work too.

T. Anderson stated the curriculum is a living document that changes as teachers implement it and it's always being updated. The resources are not set in stone. So as new resources become available or teachers recommend a different resource it continuously changes. Publishing the curriculum on the website would be difficult.

L. Rodriguez explained that she agreed the main books could be on the website with the understanding that when students choose their own books for reading they might not be included there. She felt that what parents really want to know is what their child is learning and the books they will be reading. Communication with the teachers is important too. They should be able to assist parents as well, whether it's a newsletter, teacher website or digital backpack.

B. Ross explained that even as an educator she would rather go to her child's teacher directly or their website and look there for specific things. Looking at the curriculum can be very dense and it's written for a teacher so it doesn't always make sense. Curriculum Night at the school is also a great opportunity to learn and ask questions too.



Chairperson Cunningham also suggested listing the Superintendent's office phone number and hours of operation so they could go look through the curriculum there as well.

H. Arico thought the curriculum and the books are important to list on the website.

Superintendent Stevens explained he wanted to discuss further with E. Conley and K. Stevens having the list of suggested reading books per unit to be on the website.

Chairperson Cunningham stated this is not all-inclusive as children can take other books out from the library or may choose to read books that are not on the list. She suggested moving this topic to old business for the next meeting.

Superintendent Stevens suggested that the curriculum committee add this to their agenda. This will take a while to develop but slowly work on the framework and go from there. The next meeting is in May for the curriculum committee.

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

##### **a. Willington Public School COVID Protocols update**

Superintendent Stevens recommended that the board adjust their protocols, removing masks during music classes.

Donna Cook made a motion to delete the line "students participating in singing activities must wear a mask unless they can maintain 6 feet between themselves."

Briana Ross seconded the motion.

B. Ross wanted to know if families would be reminded they do have the option to wear a mask.

Superintendent Stevens stated absolutely and asked for this to go into effect on Thursday, April 14, 2022 so he could send an email out to families.

D. Cook accepted the friendly amendment for this to go into effect Thursday, April 14, 2022.

7 Yes Motion passes, unanimously

##### **b. English Language Arts Curriculum set #2**

Superintendent Stevens explained they were voting on curriculum set #2. He also explained if anyone had any questions to please feel free to reach out to him, E. Conley or K. Stevens.

Lauren Rodriguez made a motion to approve the second set of the English Language Art curriculum.

Ann Grosjean seconded the motion.

D. Cook discussed her concerns and the wording, specifically democratic reader and the word activists. She would prefer the word citizens.

E. Conley explained what these terms meant.

B. Ross agreed in wanting to protect their students but she believed in part of protecting them is teaching them how to get through this world and understanding what's happening. She shared she has trust in the educators and she was able to see the value in it.

H. Arico thought most of the curriculum was excellent, but the books did not seem age-appropriate. He believed there is so much wonderful literature out there and he did not see those offered. He found that many of the books were very negative and biased.

E. Conley stated literature is a safe way to be exposed to very hard topics, especially if you have an educator guiding the conversation. She didn't want resources taken out of context as they are in the curriculum with an intentional purpose. She asked if anyone has any questions or concerns to please reach out to her.

Tracery Anderson made a motion to approve the ELA set 2.

Laura Rodriguez seconded the motion.

Vote:	Yes	No	Abstain
H. Arico		x	
M. Cunningham	x		
D.Cook		x	
T. Anderson	x		
A.Grosjean	x		
B. Ross	x		
L. Rodriguez	x		

5 Yes 2 No Motion passes

Chairman Cunningham reminded the board to reach out to E. Conley with any questions. Try to reach out in a timely manner so they have a few days to look it over before the meeting.

T. Anderson stated that it would be helpful for the committee if questions or concerns were sent before the meeting so they can see what they are talking about and can be prepared to discuss.

#### 11. Present to Speak

Peter Latincsics, 97 Trask Road, wanted to thank H. Arico and D. Cook for raising concerns about the curriculum. He was disappointed in the discussion with the other board members regarding this topic.

Jennifer Bowes, 328 River Road, discussed how she was in favor of the curriculum. She discussed her children that had gone through the school system and that critical thinking is very important. She doesn't feel there is a lot of diversity being taught in Willington. That should start at home but if it's not happening at home she loves that the school is picking that up and teaching about it.

Jamie Koprak, Common Road, stated she was a parent that does want to see the list of books in the curriculum. She stated children develop differently at different ages and material at different ages. But without seeing the books it is hard to know what's appropriate for your child.

#### 12. Board Comment

A. Grosjean wanted to thank the Hall band teacher and the Spanish teacher and wished them good luck in their future endeavors. She also wanted to congratulate Amanda on her new position in the CES office.

L. Rodriguez wanted to thank the teachers and the administrators for everything they have been doing.



She also wanted to thank everyone for coming out for this meeting to know what was going on.

H. Arico wanted to thank the superintendent for him being on all the committees and for all he does.

T. Anderson wanted everyone to remember the curriculum is written for the teacher and professionals. She explained it is available, but the points that they are trying to teach each year would be more useful on the website than the entire curriculum. The items being taught are to help students understand the world, and learning it in a safe place.

D. Cook shared a quote from a former superintendent: "goal number is to do no harm." She went on to explain that she was contacted about a book that the school gave to a ten year old. Before she went into the book's specifics she stated that she believed it was the job, the responsibility and the right of parents to discuss and instruct children as to what and when they learn certain sensitive matters. She was advised that the book "Lily and Duncan" was given to a 10 year old. She stated the content was uncomfortable. She then read a portion of the book. She felt these are serious matters that need to be taken seriously. This is one of the reasons she is trying to read everything in the curriculum.

B. Ross wanted to say she felt they did all of the 4 "C's" during their meeting, public included, so good job! She wanted to thank the teachers and staff for guiding their students with the utmost care and professionalism. She believes in them! She is so sad to see Tracie Canistrari leaving because she has worked wonders with the band program. She wished her good luck. She also wanted to say "Muchas Gracias" to Joany Alvarado and welcome Mrs. Palotti. She also was excited to hear about increasing enrollment and that there were many new kindergarteners joining their school system in the fall.

Chairperson Cunningham wanted to add a special thanks to the staff, teachers and administrators. It takes a lot of people to make the schools work and keep the schools safe. She also wanted to say that they trust them that they are doing a great job. She thanked them for all their long hours and she recognized that they work way past school hours. They are always thinking about the kids and always have the kids' best interest at their heart. She wished them all a restful April vacation because they earned it.

### 13. **Adjournment**

Chairperson Cunningham made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 10:12 p.m.

Donna Cook seconded the motion.

7 Yes Motion passes, unanimously

Nicole Fusco  
Recording Secretary

Next regular meeting May 10, 2022

RECEIVED  
WILLINGTON, CT.  
2022 MAY -6 A 9:13  
  
TOWN CLERK