

# **WILLINGTON BOARD OF EDUCATION**

**July 12, 2022**  
**Virtual Meeting: Zoom**  
**7:00 p.m.**  
**Minutes**  
**Zoom Recorded**

## **Members Present** (all present remotely through Zoom)

Michelle Doucette Cunningham - Chair  
Herb Arico- Secretary  
Ann Grosjean- Vice-Chair: arrived at 7:57pm.  
Tracey Anderson  
Donna Cook  
Briana Ross  
Laura Rodriguez

## **Also Present**

Phil Stevens, Superintendent of Schools, Erin Conley, Director of Instruction, members of the public

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

Chair Cunningham called the meeting to order at 7:04 p.m.

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

Chair Cunningham led the Pledge of Allegiance.

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

Matt Clark, 42 Burt Latham, expressed his concern with having the curriculum accessible to the community. He strongly believed it should be available online.

Sarah Reis, 15 Pinecrest Road, expressed the importance of having the curriculum accessible to parents and families.

Arthur Christensen, 14 Birch Meadow Lane, discussed what he had heard at the curriculum meetings and was unhappy. He reviewed what Superintendent Stevens suggested as a solution and was frustrated that the curriculum committee did not agree with it. He is just asking for transparency and being able to access the curriculum.

James Marshall, 46 Fisher Hill Rd, discussed how he had been following the School Building committee meetings more closely than these but was excited to hear more about the ed specs that were supposed to be discussed at this meeting. He also explained as an architect himself these types of discussions are difficult to have with this type of forum. He felt it was more beneficial to have more engaging and open dialogue meetings to hear what the community wants with this project. He also supports having the curriculum available for families.

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

#### **a. Recognition of Herb Arico's 100th birthday**

Chair Cunningham recognized what a milestone this is and all the years he served on the Board of Education.

H. Arico thanked Chairperson Cunningham and appreciated the recognition. He stated that he has been on the board for 45 years and enjoyed it.

Superintendent Stevens stated that H. Arico served with 72 members on the Willington Board of Education and that he was the 8th Superintendent that H. Arico had served with.

Chairperson Cunningham reminded board members that the CABE Conference is coming up and they should have received an email from Brenda. It does sell out so please register quickly. She highly recommended attending it. She also reminded the board members if they want something added to the agenda to contact the Superintendent or herself three days, minimum, ahead of time. During the summer she asked to please reach out earlier. Lastly, she read a letter from a teacher that is leaving the district who could not be at the meeting. The teacher reminisced about her many years at Willington Schools and commended the district.

5. **Communications:** Sarah Reis, Michelle Christensen

6. **Superintendent Report**

**a. Enrollment**

Superintendent Stevens discussed what they expect enrollment should be for the upcoming school year.

**b. Staffing**

Superintendent Stevens discussed the continuing movement of staffing. There have been some resignations: Jamie Blustein, HMS 6th grade math; and Carla Menditto, HMS principal's secretary. He also discussed the numerous openings they currently have and the challenges they are facing with hiring.

**c. Summer school**

Superintendent Stevens discussed the summer school program operating at Center School.

**d. HMS sidewalk project**

Superintendent Stevens shared a picture of the project as it is being completed and discussed the project. He shared the first part of the project with a handicapped-accessible ramp that was installed and the rest of the project would continue over the next year.

7. **Financial Report**

**a. June 2022 Financial report**

Attachment #1

Superintendent Stevens shared what the end of 2021-2022 looked like right now. This was after the movement and approved items. He anticipated returning approximately \$100,000 minimum.

**b. Food Services financial report**

Attachment #2

Chairperson Cunningham reminded everyone that food service is a separate fund/account so that is why it is separate from the above report.

Superintendent Stevens shared the budget and went through the fund sheet and categories.

H. Arico inquired about the funds for the equipment, such as what type of equipment needed to be

purchased? He discussed his confusion as to why equipment and tools/supplies were one item. Superintendent Stevens explained they have to review their equipment and what they currently have. He also explained these items have been grouped together for a long time, probably because there used to not be a lot of funds for both.

Chairperson Cunningham reminded the board that they approve large purchases before it is bought, including for this fund.

8. **New Business**

**a. Approve minutes of June 14, 2022 meeting**

Attachment # 3

T. Anderson moved to approve the regular meeting minutes from June 14, 2022.

H. Arico seconded the motion.

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

6 yes, motion passes unanimously.

**b. Food services payroll, 2022-2023**

Superintendent Stevens explained how minimum wage impacts food services payroll and it increased to \$14/hour and then will increase again in the spring to \$15 before the end of the next school year. He proposed to have the board move right to the \$15/hour rate. He also proposed a \$2 increase for the current food service staff that has been there for years. He then discussed retention and how it works. This would be about \$14,000 total cost, which the budget shows they have the money to do so.

H. Arico inquired if they do increase pay, does it change the rates for the students for lunch and discussed the current inflation.

Superintendent Stevens explained it depends on what the state decides but he would not propose an increase for student lunch.

D. Cook made a motion to make the starting minimum wage for the food services to \$15/hour and increase the current employees \$2/hour.

L. Rodriguez seconded the motion.

7 Yes Motion passes unanimously

**c. Substitute pay, 2022-2023**

Superintendent Stevens explained there are two parts to this; nurses and the other group is teachers



and paraprofessionals. He reviewed how much substitute pay currently is and what it is around the Willington area. He proposed a raise in their pay as well. He expressed how essential the substitute nurses are.

H. Arico made a motion for substitute pay for nurses to be increased to \$225 a day.

D. Cook seconded the motion.

7 Yes Motion passes unanimously.

Superintendent Stevens explained the teacher and paraprofessional pay as well. He proposed an increase which was very similar to the food services pay.

D. Cook made a motion to accept the schedule per the Superintendent's rates for \$15 an hour.

Chairperson Cunningham asked D. Cook if she would accept a friendly amendment to accept all four levels.

D. Cook did mean the whole column of rates that were suggested by Superintendent Stevens.

D. Cook made a motion to accept the rates under the 6.1.2022 heading.

H. Arico seconded the motion.

H. Arico asked if Willington was aligned with other towns and the pay for substitutes and what the pay would be for long-term substitutes.

Superintendent Stevens explained that Willington is right in the middle, meaning above in some cases and slightly lower in others. The buffer helps attract substitutes to take jobs at the schools. He also explained the different pay for long-term substitutes.

Chairperson Cunningham asked if this will help substitutes want to work at their schools.

Superintendent Stevens explained he thinks it helps and the pay definitely makes it more attractive.

7 Yes Motion passes, unanimously.

#### **d. Kindergarten staffing**

Superintendent Stevens discussed upcoming enrollment and the need for more than two teachers. He discussed the different choices the board had to help with this situation and how the budget would be affected.

D. Cook asked if having a floating paraprofessional would be an option.

Superintendent Stevens explained why having an extra teacher would be more beneficial and easier for the other kindergarten teachers and students.

H. Arico believed smaller classes would be more beneficial for younger students, such as kindergarten. He also asked about the funds that would be left after hiring someone. He also was

wondering if there was a classroom available.

Superintendent Stevens stated that there was one classroom available, which typically was used for Spanish.

A. Grosjean asked if the cost for two paraprofessionals was the same pay as one teacher.

Superintendent Stevens explained it depends especially with who they hire and their experience. There are many factors that could change the pay.

D. Cook inquired about the current kindergarten staff's pay.

Superintendent Stevens explained the process of how pay increases take place for teachers and where a new teacher would be placed on the pay tier. He also discussed the money that is currently in this fund and if they could afford a new teacher.

L. Rodriguez inquired about the past few years and enrollment.

Superintendent Stevens stated it changes yearly and some years all the children that move into town happen to be for one particular grade. This year seems to be kindergarten-age children.

D. Cook wanted to know what would happen if students in kindergarten move out and they don't need the new kindergarten teacher anymore?

Superintendent Stevens explained that typically this number does not go backward, especially in Kindergarten.

H. Arico made a motion that they withdraw \$118,000 from the non-lapsing fund with the purpose of hiring a third kindergarten teacher.

L. Rodriguez seconded the motion.

Chairperson Cunningham asked H. Arico if he would accept a friendly amendment to accept up to \$118,000 rather than the exact amount.

H. Arico accepted that.

7 Yes Motion passes, unanimously.

#### **e. Review English Language Arts curriculum, set #4**

Superintendent Stevens explained he had the first three sets in a binder in his office for anyone to look at. He reminded everyone this is the last set that they are reviewing. He discussed how the creators are developing the curriculum and what they are including.

D. Cook expressed how she would like to have a further discussion regarding the curriculum. She discussed her concerns regarding the curriculum and wondered when it would be appropriate to hold a special meeting on Teachers' College so that parents could ask questions.

Chairperson Cunningham stated that D. Cook's concerns were not included in the Willington english language arts curriculum but were from the website that she researched.

D. Cook discussed being a democratic reader, being an activist as opposed to being an advocate, and the philosophy of Teachers' College in Columbia, and that she doesn't feel comfortable with the things they stand for.

Chairman Cunningham took a moment of privilege to say that she thought D. Cook's interpretation of an activist is taking it a step further than she has experienced and the words activist and advocate are much closer together.

T. Anderson expressed how methods are important in the curriculum as well and inquired if Erin or Kristen could explain how this is being implemented into this set.

E. Conley explained in detail the science of reading and how they are incorporating it into this curriculum. She shared the 7 shifts. She shared a few resources that would be helpful to understand. She then used a visual to show an example of a diagnostic assessment.

D. Cook asked for the presentation from E. Conley to be posted online for parents to find and review.

Chairperson Cunningham explained it would be on the site for the district.

L. Rodriguez made a motion to approve the English Language Arts Curriculum set #4.

B. Ross 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 Abstain Motion passes

**f. Willington Education Association experience grid solution**

Attachment #4

Superintendent Stevens explained how credited years of teaching experience work using a grid. He explained why it is not working and listed all the committees and people he brought this issue to. He shared a new grid and proposal to help with the issue. He shared an example using four actual Willington teachers' salaries and what steps/years they are on. His proposal would begin at the beginning of the 2022-2023 school year.

L. Rodriguez asked for clarification regarding the salaries, tiers and savings.

Superintendent Stevens explained in further detail.

D. Cook inquired about how the new proposal will affect levels and if they will go down or be penalized.



Superintendent Stevens explained current teachers would not be penalized.

A. Grosjean inquired if this would go into their current contracts.

Superintendent Stevens explained the process and how they would proceed if this proposal was accepted.

H. Arico inquired more about the grid and the salary account.

Superintendent Stevens explained with the grant that it's a wash and does not affect the account this school year. But changes throughout the school year can affect this. He discussed further who it impacts if they do change the grid. He also gave an example of how this has affected the school district and losing staff.

A. Grosjean inquired if the union was ok with this proposal.

Superintendent Stevens stated, yes it was unanimous at both schools.

T. Anderson made a motion to approve the new salary schedule for the 2022-2025 school years and make the adjustment to the ten employees to adjust their salary steps to fit the new schedule.

A. Grosjean seconded the motion.

7 Yes Motion passes, unanimously.

## 9. Old Business

### a. Educational Specifications: square footage review

Superintendent Stevens shared the draft document with the square footage for classrooms, specialized rooms, special education, administrative space, common areas, service areas, grossing factors, locker rooms, auditorium and extra classrooms. He discussed the square footage they are approved for regarding the school building grant and what they really may need for space. He discussed a space waiver and the process to apply.

Chairperson Cunningham inquired what Superintendent Stevens wanted from the board tonight.

Superintendent Stevens asked for some direction so he would know what his next steps are regarding adding the square footage with the locker rooms, auditorium and extra classroom.

Board members discussed their concerns regarding enrollment, needing more classrooms and auditorium vs gymnasium.

Chairperson Cunningham suggested each board member give their opinion strictly on square footage for tonight and thoughts on locker rooms, auditorium and extra classrooms.

A. Grosjean inquired what Superintendent Stevens would need to bring to the state and how to present this information.

Superintendent Stevens explained that he wanted the board to really see what square footage they already need before adding locker rooms, auditorium and extra classroom. He then discussed what

the potential referendum questions would be for the town.

Chairperson Cunningham suggested asking for a minimum of 81,000 square feet and making the case strongly why they need the extra space if needed.

L. Rodriguez agreed with Chairperson Cunningham.

B. Ross, T. Anderson, A. Grosjean and H. Arico agreed with the other board members.

D. Cook expressed she would like to see the extra space for the classrooms and have the gymnasium larger so it's more usable instead of an auditorium.

Chairperson Cunningham explained the board would need to schedule another meeting to include the town and what their thoughts are regarding this.

**b. Posting the curriculum on the website**

Chairperson Cunningham explained that they understand parents want to be included in their children's education and how important this topic is. She suggested having more ways of communication between school and home so parents can be more involved. She then inquired with Superintendent Stevens about copyright and posting the curriculum online.

Superintendent Stevens explained he had contacted their lawyer regarding copyright. He explained the email he received stating if the curriculum is put onto the website it would be copyright infringement. He then discussed examples of this and why this is the case.

Chairperson Cunningham stated what seemed legal was having binders available.

Superintendent Stevens explained the binders would be at his office and could be checked out overnight.

D. Cook inquired if they could be stored at the public library.

Chairperson Cunningham stated that the binders would need to not be available for interlibrary loans. They would only be able to be taken out by Willington residents. She also stated her concern with what type of binder is used they would not want people to be able to take pages out.

D. Cook suggested only people with Willington library cards should be able to take it out.

Chairperson Cunningham suggested discussing this further with the library.

L. Rodriguez reminded everyone that this is more than just one binder. She also discussed what they could put on their website that could help a parent of a third grader to really understand what their child is learning.

Chairperson Cunningham reviewed what the board discussed regarding this issue and once approved where they could keep the curriculum available for parents.

Superintendent Stevens stated this would be discussed once teachers return from summer break.



The board agreed that transparency is important and communicating with the parents. Also providing a "digest" on the website without infringing copyright.

Superintendent Stevens agreed and discussed some options E. Conley might be able to do too.

T. Anderson discussed some concerns parents have had that she has heard through these meetings and "Present to speak." She just wanted to be sure parents know how to deal with these issues.

B. Ross inquired if during PD days these issues could be discussed.

#### **10. Present to Speak**

Arthur Christensen, 14 Birch Meadow Lane, gave a suggestion to use a private website for sharing the curriculum. He also commented on current communication between teachers and home and how unsatisfied he was with it previously. He then wanted to thank whoever purchased the water bottles for Earth Day as they were made in the USA. He appreciated that. Lastly, he wanted to express his disappointment that there were no improvements made to the school using ARPA funds.

James Marshall, 46 Fisher Hill Rd, expressed his excitement with the increase in enrollment. He discussed his concerns and thoughts regarding the ed specs and efficiency. He stated he is excited about this project and thinks it's important to get the community involved.

Nicholas Tella, Mirtl Road expressed his concerns about a new school and merging the two schools together. He would not like a new school built. He also discussed activism and what it means to him.

Ralph Tulis, 47 Village Hill Road, discussed his frustration with the wording towards "renovation" regarding Hall School. He explained it is not that simple. He explained it is more of a reconfiguration and a renovation.

#### **11. Board Comment**

H. Arico wanted to thank the Superintendent for the building specifications. He also stated that he hoped to have a full staff in the fall; he knows it won't be easy. Lastly, he thanked Chairperson Cunningham for recognizing his birthday.

A. Grosjean was glad they modified their salary grid and hopes to retain their excellent teachers. She wished H. Arico a happy birthday as well.

L. Rodriguez wanted to wish H. Arico a happy birthday too. She also stated how excited she was to attend the 8th-grade graduation and finally meet H. Arico in person. She was sad to say goodbye to the staff that was leaving and enjoyed the letter that was written to them.

T. Anderson wanted to agree with all that was said by the other board members and wanted to thank the community members that joined the meeting tonight.

D. Cook thanked everyone that showed up for the meeting and would like to know if there is a way they could structure their meetings to not be three hours long.

B. Ross agreed with the other board comments and thanked them.

Chair Cunningham stated she already had her chance above to comment so there was no need to add any more at this time.

12. **Adjournment**

D. Cook made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 10:10 pm.

L. Rodriguez seconded the motion.

7 Yes Motion passes, unanimously

Nicole Fusco  
Recording Secretary

**Next regular meeting August 9, 2022**

RECEIVED  
WILLINGTON, CT.  
2022 JUL 28 P 1:41  
  
TOWN CLERK