

**WILLINGTON BOARD OF EDUCATION**  
**Tuesday, September 12, 2023**  
**Virtual Meeting: Hybrid (in-person and online)**  
**7:00 p.m.**  
**Minutes**  
Zoom Recorded

**Members Present**

Michelle Doucette Cunningham - Chair  
Ann Grosjean - Vice-Chair  
Tracey Anderson  
Dr. Laura Rodriguez  
Briana Ross  
Arthur Christensen

**Members Absent**

Donna Cook

**Also Present**

Superintendent Phil Stevens  
Director of Curriculum and Instruction Dr. Erin Conley

**1. Call to order**

Chair Cunningham called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

**2. Pledge of Allegiance**

Chair Cunningham led the Pledge of Allegiance

**3. Present to Speak**

Ralph Tulis 47 Village Hill Road remarked that he attended the ad hoc meeting earlier and he thinks the RFP was well constructed, however, he said he was concerned about QA&M's response. He suggested putting the RFP out again for the chance to get more than one response.

Nick Tella 49 Mirtl Road commented that he believes town officials should sit down with QA&M to clarify what the request was. He suggested having this happen in a special meeting session where the public can listen in.

Matthew Clark 42 Burt Latham Road attended an earlier subcommittee meeting and voiced concerns of QA&M's reaction and said he would recommend against interviewing a firm that did not meet the RFP. He urged the board of education to reach out now to the board of selectmen to discuss the town's capacity for repairs and rebuilding Hall and Center Schools. He noted that calculating the cost and calculating Willington's ability to pay are two different things.

#### **4. Chairman's Report**

Chair Cunningham had no new reports.

#### **5. Communications**

Chair Cunningham had no new communications.

#### **6. Superintendent Report**

##### **a. Opening of school**

Superintendent Stevens noted that there was a great opening to school. Convocation and professional development sessions were well received by staff. Professional development was provided for project-based learning and the writing revolution, along with conducting many other meetings to prepare for the start of school. Meet and greets were extremely well attended and students and staff made a smooth transition back to school.

##### **b. Enrollment**

P. Stevens also discussed enrollment, with 218 students at Center School, and 179 students at Hall School. He also noted that 24 students transferred out of the school district and 23 students moved into the district.

##### **c. Coventry bus strike**

P. Stevens discussed the Coventry bus strike. The district was notified on Wednesday, August 30th about the potential bus driver strike impact on Willington. Willington's contract is not in negotiations, but our Willington group operates under the same Teamsters Local 671. Families were notified that the town was unsure if buses would be impacted and to be on the lookout for an early morning communication from me on September 5th. At this point, there have been no issues with transportation despite the strike continuing in Coventry. He thanked our local drivers.

##### **d. Emergency dismissal**

P. Stevens mentioned that the heat wave that came through last week disrupted three days of school, Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday. Families were notified about the early closure the day before each occurrence. Classroom temperatures, particularly at HMS were well into the 80's. The lack of ventilation at Hall School really impacted classroom temperatures as we were unable to exhaust the warm air overnight. P. Stevens said he would continue to make this type of safety decision should it occur again. Staff were able to use the time to engage in professional development and planning each day

A Grosjean said that heat-related early dismissals used to be unordinary, but have become normal. She asked that with repairs being planned for the school, would there ever be a time when it is safe to have the kids in school at these temperatures.

P. Stevens replied that Center School has air conditioning in the downstairs hallway, but not the classrooms, and that it makes the classrooms bearable, however when temperatures are in the 90s it is not enough. He said that long term with appropriate ventilation and a/c schools would not need to close.



e. Grants

P. Stevens noted that he keeps applying for state grants that keep popping up. They have applied for a math tutoring grant, Title IV grant, and IDEA special education grant. There are applications in the works for several other grants including Title I, Title II, Title III, and two different right-to-read grants.

f. Staffing

P. Stevens shared that two staff members had left since the last meeting. Maggie Almquist, a paraprofessional at HMS, and Marla Pokorny, a special education teacher at CES. P. Stevens noted that there are six new hires, Ashley Parent a CES para, Natasia Chandler an HMS para, Teagan Johnson an HMS para, Kierstyn Lake a CES para, Louise Rivard a CES special education teacher and Elizabeth Nyser, a mental health specialist.

g. Building projects

P. Stevens also discussed building projects. At HMS, there are some newly carpeted spaces, new tiled spaces, new stair treads, and the fire alarm installation is 99% complete. Some replacement windows were installed, additional security cameras, and sidewalks were replaced around the building. CES had their sidewalks repaired, replacement windows installed, the fire alarm was installed, and heating repairs completed.

h. Facilities study RFP response

P. Stevens also noted that there was only one response to our facilities study. The subcommittee just met before this meeting and they will be interviewing QA+M. He noted that what they got back in response was not quite what they were looking for and that they would be getting more information. If the interview goes well, the subcommittee will make a recommendation in October. If it does not go well or the price goes up significantly they will re-open for applications.

i. Upcoming events

P. Stevens noted that curriculum nights are coming up in October. There is a ½ day professional development day this Friday. There are currently walk-throughs scheduled for 4 board members, and Brenda is still working on others.

P. Stevens stated that he talked to the State and said that they were not allowed to use the school lunch funds for kids who do not qualify. He noted that he is going to make sure that kids in schools are fed. P. Stevens said he would advocate to not raise lunch prices.

A. Christensen stated that he spoke with Principal Lisa Cushing at CES about getting a popcorn machine as an affordable fun snack. He also suggested using school lunch funds to cover the service charge parents are charged when they deposit lunch funds online.

P. Stevens responded that he would check the USDA guidelines to see what was allowable.

Chair Cunningham responded that the issue is subject to federal regulations, but it is

something to look into.

## **7. Financial Report**

### **a. September 2023 financial report**

Attachment #1

P. Stevens stated that a lot of that money is going to be spent on special ed because there are a lot of expenses that have not been encumbered yet and that the district has two additional out-of-district placements. P. Stevens said that he is being very cautious with the budget. He said that there are still \$150,000 in grants that are not applied. P. Stevens said that staffing adjustments still need to be made for Center School for a new special education teacher as well as paras. P. Stevens said that transportation, utility costs, health services, and curriculum and staff development are typical for this time of year.

P. Stevens noted that he does not like showing a bottom line that does not include expenses that will be encumbered in the future.

## **8. New Business**

### **a. Approve Regular Meeting Minutes of August 2023**

Attachment #2

A. Christensen moved to approve the minutes of August 2023.

L. Rodriguez seconded the motion.

The motion passed unanimously.

### **b. Approve curriculum committee meeting minutes, August 2023.**

Attachment #3

L. Rodriguez moved to approve the curriculum meeting minutes of August 2023.

A. Grosjean seconded the motion.

The motion passed unanimously.

### **c. Memorandum of Agreement: WESS Staff Support Specialist**

Attachment #4

P. Stevens explained that they moved the utility position into the regular budget, one for each school. The negotiation committee discussed the pay for the position. The name for the position was also discussed and was changed from Utility Staff to Staff Support Specialist. The pay rate proposal is aligned with the paraprofessional group. The union rep, as well as the attorney, read the MOA and they are both happy with it. The union rep. has signed off on it. He recommended approving the MOA.

Chair Cunningham added that signing the contract does not mean that the position will be funded in the future, it is done year by year.

A. Christensen stated he believed the position would be very beneficial to staff.

A. Christensen moved to accept the memorandum of agreement on the staff support specialist.



T. Anderson seconded the motion.

The motion passed unanimously.

**d. Math Curriculum**

P. Stevens stated that the subcommittee met on August 8th and shared their feedback with him and Dr. Conley. Edits were made and the full math curriculum was sent to board members on August 9th.

Chair Cunningham noted that this was not necessarily up for a vote tonight. This was for feedback and a second meeting would be held on the math curriculum. She also thanks Dr. Conley for making edits.

A. Christensen said that he would like more time to review the curriculum before a vote due to the length of the document.

Chair Cunningham agreed to wait an extra month for a vote.

P. Stevens said that it would be beneficial to email him questions, comments, and concerns, and then he could put that person in touch with Dr. Conley if needed.

Chair Cunningham asked that page numbers be included with questions, and that questions and comments be asked or made within the next three weeks.

**9. Old Business**

There was no old business to discuss.

**10. Present to Speak**

Nick Tella 49 Mirtl Road said that it would be a good opportunity for public members to tour the schools with the Board members because public members are allowed to tour with a proper appointment.

Stewart Fisher 65 Balazs Road announced himself as a democratic nominee for first selectman. He stated that he enjoyed the board meeting, and applauded the board for the work that they do.

John Mitchell 64 Timber Lane stated that he is running for the Board of Education as a republican candidate. He stated that he really liked the ten-year plan to repair the buildings and make a better space for the kids.

**11. Board Comments**

A. Christensen welcomed everyone back for a new school year. He stated all of the work and fundraising done by the PTA including bake sales, trunk or treat, and fun run. He encouraged parents and community members to get involved because the PTA has a lot of things that they want to do and need more support to do it. He also noted that he would like

to see more teacher involvement, saying he was sure they had great ideas. Those interested in joining can email [membership.willingtonpta@gmail.com](mailto:membership.willingtonpta@gmail.com).

A. Grosjean thanked the bus drivers for standing by the children and getting them to school safely. She also thanked Erin and the teachers for the Math Curriculum and for their hard work and a great start to the school year.

L. Rodriguez thanked everyone involved with getting school started this year. She noted that she was able to go to the convocation. She noted P. Stevens did a great job integrating Ted Lasso into his presentation. She thanked teachers for the work they do to get their classrooms up and running. Rodriguez thanked the bus drivers for standing by the kids as well. She also welcomed new members coming on and is looking forward to a great year.

B. Ross stated that she made it a goal to remember Mr. Folino's and Mr. Jensen's names as she felt they were important members of their faculty. She stated she is looking forward to a fresh new school year.

T. Anderson thanked P. Stevens for working for grants for the district. She also stated that she appreciated the transition to hybrid meetings.

Chair Cunningham thanked board members for what they do because they care about the school and thanked them for their time. She also stated that those listening on ZOOM are welcome to come in and join the meeting in person. She also encouraged public members to email any questions or comments that they may have.

## **12. Adjournment**

A. Christensen motioned to adjourn the meeting.

L. Rodriguez seconded

The motion passed unanimously, meeting adjourned at 8:00 p.m.

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WILLINGTON, CT.

2023 SEP 18 P 12:50

  
TOWN CLERK