

WILLINGTON BOARD OF EDUCATION

Tuesday, June 9, 2020

Regular Meeting Minutes

Via Online Public Zoom Video Conference

7:00 p.m.

Audio Recording: Yes

Video Recording: Yes

Notes Taken: Yes

Members Present

Herb Arico - Chairman

Elena Testa - Vice Chairman

Michelle Doucette Cunningham - Secretary

Ann Grosjean

Tracey Anderson

Donna Cook

(Liz Perry submitted her resignation effective April 9, 2020)

Members Absent

Also Present

Superintendent of Schools, Phil Stevens

First Selectwoman Erika Wiecenski

Members of the Public

Chairman Herb Arico called the meeting to order at 7:04 pm.

Chairman Arico led the Pledge of Allegiance.

Present to Speak

Dr. Catherine Galagher of 5 Lucerne Drive was present to speak. She stated she would like to voice a request to the board chairman to re-open the discussion on the decision to not move forward with the community health centers student based health services program. She added in this moment where crisis learning and trauma informed pedagogy are ever more relevant I think it would behoove the board to reconsider this in terms of what is best for our children, our teachers, and our district at large. The benefits are exponential and the risk is quite minimal. Additional mental health services at no cost to the district only indicates future positive outcomes. This program provides better access to mental health services and will make students better equipped to deal with the twenty-first century learning

environment which is drastically changing everyday. Dr. Gallagher stated this will help them behaviorally and academically. It will allow educators to facilitate a more productive environment in the classroom, help improve learning outcomes, and improve test scores, all things that directly affect our district. Providing free services to students now, will better prepare them for life in general. We easily forget these are the kids that will soon be running the world and taking care of us. Supporting them now, only indicates a potential for a better outcome for the future. I urge the board to reconsider the previous vote and add the student based health services program to the future agenda. As a parent, local business owner, and educator myself, she thinks the topic is worth our time and should not be ignored.

Christopher Toomey of 33 Baxter Road was present to speak. He stated he is a parent of a Hall School student as well as three Hall School alumni and also a teacher in nearby Mansfield. I would also like to ask you to reconsider your decision on the student based health services. Social and emotional learning has become a primary point of emphasis in public schools. Here in Connecticut as well as throughout the country, social and emotional learning empowers students to recognize and manage their emotions, recognize the emotions of their peers, develop positive relationships skills, and helps them learn to make decisions in a responsible manner. These skills are vital to students' success in this time when students are asked to do a great deal of collaboration. Despite the fact that school staff puts a lot of emphasis on social and emotional learning, there are many children who demonstrate significant deficits and needs that surpass the scope of day to day instructions and require more intensive intervention and treatment. The student based health services could provide this intervention and support for those children at no cost to the families who are uninsured and at no cost to our district because of a grant opportunity. I hope you will reconsider your decision and vote to enter into a partnership with student based health services.

Sarah Baker of 7 Ridgewood Road was present to speak. She stated, she is also a parent of a Hall School student as well as the director of member experience for an insurer, although she is not speaking on behalf of them she wanted to offer some insight on the same issue of access to mental health services. She stated this is one of the number one struggles that I hear from our members. There are two key issues behind this, the first being the cost of these services and the second is the availability. In Connecticut, most of the population is covered by private insurance, the majority through their employers. Most of these employers have self funded arrangements which means they are exempt from state mandates and have a lot of leeway. Most have gone with high deductible health plans which are regulated at a federal level and require that most services are subject to a deductible before the health insurer picks up any cost which can range from \$1,400 to well over \$6,000. The average cost of a counseling visit is \$90 so a child with weekly visits would cost close to \$400 per month out of pocket which is simply unaffordable for many families and even if they can afford this cost, access is still an issue as there is an acknowledged shortage of behavioral health providers. It can take dozens of phone calls to find a qualified individual who is accepting new patients and longer to find someone who is taking patients after school hours. You may need to travel 30-40 minutes for an appointment which is hours of missed work time for parents making it very difficult to help their children get the care they need. In terms of need we look at what is called adverse childhood events which are measures of exposure to trauma such as divorce, economic instability, victims of or witnesses to emotional abuse, and household members who have mental illness or substance abuse issues. In our town 70% of the children have exposure to at least one of these and 30% are exposed to three or more. Many could testify as to how these inhibit their ability to engage in learning and really develop the relationships they need with teachers and authoritative figures to become successful in life. Programs such as this one are really built to combat the effect of these adverse events and give the child resilience and the skills they need to be successful. Today, a middle school student is more likely to die from suicide as they are from a traffic accident. There is a mental health crisis and

parents are struggling to access the services. As a town we should be working to facilitate mental health service for our children and I hope the board will reconsider this program.

Sarah Smith was present to speak. She stated she wanted to add her support and appreciation to the articulate people who spoke tonight and does think there are a lot of people requesting this review and another meeting where teachers and the public can be allowed to address the issue.

Tom Kelly of 100 Common Road was present to speak. He stated he is a father of two students in Hall School. The times we live in with people getting killed by the police, people running through town with machetes, people losing their jobs and no one leaving their home seem like good reasons to need counseling.

Greg Grzywacz of 16 Angela Lane was present. He stated he has three children in the school system and holds a Masters Degree in psychology. He stated he would like to underscore everything that has been articulated by everyone. He added in current times we had an extremely traumatic event in town of which our kids are likely hyper aware of due to media coverage and furthermore as we start to go back to a new normal, there will be a lot of adjustment and this is the type of environment in which we hear about things such as increased domestic abuse. There are a lot of these adverse circumstances at play going on for which people might need an outlet now more so than ever. I would like to encourage this to be re-visited.

Dr. Sandra Hughes of 74 Willington Hill Road was present. She stated she has two children in the school system and she is also a local physician of family medicine. I have dealt with patients with mental health illness on a daily basis even before Covid-19 and the pandemic, it has been an on-going issue. Our children today have an incredible amount of stress put on them on a regular basis and with all the increased stresses it's only that much more difficult for them to deal with their own personal issues as well as all the issues around them. Their families are more stressed by financial issues or for personal reasons there's more on their plates. Anything we can do to help support them so they can focus on their job which is to learn is useful. I'd like them to revisit this topic.

Chairman's Report

Chairman Arico stated the Willington School year is gradually drawing to a close after a very difficult year. The Board of Education, the administration, staff, students, parents, and the community have responded exceptionally well to the change in educational environments. We still have many major issues to face as we move forward and even during the closing of the school year with graduation which is in progress, summer school, serving special education students, busing, and the reopening of our schools safely in the fall. Reopening the schools in the fall will probably be a major undertaking and will take additional funding. We cannot forfeit our Willington student's future because of that so we need to continue to invest in our schools so that children continue to receive the high quality education they need and deserve.

Communication

There was no communication.

Superintendent Reports

a. Retirements and resignation

Superintendent Stevens stated we received a resignation letter from Laura Hurd. 5th grade teacher Laura Hurd has been in Willington for over 10 years. Laura went above and beyond implementing our Interim

Learning Plan for her students. I've heard Laura will be traveling the world on her bicycle and we wish her well.

HMS principal Ken Craig has resigned from his position at the end of this school year. Ken has been in Willington for four years and led some transformative change at Hall School. Ken is moving on to an elementary school principal position in his hometown of Wethersfield. I've worked closely with Ken over the last four years and greatly appreciate his dedication to his students and school. I wish him well and hope our paths cross in the future.

I've already mentioned our other retirements, but as it is the end of the year wanted to share them quickly again. Willa Berghuis, kindergarten teacher at CES, is retiring after 34 years in the district. Donna Campagna, paraprofessional, is retiring after 20+ years with us. And lastly, Wendy Knight, food services director, is retiring after 21 years of service. I would like to thank all our staff leaving us for their dedication to the Willington Public Schools and wish them well in their future endeavors.

b. HMS Principal search

Superintendent Stevens stated we posted the principal opening and currently have 24 applications. It will be 2 weeks this Thursday and we are in the process of forming a comprehensive search committee. We will need a Board member on the committee and will be discussing that later in the agenda. The timeline at this point has a screening interview on June 25 through Zoom with administrators only, and then the committee will host first round interviews on July 2 also through Zoom. The committee will host onsite interviews for the second round which will occur on July 9. I plan on moving this search quickly to try to appoint a candidate at our July Board meeting.

Donna Cook asked if the job description was looked at, reviewed and possibly tweaked to make sure that it fits what we know our needs are or perceived needs are going forward? Superintendent Stevens replied some postings only include job requirements, what we do in our postings is prioritize and let people know the types of things we are looking for such as a collaborative leader, knowledgeable, visible in the community, and has certain background experience. It doesn't necessarily change the job description because that is so lengthy but it is specific to the things we are looking for.

Chairman Arico asked, during the screening how many do you plan to present to the board or do you make the selection? Superintendent Stevens replied it is really his choice on who to hire but thinks it's a good process for a candidate to come in front of the board. In the past I've only brought you one candidate because we've had one candidate each time that has been the front runner. In the initial screening process if we have fifteen candidates that we feel are qualified, we will screen all fifteen. We want the best candidate for the district and sometimes it takes time to decide this. When we do a second round in person this is when we really whittle the numbers down.

Chairman Arico asked if most of the candidates are from Connecticut or are some out of state. Superintendent Stevens replied after a quick glance at the candidates he believes most are from Connecticut with possibly a couple from out of state but either way they must possess Connecticut certification.

c. Food Services Director search: summer meals

The food services director position will have been posted for two weeks tomorrow. At this point we have four applications. I am also expecting a proposal from a nearby district to consider the possibility of sharing a director, but can't speak to the feasibility of this concept until I see the proposal. Our director does a lot of hands on work which is not typical for a director. I hope to interview candidates next week and have an appointment soon. If I have a qualified candidate I will make the appointment so we don't experience a gap

in services as Wendy retires at the end of the month.

Donna Cook asked that since Wendy has done this job seamlessly for so long, have you had her make a pretty indepth list of the things she does and is responsible for versus the things she delegates to other people so that you know what to tell the person stepping in. Superintendent Stevens replied yes, I have performed my exit interview with Wendy and she gave me some good feedback about things we could improve on from a policy standpoint and she is also documenting everything in a binder manual. She will have this prepared for whoever the next person is. We also have a contact with the state who has been very helpful moving the process forward and to make sure we ask all the right questions.

Ann Grosjean asked if Wendy will have an opportunity to work with the next person and help them get started. Superintendent Stevens replied he did offer Wendy to be a consultant for a period of time depending on the experience level of the new director. We would have to pay her and make it worth her time.

d. School closure status

Schools are closed for the remainder of the school year. Both school principals have worked to allow teachers into their classrooms to do simple preparations for summer cleaning. We have also worked with families to return their belongings. Social distancing and safety protocols were implemented during both events. Thank you to our staff for helping work through the process of these tasks.

e. Interim Learning Plan

The Interim Learning Plan is winding down for the school year. At this point we are operating with teacher lessons and special events including the CES talent show, Hall Idol, virtual field days, and virtual field trips. Though this transition was not perfect, and we would rather have been in school, all our staff did an amazing job with our plan. Superintendent Stevens showed an exemplary lesson by a group of teachers, Katie Rychling (STEAM teacher), Tracie Canestrari (band teacher) and Becky Muldoon (HMS health). The district offered professional development on how to create a remote bitmoji classroom and these teachers created a field trip to Willington with an escape room!

Chairman Arico asked if the special education students are included in the plan. Superintendent Stevens replied yes they are part of it and case managers and families work together. So if the lessons the classroom teachers were putting out to the group were not at the specific targeted goals and objectives of that students IEP, then the special education case manager would modify it. In some cases they have modified everything and they have followed a totally different plan. Some of the case managers are Zooming one to one with students and providing support, but it is all targeted towards their goals and objectives of their IEP. As far as students who are outplaced, they also have a program which is driven by the outplacement and they were required to do the same thing based upon their IEP.

f. CES and HMS Promotion Ceremonies (graduation)

We will be facilitating our promotion ceremonies in a unique fashion this year. We will be driving around town in a school bus and our administrators will be presenting our 4th and 8th grade students with their promotion certificates. This intricate ceremony will take about 5 hours for each grade level. The 8th grade promotion is this Friday, and 4th grade is next Tuesday. Though we are disappointed we are unable to offer an onsite ceremony, we are making the most of the situation within the safety parameters. We have the Kona Ice truck following the school bus to provide a special treat. Thank you to Willington Fire department #1 for providing an emergency truck with lights for safety. We will be using Facebook live to notify families where we are on the designated route and will be filming a large portion of the ceremonies which will be put into a promotional video for the students.

g. Special education summer school

The onsite summer school requirements were extremely challenging to meet and we've decided to offer our special education summer school program remotely this summer. Our pupil services director is working with our staff and families to provide a program that will meet the needs of our students through Zoom. We're confident we can provide a meaningful learning experience to meet IEP requirements.

h. School Reopening Committee

We will be creating a school reopening advisory committee once we have requirements from the State Department of Education regarding opening in the fall. The advisory committee will be composed of members from all unions, the BOE, parents and invited guests including a member of the local health department, M&J Bus, food services, etc. My administrative team has already met several times to discuss potential hybrid models and schedules to return in the fall. At this point, we will need the requirements from the state to move forward. We expect we may see specific guidelines around social distancing, which impacts items such as class size, transportation, recess and lunch. One of the largest inhibitors could be social distancing on buses if we are required to transport students in small groups. Though we have developed a model to meet this requirement, it may increase our transportation costs significantly. I have heard one of the models the state is considering is a shortened week, but until we have details it will be really challenging to plan and make adjustments.

i. Professional development, 2020

We are looking forward to professional development opportunities for our staff in the fall. Specifically, we are looking to work with Eastconn's Gary Petersen to facilitate more training for our staff around the Readers and Writers Workshop. If we are not in school physically, Gary also has the ability to adjust his training to focus on remote learning. Also, we will be committing to Eastconn for professional development from Dr. Ravit Stein, who also works around trauma sensitive instruction and de-escalating strategies. This will be critical for our staff as we welcome students back to our buildings. Lastly, we will be providing professional development around the Portrait of a Graduate, and will be including culturally-responsive teaching strategies and identifying grade level expectations for students.

j. Portrait of a Graduate

Last week I sent a letter on behalf of the district regarding the responsibility of the Willington Public Schools to teach students specific skills to combat social injustice. Students need to develop into strong individuals who possess the tools to be anti-racist, and we need explicit instruction in our curriculum. We are in the process of creating a Portrait of the Graduate, a perfect platform for identifying curricular grade-level expectations to teach students the critical skills needed to address social injustice. We will be utilizing a subcommittee of our POG committee and our district diversity committee to focus on this portion of the portrait of a graduate. As a district, we need to be more direct in teaching these skills, and this includes providing professional development for staff.

Chairman Arico asked how much of the curriculum time is devoted to the Portrait of a Graduate or is it intertwined with the regular curriculum? Superintendent Stevens replied it is intertwined. It is not meant to add another thing for teachers to teach, it's meant to integrate into and be present across all areas of the building with expectations students should achieve by 8th grade. Chairman Arico asked if this process will be from kindergarten all the way to 8th grade? Superintendent Stevens replied yes pre-k through 8th grade. This is not a new idea, a lot of districts are doing it and we are very aware of what E.O. Smith is doing and we are trying to make sure we are funneling our work to align with their expectations.

k. Transportation negotiation

I signed our agreement with M&J to meet the Governor's executive order 7R requiring a continuation of

payment for student transportation services. We agreed to the same settlement as many other districts. Our agreement requires payment of 55% of our bill from March 16 - May 15. We will pay 90% of our contracted rate from May 15 to the end of the school year. The difference between the two rates is the rehiring of M&J staff, which again, meets executive order 7R. The savings is approximately \$46,000.

Financial Report

A. 2019-2020 Budget Update

The programs are starting to balance out at this point. As you can see, we have over \$500,000 remaining in the budget at the time of this report.

Program 1 Center School is about the same. Program 2 Hall School still has money from the open positions we didn't fill for a period of time, and a grant transition from CES to HMS. I have some good news to report around program 3 Special Education. Though we were approximately \$180,000 in the red as a result of outplacements, we were able to greatly impact the shortfall with savings from our decision to take employees into the classified WESS union instead of contracting out for services. What we thought was going to be a \$200,000+ shortfall is actually only going to be a shortfall of around \$40,000. Other reasons for savings are from transportation, para resignations, modified billing from contractors, summer school savings, and savings from the shortened Wealth program. Program 4 transportation shows the change after the M&J negotiations. Program 5 health services is short as we are restocking PPE. Program 6 curriculum and staff development has money as staff were unable to attend professional development, though we provided some through Zoom. That money I plan to use for EASTCONN commitment. Program 7 utilities are short slightly, but it may bounce back as we encumber for the year and may see savings in electricity and heating oil. Donna reconciles this at the end of June. Program 8 operations and maintenance has money because of our hiring custodial staff at the entry level. Program 9 systemwide support is on track and program 10 fringe benefits shows the savings from the insurances.

B. 2020-2021 Budget Update

The Board of Finance passed the 20-21 budget as presented to them after the BOE cut of \$123,002. Programs and personnel will stay intact for the 20-21 fiscal year. Superintendent Stevens reviewed the adjustments the Board had already approved.

Committee Report

Chairman Arico stated the committees we have include policy, finance, curriculum and instruction, staff negotiations, clubs, wellness, security, facilities, transportation, and search committees. The only committee that I know of that met recently was the finance committee. The agenda items for this committee were the freezer at Center School which the committee came to a decision on which will come up in the agenda later on. As well as we reviewed the need for computers at Hall School. We looked over multiple bids ranging from \$159 each to \$500 each. We will share the recommendation later in the meeting as well.

New Business

A. Approve minutes of May 12, 2020 regular meeting

Attachment # 1

Michelle Doucette Cunningham made a motion to accept the minutes of the May 12, 2020 regular meeting.

Ann Grosjean seconded the motion.

Discussion:

Tracey Anderson stated at the end of page 3 of the minutes when it stated she and Ann read letters written by citizens, this should be changed to written by teachers.

Vote:	Yes	No	Abstain	Absent
H. Arico	✓			
M. Cunningham	✓			
D. Cook	✓			
T. Anderson	✓			
A. Grosjean	✓			
E. Testa	✓			

Motion passes.

B. Approve minutes of June 3, 2020 Finance Committee Minutes Attachment # 2

Michelle Doucette Cunningham made a motion to accept the minutes of the June 3, 2020 Finance Committee meeting.

Elena Testa seconded the motion.

Vote:	Yes	No	Abstain	Absent
H. Arico	✓			
M. Cunningham	✓			
D. Cook	✓			
T. Anderson	✓			
A. Grosjean	✓			
E. Testa	✓			

Motion passes.

C. Transfer protocol discussion

In the past, I proposed leaving programs in the negative to be transparent with the public. For example, last year we had a \$100,000 shortfall in special education at the program level and we left it like that at the end of the year for transparency. We didn't exceed our entire budget allocation as the shortfall was covered by savings from other programs. After reviewing the purchasing policy, transfer policy and discussing with the Board attorney, I don't believe we should do that again. Though it does provide transparency, statute and our policy should provide the board the opportunity to make program allocation adjustments by transferring money to that program so it balances out. We will make transfers in our July or August meeting to balance out each program for 19-20. To maintain transparency, because I don't feel it will be clear to the public where we had a shortfall and/or surplus, we are going to insert a statement under each program that has a shortfall or a surplus with an explanation. This will also be visible under the adjusted budget when we are planning for 21-22, and we will include the explanation there as well.

Donna Cook asked, if you show the programs listed on the left as you do now, and then show what the total balances were pretransfer and then a transfer column and a totals post transfer, I think that will visually make it clear. Superintendent Stevens replied this is a great idea. Unless Donna can put it on one page we will print out what the budget looked like before and then make the adjustments and show where things have changed.

Ann Grosjean asked if this will be done monthly. Superintendent Stevens replied usually the only time we make transfers is at the beginning of the year to balance out any hiring that has happened and then again at the end of the year. The board attorney did say if you have something big come up, you either want board approval through a vote knowing that they will have to make a transfer or you want to make the transfer prior to paying for something.

D. CES septic tank and leach field project completion

Admiral Septic is almost done with the project at this point. The leaching field work is complete and the pump chamber has been installed. The electrical connection was scheduled for today and the topsoil and seeding is scheduled for next week. The project should be wrapped up in the next couple weeks. The cost from Admiral is \$34,264.50 and that will be encumbered tomorrow. The cost for topsoil and seeding is \$4,798, which has already been encumbered. Once EMCOR connects the system to the Delta panel the project will be done. Dave Lytwyn from Admiral has moved on to Hall School and pumped the septic tanks and kitchen grease trap. He found an issue with the grease trap and will be jetting and vacuuming the exit pipe. Hopefully that system is in better condition than was identified at CES.

E. CES freezer repair

As you know our freezer at Center School failed on April 19. We received quotes from EMCOR and Medford Wellington to replace the evaporator and outdoor condensing unit (2001). The Finance Committee reviewed the quotes and would like to go with the low bidder, EMCOR for \$8,969. We would receive a one year labor warranty, a one year manufacturer warranty on parts, and a five year warranty on the compressor. I'm looking for an approval to award the work to be completed.

Michelle Doucette Cunningham made a motion to move ahead with the low bid contract of \$8,969 from EMCOR for the freezer repair at Center Elementary School.

Tracey Anderson seconded the motion.

Vote:	Yes	No	Abstain	Absent
H. Arico	✓			
M. Cunningham	✓			
D. Cook	✓			
T. Anderson	✓			
A. Grosjean	✓			
E. Testa	✓			

Motion Passes.

F. CES and HMS Chromebook purchase

I've mentioned for a couple months now an issue that NOVUS identified with our Chromebooks. The operating system on our current Chromebooks will not allow updates. They were manufactured in 2013 and the operating system will no longer be upgradeable beyond Chrome 76 as of July, 2019. Current chrome operating system is version 83. State testing required OS 75 this year, and we are sure it is going to be higher next year which means our current Chromebooks won't be able to be used for testing. The finance committee met and reviewed lease and purchase quotes and would like to recommend purchasing 410 Chromebooks from the lowest bidder, S.H.I., for \$93,070.00. The cost of each Chromebook is \$227 with the educational package we would require. The committee made the recommendation to purchase additional Chromebooks as spares instead of purchasing the replacement plan, which was \$70,000 for four years. Donna and I calculated that we could use approximately \$15,000 in grant funds towards this purchase. I anticipate the Board of education could easily return \$300,000 to the town after all purchases are completed.

Michelle Doucette Cunningham made a motion to allocate \$93,070.00 for 410 Chromebooks with S.H.I.

Elena Testa seconded the motion.

Chairman Arico asked if this will provide each student with a Chromebook. Superintendent Stevens replied we will keep these Chromebooks at the school and if we go to remote learning we can push the old Chromebooks out to the students who need them and maintain the new ones in school.

Donna Cook asked if we really need the 410 if the older Chromebooks would be the ones going home to students during distance learning. Superintendent Stevens replied we believe we have about 50 Chromebooks which have the upgraded software and newer operating system so that leaves us with a breakage number of about 20.

Vote:	Yes	No	Abstain	Absent
H. Arico	✓			

M. Cunningham	✓			
D. Cook	✓			
T. Anderson	✓			
A. Grosjean	✓			
E. Testa	✓			

Motion Passes.

G. Superintendent evaluation discussion

This is a wild finish to the year and wanted to discuss my evaluation which you must complete annually. This is completed in executive session in a separate meeting, and probably much easier to complete in person, not through Zoom. My thought is to have a special meeting at some point in the near future.

Elena Testa asked what challenges do you foresee using Zoom. Superintendent Stevens stated security may be an issue. Elena Testa stated she would suggest holding the evaluation and stated she remembered Michelle having some great online tools for evaluation last year. Michelle Doucette Cunningham replied she would look back and see if she still had these tools. She added that if they do use this questionnaire again she wanted to remind everyone that they need to fill out the questionnaire entirely in one sitting so the work is not lost. She stated we should probably put this off until after the regular July meeting to give us a chance to fill out the questionnaire and possibly meet in late July or early August.

Elena Testa made a motion to schedule an executive session for the Superintendent evaluation in a special meeting during the month of August.

Michelle Doucette Cunningham stated she is happy to offer her pro account but doesn't know if by this date they could come together to have this meeting. She does not want to neglect their duties. She asked if they have to state the location of the meeting now? Chairman Arico replied he believes if it is a special meeting they have to give the location.

Chairman Arico stated since there is no second of the motion the motion is denied. The Superintendent evaluation will be postponed but we will get back to it hopefully by the end of July or at some point in August.

Donna Cook asked if since they are a small group could they meet in person. Sometimes having a discussion on Zoom could compromise security. Chairman Arico stated he agreed and he didn't know if Zoom was the way to go. Elena Testa stated perhaps they could consider meeting outside. Ann Grosjean stated she agrees they should discuss this again in July as they will have a better idea how things are going as things open up. Superintendent Stevens stated at any point the board members could complete the documentation. Then they can figure out the final meeting to share the information and be together.

H. Appoint BOE member for HMS Principal Search Committee

I mentioned the dates earlier for the HMS search: July 2 via Zoom, and July 9 onsite. I would like to have at least one BOE member on the committee. Depending on how many qualified applicants we have,

there may need to be an additional day for the first round of interviews. Ann Grosjean stated she would be interested in participating in the committee. Michelle Doucette Cunningham stated she could not commit to the second date at this time but if something happened where Ann couldn't attend and she was available she would participate. Chairman Arico replied they could put him down for participating in the committee.

I. BOE summer retreat

I would like to contact CABA to schedule a Board training and summer retreat. CABA offers customized workshops on a variety of topics, including roles and responsibilities, and facilitating self-evaluation and goal setting. I would like to bring in CABA to facilitate this retreat with your approval.

Donna Cook asked how many hours the training usually runs. Superintendent Stevens replied usually a couple hours minimum but if we are on Zoom sticking to no more than two hours seems reasonable.

Chairman Arico stated they would try to set up a date in the summertime. Superintendent Stevens stated he would have Brenda send out an email with possible dates. Donna Cook requested that Brenda give them time blocks so they can give a definite answer as to if they are available.

1. Old Business

a. Election of new board member

Chairman Arico stated we have addressed this particular item several times and the position was vacated by a republican member of the board. The board has been deadlocked on the decision and there doesn't seem to be very much movement. We have received quite a few qualified candidates but we were unable to agree on any of them filling the vacancy. We reached the point where we sent the issue to the Board of Selectmen in accordance with our bylaws. The Board of Selectmen discussed it and decided to refer the decision back to us. If we are unable to make a decision this evening, then I would assume it would go back to the Board of Selectmen. They had agreed to give us 30 days to make a decision. We have the choice this evening of doing nothing and referring it back to them or we can try to take action by appointing someone. Selectwoman Wicewski is present tonight so we can listen to her and the other Selectmen's reasoning for referring the decision back to us.

Selectwoman Wicewski stated the Board of Selectmen felt strongly that the Board of Education could have a conversation and we encourage you as we did to speak to the candidates that were before us. We took the opportunity to speak to two candidates Brenda Abrams and Laura Rodreguiz and we hoped that this board would do the same. It was our hope that the Board of Education could make a decision working together to choose the member they felt was best for the Board of Education. We did say we would send it back to you for 30 days and at the end of that there was discussion about what we would do and the census was that we would have to take a vote on the matter. All three Selectmen felt that we really wanted to see the Board of Education have a conversation amongst yourselves and the candidates about what is best for the board and that is why we sent it back to you without taking action. After the 30 days it would come back onto the agenda with the Board of Selectmen.

Chairman Arico stated perhaps they should have a special meeting on this topic and invite the candidates to come before us to interview them again and try to come to a consensus. Michelle Doucette Cunningham made a motion that the board appoint Laura Rodriguez to the Willington BOE to fill the current vacancy.

Tracey Anderson seconded the motion.

Donna Cook made a motion that the board appoint Brenda Abrams to the Willington BOE to fill the current vacancy.

Elena Testa seconded the motion.

Discussion:

Ann Grosjean asked if they could hear from the candidates before they voted. Chairman Arico stated they would have to notify the candidates ahead of time to let them know they wished to hear from them.

Tracey Anderson asked if they could please discuss the candidates as their previous discussions have been more about procedures than the actual candidates, which is exactly what the Board of Selectmen pointed out. Chairman Arico stated he had no objection to a discussion. Tracey Anderson stated she would first like to mention that she has heard several times that the votes that are being made are based on political affiliation. My votes on anything on the Board of Education are not based on political affiliation. I have dedicated most of my adult life to education and I will support education to the end for what is best for the children of Willington. When I make a decision on the Board of Education it is not about am I voting with the Democrats or Republican, I am voting for who I think is best to serve our community, students, and staff. As far as the candidates go when I heard Brenda Abrams speak in her letter I recall she stated she is a recreational therapist.

Chairman Arico stated we should be talking in regards to one's own candidate. Tracey Anderson replied she would like to give her opinion on both candidates. Chairman Arico stated they should not criticize the other candidate. Tracey Anderson replied she is not criticizing but simply discussing and she is just stating the facts as she understands them to be. Tracey added she feels offended by words being put in her mouth and doesn't appreciate not being able to finish her part of the discussion. Michelle Doucette Cunningham spoke to Chairman Arico and stated she did not believe Tracey was criticizing either candidate but simply stating facts but you cut her off too soon in fear she was going down that road. Chairman Arico stated he still believes she should keep the discussion to her own candidate.

Tracey Anderson replied she only seconded a motion for a candidate and thought in the discussion they could discuss everything. She added she does not always feel respected as a board member and that it sometimes feels like members get certain treatment depending on who they are. My recollection about Laura Rodriguez is that she is currently a professor at Eastern as well as worked in various school systems as a teacher including Willington. In my decision I do think about the fact that we need a balance of members to give different ideas but I do think right now in our current situation with education changing so quickly, that having a candidate who has current experience in education and is familiar with current changes in education and curriculum, for example new science and social studies standards, for Willington the best candidate for us to vote in would be Laura Rodriguez. I have heard from different groups that they request we have parents and educators being represented on the Board of Education so going with that request, I am voting for Laura Rodriguez.

Elena Testa stated she would like to emphasize that she has no doubt that Laura Rodriguez is a wonderful teacher and professional but we are not here just representing teachers. We have to represent the town. The town very clearly made the choice during the election that the next candidate would be Brenda Abrams because she was the next one in line who received the most votes. This is why the republican committee endorsed Brenda Abrams. In respect to the highest authority in our town, the will of the town. Also I would like to remind everyone that we had a similar situation a year ago when another republican

resigned and a candidate with a masters degree as a teacher was endorsed and we chose a person who had nothing to do with education. I think at this particular point if Ms. Rodriguez wants to continue her desire to serve on the board, she should definitely run and let the town elect her.

Ann Grosjean stated she believes what Elena is talking about is the party line. What we need to do right now during this unprecedented time in education when we don't even know if we can open our schools in the fall is stand behind our superintendent and teachers who have some really tough decisions to make. We have had people speaking every week about bringing back the mental health professional. To this day, I have no idea why the one party line voted that down. When I vote my fear is for when we need to make other big decisions like that one, that it might go the same way. We have some huge decisions we are going to have to make such as are we going to open the schools and are we going to do online learning. We really need to support our staff, and our staff stood up and talked about how important the mental health professional was and that they needed them and what an asset it would be for our schools. We cannot as a board afford to make anymore decisions like this. Ones which could have been \$70-100K in our budget which was being offered for free. That is why I'm voting the way I am. When I see the way some of the votes are going I fear for what our superintendent and teachers will be able to do when they don't have the support of the majority of the Board of Education.

Michelle Doucette Cunningham stated the reason she nominated Laura Rodriguez had nothing to do with party, it is primarily around the experience she brings to the table. I think now is the right time for us to be looking at the candidate that can bring a broad array of different school systems and experience in different places that will help the board with the different decisions we have to make in the coming year. I think during the discussion about process and how we have moved ahead, things have been said about different people on the board that puts words in their mouth, and makes assumptions about where they are coming from. You were correct earlier when you said many times we vote unanimously, but it's the times we vote differently that it's most important that we vote for what we believe in and where our values are. I think that anyone who is assuming malicious, poor, or political intent and saying it's not based on what we think is best for the children is offensive. I made the motion to nominate Laura Rodriguez because I believe she is the best candidate for the job and I think she is what Willington needs right now.

Donna Cook stated she agrees it is awful when the worst is assumed about why someone makes a decision. I think that we all care a whole lot about the children in our community and the families in our community and we want the best for the children. We may not agree on what that looks like but we need to remember that is the goal. When I look at the board my understanding is as a board member, we are not committed to interfere with the teachers. We cannot instruct them and we can't guide them, that is not under our authority. My daughter had Laura and she was a wonderful teacher, I think she would probably make an excellent middle school principal where her talent and expertise could be put to use in a way that would benefit the children and the teachers. When I look at the community, we already have three professional educators on the board. This board is to represent the town and it is to look at what is best for the children and I believe the teachers are well represented, I don't think 3/7th of our town are teachers. Sometimes we don't have to agree but when we come at a problem from different angles, maybe we will come up with a better answer than we could have individually. I think Brenda Abrams who is not a professional teacher though has some educational experience would fulfill the qualities we need and bring a different perspective.

Michelle Doucette Cunningham stated she would like to clarify that people who currently teach for the district are not serving on the board in accordance with state law. It is very common for people who teach in other districts to bring their expertise to the board. Michelle added she would like to hear from Laura Rodriguez tonight as the issue has been on the agenda and she is present.

Laura Rodriguez stated she appreciates the chance to speak about her background as more than an educator. The first part of being on this Board of Education is in fact living in Willington. My husband and I moved here 18 years ago and chose Willington because of the school district. I then got a position in the district and for those 12 years I was unable to serve on the Board of Education. I left the position at Hall School to start a new program at the STEM School in Windham. I was a science teacher there and I actually developed the whole integrated curriculum for seventh grade and it was in that context that I got the opportunity to go back to get my doctorate in science education. You have spoken to my education credentials but the other piece of my credentials is the science piece. My whole background is in science and when there are issues constantly looking at what is the data, what is the evidence, what are the facts, and how do we solve these problems. For a Board of Education with all of the issues that are facing you right now between the pandemic and social injustice, that background is going beyond being an educator. It is a part of me to work with other people to solve problems. The other piece is my background in education is not just about teachers because educators are not just about teachers they are about children. Whether I'm in the classroom for the 23 years working directly with children, at Eastern working with pre-cert teachers, or serving on a Board of Education that is making decisions about what is best for the children, my qualifications of being a community member is about children, not teachers. Lastly, I read through the bylaws for the Board of Education and there were two bylaws that jumped out at me and really represent why I'm a good candidate. The first is number 5 under the responsibility and duties, it states, to work harmoniously with other board members without trying to either dominate or neglect one share of the work and to respect the opinions of other board members. A person who knows how to collaborate and problem solve knows how to listen to all other points of view. It is so important to listen to those points of view and not try to push your agenda or not try to neglect your share of the work. The reason why now was the perfect time for me is that I just finished my doctorate. I have the time and tons of energy and I'm able to devote that to taking on this new position. The second bylaw, number 6 under the same section, to vote and act impartially at board meetings for the good of the school district and to abide by the majority vote in all cases and to support the resulting decision. That is who I am. I am going to take the facts and I will make my decision and we will vote and that is the will of the majority. You have to then move forward. These are the reasons I feel I would be a very good board member. I am extremely dedicated to the children of this community and this would be another way for me to serve.

Chairman Arico stated they would first vote on the nomination for Laura Rodriguez.

Vote:	Yes	No	Abstain	Absent
H. Arico		✓		
M. Cunningham	✓			
D. Cook		✓		
T. Anderson	✓			
A. Grosjean	✓			
E. Testa		✓		

Motion fails.

Chairman Arico stated we will now vote on the second nomination Brenda Abrams

Vote:	Yes	No	Abstain	Absent
H. Arico	✓			
M. Cunningham		✓		
D. Cook	✓			
T. Anderson		✓		
A. Grosjean		✓		
E. Testa	✓			

Motion fails.

Present to Speak

Sarah Smith was present to speak. She stated teachers are people who have dedicated their lives to education and must have a perspective on what good education is and must be selfless. I am hoping some attitudes might change toward these people who are highly educated and who have nothing but the best intentions and credibility. If you are just into saving taxpayer money, I don't think you represent the town well.

James Bulick of Laurel Drive was present to speak. He stated he is speaking out for the voters of Willington who elected Liz Perry a republican and someone who didn't have a teacher background. I'm grateful that Laura Rodriguez applied for the position but the voters clearly made a decision and a choice. It baffles me why we don't want to follow the will of the voters and elect Brenda Abrams who is a qualified individual. She is in the healthcare profession and does have some teacher experience and a good board is composed of many perspectives and you get better decisions when you have many different perspectives.

Stephanie Summers of 4 Y Road was present to speak. She stated she wanted to speak about some of the debate about who is a good candidate for the board. I am a former board member and I did not bring education in my skill set but I did bring my career as a journalist and insatiable curiosity in my quiver of arrows. I think other people have a gift to bring to the board. I think Laura made a perfectly great case about her qualities as an individual and her love for science and her qualities that go along with that love. I think you do need someone who is willing to do the research, the questioning and the analyzing. I am appreciative to her for being at every BOE and BOS meeting since her name has been brought up. I also want to address the past with the elections. Laura was not on the ballot so we don't really have the voters say on whether or not she would be the best candidate. Looking back, at what the election line up was in the past is not really relevant to what is going on now. The candidate with the best qualifications and the best willingness to show up, participate and bring their skills to the table is a much more important quality. I urge you to find a way to discuss the quality of the candidates in a better way.

Board Comments

Chairman Arico stated we have had an interesting meeting and I appreciate everyone's input. We appreciate the services of all the retirees. I would also like to thank the superintendent for his efforts during the pandemic with the online learning and the cooperation of the staff. As I mention in my earlier remarks we still have a lot to do and a lot of issues that are going to come before the board. I feel sure that we will address them together and come to a consensus regarding some of these very serious issues that are going to present themselves down the road with the end of school and the opening of the schools.

Michelle Doucette Cunningham stated she is disappointed that because the agenda was so full you chose not to raise the issue that so many people spoke so eloquently about earlier in the meeting which was reconsidering the conversation about mental health services for our children. I do hope you continue to listen to the many people who have spoken in support of that and maybe bring it up and put it on the agenda for July. Secondly, I would like to cite my disappointment in the fact that people continue to keep the focus on the voters and their will in deciding this candidacy issue about the vacancy on the Board of Education. If you look back to the election, Brenda and the democrat behind her were only one vote apart it was virtually a tie at that point and we don't have that many people who vote in local elections so talking about the voters is really giving short fall to the children who are too young to vote. Our charge here is to put the children first and this is an elected position and everyone has a chance to run for office and that is how this board is decided. When a candidate is put forward who is not going to be able to serve, there is a good chance that the people who passed the law giving the board power to elect to fill a vacancy were right in their decision that it allows the group to interview people and have conversation about the candidates and to consider the people who are nominated and what would be best for the children. Any conversation that is not about what is best for the children is really neglecting our duty as board members.

Ann Grosjean stated she would like to congratulate all of the retirees and wish them all well and thank the teachers and administrators for what a wonderful job they have done with the online learning. I've been implementing it at home and it is really amazing what they have been able to do so the kids aren't missing learning while in this situation. I also really enjoyed the signs along 32 in front of Hall School. Those were wonderful for the graduating 8th graders.

Tracey Anderson stated she would like to echo what Herb and Ann said about thanking the retirees and wishing them well in their next journey of life. We appreciate all of their hard work over the years. I also appreciate and thank the teachers, staff and administration for their hard work and for what they have given our children through distance learning. As a parent I have seen some great things happening and a lot of dedication including following up with families to make sure things were going well. I would like to express my frustration that since the election and our new board has started we have spent a lot of time on things other than education, and arguing about things other than education, and I'm frustrated that we continually keep talking about what has happened in the past and bringing up what I would call grudges about past votes. I was elected to this board as we all were because of who we are so we should be allowed to vote with our convictions and our heart and if we hear a discussion that changes our opinion we can go with that. I cannot vote for a candidate that I don't believe is going to do the job that I feel a BOE member should do and I cannot go against what is in my heart and beliefs. I was offended when I was told I had to vote for one of the candidates you brought to the table several meetings ago whether I or not I liked them. This was not fair to any of us as board members. We need to work together which was echoed at the BOS and BOF meetings and we need to do better to figure out a way we can all come together and not walk into a meeting with a conviction about this is the way I am going to vote because of

tradition or what has happened in the past. We need to think about it in the meeting and put aside what's happened because as Michelle said there was a one vote difference. Once it comes to the Board of Education we get to vote the way that we want not by what the voters said. We are representing our voters but I feel I am representing them with my decision.

Donna Cook stated there is so much that can be said. I want to thank everyone for their time and service both those who are on the board and those who have spent the evening with us electronically. I would like to thank those who have served us so well and wish them best wishes in their future. I am encouraged that there are lots of good things in our future and our teachers are putting into practice some things they didn't think they would have to but they are doing it with grace and they are learning as they go. Families are also putting things into practice they never thought they would have to and they are too learning with grace as they go and hopefully when we come out the other side we will all be better for it.

Elena Testa stated she is very surprised that she heard twice during the comments that it is not up to the voters of this town and that it does not matter what they say. I want to remind everyone that the Board of Education is an elective organization elected by the people of this town. As for Liz Perry who resigned, whatever was going on with her family no one can control. As for the vote she got the most votes. We need to respect the will of the voters and the will of this town. Most of the towns respect the will of the voters for years and we relied on the gentlemen's agreement. The voters mean everything.

Chairman H. Arico adjourned the meeting at 10:10pm.

*Next regular meeting

July 14, 2020