

Heidi Simmons, Acting Board Chair called the regular meeting to order in the District Office Board of Education Meeting Room at 7:02p.m. Members present were Gordon Lord, Craig Esposito, Jack Morehouse, and Farouk Rajab. Members Late Arrival: Alisa Morrison (7:03p.m.). Member Absent: Frank Todisco, Chair. Also present were Lily Haghpasand, Student Government Representative, Ana de Oliveira, Recording Secretary, Dr. Van Riley, Superintendent of Schools and the Administration Team.

Communications & Recognitions

Gordon Lord acknowledged the parents, students, teachers, administrators and the Board of Education noted we are not totally there yet but as of next Friday we will be there. It has been a long year, with disagreements along the way and different interests but at the heart of it, it was about the kids and believes that as a community we accomplished that. He recognized the community for getting through a very challenging year and while there were some differences we all focused on the kids and got it done.

Lily Haghpasand, Student Government Representative recognized Mrs. Dawe and Mrs. Houle for their work in the VOICE program which was so much more than the students had last year.

Farouk Rajab also recognized the administration and teachers and everyone in the Stonington Public Schools system who helped through this very difficult year and for supporting the kids and the community. He asked that Dr. Riley convey his and the Board's appreciation to everyone.

Jack Morehouse asked if the Board would consider sending a personal note of recognition to the Educator of the Year and Paraeducator of the Year. Dr. Riley suggested the Board generate the letter and his assistant will assist in distribution.

Student Government Representative Recognition – Lily Haghpasand

Heidi Simmons recognized by noting she has been dedicated and involved. She has set an example for our next Board student leader. Mrs. Simmons noted the Board is very appreciative of her time and presented her with a small gift from the Board.

2020-2021 Retiree Recognitions/2022 Educator of the Year/2022 Paraeducator of the Year

Dr. Riley noted we have a number of staff retiring this year. We will be giving them a resolution signed by the Board members and a clock after this Board meeting. The principals gave a small speech on each of their retirees and thanked them for their years of service. The following staff will be retiring.

The Board of Education of Stonington, Connecticut, at its regular meeting on June 10, 2021, adopted this resolution in respect to:

Carol Arbour – Paraprofessional – 19 years of service
Cathy Crowley – Paraprofessional – 21 years of service
Dane Lewis – Health/PE Teacher – 26 years of service
Debra Smith – Health Paraprofessional – 19 years of service
Evelyn Bridges – School Psychologist – 23 years of service
Gloria Murray-DeBiasi – Health Services Coordinator – 25 years of service
Margaret Romeo – Speech Pathologist – 20 years of service
Shannon Cummings – Special Ed Teacher – 21 years of service
Candace Wood – Family Consumerism – 19 years of service
Judy Colschen – Guidance Secretary – 18 years of service
Michele Melia – Payroll Specialist – 14 years of service

WHEREAS, This individual has completed years of faithful and conscientious service as an employee in the Stonington Public Schools and has now retired and

WHEREAS, This individual has devoted much effort in his/her job assignment to the extent that he/she is held in high admiration for his/her dedication and personal contributions to the varied needs of the Stonington Public Schools to the extent this person is held in the greatest esteem by all.

RESOLVED, That the Board of Education in a special meeting assembled on this date attest to the valuable service rendered by this individual to the cause of education in the Town of Stonington, and

Be it further RESOLVED, that a copy of this resolution be spread on the minutes of the Board of Education, and that a copy be presented to this honored individual as a testimonial of the Board's sincere appreciation of loyalty, character, and service.

Comments from Citizens

Connie Szymonik a retired teacher commented on the Critical Race Theory (CRT) and asked if this is being taught in Stonington. She also commented that she would be interested as a community member in assisting in reviewing curriculum for the district. Dr. Riley directed her to email her concerns and questions to him and he would address them through email. Heidi Simmons noted that this question does not have a yes or no answer and she too recommended Ms. Szymonik email her questions.

Nicholas Tewell questioned the 16 half days scheduled 10 of which are for professional development on the proposed 21-22 school calendar. He also asked if the ARP funding plan had conditions that the district had to adhere to in order to receive the funding. He asked if funding would be denied if we do not continue to have a mask mandate in the district. He asked when the plan would be finalized and would the district be penalized if the district did not comply.

Consent Agenda

- A. Minutes – May 4, 2021
May 13, 2021
May 19, 2021
May 27, 2021
- B. Checks and Bills – May
- C. Personnel Report
- D. Approval of Contracts and Conditions of Employment
- E. Approval of Union Contracts: Nurses – Local 1303-397 of Council 4 AFSCME, AFL-CIO
Maintenance/Custodians – Local 1303-170 of Council 4 AFSCME, FL-CIO
Secretaries – Local 1303-380 of Council 4 AFSCME, FL-CIO

The following motion was made by Jack Morehouse and seconded by Heidi Simmons:

Motion 1: To accept the consent agenda items A - D and remove item E.

All: Aye

Jack Morehouse noted he was surprised not to see the paraprofessional contract on the consent agenda and asked what is going on with that contract. Dr. Riley noted we have been in negotiations and have been able to come to agreement with all except the paraprofessional contract and there is a meeting scheduled for mid-July or August to continue with negotiations, but we do not have an agreement on that yet.

The following motion was made by Jack Morehouse and seconded by Farouk Rajab:

Motion 2: To accept item E on the consent agenda.

All: Aye

Second Read/Approval/Elimination of Board Bylaws: 9130, 9131, 9140, 9210, 9221, 9222

Farouk Rajab asked to make an amendment to Bylaw 9140 which reads *"The chairperson shall appoint representatives of the Board of Education to Town Boards, Committees, or Commissions. Such appointments shall be for one year or until the discharge of the assigned function of the said Board, Committee or Commission."* he asked that the bylaw be amended to say *"The chairperson shall recommend representatives of the Board of Education to Town Boards, Committees or Commissions"*. He added the appointment to Town Boards, Committees or Commissions are controlled by the First Selectman, he asked to amend that to "recommend" instead of "appoint".

The following motion was made by Farouk Rajab and seconded by Jack Morehouse:

Motion 3: To amend Bylaw 9140 to read *"The chairperson shall recommend representatives of the Board of Education to Town Boards, Committees or Commissions" instead of "appoint"*.

All: Aye

The following motion was made by Jack Morehouse and seconded by Craig Esposito:

Motion 4: To approve Bylaws 9130, 9131, 9140 as amended, 9210, 9221, 9222.

All: Aye

Approval of School District Medical Advisor Contract

Dr. Riley shared he requested the Board's approval of the attached contract and noted that this medical advisor is currently medical advisor for a number of districts. He shared his resume and added we are very fortunate to have someone with his caliber.

The following motion was made by Craig Esposito and seconded by Farouk Rajab:

Motion 5: To approve the attached contract.

All: Aye

Update on Board of Education Advisor Council on Return to School (BEARS) June 1, 2021

Gordon Lord reported that discussion was mostly surrounded around the ARP funding. He added there were a few citizens who came and commented. Dr. Riley went through the recommended plan and explained some updates that were coming from the state. The council shared their questions on the plan. The next meeting will be on June 16th so that the community can have a chance to comment on the funding and will also have our July meeting.

Public Input Regarding ARP Funding

Dr. Riley noted that a packet was provided to the Board of the initial recommended plan which needs to be submitted by June 23rd. He added that this topic has been open to the community for input. You can go to our website and email comments on the final draft and next week there will be a meeting for the community to share their comments also. We will take all the comments from students, teachers and the community and do what needs to be done to update the plan. The plan and all public comments will be presented at the BEARS council next week and there will also be another opportunity for public comment. Dr. Riley suggested the Board open the meeting for public comment regarding the plan. Community member, Mr. Tewell asked if the district is following CDC and Ledge Light guidelines on masks for right now. Dr. Riley answered yes. Mr. Tewell clarified there is no penalty as long as you stick to the plan. Dr. Riley answered yes and suggested if Mr. Tewell suggests not to follow the guidelines regarding masks to send that in as a public comment through the email or send his suggest directly to Dr. Riley and would make sure his recommendation is considered. Mr. Tewell asked for clarification on the plan and funding if the plan is modified after submitted. Dr. Riley explained modifications and review of the plan is done every six months if needed.

Report of the Superintendent of Schools

Revised 2021-2022 School Calendar – Dr. Riley explained there are two main changes to the calendar; 1) the change in the name of Columbus Day to Indigenous Peoples Day per the request of our DEI committee; 2) early release days. He explained that typically we have early release days prior to holidays, but there are more early release days this year than in the past for professional development because the needs are more. He explained there is a lot of professional development that needs to happen that we were not able to do this past year. There are new special education IEP mandates coming and things staff need to have to make sure we are meeting requirements. This also allows teachers to work on the social emotional needs of students. Gordon Lord asked when the Board met a few weeks ago how many early release days did we have seemed that it was not 16 days. Dr. Riley noted if the Board is not comfortable with the calendar we can come back with fewer days, but this was the recommendation from principals and teachers. Mr. Lord says it seems excessive, would like to see a better balance, full days off it helps parents in the planning perceptive. Craig Esposito noted there is research that shows better student outcomes when teachers are given release time to do collaborative work and professional development. He adds you should not assume that professional time or collaboration time is necessarily detrimental. Mr. Lord clarified with Mr. Esposito's that is not what he said but would like to see a better balance of full days and fewer half days. Jack Morehouse spoke teachers needing the extra time to also meet with students. Heidi Simmons asked if we can reassess the calendar half way through like maybe in December. Dr. Riley will bring back a couple of options of the calendar, trying to combine some of the early release days and bring it back to the Committee of the Whole. Alisa Morrison voiced that she feels you cannot in December change the calendar.

Music Program Update

Dr. Riley noted he sent a memo out outlining where we are with the music program. He thanked the music teachers, principals and administrators for meeting several times on the music program. He also thanked Mr. Morehouse for his interest in music, we have been talking about this and it is important to come up with a plan to reenergize our music program. Jack Morehouse spoke on the history of the music program in the district and his participation in the program as well. He gave his recommendations for the music program and examples of the program at East Lyme Public Schools. Dr. Riley suggested the Board approve the 1.0 FTE music position at the middle school. He will also provide a report regarding the need for a half time position at the elementary schools. Gordon Lord expressed his concern if we fund this position now that we are not cutting something else down the road, but supported the idea. Dr. Riley explained how the position would be funded. Craig Esposito noted that East Lyme is a significant larger district and larger economies of scale along with participation that makes things more feasible. Lily Haghighpassand voiced her option on the half time position and feels it should be a priority. Heidi Simmons asked that this item be added to the COW agenda. She added one of the Board's goals was to focus on signature programs. Dr. Riley will give a report on the music program at the upcoming meeting.

The following motion was made by Farouk Rajab and seconded by Jack Morehouse:

Motion 6: To approve the recommendation of the Superintendent of Stonington Public School to hire the 1.0 teacher to enhance the music program.

All: Aye

Monthly Reports

Lily Haghpasand noted this is her last meeting and commented on the Title IX. She is very happy with what the administration has done with the VOICE program. She emphasized that she hopes this is not lost.

Items for Future Agendas

No items for future agendas.

Board Comments/Concerns

Jack Morehouse commented about discussion regarding funding for school infrastructure at the legislative levels. Dr. Riley hopes that we will receive additional funding. Heidi Simmons thanked the community for coming forward to share their ideas.

Adjournment

The following motion was made by Jack Morehouse and seconded by Farouk Rajab:

Motion 7: To adjourn at 8:27 p.m.

All: Aye

Heidi Simmons, Board Secretary