

STONINGTON BOARD OF EDUCATION REGULAR MEETING November 18, 2021 - Page | 1

Farouk Rajab, Board Chair called the regular meeting to order in the District Office Board of Education Meeting Room, Pawcatuck, CT at 7:00p.m. Members present were Craig Esposito, Daniel Kelley, Kevin Agnello, Christopher Donahue, and Sara Baker. Members Absent: Heidi Simmons, Board Secretary. Also present were Ana de Oliveira, Recording Secretary, Dr. Van Riley, Superintendent of Schools, Student Government Representative Kyle Lowry and members of the administration staff and interested citizens.

Farouk Rajab, Chair asked that all community members put on their masks in order to start the meeting. He noted that Heidi Simmons, Board Secretary could not attend the meeting and asked that Kevin Agnello stand in for her as Board Secretary.

Communications & Recognitions

Craig Esposito congratulated the new Board members. Kevin Agnello congratulated the boys' soccer team and girls' field hockey team for advancing to the state finals. Dan Kelley gave a shout out to the middle school PTO for getting back together. He thanked Jack Morehouse, Gordon Lord, Frank Todisco and Alisa Morrison for the years they served on the Board. Mr. Kelley reminded everyone about the upcoming drama production happening over the weekend. He recognized the high school marching band for participating in the parade. He reminded everyone of the field hockey game at 2pm in Wethersfield and soccer game at 11am at Dillon Stadium on Saturday. He recognized Mia, Grace and Maddie tennis players for having the tennis open recently for raising \$8,000 and more than \$4,000 went to the Safe Futures organization in New London. He wished Anthony Marchigiano one of our graduating seniors who has enlisted in the air force and will be heading that way when he graduates in June. Mr. Kelly also wished Kyle Lowry well on the November 23rd Veterans' Fall Fest. Kyle Lowry commented the Veteran's Fall Fest event will take place at 12pm on the 23rd all are welcome. Mr. Lowry recognized the high school kitchen staff and teacher Victoria Esser for helping with the meals and pies for the event. Farouk Rajab, Chair recognized Deans Mill PE Teacher, Matthew Irvine for receiving the PE Teacher of the Year award.

Comments from Citizens

Nick Tewell commented about his experience during his campaigning. He hopes this Board is out for the right intentions, which should be for the students in this district. He hopes the Board respects that parents don't want it to be political and asked that this new Board focus on the students. He spoke on declining enrollment, the idea of more and new program offerings for students. Wants the Board to look into why we are losing students to Magnet and St. Michaels schools. He commented on the superintendent search and asked the Board to find a search company that is focused on finding the right superintendent, and that will do the right job for Stonington and the right fit.

Ashley Tewell shared five questions regarding sexuality and asked the Board to think whether they are fact or myth. She shared these noting this was an assignment for the 8th grade health ed class for the middle school students. She felt it was not appropriate for a 13 year old. She commented on the recent arrests surrounding sexual allegations and books that are in the district's libraries about sexual material. She asked the Board to protect the children and not have them be used as prey for sexuality.

Deb Downie welcomed the new Board members. She noted she is the liaison for the Board of Selectman and asked if there is a way to collaborate with the town when doing the superintendent search, they would appreciate being involved.

Kenyon Murphy spoke of the quarantining his son has gone through and the screen and stay program. He is disappointed that the program was not in place at the beginning of the school year. He commented on the Governor's mask mandates and his behavior regarding mask wearing. He shared his opinions regarding Ledge Light's mask mandates.

Michael Evering welcomed the new Board members, appreciates the future hard work, diligence and looks forward to seeing some great things happen in Stonington. He thanked West Vine Street School and Stonington Public Schools staff. He noted he and his wife are opposed to the mask mandate and asked that the Board put pressure back on the Governor's office at the state regarding this, adding we need to be leaders. He challenges the Board to represent this town and make a change. We need to do what is best for our children and get them back to normalcy. He commented that Representative Howard is trying to change the screen and stay protocol for students.

Consent Agenda

- A. October 14, 2021 (Regular Meeting)
October 28, 2021 (Special Meeting)
- B. Checks and Bills
- C. Personnel Report

The following motion was made by Daniel Kelley and seconded by Christopher Donahue:

Motion 1: To accept the consent agenda as presented.

All: Aye

Report of the Superintendent of Schools

Dr. Riley noted that a COVID update will be discussed later in the agenda. He welcomed the new Board members and spoke of the recent orientation with the new members and administration, adding it was very positive. Dr. Riley reported there will be a community meeting with Senator Sommers and members from nearby communities on December 8th in which the public can attend.

Board Committee Structure – Policy, Finance, Teaching and Learning

Farouk Rajab, Chair asked Board members if they would like to go back to meeting on the second Thursday of the month before the Board of Education meetings for the Teaching and Learning and Finance Committee meetings. He suggested the Policy committee meet on a different day and consider hybrid for this meeting. He asked the members to let him know by email which committee they would want to serve on and when. Chris Donahue commented he would like to be on the Finance and Facility committee. Dan Kelley commented these are the committees in the past and asked if there are other committees that are also needed. He suggested calling CABA to find out. Dr. Riley noted typically there are these three but there could be other committees that have a start and end date to them. Chair Rajab mentioned we also had a Board liaison in the past, for example to the Board of Finance but will discuss that another time. Kevin Agnello suggested they consider a superintendent search committee. He also suggested a start time of 6pm or 6:30pm before the Board meetings for the committees.

Issues facing the Board Discussion/Direction

Superintendent Search – Chair Rajab explained the previous Board members met and discussed the search and Craig Esposito has been working on getting the RFPs. Kevin Agnello created a Google form summarizing each RFP received which he presented to the Board and community. Chair Rajab reviewed the steps and time line for the superintendent search and asked if Mr. Agnello would invest an hour and help with the interview of these companies perhaps through Zoom. Chris Donahue would like to know the success the search companies had in the superintendent's they found. Craig Esposito noted we still have one or two who he has not heard from on their proposal. Paul Smotas is still interested in being considered, noting these are usually a turnkey operation. Sara Baker supports a special meeting to interview. Dan Kelley thanked Kevin for his work on the form and asked if the Board has looked in house yet for a candidate. Farouk said in order to keep the process transparent it is best to go through this process. Farouk said this is the best route; we want the community involved and want to give that subcommittee an option. Mr. Esposito said typically internals can through their hat in. Mr. Kelley explained he was just curious before we have to do a national search do we have one candidate internally. We have a great district and if we have someone in house that knows and has experience would like to see if we can start in house first or maybe do that hand and hand with the search firms. Chair Rajab said this was decided with the previous Board to go down this path. He asked the Board if they would like to continue on this path or change. Mr. Esposito said he would like to continue this path because these search firms bring other things to the process such as, a survey, goals and objectives and he would feel more comfortable this way. He feels firms would do a better job than we would do. Mr. Agnello also voiced he would like to continue the current path and would like the opportunity to learn the process and this maximizes the participation of the community. Ms. Baker also agreed. Mr. Donahue also agreed noting nothing wrong if someone comes in from within but this is more transparent. Chair Rajab added he would like to continue on this path. He will schedule a special meeting in two weeks to discuss further.

Board of Education Retreat – Dr. Riley noted the retreat is scheduled for December 2nd from 2pm to 7:30pm. The Board will meet with the Cabinet members from 2pm to 4pm then will excuse the team and the Board and facilitate will meet to discuss their thoughts.

ARP December Report Requirement – Dr. Riley reported that during the December regular meeting we will send out information on this.

Budget Calendar and Process – Dr. Riley shared the budget calendar with the Board noting there are additional budget meetings in January and asked if they had any questions to let him know.

COVID-19 Updates and Facilities Use – Dr. Riley noted the results of the local positive tests are going in the wrong direction. Today we are the highest along with North Stonington in the region. He shared with the Board a packet of information regarding masks from the Governor. He also addressed the screen and stay program noting we moved as quickly as we could. He agreed with the comments this evening. He noted even though it is a small step, he would also like to use the test and stay program. He has offered to the state in writing that Stonington wishes to be a pilot for the test and stay program.

Approval of Board of Education 2022 Meeting Calendar

Dr. Riley explained the changes in the calendar and also noted that a Board member asked the meeting to start at 6:30pm instead of 7pm. If the Board wants to consider a change now is the time to decide that. Chair Rajab asked the Board how a 6:30pm would work with all members. The members discussed the option of start times for committees and regular meeting start time.

The following motion was made by Christopher Donahue and seconded by Sara Baker:

Motion 2: To amend the proposed 2022 meeting calendar to a 6:30pm start time for regular meeting schedule.

All: Aye

Monthly Reports

The Board had no questions on the monthly reports.

Items for Future Agendas

Dan Kelley asked that the items for Jack Morehouse be brought back to the December meeting. Chair Rajab confirmed those items will be back on the December meeting agenda. Dr. Riley explained typically those items would sometimes go to the Teaching and Learning committee first. Mr. Kelley asked about later start times for schools and requested a report on that item, and perhaps have a committee to discuss this option. He also suggested getting information from CABA on this topic. Dr. Riley noted this was brought up a year or so ago and explained there was no interest but can look at this in the spring for the next fall. Sara Baker commented regarding ways we can engage students in a dialog and get a better feel of what is going on with our students. She suggested maybe survey students, have a focus group or talk to students about general campus climate. Dr. Riley will provide the Board with climate surveys. Craig Esposito stated that those surveys are a state requirement that schools do one very year.

Board Comments/Concerns

Chris Donahue commented it has been a great first meeting. He stated he is encouraged with the amount of involvement from the community, the care people have for their children. He noted this is not a committee for politics but what is best for the students and community. He encouraged everyone who spoke to stay involved in the process of finding a new superintendent. This person will be the force to moving forward in the future and he looks forward to staying with everyone in the community.

Sara Baker thanked Farouk Rajab for agreeing to lead the Board for the next year and serve as a chair. She thanked and congratulated Heidi Simmons for agreeing to step up and serve as secretary. She thanked both Chair Rajab and Dr. Riley for the open communications so far and thanked them for setting a wonderful tone for the work for the next year.

Chair Rajab noted that Heidi Simmons asked the administration to get the books from NSBA on "Becoming a Better Board Member" he asked the Board to take them and noted Mrs. Simmons spoke very highly of them. He thanked the community and echoed Mr. Donahue's comments. He stated this is not a Board of politics, we work hard because we are Stonington and we are a community that works together for one purpose we work for students and staff.

Adjournment

The following motion was made by Craig Esposito and seconded by Christopher Donahue:

Motion 3: To adjourn at 8:21p.m.

All: Aye

Heidi Simmons, Board Secretary