

Frank Todisco, Chairman, called the meeting to order at 7:01 p.m. in the Stonington High School Commons. Members present were, Alexa Garvey, Board Secretary, Candace Anderson, Jack Morehouse, Alisa Morrison, and Craig Esposito.

Member absent: Deborah Downie

Also, present were Dr. Van Riley, Superintendent of Schools, Ana de Oliveira, Recording Secretary, Student Government Representative, Madison Geiger, members of the staff, and interested citizens.

Board Presentations

Principal Ms. Dawe, introduced teachers and students from West Vine/West Broad Street Schools who gave a presentation on S.W.I.M. (Stay Safe, Work Hard, Include All, Model Respect), a school-wide behavioral expectation program. Each student gave a summary of what the program means to them and the role they play in the S.W.I.M. model. The teachers also shared a slide show of information. The students ended with the S.W.I.M. cheer.

Communications and Recognitions

Jack Morehouse shared he attended the Mystic Middle School Chorus Winter Concert at the La Grua Center and added that is a good to see we are forming partnerships. Mr. Morehouse added hats off to Mrs. Gilbert for a great performance. Candace Anderson communicated that she recently attended the high school chorus concert, which was very nice.

Comments from Citizens

Sue Jones commented on a few items that were covered in the report provided regarding the middle school consolidation. Ms. Jones remarked on the statement regarding the administration unanimously in favor of the consolidation, the Central Office building listed as a savings if the consolidation occurs. Ms. Jones had questions whether the savings from the Central Office go directly to the town budget or school, and added this item is misleading. Ms. Jones commented on Attachment A of the report and noted that there is no mention of parent and community groups for the consolidation. Ms. Jones also had questions regarding the sample schedules in the report. Ms. Jones suggested that there be open office hours in August for those students and parents who might want to get familiar with the school, which would make the transition easier.

Jana Geiger, spoke on behalf of the 2018 Graduation Party Committee and asked that the 2017-2018 school calendar be updated to reflect the snow days and graduation date for better planning the end of the year party.

Katie Quinlan commented that she has three students at Deans Mill School and is excited for the middle school consolidation and believes it is a good thing.

Ashley Gillece commented that the idea of consolidation has been brought up before and feels that it is hard to explain to students that currently attend Pawcatuck Middle School that the school they are attending will be closing. Ms. Gillece questioned why Central Office could not be moved to a wing of another school building. Ms. Gillece feels that PMS students are taking a hit on this consolidation. Ms. Gillece also spoke about the busing for the current PMS walkers and asked that the consolidation be postponed for a couple more years.

Cindy Nadeau spoke in favor of the middle school consolidation, commented that our students are more resilient than we think. Ms. Nadeau added that combining the schools would complement the music program. Ms. Nadeau also spoke we need to provide the best situation for our teachers by having full-time teachers rather than part-time teachers split among two buildings.

Paul Sartor shared this middle school configuration was looked at when he was on the building committee for the high school renovation, but did not work at that time. Mr. Sartor spoke that he has heard from parents and teachers of Pawcatuck regarding the inequity. Mr. Sartor commented on the middle school report stating that it is a really good report and feels that it addressed many issues that justify the consolidation. Mr. Sartor also added that we could improve student opportunities, increase programs, and extracurricular activities because students will be in one school, while saving money for taxpayers. Mr. Sartor spoke about the issue with parking at Mystic Middle School, but reminded the community that there is now an extra acre available that could be used for parking or sport fields. Mr. Sartor touched on the busing times, and agrees there are more positives to consider that out way the busing time issues. Mr. Sartor noted that the only down side to the consolidation is we might lose some tremendous administrative staff. Mr. Sartor ended his remarks by stating that students are coming first in this consolidation but it is nice for those paying taxes to benefit from this also.

Bruce Yarnall spoke that he supports the consolidation, but had questions regarding the map that was included the report and where certain classrooms were placed. Mr. Yarnall also had questions on the reduction of special ed teachers with the consolidation and added not sure, why we are reducing if there is the same number of students. Mr. Yarnall commented on existing building issues at Mystic Middle School that would need to be addressed. Mr. Yarnall questioned if there would be enough time to create new programs if the consolidation took place in the fall of 2018.

Comments from Citizens (continued)

Rob Marseglia spoke in favor of the merging of the two middle schools. Mr. Marseglia said he is in favor because of the new opportunities for students, and will eliminate half time teachers commuting between schools. Mr. Marseglia spoke on the history of the K-12 building committee and the consideration of building a middle school on the property near the high school, but added that the decision was made to establish equity between the two elementary schools therefore work was started in renovating those two buildings instead. Mr. Marseglia added that merging the two middle schools would bring the same equity to those schools. Mr. Marseglia added that this merge would require careful planning, important to have good communication with parents and staff so everyone can plan through the summer. Mr. Marseglia added he encourages administration to get the new class schedules, music, clubs, and sport offerings out to students and parents before the end of the school year. Mr. Marseglia voiced that due to enrollment the town cannot justify keeping two schools, adding this merge is to primarily improve education not save money and hopes this consolidation goes through.

Christina Korinek stated she feels that extracurricular activities are over played in the consolidation option and is disappointed that academics are not and adds it would be helpful to see the educational plan. Ms. Korinek commented that the consolidation feels rushed to happen this fall. Ms. Korinek also added does not like to see full time music and special ed teachers being cut.

Gordon Lord commented he has four children in the district this will affect. Mr. Lord feels the current plan for busing with the consolidation is poor and needs to be re-looked at. Mr. Lord added that he is in favor of the merge, has not been a fan of the "Pawcatuck side", Mystic side" theory. Mr. Lord is excited of what this could mean for the students in the long term.

Consent Agenda

- A. Minutes – December 14, 2017
- B. Checks and Bills
- C. Transfers
- D. Personnel Report
- E. Memorial Day Bearathon Race

The following motion was made by Craig Esposito and seconded by Alexa Garvey:

**Motion 1: Move to approve consent agenda items A-E as presented.
Frank Todisco – Abstained**

Motion Carried

Report of the Superintendent of Schools

Impact of Snow Days on Calendar and Graduation - Dr. Riley explained that we are now in January and already have had four snow days. Dr. Riley added that we have exhausted the built in snow days on the calendar, and understands families need the graduation date set as soon as possible. Dr. Riley requested that the calendar be brought back for discussion at the February Board of Education meeting to allow time for discussion regarding the snow make-up days. Dr. Riley also added that the graduation date would not be affected. Chairman Frank Todisco noted we had this situation a couple of years ago and would like this handled the same way it was handled in the past.

Discussion/Approval of Middle School Consolidation Option

Dr. Riley explained that a report on the consolidation from January 6 is available and answers some of the questions that parents and the community have. Dr. Riley also added that the purpose of the consolidation is to provide better academic opportunities for students. Dr. Riley's recommendation is to move forward with the consolidation this coming fall. Dr. Riley commented on the bus transportation times, the 35 students who currently walk to Pawcatuck Middle School and their bus ride, and the additional late busses. Dr. Riley explained the class schedule in the report is a sample and not final, the teachers will be involved in the schedules. Dr. Riley also noted that the map of Mystic Middle School in the report is to show that the classes will fit but not necessarily where they would be located in the building. Dr. Riley shared his thoughts on the academic benefits, financial implications, and music program. Dr. Riley added that we are not reducing staffing, only if there is a duplication of programming. Dr. Riley spoke on the financial aspect of the sale of the Central Office building and added this would be a town decision with the Board of Selectmen and Board of Finance. Dr. Riley feels there will be discussion with all three Boards on the financial status of this sale. Dr. Riley voiced that he feels six months is enough time for the consolidation.

Chairman Frank Todisco opened the meeting up to the Board for further discussion. Board member, Jack Morehouse voiced that he is struggling with the decision to consolidate but realizes that when the 5th grade moves down to the elementary schools the schools will have less enrollment, and consolidating would allow students to have more friendships. Mr. Morehouse is concerned about unfavorable parent feedback and wishes that we had done a parent survey about the consolidation. Mr. Morehouse added that after the special meeting he did not hear support but heard parents ask to slow down the process. Mr. Morehouse is concerned that population growth is changing. Mr. Morehouse read an article given by a parent regarding the consolidation of another Connecticut school district and its outcome. Mr. Morehouse voiced his concern regarding bus times, and added that he would like to see an award winning middle school plan, and feels music and foreign language should remain mandatory in our schools. Mr. Morehouse is not sure that the consolidation report addresses the drama and music opportunities.

Discussion/Approval of Middle School Consolidation Option(continued)

Alisa Morrison stated that there are many pluses and minuses with this consolidation. Ms. Morrison feels it is too rushed for this fall and would like to see monthly updates on the consolidation.

Candace Anderson spoke of the article in the Sun newspaper stating that administration unanimously supports the consolidation and added the issue has never been that, the team has come back every month with information and there has been much thought into this idea. Ms. Anderson noted the thought has never been we are losing a school with the consolidation; Mystic Middle School is a great facility and believes one middle school will benefit students and increase social opportunities. Ms. Anderson adds that she understands the connection with the Pawcatuck Middle School building but looking forward we cannot sustain quality education for students, and feels students are more responsive to change than parents are. Ms. Anderson adds that the consolidation would benefit all students.

Mallorie Geiger commented the consolidation would be socially better for students and there will be more academic opportunities, and teaching things at a younger age helps students.

Alexa Garvey voiced her appreciation for the time and effort that administration took answering the questions from the community. Ms. Garvey added the main goal for the Steering Committee was to answer the questions and to improve the academic quality of programs, adding the concept of consolidation has been around a long time but feels now is the right time to consolidate and be able to enhance students high school experience.

The following motion was made by Craig Esposito and seconded by Alexa Garvey:

Motion 2: Move to implement Dr. Riley, Superintendent's recommendation to consolidate the middle schools.

Frank Todisco - Yes	Jack Morehouse – No	Candace Anderson - Yes
Alex Garvey - Yes	Craig Esposito - Yes	Alisa Morrison - Yes
Motion Carried – 5-1		

Discussion/Approval of Middle School Consolidation Timeline

Chairman Frank Todisco explained Dr. Riley has recommended consolidation for this fall.

Candace Anderson stated she has complete faith in the administrative team to implement this consolidation this fall only concern is the strain on teachers. Ms. Anderson added it is better to make the change and roll it out because waiting longer does not always make it better, while adding it could work but could potentially be overwhelming for the fall of 2018.

Alisa Morrison commented she knows teachers could do the move, and has no worries about lunch waves, and academics but does worry about the physical component of the move.

Alexa Garvey stated she agreed with Ms. Morrison's comments and added that staff did ask to make the move but give them time to do it right.

The following motion was made by Alisa Morrison and seconded by Jack Morehouse:

Motion 3: Move to consolidate in the fall of 2019.

Frank Todisco - Yes	Jack Morehouse – Yes	Candace Anderson - No
Alex Garvey - Yes	Craig Esposito - No	Alisa Morrison - Yes
Motion Carried – 4-2		

Chairman Frank Todisco asked that this item be added to future Board agendas as we move forward. Chairman Todisco noted that with this change the 5th grade students will be staying at the middle schools in the 2018-2019 school year and will move in the fall of 2019.

2018-2019 Budget

Dr. Van Riley thanked all the staff for putting the budget together and added that administration met many times on the budget. Dr. Riley gave a brief overview of the proposed budget adding that there will be a 2.7% increase in the budget. Gary Shettle, Director of Finance went through the proposed budget line by line, explaining the changes and financial impacts. Mr. Shettle went into detail regarding items such as tuition, health insurance costs, added teaching increase, and the unemployment account. Mr. Shettle explained that the \$60,000 for retirement account would not be applied this time since we are two years in advanced. Mr. Shettle also added the purchase of three vans for Special Services has produced a savings. Dr. Riley added there was discussion on the high school parking fees and added they are still in the budget to offset snow removal. The Board had no questions on the proposed 2018-2019 budget.

Chairman Frank Todisco explained there are three more Board sessions to discuss the budget and asked the Board to send any questions they may have on the proposed budget to Dr. Riley by middle of next week. Chairman Todisco noted that we will be cancelling the January 18 Board meeting but will still be holding the January 25 Board meeting to discuss the budget and added that a portion of this meeting will be used for a CUBE presentation to the Board.

Monthly Reports

The Board had no comments on the monthly reports.

Committee Report

The Board had no comments on the committee reports.

Building Committee Update

Dr. Riley reported in Ms. Downie's absence that we are still dealing with PCB issues and budgets. Dr. Riley noted that the propane leak at Deans Mill was fixed and Bill King is working with the fire department for future emergencies. Principal Alicia Dawe invited the Board members to sign up for upcoming tours and walk through with Gilbane and teachers, and will forward a schedule for the tours to the Board.

Comments from Citizens Relative to Board Action on this Agenda

Sue Jones thanked everyone involved with the middle school consolidation and really appreciated how everyone listened to the concerns and comments. Ms. Jones also commented this Board really works well together, and thanked the Board and Dr. Riley.

Paul Sartor thanked the Board and feels the Board did it right and answered all the questions. Mr. Sartor added he is really excited and this is such a good thing for our kids, very happy for the consolidation.

Bruce Yarnall also thanked everyone for giving the teachers an extra year to do a good job, create, and make a great middle school experience. Mr. Yarnall added that this gives time to let administration know what resources we need to get this done.

Items for Future Agendas

There were no items for future agendas.

Board Comments/Concerns

The Board had no comments or concerns.

Adjournment

The following motion was made by Alisa Morrison and seconded by Craig Esposito:

Motion 4: To Adjourn at 8:55 p.m.

All: Aye

Alexa J. Garvey, Board Secretary