

Alexa Garvey, Secretary, called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. in the Stonington High School Commons. Members present were Deborah Downie, Candace Anderson, Jack Morehouse, Alisa Morrison, and Craig Esposito.
Member absent: Frank Todisco, Chairman

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

Middle School Consolidation Discussion

Mrs. Garvey explained there would be no action tonight regarding the middle school consolidation this is an informational meeting so the Board can get questions from the public and more information out to the public. There will be information presented from Tim Smith, Pawcatuck Middle School Principle and Dr. Van Riley will speak on the potential consolidation. Mrs. Garvey explained there would be time for public comment. Mrs. Garvey noted that in the past there was a middle school task force committee with parents, students, teachers, and Board members where we looked at putting 5th grade into the elementary level. Mrs. Garvey added that what came out of the committee was that students wanted to spend more time together and more variety in school opportunities. Mrs. Garvey added that last May the Board established a committee to look at whether consolidating our middle schools would be possible. As we are looking at the options our middle school populations are decreasing, we have shared staff at the schools; these are concerns as we go forward. Mrs. Garvey commented we offered an opportunity for the public to send questions and we have answers to some of those questions.

Mr. Smith, Pawcatuck Middle School Principal reviewed the presentation that was done at the November Board meeting and noted a link is available on our website of that presentation. Mr. Smith shared information on the option of consolidation, and explained some of the key items, which are declining enrollment, class sizes, extracurricular activity offerings, and lunch wave schedules with the consolidation. Mr. Smith also spoke on operational items that will need to be addressed if consolidation occurs, such as additional parking, additional air conditioners, and new cafeteria furniture. Mr. Smith noted that there is currently duplication of extracurricular activities between both middle schools, which if consolidation occurs the duplicate stipends could fund new activities since we would not need duplicate clubs. Mr. Smith closed by saying that consolidating the schools would give students more opportunities for students and eliminates the duplication of programs, a better opportunity to define our mission and vision and give students the best experience they could have. (presentation handout attached)

Dr. Riley thanked everyone for coming out this evening. Dr. Riley started by stating that he has heard the reason for consolidating is for class sizes to go up to save money; he added that is not the case we are maintaining the class sizes in the consolidation. Dr. Riley added that we would have more extracurricular opportunities. Dr. Riley noted that this is the sixth time we have held meetings to speak on the consolidation in which the community could ask questions. Dr. Riley added there are several handouts available tonight such as Q&A list, transportation times study, a copy of Mr. Smith's presentation and a timeline document. Dr. Riley spoke about the music program and added that he has met with music teachers to get ideas from them to provide a great and amazing music program. Dr. Riley state there would be more discussion on the consolidation at this Thursday's regular Board meeting; there will not be a decision on the proposed consolidation until the regular Board meeting in January. Dr. Van Riley noted that his recommendation is to move forward with the consultation this coming year, adding we will be able to have more opportunities, and will keep our 5th grade at the elementary if we choose to do that.

Comments from Citizens:

Sue Jones - commented she had no children currently in either elementary or middle school but shared her questions and concerns. Ms. Jones commented that during the last Board meeting the Building Committee did a presentation about fixtures and furniture which timeline for these items would be winter of 2018. Ms. Jones added if you are keeping 4th graders as 5th graders in the elementary buildings while the building project is still going on is that going to be conducive to having added students in these buildings while construction is still going on. Ms. Jones also had questions regarding Pawcatuck Middle being a Title I school, would the consolidation affect the Title I money and will there be added funds given to the consolidated middle school to help with expenses with the additional students. Ms. Jones also sked will there be additional late buses for after school activities so that the transportation could stay below the one-hour time. Ms. Jones voiced her concern of lack of space and parking for extra activities and sports, which could be running all at the same time, is there a contingency plan for this? Ms. Jones added that the Board should consider the hardship for some of the Pawcatuck parents to pick up their students at Mystic. Ms. Jones asked for the budget with the consolidation versus no consolidation and what funds are we saving. Ms. Jones notes that she is concerned that she is hearing a lot of "we are looking at that" and would like to see solid plans such as parking. Ms. Jones also asked about available funds, without a budget in place how are we going to know what funds we are saving, and how do we know there will be funds available for extra activities.