

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 5<sup>th</sup> 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 5<sup>th</sup> 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 4<sup>th</sup> graders as 5<sup>th</sup> 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.

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Ashley Gillece - questioned what is the percentage of Pawcatuck Middle School students that currently do not ride a bus? Ms. Gillece commented on the time students would be riding the bus to Mystic. Ms. Gillece feels you add extra activities but if parents cannot financially do it, they just cannot do it. Ms. Gillece asked if the Board has considered moving Central Office into another existing building other than Pawcatuck Middle School to save money or building a wall for security reasons and moving the Central Office staff to a wing of another building and saving the money that way. Ms. Gillece spoke on the timeline of the building construction and if there is a snag in the building construction after the vote on consolidation we are back in same situation of where do the students go. Ms. Gillece recommended the Board wait two years, make a decision then, and in the meantime relocate the Central Office, and save funds that way. Ms. Gillece also mentioned she feels that there are many questions that have not been answered and having more extracurricular activities is not enough reason to close a middle school.

Mark Minar - asked if the Board has statistics, on the percentage of parents who drop off students in Mystic versus Pawcatuck. Mr. Minar also commented that travel time is a concern for parents in Pawcatuck, questioned the transportation time study, and why include 5th grade in this if they are not going to be at the middle school. Mr. Minar also questioned the science behind the travel study, asked are you really going to get everyone to MMS in 40 minutes.

Sara Lewandowski - had questions regarding the health clinic at Pawcatuck Middle and how it works and who attends. Ms. Lewandowski asked if with the consolidation would there be more extra classes during the day, such as advanced math, and gifted and talented programs. Ms. Lewandowski requested to see proposal or the Board's thoughts on that.

Sam Agnello - asked if there has been a study done on the academic achievements of students riding busses for over 30 minutes versus those students riding buses for under 30 minutes. Mr. Agnello gave a history of the proposal of building a new school to consolidate elementary and middle or a new high school when he was on the Board. Mr. Agnello asked for information on the Superintendent's proposal to build one middle school and the discussion and vote of this proposal. Mr. Agnello also questioned where the savings of the consolidation will go and added that a conversation should be had with the BOE and BOF to this affect.

Bruce Yarnall - voiced his concern of the timing of the consolidation but supports this idea and feels that we need time to plan and to develop programs. Mr. Yarnall added we have the opportunity to do some good things in the district but feels there is not much time to do this by next fall.

Jennifer Ogden - commented on the bus ride for her student, which is now only two minutes will then have a 40-minute ride. Ms. Ogden spoke that for extra activities after school there will be added travel time to and from these activities for parents. Ms. Ogden added that this consolidation seems to have a very rushed timeline, there are no plans in place for parking, sports, and lunch waves and feels these issues should be figured out first before a decision is made.

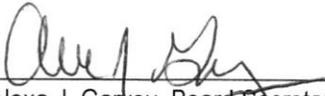
Brendan Hinchey - commented that his general impression is that this consolidation is very rushed trying to make the numbers supports the proposal that the Board wants. Mr. Hinchey asked why is enrollment is declining is it because students are moving to Magnet schools. Mr. Hinchey added he feels population is declining and not students. Mr. Hinchey spoke that a true cost analysis should be done with transportation and see how much time students are now on the bus and parents are now having to drive. Mr. Hinchey feels a forward-looking plan is not consolidating students into a 50-year-old school, the process should be slowed down, get a really good plan, and maybe build one centralized middle school.

Dr. Riley answered some of the questions that the community asked regarding the schedule of furniture purchase and delivery, transportation, late buses, declining enrollment, parking, savings with consolidation, programs, the idea of building one middle school, Title I funds and the health clinic at Pawcatuck Middle School. Dr. Riley closed by saying this is not about saving funds but about having great opportunities for our students.

Jack Morehouse voiced his concerns regarding enrollment and contingency plans if we have an increase of enrollment after the consolidation. Mr. Morehouse stated the population most affected is the 50 students who currently walk to Pawcatuck Middle School and feels we need to see what we can do for these students for the transportation and come up with a great alternative. Alexa Garvey explained that families statistically are not having large families and Mystic Middle in the past has held more students. Dr. Riley added we cannot predict the number of students that is why we need to keep Pawcatuck Middle School as part of the district buildings.

### Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 7:10 p.m.

  
Alexa J. Garvey, Board Secretary