

Frank Todisco, Chairman, called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. in the Stonington High School Commons. Members present were Faith Leitner, Secretary, Deborah Downie, Alexa Garvey, Terry Stefanski, Candace Anderson, and Craig Esposito.

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

**Comments from Citizens Relative to the Budget**

Sue Jones asked if there would be action or a vote taken on the budget tonight. Frank Todisco answered there will not be any votes tonight on the budget.

**Presentation on Staffing and Class Sizes**

Van Riley thanked the Board and the Leadership Team for this opportunity and explained there have been many questions over the years on staffing, and what type of formula is used and what aspects are involved. Dr. Riley explained staffing particularly teachers is dependent on two things and one is enrollment. If enrollment goes down the fewer teachers are needed if goes up more teachers are need but staffing is also dependent on other things such as, the we need to meet the needs of students and provide programs. Dr. Riley said he felt it would be important to hear from the administration team and shared an outline of items, which he explained to the Board and community regarding staffing and enrollment. (Outline attached)

The elementary principals, Jenn McCurdy and Alicia Dawe shared information on grade levels and their recommendations on class sizes. The elementary principals spoke of the demands that are set at each grade level, students that require one to one supports, and unknowns that arrive. The team recommended a smaller size classroom for K-2 classes with a class size of 16-19 with a max of 20 students and 18-22 with a max of 23 students for Grades 3-4. The principals also spoke of the increase of special supports for students, increase in military families, the increase in number of student transfers into Deans Mill School, changes in teaching now versus years ago, a rise of free and reduced at West Vine Street School, CHR cases, and DCF placements. The team spoke on the assessments, and interventions that put in place at each school. The elementary team spoke on the benefits of small class sizes, special education impact, and unique challenges per site.

Deborah Downie asked about the enrollment numbers when students move in during the year. Ms. McCurdy explained the historical trend of enrollment changes during the year. Craig Esposito asked what formula is used now for staffing. Mrs. Dawe explained kindergarten is the most difficult to project; they look at local and surrounding preschools and make the best estimate. Staffing for grades 1-4 are easier by using the current class size and needs to project next year class size, there is not a formula. Alexa Garvey asked about student supports, when is the behavioral specialist called in and how this is helping students. Ms. McCurdy added it is on a student-by-student basis and Mrs. Van Etten added this is approved through the Special Services office. Terry Stefanski asked what is the average class size now in K-1. The team noted current class size is about 18 students and it fluctuates. Faith Leitner asked when are tutors used in elementary, middle and high school and would they be a help and how many are there in the district? Mrs. Van Etten noted that Special Services takes care of tutors for expulsions, students with medial leave, alternative instruction for an ELL and a variety of reasons. Mrs. Gullickson noted a second set of tutors are through Title I funds based on percent of free and reduced students and currently have 4 or 5 from Title I funding.

The middle school team, Tim Smith and Greg Keith spoke on middle school level class sizes and how they are derived. Mr. Smith and Mr. Keith spoke on the effect of class size decisions on instruction, grade level special education services and additional special education programs, self-contained classroom, inclusion, intensive reading intervention and resource room. Mr. Keith noted Mystic Middle School, at the moment, has four grade levels with four teachers each and does not qualify for Title I funds so we need to be creative on how we provide supports. Mr. Smith and Mr. Keith noted students with special services have increased even though enrollment has decreased.

Alexa Garvey spoke on classroom for greater need or behavior, is that by grade level? Mr. Smith explained this is not by grade level; we have two separate classrooms, a behavioral that is grades 5-8 and a greater needs classroom that is also grades 5-8.

Mark Friese spoke on Stonington High School staffing and scheduling process. Mr. Friese emphasized this is the students' final journey and spoke on the core values and expectations of learning at the high school. Mr. Friese thanked the Board for bringing some of the programs back. Mr. Friese spoke on the declining enrollment in the past eight years and the current class sizes. Mr. Friese spoke on programs and the number of sections in each program. Mr. Friese also spoke on the new programs available such as the credit union, Financial Literacy, a partnership with Mystic Aquarium, computer science courses, and a variety of special education programs. Mr. Friese stated the current staff allows us to provide the programs we have and there is a lot of flexibility in our programs at SHS. Mr. Friese added we provide what the students need, and the school climate is fantastic and the kids are successful. Mr. Friese feels we should have more opportunities for kids to get ready for the business world and need to prepare our students and keep students at SHS.

Terry Stefanski asked if SHS offers trade courses. Mr. Friese noted there are wood tech, computer science, computer aide, and drafting courses. Faith Leitner asked if there is an option for on-line world language. Mr. Friese said we tried Mandarin but it was not good. Student Government Representative, Cameron Dreher, commented on the variety of opportunities at the high school, courses, and teachers.

Dr. Riley addressed how he got to the reduction of 4.4 teacher positions in the 2017-18 budget. Dr. Riley noted he looked at each school, the needs of students, and discussions with the principals on where we can reduce without affecting students' needs.

Allison Van Etten spoke on the increase of the special needs population and the importance of maintaining the current special education teaching positions. Mrs. Van Etten noted the number of students in each school who are receiving services and the outplaced tuition and transportation costs that would have been associated with these students if we did not have a program in our district for them.

The administration and the Board spoke on the impact of a reduction of staff of the business department at the high school. Mr. Friese explained how that decision was made. Mr. Todisco asked with the staff reduction would we sacrifice the Financial Literacy course. Mr. Friese explained how we could still offer this course. Dr. Riley noted administration is still looking at ways to save the business courses and think there will be some more changes in staffing before the next BOE meeting. Terry Stefanski had a question on the special education population and what the preparation after graduation is for these students. Mrs. Van Etten answered the Board's questions, there are about 300 special ed students, and after graduation, those students who have individualize plans the plan would determine where they go after graduation and some students we have to provide a program until they are 21 years of age.

Frank Todisco thanked the administration for meeting with the board; information was very helpful.

#### **2017-18 Budget Discussion and Direction**

Frank Todisco explained the Board submitted a number of questions to be answered by administration regarding the proposed 2017-2018 budget. Mr. Todisco asked the Board if there is a need for more explanation on these questions. The Board answered yes. The Board members stated the questions and the administration gave further explanation on items regarding staffing, need for athletic trainers at home and away games, portable rentals, overtime increase, equipment and athletic allocations, FICA line item, discrepancy in field trip line item, duplicate line item entry, and impact of new special ed van cost if not funded through CIP. Mr. Todisco recommended that at this point, if there are still some questions that need to be clarified, we will meet again next Thursday to address them at that time. Mr. Todisco added that we will be putting the 2017-2018 proposed budget on the February 9 regular meeting agenda where the Board will be taking action.

**Comments from Citizens Relative to Board Action on this Agenda**

Cindy Nadeau, commented on class size numbers, and gave her personal experience having special education students regarding outplacing students; the tremendous student supports available at the high school, and what happens once they leave the district and strongly recommended the Board listen to administration in regard to class size and class offerings.

Sue Jones had questions on the budget handout in regards to the tuition line item, if there is an actual number on magnet school tuition. Ms. Jones spoke on class choices, Financial Literacy class, school of choice, tuition paying students and those funds staying in the school budget, recruiting students from Westerly school district, and marketing our district better. Ms. Jones also spoke on the need for trainers at all games. Dr. Riley commented on the tuition funds and will bring the issue back to the BOF.

Madison Geiger, a Stonington High School student, spoke on her concern regarding course cuts that will affect students when they graduate.

**Board Comments/Concerns**

Terry Stefanski thanked the principals coming forth and sharing their concerns.

**Adjournment**

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

**Motion 1:** To Adjourn at 9:18 p.m.

All: Aye

  
Faith Leitner, Board Secretary