

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, members of the staff, press, and interested citizens.

Comments from Superintendent

Dr. Riley noted Stonington Public Schools does not ban books, there is no list of banned books, this is something the district does not do. Dr. Riley added a teacher made an inaccurate statement and said the Board of Education was banning books and that was just not true. Dr. Riley went on to summarize the language arts curriculum and how this particular issue began. Dr. Riley explained "*Animal Farm*" was not selected as an anchor book for every student to read, but teachers can use when necessary, as a supplemental, students can study it after school or in ICE block. Dr. Riley added we encourage "*Animal Farm*" to be used. Dr. Riley stressed we do not ban books, "*Animal Farm*" is there for all students to enjoy and teachers to use as appropriate but at this point it is not an anchor book. Dr. Riley noted per Mr. Todisco this item will be on the agenda for the February 9 Board meeting but between now and then Dr. Riley will be sharing with the Board more information regarding the teachers and how they are involved in some of these curriculum decisions, share 7&8 curriculum, and the list of recommended books.

Comments from Citizens

Penny Bodle, a parent of an 8th grader, commented that she does not believe the teacher misspoke and added the teacher is not allowed to teach "*Animal Farm*". Ms. Bodle questioned why the tenured teacher is not allowed to teach the book in class, and expressed there be more explanation regarding the enrichment period that happens once a week and feels this is different than teaching the book in a classroom. Ms. Bodle also added the teacher should make the call whether to teach the book or not.

Alice Sasso, a parent of a two Mystic Middle School students who attend Mr. Goldberg's class. Ms. Sasso read a statement from another parent, Harriet Statchen, regarding her son's experience with the book "*Animal Farm*". Ms. Sasso commented on the need for more information on the curriculum and academics page of the district's website so parents know what is happening in the schools.

Millie Donovan, a Mystic Middle School parent, spoke about her daughter and how she was disappointed that "*Animal Farm*" would no longer be read in school. Ms. Donovan spoke on the email thread from the Mystic Middle teacher, principal, and parents regarding dropping the book. Ms. Donovan spoke about fostering communication between the teachers, principal, and parents, and transparency in our district for parents and students to receive feedback and freedom for the teachers to teach as they see fit. Ms. Donovan feels it is okay to introduce other materials. Ms. Donovan add that she felt this conversation should have only involved the concerned parents and students.

Thomas Gamache, a teacher from the state of Rhode Island, spoke of his own experience while teaching the book "*Animal Farm*" a book that was on the list of banned books in his district. Mr. Gamache gave his opinion regarding books that are not allowed to be taught and where it could lead.

Penny Bodle asked what is the process for parents to communicate with the district and how do we foster a little bit more transparency.

Frank Todisco, Chairman paused the meeting for a five minute break.

Frank Todisco, Chairman called the meeting back to order at 7:43 p.m.

2017-18 Budget Discussion and Direction

Mr. Frank Todisco explained this item is a continuation of last week's discussion. The Board needed more clarification on some additional questions. Dr. Riley noted the Board had a graph format that depicts the difference in student enrollment and staff numbers. Dr. Riley noted he answered the questions from the last meeting but would be happy to answer any further questions from the Board. Dr. Riley suggested that the Board set a meeting with the administration in September after kindergarten enrollment numbers come in to discuss future class sizes. Dr. Riley requested the item of tuition revenue be added to the February 9 agenda. Dr. Riley clarified the staff reduction and noted it is a 5.4 FTE reduction of certificated staff due to a Physical Education teacher retirement. Dr. Riley also explained that he will have line item descriptions for the budget for the next budget season. Dr. Riley suggested after speaking to Mr. Friese, ways to fund the .6 business teacher at the high school. Dr. Riley added that Gary Shettle would be meeting with our benefits consultant where there could be a final adjustment in the budget making the final budget increase at 2.12 or 2.13 percent budget increase.

Deborah Downie noted that she appreciated the descriptions on the line items. Frank Todisco commented that he is looking forward to the conversation in September regarding class sizes. Mr. Todisco asked for clarification on the 5.4 FTE staff reductions, whether they are due to enrollment or class sizes. Mr. Todisco asked Mr. Friese, by adding the .6 teacher at the high school, would we still offer the current offerings in the business department and the Financial Literacy class the Board passed a few months ago. Mr. Friese the impact. Dr. Riley explained the reduction was based on enrollment decline plus the program impacts based on what the principals explained in the last meeting. The Board came to a consensus the addition of the .6 FTE would be in the budget coming forth at the next Board meeting on February 9.

Comments from Citizens Relative to Board Action on this Agenda

There were no comments from citizens.

Board Comments/Concerns

There were not comments or concerns from the Board.

Adjournment

The following motion was made by and seconded by Faith Leitner and Terry Stefanski:

Motion 1: To Adjourn at 7:52 p.m.
All: Aye



Faith Leitner, Board Secretary