

Alexa Garvey, Board Secretary, called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. in the Stonington High School Commons. Members present were, Candace Anderson, Deborah Downie, 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, Madison Geiger, Student Government Representative, members of the staff, and interested citizens.

Board Presentations

The Nifty Fifties Drama Presentation – Alexa Garvey, Board Secretary directed everyone to the cafeteria for a short presentation by the Pawcatuck Middle School drama students of the upcoming drama production The Nifty Fifties. The production will take place at Stonington High School on March 24th and 25th.

Accountability Report - Mary Anne Butler, Assistant Superintendent, shared a report on the twelve performance indicators. She explained how the district gets credit for each of the indicators. Ms. Butler reviewed the accountability index scores from each school and the rationale to each percentage of accountability indexes. She reviewed what category each school fell into based on the score. She noted that as a district our accountability index was at 77.7%. Ms. Butler explained the action plan with redeployment of resources for math, such as math coaches, curriculum adjustments, intervention blocks with math focus, instructional time adjustments in grade 5 at MMS, professional development, data monitoring and instructional adjustments. A copy of the presentation is attached.

Middle School Steering Committee Report

Tim Smith, Pawcatuck Middle School Principal, reported that the first task for the Middle School Consolidation Steering Committee was to establish a new name for the middle school. Mr. Smith added a survey went out to both parents and students of each middle school and received a total of 1,463 responses, which were then categorized into five groups. He shared some of the names in these categories. From those, the top three name choices were Stonington Middle School at 77.7%, Nathaniel Palmer Middle School at 17% and Mistuxet Avenue Middle School at 5.3% of the vote. He reported it seems the vast majority of the parents and students feel the name of the middle school should be consistent with the high school being one school for the whole community, so it makes sense to keep it Stonington Middle School, and this is what the data also shows at this point.

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

Motion 1: Move to name the new middle school Stonington Middle School.

All: Aye

Mr. Smith also reported that staff of both middles schools would be meeting to work together in their subcommittees on the consolidation during tomorrow's professional development at Mystic Middle School to create priorities and a calendar for these subcommittees.

Communications and Recognitions

Madison Geiger communicated that it is International Women's Day today and wanted to recognize all the woman in the district especially those in leadership roles that serve as an inspiration and as good role models to younger students.

Candace Anderson thanked the high school in particular for the sensitive response to the large shooting in terms of the lock down drill; teachers took a lot of time out of their classroom to talk to kids. This makes a big difference to help kids get a chance to process what is going on and gives a lot of credit to the high school.

Jack Morehouse reported he went to the state capital this week to attend a workshop about ECS (Educational Cost Sharing) which has adopted a new formula, which determines how and what level our district receives state funding. Mr. Morehouse stated other districts in our area similar to us seem to get more funding. He shared a website www.stschoolfinance.org where you can compare our district with others in our area concerning state funding and what is spent. He added that Board of Finance member, Danielle Chesebrough, was also there representing Stonington. Mr. Morehouse reported in Stonington we are on the middle to lower end on the household income ratio so we are now on 70/30 ratio for redistribution of funds, which will help our district. He had a pamphlet of this information available to share. He also added and thanked the three boy scouts who attend Mystic Middle School, who interviewed him and it was nice to hear about their experiences at school.

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Deborah Downie gave thanks to the Stonington High School Interact Club. She attended the packaging of 10,000 meals, and it was great to see students, staff, and community working together.

Dr. Van Riley recognized the Board of Education, explaining this is Board of Education appreciation month. He noted this is his fourth district being superintendent; it is a joy to work with a group of people that understand the focus should be on student success and achievement. Dr. Riley showed his appreciation and thanked them for serving the community well by offering the Board a special gift from the district.

Comments from Citizens

Sue Fornara commented the Stonington High School Band Boosters is very distressed by the proposed changes to the music programs. She also added the proposed cuts would hurt the quality of the music programs. She would like to see instrumental music and chorus start in 4th grade like surrounding districts. She added maintaining the full time band position would allow to have a teacher go between both elementary schools. Ms. Fornara feels the band and chorus schedule should run every other day as they do now in the middle schools and other area districts. She also noted in the new elementary buildings there is a lack of room for these groups to rehearse. With the consolidation and savings of funds, we should be able to keep this music position and not cut it. Ms. Fornara ended by asking the Board not to make cuts to music staff or the music program and use this opportunity to make it even better.

Christina Fullerton spoke of her and many other parents do not support the idea of delaying band instruction from fifth grade to sixth grade. She feels with the consolidation we should not be cutting the band position and would rather like to see the interim one-year band position be a permanent position; fill the gap for the one year and then split their time later after the consolidation to the elementary schools. She spoke about the award winning music and choral instruction, and why students stay in our schools because of these programs. She feels this is important to the students and the instructors.

Harriet Statchen spoke that she is a great believer of the power of arts education and we were promised with the consolidation there would be no cuts to services or programs but more enhancements to these programs. She voiced her concern about the Mystic Middle School music program undergoing a change in the program when Mr. Hilbie leaves, why would we cut this position, our music program will be worse without replacing the band instructor. Ms. Statchen spoke on data that supports the need for arts instruction and student achievement.

Sue Jones spoke that she supports band and chorus programs saying this is very important. Ms. Jones also asked about snow day cancellations and appreciate the work administration does with this. She asked that the graduation date be set for the 18-19 calendar on a Friday and adding five extra snow days at the end on the calendar and some throughout the calendar but use the June days first. She also said she saw social media posts regarding the naming of the new middle school and it was upsetting to see adults being rude on the social media. Ms. Jones feels it would be a good idea to have a Facebook page about the consolidation and we need to bring the community together and feels the transition would be easier.

Cindy Nadeau addressed the school staff and wanted to let them know that you are making a difference especially with the special ed students and spoke about her own student being his own advocate. Ms. Nadeau shared the Westerly Sun had an article that talked about a program that Allison Van Etten put on at the high school for several local groups. This was about training and ideas so that our special ed students can be welcomed along with their neurotypical peers in summer programs.

Alex Garvey, Secretary added that Frank Todisco, Chairman is out of town but wanted the Board to be aware he has requested a report about the middle school configuration and for the Board of Education to review it and it will be presented at the May Board meeting, which might answer questions that were asked tonight.

Consent Agenda

- A. Minutes –February 8, 2018 (Regular)
- B. Checks and Bills
- C. Transfers
- D. Personnel Report

The following motion was made by Alisa Morrison and seconded by Deborah Downie:

Motion 2: To approve items A - D on the Consent Agenda.

All: Aye

Report of the Superintendent of Schools

Dr. Van Riley addressed the music issue adding he has been talking with Mr. Todisco, and was waiting on the consolidation timeline, so now that we have it, he will bring detail report on the music program and how it will work with the consolidation. Dr. Riley also said he has met with the music teachers and nothing is changing with the program and will be extending music program down from the 4th to the 3rd grade but still do instrumental selection in 5th grade. Will bring how that will work as far as schedule and hours at the May Board meeting. He also mentioned he met with Glen Frishman, Board Finance member, and had a positive discussion about ECS and other things. Dr. Riley added our budget goes to the Board of Finance on March 21 and we will see where it goes from there. He also reported that Mr. Keith, Principal at Mystic Middle School, has been out with a family issue so has been filling in as principal at Mystic Middle School. He will be sending out a letter on Monday to parents and staff regarding the March 14th safety events. At the middle schools, student leaders will have an organized activity to do together and there will not be walkouts, and asked that elementary parents talk to their children at home about this issue.

Mr. Friese gave an update on the events taking place at the high school on March 14. Students will be doing something symbolic and meaningful for Stonington. There will be "Step Out For Safety", students will be going out to bleachers in the field, the Stonington Police will be on site to read the names and ring a bell for each student who died in the Florida event. Those students who do not want to participate can stay in the commons. At the end, we will be launching a program called "Say Something" a student safety program to help students help each other and take care of one another.

Dr. Riley apologized for the decision regarding the snow day, there was a concern in sharing thoughts with other districts that is was going to snow hard mid-day so even with an early dismissal we would had our elementary students in buses and we did not want to risk transporting the students home safely.

Approval of 2018/19 School Calendar

Dr. Riley thanked Sue Jones for the suggestion of adding five days in June for snow days and other days built in which gives us eight days for snow cancellations and a fixed graduation day on the 21st, which is a Friday. Dr. Riley asked for Board approval of the 18/19 school calendar.

The following motion was made by Candace Anderson and seconded by Alisa Morrison:

Motion 3: To approve the 2018-2019 School Calendar as presented.

All: Aye

Policy 6172 Alternative Education

Alexa Garvey asked if the policy was generated from the CAFE policy. Mark Friese said yes, the recommendation was to put all programs under one policy. The Board had no other questions or comments on the policy and will bring back for approval at the next meeting.

Monthly Reports

The Board had no comments on the monthly reports.

Committee Reports

The Board had no comments on the committee reports.

Building Committee Update

Deborah Downie explained there was a meeting this week and heard very positive progress report on construction, putting in floor tile, fixtures, cabinets and is on track. She also reported that Eversource will be coming out next month to hookup electricity, have a resolution on drainage at Deans Mill, still do not have pricing on the remaining of abatement costs, and the state has not approved the furniture but the architect has a plan to move ahead.

Dr. Riley said there have been questions from parents and staff on the retention ponds regarding the safety, and there are multiple fences around these. The building committee will do everything to make sure kids cannot get to the area. There were also questions about insects, we are looking into that, we cannot use pesticides, they are built to drain quickly, and right now, there is temporary fencing. Ms. Downie added there will be less of a pond and that the water will percolate into the ground.

Comments from Citizens Relative to Board Action on this Agenda

There were no comments.

Items for Future Agendas

Deborah Downie asked for information on other programs not just music for the consolidation.

Board Comments/Concerns

Jack Morehouse commented the best part of his student's education here was the music program, and feels students should have the same opportunity that he had back in 1976. His hope that we stay strong with the music program here in Stonington. He also feels we should promote the high school better than we do and gave examples of other schools. He noted how wonderful our sports and music programs are at the high school and feels we need to put more effort in this maybe radio or newspaper. Alexa Garvey communicated this is part of the goals of the Communications Committee and are looking into ideas. She added any ideas are great but needs non-cost methods of promoting our schools.

Alexa Garvey commented she had a good time packing meals at the high school and took her daughter along who was one of the original founders of the Interact Club, at that time it was not allowed in the school, so these students met outside the school at night at the Mystic Noank Library. The difference an administration makes in allowing us to work with the community and that we can open our doors says a lot for the school system and our town.

Madison Geiger spoke on behalf of students on student activism, we are appreciative that our school district gives us the opportunities to do things like walk ins and outs and give us a voice and should keep encouraging that to students of all grade levels. It is important and it is unique that our school district values our opinions.

Adjournment

The following motion was made by Candace Anderson and seconded by Alisa Morrison:

Motion 4: To Adjourn at 8:21p.m.

All: Aye


Alexa J. Garvey, Board Secretary