

WILLINGTON BOARD OF EDUCATION

Tuesday, May 12, 2020

Regular Meeting Minutes

Via Online Public Zoom Video Conference

7:00 p.m.

Audio Recording: Yes

Video Recording: Yes

Notes Taken: Yes

Members Present

Herb Arico - Chairman

Elena Testa - Vice Chairman

Michelle Doucette Cunningham - Secretary

Ann Grosjean

Tracey Anderson

Donna Cook

(Liz Perry submitted her resignation effective April 9, 2020)

Members Absent

Also Present

Superintendent of Schools, Phil Stevens

Members of the Public

Chairman Herb Arico called the meeting to order at 7:01 pm.

Donna Cook made a motion to add an item to the agenda regarding the Board of Education writing a letter to the Governor requesting to allow the town to pause teacher salary increases due to the unprecedented situation with the pandemic.

Elena Testa seconded the motion.

Chairman Arico stated this motion is simply to add the item to the agenda for discussion.

Vote:	Yes	No	Abstain	Absent
H. Arico	✓			
M. Cunningham	✓			
D. Cook	✓			

T. Anderson	✓			
A. Grosjean	✓			
E. Testa	✓			

Motion passes.

Present to Speak

Chairman Arico stated speakers must identify themselves by name and address then may proceed with comments. He added that speakers should try to keep comments to 4-5 minutes and the time allotted for speakers should not exceed 20 minutes. Chairman Arico stated, at the discretion of the board, comments should not address specific personal issues.

Sarah Smith shared her letter with the board stating, the proposal to have the school based health services CHC, Inc. program to provide counseling services in conjunction with school nurses, was voted on at the March 10th BOE meeting with 3 votes for and 3 votes against. Based on research outcomes it is considered beneficial and has been praised by area schools. They help families through insurance and regardless of insurance status and find ways to help so there is no out of pocket fee for the district. It was stated that there is a lack of services available to students and that many providers do not take young children. In many cases, parents do not have the funds to adequately provide medical or mental health care or the ability to transport their children to services. Our Pupil Services Director noted that families and students would have better access to community based services with the SBHS. Reasons cited opposing SBHS were that the counselors may not be a good fit with the individual student and that nowhere does it say in the boards mission goals and objectives that we are responsible for providing mental health care. The lack of it could be remedied if this were the case. I can't understand how board members could think that it is not their responsibility to provide a safe learning environment and mental health where possible to students. Today's school environment is very different from what we experienced 5 or 10 years ago. The student population represents an array of problems that most of us could not have imagined. Classrooms contain students that have behavioral disorders which disrupt the whole classroom and these students need help so that they and the rest of the students can learn in a safe environment. Studies are being conducted to see the effects of behavioral outbursts and violence by students who are now mainstreamed. This is a huge issue and bills on emotional safety have been proposed at the state government. Years ago this underserved population of behavioral challenged students were contained, however inclusiveness is now the law. When the students return after the pandemic, many problems of adjustment will be present. Though schools are to be commended for their distance learning initiatives, much work and great adjustment will have to be made by the educational community. Any resources available such as SBHS will be greatly needed. Respectfully I'm asking that the following questions be answered; would the BOE allow the public, teachers, and others to speak at an upcoming BOE meeting for or against the program? Also, in the spirit of bipartisanship, would the chair and the republican members of the board, who according to board policy must reopen the discussion of this program undertake more extensive research and bring this issue up for another vote?

Peter Latincsics of 97 Trask Road was present to speak. He stated he wished to address the vacancy the Board of Education will be seeking to fill at tonight's meeting. Sadly in recent times it seems we seek executive actions to resolve issues and would like to ask the board to respect the legislative process and this town's voters by appointing Brenda Abrams to the vacant seat.

George Debski of 12 Fenton Bluffs Drive was present to speak. He stated he is aware that at the last meeting there were three people who were proposed as candidates to fill the vacant seat and if the board is unable to agree on any of those candidates he would volunteer as an additional candidate to fill the seat.

Jim Bulick was present to speak. He stated he would also like to ask that we respect the Willington voters who saw fit to elect a republican for the open seat on the Board of Education and hopes Brenda Abrams is given serious consideration for the vacancy.

Ann Grosjean read a letter to the board submitted by several teachers regarding the mental health program and student based health services. (See Attached)

Tracey Anderson read a letter to the board submitted by a citizen also regarding the mental health program and student based health services. (See Attached)

Chairman's Report

Chairman Arico stated as many are aware, the school buildings are closed for the remainder of the year, however education goes on. We have online services and distance learning taking place in the schools and the progress has been very good. He stated he believes we have established our programs and even though it is a very difficult time for us everything seems to be moving along smoothly. He added that nearby E.O. Smith region 19 has a new Superintendent who will probably be in the area in the near future. Chairman Arico stated although the board hasn't addressed it they do have multiple issues because of the pandemic and they will be addressing them as time proceeds. He stated the re-entry process is being looked at and developed by various agencies that service us in one way or another including Eastconn, CABA (Connecticut Association Boards of Education), Connecticut Department of Education, and the Governor's Office. He added that as a board we will have to plan for re-entry or whatever is to take place down the road. Chairman Arico stated there are so many things involved and it will be a complex situation which will be done in the best interest of the students and with the safety and well-being of the students in mind.

Superintendent Reports

a. School Closure

Superintendent Stevens stated, the Governor has officially closed physical school buildings for students through the end of the year. We realize this is a tremendous disappointment for students, staff and parents, and especially for those students transitioning to new schools. Our eighth grade students are not going to experience all the traditional transition activities, but I assure you that the administrative team and school staff have been working hard to plan meaningful events for them. At this point, we are holding the first week of August as a potential time for promotion ceremonies for Center and Hall Schools. This is entirely dependent on clearance from state officials and the

local health department. We are making alternate plans as well if we are unable to celebrate as a larger group. My administrative team will be discussing this again tomorrow.

He added the school closure may also impact our summer school, and our pupil services director is working on several options including an onsite classroom model which would need to meet health department requirements, an in person 1:1 tutoring model, and an online model. Summer school is for students receiving special education services who have extended school year support identified in their individualized education plan.

Superintendent Stevens stated the last item related to the school closure is the need to start looking at options for returning to school in the fall. The administrative team will be having discussions on several options to be prepared in case we are unable to return in the fall, or if we are required to return with specific guidelines such as smaller class sizes, hallway transition plans, recess and lunch guidelines, etc. We are working on a plan to address these items as well as transportation guidelines. The alternate options would only be implemented if ordered by the state and/or local health officials to meet their return requirements. We are working on options that would not require more financial resources, but it will depend on what we are required to do by the state. One of the items we are currently looking into is touchless soap dispensers, faucets and paper towel dispensers, as well as auto flushers for our toilets. The future is very unclear regarding schooling in our physical buildings.

b. CES freezer

Superintendent Stevens stated the Center School freezer failed on the weekend of April 19. EMCOR has investigated the issue and determined that several items failed, including the evaporator coils and the condenser (2001) on the roof. Unfortunately, we lost \$1,600 worth of food that was in the freezer. It happened on the weekend and no one knew. You have heard me talk about adding items to the Delta system, such as our new septic tank, and I am investigating the cost of adding the CES freezer to the Delta system as well during this fix, especially because the building is not connected to a generator. We would have been notified of the failure if it was connected to the Delta system and been able to save the food. I will discuss this cost during the budget report, but we will need to fix this issue.

c. Interim Learning Plan

Superintendent Stevens stated the Interim Learning Plan for students to learn remotely has transitioned from purely programs to a balance of programs and teacher directed, videotaped instruction. Teachers have been provided with professional development to adjust to this expectation and are moving along quite well. The elementary school is implementing Seesaw, a program purchased to meet the needs of students in the lower grades. Participation rates are relatively consistent and students and families appreciated the adjustment to teacher driven instruction that started a couple weeks ago. The principals and I will be holding office hours this week via Zoom to answer questions and listen to feedback regarding our plan. We held the first one for HMS this afternoon and received some constructive feedback.

One concern we had from the start of our plan was our ability to get quality literature into the hands of our middle school students. I am happy to share that we are working with the Willington Public Library on a collaborative purchase for a program called Hoopla, an online book subscription that

will allow our students access to a tremendous online library. We know several districts who are using this program. Willington Public Library Director Roseboro and members of my school team met to review the program and saw huge potential for our students, even if we return to school, though this program will be critical for students while we are out of school. We hope to have this program up and running in the very near future. I submitted a letter on behalf of the school system to the Willington Library Board supporting this collaborative agreement. We expect this program to be FEMA reimbursable as well.

Ann Grosjean commented that they are loving the Seesaw program and teachers are developing very creative lessons.

Elena Testa asked for the pricing of the Hoopla program.

Superintendent Stevens replied it varies and you put down a credit and when materials are checked out the money is taken out of that credit. He added they are waiting for data to determine what they would be recommending for the amount but again this would be reimbursable. This may also be an option for the future instead of purchasing a lot of books that you can only use for so long. This could be a much more cost effective way for us to add to our library. I will have more details about the cost when we have it.

Chairman Arico commented on the Interim Learning Plan for grades K-3. He stated it concerns him because at this age kids are just learning to read, do a little math, and to get into things they will need later on. He stated their needs are great and asked if they are getting what they would if they were in the classroom or is this inhibiting their progress to a point they would have trouble later on.

Superintendent Stevens replied, as we've transitioned to this online learning, it is by no means the same level of education. I'm saying this for all districts, there are families still working and some with single parents and we are trying to balance this. One of the things we have noticed is that our middle school students definitely have more independence. Our elementary students you just mentioned who are in their critical years of reading are one of the reasons we purchased the Seesaw Program. We need to make sure that our elementary students have the opportunity to turn in age appropriate work and that they can do some of those things on their own while being a little more efficient for parents who are assisting their children. We applaud our parents and this is also why we are trying to get feedback from parents so we can know how we can help, what's working well, and what we can improve on. We got some of that feedback today and we will continue to get feedback.

d. Food Services

Superintendent Stevens stated the food service department continues to do an outstanding job preparing meals for Willington children. They are currently serving about 125 meals a day to 50 families. We are preparing for a shortage of funds to this program and have applied for a grant to support the food services department. At this time, we are expecting grants to entirely offset the deficit, but won't know until the end of June. We are looking into additional serving options on weekends and throughout the summer, but we are unsure of the sustainability of these options without additional financial support.

Superintendent Stevens stated he received a letter today, and sadly our Food Services Director Wendy Knight who has been with us for quite some years has announced her retirement. He stated Wendy will be retiring at the end of June. I would like to thank Wendy for all of her service, she is in on Saturdays and Sundays, constantly in communication especially now. She has done a great job and she will be greatly missed. Superintendent Stevens stated we will be looking for a food services director in the very near future. We want to wish Wendy luck; she has done a great job.

Donna Cook asked if people wanted to order lunch from the cafeteria and pay for it, is this an option and would it help the process.

Superintendent Stevens replied no, the way the program works for the reimbursement is, when you sign up for the process of providing food during the closure it puts everyone on as free and they are assuming if you are getting food, it is because you need it. Unfortunately you can't pay.

e. Transportation negotiation

Superintendent Stevens stated executive order 7R requires a continuation of payment for student transportation services. I have been negotiating with M&J on behalf of the board and we are very near to a reasonable settlement. Mansfield and E.O. Smith have very similar settlement figures around 55% of the home to school costs between March 16 and the day they made their agreement. We would pay 90% of the contract once the drivers are rehired by M&J. This agreement would meet the requirements of the executive order and we are close to finalizing the deal. We will also be saving \$2,000 on Eastconn transportation who provides some of our specialized transportation.

f. Grading

Superintendent Stevens stated we are currently reviewing the requirements for grading connected to the school closure since March 16. At this time, we are not grading students and do not anticipate assigning grades from the point of the closure. Our approach from the beginning has been around student connections, participation and engagement, and grading would create significant inequities. While our participation has been reasonably good, the level of engagement has varied with some students doing the bare minimum to other students going above and beyond. We have to be reasonable with our students as many families are facing hardship, illness, and many are still working and unable to support their children with assignments. Our approach from the beginning has been to work with each family on an individual basis, and the administrative team feels grading students is unreasonable at this time. Each student's end of the year report card will only have grades earned while physically in school. Our plan is to provide all students with a final email/postcard from their teacher(s) identifying items to work on in the future. All our teachers have been monitoring student progress and will share information internally for future planning. After a long discussion, and realizing we are in unprecedented times, we did not want to provide grades or comments that would cause additional undue stress on our families. Many school districts are taking a "do no harm" approach, and we intend to do the same.

Chairman Arico asked how grading will affect placement with the 8th grade students going to E.O. Smith. Are they going to use scores/grades from earlier in the school year?

Superintendent Stevens replied yes, we are well into the process already of placing students for next year. We have started and will continue to work on transition plans. Their grades from the closing to the end of the year will not affect their placement.

g. Fuel negotiation

Superintendent Stevens stated we have entered into fuel negotiations with Dime Oil as a result of the unused fuel we have at this point. The town and schools negotiate together with a minimum amount to be used and we have not reached that minimum. Fortunately, Dime Oil has been working with us on this issue, despite contractual language. Our 20-21 prices are locked in, but Dime is providing us with a credit for July. The details are not finalized yet, but we hope to have them completed for our June meeting. Dime oil has allowed us to lock our rate for 21-22 at \$1.62.

h. CES septic tank and leach field

Superintendent Stevens stated the septic tank project at CES is moving along. The new dosing chamber is in and the final touches are being completed on the system. One item that Eastern Highlands Health District would like done is to add topsoil to the entire area of the leaching field, which Dave Lytwyn from Admiral Septic agreed would be a good idea. The current cost of the project is approximately \$35,000. The topsoil and work to spread the soil and grass seed will bring the cost to \$40,000. I hope to have the project completed by our next board meeting to have the board approve a transfer to pay the cost of the work.

Ann Grosjean asked if the blacktop will be paved on top of the area as it was before or will this area be seeded.

Superintendent Stevens replied the black top is still there and the section where they had to pull out got a manhole put in which is very helpful because before they did not have access to this and they really should so that it can be inspected. The manhole was put in and they have already come out to re-pave the items that needed re-paved. He added that thanks to the Public Works Department they only had to pay for the cost of the materials not the man hours. Superintendent Stevens thanked Troy Sposato and his crew for collaborating with them to complete this project.

Financial Report

A. 2019-2020 Budget Update

Superintendent Stevens provided the following information:

- Program 1: The only items they anticipate left for spending as of right now are costs associated with the freezer, some maintenance items, and possibly some small dollars for promotional items for the promotional ceremonies. For the most part the \$29,101 will remain dependent on the cost of the freezer.
- Program 2: The large balance of \$229,251 is because of the open positions that were not filled during the school year. Very little of this will be spent as there will only be maintenance items from now until the end of the year as long as nothing big comes up as well as promotional items.

- Program 3: We are receiving outplacement bills in the next few weeks. It now shows a deficit of \$35,482 and we anticipate that to become a deficit of \$225,000 after all of the outplacement bills come in. This deficit is purely due to the outplacement and we plan to balance this out with the money in fringe benefits.
- Program 4: It looks like there is a negative number here but we have actually prepaid our fuel so we will see some savings back from the negotiation I mentioned earlier. We are also waiting on a check from Region 19 for fuel. This number will not remain in the negative.
- Program 5: Usually health services does not run a negative number which it has right now the reason being is we had to replace all of our PPE (Personal Protective Equipment) for our nurses including N95 masks, nursing masks, gowns, etc. That equipment has already been ordered and the good news is we will get reimbursed through FEMA. We may not be running in the negative after the reimbursements.
- Program 6: Still has \$18,947 mainly because staff has not been able to go out and attend things. I am going to make a recommendation at the end of this to continue some work we did this year with Eastconn which is directly connected to the readers and writers workshop but I would anticipate we can't make a decision on this until June when we have a better sense of where we are at.
- Program 7: It looks like it is in the negative by \$3,989 but that is not the case. Fuel is prepaid and it is really the CES heat that shows it is in the negative which will be trued up in June when all of the fuel negotiation prices are done and won't have to do so twice.
- Program 8: Still have some summer salaries in this program which is June 18th-July 1st which is when summer help comes into work along with some supply money to spend on cleaning supplies or whatever they need to get through the remainder of the year.
- Program 9: Really nothing to share here and it is pretty flat. There may be one subscription left such as Microsoft Office or things like it.
- Program 10: The balance we thought we had here was a 15% increase but we do not and this money will be used to cover the special education costs.

Elena Testa asked if they had any savings from the buses or anywhere else.

Superintendent Stevens replied yes they do. The bus savings are not on the report as of yet because the negotiation is still ongoing. He added the money that is coming back into the budget due to the closer could be anticipated to be a minimum of \$30,000 from transportation. He added he expects some money to come back to the town from FEMA reimbursements from PPE and food services along with the Hoopla programs mentioned earlier and the Seesaw program we purchased which we could see \$5,000 back for. Some of the title grants if they are applied to offset our budget and then the fuel. There are definitely some savings.

Chairman Arico asked Superintendent Stevens to confirm in regards to special education, do they have several students that are outplaced.

Superintendent Stevens replied that is correct.

Chairman Arico asked how they are handling this and are these students getting the services they need and is it costing them more money.

Superintendent Stevens replied it is not costing us more money at this point in time. They are getting services but obviously their program looks different just like our students that are in Willington Schools look different. They are getting their services and continuing their placements.

i. 19-20 Budget considerations

Superintendent Stevens stated when we see the balance at the bottom of our sheet \$492,366 there are many things included in this that still need to come out. Remember at the last meeting the numbers that were sent to the Board of Finance that we adjusted including \$14,000 that was going to prepay retirement, \$11,000 for the valuation, \$1,000 for the audiometer which all need to be subtracted along with the special education shortfall of \$225,000 and the septic tank about \$40,000 and a ballpark number of \$8,000 for the freezer which will be updated upon further information. After we subtract all these items it puts the budget at around \$193,000 and we have some options I can share for future discussion. Regarding the item I mentioned out of curriculum and staff development, we have hired Eastconn this past year and had a trainer come out from the readers and writers workshop which usually costs about \$2,000 a day and Eastconn is able to charge a fraction of that amount. I would like to consider doing this again which would be about a \$13,000 bill for professional development. I think it is an important item for the movement of the district moving forward. Another piece of this is if we are not in school physically we can still use that money and still do the training and Eastconn has said that if for some reason we don't come back to school for a year, that money can be applied for professional development for whatever needs come about to help our staff facilitate that process. If it's not a readers/writers workshop because we are out of school and are learning online they would apply this money. Superintendent Stevens asked if everyone would consider this as an option in the future.

Superintendent Stevens stated they have heard a lot about social and emotional health and the impact on kids. This is being taken into consideration now starting with when we have students coming to retrieve their personal items from their locker or classrooms which will be taking place soon. We are looking into how they can avoid having the schools look like a really sad place and are considering things like music and having staff members (with masks) present. One of the other items they are considering is \$6,000 for a social/emotional curriculum called Second Step which a lot of other districts use and they have identified as the top choice curriculum coming out of the school districts so far.

Superintendent Stevens stated another item is the previously mentioned touchless faucets, paper towel dispensers, and soap dispenser as well as flushless toilets. If we are required to put these items in I'm not sure if they will be FEMA reimbursable it would have to be investigated but this

project could easily cost \$20,000. Superintendent Stevens added some of our bathrooms already have these items but it may be something we want to think about to be proactive.

Superintendent Stevens stated the last item he has to discuss at this point is chromebooks. This spring we were notified by our tech company Novus that our chromebooks which are four years old are on their last year of updates and state testing will be requiring a level of updates that our chromebooks will not have. He added we no longer have computer labs or up to date ipads as we have been using and relying on the chromebooks and we haven't really purchased many in the last few years. Superintendent Stevens stated he did receive a quote to replace 325 chromebooks and the cost was \$150,000. This money is unbudgeted due to the fact that it was after the budget came through that I was given this number by Novus. They are in the process of getting further quotes as I was shocked at this price and expected a number closer to \$90,000. They are going back to see if the lease option is better just as we did with our staff laptops with the lease to own option which may save us significant money. This is another item we need to consider. Superintendent Stevens restated he would not act on anything until June but wanted to give everyone time to think about it and time to ask any questions they may have.

Ann Grosjean asked Superintendent Stevens, when you mentioned the Eastconn training for readers and writers workshop, I was wondering if the teachers are not able to attend in person, could they do this over Zoom? Would this be effective? Superintendent Stevens replied yes absolutely, it's providing professional development for the teachers' needs at that moment. This is why I asked for flexibility when we talked to Eastconn and they were great in saying if we need to flex we are going to be able to do so. We are going to book this trainer and this trainer can present on numerous things for example right now he is presenting on engagement and learning remotely.

Donna Cook asked about the touchless items and if it would be better to teach the kids to use a paper towel since there are still doors and stalls that need to be opened. She stated there may be a better way to incorporate some touchless items but with other safety protocols in place. Superintendent Stevens replied he took these touchless suggestions from the guidelines for businesses reopening and it is a lot of money. It is an item that would have to be looked at when you are thinking about priorities. He added that at the elementary school they do walk students through how to wash their hands including grabbing paper towels and these are definitely things we can build into the protocol. Superintendent Stevens stated he doesn't know what else will be required for example if we are required to do a major scrubbing of the building every night, our current staff couldn't complete this. They do what they are required to do currently but if they were required to wash every desk and chair every night, we don't have the staff to do so. Donna Cook stated hopefully there will be some accommodation in place for towns that don't have any cases where you still have some precautions but don't have to necessarily sanitize the whole building daily. Superintendent Stevens replied yes we will have to wait and see as there are a lot of possible options at his point.

Superintendent Stevens stated one of the items that he is looking into is whether the chromebooks would be FEMA reimbursable because of the fact that we will need chromebooks that students can use at home. We are just not sure if this item will qualify or not but are certainly looking into it.

2020-2021 Budget Update

2020-2021 Budget Update

Superintendent Stevens stated the Board of Finance met last week and discussed their process and next steps. There were several questions that were asked about the minimum budget requirement and I responded that we did not have that number from the state yet. I was told by Kevin Chambers who does the grant and is responsible for the grant and minimum budget calculations that they will not be collecting information from towns for another month or so. They need to finalize the education cost sharing amounts first before they set minimum budget requirements and that is what they are working on now. Superintendent Stevens stated he did provide Chairman Makuch of the Board of Finance this information. I will attend the meeting again on Thursday and answer any questions they may have. I shared the BOE letter and my letter stating that additional cuts beyond what you have already done is going to impact programs and people. I believe that the Board of Finance can keep the mill rate flat with the cuts all of the budget writers have already provided based on the paperwork I saw last week but I will get more details on Thursday.

New Business

- A. Approve minutes of April 14, 2020 regular meeting Attachment # 2
- B. Approve minutes of April 23, 2020 special meeting Attachment # 3
- C. Letter to Governor regarding teacher salary increases

A. Approve minutes of April 14, 2020 regular meeting Attachment # 2

Michelle Doucette Cunningham made a motion to accept the minutes of April 14, 2020.
Elena Testa seconded the motion.

Vote:	Yes	No	Abstain	Absent
H. Arico	✓			
M. Cunningham	✓			
D. Cook	✓			
T. Anderson	✓			
A. Grosjean	✓			
E. Testa	✓			

Motion passes.

B. Approve minutes of April 23, 2020 special meeting Attachment # 3

Michelle Doucette Cunningham made a motion to accept the minutes of April 23, 2020.
Elena Testa seconded the motion.

Vote:	Yes	No	Abstain	Absent
H. Arico	✓			
M. Cunningham	✓			
D. Cook	✓			
T. Anderson	✓			
A. Grosjean	✓			
E. Testa	✓			

Motion passes.

C. Letter to Governor regarding teacher salary increases

Chairman Arico stated Donna Cook made a request to send a letter to our governor requesting to pause salary increases for 12 months in light of the town finding themselves with a lot of people unemployed, having salaries frozen, pay cuts, and very difficult times for some people. Chairman Arico stated this is for discussion purposes and asked Donna Cook to explain further about bringing this suggestion to the board.

Donna Cook replied that she could draft a letter on behalf of the board and email it to everyone so that they have a chance to have input but the general idea of the letter is that with almost 15% unemployment and the number of people that I am aware of that have been furloughed, laid off, had to take salary cuts, and those not getting any kind of raise due to what's going on along with the 125 meals that are being served to 50 families because they are struggling. I feel that in light of this huge event salaries should be frozen for the time being. It would not take away anything that the staff and teacher currently get so it wouldn't be asking anyone to take a pay cut or give up any benefits but it seems like the right thing to do. I had been told that the only way to deal with this directly with the teachers would be to open up negotiations and I don't think it's the time to try to negotiate anything due to the fact we can't even sit in the same room. I think this would be a reasonable approach since the governor is the one who said we can't go back to school and the

one who said we still have to pay everyone so possibly he's the one who needs to say salaries are frozen.

Tracey Anderson stated she understands we are in hard economic times but as a parent watching what is happening with the teachers and as an educator working in a school building right now, I don't think this is the time and don't support saying we are not going to give the teachers what we had negotiated in a contract, especially when they put everything out there to turn around and change to a distance learning system within a week and have been educating our kids while still taking care of their own kids and perhaps homeschooling their own kids at the same time, possibly with toddlers running around their feet. To me this would be a slap in the face for what they have been doing all this time and they have not stopped working since March 13th. Tracey Anderson restated that she does not support the letter.

Ann Grosjean stated Superintendent Stevens had just mentioned that it looked as if our budget and the town's budget could go through without any mill rate increases. So it looks to me that we can afford to continue to support them in the way that we have promised. I absolutely agree with Tracey, the teachers are working so hard much harder than they would have been in the classroom. I think we will be ok, we have our budget which is at the Finance Board right now and hopefully the whole town budget can go through without a mill rate increase. I'm sorry but I also cannot support this.

Elena Testa stated at this time no one is looking at how much everyone is doing, I think at this time those of us who do, are all grateful to have jobs. In respect to those people who don't currently have jobs I would support this letter.

Michelle Doucette Cunningham stated she would also not support writing the letter because to me it seems it's going around the backs of the teacher's union with whom we negotiated in good faith. If we have an issue, we should reopen negotiations and have that conversation. Going around their backs by trying to get the governor to pass that as an executive order seems underhanded to me and if we really have an issue we should address it head on face to face or over zoom. My experience in negotiating with the union is that they have always been fair and we have addressed things as need be, if not one year then the next year. I don't feel as though we are being taken advantage of and a conversation is the best way to approach this.

Donna Cook stated this is not an attempt to go behind the back of the teachers, I was told that this is the way it had to be done by either reopening negotiations which they seem satisfied with their contract and wouldn't have agreed to it so I was not trying to circumvent the process I was advised this is the process. Secondly, I want you to be aware that one of the things the Board of Finance did say is they understand there are so many hurting families and what they would like to do is increase funding to help those hurting families. This isn't about slapping anybody in the face or insulting because the teachers are doing a great job and so are all the parents and other family members, so what they are trying to do is open up to the people that are hurting the most. People are not getting raises right now, Phil and Brenda lead by example and waived their raise and I think that was the admirable and right thing to do that is the reason I'm suggesting it and it's not to say the teachers aren't working hard and having to jump through hoops because they are and we all are. This is why I believe giving raises during this time is not prudent.

Chairman Arico stated that even if the board does not support this letter, it is possible for an individual board member to write a letter themselves as long as they represent themselves as an individual and not a letter from the board itself. He added these are difficult times and we don't know when things are going to improve and if they will get worse in the future. I believe the letter is well taken but on the other hand I think it would be very difficult for the board to pursue this any further at this time. This is not an action item, it was simply up for discussion purposes.

2. Old Business

a. Election of new board member

Chairman Arico stated we addressed this at our last meeting, and we were deadlocked. The proposition on the election was tabled until this meeting so that if we do nothing then the motion remains on the table and the election of the new board member would go to the First Selectman. If we remove the motion from the table we would then be in the position to vote on the various citizens who have been nominated either by the republican town committee or the democratic town committee. I can make a motion to remove it from the table.

Chairman Arico made a motion to take from the table the tabled motion concerning the election of a new Board of Education member to fill a board vacancy.

Elena Testa seconded the motion.

Discussion:

Michelle Doucette Cunningham stated she had a question regarding the process that was used last time and whether or not we have received any information from the lawyer that might give us more clarity about how nominations can be voted on because that will inform whether or not I wish to have this discussion taken off of the table.

Chairman Arico stated he asked Superintendent Stevens to contact the lawyer and provide us with some kind of information in regards to this.

Superintendent Stevens stated the conclusions from the board attorney were that the vacancy can only be filled on May 12th if a majority of the board members present for the meeting vote to approve a raised candidate. If all members of the board attend the meeting, the vacancy cannot be filled by an affirmed vote of three board members or less.

Elena Testa asked for the date of the letter.

Superintendent Stevens replied May 8, 2020.

Elena Testa asked why they did not receive a copy of the letter earlier.

Superintendent Stevens replied he had forwarded the letter to the board chair and did not realize that Chairman Arico didn't have access to a computer this past week. He added that he would gladly share the letter with everyone if Chairman Arico would like him to. Chairman Arico asked Superintendent Stevens to read the letter. Superintendent Stevens read the letter from the attorney

which stated the following: Dear Herb, The Superintendent of schools asked our firm to provide a legal opinion regarding the voting procedures the Willington Board of Education must follow to fill a vacancy on the board. Issue part 1: One of the seven board members resigned recently leaving six members on the Willington Board of Education. At the April 23, 2020 meeting, the board unsuccessfully tried to fill the vacancy freed by the resignation of Liz Perry. No single interested candidate for the vacancy received more than three votes by individual board members, as a result the meeting adjourned before the vacancy was filled. Accordingly as of today, the Willington Board of Education still has six members. Issue Part 2: The board is scheduled to convene a meeting on May 12, 2020 and the filing of the board vacancy is on the meeting agenda. At the April 23rd meeting, some Board members debated what procedure should be followed to fill the vacancy – the motion procedure outlined in Policy 9325.3, or procedures a member referenced in Robert’s Rules of Order. Legal Obligation: State law Connecticut General Statute 10-219 mandates that the vacancy shall be filled by the remaining members of said board unless otherwise provided by town charter. Willington does not have a town charter provision regarding board vacancies. Board policy 9221 provides one additional detail to the vacancy process mandated by state law. Any vacancy occurring on the Board of Education shall be filled by a majority vote of the remaining members. With regards to the process for taking a majority vote, board policy 9325.3 provides that a majority of the board members present is required to approve a motion. Board policy 9325.3 indicates that board members may involve Robert’s Rules of Order newly revised during meetings and this firm understands that some board members may seek to do that at the May 12th meeting. However the clearly defined voting procedures in board policy 9325.3 superseded any procedures outlined in external sources such as Robert’s Rule. Moreover even if Robert’s Rules could be invoked to supersede board policy 9325.3 this firm is not aware of any Robert’s Rule principle or rule that permits a motion to be approved by less than a majority of the agency members present. Our firm believes that Robert’s Rule stands for the general principle that a majority of agency members present at a meeting decide a question except when a specific rule of statute provides otherwise. In conclusion, for the above reasons the board vacancies can only be filled on May 12th if a majority of the board members present for the meeting vote to approve a raised candidate. If all members of the board attend the meeting, vacancy cannot be filled by an affirmed vote of three board members or less.

Vote:	Yes	No	Abstain	Absent
H. Arico	✓			
M. Cunningham	✓			
D. Cook	✓			
T. Anderson	✓			

A. Grosjean	✓			
E. Testa	✓			

Motion passes.

Chairman Arico stated the following people have been nominated: Brenda Abrams, Peter Latinsics, Elaine Newcomb, and Laura Rodriguez. He added that he received a letter from the Democratic Town Committee that stated, “On behalf of the democratic town committee, I am writing to recommend Laura Rodriguez for the open seat on the Board of Education. She is currently an assistant science education professor at Eastern Connecticut State University. Previously her K-12 teaching career spanned more than 20 years teaching grades 4-10 in four states, although you are most likely to remember her as a seventh and eighth grade science teacher at Hall Memorial School from 2002-2014. Later this month, Laura will finish her PhD at the University of Connecticut in curriculum and instruction with a specialty in science education. She has served the community for many years as part of the leadership team for the Willington Scholarship Foundation. Laura is very knowledgeable and experienced in the area of public education and she has the independent, thoughtful, and balanced temperament needed to make a positive contribution as a member of the Board of Education. The entire town committee voted unanimously to endorse her. Thank you for your consideration of our recommendation. Sincerely Michelle Doucette Cunningham, Chairman of the Willington Democratic Town Committee.”

Michelle Doucette Cunningham made a motion to nominate Laura Rodriguez to the Willington BOE.

Ann Grosjean seconded the motion.

Donna Cook stated that during this meetings present to speak George Debski also volunteered to be on the board and she believes they should include him in the list of candidates. Chairman Arico agreed to add him to the list.

Vote:	Yes	No	Abstain	Absent
H. Arico		✓		
M. Cunningham	✓			
D. Cook		✓		
T. Anderson	✓			

A. Grosjean	✓			
E. Testa		✓		

Motion fails.

Elena Testa stated that the candidates who are endorsed by the Republican Party are highly qualified candidates to do the job and Brenda Abrams came next in the election. She added that Elaine Newcomb is a retired teacher who has previously served on the Board of Education for many years and the same for Peter Latincsics who had previously served on this board for eight years. Elena Testa stated she also knows that George Debski has experience serving on this board. She stated all the candidates come with experience and she is sorry she could not vote for Laura Rodriguez, it is nothing personal she just doesn't think they should overrule the election of the town.

Donna Cook made a motion to nominate Brenda Abrams to the Willington BOE.
Elena Testa seconded the motion.

Vote:	Yes	No	Abstain	Absent
H. Arico	✓			
M. Cunningham		✓		
D. Cook	✓			
T. Anderson		✓		
A. Grosjean		✓		
E. Testa	✓			

Motion fails.

Chairman Arico made a motion to nominate Peter Latincsics to the Willington BOE.
Donna Cook seconded the motion.

Vote:	Yes	No	Abstain	Absent
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H. Arico	✓			
M. Cunningham		✓		
D. Cook	✓			
T. Anderson		✓		
A. Grosjean		✓		
E. Testa	✓			

Motion fails.

Chairman Arico made a motion to nominate Elaine Newcomb to the Willington BOE.
Donna Cook seconded the motion.

Vote:	Yes	No	Abstain	Absent
H. Arico	✓			
M. Cunningham		✓		
D. Cook	✓			
T. Anderson		✓		
A. Grosjean		✓		
E. Testa	✓			

Motion fails.

Donna Cook made a motion to nominate George Debski to the Willington BOE.
Elena Testa seconded the motion.

Vote:	Yes	No	Abstain	Absent
H. Arico	✓			
M. Cunningham		✓		
D. Cook	✓			
T. Anderson		✓		
A. Grosjean		✓		
E. Testa	✓			

Motion fails.

Chairman Arico stated since there are no further nominations, he moves that they close nominations we are deadlocked. He stated the board has been unable to decide on some really qualified candidates and thinks that any one of the five people put up for nomination could be an excellent choice. He added what will happen next will be that the nomination and decision will be with the First Selectman and we will notify the Selectman that we are deadlocked and can't decide on a candidate for the opening and it will be their responsibility. Chairman Arico stated he hopes they will take everything into consideration when they receive the names. Also keep in consideration the fact that one of the candidates had a high vote in elections. I'm sure the Board of Selectmen will make a good choice.

Present to Speak

No one was present to speak.

Board Comments

Chairman Arico stated he would like to thank the citizens in town for their participation in our meeting and for being present to speak. We appreciate all the comments that are made and we take them all under advisement. Also I would like to thank the Superintendent for his efforts and his staff for their efforts during this pandemic. They have done a great job and we still have a ways to go but we seem to have a handle on everything and we can hope for the best. I would also like to ask the board to start thinking about some of the things we have to do down the road and look to the future on a re-entry plan and some of the things that will change and be new and make sure you are ready to address them. Chairman Arico stated he's been thinking about graduation and whether or not they have plans.

Michelle Doucette Cunningham stated she would like to congratulate Wendy Knight on her pending retirement and we will definitely miss her as she has done yeomans works getting meals out to families who need them and over the years she has improved the quality of the nutrition in the schools while still holding the costs to a minimum. Thank you Wendy for years of hard work. Michelle Doucette Cunningham stated she would like to thank all of the candidates who were nominated or nominated themselves to serve on this board, this is not an easy job and this is something we dedicate our time to, anyone willing to step up and give their time to service like this deserves our welcome. She added she wishes all the students and their families in town a healthy spring season and reminds them to enjoy some sunshine.

Elena Testa stated she would like to comment on the vacancy, to the Board of Selectmen, and to the whole town and remind everyone that the highest authority in this town and any town is election and after elections when seats are distributed this is still the highest authority because everyone in town is participating. She added she would encourage the Board of Selectmen who has the authority to elect the new person to not override the result of the election and to honor the will of the people in this town and to put a republican person into this position. Thank you.

Ann Grosjean stated she would like to thank all the teachers for stepping up and doing a wonderful job which is very appreciated. She added a thank you to Wendy for her hard work especially during this time. Ann Grosjean stated that they also recently lost one of their custodians Darien, who recently retired and she would like to send her best wishes to his family.

Tracey Anderson stated she would also like to thank Wendy Knight for all of her service. Also, condolences to long-time CES Maintenance employee Darren Ducheanu's family. She added an appreciation for the correspondence that has been sent in especially from our teachers about issues that we hope to bring to the table again. She stated they have had four letters about the same issue and really encourages that we take this issue up again and have a discussion. Everyone stay well and safe.

Donna Cook stated she is sorry to hear of the loss of Darren and she is excited for Wendy getting to go onto her next season of life but she will be greatly missed. Hopefully spring and summer will come soon.

Chairman H. Arico adjourned the meeting at 9:07pm.

*Next regular meeting
June 9, 2020