

**WILLINGTON BOARD OF EDUCATION**

Tuesday, July 14, 2020

**Virtual Meeting: Zoom**

7:00 p.m.

**Join Zoom Meeting**

<https://willingtonct.zoom.us/j/86120319116?pwd=Ky9DYWdlYWlTTlRlUtuUjlk1WHdHUT09>

Meeting ID: 861 2031 9116

Password: 3XitwD

**Dial by your location**

+1 929 205 6099 US (New York)

Meeting ID: 861 2031 9116

Password: 081953

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

Laura Rodriguez

**Members Absent**

**Also Present**

Superintendent of Schools, Phil Stevens

Members of the Public

1. **Call to Order**

Chairman Herb Arico called the meeting to order at 7:00 pm.

2. **Pledge of Allegiance**

Chairman Arico led the Pledge of Allegiance.

3. **Present to Speak**

Janice Castle of 18 Pinney Hill Road was present to speak. She stated I want to express my deep disappointment over the lack of any progress on having school based health services for the students in Willington. I was at the meeting on March 10<sup>th</sup> when there was a presentation by one such organization that could provide services specifically for the mental health and emotional well-being of our students. This was not voted favorably and in the four months since, I've heard a number of people who have talked to the fact of revisiting this. I think right now is a perfect time as we are trying

to get ready to open schools. I am on the re-opening advisory committee and one of the mandates from the state has to do with the social and emotional well-being of our students. I think we don't know what our students have been through over the past four months and going ahead it is going to be very difficult. We need to have as many resources as we can that can address the mental toll the epidemic has had on our students and on their families. Not everyone in our town has the privilege of getting those services on their own and during a time of the day that many people are at work. I think having some sort of service available through the school and in the school at the discretion of not only people saying they need it but also with parental permission. This is not something that would be done without parental permission. With these services you may have to have a contract for a year and in my estimation one year of free services for our students is very valuable and if it wasn't to work it's only one year then we can change our minds the following year. I really urge the board to revisit this and add it to the agenda and move forward with this to help our students.

#### **4. Chairman's Report**

Chairman Arico stated the graduation ceremonies for the 4<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders were very successful. I received a lot of favorable comments and praise concerning the graduation process. I also wanted to say a thank you for the signs that were put up around the town for the teacher's fine work over the past year. They are very much appreciated by everyone and we are very proud of our staff. The board had a retreat on July 6<sup>th</sup> and we covered rules and responsibilities of board members. The training was facilitated by Nick Caruso who is the CAFE senior staff associate for field services. I would suggest that perhaps the board consider another retreat later on covering either FOI issues or other concerns of the board. I would also recommend that we schedule some BOE committee meetings for next year and put some dates together for policy, facility, curriculum, budget, and any other committee that we feel necessary. I think this past year during the pandemic we really did not meet very often as a committee. I am scheduling a BOE special meeting for August 5, 2020 with the topic being the re-opening of the Willington Public Schools. This meeting will give our School Re-Opening Advisory Committee an opportunity to present their suggestions for re-opening our schools. The BOE will have an opportunity to provide input and modify/approve the re-opening. If everyone cannot meet on August 5<sup>th</sup> let me know so I can have Brenda poll the board members to see when we can arrange to meet. I would like to welcome all new members that were hired, including a new principal which the Superintendent spoke to us about as well as a new food service director, and a warm welcome to Laura Rodriguez who is a new member of the BOE and has quite an impressive background.

#### **5. Communications**

Superintendent Stevens shared he received a letter from WEA co presidents Brynn Lipstreu and Sean Conlin. Their letter states that, as a result of covid-19 and the changes to the return to school, the Board and association will need to negotiate changes in working conditions and/or the impact of the changes in working conditions for bargaining unit members. This demand to bargain letter was promoted by the Connecticut Educators Association. I responded on July 9 confirming receipt of their letter and stated the Board would be open to negotiations after the reopening plan has been submitted to the state on July 24. I also welcomed informal conversations as the plan is developed, which has members of the teacher's union establishing our Willington procedures. We will need two board members able to meet between July 27 and July 31st if needed. Is anyone interested and available for these dates and then we can discuss it further.

Both Ann Grosjean and Laura Rodriguez raised their hands.

Superintendent Stevens stated Chairman Arico and I will look at the committee lists and see what they look like and including Herb we have three names of people who are interested in participating.

**6. New Business**

a. Appointment of Hall Memorial School Principal

We had a pool of over 25 candidates apply to be the next principal of Hall Memorial School. The administrative team screened 13 candidates and recommended 6 candidates for Zoom interviews with the full search committee. The search committee narrowed the group of 6 and invited two finalists to Hall School for an interview, to complete a written performance task, and rotate through stakeholder focus groups. I would like to say thank you to all the staff, students, parents, and your BOE representative, Ann, who dedicated their time, to identify Mary Kay Tshonas as our unanimous choice to be the next principal of Hall Memorial School.

Mary Kay rose to the top of all the applicants from the start, and continued to do so through each phase of the process. She spent the last six years at Eastconn’s Quinebaug Middle College High School where she was a STEM instructional coach, then assistant principal, and then principal for the last two years. Prior to that, Mary Kay was a teacher at Tolland Middle School for 24 years so she is extremely familiar with middle school operations and students. Mary Kay’s references described her as an extremely talented leader who is incredibly personable and a master at building relationships. They also shared that she is a highly respected collaborative leader with the ability to positively impact student achievement.

The search committee and I would like to formally request the board of education to appoint Mary Kay Tshonas as the next principal of Hall Memorial School.

Laura Rodriguez made a motion that the board accept Mary Kay Tshonas as the next principal at Hall Memorial School.

Ann Grosjean seconded the motion.

<b>Vote:</b>	Yes	No	Abstain	Absent
H. Arico	✓			
M. Cunningham	✓			
D. Cook	✓			
T. Anderson	✓			
A. Grosjean	✓			
E. Testa	✓			
L. Rodriguez	✓			

Motion passes.

**7. Superintendent Reports**

**a. CES and HMS Promotion Ceremonies (graduation)**

We had a tremendous promotion ceremony for the Center School 4th graders and Hall School 8th graders. Our mobile ceremonies took approximately 6 hours to complete each and were very well received by our families and students. Thank you to our teachers and principals for all their work to make the ceremonies happen with as many of the traditions as feasible. We had two staff members volunteer to be the school mascot for each ceremony and they were amazing. A great deal of the ceremony was broadcast on Facebook, and a large portion of the ceremony was inserted into the 8th grade promotion ceremony video which all the families received. Thank you also to the Willington Fire Department #1 who provided an emergency truck for safety as we paraded around town.

**b. WPS Reverse Parade at River Road Park**

The Willington Public Schools staff hosted a reverse parade at River Road park on June 18 from 9:00-10:30. We filled every parking spot in the facility and families were able to drive past to wave to staff to close the 19-20 school year. Staff and families decorated their cars in what may become an annual tradition. Again, thank you to all the staff for attending the event and sharing the love of our community during this wild COVID-19 roller coaster.

**c. New Food Services Director**

I am pleased to announce that we have hired Don Castle as the next Willington Public Schools Food Service Director. Don has spent over 35 years in the food service industry, with the last 7 years as a produce food safety manager. His expertise in this area, along with his forward thinking vision for school food services, set him apart from other candidates. In multiple interviews, he said, "it's all about the kids", and that is the type of person I want on staff. Don is a Willington resident, and also the husband of Jan Castle, who is our Center School music teacher. I look forward to seeing the advances our wonderful food service team is able to achieve under his leadership.

**d. Staff recruitment and hiring**

Over the last month we have been working to fill our vacancies. I am pleased to announce several internal moves: first, Catherine Aillion Pomo went from Grade 4 teacher to math intervention at CES. Deb Callahan went from HMS special education teacher to 5th grade math teacher, Michelle Shine went from grade 3 teacher to grade 4, and Erica Bushior went from Center School math interventionist to 7th grade math teacher. We currently have the following openings: 2 special education teachers (one at each building), HMS spanish, grade 2 at CES, and several para positions.

**e. Summer School**

We have 8 teachers operating our virtual special education summer school for 21 students. Students are receiving virtual sessions in academics, Speech and Occupational therapy. All services are focused on the students' individualized education plan goals and objectives. Students meet with their teacher virtually three times per week and are also offered work beyond their virtual session. Director McGinley shared that the program is going very well.

Chairman Arico asked if they have all the resources they need for this program.

Director McGinley stated yes we made sure they still had their computers and that they have all the

materials they need. It was a smooth transition because a lot of it was work they were already doing with their teachers and were able to continue that to keep the skills that they have learned going. Of course there are some students who may be going on vacation but we have been able to provide all of the services to the students who we have identified through their IEP who are requiring services. Pretty much all of the students who were recommended are participating with the exception of one or two that have taken some vacation time with their families.

Chairman Arico asked if the IEP were reworked to adapt with the changes to online learning.

Director McGinley stated per State guidelines we are required to leave the IEP's as they are and we are developing what the state has given us which is called Continuing Educational Opportunity Plans which is guided by the IEP and discussed with the teacher and parents to make mutually agreed upon services and how they will be provided.

Michelle Doucette Cunningham asked how long the program ran.

Director McGinley stated it is the same as we typically do for summer school which is 4 weeks in July with three days per week.

#### **f. CES septic tank and leach field project completion**

Dave Lytwyn from Admiral Septic is done with the CES project. We have some final work to do with the topsoil and seeding, along with some minor electrical work for the delta panel, but his work is complete. Thank you to Dave and his crew for their efforts to correct and improve our system to increase the life expectancy of the system.

#### **g. School Reopening Advisory Committee**

The school reopening advisory committee has started planning for the 20-21 return to school. This committee is working through the guidelines in the CSDE: Adapt, Advance, Achieve: Connecticut's Plan to Learn and Grow Together, which was released on June 29. The committee is composed of administrators, teachers, paras, custodians, secretaries, parents, and BOE member representatives will be invited into committee meetings next week. We also have invited guests for certain subcommittee meetings such as transportation officials, food services, and the local health department. This collaborative, expedited process, will result in a Willington reopening plan with 3 options: one for in-person learning in our physical buildings, a hybrid learning model with some students in school and some learning remotely, and lastly all remote learning. We have to follow a significant number of requirements listed in the plan and have subcommittees working on transportation, scheduling, facilities/cleaning, mental health, unified arts, health, and instruction. As you can imagine we have some overlap, but I'm overseeing all the committee work and they have access to each other's work and questions. The plan also contains guidelines, items not required, many of which we are building into our plan.

Some of the highlights of the plan include additional cleaning, masks for students and staff at all times while in the building and on the buses with some minor exceptions, cohorting students to minimize groups together, several fluid learning plans depending on regional circumstances or outbreaks, closure plans, communication plans, health monitoring and containment plans including an isolation room in each school, significant signage in the buildings, specific professional development for staff, classroom layout requirements to maximize social distancing, and food service protocols. Just to name a few! This is not a comprehensive list!

Students are able to choose not to participate in the physical school building and the district is still responsible for them.

As you can imagine, these are not small adjustments and we are working to identify items we may need to purchase including desks, PPE, cleaning supplies, desk shields, and tutoring hours for students that do not attend physical school. This is the short list. I am in the process of creating a spreadsheet with a significant number of items that will be needed as identified by the subcommittees. One of the ideas I'm investigating is hiring 6 temporary utility staff who could fill many roles: bus monitors, substitute teachers, substitute paras, they could deliver lunches to classrooms, they could help cleaning, they could provide mask break coverage, they could support the nurses, etc. We are going to need additional support and I will be presenting this concept, within our budget, at the August Board meeting.

The Board should grant me the authority to take any lawful actions necessary to ensure the continuation of public education, provide for the health and safety of students and employees, or to respond to direction from the State of Connecticut and/or the Eastern Highlands Health District. This is something the state is recommending. This could occur at the August 5 meeting. State plans are constantly being adjusted and we need to be able to move fluidly as new guidelines are given to districts. For example, we just received a change today only requiring 177 student days instead of 180, to allow for 3 days of professional development for staff to ensure they are prepared for the fall.

Lastly, the town created a COVID-19 Willington Emergency Communication Task Force and has a position for the BOE or you can appoint me to serve in your place, but you need to identify a member.

Selectwoman Wiecenski stated the BOS created an Emergency Communications Task Force made up of members of the community including four members at large, our Emergency Management Director, myself, a member of the BOF, a member of EMS, and we are asking for a representative from the BOE either a board member or the superintendent. We ask that you elect someone to that board and then we can begin working on charges to look at what we would need if anything for additional emergency communication and funding required. This conversation came up after the incident at the end of May and taking a look into our emergency communication and whether what is available to us from the state is adequate to fulfill our needs or if we needed something additional. It's important to me and the BOS that all stakeholders are at the table which includes the BOE. You have your own policies regarding emergency communication and although at a time like this students are not in school you still need to be a part of the conversation.

Michelle Doucette Cunningham asked Superintendent Stevens if he has the time to commit to this committee.

Superintendent Stevens stated yes. I think it is important to have someone who is familiar with the schools emergency communications capabilities. We could easily add this topic to the BOE agenda so I could report back to the board and share the discussions.

Elena Testa stated during the conversation Superintendent Stevens stated there would be mask

breaks during the school day and asked how this would work.

Superintendent Stevens replied because students and staff are supposed to wear masks all day long other than when they are eating or taking a drink, we need to find ways to get them outside which is where they can remove their mask as long as they maintain social distancing. I'm looking into circus tents. The state references mask breaks as something districts should be putting into their plan.

Ann Grosjean made a motion to appoint Superintendent Stevens to represent the BOE on the Willington Emergency Communication Task Force.

Elena Testa seconded the motion.

<b>Vote:</b>	Yes	No	Abstain	Absent
H. Arico	✓			
M. Cunningham	✓			
D. Cook	✓			
T. Anderson	✓			
A. Grosjean	✓			
E. Testa	✓			
L. Rodriguez	✓			

Motion passes.

Chairman Arico asked if students will be tested before entering the building and if staff is going to receive professional development.

Superintendent Stevens replied students will not be tested because testing can create backlogs and unnecessary grouping. What they recommend is visual evaluations with specific protocols on what to do. The other thing we are asking of parents and staff is taking temperatures and visual/self evaluations before sending their children to school or before coming to school themselves. We continue to list needed professional development within our sub committees and plan to implement these.

Laura Rodriguez stated I have a concern about the hiring of additional staff who are non-union, minimum wage and with no benefits to fill multiple roles. I'm first wondering who would want this job putting their

health at risk for minimum wage doing all these jobs and with possibly no health insurance. Also I'm wondering if the state has any money to support this type of position as all schools will need additional staff.

Superintendent Stevens replied the money is a potential and is part of the reason for the July 24th creation of the commission so they can see what districts need and try to support funding. As for who would want this job, say Laura Rodriguez wants to sub for Willington but we only call you Monday and Thursday and you're not guaranteed work. This would guarantee work for six people everyday for at least until December. I'm concerned about how overwhelmed our custodians and nurses will be. We would be required to provide training to these individuals across the board.

Michelle Doucette Cunningham stated her concern is specifically about the lack of benefits for this utility person as I wouldn't want them to delay getting tested because of a lack of health insurance or come into work because they need the money. I wouldn't want anyone in the building that doesn't have health insurance.

Superintendent Stevens stated we could look into what we want to provide and I will show you associated costs when I present to you.

Donna Cook stated as of today there have been 15 confirmed Covid cases in Willington and I think we need to keep this in mind. I personally abide by the rules and wear the masks when entering a public place. But after about 20 minutes I find myself getting light headed so I am very concerned about kids having to wear masks and be surrounded by plastic stuff at their desk. How are they going to think clearly? I really question how do-able this is. The other thing I'm concerned about is if kids are eating in the classroom and take their mask off this seems counterproductive. What about the kids with food allergies that usually eat at a separate table if they are exposed to their allergy this could be a serious medical problem.

Superintendent Stevens stated the concerns are valid and the state saw this coming which is why they have told the districts that if people aren't comfortable sending their kids to school and having them wear masks the district has to provide the distance learning. We have staff and parent surveys that will be out very shortly and it will be interesting to see what everyone says. There is a lot of planning that will need to take place.

Ann Grosjean stated my grandkids are in camp right now and the pick up and drop off works quite well. The parents drive up and stay in the car while a staff member brings over their child.



Superintendent Stevens stated these are all things we are considering. The bigger concern I think we are having right now is how you get students to sign out. We are currently looking into electronic methods.

Tracey Anderson stated I currently do in-person summer school for 3hrs 4 days per week with 5 children and 3 adults in one classroom. Everyone wears a mask and it is challenging sometimes but they are doing well. My suggestion is for anyone with school age children now is the tie to get them used to wearing a mask. I agree the mask breaks are definitely needed. Tracey Anderson stated one of the ways we had to sign into school during Covid was through a QR reader.

Superintendent Stevens stated two parents were telling me about an inexpensive app that allows you to get a code which parents would show to teachers to pick up their children. They could sign their kids out electronically and it would also create a record which we need. We have a demo of this app next week. If this keeps parents and guardians out of the building and illuminates the need to share pens and paper while still creating an electronic record it would be worth it.

Chairman Arico asked if there is any financial support coming from the state.

Superintendent Stevens replied this is why they want the information on July 24th. There is going to be some funding around it. One of my biggest concerns is if we buy all these things including the PPE and then we decide not to go back and continue remote learning. I'm trying to make decisions on things that will last and remain useful such as desks and cleaning products. We will have more funding information come August 5th.

Chairman Arico asked out of the three options you gave us does the state allow us to pick one or combine them. For example, can we not open.

Superintendent Stevens replied they haven't exactly said yet. What they did say is that they want us to go back to a physical building. If we are going to a hybrid model we have to communicate that to the State Department of Education and Eastern Highlands. The other thing that isn't clear is attendance. They are still working on all of this. We need to create three plans with the ability to change.

## **8. Financial Report**

### **a. 2019-2020 Budget Update**

As you can see the good news, we have over \$400,000 that will be returned to the town. We will be spending the next month finalizing accounts and preparing transfers to balance programs. We will be adding explanatory text under each program to identify the shortfalls and surpluses. At the next regular meeting when we complete our transfers, I would like the Board of Education to request the Board of Finance to give the board the maximum 2% of the operating budget for the non-lapsing account for unexpended education funds. This would be approximately \$160,000 and could be used

for COVID related expenses. The overall balance includes the freezer repair, septic tank repair, and the chromebook purchase approved by the Board, other than that, the majority of accounts are the same. We are also waiting on a check from Region 19 for diesel for approximately \$13,000.

b. 2020-2021 Budget update

We did not print an update on the 20-21 budget yet as very little money has been spent at this point. Also, the Business Office is still in the process of transitioning from our outdated financial software to our new software by Tyler technologies. Our staff is expected to have training in a couple weeks. During the interim, the business office is creating purchase orders for the schools as needed. We are only ordering items that we need immediately so we don't overwhelm their office.

9. **New Business (continued)**

a. Approve minutes of June 9, 2020 regular meeting

Attachment # 1

Michelle Doucette Cunningham made a motion to accept the minutes of the June 9, 2020 regular meeting

Elena Testa seconded the motion.

<b>Vote:</b>	Yes	No	Abstain	Absent
H. Arico	✓			
M. Cunningham	✓			
D. Cook	✓			
T. Anderson	✓			
A. Grosjean	✓			
E. Testa	✓			
L. Rodriguez			✓	

Motion passes.

b. Approve minutes of July 6, 2020 retreat meeting

Attachment #2

Michelle Doucette Cunningham made a motion to accept the minutes from the July 6, 2020 retreat meeting.

Laura Rodriguez seconded the motion.

<b>Vote:</b>	Yes	No	Abstain	Absent
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H. Arico	✓			
M. Cunningham	✓			
D. Cook	✓			
T. Anderson	✓			
A. Grosjean	✓			
E. Testa	✓			
L. Rodriguez	✓			

Motion passes.

**c. Determine breakfast and lunch prices**

The Board needs to set the breakfast, lunch and milk prices for the 2020-2021 school year. We received a letter from the state which identified the target lunch price for 20-21. You have two attachments regarding this topic. The first is the state’s price adjustment calculator tool and the second is a pricing review. The price adjustment calculator shows that we need to continue to raise lunch prices. The minimum increase is 10 cents. The reason the state wants districts to raise lunch prices is so we are not using reimbursement money from the free and reduced students, which is money credited to the program, to sustain the program. If you look at the pricing review page you can see the increase options for breakfast, lunch and milk, along with the cost to parents. I suggest you do the minimum raise required and raise the breakfast price to \$1.90 and the lunch price to \$2.85, and only raise milk prices 5 cents. We expect a loss to a-la-carte sales because of COVID and this increase may help keep our program self sustaining.

Michelle Doucette Cunningham made a motion to set the price for the upcoming school year at \$2.85 for lunch, \$1.90 for breakfast and \$.65 for milk.

Chairman Arico seconded the motion.

Discussion:

Donna Cook stated there may be a way to increase the a-la-carte items by offering online sales they can do prior to that day and then just have those items delivered to the child’s classroom.

Superintendent Stevens stated he is having Don look into these options.

<b>Vote:</b>	Yes	No	Abstain	Absent
H. Arico	✓			
M. Cunningham	✓			

D. Cook	✓			
T. Anderson	✓			
A. Grosjean	✓			
E. Testa	✓			
L. Rodriguez	✓			

Motion passes.

**d. Determine Substitute pay 20-21**

**Attachment # 5**

The worksheet you have in front of you shows the impact of the increase in the minimum wage through 2023. The next increase is to \$12 per hour starting September 1st. Last year we created a method of adjusting the groups to maintain a buffer between daily rates. This is more important than ever as we will need substitutes for the upcoming school year.

With the change in minimum wage we have to adjust the daily rate we pay a non-certified sub to meet the required amount. The issue is if you have the non-certified pay too close to the certified pay, it won't be worth the extra work to be a teacher sub. Last year we created experience levels to promote Willington and get ahead of the increase in minimum wage.

We created three groups with distinct pay levels: non-certified sub pay, teacher sub pay (bachelor's degree required), and a state certified teacher or retired teacher sub pay. We created a grid with the assumption that a substitute with a BA, subbing for a certified position as a classroom teacher, would get \$15 more than a non-certified substitute per day, and a retired teacher or state certified teacher would get \$20 more than the substitute with the BA. We maintained those assumptions as the minimum wage increased each year. If you review the 9/1/2020 column you will see the rates of \$84, \$99 and \$119 to align with those levels.

The bottom of the grid simply demonstrates the cost difference by year between a sub with a BA versus a retired teacher/or CT licensed certified sub. We need to continue to recruit subs and hope our levels support that mission. This adjustment is budgeted and is for your review.

Michelle Doucette Cunningham asked if most of the substitutes have health insurance from another source.

Superintendent Stevens replied yes.

Michelle Doucette Cunningham made a motion to raise the pay for substitute teachers to \$84 a day for non-certified, \$99 per day for a person with a bachelor's degree, and \$119 per day for certified or retired teachers.

Tracey Anderson seconded the motion.

Discussion:

Laura Rodriguez stated she is concerned with substitutes being with one group of kids one day and another the next. This makes it hard to keep the same people together only with that group. Maybe if the utility workers are assigned to one particular grade this would limit that. Instead of just paying them the minimum wage perhap you want to do a similar buffer for the utility workers.

<b>Vote:</b>	Yes	No	Abstain	Absent
H. Arico	✓			
M. Cunningham	✓			
D. Cook	✓			
T. Anderson	✓			
A. Grosjean	✓			
E. Testa	✓			
L. Rodriguez	✓			

Motion passes.

**10. Old Business**

Laura Rodriguez stated I would like to know if I can make a motion to amend the agenda in order to discuss the school based mental health services I have been hearing so much about. There were several people at the last meeting who spoke about it as well as Janice Castle tonight all who spoke about the need for it and the fact that the community has been asking for it. I was hoping we could bring that issue back up.

Chairman Arico stated that the motion was defeated a number of months ago.

Laura Rodriguez stated I believe it can be brought up again because enough time has passed.

Michelle Doucette Cunningham stated I would like to refer people back to Robert’s Rules because when I had talked about Robert’s Rules requiring the winning side to be the people to bring up a motion a second time which is called a motion to reconsider. When I did more research on this it turns out that a motion to reconsider a specific type of motion that is only for something within 24 hours of a motion. It is meant to reconsider before the policy is implemented. It is acceptable within Robert’s Rules to renew or re-move any motion that is in the past as long as it is at a separate meeting.

Chairman Arico stated I disagree with these findings.

Tracey Anderson asked if there is a difference between the vote being defeated in a forum or because it was a tie.

Chairman Arico stated when you have a tie vote you do not have the support of the majority therefore the motion fails.

Donna Cook stated I've been told all along once a vote is done whether I like the results or not that as a board we need to stand behind the vote.

Ann Grosjean asked if there is a way to check on Robert's Rules and whose information is correct. Also our townspeople have come to us week after week asking us to reconsider this issue. We took this vote before we had any idea that COVID was coming and we discussed how important emotional and social development is because of COVID and as we go back to school and readjust. This is something that could cost anywhere from \$75,000-\$100,000 by the time you put a professional in that position and give them their benefits. This may be something we have to consider doing in order to meet the needs of the children who are coming back to school. I agree with Donna but I think this is a little different within the situation.

Chairman Arico stated I have been on the board when I was not in the majority and when my opinions were not considered. Never once was I allowed to bring it up for another vote. I don't think it is in the best interest of the board to start now.

Tracey Anderson stated I have always supported the votes but I feel like it is a difference when it is a tie rather than a majority vote. We had a retreat last week where two things were mentioned. One was that it is always about the students and second we need to respect our staff and faculty. In the two years plus I have been on the board or coming to meetings I have never seen an issue discussed so many times by the public. Eight people and two letters have requested for a reconsideration. I don't think we are respecting them by not reconsidering and having a conversation about it.

Elena Testa read part of Robert's Rules. I suggest to not ignore Robert's Rules in this case.

Michelle Doucette Cunningham read from page 337 in Robert's Rules.

Chairman Arico moved to the next meeting agenda.

#### 11. **Present to Speak**

Chris Toomey of 33 Baxter Road was present. He stated I spoke briefly at the beginning of the June meeting and I am still hoping the board will reconsider their decision on the school based health services whether it's tonight or at the next meeting and I really think the kids will benefit from this.

Sarah Smith 69 Eldridge Road was present to speak. She stated I can see both points of view. If possible I would like the board to see this as not being in opposition of one another. This is coming from me as a community member. For all the reasons that have been discussed I think it is necessary for our students. I think you should get a neutral party to find an answer to the questions you discussed tonight.

Janice Castle was present to speak. She stated she looked up Robert's Rules and it clearly states the topic can be introduced at another session. I hope someone gets the facts from another party as suggested.

Desiree Daigle was present to speak. She stated I am also here to advocate for the school based health services and ask the board to please reconsider and re-open for further discussion. I think we need to do all we can to teach the students the skills they need to navigate what they have been through as well as looking forward.

## 12. **Board Comments**

Chairman Arico stated I am glad to see we are putting together a pandemic plan for our schools. It's imperative we provide a school climate that will put our students in a safe and healthy environment. This is why I scheduled a meeting for August 5th. I look forward to the meeting coming up. The board will probably have some suggestions for the plan. I'd like to welcome all new staff. I think we have some highly qualified people who will benefit our students. As a board we are very proud of our school system. Our interest is to provide the best possible services to our students. I'd like to thank all those who were present to speak.

Michelle Doucette Cunningham stated I would like to thank everyone who has been keeping Willington Public Schools moving in the right direction over the past month. I want to address a comment from earlier about the board's ethical responsibility. I do agree we have a responsibility to uphold the decisions of the board. However we do have the obligation to speak our minds and represent the residents. I will send you my research on Robert's Rules and formally request that we add this to the agenda of the regular August meeting and renew the discussion on mental health services.

Laura Rodriguez stated I want to thank Phil and all staff for the mobile graduation ceremonies. I would also like to recognize Jason Philips, the music teacher at Hall Memorial. He sent us the Youtube videos of the school play that they were able to put together online as well as the chorus who sang the alma mater and the 8th grade send off. I would like to welcome Mary Kay as the new principal at Hall Memorial as well as Don Castle who is the new Food Services Director and thank Marcia and staff who are providing summer school to students so they do not fall behind.

Note: the recording failed at this point and the minutes do not contain board comment from the following members: Elena Testa, Ann Grosjean, Tracey Anderson, and Donna Cook.

## 13. **Adjournment**

Chairman Arico adjourned the meeting at 9:45PM

\*Next regular meeting  
August 11, 2020

## **WILLINGTON BOARD OF EDUCATION**

Tuesday, June 9, 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

First Selectwoman Erika Wiecenski

Members of the Public

### **Chairman Herb Arico called the meeting to order at 7:04 pm.**

Chairman Arico led the Pledge of Allegiance.

#### **Present to Speak**

Dr. Catherine Galagher of 5 Lucerne Drive was present to speak. She stated she would like to voice a request to the board chairman to re-open the discussion on the decision to not move forward with the community health centers student based health services program. She added in this moment where crisis learning and trauma informed pedagogy are ever more relevant I think it would behoove the board to reconsider this in terms of what is best for our children, our teachers, and our district at large. The benefits are exponential and the risk is quite minimal. Additional mental health services at no cost to the district only indicates future positive outcomes. This program provides better access to mental health services and will make students better equipped to deal with the twenty-first century learning environment which is drastically changing everyday. Dr. Galagher stated this will help them behaviorally and academically. It will allow educators to facilitate a more productive environment in the classroom, help improve learning outcomes, and improve test scores, all things that directly affect our district. Providing free services to students now, will better prepare them for life in general. We easily forget these are the kids that will soon be running the world and taking care of us. Supporting them now, only indicates a potential for a better outcome for the future. I urge the board to reconsider the previous vote and add the student based health services program to the future agenda. As a parent, local business owner, and educator myself, she thinks the topic is worth our time and should not be ignored.



Christopher Toomey of 33 Baxter Road was present to speak. He stated he is a parent of a Hall School student as well as three Hall School alumni and also a teacher in nearby Mansfield. I would also like to ask you to reconsider your decision on the student based health services. Social and emotional learning has become a primary point of emphasis in public schools. Here in Connecticut as well as throughout the country, social and emotional learning empowers students to recognize and manage their emotions, recognize the emotions of their peers, develop positive relationships skills, and helps them learn to make decisions in a responsible manner. These skills are vital to students' success in this time when students are asked to do a great deal of collaboration. Despite the fact that school staff puts a lot of emphasis on social and emotional learning, there are many children who demonstrate significant deficits and needs that surpass the scope of day to day instructions and require more intensive intervention and treatment. The student based health services could provide this intervention and support for those children at no cost to the families who are uninsured and at no cost to our district because of a grant opportunity. I hope you will reconsider your decision and vote to enter into a partnership with student based health services.

Sarah Baker of 7 Ridgewood Road was present to speak. She stated, she is also a parent of a Hall School student as well as the director of member experience for an insurer, although she is not speaking on behalf of them she wanted to offer some insight on the same issue of access to mental health services. She stated this is one of the number one struggles that I hear from our members. There are two key issues behind this, the first being the cost of these services and the second is the availability. In Connecticut, most of the population is covered by private insurance, the majority through their employers. Most of these employers have self funded arrangements which means they are exempt from state mandates and have a lot of leeway. Most have gone with high deductible health plans which are regulated at a federal level and require that most services are subject to a deductible before the health insurer picks up any cost which can range from \$1,400 to well over \$6,000. The average cost of a counseling visit is \$90 so a child with weekly visits would cost close to \$400 per month out of pocket which is simply unaffordable for many families and even if they can afford this cost, access is still an issue as there is an acknowledged shortage of behavioral health providers. It can take dozens of phone calls to find a qualified individual who is accepting new patients and longer to find someone who is taking patients after school hours. You may need to travel 30-40 minutes for an appointment which is hours of missed work time for parents making it very difficult to help their children get the care they need. In terms of need we look at what is called adverse childhood events which are measures of exposure to trauma such as divorce, economic instability, victims of or witnesses to emotional abuse, and household members who have mental illness or substance abuse issues. In our town 70% of the children have exposure to at least one of these and 30% are exposed to three or more. Many could testify as to how these inhibit their ability to engage in learning and really develop the relationships they need with teachers and authoritative figures to become successful in life. Programs such as this one are really built to combat the effect of these adverse events and give the child resilience and the skills they need to be successful. Today, a middle school student is more likely to die from suicide as they are from a traffic accident. There is a mental health crisis and parents are struggling to access the services. As a town we should be working to facilitate mental health service for our children and I hope the board will reconsider this program.

Sarah Smith was present to speak. She stated she wanted to add her support and appreciation to the articulate people who spoke tonight and does think there are a lot of people requesting this review and another meeting where teachers and the public can be allowed to address the issue.

Tom Kelly of 100 Common Road was present to speak. He stated he is a father of two students in Hall School. The times we live in with people getting killed by the police, people running through town with machetes, people losing their jobs and no one leaving their home seem like good reasons to need counseling.

Greg Grzywacz of 16 Angela Lane was present. He stated he has three children in the school system and holds a Masters Degree in psychology. He stated he would like to underscore everything that has been articulated by everyone. He added in current times we had an extremely traumatic event in town of which our kids are likely hyper aware of due to media coverage and furthermore as we start to go back to a new normal, there will be a lot of adjustment and this is the type of environment in which we hear about things such as increased domestic abuse. There are a lot of these adverse circumstances at play going on for which people might need an outlet now more so than ever. I would like to encourage this to be re-visited.

Dr. Sandra Hughes of 74 Willington Hill Road was present. She stated she has two children in the school system and she is also a local physician of family medicine. I have dealt with patients with mental health illness on a daily basis even before Covid-19 and the pandemic, it has been an on-going issue. Our children today have an incredible amount of stress put on them on a regular basis and with all the increased stresses it's only that much more difficult for them to deal with their own personal issues as well as all the issues around them. Their families are more stressed by financial issues or for personal reasons there's more on their plates. Anything we can do to help support them so they can focus on their job which is to learn is useful. I'd like them to revisit this topic.

### **Chairman's Report**

Chairman Arico stated the Willington School year is gradually drawing to a close after a very difficult year. The Board of Education, the administration, staff, students, parents, and the community have responded exceptionally well to the change in educational environments. We still have many major issues to face as we move forward and even during the closing of the school year with graduation which is in progress, summer school, serving special education students, busing, and the reopening of our schools safely in the fall. Reopening the schools in the fall will probably be a major undertaking and will take additional funding. We cannot forfeit our Willington student's future because of that so we need to continue to invest in our schools so that children continue to receive the high quality education they need and deserve.

### **Communication**

There was no communication.

### **Superintendent Reports**

#### **a. Retirements and resignation**

Superintendent Stevens stated we received a resignation letter from Laura Hurd. 5th grade teacher Laura Hurd has been in Willington for over 10 years. Laura went above and beyond implementing our Interim Learning Plan for her students. I've heard Laura will be traveling the world on her bicycle and we wish her well.

HMS principal Ken Craig has resigned from his position at the end of this school year. Ken has been in Willington for four years and led some transformative change at Hall School. Ken is moving on to an elementary school principal position in his hometown of Wethersfield. I've worked closely with Ken over the last four years and greatly appreciate his dedication to his students and school. I wish him well and hope our paths cross in the future.

I've already mentioned our other retirements, but as it is the end of the year wanted to share them quickly again. Willa Berghuis, kindergarten teacher at CES, is retiring after 34 years in the district. Donna Campagna, paraprofessional, is retiring after 20+ years with us. And lastly, Wendy Knight, food services director, is retiring after 21 years of service. I would like to thank all our staff leaving us for their

dedication to the Willington Public Schools and wish them well in their future endeavors.

**b. HMS Principal search**

Superintendent Stevens stated we posted the principal opening and currently have 24 applications. It will be 2 weeks this Thursday and we are in the process of forming a comprehensive search committee. We will need a Board member on the committee and will be discussing that later in the agenda. The timeline at this point has a screening interview on June 25 through Zoom with administrators only, and then the committee will host first round interviews on July 2 also through Zoom. The committee will host onsite interviews for the second round which will occur on July 9. I plan on moving this search quickly to try to appoint a candidate at our July Board meeting.

Donna Cook asked if the job description was looked at, reviewed and possibly tweaked to make sure that it fits what we know our needs are or perceived needs are going forward? Superintendent Stevens replied some postings only include job requirements, what we do in our postings is prioritize and let people know the types of things we are looking for such as a collaborative leader, knowledgeable, visible in the community, and has certain background experience. It doesn't necessarily change the job description because that is so lengthy but it is specific to the things we are looking for.

Chairman Arico asked, during the screening how many do you plan to present to the board or do you make the selection? Superintendent Stevens replied it is really his choice on who to hire but thinks it's a good process for a candidate to come in front of the board. In the past I've only brought you one candidate because we've had one candidate each time that has been the front runner. In the initial screening process if we have fifteen candidates that we feel are qualified, we will screen all fifteen. We want the best candidate for the district and sometimes it takes time to decide this. When we do a second round in person this is when we really whittle the numbers down.

Chairman Arico asked if most of the candidates are from Connecticut or are some out of state. Superintendent Stevens replied after a quick glance at the candidates he believes most are from Connecticut with possibly a couple from out of state but either way they must possess Connecticut certification.

**c. Food Services Director search: summer meals**

The food services director position will have been posted for two weeks tomorrow. At this point we have four applications. I am also expecting a proposal from a nearby district to consider the possibility of sharing a director, but can't speak to the feasibility of this concept until I see the proposal. Our director does a lot of hands on work which is not typical for a director. I hope to interview candidates next week and have an appointment soon. If I have a qualified candidate I will make the appointment so we don't experience a gap in services as Wendy retires at the end of the month.

Donna Cook asked that since Wendy has done this job seamlessly for so long, have you had her make a pretty indepth list of the things she does and is responsible for versus the things she delegates to other people so that you know what to tell the person stepping in. Superintendent Stevens replied yes, I have performed my exit interview with Wendy and she gave me some good feedback about things we could improve on from a policy standpoint and she is also documenting everything in a binder manual. She will have this prepared for whoever the next person is. We also have a contact with the state who has been very helpful moving the process forward and to make sure we ask all the right questions.

Ann Grosjean asked if Wendy will have an opportunity to work with the next person and help them get started. Superintendent Stevens replied he did offer Wendy to be a consultant for a period of time depending on the experience level of the new director. We would have to pay her and make it worth her time.

#### **d. School closure status**

Schools are closed for the remainder of the school year. Both school principals have worked to allow teachers into their classrooms to do simple preparations for summer cleaning. We have also worked with families to return their belongings. Social distancing and safety protocols were implemented during both events. Thank you to our staff for helping work through the process of these tasks.

#### **e. Interim Learning Plan**

The Interim Learning Plan is winding down for the school year. At this point we are operating with teacher lessons and special events including the CES talent show, Hall Idol, virtual field days, and virtual field trips. Though this transition was not perfect, and we would rather have been in school, all our staff did an amazing job with our plan. Superintendent Stevens showed an exemplary lesson by a group of teachers, Katie Rychling (STEAM teacher), Tracie Canestrari (band teacher) and Becky Muldoon (HMS health). The district offered professional development on how to create a remote bitmoji classroom and these teachers created a field trip to Wellington with an escape room!

Chairman Arico asked if the special education students are included in the plan. Superintendent Stevens replied yes they are part of it and case managers and families work together. So if the lessons the classroom teachers were putting out to the group were not at the specific targeted goals and objectives of that students IEP, then the special education case manager would modify it. In some cases they have modified everything and they have followed a totally different plan. Some of the case managers are Zooming one to one with students and providing support, but it is all targeted towards their goals and objectives of their IEP. As far as students who are outplaced, they also have a program which is driven by the outplacement and they were required to do the same thing based upon their IEP.

#### **f. CES and HMS Promotion Ceremonies (graduation)**

We will be facilitating our promotion ceremonies in a unique fashion this year. We will be driving around town in a school bus and our administrators will be presenting our 4th and 8th grade students with their promotion certificates. This intricate ceremony will take about 5 hours for each grade level. The 8th grade promotion is this Friday, and 4th grade is next Tuesday. Though we are disappointed we are unable to offer an onsite ceremony, we are making the most of the situation within the safety parameters. We have the Kona Ice truck following the school bus to provide a special treat. Thank you to Wellington Fire department #1 for providing an emergency truck with lights for safety. We will be using Facebook live to notify families where we are on the designated route and will be filming a large portion of the ceremonies which will be put into a promotional video for the students.

#### **g. Special education summer school**

The onsite summer school requirements were extremely challenging to meet and we've decided to offer our special education summer school program remotely this summer. Our pupil services director is working with our staff and families to provide a program that will meet the needs of our students through Zoom. We're confident we can provide a meaningful learning experience to meet IEP requirements.

#### **h. School Reopening Committee**

We will be creating a school reopening advisory committee once we have requirements from the State Department of Education regarding opening in the fall. The advisory committee will be composed of members from all unions, the BOE, parents and invited guests including a member of the local health department, M&J Bus, food services, etc. My administrative team has already met several times to discuss potential hybrid models and schedules to return in the fall. At this point, we will need the requirements from the state to move forward. We expect we may see specific guidelines around social distancing, which impacts items such as class size, transportation, recess and lunch. One of the largest inhibitors could be

social distancing on buses if we are required to transport students in small groups. Though we have developed a model to meet this requirement, it may increase our transportation costs significantly. I have heard one of the models the state is considering is a shortened week, but until we have details it will be really challenging to plan and make adjustments.

#### **i. Professional development, 2020**

We are looking forward to professional development opportunities for our staff in the fall. Specifically, we are looking to work with Eastconn's Gary Petersen to facilitate more training for our staff around the Readers and Writers Workshop. If we are not in school physically, Gary also has the ability to adjust his training to focus on remote learning. Also, we will be committing to Eastconn for professional development from Dr. Ravit Stein, who also works around trauma sensitive instruction and de-escalating strategies. This will be critical for our staff as we welcome students back to our buildings. Lastly, we will be providing professional development around the Portrait of a Graduate, and will be including culturally-responsive teaching strategies and identifying grade level expectations for students.

#### **j. Portrait of a Graduate**

Last week I sent a letter on behalf of the district regarding the responsibility of the Willington Public Schools to teach students specific skills to combat social injustice. Students need to develop into strong individuals who possess the tools to be anti-racist, and we need explicit instruction in our curriculum. We are in the process of creating a Portrait of the Graduate, a perfect platform for identifying curricular grade-level expectations to teach students the critical skills needed to address social injustice. We will be utilizing a subcommittee of our POG committee and our district diversity committee to focus on this portion of the portrait of a graduate. As a district, we need to be more direct in teaching these skills, and this includes providing professional development for staff.

Chairman Arico asked how much of the curriculum time is devoted to the Portrait of a Graduate or is it intertwined with the regular curriculum? Superintendent Stevens replied it is intertwined. It is not meant to add another thing for teachers to teach, it's meant to integrate into and be present across all areas of the building with expectations students should achieve by 8th grade. Chairman Arico asked if this process will be from kindergarten all the way to 8th grade? Superintendent Stevens replied yes pre-k through 8th grade. This is not a new idea, a lot of districts are doing it and we are very aware of what E.O. Smith is doing and we are trying to make sure we are funneling our work to align with their expectations.

#### **k. Transportation negotiation**

I signed our agreement with M&J to meet the Governor's executive order 7R requiring a continuation of payment for student transportation services. We agreed to the same settlement as many other districts. Our agreement requires payment of 55% of our bill from March 16 - May 15. We will pay 90% of our contracted rate from May 15 to the end of the school year. The difference between the two rates is the rehiring of M&J staff, which again, meets executive order 7R. The savings is approximately \$46,000.

### **Financial Report**

#### **A. 2019-2020 Budget Update**

The programs are starting to balance out at this point. As you can see, we have over \$500,000 remaining in the budget at the time of this report.

Program 1 Center School is about the same. Program 2 Hall School still has money from the open positions we didn't fill for a period of time, and a grant transition from CES to HMS. I have some good news to report around program 3 Special Education. Though we were approximately \$180,000 in the red as a result of outplacements, we were able to greatly impact the shortfall with savings from our decision

to take employees into the classified WESS union instead of contracting out for services. What we thought was going to be a \$200,000+ shortfall is actually only going to be a shortfall of around \$40,000. Other reasons for savings are from transportation, para resignations, modified billing from contractors, summer school savings, and savings from the shortened Wealth program. Program 4 transportation shows the change after the M&J negotiations. Program 5 health services is short as we are restocking PPE. Program 6 curriculum and staff development has money as staff were unable to attend professional development, though we provided some through Zoom. That money I plan to use for EASTCONN commitment. Program 7 utilities are short slightly, but it may bounce back as we encumber for the year and may see savings in electricity and heating oil. Donna reconciles this at the end of June. Program 8 operations and maintenance has money because of our hiring custodial staff at the entry level. Program 9 systemwide support is on track and program 10 fringe benefits shows the savings from the insurances.

**B. 2020-2021 Budget Update**

The Board of Finance passed the 20-21 budget as presented to them after the BOE cut of \$123,002. Programs and personnel will stay intact for the 20-21 fiscal year. Superintendent Stevens reviewed the adjustments the Board had already approved.

**Committee Report**

Chairman Arico stated the committees we have include policy, finance, curriculum and instruction, staff negotiations, clubs, wellness, security, facilities, transportation, and search committees. The only committee that I know of that met recently was the finance committee. The agenda items for this committee were the freezer at Center School which the committee came to a decision on which will come up in the agenda later on. As well as we reviewed the need for computers at Hall School. We looked over multiple bids ranging from \$159 each to \$500 each. We will share the recommendation later in the meeting as well.

**New Business**

**A. Approve minutes of May 12, 2020 regular meeting**

**Attachment # 1**

Michelle Doucette Cunningham made a motion to accept the minutes of the May 12, 2020 regular meeting.

Ann Grosjean seconded the motion.

Discussion:

Tracey Anderson stated at the end of page 3 of the minutes when it stated she and Ann read letters written by citizens, this should be changed to written by teachers.

<b>Vote:</b>	Yes	No	Abstain	Absent
H. Arico	✓			
M. Cunningham	✓			
D. Cook	✓			
T. Anderson	✓			
A. Grosjean	✓			

E. Testa	✓			
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Motion passes.

**B. Approve minutes of June 3, 2020 Finance Committee Minutes Attachment # 2**

Michelle Doucette Cunningham made a motion to accept the minutes of the June 3, 2020 Finance Committee meeting.

Elena Testa seconded the motion.

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

Motion passes.

**C. Transfer protocol discussion**

In the past, I proposed leaving programs in the negative to be transparent with the public. For example, last year we had a \$100,000 shortfall in special education at the program level and we left it like that at the end of the year for transparency. We didn't exceed our entire budget allocation as the shortfall was covered by savings from other programs. After reviewing the purchasing policy, transfer policy and discussing with the Board attorney, I don't believe we should do that again. Though it does provide transparency, statute and our policy should provide the board the opportunity to make program allocation adjustments by transferring money to that program so it balances out. We will make transfers in our July or August meeting to balance out each program for 19-20. To maintain transparency, because I don't feel it will be clear to the public where we had a shortfall and/or surplus, we are going to insert a statement under each program that has a shortfall or a surplus with an explanation. This will also be visible under the adjusted budget when we are planning for 21-22, and we will include the explanation there as well.

Donna Cook asked, if you show the programs listed on the left as you do now, and then show what the total balances were pretransfer and then a transfer column and a totals post transfer, I think that will visually make it clear. Superintendent Stevens replied this is a great idea. Unless Donna can put it on one page we will print out what the budget looked like before and then make the adjustments and show where things have changed.

Ann Grosjean asked if this will be done monthly. Superintendent Stevens replied usually the only time we make transfers is at the beginning of the year to balance out any hiring that has happened and then again at the end of the year. The board attorney did say if you have something big come up, you either want board

approval through a vote knowing that they will have to make a transfer or you want to make the transfer prior to paying for something.

**D. CES septic tank and leach field project completion**

Admiral Septic is almost done with the project at this point. The leaching field work is complete and the pump chamber has been installed. The electrical connection was scheduled for today and the topsoil and seeding is scheduled for next week. The project should be wrapped up in the next couple weeks. The cost from Admiral is \$34,264.50 and that will be encumbered tomorrow. The cost for topsoil and seeding is \$4,798, which has already been encumbered. Once EMCOR connects the system to the Delta panel the project will be done. Dave Lytwyn from Admiral has moved on to Hall School and pumped the septic tanks and kitchen grease trap. He found an issue with the grease trap and will be jetting and vacuuming the exit pipe. Hopefully that system is in better condition than was identified at CES.

**E. CES freezer repair**

As you know our freezer at Center School failed on April 19. We received quotes from EMCOR and Medford Wellington to replace the evaporator and outdoor condensing unit (2001). The Finance Committee reviewed the quotes and would like to go with the low bidder, EMCOR for \$8,969. We would receive a one year labor warranty, a one year manufacturer warranty on parts, and a five year warranty on the compressor. I’m looking for an approval to award the work to be completed.

Michelle Doucette Cunningham made a motion to move ahead with the low bid contract of \$8,969 from EMCOR for the freezer repair at Center Elementary School.

Tracey Anderson seconded the motion.

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

Motion Passes.

**F. CES and HMS Chromebook purchase**

I’ve mentioned for a couple months now an issue that NOVUS identified with our Chromebooks. The operating system on our current Chromebooks will not allow updates. They were manufactured in 2013 and the operating system will no longer be upgradeable beyond Chrome 76 as of July, 2019. Current chrome operating system is version 83. State testing required OS 75 this year, and we are sure it is going to be higher next year which means our current Chromebooks won’t be able to be used for testing. The finance committee met and reviewed lease and purchase quotes and would like to recommend



purchasing 410 Chromebooks from the lowest bidder, S.H.I., for \$93,070.00. The cost of each Chromebook is \$227 with the educational package we would require. The committee made the recommendation to purchase additional Chromebooks as spares instead of purchasing the replacement plan, which was \$70,000 for four years. Donna and I calculated that we could use approximately \$15,000 in grant funds towards this purchase. I anticipate the Board of education could easily return \$300,000 to the town after all purchases are completed.

Michelle Doucette Cunningham made a motion to allocate \$93,070.00 for 410 Chromebooks with S.H.I.

Elena Testa seconded the motion.

Chairman Arico asked if this will provide each student with a Chromebook. Superintendent Stevens replied we will keep these Chromebooks at the school and if we go to remote learning we can push the old Chromebooks out to the students who need them and maintain the new ones in school.

Donna Cook asked if we really need the 410 if the older Chromebooks would be the ones going home to students during distance learning. Superintendent Stevens replied we believe we have about 50 Chromebooks which have the upgraded software and newer operating system so that leaves us with a breakage number of about 20.

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

Motion Passes.

**G. Superintendent evaluation discussion**

This is a wild finish to the year and wanted to discuss my evaluation which you must complete annually. This is completed in executive session in a separate meeting, and probably much easier to complete in person, not through Zoom. My thought is to have a special meeting at some point in the near future.

Elena Testa asked what challenges do you foresee using Zoom. Superintendent Stevens stated security may be an issue. Elena Testa stated she would suggest holding the evaluation and stated she remembered Michelle having some great online tools for evaluation last year. Michelle Doucette Cunningham replied she would look back and see if she still had these tools. She added that if they do use this questionnaire again she wanted to remind everyone that they need to fill out the questionnaire entirely in one sitting so the work is not lost. She stated we should probably put this off until after the regular July meeting to give us a chance to fill out the questionnaire and possibly meet in late July or early August.

Elena Testa made a motion to schedule an executive session for the Superintendent evaluation in a special meeting during the month of August.

Michelle Doucette Cunningham stated she is happy to offer her pro account but doesn't know if by this date they could come together to have this meeting. She does not want to neglect their duties. She asked if they have to state the location of the meeting now? Chairman Arico replied he believes if it is a special meeting they have to give the location.

Chairman Arico stated since there is no second of the motion the motion is denied. The Superintendent evaluation will be postponed but we will get back to it hopefully by the end of July or at some point in August.

Donna Cook asked if since they are a small group could they meet in person. Sometimes having a discussion on Zoom could compromise security. Chairman Arico stated he agreed and he didn't know if Zoom was the way to go. Elena Testa stated perhaps they could consider meeting outside. Ann Grosjean stated she agrees they should discuss this again in July as they will have a better idea how things are going as things open up. Superintendent Stevens stated at any point the board members could complete the documentation. Then they can figure out the final meeting to share the information and be together.

#### **H. Appoint BOE member for HMS Principal Search Committee**

I mentioned the dates earlier for the HMS search: July 2 via Zoom, and July 9 onsite. I would like to have at least one BOE member on the committee. Depending on how many qualified applicants we have, there may need to be an additional day for the first round of interviews. Ann Grosjean stated she would be interested in participating in the committee. Michelle Doucette Cunningham stated she could not commit to the second date at this time but if something happened where Ann couldn't attend and she was available she would participate. Chairman Arico replied they could put him down for participating in the committee.

#### **I. BOE summer retreat**

I would like to contact CABA to schedule a Board training and summer retreat. CABA offers customized workshops on a variety of topics, including roles and responsibilities, and facilitating self-evaluation and goal setting. I would like to bring in CABA to facilitate this retreat with your approval.

Donna Cook asked how many hours the training usually runs. Superintendent Stevens replied usually a couple hours minimum but if we are on Zoom sticking to no more than two hours seems reasonable.

Chairman Arico stated they would try to set up a date in the summertime. Superintendent Stevens stated he would have Brenda send out an email with possible dates. Donna Cook requested that Brenda give them time blocks so they can give a definite answer as to if they are available.

### **1. Old Business**

#### **a. Election of new board member**

Chairman Arico stated we have addressed this particular item several times and the position was vacated by a republican member of the board. The board has been deadlocked on the decision and there doesn't seem to be very much movement. We have received quite a few qualified candidates but we were unable to agree on any of them filling the vacancy. We reached the point where we sent the issue to the Board of Selectmen in accordance with our bylaws. The Board of Selectmen discussed it and decided to refer the decision back to us. If we are unable to make a decision this evening, then I would assume it would go back to the Board of Selectmen. They had agreed to give us 30 days to make a decision. We have the choice this evening of doing nothing and referring it back to them or we can try to take action by

appointing someone. Selectwoman Wiecenski is present tonight so we can listen to her and the other Selectmen's reasoning for referring the decision back to us.

Selectwoman Wiecenski stated the Board of Selectmen felt strongly that the Board of Education could have a conversation and we encourage you as we did to speak to the candidates that were before us. We took the opportunity to speak to two candidates Brenda Abrams and Laura Rodreguiz and we hoped that this board would do the same. It was our hope that the Board of Education could make a decision working together to choose the member they felt was best for the Board of Education. We did say we would send it back to you for 30 days and at the end of that there was discussion about what we would do and the census was that we would have to take a vote on the matter. All three Selectmen felt that we really wanted to see the Board of Education have a conversation amongst yourselves and the candidates about what is best for the board and that is why we sent it back to you without taking action. After the 30 days it would come back onto the agenda with the Board of Selectmen.

Chairman Arico stated perhaps they should have a special meeting on this topic and invite the candidates to come before us to interview them again and try to come to a consensus. Michelle Doucette Cunningham made a motion that the board appoint Laura Rodriguez to the Willington BOE to fill the current vacancy.

Tracey Anderson seconded the motion.

Donna Cook made a motion that the board appoint Brenda Abrams to the Willington BOE to fill the current vacancy.

Elena Testa seconded the motion.

Discussion:

Ann Grosjean asked if they could hear from the candidates before they voted. Chairman Arico stated they would have to notify the candidates ahead of time to let them know they wished to hear from them.

Tracey Anderson asked if they could please discuss the candidates as their previous discussions have been more about procedures than the actual candidates, which is exactly what the Board of Selectmen pointed out. Chairman Arico stated he had no objection to a discussion. Tracey Anderson stated she would first like to mention that she has heard several times that the votes that are being made are based on political affiliation. My votes on anything on the Board of Education are not based on political affiliation. I have dedicated most of my adult life to education and I will support education to the end for what is best for the children of Willington. When I make a decision on the Board of Education it is not about am I voting with the Democrats or Republican, I am voting for who I think is best to serve our community, students, and staff. As far as the candidates go when I heard Brenda Abrams speak in her letter I recall she stated she is a recreational therapist.

Chairman Arico stated we should be talking in regards to one's own candidate. Tracey Anderson replied she would like to give her opinion on both candidates. Chairman Arico stated they should not criticize the other candidate. Tracey Anderson replied she is not criticizing but simply discussing and she is just stating the facts as she understands them to be. Tracey added she feels offended by words being put in her mouth and doesn't appreciate not being able to finish her part of the discussion. Michelle Doucette Cunningham spoke to Chairman Arico and stated she did not believe Tracey was criticizing either candidate but simply stating facts but you cut her off too soon in fear she was going down that road. Chairman Arico stated he still believes she should keep the discussion to her own candidate.

Tracey Anderson replied she only seconded a motion for a candidate and thought in the discussion they could discuss everything. She added she does not always feel respected as a board member and that it sometimes feels like members get certain treatment depending on who they are. My recollection about Laura Rodriguez is that she is currently a professor at Eastern as well as worked in various school systems as a teacher including Willington. In my decision I do think about the fact that we need a balance of members to give different ideas but I do think right now in our current situation with education changing so quickly, that having a candidate who has current experience in education and is familiar with current changes in education and curriculum, for example new science and social studies standards, for Willington the best candidate for us to vote in would be Laura Rodriguez. I have heard from different groups that they request we have parents and educators being represented on the Board of Education so going with that request, I am voting for Laura Rodriguez.

Elena Testa stated she would like to emphasize that she has no doubt that Laura Rodriguez is a wonderful teacher and professional but we are not here just representing teachers. We have to represent the town. The town very clearly made the choice during the election that the next candidate would be Brenda Abrams because she was the next one in line who received the most votes. This is why the republican committee endorsed Brenda Abrams. In respect to the highest authority in our town, the will of the town. Also I would like to remind everyone that we had a similar situation a year ago when another republican resigned and a candidate with a masters degree as a teacher was endorsed and we chose a person who had nothing to do with education. I think at this particular point if Ms. Rodriguez wants to continue her desire to serve on the board, she should definitely run and let the town elect her.

Ann Grosjean stated she believes what Elena is talking about is the party line. What we need to do right now during this unprecedented time in education when we don't even know if we can open our schools in the fall is stand behind our superintendent and teachers who have some really tough decisions to make. We have had people speaking every week about bringing back the mental health professional. To this day, I have no idea why the one party line voted that down. When I vote my fear is for when we need to make other big decisions like that one, that it might go the same way. We have some huge decisions we are going to have to make such as are we going to open the schools and are we going to do online learning. We really need to support our staff, and our staff stood up and talked about how important the mental health professional was and that they needed them and what an asset it would be for our schools. We cannot as a board afford to make anymore decisions like this. Ones which could have been \$70-100K in our budget which was being offered for free. That is why I'm voting the way I am. When I see the way some of the votes are going I fear for what our superintendent and teachers will be able to do when they don't have the support of the majority of the Board of Education.

Michelle Doucette Cunningham stated the reason she nominated Laura Rodriguez had nothing to do with party, it is primarily around the experience she brings to the table. I think now is the right time for us to be looking at the candidate that can bring a broad array of different school systems and experience in different places that will help the board with the different decisions we have to make in the coming year. I think during the discussion about process and how we have moved ahead, things have been said about different people on the board that puts words in their mouth, and makes assumptions about where they are coming from. You were correct earlier when you said many times we vote unanimously, but it's the times we vote differently that it's most important that we vote for what we believe in and where our values are. I think that anyone who is assuming malicious, poor, or political intent and saying it's not based on what we think is best for the children is offensive. I made the motion to nominate Laura Rodriguez because I believe she is the best candidate for the job and I think she is what Willington needs right now.

Donna Cook stated she agrees it is awful when the worst is assumed about why someone makes a

decision. I think that we all care a whole lot about the children in our community and the families in our community and we want the best for the children. We may not agree on what that looks like but we need to remember that is the goal. When I look at the board my understanding is as a board member, we are not committed to interfere with the teachers. We cannot instruct them and we can't guide them, that is not under our authority. My daughter had Laura and she was a wonderful teacher, I think she would probably make an excellent middle school principal where her talent and expertise could be put to use in a way that would benefit the children and the teachers. When I look at the community, we already have three professional educators on the board. This board is to represent the town and it is to look at what is best for the children and I believe the teachers are well represented, I don't think 3/7th of our town are teachers. Sometimes we don't have to agree but when we come at a problem from different angles, maybe we will come up with a better answer than we could have individually. I think Brenda Abrams who is not a professional teacher though has some educational experience would fulfill the qualities we need and bring a different perspective.

Michelle Doucette Cunningham stated she would like to clarify that people who currently teach for the district are not serving on the board in accordance with state law. It is very common for people who teach in other districts to bring their expertise to the board. Michelle added she would like to hear from Laura Rodriguez tonight as the issue has been on the agenda and she is present.

Laura Rodriguez stated she appreciates the chance to speak about her background as more than an educator. The first part of being on this Board of Education is in fact living in Willington. My husband and I moved here 18 years ago and chose Willington because of the school district. I then got a position in the district and for those 12 years I was unable to serve on the Board of Education. I left the position at Hall School to start a new program at the STEM School in Windham. I was a science teacher there and I actually developed the whole integrated curriculum for seventh grade and it was in that context that I got the opportunity to go back to get my doctorate in science education. You have spoken to my education credentials but the other piece of my credentials is the science piece. My whole background is in science and when there are issues constantly looking at what is the data, what is the evidence, what are the facts, and how do we solve these problems. For a Board of Education with all of the issues that are facing you right now between the pandemic and social injustice, that background is going beyond being an educator. It is a part of me to work with other people to solve problems. The other piece is my background in education is not just about teachers because educators are not just about teachers they are about children. Whether I'm in the classroom for the 23 years working directly with children, at Eastern working with pre-cert teachers, or serving on a Board of Education that is making decisions about what is best for the children, my qualifications of being a community member is about children, not teachers. Lastly, I read through the bylaws for the Board of Education and there were two bylaws that jumped out at me and really represent why I'm a good candidate. The first is number 5 under the responsibility and duties, it states, to work harmoniously with other board members without trying to either dominate or neglect one share of the work and to respect the opinions of other board members. A person who knows how to collaborate and problem solve knows how to listen to all other points of view. It is so important to listen to those points of view and not try to push your agenda or not try to neglect your share of the work. The reason why now was the perfect time for me is that I just finished my doctorate. I have the time and tons of energy and I'm able to devote that to taking on this new position. The second bylaw, number 6 under the same section, to vote and act impartially at board meetings for the good of the school district and to abide by the majority vote in all cases and to support the resulting decision. That is who I am. I am going to take the facts and I will make my decision and we will vote and that is the will of the majority. You have to then move forward. These are the reasons I feel I would be a very good board member. I am extremely dedicated to the children of this community and this would be another way for me to serve.

Chairman Arico stated they would first vote on the nomination for Laura Rodriguez.

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

Motion fails.

Chairman Arico stated we will now vote on the second nomination Brenda Abrams

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

Motion fails.

**Present to Speak**

Sarah Smith was present to speak. She stated teachers are people who have dedicated their lives to education and must have a perspective on what good education is and must be selfless. I am hoping some attitudes might change toward these people who are highly educated and who have nothing but the best intentions and credibility. If you are just into saving taxpayer money, I don't think you represent the town well.

James Bulick of Laurel Drive was present to speak. He stated he is speaking out for the voters of Willington who elected Liz Perry a republican and someone who didn't have a teacher background. I'm grateful that Laura Rodriguez applied for the position but the voters clearly made a decision and a choice. It baffles me why we don't want to follow the will of the voters and elect Brenda Abrams who is a

qualified individual. She is in the healthcare profession and does have some teacher experience and a good board is composed of many perspectives and you get better decisions when you have many different perspectives.

Stephanie Summers of 4 Y Road was present to speak. She stated she wanted to speak about some of the debate about who is a good candidate for the board. I am a former board member and I did not bring education in my skill set but I did bring my career as a journalist and insatiable curiosity in my quiver of arrows. I think other people have a gift to bring to the board. I think Laura made a perfectly great case about her qualities as an individual and her love for science and her qualities that go along with that love. I think you do need someone who is willing to do the research, the questioning and the analyzing. I am appreciative to her for being at every BOE and BOS meeting since her name has been brought up. I also want to address the past with the elections. Laura was not on the ballot so we don't really have the voters say on whether or not she would be the best candidate. Looking back, at what the election line up was in the past is not really relevant to what is going on now. The candidate with the best qualifications and the best willingness to show up, participate and bring their skills to the table is a much more important quality. I urge you to find a way to discuss the quality of the candidates in a better way.

### **Board Comments**

Chairman Arico stated we have had an interesting meeting and I appreciate everyone's input. We appreciate the services of all the retirees. I would also like to thank the superintendent for his efforts during the pandemic with the online learning and the cooperation of the staff. As I mention in my earlier remarks we still have a lot to do and a lot of issues that are going to come before the board. I feel sure that we will address them together and come to a consensus regarding some of these very serious issues that are going to present themselves down the road with the end of school and the opening of the schools.

Michelle Doucette Cunningham stated she is disappointed that because the agenda was so full you chose not to raise the issue that so many people spoke so eloquently about earlier in the meeting which was reconsidering the conversation about mental health services for our children. I do hope you continue to listen to the many people who have spoken in support of that and maybe bring it up and put it on the agenda for July. Secondly, I would like to cite my disappointment in the fact that people continue to keep the focus on the voters and their will in deciding this candidacy issue about the vacancy on the Board of Education. If you look back to the election, Brenda and the democrat behind her were only one vote apart it was virtually a tie at that point and we don't have that many people who vote in local elections so talking about the voters is really giving short fall to the children who are too young to vote. Our charge here is to put the children first and this is an elected position and everyone has a chance to run for office and that is how this board is decided. When a candidate is put forward who is not going to be able to serve, there is a good chance that the people who passed the law giving the board power to elect to fill a vacancy were right in their decision that it allows the group to interview people and have conversation about the candidates and to consider the people who are nominated and what would be best for the children. Any conversation that is not about what is best for the children is really neglecting our duty as board members.

Ann Grosjean stated she would like to congratulate all of the retirees and wish them all well and thank the teachers and administrators for what a wonderful job they have done with the online learning. I've been implementing it at home and it is really amazing what they have been able to do so the kids aren't missing learning while in this situation. I also really enjoyed the signs along 32 in front of Hall School. Those were wonderful for the graduating 8th graders.

Tracey Anderson stated she would like to echo what Herb and Ann said about thanking the retirees and

wishing them well in their next journey of life. We appreciate all of their hard work over the years. I also appreciate and thank the teachers, staff and administration for their hard work and for what they have given our children through distance learning. As a parent I have seen some great things happening and a lot of dedication including following up with families to make sure things were going well. I would like to express my frustration that since the election and our new board has started we have spent a lot of time on things other than education, and arguing about things other than education, and I'm frustrated that we continually keep talking about what has happened in the past and bringing up what I would call grudges about past votes. I was elected to this board as we all were because of who we are so we should be allowed to vote with our convictions and our heart and if we hear a discussion that changes our opinion we can go with that. I cannot vote for a candidate that I don't believe is going to do the job that I feel a BOE member should do and I cannot go against what is in my heart and beliefs. I was offended when I was told I had to vote for one of the candidates you brought to the table several meetings ago whether I or not I liked them. This was not fair to any of us as board members. We need to work together which was echoed at the BOS and BOF meetings and we need to do better to figure out a way we can all come together and not walk into a meeting with a conviction about this is the way I am going to vote because of tradition or what has happened in the past. We need to think about it in the meeting and put aside what's happened because as Michelle said there was a one vote difference. Once it comes to the Board of Education we get to vote the way that we want not by what the voters said. We are representing our voters but I feel I am representing them with my decision.

Donna Cook stated there is so much that can be said. I want to thank everyone for their time and service both those who are on the board and those who have spent the evening with us electronically. I would like to thank those who have served us so well and wish them best wishes in their future. I am encouraged that there are lots of good things in our future and our teachers are putting into practice some things they didn't think they would have to but they are doing it with grace and they are learning as they go. Families are also putting things into practice they never thought they would have to and they are too learning with grace as they go and hopefully when we come out the other side we will all be better for it.

Elena Testa stated she is very surprised that she heard twice during the comments that it is not up to the voters of this town and that it does not matter what they say. I want to remind everyone that the Board of Education is an elective organization elected by the people of this town. As for Liz Perry who resigned, whatever was going on with her family no one can control. As for the vote she got the most votes. We need to respect the will of the voters and the will of this town. Most of the towns respect the will of the voters for years and we relied on the gentlemen's agreement. The voters mean everything.

**Chairman H. Arico adjourned the meeting at 10:10pm.**

\*Next regular meeting

July 14, 2020



**WILLINGTON BOARD OF EDUCATION**

**Retreat Minutes**

Monday, July 6, 2020

Virtual Zoom Meeting

**6:00 p.m. - 8:00 p.m.**

The meeting was called to order by Chairman Herb Arico at 6:00 p.m.

Nick Caruso, CABE Sr. Staff Associate for Field Services, conducted Board member training.

The meeting adjourned at 8:04 p.m.