

WILLINGTON BOARD OF EDUCATION

Thursday, January 7, 2021

Special 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

Laura Rodriguez

Members Absent

Also Present

Superintendent of Schools, Phil Stevens

Members of the Public

Chairman Arico called the meeting to order at 7:00PM

Chairman Arico led The Pledge of Allegiance.

Present to Speak

Laurie Semprebom of 271 Turnpike Road was present. She stated I wrote a letter previously about the mental health issue and I think it is important that the town accept this non-profits offer for mental health services for our students. If parents don't want their children to have the services they don't have to and we have many students who have needs especially during the pandemic.

Matt Clark of 42 Burt Latham Road was present. He asked do we have evidence of a need for new mental health care services in our schools? How long is the wait to see a school counselor now? Do the school counselors refer students to services outside of the school now? If so, how many times a year

does this happen? If there is a need for mental health care services, is it related to Covid 19 or is it a long term multi-year need? What is the time duration of the contract that is before the BOE? What is this new mental health care organization proposing for the Town of Willington in the contract? Finally who manages these new mental health care providers, who do they report to? I thought the BOE already voted on this issue this year. Why are we revisiting this issue?

Mike Makuch of 52 Clover Springs Drive was present. He stated I am the parent of three children in Willington Public Schools. I have also been a first responder since 1982 and I see the impacts of mental health and stress in the community. I am a Willington Public School alumna from a day when none of these services were available. I understand that some members feel that we don't need these services. I think that point should be reconsidered in both the global scheme and during Covid. I have two friends who are local licensed family therapists and they said since the pandemic they have been completely booked for services due to the added stresses. I took some time looking at the American Pediatric Administration information and there were articles regarding extra pressures and depression during Covid-19. These needs are real and it is important that it is revisited. I can see the agenda has a discussion about parliamentary procedure, in my understanding of Robert's Rules, it is allowed that a failed previous motion can be renewed. I think every public board and committee exists only to serve its constituents. I would like to ask as a parent that this board move forward with accessing these services.

Sarah Baker of 7 Ridgewood Road was present. She stated I am a parent of a child in the Willington School system. I am also a health care professional and this is the third or fourth time I have come to talk about the importance of these services. Just this morning I read an article about the increase in emergency department visits by children with mental health concerns which would usually mean suicide attempts. Suicide attempts increased by 31% in 2019 for adolescences. These visits are due to the fact that there is so much need and people have trouble accessing the services. It is very hard to find providers without a long wait time and then there is a burden on the families to then take time off of work to bring their child to weekly or biweekly appointments. Having these services located at the school is a huge benefit for our community. There is no risk or cost and we have so much to gain. We have had parents, mental health professionals, physicians, and others talking about the need and the struggles families have. I hope the board will move forward with trying these services.

Elizabeth Woolf of 65 Balazs Road was present. She stated I had a child who successfully went through the Willington School system. The school system is a part of the community and we chose this community because of the active nature of the involvement between the school and the community. I believe we should not be afraid to set an agenda to help all children regardless of their needs. Putting all these different needs into our classrooms can be stressful, and then you add in real life issues. We have seen that mental health and mental illness in the schools is real. These services are not something the school system has to pay for and if there are families that don't have insurance, they fall under the Affordable Care Act. I think we want to offer all services to ensure that our children have every opportunity to be the best they can.

Jim Bulick of 12 Laurel Drive was present. He stated it was my understanding that the board had a policy that if a matter was discussed and decided upon; it doesn't get brought back up. I don't deny there is a

need but I don't know that we have looked at all the options. We have a great Human Services Department here in Willington which addresses mental health needs as well as a wide range of other needs and I think we should be trying to use every tool first before subcontracting. My concern is trying to manage the contracted work.

Steph Summers of 4 Y Road was present. She stated I am the parent of a child who has gone through the Willington School district. I am concerned with the overall health of the school. I feel this is a key step to improve and secure the health of the school. It is a question of access for me and this would be at the point of need without having to send the kids for outside services. These are qualified professionals who are going to abide by HIPPA policies. I don't know why a program that is successful in 180 other school districts wouldn't be for us. The more we can secure good services for our kids the better.

Peter Lanticsics of 97 Trask Road was present. He stated I want to speak in support of the decision the board made not to pursue this avenue. There is a fundamental concern about accountability. This organization would not be accountable to our town, parents, or the school administration. It may work well in other towns but that is not the nature of Willington. We live in a world full of big organizations and it is nice to live in a town like Willington where we can escape all of that. I urge the board to stand by its original decision.

Chris Toomey of 33 Baxter Road was present. He stated I am the parent of four children three of whom have gone through the Willington Public School and one who is still in the school; I am also a public school teacher. I am in support of the board reconsidering this matter and changing their decision. Schools today are putting more emphasis on the social and emotional well-being of the students. We work hard to provide a baseline set of services for kids but we are not mental health professionals. When you have children demonstrating the need for further services and have this opportunity to align ourselves with an organization that can provide mental health professionals it seems to me an excellent idea.

John Blessington of 29 Mason Road was present. He stated I was under the impression we had some sort of counseling services already available at the school. If a counselor feels a child needs help do they just provide it or do they go to the parents first and if the parents say they aren't interested then what happens? I think it should be the parent's option.

Sarah Smith of 69 Eldridge Road was present. She stated we have heard compelling statements from everyone. I would greatly appreciate it if we could come to a decision this evening. There is much work to be done by the school board.

New Business

- a. Discussion of parliamentary procedure regarding motions introduced at subsequent sessions.

Chairman Arico stated our board operates under a few different areas. We have our Robert's Rules of Order and we have policies. Our policies provide us with regulations as far as different issues and one of the policies we have deals with the fact that we aren't supposed to have any outside groups come into

the school. We also have bylaws that provide us with information on the duties of the chairman, the vice chairman, and the secretary. Additionally we have mandates from the state and board goals which give us direction. We have roles and responsibilities as board members, general things that are expected of board members. One ethical practice that comes to mind for this scenario is, once the board makes a decision on an issue, board members would support this decision and go on to other issues. When I was a minority member of the board, many issues came up that I felt bad about but once the decision was made but I always felt I had to support that particular issue and I would not go into the public and find people to advocate for that issue, I would go along with what the majority of the board felt was needed at that time. The reason we have this meeting tonight is a result of a board member's research into state statutes dealing with provision for setting up this meeting. We have discussed this topic extensively and I believe all the board members have the knowledge of what it is about. The decision has been made and I think we have followed parliamentary procedures regarding all of our motions and we have let the majority rule. There are a lot of programs in the schools which deal with behavioral and mental health issues including outplacement and 504s.

Michelle Doucette Cunningham stated there was some confusion in some of the comments that were made earlier so I would like the letter that I sent to the entire board included in the minutes for this meeting so people can see what has happened as well as some detail and references on the parliamentary procedures.

Chairman Arico stated I believe we didn't include your last letter in the minutes because it bordered on an FOI violation.

Michelle Doucette Cunningham stated I am referring to the one I sent this morning and I understand that violation is only when there is a conversation. I think it is important that any information that is going to be presented at a meeting be presented to everyone so we have a chance to read it ahead of time and be prepared. Elena emailed all of us yesterday and requested that, but I did not start a conversation online which would violate FOI.

Chairman Arico stated rules under FOI prevent that. Board business is conducted at a board meeting. We will include this letter with the minutes.

Michelle Doucette Cunningham stated this started last February when the issue was raised about the need for additional mental health counseling because there were not enough services available for our students both in the community within driving distance as well as within the school. At the March meeting we brought in an organization and at the end of that meeting we made a motion to enter into a contract with them and at that time there were six members at the table and the motion failed 3:3. We did not take action because the motion failed so there is no action that needs to be undone. There were a number of people since that have come to say how disappointed they were that we were unable to make that decision and asking us to consider additional facts. In July when we had a 7th board member she asked if she could amend the agenda to make a motion to revisit this issue. At the time the Chairman ruled that it would not be appropriate to make a motion because it had been revisited. I asked in writing that it be added to an agenda, it was done in September and at that time we agreed to have

further discussion at a special meeting. That special meeting happened in October and I thought we had a good conversation and there were some questions raised and we agreed to have a second special meeting. That meeting was scheduled for November 4th and that meeting was cancelled by the Chairman with no reason given and it was never rescheduled. In early December I wrote to the Chairman requesting that the meeting be rescheduled, myself, Tracey Anderson, Laura Rodriguez, and Ann Grosjean all signed that letter. It is both policy and state statute that if enough members of a board request a meeting the Chairman has to call one within 14 days, that letter was received on December 7th and the meeting was never called, therefore state statute allows any 3 members to call a meeting as long as they notify everyone appropriately which is exactly what was done. There was a question a number of times whether or not it was appropriate to bring a motion back to the table. In Robert's Rules it is very clear that this is called renewal of motions, it's not a reconsideration just a renewal it states, "If a motion is made and disposed of without being adopted it is later allowed to come before the assembly before being made again by any member in essentially the same connection the motion is said to be renewed. Renewal of motions is limited by the basic principle that an assembly cannot be asked to decide the same or substantially the same question twice during one session". For the BOE every meeting is considered a different session and because of that we are allowed under Robert's Rules to bring up a motion at each board meeting. I would also argue that many things have changed in the past nine months and the need for these services has only increased. I think it is important that we met the communities and the student's needs with this free service for our students and our families. I would like everyone to understand we are following the rules and have given you time but I am beginning to feel a sense of urgency. I think it is time for us to bring this to a vote and move on to other business.

Chairman Arico stated Robert's Rules of Order is the book we are using and when this issue came up the motion was made to allow this organization to come in. The motion failed and if a vote fails you really have to deal with that. In your case you have come back time after time in regards to this issue but the fact of the matter is the motion failed. The only way you can bring it back I believe was a reconsideration of the motion by someone on the prevailing side which has not happened. A renewed motion as you said is in order if there isn't something blocking it and reconsideration cannot take place until the reconsideration motion has taken place.

Michelle Doucette Cunningham stated I would like to refer you to Robert's Rules section 37 which is the reconsideration section. Reconsideration is for within the same session. Section 38 is about renewal of motions, that's where it is allowed in different sessions. Using section 38 it is clear that reconsideration and renewal are different and renewal allows the same motion to come up at every session/meeting.

Elena Testa stated I wanted to make a note about the word session in Robert's Rules, the session doesn't clarify that it applies to every meeting and in congressional terms, session refers to the term. If we are talking about the term of this board we would be talking about two years.

Michelle Doucette Cunningham replied the difference is that in Congress they don't actually adjourn at the end of the day and pick up the same business the next day. We adjourn at the end of each meeting and start with a new agenda for the next meeting.

Ann Grosjean stated when Herb referred to prevailing; if we had a tie vote how do you determine which side is prevailing.

Chairman Arico replied in this case it is the group that voted no because the motion failed.

Tracey Anderson stated in the additional citations that Michelle included in her letter, she said she spoke with a licensed parliamentarian and he agrees with our interpretation of the renewal of motions. Would it help if a parliamentarian actually attend our meeting? Otherwise I would like to move to a vote instead of continuing to argue about these rules.

Michelle Doucette Cunningham stated I did contact a parliamentarian to see if they were available for tonight's meeting and they do charge \$250/hour for their services.

Tracey Anderson stated at this point I would be willing to take these funds out of pocket because I am frustrated that we continue to ignore our teachers, administrators, superintendent, and parents. I would like to be able to move on to other topics which we all understand are very important.

Donna Cook stated I agree I would like to be able to move on. I would also like to stop going over this time and again. I would like if someone could come forward with an idea that is different and maybe could accomplish the same end goals without putting our school between our students and a group that I perceive could do great harm to our students. I cannot trust this particular outside organization to be in our school building with our children. At one of our prior meetings I asked questions about our in school services and I have not seen answers to those questions. We said no to this group but it doesn't mean we can't look for something else and use different resources. I know Tolland is taking a look at what is provided and assessing their needs and then they are going to come up with a plan that is best for their community. Maybe the right answer is to move this out of the school and into the community so everyone can have access to the help they need.

Elena Testa stated I see that people who are bringing up this service such as Elizabeth during the present to speak stated we do not have to ask parents about providing the services and this is a problem for me. I can't agree with something that takes away from how families function. Children are supposed to be their parent's responsibility and this company only has an ethical responsibility to involve parents and they may choose not to. I would consider coming back to this with two conditions, first we asked Phil to provide us with a report on exactly which services our schools provide at this point and secondly if we will involve all parents and ask them their opinion after the program is thoroughly explained. We do not deny a need for these services but this organization provides many other services which I cannot agree with. There is no way for us to control and limit the services in which they provide. It only requires a once a year signature from the parents I don't think this should be in Willington Schools. Let's look into other options and organizations.

b. Provision of behavioral and mental health services.

Chairman Arico stated there is more than one company that provides these services in our area. The Community Health Centers are all over Connecticut and have a lot of companies. They are a non-profit

business but they operate like any other business and they bill through their clients insurance. I'm not saying there isn't a need for these services but we are going to have a company of this size come in and we aren't going to charge them a fee for any of the rooms or equipment that they use. We have no control over the staff that comes in and once they come in they will want to expand their services. I'm also concerned that children are going to be pulled out of class for these services and lose part of their education. Phil, are we developing a social and emotional curriculum?

Superintendent Stevens replied yes it is part of our process.

Michelle Doucette Cunningham stated some of your statements could be misleading. There is no charge to parents for these services, it is charged to insurance and for the children who don't have insurance, grants are used to make up for the lack of insurance. This non-profit is large and has grown because the services are so great and there is such a large need. Their mission is to provide these services to uninsured and underinsured children and they want to see more children be healthy.

Michelle Doucette Cunningham made a motion that Willington Public Schools enter into a contract with Community Health Centers to provide behavioral and mental health services in both Center and Hall Schools.

Elena Testa stated this motion goes against our current policies.

Tracey Anderson seconded the motion.

Chairman Arico stated the motion is out of order.

Michelle Doucette Cunningham stated I appeal the decision of the Chairman.

Tracey Anderson seconded the appeal.

Elena Testa stated our policy 1330 states use of school premises for non-school activities is not permitted during school hours.

Michelle Doucette Cunningham stated we are only allowed to discuss the appeal that is on the table right now.

Elena Testa stated this motion isn't valid because it contradicts our local law.

Tracey Anderson stated there was something about policy in the minutes from the March 10th meeting. It says the board would have to put a policy surrounding it but we have heard positive feedback from the town so we need to be specific in our motion about what services we would be providing. Maybe we need to amend our motion.

Michelle Doucette Cunningham stated after we address the appeal, we can go back and make a friendly amendment at that time.

Elena Testa stated I think we need a special meeting with a lawyer present because I believe this motion is out of order.

Michelle Doucette Cunningham stated if you refer to section 24 in your Robert's Rules, there is a clear process which we can use to appeal the Chairman's decision that our motion is out of order regardless of the reason it was out of order, we have a right to appeal.

Elena Testa stated you cannot appeal the motion which has no standing.

Michelle Doucette Cunningham stated the appeal is to Herb's statement of the motion being out of order.

Elena Testa stated if you want to move on this matter you need to first amend that policy which would happen at a separate meeting. In one meeting we would need to announce we are amending the policy and in the next regular meeting we would amend the policy.

Michelle Doucette Cunningham stated the appeal is correct and has been seconded.

Elena Testa stated the appeal is to a motion that is out of order.

Michelle Doucette Cunningham stated Robert's Rules state, "By electing a presiding officer the assembly delegates to him the authority and duty to make necessary rulings on questions of parliamentary law, but any two members have the right to appeal his decision on such a question, one member making the appeal and another seconding it, the question is taken from the Chair and vested in the assembly for final decision. Members have no right to criticize a ruling of the Chair unless they appeal his decision".

Chairman Arico stated the reason the motion was out of order is because the motion made some time ago failed.

Michelle Doucette Cunningham stated that's your understanding of Robert's Rules which is incorrect and we are allowed to appeal your decision.

Elena Testa stated we are taking illegal action if we move forward with the motion and the appeal to the motion. I request to have a lawyer and request to postpone the meeting until we can have that lawyer present.

Tracey Anderson stated I have a card from CABA which states under appeal of the decision of the Chair and states, "It's not debatable and non-amendable a vote is required by the majority".

Chairman Arico stated if I agree to the appeal and can we put this issue into the hands of an attorney before we vote on it.

Michelle Doucette Cunningham stated we need to vote on the appeal before we discuss the motion.

Donna Cook asked once the appeal is voted on, is there an opportunity to table the motion Michelle made?

Chairman Arico asked shall the decision of the Chair stand as the judgement of the board.

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

Motion passes.

Chairman Arico stated this brings us back to the main motion.

Michelle Doucette Cunningham made a motion that Willington Public Schools enter into a contract with Community Health Centers to provide behavioral and mental health services in both Center and Hall Schools.

Tracey Anderson seconded the motion.

Laura Rodriguez stated looking at the timeline, it has been almost a year since the school district brought the issue to the board. I want to remind everyone that this issue came to us from the Superintendent and the teachers. Through the year I think it's been established there is a need for these services. Some of the things that have been said tonight make it sound as though these services or all of the things that are already offered in the school and in the community. It is not an either or. Dr. Stein really made the case of the different levels of need that students have. There are a lot of things the teacher can do in the classroom with a good social and emotional program but then there are students that need more. There are other services at the school such as the counselors but another thing that was addressed is that our school personnel are overwhelmed. School shootings are happening constantly and it always brings up the issue of mental health and these issues need to be addressed early. Mental illness affects children across the spectrum. Parents must give consent and they do not have to have their children receive these services. This company can't just decide to expand their services if they want to give other services. It is our responsibility as a board to make decisions on those

services. Another point that was made was the children would be pulled out of class for services. If they are pulled out for a service that is in school it will be much less time missed then if they have to travel to services.

Elena Testa stated I still would like to table this motion until the next meeting or whenever the lawyer is available.

Ann Grosjean stated someone expressed a concern about pedophiles, but these people will have to go through the same background checks that every school employee in our district goes through. I'm sure if the parents would like feedback every time the person meets with their child I'm sure they will do so.

Tracey Anderson stated I agree with what Laura and Ann have said. This issue was brought to our attention by Superintendent Stevens in March after a meeting with Marcia and he told us the caseloads are huge and they are looking for solutions to help with the number of students who need counseling services that they are not able to meet. There are 190 schools in the state that are currently using this program many of which have been using them for years and have not had issues. We have social and emotional learning in our schools through different programs but the needs have been increasing over the past ten to twenty years and we have seen this in our society as a whole. The experts that came to speak stated this would increase our accessibility and access to the curriculum because it allows students an increased time in school and there can be communication between the teacher and the professionals from the Community Health Centers with parents involved in the entire process. We have heard from the Superintendent, the administrative team, the pupil services director, 20 teachers who wrote a letter, teacher who came to meetings to speak, and 24 parents who were in favor of it. I am strongly in favor of supporting those people.

Elena Testa moved to table the motion until a pending meeting with the lawyer.

Donna Cook seconded the motion.

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

E. Testa	✓			
L. Rodriguez		✓		

Motion fails.

Donna Cook stated I want to remind all the parents that the group we are discussing does provide tele-health mental health services now, you don't have to wait.

Michelle Doucette Cunningham stated Connecticut has been suffering from an increase of youth suicides this fall and it is heartbreaking. I think if you don't agree with these services your children do not have to participate in them and for those people who need it; it would be a tragedy to not take advantage of it.

Chairman Arico called for a vote on the original motion.

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

Motion passes.

Chairman Arico stated the contract will have to be negotiated perhaps by the negotiation committee.

Superintendent Stevens stated most contracts we have here go through the attorney and I would also recommend it go through the committee. I know there are folks who are unsure about this agency and I

think it would be easy to develop some regulations that align with your policy that are specific to an outside agency and it could state the expectation you have for this group.

Chairman Arico stated we will put this to the committee and once they resolve the contract it will come before the board for ratification.

Elena Testa stated I would like to be on that committee.

Chairman Arico replied I believe that committee is already established.

Board Comments

Elena Testa stated I am disappointed that we as a board did not make time to involve parents in this decision. Though this company could be positive it could also have a lot of negative effects on the children. I would encourage parents before signing any consent with the company to thoroughly research this company and what services they provide as well as what they are allowed to talk to your child about.

Tracey Anderson stated I think we made an important decision tonight for the benefit of our children in Willington and we are providing a service that is very much needed. I think we need to keep up with the data and information so that in a certain time frame we can decide if we would like to continue these services. I am grateful for all the people who have come out to speak for and against this topic.

Donna Cook stated I don't need to add anything else, thank you for your time and your patience.

Laura Rodriguez stated I want to thank the people who came out and expressed their opinions and reviews. Over the year we truly looked into this issue and I feel good about the decision we have made for the well-being of our children. The tele-health is also a wonderful idea and if parents don't want their children involved in these services they don't have to. Having access in the schools and having teachers be able to refer the children to these services with parental consent is great.

Ann Grosjean stated I believe there is also a parental referral process so that parents could also refer their child. I think we have made a good choice and we did a lot of research leading up to it.

Michelle Doucette Cunningham stated I want to thank the parents and teachers who took the time to express their concern for this issue. We may never know what tragedies we prevent by providing these services but the success of this is what doesn't happen. I think we did the right thing today and I think we have provided greater learning opportunities for our children and we may see the good results in our standardized test results.

Chairman Arico stated I voted in opposition to this and that is still my position to some extent. That being said the Community Health Center is well established and has been around for many years. I'm not happy with an outside agency operating within our building. Also this company provides services of all kinds and once they get in I'm sure they are going to try to expand their operation.

Chairman Arico adjourned the meeting at 9:33PM.