

# WILLINGTON BOARD OF EDUCATION

Tuesday, June 8, 2021

Virtual Meeting: Zoom

7:00 p.m.

## Meeting Minutes

### **Members Present**

Herb Arico - Chairman

Elena Testa - Vice Chairman

Michelle Doucette Cunningham - Secretary

Ann Grosjean

Tracey Anderson

Donna Cook

Laura Rodriguez

### **Members Absent**

None

### **Also Present**

Superintendent of Schools, Phil Stevens

Mary Kay Tshonas, Principal of Hall Memorial School

Marcia McGinley, Pupil Services Director

Members of the public

#### **1. Call to Order**

Chairman Arico called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

#### **2. Pledge of Allegiance**

Chairman Arico led the Pledge of Allegiance.

#### **3. Present to Speak**

No one was present to speak.

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

Chairman Arico stated that this has been a challenging academic year because of the COVID 19 pandemic and the consequences on our schools will be felt for years to come. The schools have much to be thankful for, we opened safely and put in place numerous safety measures to guarantee the safety of our students and staff. The BOE is very proud and worked very hard for our students to pursue their education and development in a thriving and sustainable environment. We must now prepare for the next phase as students return to school in the fall. I'm sure our Superintendent has already put things in place to ensure the needs of our students and families are addressed next year.

#### **5. Communications**

No communications.

#### **6. Superintendent Report**

**a. Staffing update**

We had three paraprofessional resignations. Andrew Hurd took a teaching position in New York City, Sarah Jean resigned, and Lynn Phillippi has retired. Lynn has been in Willington since 1990 and done a fabulous job with our students and will be missed. Lynn has been in Willington since 1990. I've worked with Lynn at Center School and she has been an asset to our school district. We wish them all a successful future and a happy retirement to Lynn.

**b. Willington Education Association Memorandum of Understanding**

WEA (Willington Education Association) voted to approve the 3 year contract extension MOU. The contract is extended through June, 2025. Thank you to the committee members for their work through that process.

**c. Willington budget referendum**

The budget referendum is today. I will let you know the results once they are posted.

**d. Enrollment update**

Our current enrollment at Center School is 214 students with 202 students learning on-campus and 12 students (6%) learning fully remote. Our current enrollment at Hall School is 192 students with 172 students learning on-campus and 20 students (10%) learning fully remote. We currently have 8% of our students learning fully remote.

**e. COVID-19 school operations**

We had one COVID case in the district this past month. We are continuing our mitigation strategies through the end of the school year. The reopening committee met yesterday to review a draft of our plan called the Continuity of Services Plan for the fall. I will provide a brief overview later in the agenda. We are wrapping up the school year and facilitating events with safety measures in place. Last week we had a successful outdoor band concert and have found creative ways to implement school events. We did have early release days for heat yesterday and today. It was 83 degrees in the HMS classrooms at 7:30 a.m. so you can imagine it makes for a very long day with the heat and required masks.

**f. CES and HMS Roof Replacement**

We had our meeting with the Office of School Construction Grants and Review last Wednesday. It took 3 hours to get through the Hall School documents and they told us to schedule a second meeting to review the Center School project. The review of Center School is slated for next week. OSCGR staff told us to finish the approval process, which is near complete, and complete the projects next summer if we do not have a construction project. They told us that we were very likely to see cost reductions if we bid the construction portion of the project in the spring of 2022 as companies tend to bid aggressively at that time to start booking their summer work.

**g. Erate wireless infrastructure project**

I wanted to make you aware that we are utilizing federal funding to replace our wireless infrastructure in both Center and Hall Schools. We completed all the paperwork and are on track for a summer 2021 installation. A large portion of the current wireless system is no longer supported by the manufacturer. This project will be fully funded by grants.

**h. Office of School Construction staff school visit**

The Director of the Office of School Construction Grants and Review (OSCGR), Kosta Diamantis, attended a walkthrough at Hall School on Monday, May 17 as requested by the School Building Committee (SBC). During the walkthrough, Kosta asked about the status of our roofing project applications. After learning our projects had state commitment project numbers, he directed us to halt our progress until he had an opportunity to meet with his OSCGR staff. Director Diamantis thought it was a significant waste of local and state taxpayer dollars to install new roofs on the schools when the town has an active school building committee considering a preschool through grade 8 building. Director Diamantis stated he would not support a renovation of either of our buildings. Kosta is going to be attending the next SBC meeting on Wednesday, June 16 at 6:30 p.m. to answer questions from the committee and public.

**i. Promotion ceremony**

The Hall School 8th grade promotion ceremony is scheduled for Friday, June 18th. The ceremony will be held outdoors so we have a rain date of Monday, June 21st. Board members should have received an invitation from the HMS principal. This will be a shorter ceremony this year, but we will be able to host the ceremony in person. Masks will be required as it is a school event.

E. Testa asked when is the last day of school? Superintendent Stevens reported that June 21 is the last day, a minimum day and it is the 177th day of school, which is the minimum number of days required.

Chairman Arico asked if 8th grade families receive two reservations to attend. Principal Tshonas reported that each student is able to reserve four spots. If students don't use all four invitations, a waiting list is available for families that would like more reservations. Seating will be socially distanced and by family and guests will be required to bring their own seating. A check-in station will be in place with one access point to enter and our newly formed Student Leadership Group will escort families to seating locations with programs.

**7. Financial Report**

**a. June 2020-2021 budget update**

Attachment #1

Superintendent Stevens reviewed the June budget report.

**b. School security grant**

We are working on a school security grant that will impact both schools. Many of the items we are looking at updating are related to door access and recommendations from our school security checklist review. We are looking into adding fob access to additional doors as well.

**c. Esser III, American Recovery Plan Act**

The curriculum committee and policy committee have had a chance to review information pertaining to the addition of a 3 year limited term director of curriculum and instruction. The district will be receiving \$577,357 that will need to be utilized for learning recovery and other items. The reopening committee discussed some ideas yesterday that we will be taking into consideration as well.

**8. Committee Reports**

**a. Curriculum Committee (June 1, 2021)**

The committee met to review the Second Step curriculum.

**b. Policy Committee (June 4, 2021)**

The policy committee met to review the administrative regulations for use of school facilities as well as a job description for the Director of Curriculum and Instruction.

**c. School Security Committee**

The school security committee reviewed the items that were in the security grant section of the financial report.

**9. New Business**

**a. Approve minutes of May 11, 2021 BOE meeting**

Attachment # 2

**b. Approve minutes of June 1, 2021 Special BOE meeting**

Attachment # 3

**c. Approve minutes of June 1, 2021 Curriculum Committee meeting**

Attachment # 4

**d. Approve minutes of June 4, 2021 Policy Committee meeting**

**Michelle Doucette Cunningham moved to approve the minutes of the May 11, 2021 regular meeting, the minutes from the Special BOE meeting on June 1, 2021, the minutes from the June**

**1, 2021 Curriculum Committee meeting and the minutes of the June 4, 2021 Policy Committee meeting.**

**Laura Rodriguez 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.

**e. Director of Curriculum and Instruction Job Description**

Superintendent Stevens stated that both the curriculum committee and policy committee have reviewed this job description, as well as administration. You have the ability to either approve the policy this evening or next month. If you plan on waiting one month I would simply request the nod to start the hiring process and add it to the grant.

Michelle Doucette Cunningham asked could we add to the description that it is temporary. Superintendent Stevens stated that it is listed in the MOU as a limited time position and he will also add that to the job description.

Chairman Arico asked about the locator code and Superintendent Stevens stated that it will follow administrators' job description codes.

Chairman Arico asked if this is a new position. Superintendent Stevens stated that it is and that will be fully funded by the ESSER III grant.

Donna Cook asked about item F.1, Professional Development and Knowledge. Superintendent Stevens said professional development is contractual for a certain amount of days or dollars for continued growth.

Chairman Arico stated that this is a massive job and writing curriculum will take 2-3 years to complete.

Donna Cook asked if you have identified areas of weakness in all curriculum areas so the person already has a list so they don't have to reinvent. Superintendent Stevens stated that staff has identified areas.

**Ann Grosjean moves to approve the job description of the Director of Curriculum and Instruction**

**Tracey Anderson 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.

**f. Memorandum of understanding with administration**

**Attachment # 5**

**Michelle Doucette Cunningham moves to approve the Memorandum of Agreement between the Willington Board of Education and the Willington Administrators Association.**

**Ann Grosjean seconded the motion to approve.**

Donna Cook asked about the salary range and increases for the contract period. Superintendent Stevens stated that the position becomes part of the administrators union and therefore contractual increases will occur as negotiated between the Board and union, with increases being paid through the ESSER III grant.

Elena Testa asked if we hire this person, do we expect the curriculum will be publicly available for parents and anyone. Ann Grosjean stated yes, the position is necessary because of the amount of work involved to write and post on our website. The person will coordinate with teachers and staff. Instruction changes so the person would teach the teachers about new developments and add it to the curriculum.

Tracey Anderson added that there are 169 towns in Connecticut, some schools are regional, but every school uses a different curriculum.

Superintendent Stevens stated we couldn't create this position if it wasn't for the grant because it is expensive.

Tracey Anderson said Kristen Stevens and Erica Bushior wear many hats and are pulled in many directions from being classroom teachers to trying to write curriculum and aren't able to focus on just writing curriculum. Hiring a Director of Curriculum and Instruction is a wise use of our money.

Chairman Arico reiterated that this is a massive job with a K-8 system in 2 buildings and doesn't know if we can have all of the curriculum written in 2-3 years.

Tracey Anderson stated that curriculum changes continuously. Chairman Arico stated that in his experience once the curriculum is updated, it will change again. Superintendent Stevens stated that once we have the curriculum in place we will be able to make the minor changes necessary as we go along.

Donna Cook stated that she doesn't disagree with the fact that a Director of Curriculum is needed, but we need to begin with the end in mind and we still haven't decided what the kids need to know by the time they walk out of the schools. Laura Rodriguez stated that Donna is talking about the standards. What we want our students to know and understand at the end of each grade level, that's what's in the Common Core for English and math and what's in the next generation for science standards and social studies framework. That's what tells us what we want them to learn. The curriculum is how to get there. It's what materials we are going to use, what we are going to have them read, what investigations we are going to have them do. That's already in place. What we need is the curriculum that is responsive to our students in Willington. That's why we need to take those standards and decide how we are going to teach it so our students do get to those endpoints each year.

Donna Cook asked about the Portrait of Graduate, which she thought is what we wanted the kids to know by the time they left. So it sounds like it's not necessary if it's already covered by the curriculum. Superintendent Stevens stated that the Portrait of a Graduate is not written into the Common Core Standards. The Portrait of a Graduate identifies how to teach things like grit and organization. Those are things we infuse into our curriculum to make sure students have those skills. So the Portrait of a Graduate is a piece of this puzzle. The curriculum we are talking about now is the academic portion. Donna Cook asked, aren't they intertwined? Superintendent Stevens stated absolutely, however the Portrait of a Graduate work is not completed yet though.

Ann Grosjean stated that this person will also be in charge of testing and we review testing to be aware of what skills those children need.

Chairman Arico reminded everyone that we are discussing the Memorandum of Agreement and we have a motion on the floor and asked if we are ready to vote.

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

Motion passes.

**g. Proposed social emotional learning curriculum, Second Step**

Superintendent Stevens stated that SEL has been a focus for the past several years. A district SEL Committee began meeting this year to review current practices, participate in social emotional professional development, solicit feedback from staff, and research social emotional curriculum that best meet the needs of our community. A large list of programs was whittled down to three and identified for further study by the committee. Upon completion of the in-depth study, the Committee unanimously determined that the Second Step Curriculum met our district SEL learning needs.

The program meets CASEL Standards (The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning) and connects to the Portrait of a Graduate. It provides professional development for staff. The program offers a Scope and Sequence that meets student needs. It offers best practice multi-sensory instructional approaches and the Second Step offers opportunities for family engagement. This recommendation was unanimous, and the committee would like to formally request the Board approve the Second Step program as the district SEL program. The program will be entirely funded by the ESSER II grant and implementation would start in the fall of next school year. No local funds would be used.

Chairman Arico asked if the Superintendent could provide additional information and that he wasn't ready to vote on it.

Superintendent Stevens shared an example of grade 6, Unit 1: Mindset and Goals. Marcia McGinley reported that the committee met with Second Step representatives and were able to get free access for 3 months and that staff and students found the lessons to be very engaging, easy to use and they noticed that students were able to transfer their learning throughout the day. We had some really great feedback from staff that were able to pilot the program.

Tracey Anderson stated she supports the program and is ready to vote. This has gone through an extensive process, it met the criteria that the full committee had come up with as far as connecting to Portrait of a Graduate, our other curriculums and best practices, and it is user friendly and had family engagement.

Elena Testa stated that she is very uncomfortable with voting on this since only three people know the details and the rest of us wholeheartedly follow and vote for something we have no information on. So I would appreciate looking at the material in advance. I cannot vote on something I have no information on. Tracey Anderson stated she is confused because in other situations the Board has taken the recommendation from the Finance subcommittee. She understands that this is social emotional learning, however, it is a research based program, and studied extensively by our staff. She said she trusts our staff to choose something effective and that she also trusts our committee and administrators. She asked Superintendent Stevens if the Board didn't vote on this until July, would we be able to put this program in place in time for the fall. Superintendent Stevens said yes. Tracy Anderson stated that she feels there is a trust issue and there is distrust in the system that has worked for other processes. Chairman Arico stated that Tracey has stated her position, but thinks that any curriculum the Board should have something tangible to look at.

Ann Grosjean suggests Board members who have questions watch the recording of the Curriculum Committee meeting so they could have the same exposure to information. Elena Testa would appreciate that and will watch. Superintendent Stevens stated that they are all on YouTube.

Donna Cook stated that as a nonprofessional educator she is still learning and in light of other things she sees in the world, some are kind of scary and she is learning what SEL really means and trying to ask appropriate questions.

Michelle Doucette Cunningham stated Second Step is the most widely used program in the State and recommended the CASEL website. Marcia McGinley stated that SEL is the primary focus of the state of Connecticut and beyond.

Chairman Arico asked if we could vote on this next month.

#### **h. Feedback on the Willington Plan for Continuity of Services**

Superintendent Stevens stated that I'm going to take a few minutes to breeze through some of the highlights of the reopening plan. The reopening committee met yesterday to review our Continuity of Services Plan. This is a requirement for the ESSER III grant and will be posted as a draft on our district website this month. It will be updated as new information becomes available. The plan is written with two prongs. The first prong is the district response during a time of little or no community transmission of COVID-19. The second prong is our response during substantial community transmission. Superintendent Stevens reviewed sections of the plan. He shared that the staff and public will have separate Zoom meetings next week to review the plan and provide feedback.

#### **10. Present to Speak**

Lisa Eaton stated that she has 2 children in the system and has heard of more social and emotional issues this year than in the past and has been concerned about what the BOE is doing to help with these issues. She has reviewed past BOE minutes and noticed that certain BOE members seem to be delaying or resenting moving along social and emotional health and as a parent she finds this frustrating. As a parent she is paying attention, as well as other parents are paying attention to the actions of the BOE and she hopes this moves along because it affects real people and our children. She stated when items are delayed it doesn't seem to make sense.

Sara Anderson stated that she also has 2 children in the system and is disappointed in the lack of action on social and emotional learning. I think there was a strong case made by staff and the committee that there is a need for social and emotional learning, especially after COVID. She stated that she sincerely hopes the BOE will take action in a positive direction.

#### **11. Board Comment**

Chairman Arico thanked the retirees for their service and Superintendent Stevens for his work on the roofs. He reminded the Board about the BOE retreat on June 15 and June 16 for the School Building Committee meeting with Kosta Diamantis.

Tracey Anderson thanked the faculty and staff on the SEL committee and the parents who spoke on behalf of the SEL program. She also stated that we have a quality curriculum in place already happening in our schools, even though it is not on a computer or on paper. The Curriculum Coordinator will help us to do that so the public can see this.

Michelle Doucette Cunningham congratulated Lynn Phillippi on her retirement and also congratulated the 8th graders.

Laura Rodriguez thanked those people retiring and the SEL committee and believes that if staff are asking for SEL, they will use it. She is excited to attend the 8th grade graduation again.

Elena Testa also wishes those employees who are leaving well. Everyone have a great summer, teachers, children and families.



Ann Grosjean wished the retirees well and encouraged people to come to the meeting on June 16 because it is a pivotal step. Congratulations to 4<sup>th</sup> and 8th graders and thank you to teachers, admin, and Phil that we are able to make this year happen.

Donna Cook wishes the graduates well and would hope they drop us a note to let us know what they appreciated learning and what they would have liked to learn at our schools so we can help the next group be better prepared. Thank you to the staff, students, parents and community who worked so hard. Thankful Willington was able to remain open.

**12. Old Business**

**i. Executive Session: Superintendent end of year evaluation**

**Chairman Arico moved to go into executive session for the Superintendent end of year evaluation.**

**The Board moved into executive session at 9:01 p.m.**

**The Board exited the executive session at 10:09 p.m.**

**Michelle Doucette Cunningham moved to accept the changes as recommended to extend the Superintendent's contract through 2024 with a salary increase of 2.75%.**

**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.

**13. Adjournment**

**Michelle Doucette Cunningham made a motion to adjourn.**

**Donna Cook 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.

The meeting was adjourned at at 10:22 p.m

\*Next regular meeting July 13, 2021\*