

WILLINGTON BOARD OF EDUCATION

Tuesday, September 14, 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 all present remotely through Zoom)

Also Present

Superintendent of Schools, Phil Stevens
Erin Conley, Director of Curriculum and Instruction
Members of the public

1. Call to Order

Chairman Arico called the meeting to order at 7:02 pm.

2. Pledge of Allegiance

Chairman Arico led the Pledge of Allegiance.

3. Present to Speak

Herb Arico reminded the public of expectations during present to speak.

No present to speak at this time.

4. Presentation: Erin Conley, Director of Curriculum and Instruction

Erin Conley shared a presentation to give the board a sense of what she has already accomplished and where she is headed next in her new position. Erin began by providing a snapshot of her progress so far. This included her 90-day entry plan, LETRS Training, Second Step Rollout, initial review of our current SRBI progress (including notes on how curriculum development could further assist this process), and conversations with all certified staff members on the current curriculum. The next steps include the development of a 3-year curriculum strategic plan, revision, and development of ELA units that integrate the Science of Reading, LETRS training, monthly meetings with curriculum stipend staff to continue collaborative conversations, and continuing to be present in classrooms to oversee implementation of the curriculum.

Laura Rodriguez asked about the status of Social Studies. Erin met with Theresa Smith (Social Studies Curriculum Coordinator) to begin reviewing the current curriculum and discuss possible points of integration. In order to successfully modify the Social Studies curriculum, we need to figure out ELA so we can find natural points for integration. Laura also commented that she was pleased staff members would be receiving NGSX training, and asked about Open Sci Ed for elementary school students considering it only has a curriculum for Middle School and beyond. Erin said there are plans for them to expand to elementary schools, but they are just not there yet.

Elena asked if there is a plan to provide parents with resources so that they can better assist their children. Erin made clear that the curriculum will be published which will include a scope and sequence, allowing you to see curriculum progression.

Herb asked Erin to provide a copy of her presentation to the BOE members. Herb asked how this process of curriculum writing will look and when the monthly conversations will be happening. Erin clarified that the bulk of the collaborative conversations will be happening in monthly meetings with stipend staff and she is responsible for putting the curriculum together in a written format.

Ann Grosjean thanked Erin for her collaborative approach and is pleased that there are so many staff members involved in this process.

Donna Cook appreciates Erin's excitement and energy level but wanted clarification on how she is expected to do this job in addition to 2 days a week at Center School when the interim principal is not there. Phil clarified that it is necessary to have an administrator in the building if there is an emergency, but during Erin's time at CES she is able to continue to work on curriculum, just in a different location. Erin is in constant contact with the interim principal (Marybeth Moyer) and is only providing the necessary support and dealing with immediate needs. Phil also clarified that Marybeth is being compensated on a daily basis and not being paid full-time. Erin added that being on-site at CES is allowing her to gather data she needs for curriculum writing and sees this as a positive opportunity. She is able to get into classrooms and see the structures and setup of school, which is necessary as part of her 3-year plan. Phil also clarified that Erin is only evaluating the staff that has stipends for curriculum because she is working so closely with them.

5. Chairman's Report

Chairman Herb Arico reviewed the mission and goals.

6. Communications

Katherine Kenyon, parent of 2 students at CES. Herb read portions of her letter and thanked her for the communication.

7. Superintendent Report

a. School opening 2021-2022

It was a great start to the school year. Both schools held an altered version of the meet and greet which allowed students and parents to get into the buildings prior to the first day of school. Staff and students have been in great spirits and are happy to be back. The staff handled some minor challenges well on the first day of school including the possibility of some difficult weather and CES losing power for approximately 90 minutes.

Phil has been extremely busy with contact tracing. Today is our 8th school day and we have had 3 positive cases and 18 individuals quarantined since the start of school. We have seen other positive cases outside of school that did not require us to complete contact tracing. There were 4 additional today, and a 5th one came moments after the letter came out. Phil is appreciative of parents and staff following safety protocols. Phil clarified that there have been cases and close contacts in both buildings and the COVID guidelines are on both school websites. This is still a working document and is updated when guidelines change. Elena suggested that maybe in the future we should try no masks considering there are still cases. Phil clarified that the cases and close contacts being identified are not necessarily being spread in school. We are seeing transmission in places where masks are not in place, such as outside of school. The mask mandate from the state will be ending in a few weeks. There is currently no word if this will be extended, but if not then it will be on the board to make a decision.

We have had some challenges with our internet lately, with some malicious attacks that are impacting our

service. NOVUS has been working diligently to stop the attacks which are resulting in our network being flooded for 5-60 seconds. The police will be involved at some point to investigate. NOVUS has put some measures in place to stop this from happening.

Boys and girls soccer has started up after no sports last year. We have a new boy's soccer coach, Kyle Bilyak, and a new athletic director, Erica Bushior. Erica has been working extremely hard to make sure our student-athletes can participate in sports.

b. Enrollment update

Center School has 199 students and 184 students at Hall School. We currently have 3 outplacements and have a total of 386 students. We have 10 students who are being homeschooled, of which we expected all 10 to be in school, and 8 students are in school choice. Part of the reason for less than expected children is due to the fact that we accepted fewer Pre-K students due to COVID as we usually have 20, but only accepted 14 this year.

c. Staffing

We had 2 paraprofessionals, Graham Frasinelli and Kristen Andrulonis, resign prior to the start of the school year to go into their specific field of study. We hired Brittany Bassett as a paraprofessional. Alison Spector, our district art teacher, resigned at the start of the year and we have two separate substitutes, Sharon Puntly and Sherry Kraus, both certified teachers, covering that position at this time. We are currently searching for a new art teacher. We hired Mark Bartomeli as our 7th grade ELA teacher to replace Bridget O'Connor. There is still a .6 utility staff opening. Rich Napoli left Center School, and we have hired Marybeth Moyer as the interim principal through December. She is working 3 days a week and Erin Conley, our director of curriculum and instruction, is covering the other days. We will be posting the principal position at the end of this month. We will need a board member or two for the committee if anyone is interested. Ann Grosjean, Herb Arico, and Donna Cook expressed interest.

Donna expressed concerns over our small Pre-K program. She feels as though our Kindergarten students are behind and this is directly related to the number of students we accept. Phil reminded the board that we are very limited on space at CES and there are requirements that make it challenging to use just any space as a Pre-K room. Ann requested that this is a topic of conversation for the building committee.

Tracey has noticed that over the past 10 years we have had multiple art teachers in the 1.0 position between both schools. She is worried that this is too large of a job for one person to handle and questions if there is any consideration to make this a 2 person job. Phil reviewed what changes were made to make this a more manageable job for one person, including stopping mid-day travel. He has also strategically posted the position as a 1.0 or a .6 and .4 which might be of interest to some candidates that aren't looking for something full-time.

Elena brought up a concern over teachers not following proper protocols when outside. Phil reminded the board that teachers are allowed to be unmasked outside as long as they are properly distanced. Elena asked that this be emphasized to teachers.

d. Professional Development 2021-2022

Staff received professional development on their new Promethean boards, Second Step, IEP training, specific special education training, DCF training, and other items needed to start school. Throughout the school year, staff will be completing LETRS training (*Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling*). We have a two-year commitment to this professional learning as teachers are the most essential factor in a student's reading success and this training will provide teachers a deeper understanding of the science of reading.

This year we will be working on our portrait of a graduate. We will be using grant funding for work with the Great Schools Partnership to move us through the remainder of the portrait of the graduate work to gather stakeholder feedback and develop expectational targets for each of the skills across the grade levels. This work will be integrated into our curriculum so we are not creating another item that would be competing for time in our busy schedules.

Another item that we will be working on with the Great Schools Partnership is assessment. E.O. Smith, Mansfield, Willington, and Ashford will be working on a joint effort across the districts, to create “we believe” statements tied to student-centered assessment practices. Collaboratively, we will create a common assessment language to ensure we have aligned practices across the districts, that each district will be able to implement engaging assessment practices that lead to student achievement and mastery. This work will be tied to our curriculum development as well.

e. Fire Marshal inspection

Fire Marshal, Dick Palmer, completed his inspection on August 26. He commented that our maintenance staff does an outstanding job in maintaining the schools. Mr. Palmer identified three issues in his letter. The first issue was some failing emergency lights which we will continue to replace as they fail. The second issue was the remaining maintenance items in the hallways, which are always put away prior to students arriving. The last item was he found a door that didn't latch properly and we have had the closer repaired.

f. BOE facilities walkthrough

If the Board is interested in walking the buildings in small groups to get a sense of some of the COVID protocols and to see some of the new updates including the Promethean boards, Phil will arrange that. Laura Rodriguez, Donna Cook, and Herb Arico expressed interest.

g. Kevin Legare field dedication

The baseball field dedication for Kevin Legare, our HMS baseball coach who passed away in February 2019, was August 28. We had a brief ceremony at the Town Office Building baseball field that was attended by his family, friends, and former players.

h. Clubs and sports

Phil reviewed what clubs and sports are offered, per Elena's request. He hopes to branch out and offer more clubs with the help of community members.

Elena had hoped that Phil would have sent the lists of clubs and sports before the start of the meeting so that there would be adequate time to review and analyze. She feels as though he did not fulfill her request by just reading off the list. She reminded the board that she requested a meeting about clubs two years ago, and it was held without her knowledge.

Phil reviewed the process of getting students to sign up for clubs as well as how these clubs are advertised.

Elena shared she is especially concerned with offering GSA (Gay Straight Alliance) to middle school students. She is questioning what educational point there is to be made and suggests that this is just clear brainwashing. Elena is also concerned that this club is very widely advertised. She would like to request a special meeting about clubs, particularly GSA being continued to be run in school. Elena requested to vote on this right now.

Donna suggests the board waits to provide more time to review the list of clubs and sports provided by Phil.

Elena thinks that offering this club could be very harmful for little kids. Phil shared that there is a lot of research around school climate and acceptance, which is exactly what GSA stands for and promotes. Phil clarified that there is no promotion, it is all based on student interest and choice. Elena disagreed and reminded the BOE that this 100% contradicts what is in the Bible and she will continue to stand against any of these organizations in our schools.

Laura expressed her strong opinion in support of continuing GSA at HMS due to its mission of supporting all students and promoting inclusion and acceptance. Her personal experiences as a parent and a teacher have shown her the necessity of such a club.

Herb would like this to be discussed at a future meeting.

8. Financial Report

a. September financial report

Attachment #1

Superintendent Stevens reviewed the financial report.

b. Student activity account review

Superintendent Stevens reviewed the student activity reports for Center and Hall Schools.

Donna Cook responded that she would like to receive information ahead of time to review for the Board meeting. She asked Phil Stevens to share the reports on his screen. She asked what BESB is. Phil Stevens reported that it was soda machine commissions received from the services for the blind. She asked why the HMS report had more lines than the CES report. Phil Stevens stated that is because HMS has more activities such as sports officials and referees.

9. Committee Report

The policy committee and the curriculum committee will gather in the next few weeks. The policy committee will be starting work to address our outdated dress code policy (Ann, Herb, and Elena). The curriculum committee (Laura, Ann, Tracey) will have their first meeting with Erin to discuss the process.

10. New Business

a. Approve minutes of regular meeting August 10, 2021

Attachment #2

Herb Arico made a motion to accept the minutes of August 10th.

Elena Testa seconded the motion.

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

Motion passes

b. Legal update

There was not a legal update from the Board attorney or other education attorneys in the state, but there was a legal update from CAFE that summarizes the changes in education law. Overall, we didn't see a tremendous change in educational law this year because of COVID.

Donna had several questions about the document (July 20-21 Education Loss Summaries) that she will email to Phil so that he can address the attorney for clarification as necessary. Phil requests that any board members that also have questions, email him as well.

c. Transportation status

The bus industry is in the middle of a national driver shortage. The process of adding a new driver takes 2-3 months so we need a short-term solution. Phil provided several possible solutions: One of the solutions that we've come up with is to run a third combined CES/HMS bus run starting at approximately 8:30 a.m. after our elementary run. This would allow us to pick up students for whatever bus run that did not operate that day. CES students would be approximately 1 hour late while HMS students would be approximately 2 hours late. We would then need to distribute these students onto fewer buses in the afternoon though which would extend the length of the bus rides. We are also looking into alternate bus stops for morning pickup, and coverage for late pickups if we can't provide transportation home because of space constraints.

Herb suggested calling on Eastconn to ask for help but realizes they might be in a similar situation.

Donna suggested freeing up the spaces for students that are consistently dropped off every day to allow for other students on that bus. Phil has already looked into this and it does not make a big enough difference to solve the problem. Donna also suggested using UCONN students that drive buses. Phil will look into this.

Ann suggested looking into Charter Bus companies, but as clarified by Phil, they are struggling as well.

Phil mentioned future concerns about negotiating a bus contract for this year.

Donna also suggested using the Digital Backpack for advertising.

d. Vaccination requirement for WPS staff

Governor Lamont issued executive order 13D on August 19, 2021. The Connecticut State Department of Education provided an FAQ document to superintendents on August 25, 2021. In summary, the executive order states that after September 27, 2021, school boards shall not employ or maintain a contract with any covered worker or an entity that employs a covered worker, unless such covered worker is: (1) fully vaccinated against COVID-19; (2) has received the first dose of one of the vaccines, and has an appointment for the second dose in a two-dose series vaccination, or has received a single-dose vaccine; (3) is exempt from this requirement (medical or religious exemption) or (4) objects to the vaccination process. Any employee falling under reason #2, #3, or #4 will require weekly testing until they are fully vaccinated. We are supposed to be receiving an update to this executive order with clarification regarding individuals who object to taking the vaccine.

Expect an update that allows people to opt-out of it. Any employee that falls under 2, 3, or 4 will be required to test weekly starting on Sept 27. Phil estimates that 95% of the WPS staff is vaccinated. There will be a fine if the school does not abide by these requirements. At this time, we do not believe that home testing kits will be accepted. At this time, the attorney has said that it is the responsibility of the employee to pay for this testing.

11. Old Business

None at this time.

12. Present to Speak

Sara Anderson

Sara is thankful for the continued support shown from the Willington community, particularly the Willington School Community. She currently has one student at CES and one at HMS. Her comments tonight are specifically targeted towards her support of the GSA for providing a safe, loving, and accepting place for students to go within the middle school. She believes that our guiding documents as a school community should be the scientific and psychological studies that show that those kinds of spaces and clubs for our

children are not only critically important but are life-saving for our students.

Meghan Szabo

Meghan thanks Mr. Stevens and the whole school community. Her preschooler is very happy to be back in school. Meghan is an HMS alumni and remembers there being a GSA at Hall School in 1998. Her experience in GSA was that of inclusion and acceptance. Meghan hopes that parents continue to fight against this.

Melissa McKinnon

Melissa wanted to thank Laura for speaking out in response to the opposition of the GSA club. This club has been a lifesaver for her son that has always had a difficult time fitting in and finding other students to accept him. GSA is a space where the members accept him for who he is.

Nick Tella

Nick wanted to speak up in regards to masks and GSA. He witnessed kids standing very close to each other with teachers standing shoulder to shoulder with no masks. He found this very disturbing because we are forcing masks on students but allowing teachers to do whatever they want. As far as GSA, Nick does not believe that it belongs in our schools because it is a political thing and he has seen no science that backs up what other people are saying.

Katherine Kenyon

Katherine wanted to echo what many others have said in the meeting so far. She loves this school community and is becoming concerned about the lack of focus on conversations surrounding diversity and inclusion. To pretend there are no gay students in this town is shockingly ignorant. She urges the board to continue to focus on diversity; It can matter to the point of life and death.

Meghan Szabo

Meghan wanted to include her experience in watching teachers and students during drop-off and pick-up time. She drops her child off daily and comments that they have been doing a fabulous job and has never seen any teacher in violation of mask expectations. She commends teachers, administrators, and kids for all that they are doing so that students can go to school safely.

Doris Bacon

Doris echoes the sentiments regarding the comments around the GSA club. She is aghast that one singular club is going to be called out in such a way. We need to be mindful of the community that we are developing our children into. She thinks the GSA should have an equal opportunity to be offered just like any other club.

Jason Ross

Jason wants to remind the public that students request to participate in these clubs.

13. Board Comment

Herb wants to thank Phil for his presentation tonight. There are lots of issues to deal with and planning to do down the road. Herb welcomes the entire WPS staff back and all new teachers and students. This year will be an eventful and adventurous one and he hopes that the mission statement and goals will be supported by the community.

Laura wants to thank parents and community members that came out tonight, Erin for her exciting presentation on the curriculum, and the maintenance staff for their continued hard work. Laura is excited to hear that former students are joining the WPS community, but also sad to see that some folks are leaving. Laura urges the Willington Community to refer to the CDC website for information on various scientific studies that show there are no adverse effects to wearing masks and masks work to stop the spread of COVID. There is a lot of misinformation out there and she urges people to go to reputable websites.

Ann welcomes Erin and her enthusiasm to the WPS community. She looks forward to working with her as

part of the curriculum committee. She also thanks Marybeth Moyer for coming forward right when we need her and bringing stability, along with Erin Conley. Ann thanks staff, teachers, and administrators for a great start to the year.

Tracey wants to congratulate everyone for a great start to the school year in spite of all of our challenges. She was excited to hear from Erin and all that she has done in a short amount of time. She appreciates all the members of the public that came out to hear our meeting and participated during present to speak.

Donna is appreciative of everyone's time and shared a quote, "Direction not intention determines your destination."

Michelle thanks the school community for getting us started as safely as possible. She also thanks the parents that both spoke up today. Michelle is pleased that so many parents stood up and commented on the importance of the Gay-Straight Alliance and believes this is an essential part of making sure all children feel as though they belong. She strongly believes that there is no room for bigotry in Willington and it should be called out when we see it.

Elena is disappointed that there is such division in society. She believes we are covering up this division with acceptance which in reality is causing further division. Elena is happy to hear from parents because it helps to guide the board's decisions. She wants to further emphasize her great desire to see us united, but she does not want to be afraid to say what she thinks is right. Elena reminds community members that she will not hide who she is or what she stands for, and now that we have heard her opinion, she urges community members to vote accordingly. Elena thanks everyone for their comments and respects everyone's position.

14. **Adjournment**

Herb moved to adjourn the meeting at 9:37 pm.

Elena Testa seconded the motion.

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

Motion passes

The meeting adjourned at 9:37

Next regular meeting October 12, 2021