

# WILLINGTON BOARD OF EDUCATION

October 12, 2021

Virtual Meeting: Zoom

7:00 p.m.

Minutes

Via Zoom

## **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

Marcia McGinley, special education director

Mary Kay Tshonas, HMS principal

Marybeth Moyer, CES interim principal

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**

Judie Threatt read the letter she sent to the Board into the record:

“September 22, 2021

Chairman Arico, Willington Board of Education Members, and Superintendent Stevens;

As a Willington resident for 20 years, I am appalled by the comments made by Elena Testa, member of the Willington BOE during the 8/14/2021 BOE meeting in regards to the Gay Straight Alliance at Hall Memorial School. Her bigotry and discrimination against the LGBTQ students is reprehensible, and grossly inappropriate as a BOE member.

Ms. Testa advocated for her right to speak her opinion, however, she does not have the right, as an elected official, to advocate for the Willington Board of Education to violate the law. Ms. Testa advocated to terminate the Gay Staright Alliance at HMS. Such termination violates:

- 1) Title IX, which protect students from discrimination based on sexual orientatioand gender bias; and
- 2) The First Amendment to the Constitution, which protects the right to free speech and to peaceable assembly.

**Title IX:** Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex in

any education program or activity offered by a recipient of federal financial assistance. Violation of Title IX results in the termination of federal funding for the educational entity involved. HMS' Federal Funding would be terminated if the Gay Staright Alliance was eliminated as Ms Testa requested. It is reckless and negligent for any BOE any action that would violate Title IX and result in the termination of Federal Funds.

**The First Amendment:** There's no "legal age" you have to reach to exercise your First Amendment freedoms. They are guaranteed to you the day you're born. There's also no citizenship requirement for First Amendment protection. If you're in the U.S., you have freedom of speech, religion, press, assembly and petition. Ms. Testa advocates for her right to free speech while attempting to strip the students at HMS of theirs by terminating the Gay Staright Alliance. As a BOE member, Ms. Testa should be advocating to protect the Constitutional rights of our Willington students. The hypocrisy can not go unnoticed. Ms. Testa claims "...the US Constitution are the guiding principles of my position on every question." \*Elena Testa 9/14/2021 BOE Meeting. Ms Testa does not seem to understand that the Constitution does not only protect her rights but the rights of Willington students too.

I hope that by this point in time, the Town Attorney has explained to all of you the risk of potential lawsuits against the Town Of Willington and the BOE due to Ms. Testa's comments: If the the BOE had voted to terminate the Gay Straight Alliance, as Ms. Testa requested at the BOE meeting, the hundreds of thousands of dollars in expense from the resulting lawsuits and lost funding would have been too significant for the Town to bear.

Ms. Testa's advocacy to violate the law, must be addressed by the BOE. I join other town residents in calling for Elena Testas immediate resignation. I encourage all the members of the BOE and the residents of our town to do the same.

Judie Threatt"

Chris Toomey read the letter Sarah Baker (who was unable to attend) sent to the Board into the record:

"15 September 2021

Dear Mr. Arico,

In the Board of Education by-laws it states that you will "uphold and enforce all laws, rules, regulations, and court orders pertaining to public schools." The vote proposed at the September 14th Board of Education meeting is in clear violation of the Federal Equal Access Act. Additionally, Connecticut state law expressly forbids local Boards of Education from discriminating based on gender identity or sexual orientation, among other characteristics. I am dismayed that the Board would be debating in any way actions that are illegal, discriminatory, and harmful to our children. I believe in open debate and civil discourse. People have a right to opinions and to express those opinions. However, this is not an unfettered right and speech is not benign. One must exercise care and judgement. This is especially true for our community leaders and elected officials. Allowing the Board to entertain derogatory and negative speech towards a protected class of individuals, or any other group, undermines the integrity of this Board and its work in this town.

Indeed, the Board of Education is also an employer. You employ gay people. You must consider how conversations at Board meetings contribute to a hostile work environment for our teachers and staff and how a vote could have led to violations of their rights under Federal and state employment laws.

I truly appreciate the time and dedication you have consistently demonstrated to our children and to our education system and value your experience in this sector. As the chair, I hope that you can guide the Board towards speaking and acting with clarity of purpose and eschewing further unproductive conversations.

Sincerely,  
Sarah Baker”

**4. Presentation: WPS Data Presentation, District Goals, Curriculum Strategic Plan**

The school administrators presented SBAC, iReady, NGSS science assessment, and climate survey data along with action steps for the district. Action steps included professional development for staff, improved intervention processes, development and revision of curriculum, finalization of the Portrait of a Graduate, and the implementation of an social emotional learning program for students.

**5. Chairman’s report**

Chairman Arico thanked the food service staff for providing healthy school meals and for their sincere efforts throughout the entire pandemic.

**6. Communications:**

Communications from the following people were shared with the Board: Katherine Viveiros, SBC chair; Ashley Holbrooks, *Gay, Lesbian, Straight Education Network*; Current parents: Sarah Baker, Meghan Szabo, Julie Marshall, Sarah Reis, Jennifer O’Connell-Boltseridge, Shannon Bourbeau, Karen Stevens, Beth Lawrence (Fahey); Parents of graduated children: Christina Mailhos, Jen Rovetti, Dina Gilbert, Judie Threatt

**7. Superintendent report**

The Superintendent shared that the Board needed to add an agenda item, 10h. Request BOF transfer funds from EOY 20-21 budget to the non-lapsing fund as proposed by Business Manager, Donna Latinscics. Michelle Doucette Cunningham made a motion to add an agenda item after 10g to look at transferring funds into the non-lapsing fund.

The motion was seconded by Elena Testa.

<b>Vote:</b>	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

**a. School opening 2021-2022**

Our first six weeks of school have gone well. We have only had three positive cases of COVID in the school community. None of the cases within the school resulted in transmission to another individual within our schools. The mask requirement was extended by the Governor’s office into February 2022 and we will continue to abide by that mandate. So far the vaccine mandate for staff has not affected our staffing. Unvaccinated staff have all been very cooperative with the weekly testing requirement and to date, it has had minimal impact on hiring new staff as they must either be vaccinated or have a religious or medical exemption for me to be able to hire them. We have been able to operate boys and girls soccer, the

implementation of our staggered seating at lunch is working so students can eat in the cafeteria, and students have been mixing classes at the middle school, not just staying with their cohort as we did last year. Overall, we've had a very good start.

**b. District Steering committee meeting (Portrait of the Graduate)**

The District Steering Committee met to discuss the teacher evaluation plan and discuss the next steps for the Portrait of a Graduate. They reviewed the 21-22 teacher evaluation flexibilities provided by the state department of education and will be requesting your approval later in the meeting. The committee also discussed the next steps for the Portrait of the Graduate and will be scheduling their next meeting to coordinate with the Great Schools Partnership group to facilitate the work.

**c. Enrollment update**

Center School has 200 students and Hall School has 185 students. We currently have 3 outplacements and have a total of 388 students.

**d. Staffing**

One of our longtime staff members, 3rd-grade teacher Brynn Lipstreu has resigned to work as an instructional coach in Sprague as she looks to advance her career. I forwarded her resignation letter to each of you. Brynn worked in Willington for 21 years, will be missed for sure, and I wish her the best of luck in the future. We also received a letter of resignation from our HMS health teacher, Nick Cody, who we recently hired, as he took a full-time position in Putnam. We currently have an open position for .5 health and 1.0 art, with leads for both positions.

We continue to see movement in the paraprofessional positions. We had one paraprofessional, Brittany Bassett, resign, and were able to hire two new paraprofessionals, Ryan Colenbaugh and Alex Kalgren.

We have received 23 applications for the principal opening at Center School and I'm excited about the pool of candidates. The administrative team will be reviewing applications this coming Monday and scheduling introductory interviews for October 25.

**e. Transportation status**

We are thankful the vaccination requirement did not impact our transportation in Willington. We continue to struggle to find transportation for sporting events, but our Athletic Director and M&J coordinator are doing everything they can to make sure our student-athletes play as many games as possible. I met with our local bus coordinator and we developed a plan to provide transportation should we have one or more drivers call out. If one driver calls out, we will communicate alternate routes to allow all students to be picked up. This may move the buses closer to capacity, but they will be preplanned allowing us to provide transportation to all students, though routes will be longer. If we have 2 or more drivers call out, we are considering adjusting the school schedules which would allow us to transport all students. Hall School would start on time and have an early dismissal while Center School would have a 2-hour delay and finish at their normal time. This adjustment would allow us a longer block of time to run buses between start and finish times thus allowing all students to be able to be transported. The plan has not been finalized yet as we are waiting for routes from the bus company, at which time we will communicate with parents.

**f. Response to Board member request regarding lessons on gender choice**

A board member had heard that some schools in surrounding towns are including lessons that instruct students that they can choose their gender in their curriculum. I was asked whether or not that is currently being taught or planned to be taught in Willington. After speaking with my administrative team who had requested this information from staff, I can report Willington is not teaching students they can choose their gender. Our climate surveys provided by the state, have gender choices of male, female, or non-binary for students to choose from. We have books in our libraries students may choose from that may have gender contained as part of the narrative. Students, starting in 4th grade, may select books containing this topic for book groups. Teachers work on ELA skills with students who

choose these books, which includes comprehension and text to self-connections, which may open conversations around this in that particular group. Students, particularly at the middle schools, have notified staff if they have amended their preferred pronoun. Currently, choosing gender is not directly taught, nor is it our intention for future curriculum to contain this material. We will continue to provide books with a variety of main characters for students to see themselves and support their individual growth.

Laura Rodriguez asked who was paying for the testing for staff who are unvaccinated. Superintendent Stevens replied that the testing is the responsibility of the staff member and the state has free testing sites available.

Elena Testa asked if the enrollment reported is what was reported to the state. Superintendent Stevens stated that the number reported was off of PowerSchool the day of the meeting and that the October 1 enrollment may be higher or lower by one student.

Elena Testa thanked the superintendent for the response on lessons on gender and asked if parents could be made aware if anything changed. The superintendent stated the Board policy on controversial content dictates how he would communicate with parents.

Chairman Arico asked a question about new legislation regarding model curriculum and asked if it was a mandate or choice for the Board. Superintendent Stevens stated the model curriculum would be a choice for the local Board.

**8. Financial Report**

**a. October 21-22 financial report**

**Attachment #1**

The superintendent reviewed the October financial report. Donna Cook asked if the Board was locked into a price for heating fuel. Superintendent Stevens stated they were locked in at a good price.

**b. 2020-2021 end of year financial report**

**Attachment #2**

The superintendent reviewed the end of the year financial report from 20-21 to show the status of each program before transfers.

**c. 2020-2021 budget transfers**

**Attachment #3**

The superintendent reviewed the budget transfers and how they would zero out a program as recommended by the auditor. Discussion was held about the transfers.

A. Grosjean made a motion to transfer \$179,643 from program 03 Special Education to program to 02 HMS Middle School, that we transfer \$7,783 from program 01 Center Elementary School to program 02 HMS Middle School, and that we transfer \$20,931 from program 01 Center Elementary School to program 07 Utilities.

M. Cunningham seconded the motion.

<b>Vote:</b>	Yes	No	Abstain
H. Arico	<b>x</b>		
M. Cunningham	<b>x</b>		
D. Cook	<b>x</b>		
T. Anderson	<b>x</b>		

A.Grosjean	<b>x</b>		
E. Testa	<b>x</b>		
L. Rodriguez	<b>x</b>		

Motion passes

**d. Food Services Account review**

**Attachment #4**

Superintendent Stevens reviewed the August 2021 report and stated that the account is extremely healthy. The reimbursements from COVID have resulted in a very healthy food services account. He shared issues regarding the Center School freezer. Ann Grosjean thanked the food service staff for all their hard work.

**9. Committee Report**

**a. Curriculum committee**

Ann Grosjean stated that Erin Conley went into great detail regarding curriculum improvements and that she has an incredible plan.

**b. School building committee**

Ann Grosjean stated the committee had an exciting meeting and that they would be writing an RFP for an owner’s project manager. The committee also started a discussion on educational specifications.

**10. New Business**

**a. Approve minutes of regular meeting September 14, 2021**

**Attachment #5**

T. Anderson made a motion to approve the minutes from the regular meeting of September 14, 2021

L. Rodriguez seconded the motion

E. Testa commented that the minutes were written with a biased attitude and that she felt certain items were missing from the minutes.

Michelle Doucette Cunningham asked to make an edit to the minutes, second paragraph under clubs and sports. She felt Elena’s statement was inaccurate and leaving it in the minutes creates a misunderstanding and requested they strike it from the minutes.

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

Motion passes

**b. Approve minutes of special meeting September 24, 2021**

**Attachment #6**

Michelle Doucette Cunningham made a motion to accept the minutes from the special meeting on September 24, 2021.

Ann Grosjean seconded the motion.

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

**c. Approve minutes curriculum committee October 5, 2021**

**Attachment #7**

Ann Grosjean made a motion to approve the curriculum committee minutes from October 5, 2021.

Laura Rodriguez seconded the motion.

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

**d. Approval of teacher evaluation flexibilities 21-22**

Superintendent Stevens shared that due to COVID, the CSDE is allowing districts flexibility in the facilitation of their evaluation plans. Our district steering committee met and would like to adjust our plan for this school year to allow flexibility during this time. Instead of a balance of formal observations and informal observations for teachers, we would implement 3 informal observations for all staff. An informal observation does not require a teacher to submit plans ahead of time and the administrator can pick the specific period of time to complete the observation. Research shows that more informal

and more frequent observations result in improved practice. The adjustment we are requesting results in more observations than our regular plan. This plan is better aligned with the direction our teacher evaluation committee was going prior to the COVID closure. Basically, all you would be approving is accepting the teacher evaluation flexibilities for the 21-22 school year.

Donna Cook asked if teachers need to submit lesson plans. Superintendent Stevens stated that teachers only submit them for formal observations. Laura Rodriguez added that teachers have lesson plans, but they are not required to submit to an administrator unless requested.

Laura Rodriguez made a motion to accept the teacher evaluation flexibility plan for 21-22.

Herb Arico seconded the motion.

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

**e. 2022-2023 budget priorities**

Superintendent Stevens shared that the Board can see his priorities from discussions around professional development and curriculum, but wanted to ask the Board for feedback prior to the 22-23 budget process. At a curriculum meeting committee members heard the need for an instructional coach for math, and there was also discussion about more science and social studies at the middle school. Without going into great detail, he was hoping to hear some of your budget priorities so I can try to infuse them into my budget this year, or at least gather more information for the process.

Herb Arico asked to review the money being allocated to the two libraries and to look into the issue of sports. He also asked the superintendent to review the enrichment STEAM block. Lastly, he asked about video production for the public to view sporting events or other school events.

Laura Rodriguez shared her concern to balance instructional time for science and social studies at HMS so they get more time than they are getting now.

Ann Grosjean stated we may need a full time coach for math.

Michelle Doucette Cunningham requested the Board to consider maintaining utility staff next year for coverage for classrooms and lunch duties. She also asked about expanding the WEALTH program in the summer. Lastly, she requested the Board consider sub pay to be competitive with neighboring districts.

Donna Cook asked what ~~money~~ program (change made at 11/9/21 meeting) could help move students in the red or yellow into the green.



**f. Capital Improvement Projects draft (BOF request for 10-year roofs)**

Superintendent Stevens requested feedback on the CIP project requests. He reviewed the plan from last year and asked the Board what they would like to see in the future. He asked the Board if they would like prices for a 10 year roof for both schools. Lastly, he asked if the Board would like to leave items in year 5 until the building project decision is made and only ask for an emergency fund in year one of the plan, 22-23.

Elena Testa asked if we could keep the full roof replacement cost in year 5.

Donna Cook shared that she thought air conditioning in the band room should stay in year one, and any issue that is a safety issue should be in year one of the plan.

Tracey Anderson asked what sidewalk would be replaced that was identified on the plan.

Michelle Doucette Cunningham added that anything that causes damage to the infrastructure should be addressed early in the plan.

Ann Grosjean asked how the superintendent would prioritize the windows and he shared they are not a priority at this time.

The superintendent also shared that the school building committee will be requesting their own funds.

**g. School Building Committee request for education specifications**

The superintendent shared sample educational specifications developed by Mansfield for their project. He shared that an owner's project manager could help with this process. The school building committee chairwoman sent a request to the Board to start completing ed specs, something needed whether you renovate or build new.

The superintendent asked how the Board would like to proceed. He gave options of either doing the work via a subcommittee or as a full Board with most of the components being developed by the superintendent and his administrative team.

Elena Testa asked about the timeline. Superintendent Stevens said the School Building Committee did not provide a timeline. She suggested the Board should wait until after elections. Chairman Arico agreed with Elena Testa but shared that the Board really needs to expedite the process. Michelle Doucette Cunningham asked for a couple sample plans for review. Donna Cook shared that the superintendent should start gathering information and then the remainder of the project could be divided up to be completed and then pull all the information together.

**h. Request BOF transfer funds from EOY 20-21 budget to the non-lapsing fund.**

Superintendent Stevens stated that each year you have funds left at the end of the school year you can ask the Board of Finance to transfer funds into the BOE's non-lapsing fund. CT statute allows you to request the BOF deposit funds from the prior fiscal year provided the transfer amount does not exceed 2% of the total budget appropriation for education the prior fiscal year. Board of Education Policy #3171 states that the maximum cumulative amounts held in the fund may not exceed 3% of the most current fiscal year K-8 education budget.

These funds are intended for unbudgeted costs including facilities issues and special education costs. I can tell you that we currently have an unbudgeted out-of-district placement that we will be requesting these funds to pay for so I anticipate, if approved, your budget would be approximately \$158,000 after

paying for the placement.

M. Doucette Cunningham made a motion to have the Board of Education request that the Board of Finance consider that \$64,488 of the \$192,066 be placed in the Board of Education non-lapsing fund in accordance with Board of Education Policy #3171.

E. Testa seconded the motion.

D. Cook asked if the Superintendent will provide the Board of Finance with information about the outplacement to help them understand. P. Stevens said he will share with them that there is now an additional outplacement that wasn't budgeted for.

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

Motion passes

**11. Old Business**

No old business.

**12. Present to Speak**

No one was present to speak.

**13. Board Comment**

H. Arico thanked the cafeteria staff for their hard work in providing nutritious meals to our students. Thank you also for the presentation this evening and I look forward to future discussions.

M. Cunningham congratulated staff on a great start to school and for being safe. I frequently speak with people around the country and I often hold up Willington as an example of what can work when everybody is paying attention to safety and keeping those protocols in place. All the best to Brynn Lipstreu in her new position. We will miss her, she's done a great service for us here over the past 21 years she was in Willington. I would like to make a few additional comments since we did not have Board comments after our special meeting at the end of September. American democracy is founded upon a number of principles one of which is the separation of church and state and we need to keep our decisions within the Board focused on what is legal, what is acceptable and what is best for the students and I think that it is really essential for all people who are on the Board of Education whether they are now or whether they serve in the future at some point, to do all of their homework and understand what's legal and what's not legal. There's a lot of work that can be done and orientations that are provided and preparation. While we are all volunteers in this it really is a lot of work and the seven of us certainly have the hours you see on camera but many of us also put in a lot of additional hours learning about the job of serving on a Board of Education. I think the separation of church and state are an essential part of our

democracy and people should understand that and really understand what the scope of the Board of Education's authority is. We should all be very careful with our words if we need to write them down ahead of time so that we are able to speak from a place that has time to prepare and well thought through. I acknowledge that the process has been frustrating for many people because there has not been feedback from all of us. You did not have an opportunity to speak at the end of the last meeting and there wasn't an opportunity for Board members to speak. I want to go on the record to say that I am very much in support of the gay and straight alliance at the middle school and I think it is a tremendous service for our students and I am very happy that so many parents have come out in support of that work. So thank you or your dedication for the time you've all spent on these meetings. It is much appreciated and we hear you.

A. Grosjean thanked Brynn Lipstreu for her wonderful years and wished her success in her new administrative endeavors. At our Board meeting last month I was very much in shock when it was proposed that we take action to eliminate the gay straight alliance club from Hall School. I have a daughter who is gay and her haven was the equivilant club at EO Smith. It gave her a place to feel accepted and safe as she explored her path. At our summer Board meetings it was suggested that we delete the words diversity and inclusivity from our Board goals. The hiring of a free mental health professional for our children of great need was obstructed for almost one year. There is a pattern here. It is our responsibility as members of the Willington Board of Education to represent all students. I thank the residents of Willington who spoke in support of our mission that each of our students no matter their national origin, gender, race, religion , ethnicity, sexual orientation, disability or any other form of diversity is to be respected as unique individuals and provided with a safe inclusive environment with a student centered instructional practice that is individualized and responsive to their learning styles and connect with their individual abilities and interests. All of our children deserve to have their unique academic, social and emotional needs met within our schools.

T. Anderson thanked Brynn Lipstreu and wished her well saying that many of our children have benefited from her teaching over the years. Thank you to Phil for the creative plans he has made with transportation that will help us to make sure our students get to school. Regarding our September meeting, I agree with comments made by Michelle and Ann and I too was astounded and angered about the discussion in regards to the gay straight alliance club at Hall School and the motion to eliminate this club. I appreciate all of the parents who have come forward to speak and have written letters and who have attended this meeting and the special meeting. There is a large body of evidence that confirms that the presence of a gay straight alliance has a positive and lasting effect on student health, wellness and academic performance. It can also protect students from harassment based on sexual orientation or gender identity and improve school climate in the long term. And as many of our parents have mentioned to us, it has been a life saver for many kids as well. As an elected official of the Willington Board of Education I feel it is our job to represent and value each and every student no matter their gender, race, ethnicity, religion, national origin, sexual orientation , disability or any other difference. It is our mission to advocate for the students of Willington and to provide them with exceptional instruction in an environment of inclusion where students achieve their maximum potential . That includes our after school activities and shouldn't single out any individual or groups. In our schools we teach our students to be kind and accepting of each other and we should be examples of them as adults. I recently heard a quote from Frank Sherma and I think it applies to this situation: "When we see other perspectives besides our own, we move beyond simply acknowledging our differences and begin to understand and celebrate them."

L. Rodriguez stated that she found the order in which people were called on to speak was interesting. Thank you to the food service folks. Congratulations to Brynn. She dedicated a lot of years to Willington and I'm glad that she is moving forward with what she wants to do. Thank you to all the people who have come out to our meetings and to those who wrote letters to the Board of Ed about the September meeting. I was completely shocked at the situation and how it was orchestrated to have a discussion about the gay straight alliance. We are a volunteer Board but we make a commitment to represent the

children of this community and to work for their best interests in getting a quality education which of course includes them feeling that they are accepted, that they belong, that they are heard, that they are seen, and that they are part of this community whatever their background. My concern is that if you decide you want to be on a Board of Education, then you should be willing to educate yourself about responsibilities and the duties as a member of the Board of Education. We had someone breaking the law and doing something illegal and yet we have tremendous resources. Herb is great at pointing out the resources we have through C.A.B.E. We get emails almost everyday from C.A.B.E about webinars, conferences and documents that you can read so ignorance of law is not an excuse for ignorance about what our duties and responsibilities are on the Board of Education. It is part of what we have to do to educate ourselves to know what we should be doing. I'm actually very concerned about that and started looking into why training for Board of Education members is not mandatory.

D. Cook shared a quote by Theodore Roosevelt: "Comparison is the thief of joy" and I picked this out during the week to share with you guys.

E. Testa thanked Michelle, Ann, Tracey and Laura for respectfully addressing their disagreement with my position. Since the last meeting I was harassed, lied about, threatened personally and publicly, bullied, including by Board members. I was screamed at and name called including by Board members. If we disagree, it doesn't give you a right to try to destroy me in every possible way or name-call me publicly. I understand that we get emotional, but when we get emotional we apologize so I'm very pleased that Tracey and Michelle showed that they can do it. It's not only Board members, but adults in the community who poured on me a lot of negative, not truthful statements. We are fighting against bullying in our schools, but that bullying is not going anywhere while it is allowed among adults in the community, including the Board of Education, and on social media. Because adults are examples of whatever children do. So whoever said anything against me you're not my enemies. I respect your opinion and I respect your right for free speech even if somebody will be attacking you for saying something against me I will protect your right for free speech. Because I think that's where our country is standing.

**14. Adjournment**

H. Arico made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 10:03 p.m.

T. Anderson said she has another comment.

E. Testa seconded

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

Motion failed

H. Arico stated that everyone has had an opportunity to speak, under Board comments, at least once. We're just prolonging the meeting and the hour is very late and things are just going to get heated up. I think we should take a break and adjourn. I think it doesn't make sense to continue the meeting the way it is going now.

M. Cunningham stated that H. Arico gave E. Testa the last word and are not allowing people to respond to her negative attacks personally to some of us on the Board.

T. Anderson stated that E. Testa personally named two Board members in a negative way.

L. Rodriguez stated that we should hear the comments and that E. Testa was allowed to go last, as usual, and she did say Board members bullied her so I think we should be allowed to at least respond to that.

T. Anderson said that she is confused because in the minutes of the meetings that we have seen, I did not attack you. I did not say anything at the last meeting about this issue. We did not have Board comments during the last meeting so I'm not really sure what you are talking about me saying anything negative about you in a public meeting. I do think that it is unfair the order of how the comments are made because Elena gets the last word every single meeting and that's not fair.

D. Cook stated that she has nothing to say.

L. Rodriguez stated that she wanted Tracey to have a chance to say something. She stated she did not understand what Elena was saying about being screamed at and name called by Board members as she had not witnessed that. I don't know what happens outside of Board meetings, but I can tell by the letters that many people in the community are not happy with her comments.

A. Grosjean stated that she voted against adjourning the Board meeting because I felt that Tracey deserved the right to speak.

E. Testa clarified she meant the executive meeting behind closed doors because there were many people present including the lawyer.

H. Arico stated that he had no additional comments.

M. Cunningham stated that she thinks the comment about being bullied is specific to her comment made in September when she said there was no room for bigotry in Willington and she stated I stand by that comment. I did not personally name-call an individual as I was talking about a person's actions, a person's words. Everyone has their right to their own opinions, even if they're hurtful and problematic in a thousand ways. Even if I find them grossly offensive, I believe you have the right to your opinion, but I do not believe that opinion should be expressed in a public meeting in which we are serving as public officials. The concern about bullying seems hypocritical because the entire focus of a lot of these clubs and particularly this club is to help work with young people and give them a safe space, especially people who have been bullied and exposed to all kinds of hurtful things in other places. To have another public official on a public meeting go after a support that is essential for a group of people who have such high rates of mental health issues and suicide and depression because of bullying, and to hear you flip it on it's head and say, "oh, I've been bullied" because we disagreed with you and you didn't like our tone of voice. The only conversations we've had with you are at these meetings and it's all taped and anybody can go back and see it. The way you said your comment made it sound as if we are harassing you on Facebook or that we are stalking your house, or picketing your house or bullying you in the supermarket and none of that has happened. Your passion for sticking up for your thoughts is fine, but that's your opinion that you felt bullied. I would not

characterize any of the statements by colleagues and I as bullying or harassing or personally attacking in a way that has been unprofessional or hurtful.

M. Cunningham made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 10:14 p.m.

L. Rodriguez seconded the motion

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

Motion passes

\*Next regular meeting November 9, 2021\*