

WILLINGTON BOARD OF EDUCATION

June 13, 2023

Virtual Meeting: Zoom

7:00 p.m.

Minutes

Zoom Recorded

Members Present (all present remotely through Zoom)

Michelle Doucette Cunningham - Chair

Ann Grosjean- Vice-Chair

Tracey Anderson

Laura Rodriguez

Briana Ross

Arthur Christensen

Members Absent

Donna Cook

Also Present

Phil Stevens, Superintendent of Schools; Mary Kay Tshonas, HMS Principal

1. Call to order

Chair Cunningham called the meeting to order at 7:04 p.m.

2. Pledge of Allegiance

Chair Cunningham led the Pledge of Allegiance.

3. Present to speak

Nick Tella, 49 Mirtl Rd., expressed thanks to the Center School staff; stated he would like BOE meetings to be hybrid; and that permission slips should be completed by parents regarding the books they allow their children to read.

James Marshall, 46 Fisher Hill Rd., said he toured the new Mansfield school and that he believes it is something that Willington should aspire to whether new or rebuild.

Elaine Newcomb, 28 Fermier Rd., stated that the School Building Committee should not be on the BOE agenda.

4. Chairman's report

The Chairman stated that the item on the agenda about the joint meeting discussion and next steps is not a joint meeting, it is the BOE's discussion about that past meeting so it is not a meeting of the School Building Committee.

5. Communications

The Board received a communication from Jim Marshall.

6. Superintendent Report

Superintendent Stevens shared that Anita Macken, CES paraprofessional hired in 2001, is retiring from education after 22 amazing years; Nicole Maines, special education teacher at HMS resigned for another school district; and we hired Michelle Tharp as a speech and language pathologist. The superintendent thanked Marcia McGinley for her work managing the staff shortage in speech and language.

Superintendent Stevens shared a couple of pictures from the 8th-grade trip to Washington DC and asked

Principal Tshonas to provide an overview of the trip. Principal Tshonas expressed her appreciation to the BOE for approving the field trip and that it was an amazing experience for our students who conducted themselves in a respectful manner. The chaperones were terrific and she was happy students had a chance to experience the Nation's Capital. They visited the African-American Museum, saw a show called Shear Madness, and visited many memorials. She thanked the BOE for funding the trip for students who would not have been able to go because of the expense. Superintendent Stevens and Board members congratulated Principal Tshonas for taking on the project and asked some follow-up questions.

7. Financial Report

a. June 2023 financial report

Attachment #1

Superintendent Stevens shared the budget update and that he was working with his administrative team and maintenance custodians to get projects completed. He shared that he believed the budget would be very close to the \$275,000 balance the Board said they would return at the end of the school year.

8. New Business

a. Approve regular meeting minutes, May 9, 2023

Attachment #2

L. Rodriguez moved to approve the minutes of the May 9, 2023 Board meeting.

A. Grosjean seconded the motion.

Vote:	Yes	No	Abstain
T. Anderson	x		
A. Christensen			x
M. Doucette Cunningham	x		
A. Grosjean	x		
B. Ross	x		
L. Rodriguez	x		

5 yes, 0 no, 1 abstain, motion passes.

b. Approve curriculum committee meeting minutes, April 20, 2023

Attachment #3

A. Grosjean moved to approve the minutes of the April 20, 2023 curriculum committee meeting.

T. Anderson seconded the motion.

Vote:	Yes	No	Abstain
T. Anderson	x		
A. Christensen			x
M. Doucette Cunningham	x		
A. Grosjean	x		
B. Ross	x		
L. Rodriguez	x		

5 yes, 0 no, 1 abstain, motion passes

c. Substitute pay 2023-2024

Superintendent Stevens shared that the Board approves the substitute pay each year. He shared he had reviewed sub rates within the region and requested the Board increase substitute pay by \$5.00 per day for each category including subs for non-certified staff, certified staff, certified staff with teaching licensure, and nurses. Non-certified subs would be at \$110, certified staff \$125, certified staff with a teaching license \$145, and nurses \$230.

L. Rodriguez asked if the additional \$5/day will make us competitive in our area.

Superintendent Stevens said yes.

A. Grosjean moved to increase the substitute pay in each category by \$5.00 per day.

A. Christensen seconded to motion.

All in favor, the motion passes unanimously.

d. Cafeteria staff payroll, 2023-2024

Superintendent Stevens said the Board also approves the cafeteria staff rates each year and proposed they match the same increase that the WESS non-certified staff union received. He noted that the cafeteria staff is not part of a union.

A. Grosjean asked if that was an increase of 2.75% and Superintendent Stevens said yes.

L. Rodriguez motioned to increase the cafeteria pay rate by 2.75% for the 2023-2024 school year.

T. Anderson seconded the motion.

All in favor, the motion carried unanimously.

e. Virtual meetings

Chairman Doucette Cunningham asked to open a discussion on virtual meetings

A. Christensen discussed the positives and negatives of virtual meetings. He stated that people should have the option of attending meetings in person and he believes the best course of action for this would be for the Board to move to a hybrid model where we can Zoom or that the public can attend in person.

L. Rodriguez agreed with A. Christensen's suggestion and that there is great value in meeting in person. She stated that there are difficulties with hybrid meetings and it was very difficult to focus on the people in person and also the people on your screen. She stated that now would be a good time to figure out how to hold a hybrid meeting effectively so everyone feels they are participating. Hybrid allows us to participate when we travel.

Superintendent Stevens asked the Board to consider the impact on the Board. He stated that if the meetings are hybrid he thinks it's important that the Board does their best to meet in person. Other places that have gone hybrid have requested that their Board or committee members attend in person.

M. Doucette Cunningham stated that it is difficult to Chair a hybrid meeting where you have a member who is on the screen who cannot hear the full conversation because of the audio. She also said we struggled to get a good camera when we were just taping the meetings because the meeting room is long and wide. When we are together people can see our faces a lot more clearly and they can hear our voices. We may want to make our meeting technology work for us better than it does now if we go hybrid. We also have the option to go back to meeting fully in person and recording the meeting and posting them on YouTube to watch, and accept emails and letters from those who cannot attend the meeting.

T. Anderson sees the benefits of hybrid meetings because of the high participation rate.

M. Doucette Cunningham agreed with the high participation rates.

L. Rodriguez suggested BOE members try to attend in person but can Zoom in when traveling. She suggested asking our parents what they would prefer.

B. Ross stated that she does not want to abandon Zoom because it is a beneficial way for parents to attend. She stated that attending meetings virtually is better than watching a video after the fact.

A. Grosjean agreed that it is important for parents to attend and also agrees with M. Doucette Cunningham's comments about the difficulty in following who is on screen and who is in person and the Owl filming from person to person. If we can get the technology to work well it would be fine.

M. Doucette Cunningham moved to table the discussion for a future meeting once we've had a bit more input and asked the Superintendent to communicate with parents asking about their preferences.

Superintendent Stevens stated that it is also about community members and will see if a survey can be sent through the Town email service.

L. Rodriguez seconded the motion

All in favor, motion passes.

9. Old Business

a. Joint meeting (SBC, BOE, BOS) discussion and next steps

M. Doucette Cunningham reported that a joint meeting was held in person for 3 hours. We need to invest now in a full facility study that will look at what we have, updated costs, and recommendations.

A. Grosjean believes we should hire someone to do a complete study. She stated that Superintendent Stevens has done a great job but we need a study to show exactly what needs to be done and exactly how much it is going to cost.

A. Christensen asked if EMCOR can do this because they are familiar with the schools.

Superintendent Stevens stated the study will need to go out to bid. EMCOR inventoried our mechanical systems, but not specifics like plumbing or ADA. We need a prioritization of projects from a facility study.

M. Doucette Cunningham stated that there needs to be a recommended sequence for the improvements.

T. Anderson asked where the money for the study would come from.

Superintendent Stevens stated that the Capital Improvement Committee put a million dollars into the budget for the SBC/BOE to begin fixing the buildings. The BOE would have access after going through a Town meeting. He stated, for long-term planning, you need a 10-year plan with priorities.

A. Christensen asked if Colliers assessed the cost for building repairs or just to consolidate the schools.

Superintendent Stevens said Colliers did a cost analysis by square foot and current pricing, mainly for Hall School.

A. Grosjean made a motion to prepare and issue an RFP/RFQ for a facilities study which includes an estimation of the cost to repair both schools.

M. Doucette Cunningham seconded the motion.

The motion passed unanimously.

Superintendent Stevens recommended the Board vote to recommend the School Building Committee complete a final report of their findings.

L. Rodriguez moved to recommend the School Building Committee write a final report of their findings and submit it to the Board of Selectmen.

A. Christensen seconded the motion.

The motion passed unanimously.

10. Present to Speak

Nick Tella, 49 Mirtl Rd., shared that if the Board used James Marshall he should excuse himself from further conversations. He shared that he walked the new Mansfield school but that the only difference was new furniture and it wasn't worth the 50 million they spent.

Melissa Abercrombie, 238 Tolland Turnpike, agreed that maintaining is not acceptable and that she was concerned doing a facilities study would result in spending funds that wouldn't be put towards fixing the buildings. She also asked about the million dollars that were approved to fix the schools as she hadn't seen anything yet.

Jon Mitchell, 64 Timber Lane, asked about the 2.75% increase and thought it wasn't enough as inflation was higher. He also shared that in-person meetings with a live feed through Facebook with a Zoom section would allow a hybrid model. Lastly, he was happy the Board recommended the SBC write a report and disband so we can fix the buildings over the next 10 years.

Peter Latincsics, 97 Trask Rd., shared that he agreed with moving to a hybrid meeting model. He shared his concerns about comments made regarding the application for grants for roof projects.

11. Board Comment

A. Christensen congratulated all the Willington graduates from E.O. Smith and Hall School. He shared he was looking forward to the CES color war the next day. He congratulated all the students on another successful year.

T. Anderson congratulated the graduating class. She thanked Anita Macken for her dedication and sent best wishes to staff leaving and joining. Lastly, Tracy was very excited to hear about the success of the DC trip.

A. Grosjean thanked all the staff for a wonderful year and wished them a relaxing summer.

L. Rodriguez congratulated the graduates and staff on another phenomenal year. She thanked Marcia McGinley for her work in filling the staffing shortage. Laura reiterated comments made by other members.

B. Ross shared she was proud to be part of a group that was able to approve the DC trip. She congratulated first-year teachers for making it through the school year. Briana highlighted the success of the music department and thanked the staff. She thanked all the staff for making our schools a special place.

M. Doucette Cunningham congratulated all the graduates. She clarified that the million dollars for repairs were not available until July 1, 2023. Michelle thanked the Board members for their work.

12. New Business

a. Executive Session: Superintendent evaluation

M. Doucette Cunningham made a motion to go into executive session for the superintendent's evaluation and invited the superintendent of schools.

L. Rodriguez seconded the motion.

The motion passed unanimously and the Board went into executive session at 8:41 pm.

The Board came out of the executive session at 9:10 pm.

M. Doucette Cunningham made a motion to renew Superintendent Stevens's contract for another year with the minor edits discussed and include a 2.75% increase in salary.

L. Rodriguez seconded the motion.

The motion passed unanimously.

13. Adjournment

L. Rodgriguez made a motion to adjourn.

A. Grosjean seconded the motion.

The motion passed unanimously and the meeting adjourned at 9:11 pm.

Next regular meeting July 11, 2023