

WILLINGTON BOARD OF EDUCATION

Tuesday, August 8, 2023

Virtual Meeting: Zoom

7:00 p.m.

Agenda

Join Zoom Meeting

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Meeting ID: 886 4273 1403

Passcode: 449612

1. **Call to order**
2. **Pledge of Allegiance**
3. **Present to speak**
4. **Chairman's report**
5. **Communications**
 - a. FOI request, N. Tella
6. **Superintendent report**
7. **Financial Report**
 - a. July 2023 financial report Attachment #1
 - b. Food Services financial report Attachment #2
 - c. Mental Health Grant award
8. **New Business**
 - a. Approve regular meeting minutes, June 2023 Attachment #3
 - b. Approve joint meeting minutes (BOS, BOE, SBC), May 2023 Attachment #4
 - c. RFP for School Facilities Study
 - d. CES and HMS breakfast and lunch prices
 - e. Flexibilities for teacher evaluation, 2023-2024
9. **Old Business**
 - a. Virtual meetings (survey results)
10. **Present to Speak**
11. **Board Comment**
12. **Adjournment**

Next regular meeting September 12, 2023

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 #3

Attachment

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		
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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, Tracey 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. Rodriguez 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

**Joint meeting of the
Board of Selectmen-Board of Education- School Building Committee**

Special Meeting
In Person: TOB Common Room

May 24, 2023
6:30 PM

**Minutes are not official until approved at the next regular meeting*

First Selectwoman Wiecenski called to order a joint meeting of the Board of Selectmen, Board of Education and School Building Committee to order at 6:30 PM. The following were in attendance:

BOS: First Selectman Wiecenski, Mike Makuch, Jim Bulick

BOE: Michelle Doucette Cunningham, Ann Grosjean, Briana Ross, Donna Cook, Tracey Anderson, Arthur Christensen; Absent: Laura Rodriguez

SBC: Phil Stevens, Jim Marshall, Ralph Tulis, Justin Niderno, Chris Tilon, Peter Latincsics, Katherine Viveiros

Pledge of Allegiance

Present to speak

Nick Tella – Voiced his concerns of the difficulty of finding information out about the joint meeting.

Samantha Sperry – Voiced her concerns about being disappointed that the meeting was in-person only and her concerns about the school building committee and what our next steps are.

Phil Monty – Stated he had difficulty finding the agenda

John Blessington – Voiced his concerns about the meeting being for all the stakeholders and wanted to know why the Board of Finance is not present.

Joe Sherrell – Voiced his concerns about the meeting being in-person only.

Stephanie Summers – Shared her belief that the SBC has a body of expertise and has developed within the two years since they began and feels they should not disband the SBC.

Introductions

All members introduced themselves and shared what boards they were members of.

New Business

A. Follow up Re: Meeting with State Leaders regarding funding

First Selectwoman Wiecenski stated there was a meeting scheduled with Senator Jeff Gordon and Representative Tammy Nuccio, however Senator Gordon had a hospital matter that kept him from the meeting. Senator Jeff Gordon and Representative Tammy Nuccio are working together in regard to the items we spoke about. First Selectwoman Wiecenski, Superintendent Phil Stevens and Schott Pellman from Colliers were present at this meeting with Representative Nuccio and they discussed funding, state funding and how that impacts the town's ability to fund a building project either new or renovate.

Superintendent Stevens stated they spoke about the age of the schools and their existing conditions, and repair costs. He stated that the problems towns face are not knowing the reimbursement rate. It is important to be able to tell taxpayers what the reimbursement rate would be and that the gap for reimbursement was too large. Scott Pellman found some statutory information that if new is cheaper

the state would have to fund the higher amount which would be 63%. Representative Nuccio stated that she would meet with the Office of School Construction and Grants & Review (OSCGR) and do some research through her office to determine what other information could come forward.

First Selectwoman Wiczenski stated they were having a general discussion with Representative Nuccio about our process not necessarily new build versus renovations. In a state that is encouraging consolidation or regionalization, the system is broken and doesn't help Willington and we want to pull Senator Gordon into the issue because many towns are small rural towns like Willington, and they are seeing the same challenges that we are. Regardless of where Willington goes with this, this is something that needs to be addressed on the whole.

Peter Latincsics (SBC) – Spoke about the space dilemma as the Superintendent described it, he disagrees to some extent as we could not duplicate the amount of space in the two buildings that we currently have in a new school. He felt the townspeople recognized that and thought why would we pay more for less? We were getting a smaller building for a substantial investment. We would not enjoy the luxury of space that we have now in having two buildings.

Selectman Makuch and Chairman of the SBC – Clarified that a couple of comments made by Peter Latincsics mischaracterized some of the actions of the SBC and a couple of statements were completely incorrect, including the fact that the very existence of this SBC is preventing the Town from getting grants. He stated that is not true and it has been clarified in meetings and should not be repeated by board members when it has been clarified in meetings. The Superintendent and the BOE have repeatedly said they are pursuing all grants they are eligible for, the only thing that we know was halted was the roof project. Nothing right now is being prevented by the existence of this committee.

Arthur Christensen (BOE) - Asked if there has been a replacement for the head of OSCGR. Superintendent Stevens said they did not know if they hired someone.

Donna Cook (BOE) – Stated that she has some confusion in regard to funding of school building projects while the SBC was considering the possibility of a new school and asked if the SBC is disbanded will funding be once again available to the town to make the necessary school building repairs?

Superintendent Stevens commented that grant applications for projects including new roofs, would need to be in place in November 2023 in order to go in front of CIP in December 2023. The money needs to be there for July 1, 2024. This would be the timeline that would need to be followed in order to do the roof project in the summer of 2024.

Peter Latincsics (SBC) – Asked why can't we start the process now instead of waiting until November?

Michelle Ducette Cuningham (BOE) - Commented that the BOE needs to know the scope of all the different projects that we have as some projects need to be done at the same time, such as roofs and ventilation projects. Some projects take longer to complete. The BOE needs to look at the condition of the facilities and what needs to be completed sooner rather than later. The Friar report is more than five years old, so we need updated information in order to move forward on making the best decisions as now there could be more issues we are unaware of.

B. Discussion of Next Steps of the SBC

i. Discuss components of current charge

First Selectwoman Wiczenski commented the SBC was created by town meeting with a specific purpose of a pre-k through grade 8 school building project. She stated the SBC can continue to work within their charge or write a final report. The charge of the SBC can be changed as long as it fits this criterion, or we need to go back to the drawing board.

First Selectwoman Wiecenski commented the process started because there was declining enrollment and increasing operating costs per pupil, which is why the discussion began about needing one building. The BOE determined that being in one building would be the best way to mitigate those issues.

Michelle Doucette Cunningham (BOE) stated there were many years of discussion and the result was to make a recommendation to the Board of Selectmen to assemble an SBC as the BOE felt that a new building was more cost-effective in educating all the students.

First Selectwoman Wiecenski stated the language of the charge was to investigate all aspects of defining a pre-k through 8 school and it did not say a new school or renovated. It was important to review all the information to make the best decision.

Discussion occurred regarding the impact of state funding on building repairs if the SBC was intact.

M. Cunningham noted that the charge of the current SBC targets a consolidated preschool through grade 8 building. If it was disbanded the Board of Education would still need a school building committee, but not to the same extent as the one for a consolidated school building. Discussion was held on what members would meet the needs of a school building committee based on project size.

Selectman Makuch (also SBC Chair) shared that the SBC needs direction to be effective and move forward.

Michelle Doucette Cunningham (BOE) noted that the town doesn't have a facilities manager and they needed an updated facilities study.

Katherine Viveiros (SBC) agreed an updated facilities study with the cost was the first step and reset priorities to repair the buildings.

Peter Latincsics (SBC) suggested we make use of the resources we already have available like EMCOR and Siemens as they are already in our buildings.

Selectman Makuch asked what is it that we envision that we need to improve our schools and improve the environment and be palatable to taxpayers.

Jim Marshall (SBC) – Stated the Town needed to look at what needed to be fixed and identify enhancements to the learning environment to better serve the teachers and the mission of the school. Packaged together you can find the most cost-effective projects that improve the schools and keep them long lasting. These school projects are a significant undertaking and you need a comprehensive picture to effectively plan for a long-term, strategic plan over a number of years.

Selectman Bulick shared his thoughts on including the BOF in the discussion to help in preparing a capital budget, so we know what we are working with to complete repairs.

Ann Grosjean (BOE) – Wanted to know the approximate reimbursement for repair projects and the Superintendent stated it would be very minimal.

Tracey Anderson (BOE) – Spoke in regard to how frustrating and slow the process is. We have discrepancies between the process we have to go through and the reality of how long it takes to happen.

ii. Discuss Additional Data

Superintendent Stevens stated he and Selectman Makuch reached out to UCONN School of Public Policy to discuss where we were in the process and what happened at the referendum and how to move forward. The idea was to do a survey to gather data to determine what people wanted.

Selectman Makuch stated the people they spoke with at UCONN are experts in public polling. They asked a lot of questions, and we could have them design a survey for us. They would do the work and leverage the resources they have. It means it would be unbiased because no one in Willington would be

doing it. They would run the program and there is a cost but they did not share that information with us.

P. Latinsics – Stated he strongly objects to a poll that asks people why they voted the way they did. He believes it does not sit well with the townspeople, in his opinion.

A. Grosjean – Stated the purpose would be to get a feeling of what the people want and the direction we need to move in. The survey is the best chance to hear the people. The survey is a good idea.

M. Cunningham, BOE – the Board of Education would like to collect more data in some form to hear what the people want and they will decide what is the best route to do that.

T. Anderson – Stated that we need to capitalize on the interest of the people now while they are interested to get a better direction. Social media needs to be better managed in the town because it seems to be detrimental to the SBC and what has happened in the town because people did not really know what was true information and what was not.

First Selectwoman Wicinski - Stated that doing a survey is not about asking the people why they voted the way they did, it is about asking the people where they would like to see their schools and what direction we need to go in.

iii. Recommendations

Selectman Makuch – Stated the SBC has some administrative things to do but that it is idle and needs direction from the BOE, BOS, or the townspeople. He would like to see the committee disband or be given a new charge.

Superintendent Stevens – summarized that the joint meeting discussion focused on two topics, a survey, and a facilities study.

Peter Latinsics (SBC) moved - that the SBC recommend to the BOS, that the SBC be dissolved, and a town meeting called for a new committee to be formed for repairs and renovations of the existing school facilities.

Ralph Tulis (SBC) seconded

Discussion:

R. Tulis stated he didn't feel there was anything left for the SBC to do under the current charge.

M. Makuch stated the SBC has addressed this motion already in the last two School Building Committee meetings.

K. Viveiros – Feels we need to see if the SBC could do the survey and the facilities study. Feels we need to do a little more work before we just disband the SBC because these things could help us determine what direction the SBC goes in.

Ralph Tulis – No, Peter Latinsics– Yes, Mike Makuch – No, Briana Ross – No, Chris Tilona-No, Jim Marshall – No, Ann Grosjean – No, Kathryn Viveiros- No, Justin Niderno – No

1-Yes, 8-No Motion Failed

Peter Latinsics moved the SBC to recommend that the BOS dissolve the SBC which has completed its charge.

Ralph Tulis seconded.

A discussion was held.

Ralph Tulis called the question to end the discussion.

The motion to call the question passed unanimously.

The SBC then voted on the main motion.

Ralph Tulis – Yes, Peter Latincsics– Yes, Mike Makuch – No, Briana Ross – No, Chris Tilon-No, Jim Marshall – No, Ann – No, Kathryn Viveiros- Yes, Justin – Yes

4 – Yes, 5-No Motion failed

Present to Speak

Peter Tanaka – Shared his thoughts on dissolving the SBC and that we should consider the whole town not just education.

John Blessington – Supports the SBC to be disbanded. He talked about social media, town meetings, and the referendum.

Elaine Newcomb – Spoke about misconceptions and asked what role did the current parents of the students play in all this. She asked how the path forward helps to improve student learning and performance. We need to provide an environment for the kids to thrive.

Chris Sampson – shared that communication is a problem, as well as transparency. He feels we are headed back into the weeds. He believes the SBC should be disbanded.

Nick Tella – Stated that the money that the SBC is holding needs to go back to the townspeople. He does not believe a survey will help anything.

Jen Tehan - Thanked the committee and the two boards, she stated it is easy to come in here and tell you what you are doing wrong, but you are all putting in the time and looking at the whole picture and it's a lot of work and that all of you are appreciated by the townspeople.

Thomas Phippen – Spoke about social media and that adults are making awful comments on social media and it's disrespectful.

Christina Mailhos – stated that she doesn't feel that surveys are the right way to go.

John Tehan – stated that there was not a vote on fixing the current schools. It is important to gather information and share that with townspeople so we know what the best decisions are moving forward.

Stephanie Summers – Stated that she feels that people are saying they do not want to spend a dime on the schools, which she believes is disheartening and that it's important to gather the information that we need to be able to fix the schools.

Bob Shabot – Stated that when doing things at the historical society they had professionals come in and tell us what the condition of the building is and what needs to be done. Is it free, no it's not. Just do it and get it done because that is the first step.

Adjourn

First Selectwoman Wicinski moved to adjourn the meeting at 9:49 PM.

All those in favor

16 Yes 0 No. Motion carried.

Respectfully submitted,
Karen Côté
Recording Secretary
Town of Willington