

The minutes presented within this document provide a summary of the discussion that took place at the Board of Education meeting. For the complete discussion of the agenda items, please view the video of the Board meeting on our website at www.southingtonschools.org. These minutes are considered a draft until approved at the following regular Board of Education meeting.

SOUTHINGTON BOARD OF EDUCATION

SOUTHINGTON, CONNECTICUT

REGULAR MEETING

SEPTEMBER 23, 2021

The regular meeting of the Southington Board of Education was held on Thursday, September 23, 2021, at 7:00 p.m. as a public meeting in the John Weichsel Municipal Center Public Assembly Room, 200 North Main Street, Southington, Connecticut.

1. CALL TO ORDER

Mrs. Terri Carmody, Chairperson, called the meeting to order at 7:01 p.m.

Board members present were Mr. Joseph Baczewski (Vice-Chairperson), Mr. Robert Brown, Mrs. Terri Carmody, Mrs. Missy Cipriano, Mrs. Colleen Clark (Secretary), Mr. David Derynoski, and Mr. Zaya Oshana. Absent were Mr. James Chrzanowski and Mr. David Falvo.

Cabinet administrators present were Mr. Steven Madancy, Superintendent of Schools, Mr. Frank Pepe, Assistant Superintendent, and Mrs. Jennifer Mellitt, Director of Business & Finance.

Student Representatives Jhalissa Vincent, Ethan Solury, and Angelina Micacci were absent.

2. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Mrs. Clark led in reciting of the Pledge of Allegiance.

As a point of order, Mr. Madancy announced that he received an email on the current COVID numbers from Town Manager Mark Sciota and that the town numbers were still in the red requiring masks to be worn in all Town buildings during public meetings unless attendees can appropriately distance themselves.

3. APPROVAL OF MINUTES ~ September 9, 2021

MOTION: by Mr. Baczewski, second by Mr. Derynoski:

“Move to approve the Regular Board of Education meeting minutes of August 12, 2021, as submitted.”

Motion carried unanimously by voice vote.

4. PUBLIC COMMUNICATIONS

a. Communication for Student Representatives

Mrs. Carmody stated that the student representatives had previous commitments.

b. Communications from Public

Mrs. Carmody requested that Southington residents only could approach the podium to speak and needed to complete a sign-in sheet with their name and address (*Attachment #1*). She noted that Mrs. Clark would start a 3-minute timer for each speaker.

There were six people who came to the podium and voiced their opinions about segregation, HB6423 on Immunization, requesting each Board member's position on mask mandates before the election, vaccines, masking and unmasking, no consistency throughout the state, effectiveness of masks, denial of medical exemptions and a parent's offer to buy outside furniture for a school, safety, following the science and guidance of the experts, no distancing on buses, unanswered questions, inviting the Governor and the Regional Health Director to attend a Board of Education meeting to discuss mask wearing and the appropriate type of medical mask, and parents right to choose what is right for their child(ren). Other topics of discussion were Critical Race Theory (CRT) being taught in some classrooms. LGBTQ+ ally video/discussion that should be up to the parent's discretion to teach their child(ren) and not the school district's responsibility, students should be allies to all children and not just one group. Schools should focus on teaching academics, not sexuality. Some participants yielded their 3-minutes to people already speaking so they could finish their speech.

Mrs. Clark read emails that she received that were requested to be read into the record regarding universal masking of students / staff for safety and following CDC recommendations, data not supporting masking of students and freedom of choice, vaccinations, the physical and psychological / emotional harm of wearing masks, children wearing masks to protect an unvaccinated adult, masks hindering students in speech therapy (*Attachment #2*). Mrs. Clark apologized for missing part of an email at the last Board meeting and read the missing page into the record at this meeting.

Please see the YouTube video link of the meeting and public communication below that also can be found on both the Town of Southington and Southington Board of Education websites:

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC59RScd50ReAqz-PnbXUSSQ/playlists>

c. Communications from Board Members

Mr. Baczewski addressed CRT (Critical Race Theory) and after reviewing the Civics curriculum at the high school level found nothing in the curriculum that addressed CRT. If parents know of a class where it is being taught, he requested they contact the principal / administration with the specifics so it could be addressed. He addressed the Governor's Emergency executive powers being overreaching to all school districts in the state. He did not understand why the legislative branch could not meet in person just like the Board of Education was doing. He noted that the Board was not being complacent and that he personally had contacted the Department of Public Health (DPH) and Governor Lamont's office and stated that the silence he received from the state was deafening. Under the circumstances, he thought that the school system was doing a fantastic job and that Mr. Madancy and Mr. Pepe were doing the

best with what they had to work with. Mr. Baczewski remarked that his children were excited to be attending school and enjoying it. He told the public that he heard them loud and clear but, unfortunately, there was no response to his questions at the state level.

Mrs. Cipriano stated that she agreed with Mr. Baczewski and that she also sent emails and reached out to the Governor that went unanswered. She thanked Sgt. Isaac Rodriguez, who yielded his 3-minutes to Angelica, for his service to the country. Mrs. Cipriano stated that the Board was just as concerned as the parents but could not give them answers to their questions when the Board was being ignored by the state and that their hands were tied. She wanted the parents to know that the Board members silence was not because they don't care, it was because they do not have any answers. She noted a parent questioned inconsistency throughout the state with the guidelines that had been passed and that she would contact the representatives in Hartford for an answer. She also addressed medical exemptions. She noted that some parents were afraid to voice their opinions; however, she encouraged all parents to speak out and let their views be known.

Mrs. Cipriano stated that she was the Board liaison to the STEPS (Southington Town-wide Effort to Promote Success) Coalition and reported that STEPS received grant money to hire a part-time administrative assistant and that the 2021-2022 STEPS Calendar was available. She praised the SHS Blue Knight Baseball team for rallying behind their Coach Charlie Lembo who is facing health challenges and that the team conducted a food drive to benefit Bread for Life in honor of their coach.

Mr. Brown reported that he attended a CREC (Capital Region Education Council) meeting, which Southington is a member, and that it is the governing body for the Head Start program. Head Start services 444 students in 29 towns until the age of five. He explained all the services that Head Start provides to the families.

Mrs. Carmody stressed that CRT was not part of the SHS curriculum and that if someone thinks it is, to please bring forth a specific example so administration could deal with it right away. She stressed that it needed to be repeated that Southington was not teaching Critical Race Theory and that it was not part of the curriculum. Mrs. Clark added that she could not find anything in the 9th Grade Curriculum and source documents about CRT and that the Board could not go by hearsay that it was being taught and needed specifics to address it if any teacher was overstepping. Mr. Brown explained the different teacher disciplinary levels and added that any instances should be brought to the principal who would then bring it to the attention of central office. To date, nothing has been brought to the Board level. Mrs. Carmody addressed people in the audience who were shouting questions during the meeting and explained the meeting procedures that needed to be followed. She added that the Board members were listening to the public and doing exactly what they were elected to do and found it very disheartening to listen to the criticisms after putting many hours into the job as volunteer elected officials. Mr. Baczewski noted that there was a path to follow for anyone in the public who wanted to view the curriculum. Mrs. Carmody stated that they would have to contact Mr. Pepe's Office to make an appointment to look up all the curriculum and that it was also online to view.

d. Communication from Administration

Administration reported on the following:

1. September Chamber Meeting: Mr. Madancy stated that he attended the September 15th Chamber of Commerce meeting along with Mr. Larry Covino, Adult Education Program

Director, to engage with community members and talk about potential partnerships and expanding on what already exists (internships, apprenticeships, etc.) between the public schools and business community.

2. September Rotary Meeting: Mr. Madancy reported that he attended the September Rotary meeting and spoke about civic engagement and to give an update on the vision for the school district.

3. Bristol-Southington Adult Education Co-Op: Mr. Larry Covino, Program Director of the Bristol-Southington Adult Education and President of the state-wide organization for Adult Education, gave a detailed PowerPoint presentation on the Co-Op between the Bristol and Southington Adult Education programs, which is a new collaboration this year. He discussed the collaborative program in detail and how it benefited Southington. He provided Southington Adult Education Data from 2010 and spoke at length about the state mandated adult education programs offered. He explained that the district receives grant funds from the state for mandated adult education and noted that in 2021, Southington serviced a total of 25 students and awarded four high school diplomas. Mr. Covino acknowledged the benefits and return on investment of receiving a high school diploma that helped people in obtaining careers that include benefits, etc. He noted that Southington had a waiting list for ESL (English as a Second Language) classes because they were full. He explained that in school year 2020-2021 there was programming only two nights a week, one ESL and GED Diploma Program at night, no school counselor and no daytime director or data administrator at night because they were teaching during the day. Currently, with the Bristol-Southington collaborative these areas have coverage. Mr. Covino explained in detail the 2021-2022 programming that includes Adult Education open three nights a week, Southington students having access to three high school completion programs (GED, CDP & NEDP), residents can attend Bristol's daytime programs, expanded marketing and outreach and access to federally funded programs in Bristol such as Allied Health, Family Literacy, Employability Skills including resume writing, interviewing, and career counseling. Mr. Covino explained that all the adult education programs were free.

Mr. Brown questioned how the adults in Southington would find out about these programs. Mr. Covino replied that he was working on the marketing aspect and attended the September Chamber of Commerce meeting for that purpose as well as advertising on Telemundo. Mr. Brown pointed out that Southington was working on a grant to advertise to people who need help in some way to find out about services offered and that adult education could be included in that grant. Mr. Covino noted that in Bristol he does a lot of grant writing and would be happy to help with that grant.

Mr. Madancy noted, per Mr. Derynoski, that in the future this report would be a separate agenda item under New Business and not part of the Administrative Report.

4. After Hours COVID Reporting: Mr. Madancy praised the administrators at the building level and central office administrators including Mr. Pepe, Assistant Superintendent, Mrs. Passamano, Human Resources Manager, and Mrs. O'Hara, Nurse Supervisor, who are checking a hotline and portal every evening and weekend for reported COVID cases and contacting building administrators for appropriate contact tracing. They have been on-call 7-days a week, 365 days a year since last March, which is a testament to their professionalism and dedication to the district.

5. Staff Vaccine Mandate Update: Mr. Madancy thanked the Human Resources Office for working through the processes and sending communication to the school district employees, which was a monumental task with over 1,200 employees, in a very limited amount of time given to them by the state.

Mr. Madancy requested a Moment of Silence in memory of Mrs. Mary DeCroce of SoCCA (Southington Community Cultural Arts Center), who recently passed away and was a true champion of children and the arts. She started a program at SoCCA for students with disabilities.

5. COMMITTEE REPORTS

a. Curriculum & Instruction Committee Meeting – September 15, 2021

Mr. Brown thanked the Board members, administrators, and teachers who attended the September 15 meeting. Mrs. Amy Zappone, Math and Science Coordinator presented the Grades K-5 science goals and aligning the NGSS (Next Generation Science Standards) with the Vision of a Graduate. The committee received an overview of two social studies courses: 1) Citizenship in Action Course and 2) Black and Latino Curriculum. He explained that the teaching of Civics (previously 9th grade) and U.S. History (previously 11th grade) were switched around this year. He explained that an Action Inquiry Project was embedded in the Citizenship in Action Course that allows students to investigate an issue ranging from global to community. Mrs. Cipriano added that Citizenship in Action is a one-year course on civil discourse. Mr. Baczewski thought that it was currently a good time in history for students to be studying this course especially on conservatism and liberalism and the current media madness. Mr. Brown added that another part of this curriculum was how to detect bias in a source, which is complicated to teach and essential today.

Mr. Brown acknowledged that the Curriculum & Instruction Committee meetings were public meetings that the public could attend, and an agenda is posted with the Town Clerk's Office. He noted that there copies of the curriculum could be obtained from Mr. Pepe's office.

Mr. Brown explained that the Black and Latino Curriculum was a new elective course mandated by state Public Act 19-12 in June 2019 that is a one-year course on the history of Black and Latino people in the United States, which the state required to be taught next school year; however, Southington was one-year ahead of schedule. The state provides workshops on this course for teachers to attend on their own time during the summer. Mr. Brown acknowledged that he would put Critical Race Theory (CRT) on the agenda for a topic of discussion at the next meeting. Mrs. Cipriano wanted the public to know that this was a state curriculum that teachers had to follow and was a 300-page curriculum. She spent a lot of personal hours going through every 6th grade to 12th grade curriculum over the last two months including the 300-page Black and Latino Curriculum, which is an elective. She believed that there would be topics that would fire-up different passions from different students and taught by the teachers per state requirements. She stated that the Board would discuss it in more detail. She thought it was important to note that teachers were studying and investigating this state required curriculum on their own.

6. OLD BUSINESS

a. Town Government Communications

There was no Town Government Communication.

7. NEW BUSINESS

a. Budget Assumptions and Priorities 2022-2023

MOTION: by Mr. Baczewski, second by Mr. Derynoski:

“Move to adopt the Budget Assumptions and Priorities for 2022-2023.”

Motion carried unanimously by voice vote.

- b. SHS Citizenship in Action Course – First Reading**
- c. SHS Black and Latino Curriculum – First Reading**

Mr. Madancy stated that these courses were first reads and action would be taken at the next Board meeting.

8. ADJOURNMENT

MOTION: by Mr. Derynoski, seconded by Mr. Baczewski:

“Move to adjourn.”

Motion carried unanimously by voice vote.

The meeting adjourned at 8:35 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Linda Blanchard
Recording Secretary

ATTACHMENT #1 – PUBLIC COMMUNICATIONS - SPEAKERS

Southington Board of Education
PUBLIC COMMUNICATION

	NAME	ADDRESS	TOPIC
1	Angelica Espada	550 Darling Street	Segregation
2	Jennifer Couture	181 Prospect St	yielded 3 minutes
3	ISAAC RODRIGUEZ	550 DARLING ST	ll ll ll
4	STEVEN BALSHSKI	191 Queen St Apt A12	CR
5	Colleen Dabkowski	363 Mulberry St.	yielded 3 minutes
6	Michael Kozlowski	27 Hitching Post Dr	LGBT Ally video
7	Tyler Young	48 Berkley Ave	Mask
8	Keith Ritchie	Chautauque Ter	mask
9	RANDALL HEATH	165 Kensington Rd	Mask
10	Richard Corcoran	79 Babcock Ave	green table
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ATTACHMENT #2 - PUBLIC COMMUNICATIONS - EMAILS

From: Marissa S <marissa.salvo@gmail.com>
Sent: Wednesday, September 22, 2021 9:43 AM
To: SBOE <SBOE@southingtonschools.org>
Subject: Letter in support of universal mask wearing

Good morning Superintendent Madancy, Board of Education members, and Ms. Colegrove,

Please find attached my letter of support for universal mask wearing in the Southington Public Schools for the entire 2021-2022 school year. I'd appreciate this being read into the record at tomorrow's Board of Education meeting.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,
Marissa Salvo

September 21, 2021

Dear Members of the Board of Education and Superintendent Madancy,

I know many in our community and perhaps some on this board are in support of “unmasking our kids.” How would you, as the Board of Education, feel after deciding to make masks optional in the following scenario: an elementary student in the Southington school district comes in contact with COVID-19 while in school, becomes seriously ill, requiring hospitalization in the intensive care unit and needing a ventilator to breathe, and in the worst-case scenario **dies**? What if this student was your child, grandchild, sibling, or neighbor?

With the highly infectious Delta variant circulating, removing masks indoors, as in the case with optional mask wearing, could make this scenario a reality. Just one infected person could spread the virus to an entire class, especially in an elementary school where **all children under the age of 12 are unvaccinated**. (At this time, the COVID-19 vaccine is not indicated for individuals under the age of 12.)

As the National Education Association, an organization supporting universal masking in schools, states, “**America’s public schools should be the safest place in every community.**” It is up to *you* to ensure that this holds true in Southington Public Schools!

Remember that the 2020-2021 school year proved that kids could go to school and remain safe, even during a global pandemic because of **UNIVERSAL MASKING**. When you need to make a decision on this topic, I urge you to follow the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the American Academy of Pediatrics recommendation of **universal indoor masking by all students (age 2 and older), staff, teachers, and visitors to K-12 schools, regardless of vaccination status.**

Please do what you can to **protect all children while they are in your school buildings!**

Sincerely,



From: Jillian Echard <jillian.echard@gmail.com>
Sent: Thursday, September 23, 2021 2:19 PM
To: SBOE <SBOE@southingtonschools.org>; TERRI C. CARMODY <tcarmody@southingtonschools.org>; JOSEPH BACZEWSKI <JBACZEWSKI@southingtonschools.org>; COLLEEN W. CLARK <cwclark@southingtonschools.org>; JAMES CHRZANOWSKI <JCHRZANOWSKI@southingtonschools.org>; MISSY CIPRIANO <MCIPRIANO@southingtonschools.org>; DAVID J. DERYNOSKI <dderynoski@southingtonschools.org>; ZAYA OSHANA <zoshana@southingtonschools.org>; BOB BROWN <bobbrown@southingtonschools.org>; DAVID FALVO <DFALVO@southingtonschools.org>; STEVEN MADANCY <smadancy@southingtonschools.org>
Subject: Partial Letter for Tonight

Good Afternoon,

Mrs. Clark, thank you so much for offering to read the portion of this letter, that was left out previously, at tonight's meeting. No need to read the entire letter again obviously, just the portion noted below. Since it sounds disjointed, if you wouldn't mind just mentioning that it is part of a previous letter that was mistakenly omitted, I'd appreciate it.

Thank you very much for your attention to this.

Jillian Echard

I have heard the argument that, yes, children aren't being affected by this virus that much, but they can still spread it to an adult who hasn't been vaccinated. With all due respect, that unvaccinated adult has made it their choice to not be vaccinated. Why, then, is it my child's responsibility, our children's burden, to wear a mask to protect them? Let me make my opinion on this clear: It is not my child's responsibility to protect an unvaccinated adult.

I have heard people say "it's the parents complaining, not the kids", but I know firsthand that not to be true. I kept a positive attitude in front of my children, not complaining or voicing my opinions, for fear they'd just emulate my behavior. But at the end of the school year, with no provocation, my children started to complain that the masks were harder to breathe in. Perhaps it was because their school lacks air conditioning, and this was a result of the rising temperatures in the building. And I have heard countless other parents speak to this as well.

At the beginning of last school year, my sister (also in the Southington School district) asked if my niece, who had just started kindergarten, could benefit from speech therapy. The teacher honestly said that she didn't know, because it's very hard for her to hear what her students are saying with the masks on. After testing occurred, she overwhelmingly qualified for services. However, through a year of speech therapy with both my niece and her therapist in masks, not a single gain was made in any area of concern. These are these children's formative years, and they're being hindered due to these mask policies. Are we really willing to have our children in masks for another school year where their teachers struggle to hear their little, developing voices?

Recently studies have emerged that U.S. elementary school students ended this school year 4-5 months behind where they should have been. No doubt because time and time again, it has been proven that children this age do not learn the way they were made to learn last year. They need interaction, and groups, and play. They need to be heard by their teachers.

A friend's son's teacher, in the Southington school district, with a background in psychology, noted during their parent teacher conference that the masks are affecting our children's ability to empathize, and learn basic social cues. Interested, I then researched this, and found published peer review papers to this point. If we can't tell if someone is sad, or hurt, or angry, how do we know to stop the actions causing these feelings? Masks are impacting our children's emotional development.

From: Jenna Giacomi <jennagiacom@yahoo.com>
Sent: Friday, September 3, 2021 3:24 PM
To: JOSEPH BACZEWSKI <JBACZEWSKI@southingtonschools.org>; BOB BROWN <bobbrown@southingtonschools.org>; TERRI C. CARMODY <tcarmody@southingtonschools.org>; JAMES CHRZANOWSKI <JCHRZANOWSKI@southingtonschools.org>; MISSY CIPRIANO <MCIPRIANO@southingtonschools.org>; COLLEEN W. CLARK <cwclark@southingtonschools.org>; DAVID J. DERYNOSKI <dderynoski@southingtonschools.org>; DAVID FALVO <DFALVO@southingtonschools.org>; ZAYA OSHANA <zoshana@southingtonschools.org>
Subject: Unmask Our Kids- To be read into BOE Record 9/9/2021

Hello,

Today I am writing to you in hopes that you have a better understanding as to why there *should not* be a mask mandate for children enrolled at Southington Public Schools.

I am aware that Governor Lamont's executive orders are in effect until 9/30/2021, but I want to continue to push for the freedom to choose whether our children wear masks in Southington Public Schools.

Currently it seems that everyone is concerned about increased hospitalizations among young children testing positive with COVID-19. If you only watch the news, you would be led to believe that children are the driving force for the increase in hospitalizations, however, data straight from the CDC indicates otherwise.

The CDC website has a "New Admissions of Patients with confirmed COVID-19 per 100,000 Population by Age Group, Connecticut."

Specifically looking at CT, the data shows that children between the ages of 0-17 have a total of 1 hospital admission for the last 7 day from 8/26/2021-9/1/2021.

Additionally, as of 9/1/2021, the data shows that children in CT between ages 0-17 make up 0.12 of the population for New Admission per 100,000 population. Whereas, ages 70+ still make up the majority of 3.09.

The CDC also continues to state that most children with COVID-19 have mild or they have no symptoms at all. It also appears they continue to be the lowest risk for severe disease and death.

As a State we have surpassed many others in regards to vaccination efforts. CT has managed to fully vaccinate 66% of its population, with over 88% of individuals over 55+, who are considered high risk.

Not that I want to downplay anyone's experience or hospitalization with COVID-19, but the data just doesn't support these universal restrictions on our CT children. I believe we should leave it up to each individual parent/ guardian whether or not mask our children in school and be respectful to each other's choices.

Thank you for your time.
-Jenna Giacomi

My address to be read in the record is 51 Arrowhead Lane, Plantsville