

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 on the video recording of the Board meeting, please contact the Superintendent of Schools. These minutes are considered a draft until approved at the following regular Board of Education meeting.

SOUTHINGTON BOARD OF EDUCATION

SOUTHINGTON, CONNECTICUT

SPECIAL MEETING

SEPTEMBER 3, 2020

The special meeting of the Southington Board of Education was held on Thursday, September 3, 2020, at 7:00 p.m. in the John Weichsel Municipal Center Public Assembly Room, 200 Main Street, Southington.

1. CALL TO ORDER

Mrs. Terri Carmody, Chairperson, called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

Board members present were Mr. Joseph Baczewski, Mr. Robert Brown, Mrs. Terri Carmody, Mrs. Missy Cipriano, Mrs. Colleen Clark, Mr. David Derynoski, Mr. David Falvo, and Mr. Zaya Oshana. Absent was Mr. James Chrzanowski.

Administrators present were Mr. Timothy Connellan, Superintendent of Schools; Mr. Steven Madancy, Assistant Superintendent; and Mrs. Sherri DiNello, Director of Business & Finance.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE & MOMENT OF SILENCE

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

Mrs. Carmody called for a moment of silence in memory of Mrs. Frieda Madancy, mother of Assistant Superintendent Steven Madancy, who passed away on July 30, 2020.

Mrs. Carmody understood that people had different opinions on the opening of the schools, and that everyone was entitled to their opinion. She visited Southington High School to see what was being done to prepare for school reopening. She was very impressed with all the precautions that have been put into place. The Southington Public Schools administrators, maintenance staff, school nurses, central office state, food service employees, and secretaries had worked many hours in planning to make certain that the students and staff had a safe health environment. Mistakes would be made and corrected, and that no one could guarantee 100% safety. She noted that it was important to concentrate on the emotional well-being of everyone and stressed that they were all in this together. Mrs. Carmody asked that everyone to be patient and give it their best. She quoted Albert Einstein, "*Learn from yesterday, live for today, and hope for tomorrow.*"

The past week, Mr. Oshana visited Kennedy Middle School and Oshana Elementary School unannounced on a Professional Development Day. He noted that Kennedy Middle School looked clean, very well laid out with rooms set-up and teachers were wearing masks. He noted the same thing at Oshana School with the teacher prepping their classrooms and getting materials ready for students. He was impressed with desk spacing and the markings on the floor. The message that he took away from both schools was safety first. With the Covid-19 virus turning everything upside down, all school employees were working hard all summer focusing on creating the best education experience possible for the students under the circumstances. It forced administrators, teachers, and staff to reinvent the way they interact and educate the students. He thought that everyone should be thankful for their commitment and that people should have an open mind instead of just throwing stones and being negative. If people see something that could be done better, then they should give suggestions on a solution instead of critiquing the problem.

Mrs. Clark visited South End and Hatton Elementary Schools because of complaints that she heard and read on social media. She saw enthusiasm and anxiety because all the school employees want to make this school year as normal as they can for the students. She was happy to see how well everyone was adapting to what is the new normal. She agreed with Mrs. Carmody and Mr. Oshana that there would be bumps in the road because no one has the answers to every question that is out there right now. Mrs. Clark read a letter that Mrs. Jillian Echard, Kelley Elementary School parent, asked to be read into the record advocating for in-school learning for the youngest learners (*Attachment #1*).

2. FINANCIAL UPDATE

Mrs. DiNello spoke at length about the Covid-19 Return Recovery Plan that included a revenue summary and funding sources (*Attachment #2*). The district was approved for the ESSER (Cares Funds) of \$412,653 that the district used to purchase one-to-one (1:1) devices in June 2020. For the 2020-2021 school year, the Board of Finance established a Non-lapsing Account for the Board of Education for the remaining balance from the 2019-2020 school year with the two-percent (2%) threshold is just over \$1.9 million that would be available to utilize for the safe re-opening of schools. At the BOE meeting on August 13, she shared that the district participated in several surveys through OPM (Office of Policy & Management) and the State Department of Education and anticipated additional grant funds. On August 21, administration received the announcement that the district was approved for \$401,000. A week later, administration received a letter from Kathy Dempsey, CFO at the State Board of Education, stating that there was an error in the transportation calculations throughout the state of Connecticut and they re-ran the numbers, which changed the grant funds to Southington to \$546,076. This amount would be paid out on a reimbursement basis. It is not an outright grant that the Board could determine how to spend the funds. Mrs. DiNello gave a breakdown to the BOE of the Coronavirus Relief Funds being funded by the survey that included Personal Protection Equipment (PPE) \$16,617, personnel related to transportation of \$108,023, and non-personnel transportation of \$421,436, which totaled the \$546,076 available through December 31, 2020. The non-personnel transportation funds were when they submitted the survey results and they were looking at the mid-day bus runs at SHS for just over \$500,000. The district would not be running the mid-day SHS bus run; therefore, as of right now, they were not necessarily eligible for the \$421,436 that the state was going to give the district as a reimbursement. Mrs. DiNello stated that she was pushing for better clarification on that because the thought process

that the district was running all their bus runs even though they were doing the Hybrid Model at SHS. They would be running all the buses to have the appropriate social distancing to occur and receiving the refund towards the overall transportation costs would allow them to reallocate funds within the budget to help pay for personnel that is needed. None of the district's personnel requests were funded because the free and reduced lunch population fell under the 40% threshold. The \$108,023 that the state approved for transportation related expenses for personnel would be able to assist administration with the monitors and additional time for paraeducators to help with the arrival and dismissal of students. Mrs. DiNello was troubled by the \$16,617 for PPE because many of her colleagues across the state told her that PPE was the most important thing that was going to be funded and many districts were funded in full. She realized in conversations that Southington was funded at the minimum of \$2.60 per student. Mrs. DiNello called the state and spoke to Kathy Dempsey who acknowledged that Southington's PPE request was not considered. Prior to the start of tonight's meeting, Ms. Dempsey emailed Mrs. DiNello stating that the PPE would be funded and that she will send a formal letter on Friday. The PPE amount was \$310,000 and of that amount the state was only funding the \$16,617. Mrs. DiNello noted that the additional funding was not reflected in her draft 2020-2021 COVID-19 Recovery Plan.

Mrs. DiNello spoke at length on the Expenditure Summary that included staffing (custodians, nurses, food service staff, bus monitors for two weeks, and additional time for paraeducators), benefits, purchased services (technology, transportation, professional development training) and supplies/furniture (masks, shields, gloves, gowns, sanitizer, wipes, cleaning supplies, signs and furniture/signs), which currently total \$1,664,175 of the \$2.5 million revenue funds. There were still unknowns and funds to be spent on things not even thought about at this point in time until school starts.

Mr. Brown questioned if the estimated numbers were for the whole year. Mrs. DiNello replied that they were. Mr. Derynoski thanked Mrs. DiNello for the detailed information. Mr. Baczewski requested clarification on eligibility for the \$421,436 transportation reimbursement and if some of it could potentially be transferred to the PPE request for \$310,000. He asked if the model would change if once the school year started and the remote learning students wanted to attend school in-person. Mr. Connellan explained that there were approximately 430 students at the elementary level who would be engaging in remote learning and, with the exception of kindergarten, it was structured based on the number of people needed based on the BOE recommended class sizes, which is where the number of teachers came from. The teachers would stay with those students throughout the course of the year. Mr. Connellan did not think that they would have 430 remote learning students re-engaged into the in-person classrooms. He did not foresee a change in the number of custodians or nurses over time. If classes were cancelled as in March, they would have the ability to look at the interim employees that were hired; it is all unpredictable. He did not foresee that there would be a significant reduction on the personnel side.

Mr. Oshana noted that even if they did not get the \$421,436 in transportation, they would still be at \$2.4 million, which was much better than where they were at the last Board meeting. Mrs. Carmody thought that the community should be extremely proud of the work that everyone associated with the school system had done. She thought that once school started, they should concentrate on the emotional, as well as the academic, well-being of everyone involved.

Mr. Brown noted that it sounded like the Board had extra money, but they do not know what would happen once school started and should have a buffer because of the unknowns. Mr. Derynoski requested an agenda item to report on the opening of schools at the regular Board of Education meeting on September 10, 2020.

Mr. Connellan pointed out the way the state handled the distribution of the funds based on the survey, which was for administration to estimate costs in July 2020, two weeks after receiving the guidelines from the state. The Connecticut Superintendents did not know that the survey was going to be a funding stream mechanism and were very unhappy on how it was handled with a lot of inequities in the whole process. The Superintendents Association requested that Governor Lamont and the Commissioner of Education put a moratorium on distributing the funds until it could be looked at further.

Mrs. Carmody stated that she heard wonderful things about the professional development for teachers learning the new Canvas Learning Management Platform software and noted that the teachers were nervous too. She asked everyone to remember that they were all in these uncertain times together.

3. SCHOOL REOPENING PLAN UPDATE

Mr. Madancy gave an update on the School Reopening Plan and professional development. He gave credit to the coordinators, teachers, administrators, and sub-committee chairs who volunteered to serve on the Professional Development Evaluation Committee.

Last week, his office sent to the Board members four (4) Addendums to be added to the 2.0 School Reopening Plan regarding special education, food services, healthcare and monitoring, cleaning, and disinfecting. Once central office receives the guidance needed from the State Department of Education and State Department of Public Health (DPH), which is on a continuous basis, the addendums are sent. To the families, they may feel that they are receiving information sporadically, but that is how administration is receiving it from the state, which the district relies on to make informed decisions for staff and students.

Mr. Madancy and Mr. Connellan frequently attend the Department of Public Health (DPH) meetings that are very detailed such as how to use playscapes, UV rays, transition methods, social distancing, etc. Mr. Madancy stated that in one week, the district must open a virtual school, staff it, get a curriculum learning platform, distribute devices, create schedules, communicate with families, and make everyone feel welcome and safe. Administration was interviewing late into the night to onboard staff and honoring all the statutes and laws, which is not a quick turnaround with references, fingerprinting, background check, and drug testing and training existing and new staff for remote learning classes. In addition, the orientation plan for remote learners focuses around getting devices deployed, the emotional piece for students, teachers meet and greet for the remote learners, materials and supplies picked up, the consumables, and virtual open house. Mr. Madancy announced that Ms. Kelly Nichols had been designated as the administrator overseeing the remote learning school of 430 students. She would be overseeing the instruction, coordination, and communication with the remote learner's faculty and as the point person for remote learning families.

Mr. Madancy reported that the teacher professional development had been on software applications. The teachers did a tremendous job on their virtual and physical classrooms. In the spring, Mrs. Rebecca Savelkoul, Instructional Technology Coordinator, and a team of teachers called the “Techsperts” worked with teachers to provide technical support and training, which makes Southington ahead of other districts in terms of preparedness with technology. They are working on training materials for families in order to navigate the learning management systems of Canvas and Remote Classroom that would be sent shortly. Mr. Madancy met with the Early Childhood Collaborative and noted that their webpage had set up all the childcare openings. He had conversations with existing staff regarding making remote learning a meaningful and quality experience and noted that it would be a work in progress.

Mr. Madancy spoke about lessons learned in the spring about live instruction and screen time. Schedules would be developed that are developmentally appropriate and would have a balance of screen time and screen breaks. It would not be just digital and would be hands on learning also. A lesson learned from the spring was that the district was not one-to-one (1:1) with devices and many families had to share. There was a learning curve at that time because much of the responsibility was thrust on parents, especially when a student had a question. More live instruction by teachers was needed so they could answer student questions in real time. Administration will be clearer with families on the expectations for remote learning. There will be a virtual orientation for the remote learning families and teachers. Administration was trying to keep students and their home schools together with remote learning teachers from the home school. Central office was doing all that they could to have everything ready for the opening of school.

Mr. Derynoski questioned grading for the remote learners. Mr. Madancy replied that all the recommendations and guidance around grading was to have a traditional grading system that had always been used. How they grade and assess remotely would be a different conversation that he was currently working on with administrators about demonstration and application of knowledge and not rote recall.

Mr. Brown questioned if there were still parents and students who had not responded to the survey whether they are doing in-person or remote learning. Mr. Madancy explained that the schools reached out to all their families that did not reply. A problem was that families change their mind for remote learning and opting back into in-person learning, which causes a ripple effect to rearrange rooms, cohorts, and hiring a teacher, if needed. At some point soon, there will need to be a transition period implemented because of the health and safety protocols established for the in-person classrooms that would need to be maintained.

Mr. Falvo questioned if there was a device for every child in the district because at the last Board meeting devices were still on back order. Mr. Madancy explained that currently, as a community, they have devices. He noted that 65% of families on the survey indicated that they had a device for a student. He acknowledged that 35% of families that stated a child did not have a device were the first to receive one. They are following up with families now who indicated the device was a desktop that would not be a mobile device. Eventually, all the devices will be on the network with all the software installed for a seamless integration.

Mrs. DiNello reminded parents to complete a 2020-2021 Free and Reduced Meal Application to see if they are eligible for free or reduced meals. The school district will be going

cashless and an email was sent to encourage families to put money on their child(ren)'s MyPaymentPlus Account or they could bring in a check that the food service cashier could put onto their account. Locations would be set-up at both Kennedy and DePaolo Middle Schools from 9:00-10:00 a.m. every morning for families who have remote learning students or hybrid model high school students, who might not be in school, to have the ability to pick-up meals for breakfast and lunch. This is not the same as in the spring of 2020 when the meals were free. The meals would be free only for those students eligible for free meals. Times and locations could change based on participation.

Mr. Baczewski questioned if they were operating from Center for Disease Control (CDC) guidelines or Connecticut Department of Public Health recommendations. Mr. Connellan replied that they were using a combination of CDC and American Academy of Pediatrics guidelines. Mr. Baczewski asked if there were any changes to physical distancing and mitigation. Mr. Connellan replied that they tried to keep to the six feet (6 ft.) apart distancing and that the minimum guideline was three feet (3 ft.) apart. He noted that DPH just sent out guidelines regarding face covering/mask wearing. They are continuing to impress upon people to use the suite of mitigation strategies (hygiene, distancing, ventilation, cleaning, and disinfecting) with the importance of mask wearing.

Mr. Derynoski questioned if a motion was needed to authorize the expenditures for the \$1.6 million that was listed on the Return Recovery Plan. Mrs. DiNello explained that at the last Board meeting the Board members gave the administration the flexibility to spend up to \$1.9 for a safe reopening of schools and this was under that amount.

Mr. Connellan addressed working collaboratively with the SEA (Southington Education Association) on a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) and they were in favor of making a one-year adjustment for long-term substitute teachers in order to do the remote learning school.

4. ADJOURNMENT

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

“Move to adjourn.”

Motion carried unanimously by voice vote.

The meeting adjourned at 8:05 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Linda Blanchard
Recording Secretary

Attachment #1**From:** Jillian Echard <jillian.echard@gmail.com>**Date:** August 27, 2020 at 4:18:27 PM EDT**To:** TIMOTHY CONNELLAN <tconnellan@southingtonschools.org>, STEVEN MADANCY <smadancy@southingtonschools.org>, SBOE <SBOE@southingtonschools.org>**Subject:** Letter to be read at next Board of Education Meeting

CAUTION: This message has originated from an External Source. Please use proper judgment and caution when opening attachments, clicking links, or responding to this email.

Good Afternoon,

I am writing for this letter to be read into record at the beginning of the next Board of Education meeting, which I was told would be September 3rd, 2020. I would like to be there in person but understanding that the 25-person restriction on gatherings might impede in person public comment. Please contact me with any concerns or questions, thank you very much.

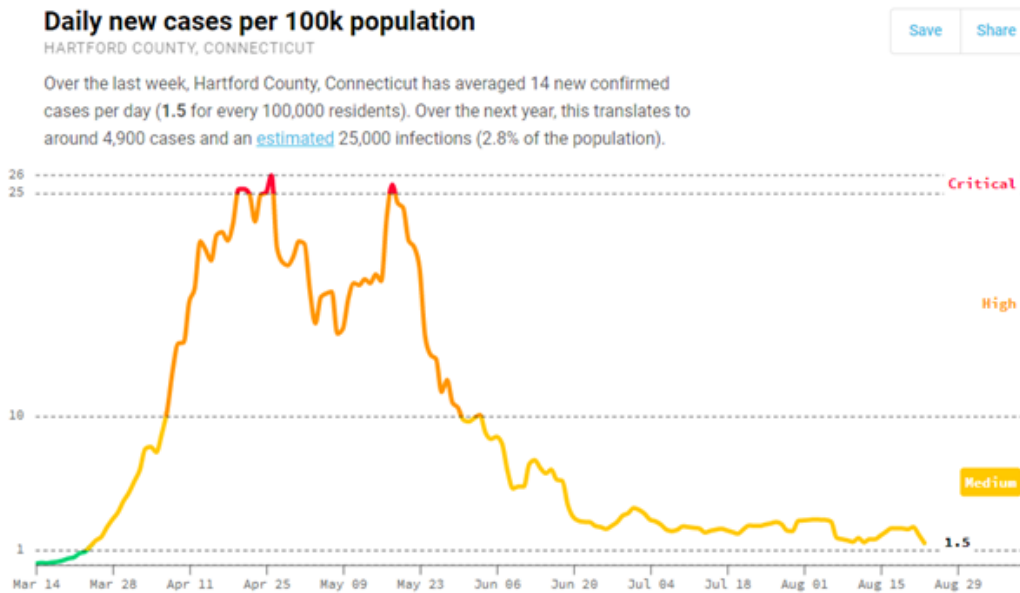
Jillian Echard

Good Evening Mr. Connellan, Mr. Madancy, and Board of Education Members,

My name is Jillian Echard. I have been a resident of Southington since 2004. I have two children in the Urbin T. Kelley school district. My daughter, Audra, will be entering the second grade, and my son, Andrew, will be starting his educational journey in Kindergarten. I am writing to you today to stress the importance of in school learning for our youngest learners. I very much appreciate all of the effort that was put forth by the reopening committee, and not wavering from starting the school year with full in person learning for those who chose to send their children. I thank you for listening to our government, our epidemiologists, and our pediatricians, who all believe that in person learning is essential for our children's wellbeing, both academically and mentally, especially at the younger levels.

I hope that as the school year starts, we continue to look at the science and metrics as leading indicators when and if we decide to potentially switch from in person to hybrid, or full distance models. I hope that we do not make decisions out of fear on what is happening in other countries, states, or even other counties. If the switch is not scientifically warranted, I would implore you to think of the mental impact switching educational plans would have on our children before making that decision.

Our county currently has a 7-day rolling average of new COVID-19 cases per 100,000 per day of 1.5 cases. We have been plateaued at or around this level for almost two months now. All of our secondary indicators are also extremely low, and again have plateaued at a low indicator risk category for well over a month. Medical experts have advised our government that the switch to hybrid learning should not happen unless the new COVID-19 cases per 100,000 per day exceeds 10. I implore you to follow those guidelines. I would also hope that we take the theory behind the cohorting to heart, and that an isolated case in one school, or even one classroom, will not impact the in-school learning of others.



We actively participated in distance learning this past spring. To say it was hard on my daughter would be an understatement. She was not given any direct instruction. Instead, I was given curriculum that I was not equipped to adequately disseminate. This caused her to doubt herself academically, which had a severe impact on her mental health. Despite efforts by her school psychologist and teacher, it was not uncommon several days a week for her to have meltdowns lasting hours. In speaking with many other parents, I know I am not alone in this.

I have been told that distance learning will be more synchronous this year, but I wonder how effective that will be for young children. I'd like you to think how long a child that age not only can but should be sitting in front of a computer screen. And how effective would that learning be? Or would it instead be detrimental to their lifelong love of learning, causing irreversible damage to developing psyches.

My husband and I both work full time and are unable to work from home. I am considered an essential employee, as a Forensic Scientist at the state's Division of Scientific Services. I am also considered, per my commissioner, a first responder, and therefore am exempt from the Families First Corona Virus Response Act. Myself, like many others who are unable to work from home, or are unable take leave at reduced pay, would be forced, in a hybrid plan (or full distance for that matter) to scrounge for whatever limited daycare is available, doubling my children's exposure (and subsequently the rest of their cohorts) to other children and adults.

Southington is a large town, but it has a small-town feel, and with that rumors spread. Everyone seems to know "someone" who has heard "something" from "someone" on the Board of Education, the reopening committee, and higher ups in administration, up to and including the Superintendent. The ones that have reached me recently through friends and family include that "we probably won't even be in school in three weeks" and "we'll be lucky if we last a month before everything gets shut down". It's so disheartening to hear these words coming from people given such great responsibility, which seem to be based in fear instead of based on actual numbers. At our Kelley School PTO meeting this week, the PTO approved for \$6,000 dollars to be spent on 3 outdoor tents, so that the children can be in class outside, \$500 dollars to be spent

on lanyards for the children's masks, and almost one thousand dollars for individual cohort recess supplies. With all this time, effort, and money going into bringing the students back to school, deciding to close schools, again, should not be a decision made likely, or based on fear.

As each sector of our economy has opened in several phases in Connecticut, there was a sense of fear and uncertainty as we moved forward. Yet, with each step, our numbers have continued to decline, to some of the best in the nation. I understand the nervousness of the teachers and administration. As everyone was sheltering in their houses in the spring, I was going to work every day, not knowing what I was being exposed to, or what I would bring home to my family. Then slowly, as almost all types of business have opened, appropriate safety protocols have been put in place that have allowed for our society and economy to return to a place where it is functioning. Now with the school year upon us, it is the turn of the educators to put those safety precautions into place, and resume their own essential, and immensely important role in our society.

Thank you very much for your time,

Jillian Echard

ATTACHMENT #2
DRAFT – COVID-19 RETURN RECOVERY PLAN