

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

REGULAR MEETING

SEPTEMBER 10, 2020

The regular meeting of the Southington Board of Education (Committee of the Whole – Operations) was held on Thursday, September 10, 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. Colleen Clark, Mr. David Derynoski, and Mr. Zaya Oshana.

Absent were Mr. James Chrzanowski, Mrs. Missy Cipriano, and Mr. David Falvo.

Administrators present were Mr. Timothy Connellan, Superintendent of Schools; Mrs. Sherri DiNello, Director of Business & Finance; and Ms. Rebecca Cavallaro, Director of Pupil Personnel Services.

Student Representatives present were Miss Amrit Kaur and Mr. Brett Sheldrick.

Mrs. Carmody explained that after the last two Board meetings she received criticism for allowing a Board member to not wear a mask while in attendance. She explained that as chairperson, she did not have the authority to mandate enforcement of Governor Lamont's Executive Order. Personally, she believed that a Board member had the responsibility to set an example since the Board was requiring the students and staff to wear masks. Mrs. Carmody agreed with others that it was a safety measure. She made this statement to publicly clarify her viewpoint to the people who contacted her and the other Board members through email and telephone calls on this matter.

2. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Student Representatives led in reciting of the Pledge of Allegiance.

3. APPROVAL OF MINUTES – August 13, 2020 – Regular Meeting

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

“Move to approve the regular Board of Education minutes of August 13, 2020, as submitted.”

Motion carried unanimously by voice vote.

4. APPROVAL OF MINUTES – September 3, 2020 – Special Meeting

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

“Move to approve the special Board of Education minutes of September 3, 2020, as submitted.”

Motion carried unanimously by voice vote.

5. PUBLIC COMMUNICATION

a. Communications from Public

There was no communication from the public.

b. Communications from Board Members

The Board members reported the following:

- Mr. Baczewski stated that it was exciting to have the students back in school and that his children were happy to be back and to see their friends. He read a prepared statement into the record due to the criticism that Mrs. Carmody spoke about because he did not wear a mask (Attachment #1). He explained in the statement that he was following the Governor’s Executive Order regarding mask wearing.
- Mr. Brown reported that on Tuesday he visited the high school and middle schools. He explained that he had made earlier statements about delaying in-person school for several reasons. However, because the administrators and staff worked very hard to prepare and open school as safely as possible, he hoped that they could all move forward together. He noted that there would be glitches and bumps in the road but asked for everyone to make it work and move forward instead of criticizing and tearing down what was being done. The educators from the top down had worked hard, considered every possibility in order to be prepared. Suggestions are always welcome and should be made in the spirit of moving forward to making this work academically, socially, and emotionally. He thanked all school employees for their dedication and doing their best to educate Southington students. He was very impressed when he visited the schools.
 - Mr. Brown stated that he wore a mask because he believed the Board’s role was to set a positive example for teachers and students. Every legitimate medical and scientific source that he read stated that the number one way for individuals to prevent potentially separating COVID to others was by wearing a mask. He understood that by wearing a mask it prevented him from possibly spreading COVID to others rather than to protect himself because not everyone who carries COVID displays symptoms. His wife has health issues and has a compromised immune system. It would probably kill her if he came into contact with COVID and brought it home to his wife. They do not live in fear but live cautiously.

c. Communication from Administration

Administration reported on the following:

1. Pupil Personnel Services Director: Mr. Connellan formally introduced the new Director of Pupil Personnel Services, Ms. Rebecca Cavallaro, who thanked the Board for the opportunity to be a part of the Southington Public Schools and looked forward to being a part of the community.

2. Seamless Summer Meal Options: Mrs. DiNello announced that as of Wednesday, September 16, 2020, all meals for all students would be free. The USDA (United States Department of Agriculture) extended their “Seamless Summer Option”, which is the waiver that was received in the spring when the school district began to serve the “Grab N’ Go” to all individuals. This program is now expanded through December 31, 2020 or until the funding runs out. The Food Service Department is in the process of gearing up for what they hope would be a very large increase in participation in the food service program. A press release would be sent out on Friday, September 11, 2020 and communication to all parents would be sent regarding this option for every single individual 18 years old and under (whether they are enrolled in Southington Public Schools or preschool-age) they could participate in the free, remote “Grab N’ Go” pickup. The remote “Grab N’ Go” pickup would be able to serve the remote distance learners, hybrid high school students and preschool population. The news arrived after administration had already encouraged parents to set-up MyPaymentPlus Accounts and put money on their child(ren) accounts. The district would still sell items such as snacks and ice cream. Students would be able to use those funds to purchase these additional food items. Regardless of income, students would be fed breakfast and lunch for free.

Mr. Brown assumed that there would be an increase in the number of students who would want a free lunch and questioned the need for additional staff. Mrs. DiNello explained that it would be a per meal fee that the district receives back as a reimbursement.

3. School Opening Observations: Mr. Connellan reported that the universal feeling between the administrators, teachers, and students that he spoke to was that it was wonderful to be back in school. He thanked everyone for all their hard work. Numerous staff members worked very hard and every time they received a recommendation from the state for a modification or adjustment, employees made them without question. Custodial and maintenance staff did amazing work providing for the students’ safety. Mr. Connellan noted that he was lobbied by the elementary administrators for the orientation days to become a permanent part of the school calendar. It had been a different school reopening than in the past, but it went well. He thanked the Board members for their support.

Mrs. Clark questioned how the new elementary school Remote Learning Academy was working. Mr. Connellan stated that he met with Mrs. Kelly Nichols, Remote Learning Academy Coordinator; Mrs. Stephanie Lawlor, Coordinator of Language Arts; and Mrs. Amy Zappone, Math Coordinator, and they had dedicated a tremendous amount of time to organize the Remote Learning Academy. They provided professional development (curricular and technology-based) for staff. At the last moment, there was a staffing issue when teachers decided they did not want to participate in the Remote Learning Academy, and they had to back fill with Learning Specialists filling the gaps. The Learning Specialists are very experienced teachers. Device pick-up for elementary remote learners was at the high school on Tuesday. There was a “Meet n’ Greet” at DePaolo Middle School for the over 400 remote learners to meet their remote teachers and receive needed materials. On Friday, September 11, 2020, in the morning, there would be Virtual Open Houses via Zoom. The K-Grade 1 Virtual Open House was scheduled for 9:00 a.m.; Grades 2-3 at 10:00 a.m.; and Grades 4-5 at 11:00 a.m. Adjustments to remote

learning to make it better would continue to be made, as needed, because there was no perfect plan anywhere. Mr. Connellan explained that there was not one school district in the state of Connecticut that was not experiencing some technology-related issues. Southington was doing their best to deal with that and were using a support company, ADNET, to help with the stability of the network. The school district technology team were putting in a tremendous amount of time to get everything up and running. Over the Labor Day weekend, Mr. Connellan, the technology team, and employees from ADNET unboxed, affixed asset tags, coded, and set-up approximately 370 laptops so students would have them for the start of school. There are three levels of Technology Help Desks on the school district website for high school, middle schools and elementary school technology support with remote learners receiving priority. The technology piece of learning was something that they could practice before implementing on such a large scale because they have not had students in school since March 13, 2020. There would be some “lumps and bumps” with technology that would be addressed with teachers providing contingency plans for remote learners who cannot access their remote learning class with their device on any given day. Mrs. Clark reported that there was a CABA (Connecticut Association of Boards of Education) meeting with Board members from all over the state and everyone who spoke indicated that technology was the struggle for their school district.

Mr. Oshana noted the stress on the Internet now was causing crashes because of many people working at home and now with some students learning remotely. He asked parents not to throw stones, to come up with suggestions and to be positive because the teachers, staff and administrators were creating a system that was never there before. It was like “building an airplane while flying.” He noted that the state was constantly making changes and that it was smart of administration to not put out the final Learning Plan until the last minute because the numerous daily changes would have caused confusion. He congratulated administration for a job well done.

Mr. Derynoski agreed that everyone should be congratulated for a job well done because information that he received from parents and staff members was about communication being right on target, even though they might not like what was communicated. He recommended that communication from administration continues between staff and parents. Mr. Connellan agreed that communication was important and that they would be using a new software application called, “Parent Square”. Right now, communication has been through “School Messenger.” Parent Square would allow administration to communicate more effectively and quickly. A parent could choose to receive the communication in whatever language that they wanted. However, the Parent Square application was not currently up and running.

c. Communications from Student Board Representatives

Miss Amrit Kaur reported on the following:

- She was happy to back to serve another year on the Board of Education.
- She explained that the new student representative, Miss Jhalissa Vincent, was not able to attend the meeting in-person but was watching the Board meeting online.
- She and Brett Sheldrick attended the Freshmen Orientation as SHS mentors and gave tours. Miss Kaur noted that it was a shock to them when they first entered SHS because of the layout and having to follow arrows and the changed staircases. There was some confusion when giving the tours because the staircase could be used only to go upstairs and not downstairs or vice versa.

- She spoke to Miss Vincent, who is a remote learner and had some technology issues that was to be expected without any test practice.
- Her first day of in-person classes went well and there were some remote learners who attended classes online. Most of the teachers talked and covered in-class learning information until the bell rang.

Mr. Brett Sheldrick reported the following:

- He gave six tours for the Freshmen Orientation on Tuesday and he noted the anxiety of the freshmen. He addressed the maps in the hallways, arrows on the floor, and arrows on staircases that he found overwhelming at first. He also was confused of where he was going on some of the tours.
- He explained that besides everyone happy to be back in school, he noticed the patience and mutual feelings of understanding between teachers and students on the first day of school. There was a calmness. Mr. Brown stated that what he was hearing was of the compassion by everyone because they were all in the same boat together. He thought that it was a good start to the school year.
- Brett was very happy with the Canvas application because he liked that it was one page where everything was condensed and could be easily viewed. He was happy to have all his classes moved to Canvas.

6. SUPERINTENDENT’S REPORT

a. Personnel Report

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

“Move to approve the Personnel Report, as submitted.”

Motion carried unanimously by voice vote.

7. OLD BUSINESS

a. Town Government Communications

There was no Town Government Communication.

b. Update – School Reopening

Mr. Connellan stated that he had nothing else to add and that he addressed this under the Administrative Report on the agenda.

c. Award of RFP 2020-109 Replacement of High School Auditorium Lighting System

Mr. Oshana explained that this agenda item was discussed at the last regular Board of Education meeting and tabled.

MOTION: by Mr. Oshana, seconded by Mrs. Clark:

“Move to award RFP 2020-109 Replacement of High School Auditorium Lighting System to Supertech, Inc. in the amount of \$241,777.

Mr. Derynoski questioned if the Board was still in the same positive monetary position as reported at the special Board of Education meeting held last Thursday. Mrs. DiNello replied that there was limited change to the report that she gave on September 3, 2020. Mr. Oshana explained that this was replacing the original lighting system at the high school and that it was a safety issue because it was falling apart. There were academic events held in the auditorium that were credit courses. Mrs. Clark questioned if students were currently using the auditorium. Mr. Connellan replied that it was being used for music classes. Mr. Derynoski felt comfortable with expending the funds because they did their due diligence making sure they were financially in a good position to move forward with this expense. It was something that needed to be done for many years. Mr. Baczewski noted that he was vocal about awarding the bid at last Board meeting and thought it made sense now to award the bid because they were using the space for curriculum. He questioned where the Board was with finances with the reopening of schools. Mrs. DiNello explained that nothing had changed since the last meeting and that they were under the \$1.9 million that the Board had given the administration the authority to spend in addition to receiving more grant funds. She reminded the Board that this expenditure was coming from the non-lapsing account from the closeout of the 2019-2020 school year. Where the funds are currently located was a place that administration did not have access to for reopening of school or the operating budget.

ROLL CALL VOTE: YES – Mr. Baczewski, Mr. Brown, Mrs. Clark, Mr. Derynoski, Mr. Oshana, Mrs. Carmody. **Motion carried unanimously.**

8. NEW BUSINESS

a. Ratification of the NIPSEU – Southington Clerical & Food Service Workers Union Contract

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

“Move to approve the tentative agreement between the NIPSEU – Southington Clerical & Food Service Workers Union and the Southington Board of Education.”

Motion carried unanimously by voice vote.

Mr. Derynoski noted that a very nice job was done on the high school parking lot. He was not sure who designed it, but he saw a problem when the area needed to be plowed in the winter because of the two peninsulas in the middle of the parking lot. In the snowplowing contract there was a caveat that the plow company was responsible for any curb damage. He could not see how anybody could plow that area without hitting the curb. Mr. Connellan explained that the parking lot was designed inhouse by the Town Engineering Department. He will ask why the peninsulas were included in the design. Mr. Derynoski thought that they looked nice but were not functional for water drainage and plowing.

9. ADJOURNMENT

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

“Move to adjourn.”

Motion carried unanimously by voice vote.

The meeting adjourned at 7:55 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Linda Blanchard

Recording Secretary

Attachment #1

From Mr. Joseph Baczewski, Vice Chair of the Board of Education

It always seems that we are to follow a path of least resistance. To blindly accommodate others at the expense of staying true to ourselves. I sit here, at this moment, a board member. But my character is made up of being a husband, a dad, a nurse, a small business owner, and the list goes on. I do my best, every day to be kind, concerned, helpful, dependable, and above all, a role model to my children. I am responding to those of you who have accused me of not being a role model.

During the end of 2019 and into the beginning of 2020, we started talking more about “this new virus.” That there were concerns that it could potentially be more deadly than what we have seen before. As the year was underway, we began to shut down our society. Large swathes of the work force went home to work, our teachers were faced with the challenge of trying to engage our youngsters through an electronic device, and the life that we had grown accustomed to had become a skeleton in order to flatten a curve. I was not afforded such an opportunity. For me [as a nurse], it was different.

Our healthcare workers speculate that we had been taking care of patients with this new virus since January. Our healthcare system was on high alert and ready, but not sure what to expect. We began seeing patients that had COVID. Some did well, others did not. The CDC changed their minds multiple times during these 6 months about the proper care for those patients. Some of them adversely caused more issues, others helped tremendously. I constantly had to don and doff PPE [Personal Protective Equipment] before walking into patient rooms. Even with PPE, I caught the virus. I had to deal with the fact that local and national news assumed that this infection was a death sentence. So now I was sick, at home with my family, trying to figure out what the next step is. All that kept going through my head was the news reports. The patients that I had taken care of and how sick they were. The thought that this would end my story. Days began to pass, I started to feel better. I focused on taking care of myself. In just about 2 weeks, I felt better and went back to work. I continued to see patients and the evolution of how we took care of them. Fast forward to the present, Connecticut went from being ravaged by this virus to having the lowest infection rates in the country. Metrics were set to begin the process of coming back to life, and then would change in the eleventh hour. More metrics were set, consultants were hired, we would hit metrics and choose not to follow them because of “the risk” of another wave that may or may not come. Perhaps we helped to save people, but I can tell you, from my own experience, that there were other demons that came with it. Depression, suicides, people avoiding hospitals for medical treatment, isolation, abuse, and other unforeseen issues. We need to keep pressing on from the shutdown, to pick up these pieces.

I am choosing to follow the governor’s executive order. I wear my mask only when I NEED to. I wear my mask into this [Municipal] building because I like to talk with people. I take it off when I am seated and spaced appropriately from others. If I need to get up or when I leave, I put my mask back on. Why do I do this? Because I want to model the behavior I expect from our students in this town. To follow rules that have arguably helped us make a comeback. To model where we NEED to be rather than any other form of a “new normal.” Having been hard of hearing as a child and relying on seeing mouths move, being a nurse and having to read nonverbal cues that can help me better take care of patients and help others is why it is important to me. I model the behavior I want to see. I also model my expectations of respect (even when you disagree), Dependability, and Kindness (something that seems to be in short supply as of late). We have missed out on a lot

of time with our students, my kids seeing their friends and being able to socialize with them as they continue to learn and grow. Distance learning was not a good fit for my family. I am invested in the success of our 2020-2021 school year. I follow the rules that Mr. Connellan and our administration has set forth when I visit schools, and will continue to follow the governor's order while taking part in public meetings like this to model where we need to be. I would suggest to those that are upset with me, reach out directly next time. Here is to a new school year of perseverance!