

*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 24, 2020**

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The regular meeting of the Southington Board of Education (Committee of the Whole – Operations) was held on Thursday, September 24, 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 7:02 p.m.

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

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

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

#### **2. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

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

#### **3. APPROVAL OF MINUTES – September 10, 2020 – Regular Meeting**

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

**“Move to approve the regular Board of Education minutes of September 10, 2020, as submitted.”**

**Motion carried by voice vote with Mr. Chrzanowski abstaining.**

#### **4. 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. Falvo announced that, as a Latino representative in Southington, it was Hispanic Heritage Month and a time to reflect on the influence and achievements of Hispanic Americans. He noted that many Southington Public School students identify as Hispanic/Latino. Mr. Falvo planned to work with administration and educators to bring in speakers and activities to educate and offer Hispanic cultural experiences for all students next year. He addressed this as part of social justice, equity, and unity in the Southington schools.
- Mr. Brown congratulated Kara Sievel, 2020 Southington District Teacher of the Year and Southington Middle School Teacher of the Year; Stacy Ferrett, 2020 Southington High School Teacher of the Year; Kathleen Wagner, 2020 Southington Elementary School Teacher of the Year; and Jill Chapman, Timothy Johnson, Judith Sokoloff for 30 years of service to the Southington Public Schools, and all retirees. He was disappointed that the Board could not celebrate these people in person. Some of the honorees expressed reluctance to attend the Board meeting because of doubts about safety precautions that Board members would take to protect them, such as wearing masks. Mr. Brown hoped that someday the Board could celebrate these people in person.
- Mr. Brown visited South End and Oshana Elementary Schools and was impressed by staff and students. Except for social distancing and wearing of masks, everyone was happy to be in the elementary schools. He thought that Southington's approach to return to school full-time for middle and elementary school students was the best decision compared to some other towns. He noted that it was more challenging at the high school with the hybrid model.
- Mrs. Carmody stated that she was working with administration for eventually holding a Celebration of Excellence for the honorees mentioned by Mr. Brown.
- Mrs. Cipriano visited the schools and made it a point to thank every school employee for all that they did for a successful reopening of schools.
- Mrs. Cipriano stated that she was the Board representative for STEPS [Southington Town-wide Effort to Promote Success] and explained that they were moving forward with their initiatives. She announced that Mr. Mark Pooler [YMCA Executive Director] was the new STEPS President for this year. STEPS went fully online for training with their Asset Building program. She explained that four years ago, STEPS applied for and received a patent for their "Liquor Stickers" held by Yak Industries LLC. These stickers are sold to help families keep their liquor cabinets safe with the Liquor Sticker Seal affixed over the top of the bottle.
- As Assistant Director of Bread for Life, Mrs. Cipriano recognized two Southington students who donated their fundraising proceeds to the Bread for Life: Emily Blum, who made masks, raised over \$800, and Avery Morgan, who sold fresh, gluten-free, homemade cookies raised over \$900.

#### **c. Communication from Administration**

Administration reported on the following:

1. Parking Lot - SHS: Mr. Connellan gave a follow-up to Mr. Derynoski's question at the last Board meeting about the parking lot at Southington High School. The peninsulas/islands in the parking lot were in the zoning regulations and needed to be there per the Town Engineering Department.

2. Food Service – Meal Pick-up: Mrs. DiNello gave an update on the Summer Seamless Option with all the food service meals free. They found that 9:00 a.m. was not a convenient time for the high school and remote learners to pick up meals. As of Monday, September 21, the time was changed to pick up meals at DePaolo Middle School from 5:00 p.m.-6:00 p.m., which was very successful. Friday, September 18 was just for one day and they served 196 meals. The evening distribution now is on Monday, Wednesday and Friday and they are handing out two days' worth of meals. When they began on Monday, they handed out 664 meals and on Wednesday 760 meals. On Friday evening, they will be handing out three meals for Saturday, Sunday, and Monday.

3. General Feedback on School Opening: Mr. Connellan reported that there was a lot of positive feedback received from staff and parents. It had been a positive experience for many people.

4. SPS Coalition for Social Justice COVID Community Support Network: Mr. Madancy reported on the project that was started in the spring of 2020 regarding equity and access for families during the pandemic. The primary goal of the coalition was to promote diversity, equity (access) and inclusion. He pointed out that some families with needs were too proud to ask for help and were unknown to administration. Some families thought that their needs might be misconstrued as abuse or neglect or there might be documentation issues, so they do not come forward with their needs. The coalition was trying to create a Community Support Network with clergy, social services, various town agencies, etc. where families would feel comfortable to go for help. These networks would work with the school district to provide for the needs of these families. To support this, the district was pursuing grants through the Community Foundation of Greater New Britain and other groups to help these families. Many times, people do not know where to turn to for help. The objective of the Community Support Network is for the school district to support these families behind the scenes.

### **c. Communications from Student Board Representatives**

Miss Jhalissa Vincent introduced herself as the new student representative serving on the Board and that she was a junior at the high school. The Board members welcomed her.

Mr. Brett Sheldrick reported the following:

- The students did not attend the high school for three days because of the first confirmed case of COVID-19 at the school. He found the closing fluid going right from in-person to remote learning. Now that all resources and assignments are online, it was a smooth transition and with the one-to-one (1:1) device ratio, it made it easier to go online.
- Financial Aid Night is scheduled for October 1, 2020. It is very informative on financial resources that are available to students for attending college.
- Many students were taking advantage of the Free Breakfast and Lunch program.

Miss Amrit Kaur reported on the following:

- She liked switching to remote learning because the teachers were able to focus on one group at a time and not doing two things at once.

Miss Jhalissa Vincent reported on the following:

- She was a full-time remote learner and does not go into the high school for classes. She thought it was going well.

Mr. Brown noted that he logs into many Zoom meetings and that last week he was thrown off a couple of the meetings because of the Internet going down. He questioned if it was an issue for the students. Brett Sheldrick acknowledged that there were two incidents where students could not get on Google Meets because the servers were down.

Mr. Oshana questioned the reaction of the students when they learned that they were going to remote learning because of the COVID issue. Amrit Kaur did not think that the students were phased by it because they knew that it would be a possibility and were waiting for it to happen. She received some questions such as why the whole school closed because of just one student testing positive for COVID, or why the schools opened again after a couple of short days. Students were ready to attend school whether in school or online.

Mrs. Cipriano encouraged the student representatives to be the leaders for the underclassmen and tell them to stay focused, go with the flow, and be ready.

## 5. COMMITTEE REPORTS

### a. Finance Committee Meeting – September 17, 2020

Mr. Oshana reported that the committee reviewed the one-year lease for space used by the STELLAR program at Abby Park that expires in October 2020 and reviewed a three (3) year lease extension. The committee requested that Mrs. DiNello follow-up with Florian Properties with a counteroffer to lock in the monthly rent at \$3,500 for three years for rent and utilities. The property owner was not interested in the counteroffer. Mrs. DiNello explained that last year, the lease language included the utilities and the school district was supposed to be billed for them; however, Florian Properties waived those charges all last year and did not pass them on to the school district. In the lease extension, Florian Properties wants to charge a flat fee of \$600 per month for all utilities including heat, air conditioning, water, sewer, trash, etc. In addition, the current monthly lease amount increased \$90. There would be an add-on of the Consumer Price Index (CPI-U) for each year.

#### 1. Abby Park, Inc. – Three (3) Year Lease Extension

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

**“Move to approve the three-year lease extension for Florian Properties at Abby Park, Inc.”**

Mr. Derynoski questioned the square footage that the STELLAR program utilizes at the site, the cost per square foot because they only use the space for 10-months, why 14 students would need so much space, and for the total cost of the program. Mrs. DiNello will provide that

information to him. She explained that it was a transition program for special education students and that students were learning different skills such as cooking, how to do laundry, one room was a make-shift bedroom for students to learn how to make a bed and learn essential living functions to be able to be on their own. There was also a classroom setting.

Mr. Madancy explained that because of the configuration of the program, all 14 students were not learning the same program at the same time and rotated amongst the various spaces for the different life skills that they were being taught. They occupy the entire second floor of the building consisting of six rooms. Mr. Connellan added that the district would be paying Florian Properties approximately \$49,400 annually and for outplaced transition services the district would pay that amount just for one (1) student. The STELLAR program was a savings for the district. The program was for students up to age 21 with disabilities and is in the heart of downtown where students could walk to some of their jobs such as the YMCA, library, restaurants, etc. These students would otherwise be outplaced, and the district would be purchasing services because very few districts have their own program like Southington, which is a model for other districts.

**Motion carried by voice vote with seven in favor and Mr. Derynoski abstaining.**

Mr. Oshana reported that Mrs. Jennifer Mellitt, Accounting Manager, gave an update on the Food Service Program and that in May of 2020 the Food Service Program was running at a significant loss and may need financial assistance from the Board to keep operating. It was a self-sustaining program up until the pandemic. For fiscal year ending June 30, 2020, the income statement showed a loss of (-\$337,000). The program received a Seamless Summer Option to cover the free meals during the shutdown and some federal funds were received for the food, but the staff still needed to be paid. Mr. Oshana stated that after Mrs. Mellitt reviewed the balance sheet, the final cash balance nets to less than \$250,000. The committee agreed that the program needed a cash influx to meet payroll and food expenses to stay afloat and would like to make a loan payment to the program out of the Non-Lapsing Account of an estimated \$200,000. This request would be brought forward at the October 8th Board of Education meeting. Mrs. DiNello added that the Food Service Program would not receive the federal reimbursements until November, which would leave the Food Service Program September and October overhead and expenses in need of funding.

Mrs. DiNello thought that there was misinformation in the community about the School Lunch program free meals. Some people felt that if their children participated, they are taking advantage of a program that they do not need because they could afford to pay. However, the school district's ability to sell the meal has now been taken away. The district needs to take advantage of the funding for this program and increase the participation to cover the overhead, or instead of using federal funds to sustain the program, it would be the local tax dollars needed to inject into this program to subsidize it. Families would help keep the Food Service Program sustainable because the district is required to serve meals every day to in-person, hybrid, and remote learner students.

Mr. Oshana reported that the next Town Board of Finance meeting was scheduled for October 14, 2020 and the funding of the \$1.9 million Non-lapsing Account was on the agenda. No action was needed by the Board at this time.

**6. OLD BUSINESS****a. Town Government Communications**

There was no Town Government Communication.

**b. Update – School Reopening**

The Board spoke at length regarding the closing of the high school for three (3) days due to one individual testing positive to the COVID-19 virus. They discussed the different Cohorts (A & B), 14-day quarantining, contact tracing, following the Center of Disease Control (CDC), Department of Public Health (DPH) and the local Regional Health Department guidelines/protocols, masks, physical/social distancing, testing out of quarantine, students from bad home situations needing to attend school for refuge, and the health and safety of all students and staff.

Mr. Baczewski stated that he received some feedback from parents and staff regarding the different Cohorts A & B and that if one cohort had a positive COVID individual, then the other cohort should still be able to attend school. He was concerned about the number of people who were quarantined from this event that included 400 students and 10 staff members who had to quarantine. Mr. Baczewski questioned the threshold for requiring a quarantine because the information from the website and cross-referencing with CDC stated it was within six feet (6'), mask or no mask, and 15 minutes of exposure.

Mr. Connellan stated that quarantines were not required, they were recommended from the CDC, DPH, and the local health department. They cannot force someone to quarantine. The local Health Director had quarantine powers that he needed to go to court to receive. The recommendation was for people to self-quarantine for safety purposes. Every school district and every incident are completely different. Mr. Connellan explained that he and another administrator met with the Health Director, Nursing Supervisor, and Human Resource Manager, to determine the facts of the situation. It was driven by contact tracing, first and foremost. Contact tracing is the responsibility of the local health department in conjunction with school districts because they have the information about where staff members and students are and how and where they interacted. This group asks questions, puts all the information together, and the decision comes out of that group. There is not a single threshold or magic number. Every situation is different.

Mr. Connellan acknowledged that administration had received complaints about quarantining also; but he and the Health Director would always err on the side of health and safety for students and not take a chance. It is very complex, especially at the high school. There was not any way to tell when a student sitting in a cafeteria, where everyone is sitting unmasked, if they stayed only in one place and six feet away from someone. It is not easy. All they can do is follow all the recommendations and all the strategies for contact tracing to keep everybody safe. The next time, the situation might be different.

Mr. Baczewski thought that the purpose of contact tracing was if someone was within a certain distance, wearing a mask or not wearing a mask, for 15 minutes or more than it was considered a primary contact. He understood that at the high school they carefully set-up a plan.

He assumed that a certain protocol was followed in the cafeteria to get the students through the lunch line to minimize the mixing of students. He questioned if they encourage students to sit back in their seat or if they get up and mingle.

Mr. Connellan stated that the purpose of contact tracing did not have anything to do with the definition of a close contact. The definition of a close contact was “within six feet for 15 minutes or more”. The purpose of contact tracing was to contain the potential spread of the virus for health and safety reasons, which always comes first.

Mr. Baczewski’s concern was that 400 students were possibly exposed and if quarantining was “optional” then they should be able to return to school if they wanted. Mr. Connellan responded that they could not return to school. Mr. Baczewski remarked that it was not “optional” then. Mr. Connellan explained that Mr. Baczewski was mixing things. He explained that a recommendation for self-quarantine was a recommendation for self-quarantine. Quarantine involves someone being isolated, staying in their house, and staying away from other people. Because someone has been recommended for self-quarantine, the recommendations, and guidelines from CDC, DPH, and local public health department state that an individual cannot test out of that; therefore, the individual is not allowed back into school. Administration cannot control whether someone stays in their house; but they can prevent someone from going back into school and endangering someone else. It is not the Southington Public Schools guidelines, it is the guidelines from the CDC, DPH and local health department, which the school district was following.

Mr. Connellan explained that all that information has been out in the public for months, but it does not become personal to anyone until it happens to them. Quarantining, self-quarantine, each situation is going to be different and administration will respond appropriately. It is about keeping students and staff members safe. Mr. Baczewski agreed that maintaining health and safety of people was important; however, he noted that the restaurants were open downtown and there was inconsistency all over. Mr. Connellan explained that restaurants had nothing to do with what they were doing with the schools. Mr. Baczewski stated that it was all the same environment that they were living in Southington and there were inconsistencies.

Mrs. Carmody reiterated that the school district was following the guidelines set by the CDC and local Health Director for students, not restaurants, and stated that Mr. Baczewski was not comparing oranges to oranges. She had a grandchild who received a notice to quarantine. The Board was following the guidelines from the CDC and Health Director on what makes the children safe. Mr. Baczewski remarked that some students have bad situations at home and go to school to get out of the house and that he was upset with the inconsistencies because one individual is making recommendations for what was being done.

Mr. Oshana acknowledged that there were a lot of different opinions on this subject and noted that there was consistency from the documents that he had read. The school district is different from restaurants and trying to keep the children safe. The safety protocols are coming from the CDC and local Health Director, not one person, someone had to be the point person on making these decisions, which was the Health Director. Mr. Baczewski was not advocating for anything other than to be able to look at situations with consistency. He pointed out that the Board’s concern was the health and safety of students who happen to be the least affected by the COVID-19 virus. He was trying to provide some insight after talking with some parents, staff

and students. He noted that the pandemic had created turmoil in some families and going to school was a refuge. He questioned if they could do better with the contact tracing so 400 students were not quarantined.

Mr. Oshana pointed out that the recent data was showing that children are the fastest rising people getting the virus and could be spreaders. Mr. Derynoski stated that the Board was not in the position to make decisions because it must be made by the experts in the field. They can talk about it and discuss it but there was nothing that the Board should take the authority to change. Mrs. Carmody agreed that it was something that the Board of Education had nothing whatsoever to say about and that it was up to the administration, CDC guidelines and local Health Director. The Board was following the policy and guidelines for the health and well-being of the students.

Mr. Baczewski questioned oversight. Mrs. Carmody asked the student representatives for their input. They replied that while at the high school, students follow the rules; however, once they are off school grounds it was different, masks come off.

Mrs. Cipriano questioned if there was something in writing about not being able to test out of a quarantine when a student tests negative but still could not return to school. Mr. Connellan stated that it was included in the guidelines, which has been published for quite some time and clearly indicates the quarantine is for 14-days. It is straight from the CDC and DPH guidelines.

Mr. Chrzanowski questioned the technical issues with Google and outages that had impacted remote learning. Mr. Connellan explained that outages were happening all over the state because Google was having a variety of issues due to every school district trying to utilize the same services. The district works through CEN (Connecticut Education Network), which is where service is from and the district is also receiving services from another company to help keep the network stable. Mr. Chrzanowski questioned if there was a service level agreement with Google that the district was paying for their services. Mr. Madancy replied that there was a contract through Google Enterprise. Google does not provide the network for Internet service; they were a platform. Sometimes there were software compatibility issues with the firewall that was part of the statewide issues that districts were having. He would not attribute outages completely to Google because it could be the local Internet provider, the district network or software compatibility issues. Mr. Connellan pointed out that there had been denial of service attacks throughout the state that were short-lived, but disruptive.

Mr. Falvo questioned how secure the Google Meets links were because he knows of an incident where he teaches where students were sharing the links on Twitter and then disrupt the Google Meet class. Mr. Connellan clarified that all Southington students have a Southington domain email address and cannot login from a personal email.

Mr. Oshana questioned if there would be a snow day this year because of the ability of remote learning. Mr. Connellan explained that he spoke to the Commissioner Education and the state was working on that topic. The issue would be attendance and accountability. The school district must be able to have all student's login, have attendance taken, and move forward with the lesson. However, the district was not in that position yet because all the Chromebooks had not arrived, so Southington was not fully a one-to-one (1:1) district at this time. The topic at the



state was also about equity and access. Mr. Connellan stated that when Southington receives the complete shipment of Chromebooks and was a one-to-one district then they would be in the position to pivot to remote learning on inclement days.

## 7. NEW BUSINESS

- a. **Ratification of the AFSCME – Nurses Union, Local 1303-140 of Council #4 Contract, 2020-2024**

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

**“Move to approve the tentative agreement between the AFSCME – Nurses Union, Local 1303-140 of Council #4 and the Southington Board of Education.”**

Mr. Derynoski thought the motion should read the approving of the agreement, not the tentative agreement.

Mr. Oshana agreed to amend the motion, seconded by Mrs. Cipriano.

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

**“Move to approve the agreement between the AFSCME – Nurses Union, Local 1303-140 of Council #4 and the Southington Board of Education.”**

**Motion carried unanimously by voice vote.**

## 8. ADJOURNMENT

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

**“Move to adjourn.”**

**Motion carried unanimously by voice vote.**

The meeting adjourned at 8:22 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,  
*Linda Blanchard*  
Recording Secretary