

**TOWN OF SIMSBURY
BOARD OF EDUCATION**

Record of Proceedings

Special Meeting

September 22, 2020

Ms. Susan Salina called the special meeting to order at 6:34 p.m. in the Simsbury High School auditorium.

Roll Call:

Members present: Mmes. Susan Salina, Tara Willerup, Lydia Tedone, Jen Batchelar and Sharon Thomas. Messrs. Todd Burrick, Jeff Tindall and Brian Watson.

Also present: Superintendent Matt Curtis, Assistant Superintendent Erin Murray, Assistant Superintendent Sue Homrok-Lemke, Director of Personnel Neil Sullivan, Director of Finance Amy Meriwether, BOE Student Representatives Katherine Bonnell and Shannon Zeilman, and Recording Secretary Katie Wilde.

PUBLIC AUDIENCE

Ms. Batchelar read a letter submitted for public comment requesting an extension of the hybrid model for grades 3-6. The letter was signed by 47 families.

Michael Hunter, 14 Fawnbrook Lane, spoke as a school district employee and parent. He urged the board to move forward with the next phase of the hybrid plan as distance learning does not reach students in the best way.

BOARD AND ADMINISTRATIVE COMMUNICATIONS

Ms. Willerup reported on the Curriculum Committee meeting where new textbooks were discussed as well as the role of the Capstone Coordinator. Ms. Tedone reported on activities of the NSBA, and her presentation relative to the Passion Project.

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

A. Approval of Minutes of September 8, 2020 Meeting

Ms. Willerup: MOVE to approve the minutes of the September 8, 2020 meeting.

Mr. Tindall: Seconded. So moved.

B. Personnel

Ms. Tedone: MOVE that the Board of Education accept the resignation of Alden Paye effective October 8, 2020.

Ms. Batchelar: Seconded. So moved.

INFORMATION AND REPORTS

A. School Opening Update

Mr. Curtis stated that the administration will report on the strategies and progress the district is making based on the four guiding principles for reopening school. He

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stated the focus of tonight's presentation is contract tracing and our relationship with the Farmington Valley Health District, and distance learning at the secondary level. Mr. Curtis reviewed the most recent public health data markers. The 7 day average is 2.4 cases; this number will lower to 1.4 in next week's data set.

Mr. Sullivan reviewed the hybrid model to full in-person transition. He stated that grade 3-6 teachers are looking forward to the full return of their students. Mr. Sullivan discussed the plans in place and going forward at HJMS. The middle school administration has been excellent with their use of outside space and thoughtful about their use of teams. They have plans in place to enable the return of full in-person learning on October 13.

Mr. Sullivan discussed the inherent challenges at SHS with a full in-person return. The size of the facility, student class schedules, the need to move larger classes to larger spaces, and tweaking lunch procedures all need to be addressed before the high school can open in full. At this point in time, only smaller high schools are making plans to open in full. Mr. Sullivan briefly reviewed the transition timeframes for neighboring communities. Mr. Curtis noted that Mondays will remain remote learning at the secondary level in order for teachers to continue to support distance learners.

Ms. Lemke reviewed the contact tracing process in schools that is performed in close conjunction with then Farmington Valley Health District (FVHD). Information provided by parents, teachers, administrators and paraprofessionals is used to determine close contacts. Close contacts are defined as those within 6 feet of the person who tested positive for greater than 15 minutes up to 48 hours prior to symptom onset or test date.

Ms. Lemke provided some contact tracing scenarios for schools. She noted that the FVHD also reaches out to close contacts of confirmed cases. The FVHD and the school district have partnered to develop positive case protocols, communication, confirmation of contact tracing information, and ongoing updates.

Ms. Salina asked if parents are continuing to utilize the absence line. Ms. Lemke responded that parents still call in and provide details on their child's absence. Follow-up phone calls are made if necessary.

Ms. Murray addressed distance learning at the secondary level. She stated that 100 HJMS students and 185 SHS students are logging into the classroom. The district is committed to engaging all students in high quality, engaging instruction. Ms. Murray noted that we made a huge change in the use of technology over the last 6 months, which has caused a learning curve for our teachers. We continue to involve our teachers in ongoing professional learning opportunities.

Ms. Murray stated that due to the huge change in how we are utilizing technology, we have experienced some significant interruptions in the delivery of our instruction. Our technicians are working diligently to address the issues and we continue to provide learning opportunities on technology for teachers. Webcams and microphones have been installed in all of the classrooms at SHS and HJMS. We have purchased 100 PC towers as replacements, in order to increase processing speed, as this has been causing our biggest issue with video. Ms. Murray noted the need to ensure we are providing an equitable opportunity for all students.

Ms. Murray stated that Monday afternoons are utilized for secondary teachers to connect with their distance learning students. This also provides time for school counselors and psychologists to connect with students.

Ms. Batchelar asked if the number of home schooled students has increased this year. Ms. Murray responded that the number has doubled.

Shannon Zeilman, BOE Student Representative, stated that the technical difficulties have made it harder to stay engaged when students are not in school. Katherine Bonnell, BOE Student Representative, noted that everyone is following health and safety protocols when they are in school.

Ms. Batchelar stated that the technology issues seem to be getting better. She asked how teachers know if distance learning students are having issues. Ms. Murray responded that during students' connections with school counselors they can determine what is working and what is not working. Sending a survey has also been discussed. Ms. Salina pointed out that when the school district virtualized, as a cost savings measure, we didn't anticipate the current level of technological need as being a factor in the decision.

B. Year End Results

Ms. Meriwether reviewed general fund balances. She stated that at the close of the 2019-20 fiscal year the BOE ended with a surplus of \$266,308.32. The Board of Finance approved the request to move these funds to the non-lapsing account. In the General Control line item there is a budget deficit of \$43,688.71 due to 3 staff retirements during the year that overlapped with the onboarding of new staff members. There were also additional expenditures for individuals taking on responsibilities of the Business Manager during his leave.

Ms. Meriwether noted that there was a budget savings in the Instruction line item due to staff savings with the appointment of the SHS principal and staff transition which amounts to \$100,000 in savings. The Food Services account has a deficit due to the impact of COVID. \$100,000 was transferred from the general fund to this account. The Out of District Tuition account has a budget deficit of \$371,316 due to an increase in special education students outplaced receiving higher value services.

Ms. Meriwether reviewed the Food Services Profit and Loss statement. The USDA requirement that we continue our food service program, at no cost to families resulted in a significant loss in 2020. Without the transfer of \$100,000 into this account we would not have been able to meet our financial obligations. Ms. Meriwether noted that at this time last year, the food service account sold 16,224 meals. This year that number is 2,509 meals. The increase in minimum wage is also a factor for this account. Ms. Meriwether stated that the fund balance in this account needs to be built up. The Food Services Director is looking into changing the menu in order to save money. The account will be revisited in November, but needs to be a focus item during the budget process. This information will be brought to the Board of Finance at their next meeting so they are aware of the situation.

Ms. Meriwether provided an update on COVID related expenses. There has been an increase of \$100,000 in expenditures since the last BOE meeting. Some of this is

Year End
Results

<p>attributed to our expenditures to resolve the technology issues. The personnel costs for 5 teachers are included, but this number will be updated with our October 1 numbers. In fiscal year 2021 COVID expenditures equal \$922,864. We have received two rounds of State Cares Act funding, we had some left over capital money, and the \$260,000 in savings from last year result in an offset of approximately \$700,000. This leaves a deficit of \$221,000 which will be funded by the non-lapsing account. The non-lapsing account has a remaining balance of \$163,000.</p> <p>C. Review of Face Mask Policy</p> <p>Mr. Sullivan stated that the state is now requiring that Boards of Education have a formal policy relative to face masks in schools. He reviewed the proposed policy and accompanying regulations. The policy will be placed on the next board agenda for approval.</p> <p><u>PUBLIC AUDIENCE</u> None</p> <p><u>ADJOURNMENT</u> Ms. Willerup: MOVE to adjourn the meeting at 8:01 p.m.</p> <p>Ms. Batchelar: Seconded. So moved.</p> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; margin-top: 20px;"> <div style="width: 45%;"> <hr style="border: 0; border-top: 1px solid black; margin-bottom: 5px;"/> Jennifer Batchelar Secretary </div> <div style="width: 45%;"> <hr style="border: 0; border-top: 1px solid black; margin-bottom: 5px;"/> Katie Wilde Recording Secretary </div> </div>	<p>Face Mask Policy</p> <p>Public Audience</p> <p>Adjournment</p>
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