

STONINGTON BOARD OF EDUCATION SPECIAL MEETING March 27, 2014

Frank Todisco, Chairman, called the meeting to order at 7:02 p.m. in the Stonington High School Commons. Members present were Deborah Downie, Secretary, Faith Leitner, Alisa Morrison, Craig Esposito, Alexa Garvey, and Terry Stefanski.

Also present were Dr. Van Riley, Superintendent of Schools, Ana de Oliveira, Recording Secretary, members of the staff, and interested citizens.

Frank Todisco opened the meeting with a short summary of what impacts the district will feel with the BOF budget cuts.

Comments from Citizens

Gretchen Noonan thanked the Board and administration for their work on the budget presentation to the Board of Finance. Mrs. Noonan commented on the affects that the cuts would have on the students and staff in Stonington.

Steven Smith commended the Board and administration for the budget and asked the community to contact the state to stop the unfunded mandates. Mr. Smith also noted that the community needs to let the town know that the town can do better for the students of Stonington in regards to education.

Sue Jones commented on the great attendance at the meeting, commended, and thanked the Board for their work. Mrs. Jones advised the community that parents need to be present at the hearing on April 10. Mrs. Jones noted that she would be willing to pay to participate in extracurricular activities before seeing teachers cut and believes transportation to alternative schools and schools of choice needs to be looked at again.

Tim O'Brien spoke on schools of choice and their means of funding.

Rob Marseglia asked that the Board supply a list of items that may be cut so the community can address these items with the BOF on April 10.

Kevin Bornstein commented on the budget cuts and suggested the Board focus on things that only certified staff can do and use volunteers for other non-certified duties when looking at budget cuts. Mr. Bornstein talked about information that would be helpful to justify the number of certified staff and administrators needed for student progress while noting that the fundamental mission is education, which cannot be further impacted.

Jennifer Middleton said, "Hats off" to all educators and their commitment to the students. Ms. Middleton spoke on links between physical activity and learning. Ms. Middleton noted that she would rather see other items kept in the budget and eliminate the AP courses, and asked for better notification of special Board meetings.

Harriett Statchen spoke on the budget process and how un-democratic the process of the budget approval currently is and the possibility of changing the charter to correct the process. Ms. Statchen also asked what would happen if we say no to the BOF on proposed budget cuts.

Grace Murray commented on her willingness to pay more in taxes to provide every child in this town with an education and feels that the BOF needs to hear this from parents.

Sarah Lewandowski thanked the Board for standing up to the BOF and feels if we continue the fight eventually we can win.

Bruce Yarnall commented on how the members of the BOF are elected, changing the charter, and asked that the community get friends and neighbors out on April 10. Mr. Yarnall commended the BOE for their work on the budget.

2014-2015 Calendar – Spring Break Issue

Dr. Van Riley explained the issue of spring break for the 2014-15 school year calendar, which currently is scheduled for April 6-10. Dr. Riley recommended that spring break be changed to the week of April 13-17, which would coincide with LEARN's regional calendar and most area school districts.

The following motion was made by Alisa Morrison and seconded by Faith Leitner:

Motion 1: To change the spring break on the 2014-2015 School Calendar to the week of April 13-17, 2015.

Aye: All

Approval of Mark Friese to Principal of Stonington High School

Van asked the Board to the approved the appointment of Mark Friese to the principal position.

The following motion was made by Faith Leitner and seconded by Alisa Morrison:

Motion 2: To approve the appointment of Mark Friese to the position of Principal of Stonington High School.

All: Aye

Budget Update

Frank Todisco gave an update on the budget and noted the only change was to the health insurance account, which came in \$138,000 lower than originally estimated.

Proposed Cuts to Comply with BOF Mandated Reduction

Dr. Van Riley reviewed and distributed a document of his budget recommendation to the Board of Education, which included a list of reductions to meet the BOF mandated cuts. (See attached) Dr. Riley noted that the Board has asked the Board of Finance and Board of Selectmen to meet and discuss the budget but they declined that request. Dr. Riley explained that the BOF needs to look at long-term affects with a 1% increase for the next five years. Dr. Riley presented solutions that would not raise taxes and still provide for our schools and town and asked that the community talk to the BOF and share these solutions.

The Board discussed the items on Dr. Riley's recommended list of reductions, in particular, Mandarin. The Board and Dr. Riley will look at other options for those students enrolled in this course and share these options with parents. Frank Todisco told the Board there needs to be a consensus on which items will make up the mandated reductions of \$524, 900. The Board agreed they do not want to cut any item on the list but came to a consensus that to keep the list of items recommended and put forward by Dr. Riley.

Comments from Citizens

Natalie Denard commented on reductions in specialists, sports, and magnet school students.

James Hilbie commented on cuts to the arts, such as music and chorus and class sizes of these groups.

Michael Freeman commented that everything that is being cut is a difficult decision and believes we can no longer let six members hold children hostage. Mr. Freeman also spoke on the increase of class sizes. Mr. Freeman asked that parents contact the BOF.

Dane Lewis noted that he finds it very disturbing that the request for dialogue between the BOF and BOE was declined and feels it would be wise for all of us to contact the BOF members.

Bob Stachen commented on the BOF and their term, creating a new charter committee to change the charter so we avoid this situation and have rational discussions in the town in the future.

Cindy Nadeau spoke on the implications of special education students to the budget and asked that everyone go to the April 10 hearing to express their concerns.

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Ashley Gillice commented on the petition set forth by the PTO groups and noted that 2,500 signatures are needed in order to show the BOE we have enough support to pass this budget.

Thomas Connitt a sixth grader at Mystic Middle School noted that athletes and musically involved students are better academically than noninvolved students and asked that cuts to these items be reconsidered.

Board Member Comments

Craig Esposito asked that SEF get the message out to the community to get out and vote.

Frank Todisco read the petition from the PTO groups asking for community support on the budget.

The following motion was made by Craig Esposito and seconded by Alexa Garvey:

Motion 3: **To adjourn at 8:21 p.m.**

Aye: **All**


Deborah Downie, Board Secretary