

Seymour Board of Education REGULAR MEETING MINUTES

May 4, 2020
Zoom
7:00 pm

COPY RECEIVED
DATE: 6/4/2020
TIME: 9:47 AM
TOWN CLERK'S OFFICE

BOARD MEMBERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Kristen Bruno
Christopher Champagne
Kristen Harmeling
Jay Hatfield
Peter Kubik
Beth Nesteriak
Fred Stanek
Ed Strumello
Ashley Sirowich, Student Representative
Zachary Braca, Student Representative

BOARD MEMBERS ABSENT:

OTHERS IN ATTENDANCE:

James Garofolo
Michael Wilson, Superintendent of Schools
Vonda Tencza, Associate Superintendent
Sherry Holmes, Business Manager
Kris Boyle, Director of Special Services
Lee-Ann Dauerty, Board Clerk
Rob Dyer, System Technology Coordinator
Jim Freund, Principal, SHS
Ernie DiStasi, Assistant Principal, SHS
Jodie Roden, Principal, SMS
Kathleen Freimuth, Assistant Principal, SMS

I. CALL TO ORDER

A. Pledge of Allegiance

Mr. Strumello called the meeting to order with the Pledge of Allegiance at 7:38 p.m.

II. BOARD AND ADMINISTRATIVE COMMUNICATIONS

A. Recognitions

None

III. CONSENT AGENDA

A. Approval of Minutes

1. Regular BOE Meeting Minutes – April 6, 2020

B. Nutrition Services Financial Report – April, 2020

C. Financial Management Summary – Ending April 29, 2020

D. Staff Hiring – Certified

1. Sheldon, Daniel

- Physical Education/Health Teacher
- 2020-21 School Year
- Bungay Elementary School
- Replacing Jason Freeman

MOTION: (Ms. Harmeling/sec., Mr. Kubik) move to approve the consent agenda as presented/amended

SO VOTED

AFFIRMATIVE: Ms. Bruno, Mr. Champagne, Ms. Harmeling, Mr. Hatfield, Mr. Kubik, Ms. Nesteriak, Mr. Stanek, Mr. Strumello

MOTION PASSES: 8-0

IV. ITEMS REMOVED FROM THE CONSENT AGENDA

None

V. RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

A. Policy 5123 Promotion/Acceleration/Retention

AMENDED MOTION: (Mr. Kubik/sec., Ms. Harmeling) to accept the recommendation of the Superintendent and the Administrative team to ratify Board of Education Policy 5123, Promotion/Acceleration/Retention, per the direct guidance from the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) to move to a Pass/Pass Plus/Fail standard of grading for Quarter 4 of the 2019 – 2020 school year for students in grades six through twelve

SO VOTED

AFFIRMATIVE: Mr. Hatfield, Mr. Kubik, Mr. Stanek, Mr. Strumello

OPPOSED: Ms. Bruno, Mr. Champagne, Ms. Harmeling, Ms. Nesteriak

MOTION FAILS: 4-4

MOTION: (Mr. Kubik/sec., Ms. Harmeling) to accept the recommendation of the Superintendent and the Administrative team to ratify Board of Education Policy 5123, Promotion/Acceleration/Retention, per the direct guidance from the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) to move to a Pass/Fail standard of grading for Quarter 4 of the 2019 – 2020 school year for students in grades six through twelve

SO VOTED

AFFIRMATIVE: Mr. Stanek, Mr. Strumello

OPPOSED: Ms. Bruno, Mr. Champagne, Ms. Harmeling, Mr. Hatfield, Mr. Kubik, Ms. Nesteriak

MOTION FAILS: 2-6

Mr. Wilson explained that this was the guidance that was given from the state. Ms. Harmeling asked who was consulted regarding the recommendation from the state. Mr. Wilson said the administrative team met and reviewed the recommendation and moved it forward to the board for ratification. Mr. Stanek asked what direct guidance was. Mr. Wilson said it was a suggested directive. Mr. Hatfield asked if there would be an option for kids who want to continue working toward a letter grade. Mr. Wilson said there is no option, we would move to a pass/fail grade for grades 6-12 in the fourth quarter. Ms. Harmeling asked Mr. Wilson if this was his recommendation or the state's recommendation. Mr. Wilson said this is both the state's recommendation and the district recommendation. Mr. Champagne voiced a concern for grade 6, 7, and 8 and high school juniors who might be looking to increase their GPA for college admission. He asked why this is being considered since the grades are in PowerSchool. When the Board asked to hear from the administrators, Mr. Wilson said the administrators were not prepared to speak to the Board on this and he would not like to put them on the spot. When asked what other districts were doing, Mr. Wilson said it runs the gamut across the state, and there are a myriad of choices. He said the deciding factor was student stress. He said all students would have the same loss with respect to grades and Pass/Fail carries the same impact with learning. Mr. Strumello said Watertown has a pass/fail with a pass with distinction option. He asked how will GPA be figured out and wondered out loud how colleges will look at this. He said he was concerned with grading and how will we know if a student is doing the work by himself. Ms. Bruno pointed out that the state has had many directives roll out and then change them. She said she felt we should take the recommendation into consideration. She noted that some families are concerned about college admission. She would like to include teachers and families in the discussion before a decision is made. Ms. Harmeling said she was going to abstain because she feels like there are no good options. She feels students should see the grades they have worked so hard for. Teachers, students, families should be part of the discussion. She said she also feels this is an inequitable situation for those students who cannot do work at home and we cannot penalize students who are not self-starters. Mr. Strumello said we should consider tabling this item for a special meeting. Mr. Stanek said this is a unique situation and that he will defer to the administrative team for a decision but feels it must be made quickly. He said pass/fail makes sense. Ms. Bruno asked about elementary level grading and Mr. Wilson responded that pass/fail is for grades 6-12 only. Mr. Wilson emphasized that the administrative team met for over two hours and had a lot of discussion. He would not want their work to be minimized. Ms. Nesteriak said this was a difficult situation and said she did not see any other options discussed. Ms. Bruno asked what the criteria was for Pass Plus and was it based on work completion or quality, Mr. Wilson said failing is 59 or below, and it is based on both completion and quality. She wanted to know how this addresses the equity issue and Mr. Wilson said students who are working and can achieve a pass or who are on the cusp can be helped to get a pass. Ms. Harmeling said she would not support this as she felt teachers should have been involved in the decision making.

- A. Policy 9132 Bylaws of the Board-Permanent Board Committees
MOTION: (Mr. Hatfield/sec., Mr. Champagne) to adopt policy 9132- Bylaws of the Board-Permanent Board Committees that was approved by the Board of Education on April 6, 2020

SO VOTED

AFFIRMATIVE: Ms. Bruno, Mr. Champagne, Ms. Harmeling, Mr. Hatfield, Mr. Kubik, Ms. Nesteriak, Mr. Stanek, Mr. Strumello

MOTION PASSES: 8-0

- C. Middle School Course Revisions

1. Music History – Grade 6, 7, 8

MOTION: (Ms. Harmeling/sec., Ms. Bruno) to approve the recommendation of the Curriculum & Technology Committee to add a Music History Elective Course to the Middle School Course selections

SO VOTED

AFFIRMATIVE: Ms. Bruno, Mr. Champagne, Ms. Harmeling, Mr. Hatfield, Mr. Kubik, Ms. Nesteriak, Mr. Stanek, Mr. Strumello

MOTION PASSES: 8-0

Ms. Harmeling said the Curriculum & Technology Committee supported the replacement of General Music with this course, Music History, which will link with social studies curriculum. The two music teachers will collaborate to avoid overlap.

2. Computer Foundational Skills – Grade 6, 7, 8

MOTION: (Ms. Harmeling/sec., Mr. Champagne) to approve the recommendation of the Curriculum & Technology Committee to add Computer Foundational Skills to the Middle School Course selections

SO VOTED

AFFIRMATIVE: Ms. Bruno, Mr. Champagne, Ms. Harmeling, Mr. Hatfield, Mr. Kubik, Ms. Nesteriak, Mr. Stanek, Mr. Strumello

MOTION PASSES: 8-0

Ms. Harmeling explained that around two years ago the middle school moved away from computer skills classes because the belief was kids were well versed in computer skills and replaced it with personal finance. We have since found that kids are not up to speed on the use of programs and teachers are spending more time explaining the programs than working on the assignments. The Curriculum & Technology Committee is being responsive to what teachers are saying by bringing Computer Foundational Skills back to the curriculum.

- D. Administrators Contract

MOTION: (Mr. Kubik/sec., Mr. Champagne) to ratify the collective bargaining agreement between the Seymour Board of Education and the Seymour School Administrators' Association for the period July 1, 2020 to June 30, 2023 as negotiated by the Seymour Board of Education Liaison Committee

SO VOTED

AFFIRMATIVE: Ms. Bruno, Mr. Champagne, Ms. Harmeling, Mr. Hatfield, Mr. Kubik, Ms. Nesteriak, Mr. Stanek, Mr. Strumello

MOTION PASSES: 8-0

Mr. Hatfield asked if there was a summary of changes within this contract and Mr. Kubik gave a quick synopsis of this contract as he is the only one left who was on the Liaison Committee during the time this contract was negotiated. Mr. Kubik said the administrators will be getting a 1.94% increase, 210 days(185 for the school calendar year and 12 days after the last day and 13 days before the start of the next school year as opposed to old contract language of 2 weeks after school has ended and 2 weeks preceding the start of the next school year), and a change to the premium insurance cost share.

VI. REPORTS and DISCUSSION/POSSIBLE ACTION

- A. Student Representative Report – Ashley Sirowich, Zachary Braca

Miss Sirowich wished everyone a Happy Teacher Appreciation Day and also wished the principals a Happy Principal Day which was last Friday. She reported that most of the work is being done on Google Classroom and teachers are doing a good job accommodating the non-traditional classes such as Ms. Keefe who is having the students drop off clay which she fires and has the kids pick up the completed pieces. Ms. Ashley Sirowich and Mr. Jack Crocomo were selected as the Scholar Athletes this year and although no banquet happened due to the stay at home order, a nice video acknowledgment was done for all the students who were honored. Mr. Strumello said this is a tremendous award saying the CIAC acknowledges one male and one female athlete from each school who excels academically as well as athletically. Ms. Sirowich said decision day is normally on 5/1 but Ms. Anelli has pushed it back to 6/1

but had a Zoom meeting with students who have made their decisions. She said it was a very nice meeting where students got to talk about their college choices.

Mr. Braca said the staff parade was very entertaining and he was very happy that we did it. It was a great event and he said he really enjoyed it. He wanted to know who the Wildcat was and Mr. Wilson divulged its identity as Mike Starkey.

B. Committee Reports

1. Curriculum & Technology Committee Minutes – April 23, 2020

Ms. Harmeling said the Library Media Curriculum was discussed and will be put in the 2020-21 budget for a library media specialist that would be split between the high school and the middle school. They also talked about the math pilot K-5. The math program has to change because the current program is no longer being supported by the publisher. The committee will pick what is best for the students. There was also a discussion on distance learning.

C. Return to School Discussion

Mr. Stanek said he was not privy to the discussion on returning to school but he feels that the Board should seriously consider having schools start 3 or 4 weeks early in the fall with the goal being to catch the kids up for the first month. He would like this to be presented to the State Department of Education. Ms. Harmeling felt this was an amazing idea if we can pull it off. She also said a summer boot camp should be considered for the same reasons. Mr. Strumello asked Mr. Wilson to provide some clarification on this recommendation. Mr. Wilson said that while he applauded the idea there are a lot of things that need to be considered including the cost which he estimates to be between \$200,000 and \$300,000. He also informed the Board that we would have to secure agreements from all the bargaining units as this is a mandatory subject of collective bargaining. He said there is also the concern for those teachers and families that have summer plans. He said he feels our teachers work very hard to keep the students on track. He feels the out of the box thinking is very good but this will be a daunting task. Ms. Harmeling said we can't come back like it is a normal school year; she feels it is important to catch our students up and help our teachers out. She said there has to be some plan or some consideration given to this idea, it should not be discounted. Mr. Wilson explained that he is not discounting the plan, he is just trying to give the Board an idea of the obstacles. Ms. Harmeling said the collective bargaining units need to have a serious discussion regarding either an early start or an extended school year. Ms. Bruno reminded the Board that we have two schools that are not air conditioned and she feels the Facilities Committee would need to be involved in the discussion. Mr. Stanek said given the air conditioning situation at two schools maybe we can consider a four hour a day program with no extracurricular activities and no lunch. Ms. Bruno and Ms. Harmeling also talked about the students' social emotional needs with Ms. Harmeling suggesting counselors could meet with students over the summer. Ms. Nesteriak said there are also conversations that need to happen regarding gatherings and space concerns. Mr. Wilson said he is waiting for the directive from the governor. His feeling is things are not looking good for coming back this academic year. He has been in contact with NVHD regarding the restrictions that will probably be in place when we return to school. There are things that we will have to look at when the timeframe is announced and the restrictions are communicated. This is when we will be able to work on a reentry plan. He said the bottom line is that we make the best decisions that will insure the health and safety of our staff and students.

D. Discussion on High School Graduation, Middle School Ceremony and 5th Grade Moving Up Ceremony

Mr. Wilson referred to the "if then" statements he issued previously. He said they have been well received by many other districts. We will have to wait for the state guidelines regarding gatherings. Mr. Kubik complimented Mr. Wilson saying he felt these were an excellent set of guidelines that are easy to follow. He said it was a great thing to do. Mr. Strumello feels administrators, teachers and students need to be involved in the decision. Ms. Bruno said she liked the transparency of the "if then" guidelines. Ms. Sirowich thanked the Board and Mr. Wilson for all that they are doing to try to get a graduation ceremony together. She understands there is no perfect solution. She said it means very much and she wanted them to understand that while she wants a ceremony very much she understands if we are unable to have one.

E. Discussion of Survey on Distance Learning

Ms. Harmeling said she feels it is a good time to do a survey about distance learning. We have done a satisfaction survey in the past using Survey Monkey. There were some concerns that people may have been doing the survey more than once. Ms. Harmeling said she would be happy to work with administration to lead the charge as a Board of Education member after we know if we are returning to school this year. Mr. Stanek said this is an excellent idea and it will be helpful as we work on a future distance learning plan. Mr. Hatfield would like a mental health dipstick and Ms. Harmeling agreed. Ms.

Bruno said we need to be clear about the purpose of checking on mental health and walk that line carefully.

F. 2020-21 Board of Education Budget

MOTION: (Mr. Hatfield/sec., Mr. Champagne) to table the acceptance of the 2020-21 Board of Education Budget to the June 1, 2020 meeting

SO VOTED

AFFIRMATIVE: Ms. Bruno, Mr. Champagne, Mr. Hatfield, Mr. Kubik, Ms. Nesteriak, Mr. Stanek, Mr. Strumello

ABSENT: Ms. Harmeling

MOTION PASSES: 7-0

G. Board of Education Report

1. Chairperson Comments

Mr. Strumello asked the Board members to contact him regarding their participation in using their personal funds to purchase a Seymour Strong banner. He asked that they get in touch as soon as possible.

2. Board Member Comments

Mr. Hatfield asked that there be a full Board conversation regarding the payment of the Appendix E positions, stipend positions, and any savings that might be realized due to the shutdown. Mr. Strumello suggested he have a conversation with Ms. Holmes. Mr. Hatfield said he felt it was important for all Board members to hear.

H. Superintendent Report – Mr. Wilson

1. Car Caravan, May 4, 2020

Today, we had our car caravan of approximately 180 participants that went through several neighborhoods. The staff turnout was fantastic and was well received by members of our community. A special thanks to all that helped organize this wonderful event and to our police department, fire department, and EMS for their support and assistance.

2. Staff Appreciation Day, May 5, 2020 thank you to all of our staff members for all of their hard work and dedication. All staff will receive a letter from Mr. Wilson and Ms. Tencza. A small token of our appreciation for all that they do will follow at a later time.

3. Connecting with Students

As George Evans stated: "Every student can learn, just not on the same day, or the same way". Our staff have all found a way to connect with our students during these unique times and that is what is continually helping them to learn. Their ability to adapt has made it possible for our students to achieve success because you know how to motivate and inspire our learners to achieve to their fullest potential.

4. Thank you for all of your Support

A continued thank you for all of your support throughout this entire transition into distance learning. Your support as members of our team has helped to make our students, teachers, and administrators feel less anxious about this new learning experience that we are providing.

5. Word from the Governor

Last Wednesday, I had another conference call with the Commissioner of Education and the Governor, and May 20 is still the target date. However, we are supposed to hear more this week. The Commissioner stated that it is ultimately the Governor's decision, but that he would try his best to alert Superintendents of the decision prior to public release.

6. Distance Learning

An update on distance learning: our teachers and our administrators have been working really hard to provide the best learning opportunities possible. Teachers have had administrators join their Google Classrooms throughout the week and the students were happy to hear from them in there. Administrators also have been reaching out to teachers and parents as well, to answer any questions that have come up. Administrators have held virtual faculty meetings as well as some grade level team meetings with staff so that they could check in and share ideas with one another. Mr. Wilson and Mrs. Tencza have joined several of these meetings as well throughout the week to show our support.

7. Story Time with the Superintendent

As this Board is aware, I have been reading to students every night, which has been great and appreciated by parents.

8. Year-End Ceremonies

Here are the **IF THEN** scenarios that we have in place for our end of year ceremonies and events:

IF we return to school on or before May 20, 2020:

THEN we will continue with Prom on a later date in May 2020 or early in June 2020 as well as with High School Graduation on June 12, 2020.

THEN we will continue with Middle School Promotion Ceremony on the morning of June 12, 2020.

THEN we will continue with Bungay and CLS Moving Up Ceremonies in both K and Grade 5 as scheduled.

THEN Kindergarten registration will be held between May 20, 2020 and June 12, 2020 with further details being provided by our Student Registration Specialist, Cathy Guerra.

IF we do not return to school for the remainder of the 2019 – 2020 school year:

THEN we will hold High School Graduation on June 26, 2020 at 6:00pm provided the STAY HOME STAY SAFE ORDER has been lifted prior to this date and the team working on Prom will work hard to find another date later in June of 2020 but there are no guarantees that this will happen. A communication from SHS will come out regarding the possibility of this.

THEN we will set up a schedule where students and staff will be able to come in to collect their belongings for their summer vacation.

THEN Moving Up and Promotion Ceremonies in grades K, 5, and 8 will be cancelled.

THEN Kindergarten registration will take place using a digital platform on which you will receive further details from our Student Registration Specialist, Cathy Guerra, the week of May 4, 2020.

THEN every effort will be made to hold Kindergarten, grade 6, and grade 9 orientation in August of 2020.

IF the STAY HOME AND STAY SAFE ORDER is still on until the end of June 2020:

THEN we will hold High School Graduation on July 10, 2020 at 6:00pm provided the STAY HOME STAY SAFE ORDER has been lifted prior to this date.

THEN EXTENDED SCHOOL YEAR, ELL, as well as a Credit Recovery Program will begin on July 6, 2020 provided the STAY HOME STAY SAFE ORDER has been lifted prior to this date.

VII. ADJOURNMENT

MOTION: (Ms. Harmeling/sec., Mr. Kubik) to adjourn

SO VOTED

AFFIRMATIVE: Ms. Bruno, Mr. Champagne, Ms. Harmeling, Mr. Hatfield, Mr. Kubik, Ms. Nesteriak, Mr. Stanek, Mr. Strumello

MOTION PASSES: 8-0

The meeting adjourned at 9:13 pm

Submitted by:
Lee-Ann Dauerty
Board Clerk