

# Seymour Board of Education SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES

May 19, 2020  
Zoom Virtual Meeting  
7:00 pm

COPY RECEIVED  
DATE: 5/20/20  
TIME: 10:15 AM  
TOWN CLERK'S OFFICE

## BOARD MEMBERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Kristen Bruno  
Christopher Champagne  
James Garofolo  
Kristen Harmeling  
Jay Hatfield  
Peter Kubik  
Beth Nesteriak  
Fred Stanek  
Ed Strumello

## OTHERS IN ATTENDANCE:

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  
Paul Lucke, Assistant Principal, SHS  
Ernie DiStasi, Assistant Principal, SHS  
Jodie Roden, Principal, SMS  
Kathleen Freimuth, Assistant Principal, SMS  
Mary Sue Feige, Principal, BS  
Lauren Reid, Assistant Principal, BS  
David Olechna, Principal, CLS

## I. CALL TO ORDER

### A. Pledge of Allegiance

Mr. Strumello called the meeting to order with the Pledge of Allegiance at 7:14 p.m.

## II. RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

### A. Policy 5123

**MOTION:** (Ms. Harmeling/sec., Mr. Kubik) to accept the recommendation of the Superintendent to ratify Board of Education Policy 5123, Promotion/Acceleration/Retention, moving to a grading system where students in grades six through twelve have the choice between receiving their earned grade or choosing a Pass/Pass+/Fail standard of grading for Quarter 4 of the 2019 – 2020 school year.

**SO VOTED**

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

**OPPOSED:** Mr. Garofolo

**MOTION PASSES: 8-1**

Mr. Garofolo asked if there was any possible chance of litigation that the grading would affect the final grade of a student. Mr. Wilson said it is not absolute in terms of litigation but this motion covering the rationale would limit the chance of litigation. Mr. Garofolo went on to say this has been in the back of his mind noting the extreme change in Distance Learning. He felt that something would come up with possibly a student who was doing great now put up against students who did not put in as much effort. He explained he was just expressing his concern and wanted in in the record even though Mr. Wilson said we are protected. Mr. Champagne asked for

clarification regarding the Pass/Pass+/Fail option; would student have the option to choose this for each class or would it be only for all classes? Ms. Harmeling said the option would be for each class for example a student may want to opt for Pass/Pass+/Fail in math, but could choose to receive a letter grade in Science. Mr. Champagne said he reviewed the examples that Mr. Wilson sent to the Board regarding the weighting of the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter. Mr. Wilson said the recommendation was based on the recommendation from the state and the administrative team and it was due to the pandemic. Mr. Champagne was concerned that we were sending the message to students/teacher that they are only doing 10% of the work. Mr. Wilson reminded the Board that grade weight is not a Board decision. Ms. Harmeling asked him to explain the weights. Mr. Wilson explained that there will be no final exams given. The calculation for the 2019 – 2020 school year will be 26.67% for Quarter 1, 26.67% for Quarter 2, 10% for midterms, 26.67% for Quarter 3, and 10% for the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter. Ms. Harmeling said she felt the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter should be 20% since the students should receive the grades they have earned. She asked the Administration to reconsider saying why would we tell students that their hard work doesn't count as much? Mr. Garofolo asked if this the best that we have been able to do for our students. Have we given them the opportunity to show what they have learned? Are we doing what is right by our students? He noted there are districts where students have not shown up for class. Stamford had a Spanish class with only three students who showed up. How do you mitigate consequences for students who were not in attendance? He said this is all new and he was not sure that the state guidelines give enough recognition to the students who have worked. Ms. Bruno thanked the Administration for taking another look at this, noting that there has been no other marking period like this in the past. She said she would like to hear the rationale regarding the weighting in the fourth quarter. Mr. Wilson said he knows this doesn't replace a teacher who is physically in a classroom but they did not want the pandemic to impact students negatively. He confirmed that learning is happening and feedback is happening. The goal is to help our students. The goal was not to impact any student negatively. Ms. Harmeling said she appreciated the time and effort that went into this but feels we should offer Pass/Pass+/Fail option. She is opposed to the proposal to weight the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter as only 10% instead of 20%. Mr. Hatfield said he was having a hard time with the 10%. He understands that the Board doesn't have input into this decision but he feels the Pass/Pass+/Fail is the failsafe. He feels changing the grade weight sucks and grade weight should be the student's choice. Mr. Garofolo said the state issues guidelines but the Board has the ability to choose how we administer grades if the state guidelines don't do what is best for our students. He asked are we just sheep that follow the state or are we above that. Mr. Strumello said he would like to hear from Mr. Freund and Mrs. Roden. Mr. Freund said it was a difficult process and we are in a tough situation. Distance Learning is more challenging for some students than for others. He said he felt that Pass/Pass+/Fail is a good choice. It is important for the students who are working hard to be able to show their hard work but for students that are struggling it is a good option. We have to take into consideration the social emotional health of our students which he feels is not good right now. The 4<sup>th</sup> quarter grade weight is a good option for those students who are struggling and when the math is done, it is not a significant amount of points; maybe 3 to 5. We do the best for all students. Distance Learning is new to our students as well as to our teachers. He said the teachers have done a fantastic job but we recognize that it is not the same as being in the classroom. He noted that we are still learning. Ms. Roden thanked the Board for asking for her input. She said she would like to reiterate what Mr. Freund just said. The main focus is the students' social emotional status. Kids are concerned about the amount of work, about not seeing their friends, they are struggling. We are working to keep the relationships between school and home close. There is no right or wrong answer but we are trying to make the best decisions possible for our students. Mr. Strumello asked Mr. Wilson to summarize. Mr. Wilson said countless hours have been spent to come to this decision with the students at the center of everything that we do. The goal is to not negatively impact our students. We miss them and they miss us. He thanked the administrative team who came together and shared their voice at the table. He thanked the Board for taking another look at the motion and is looking forward to the outcome. Mr. Champagne asked how students will get the help they need to help them make a decision. Mr. Wilson responded that each school will send out a letter explaining what was decided tonight

and there will be a Google form that they will be able to complete. Mr. Strumello explained the necessity in having this meeting as quickly as possible in order to give parents and students time to make this decision. He thanked the Board for coming together to attend tonight.

### III. INFORMATION

#### B. Board of Education Report

##### 1. Chairperson Comments

Mr. Strumello said he read where 30% of the students in Bridgeport and Waterbury were not involved in learning. He said neighboring towns are working less hours than our teachers are. He acknowledged that everyone in Seymour is working hard to do their best with Distance Learning. He asked the Board to be prepared to discuss graduation at our next meeting. He said we have the ability to have local input on social gathering since Mr. Wilson is in contact with Naugatuck Valley Health District on an ongoing basis.

##### 2. Board Member Comments

None

#### C. Superintendent Report – Mr. Wilson

Mr. Wilson said he has no formal report this evening but would like to thank everyone for coming together to come to this decision. Everyone in the district is working hard. We will get through this together. He acknowledged that these are frustrating times but we are here for our students, teachers, and we will continue to work hard. He thanked the Board for meeting this evening.

### IV. ADJOURNMENT

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

**SO VOTED**

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

**MOTION PASSES:** 9-0

The meeting adjourned at 7:59 pm

Submitted by:  
Lee-Ann Dauerty  
Board Clerk