

**Watertown Board of Education
Regular Meeting Minutes**

Meeting Date: February 10, 2020
Meeting Time: 7:30 p.m.
Meeting Place: Lecture Hall, Watertown High School

Members Present: Ms. Leslie Crotty, Chairman
Mr. Tom Lambert, Vice Chairman
Ms. Janelle Wilk, Secretary
Mr. Robert Makowski
Ms. Cathie Rinaldi
Ms. Diane Bristol
Ms. Cindy Eastman
Ms. Josephine Cavallo-Rosa
Mr. Jason Malagutti

Members Absent: None

Others Present: Dr. Rydell Harrison –Superintendent of Schools
Mr. Tom DiStasio – Business Manager

A. Convene Regular Meeting – 7:30 p.m.

B. Salute to the Flag

C. Roll Call – Ms. Davidson

D. Minutes

Agenda Item: D.1
Subject: Minutes of the January 27, 2020 Regular Board of
Education Meeting

Motion Presented By: Ms. Wilk
Motion Seconded By: Mr. Lambert

Text of the Motion:	Madame Chair, I move that the Board approve of the minutes from the January 27 th , 2020 regular Board of Education meeting as presented by Ms. Davidson.
Discussion:	None
Opposed:	None
Abstained:	None
Vote:	Motion passed

E. Report from Student Council Representative – Jordan Arnold

Mr. Arnold – No Report

F. Superintendent’s Recommendations and Report

1. Appointments – (Information Only)

Mr. Shawn Stanco to the position of Head Football Coach for Watertown High School, effective for the 2020-2021 school year, at a contractual stipend amount of \$5,280.00, Step 0 of the WEA Contract.

2. Transfers– (Information Only)

None

3. Resignations – (Information Only)

None

4. Superintendent’s Report

Dr. Harrison – Good evening Board members and to our community. I am excited to see some of our families represented here tonight to hear a little bit more about the Superintendent’s proposed budget and also where we are with our district improvement plan update. I want to take a minute to welcome Mr. Paylor. He is our new Asst. Principal at John Trumbull Primary School and he started last Monday, made it through week 1 and decided to come back again today. We are excited to have him as part of our administrative team. I wanted to also take a minute to say you will hear tonight, some really great information about some of the fantastic things happening around the district, and one of the things that I wanted to highlight as we are thinking about student centered learning and looking to our students to have incredible impact on our world and community as they grow into young people and young adults, I wanted to highlight that 20 High School students and 20 teachers participated in the first training session from the Anti-Defamation League of CT to prepare for an assembly for app sophomores on March 12th. The assembly will focus on

tolerance and kindness in schools and the students and teachers are being trained over two evening sessions. Those teachers and students will lead the group discussions. I am always excited to see our students take on leadership roles and in acting on improving as a community.

Board members, in your agenda you will see there is the appointment of Shawn Stanco to the position of Head Football Coach of Watertown High School. I want to take a moment to say thanks to Mr. Catuccio and the team of teachers and administrators that worked with him as part of the interview committee. I know they had some really great candidates that they took through the first round and then the second round with additional input from Dr. Parlato. So thank you to all of you and I am looking forward to a great football season.

G. Presentation – Strategic Plan 2020 Update & Superintendent’s Recommended Budget for Fiscal Year 2020-2021

To see Dr. Harrison’s entire presentation, please visit:

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCIf9pwrH64gbrzGfmV4dtSw>

H. Item of Discussion – 2020-2021 Proposed School Year Calendar

Ms. Fekete – In your packet, I included a page that outlines the process that we used to develop the calendar and also some drivers and priorities that were used to determine some of the specific dates. As you can see, we started with cabinet brainstorm, administrative council brainstorm around drivers for the calendar, then priorities. We looked at other schools in our DRG to see what they were doing, area schools to see what their calendars looked like, and I also pulled together some teacher leaders from each building and got feedback from them. I then synthesized those ideas to make some recommendations for the calendar. Some of the priorities we had based upon feedback from multiple stakeholder included: have three days before school started for professional learning at the beginning of the year, strategically select some of our professional learning days to align with the planning from the SRBI committees, minimizing the interruptions in the flow of weeks, so you will see a lot of dates on the calendar backed up to something else so it doesn’t chop up multiple weeks. We had a lot of conversation about the half day before Thanksgiving and potentially having that be a day off based on a number of pieces, including attendance data, and how many students are not in school due to traveling. We did decide to keep it to a half day this year, but to keep an eye on it and have it be a discussion piece moving forward. We thought this may be the year to do it because we are getting out two days earlier, next school year than we did this year, but that is just something to keep in mind based on our attendance data. We also wanted to explore and pilot some late opening days for professional learning versus early dismissals, and some of the rationale for that was that parents tend to have a plan already for snow days for late arrivals. The quality and the time of day, to wrap your head around some of the difficult concepts in training and things that teachers participate in, and we also talked about that is might be even a safe piece for high school students where they can sleep in versus getting out early and driving around town. If you look at the calendar, you will see that reflected and how it is structured.

I. Public Participation (Please state name, address and topic of discussion)

None

J. Committee Reports:**Curriculum and Instruction Committee, Ms. Cathie Rinaldi, Chair – Yes**

Yes, Madam Chair. As Chair of the Curriculum and Instruction Committee, I would like to clarify some discrepancies that have surfaced involving the passing grade change from a 70 to a 65 at Watertown High School. The Board of Ed carefully considers what is in the best interest of all our students before making a final decision on any item that is brought before us. As stated in the district letter sent out by Dr. Harrison last night, the Board of Ed's primary concern is to give our students a level playing field so they have equal opportunities and advantages with students from our District Reference Group and districts close to us geographically. In addition, to two local Catholic Schools. We also want to be aligned with the College Board Standards and Technical Schools our students may attend. We do mandate a higher graduation credit requirement than the state dictates because our goal in Watertown is to always hold our students to a higher standard.

That being said, in no way would this Board of Ed approve a change of a passing grade to make it easier for a student to obtain that goal. If a student is struggling in any way, it is the responsibility of the teacher, the parent, and the student, and I emphasize mostly on the student, to collaborate to make him or her succeed. It is important for our students to learn that wherever their future leads them, they will be held accountable for their successes as well as their failures. This Board of Ed takes pride in the resources and guidance our staff provides, to our families, to make our students prosper.

In closing, I cannot emphasize enough that this change was not at all intended to increase the graduation rate or make learning easier for our students. The administration and staff at every school, in collaboration with the Board of Ed, will continue to hold our students to the highest standards and we will continue to create curriculum that will challenge our students with competitive and stimulating opportunities.

Policy and Labor Committee, Ms. Janelle Wilk, Chair –No**Budget and Finance Committee, Ms. Diane Bristol, Chair – No****Facilities/PBC/Operations Committee, Mr. Thomas Lambert, Chair –Yes**

On Friday, February 7th, the Board of Ed Chair Leslie Crotty, myself, Dr. Harrison, Ray Ceniccola, representative of the Watertown Police and Fire departments, building Principal Laura Meka, and custodial representatives met with representatives from Emergency Management and Homeland Security, and a member of the CT Intelligence Center for the security assessment of John Trumbull Primary School. This very thorough security audit was at our request as part of our ongoing efforts of continuous improvement of our school's security plans. We are very fortunate to have these high level security professionals visit our school and share their insights with our group. This assessment, the first of two parts, and the second assessment will take

place at Watertown High School on Thursday. Moving on to the municipal center, all trades including HVAC, chemical fire suppression specialists, electrical, plaster and painting has been ongoing. Also, air handling, woodworking, communications and internet wiring, has been continuing.

Governance and Community Engagement Committee, Mr. Robert Makowski, Chair – Yes

Our next Community Engagement meeting will be February 24th at 6:15 p.m. before our scheduled Board of Education meeting. On the agenda, we will review the state's family engagement definition and the district's family survey data.

K. Communications - Secretary

None

L. Report from the Board Chair

Ms. Crotty – I did want to mention, in regards to the passing grade at Watertown High School going from 70 to 65, that without a lot of explanation, that The Board of Education, as individuals, don't have individual authority. Each one of us is only authoritative as a group and I have received, as have many board members at this table, multiple text messages, phone calls, emails, nothing in writing yet, but about this passing grade, mostly because there was not as much understanding as we had hoped, about it. I would just like to add, that one of the biggest questions that I received over and over and over, is why doesn't any of the board members respond to social media remarks regarding the passing grade changing. I know that most of you on the board are aware there was quite a lot of discussion, more so than I have seen in quite some time, on district related items. It is not within the Board of Education's prevue to respond as a board member to social media questions and remarks and comments. It is also a rabbit hole that I would recommend that none of us get involved in. I think the proper place for information is through the Superintendent's office, through your administrator; there are Twitter and Facebook pages for both the Board of Ed, the Superintendent and all of the principals. If you can't get your question answered, you are not asking. You are really not asking in the right place, because we have so many dedicated staff members that would love to be able to answer questions that the public has on any decision of the board or the district makes, whether separately or together. It is really a disservice to the work that our administrators and teachers and staff, the Superintendent's cabinet and the Superintendent himself, do to recommend to our Board. Responding to some of the negative comments on social media, while people have every right to have an opinion, we don't anticipate trying to change, but just to help them understand that it is really not, in my opinion, the place. We have so many dedicated people that could have lots of information to share, and I thank everyone here for not engaging in those conversations online over the past week. As we move forward, you can count on the fact that the Board of Education members aren't going to respond to social media comments in regards to decisions that were made at this table or anywhere else, other than the platforms that I have already talked about.

I also want to say that Mr. Lambert and Dr. Harrison mentioned the security assessment that we requested and was arranged through the Department of Emergency Services and Homeland

Security. We did not anticipate someone from Central Intelligence to join us; we didn't anticipate some leaders from both Connecticut and Massachusetts to be in the room; we had everybody from the Federal and State government in that room. It was quite remarkable that they were all able to come and look at our security at John Trumbull. It was really a fantastic opportunity. Four and a half hours of external and internal conversations. I would like to say, that one of the things that I walked away with was a better understanding of the level of dedication that our teachers and our administrators have for our students and I want to applaud Mrs. Meka for her answering the litany of questions that those people asked of her in that meeting. The level of remarks and information that she shared showed the depth in which Mrs. Meka and her staff and teachers and cafeteria workers have thought about the safety and security of those students in that building. If I wanted to have any more children, I feel that they would be very safe at that school. So I just want to thank you for that work and for the 4 ½ hours of questioning that you responded to very well. It was impressive and there was no doubt that everyone from the Federal and State offices were very impressed and I am sure it will be reflected in their report.

M. Action Items – Adoption of Items to be Approved by Consent

Agenda Item:	M.1
Subject:	Consideration of the Approval of the Proposed 2020-2021 School Year Calendar
Motion Presented By:	Ms. Rinaldi
Motion Seconded By:	Ms. Eastman
Text of the Motion:	Madame Chair, I move that the Board approve of the proposed 2020-2021 calendar for the Watertown Public Schools.
Discussion:	None
Opposed:	None
Abstained:	None
Vote:	Motion passed

Agenda Item:	M.2
Subject:	Consideration of the Approval of an Out of State Field Trip to West Springfield, Massachusetts
Motion Presented By:	Mr. Lambert

Motion Seconded By: Mr. Makowski

Text of the Motion: Madame Chair, I move that the Board approve of an out of state field trip to West Springfield, Massachusetts, for approximately twenty-eight (28) Watertown High School FIRST Robotics Team member/students and six chaperones on April 8th through April 11th, 2020 to participate in the New England District Championship Competition.

Discussion: None

Opposed: None

Abstained: None

Vote: Motion passed

N. Future agenda Items and Board Members' Comments

None

O. Public Participation (Please state name, address and topic of discussion)

None

P. Adjournment

Agenda Item: P.1

Subject: To adjourn the meeting

Motion Presented By: Ms. Rosa

Motion Seconded By: Ms. Bristol

Text of the Motion: Madame Chair, I move that we adjourn.

Discussion: None

Opposed: None

Abstained: None

Vote: Motion Passes

The meeting adjourned at 9:48 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Mindi Davidson
Recording Secretary

Janelle Wilk
Secretary of the Board