

Pending BOE Approval

**Watertown Board of Education
Emergency Meeting Minutes**

Meeting Date: March 23, 2020
Meeting Time: 7:30 p.m.
Meeting Place: REMOTE MEETING

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: Ms. Josephine Cavallo-Rosa

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. Superintendent’s Recommendations and Report

1. Superintendent’s Report

Dr. Harrison – Good evening everyone. I just want to take a few moments and update you on what has been happening over the last couple of weeks. Since the last time we have spoken, we have had two Admin Council virtual meetings on March 13th & 19th, I have been on a lot of calls with the Governor and the Commissioner of Education, and various Emergency Personnel for each of our towns. We have had calls on March 9th, March 12th, March 16th, March 19th, March 20th and the 21st. Each of those have focused on different components of

the different Executive Orders that the Governor has introduced and the impact of the Covid-19 virus along with what is happening in our schools and in our district. On March 20th, I was involved in a phone call with the US Department of Education where we wanted to get guidance related to distance learning and some of the ways that we can support our students with disabilities. So, I will summarize some of the information and then I will talk about our distance learning plan.

Governor Lamont introduced an Executive Order alleviating the 180 day school day requirement for all school districts and with that, also eliminated the requirement for districts to submit distance learning plans for approval. This change allowed for Administrators to revisit our distance learning plan. When districts were told to prepare for school closings, we were given the option of distance learning rather than supplemental learning and then as a distance, we began planning for distance learning, but then made the shift to supplemental learning based on recommendations we received from the CT Department of Education. The concerns there were equity among our teachers, but most importantly, the best ways to engage our students with disabilities or our students with IEPs. Administrators were notified of the shift back to distance learning last week when the Governor sent the school closures and the Superintendents to develop plans for distance learning, moving away from the original recommendation not to do that. Because of the 180 day waiver, and the implementation of distance learning, our plan for this year is to end the school year on June 17th as originally planned. Governor Lamont also issued an Executive Order urging residents to “Stay safe, stay home” in order to contain the spread of Covid-19 while keeping essential services running. The Commissioner of Education confirmed that this will not stop the function of food service or meals program in the schools. To date, as of today, we have served over 1900 meals with the grab and go lunch program while schools are closed. This is a great opportunity just to take a moment and thank Ms. Onion and her entire team, and all of the volunteers that have come out to help pass out lunches and delivering that. It has been a great service to our community and I am really proud of how everyone has been pitching in.

This order of “stay safe, stay home” will also not prevent school function that is taking place to support continuation of educational opportunities or operationally, such as payroll and building maintenance. While there will be a limited number of people, as we have tried to limit the number of people in buildings already, we will continue to have essential staff as necessary.

I want to take a moment and highlight our distance learning plan. This plan will be formally shared with teachers today and we will be engaging them in virtual professional learning over the next few days as we launch our district learning on March 30th. Teachers will use Google Classroom to deliver lessons to students and receive assignments and feedback from students who will also use Google Classroom and other digital tools to check in on the social/emotional needs of our students. I am really thinking about their well being during this time. Learning will be asynchronous and that means that teachers will post instructional learning materials online and Students engage with class materials and complete assignments at their own pace within a given timeframe. We chose not to do a synchronous model where students and teachers are working together in a digital pace at the same time, like where they may be doing a live lecture, because we know that the resources available to families may be different and we may have multiple students that are sharing devices and also with the number of parents that are working from home now, it may be difficult to have

students log in real time. To that point, though, we wanted to ensure that our students have the resources that they need, so over the past several days, we have distributed about 420 chrome books to all students that needed them. We will continue to make those available to students as parents reach out to us to share need. I want to say thank you to Jeff Turner and his team for getting that all prepared and for the folks that came to help distribute those. We have also purchased ten hot spots for students that may not have access to WiFi at home and today, in a press conference, the state announced that some companies are offering free WiFi to families in need, so we are looking forward to getting more information on that in the days to come.

During distance learning, our teachers will have an hour of collaboration time each morning with SPED teachers, administrators and other colleagues, and that will be from 10 to 11 every morning, collaboration time with all teachers and supporting all learning, including our students with IEPs and 504 plans and giving them time to collaborate with the SPED teachers, case managers and support staff. In addition to planning and reviewing student work each day, teachers will be available to students and parents, almost like an office hours, every day from 11 to 3 in order to support and answer questions through a digital platform, whether that is through email or a digital classroom. With being on the call with the Department of Education to be guided on SPED students and Mr. Brown and his team have been working really closely with our SPED teachers and related services staff to review recommendations and guidance from the Department of Education, the Office of Education and Rehabilitative Services and the CT State Department of Education as it pertains to meeting the needs of our SPED students. We are really following their guidelines and recommendations to make sure that we are doing everything that we can to be in compliance with each of our student's individual education plans. As I mentioned earlier, our teachers will be participating in virtual professional learning on Tuesday and Wednesday of this week and our distance learning will go forward on Monday, March 30th. There has been a lot of parent communications so far and distance learning guidelines for families, by this Wednesday, so that they know what they can expect from teachers and also some recommendations for students to build some good habits around distant learning. We hope that this will make this experience for them as successful as possible.

I also want to touch on communications from the District. On Friday, March 13th, I had a Covid-19 update to parents and included in that update, I had a dedicated email address that they can use to ask questions related to school closings, the Corona Virus, or anything related to this period while we are away from each other. Since then, I have received and responded to over 150 emails ranging from questions about technology to concerns about social distancing and each day I have been posing those relevant questions and answers to the Q & A page on our district website. Also linked to our district website are all of the supplemental learning resources and I will link the distant learning materials for all of the families after they are released prior to next week. A lot of information and a lot of work being done behind the scenes and overall I just want to say a big thank you for all of your support, to our Administrators for all of their work behind the scenes, and a special shout out and appreciation for our Board Chair, Ms. Crotty....we have been talking daily, multiple times daily, as together we have been working to interpret some of the changes that have come from the Governor and things that we may need to anticipate having to deal with as we move forward. Are there any questions?

Mr. Makowski – I just want to clarify something, with starting the distance learning program, it is still the District’s intent for the last day of school to be June 17th?

Dr. Harrison – Yes, that is correct. If you add in the winter related closings, that is how we got to that date.

Mr. Makowski – Great, thanks and just a follow up, does that also mean no changes to the scheduled April break?

Dr. Harrison – That is correct. I am not going to bring forward a recommendation to make a change to the calendar. That was one of the things considered, however, it made more sense to continue with the times because we are doing distance learning and we are not going to be required to make those days up. Obviously, that was a strong consideration as an alternative to extending the school year to June 30th, but because we won’t have that requirement, we don’t need to go to the 30th, I would like to remain how it is.

Ms. Crotty – I know it is recent news with the news conference by the Governor with regards to his statement about potentially having the last day being as early as April 20th...the first day that we could possibly open, when you had your conference call with the Governor today, did that come up at all? Any clarification on that? Because that would certainly supersede any decision about April vacation for us, based on when our April vacation falls anyway.

Dr. Harrison – Yes, that is correct. There was no specific clarification about the extension of the closing until April 20th other than the Commissioner made it clear that the decision to observe or not observe April break is a local decision. However, if schools are closed either way, it is a moot point.

Ms. Crotty – Are there any more questions? Hearing none, I would like to move forward to Item E, Executive Session.

E. Executive Session (7:46 p.m.)

Agenda Item:

E.1

Subject:

To go into Executive Session

Motion Presented By:

Mr. Lambert

Motion Seconded By:

Ms. Rinaldi

Text of the Motion:

Madame Chair, I move that the Board go into Executive Session for the discussion of memorandums of understanding related to collective bargaining strategy with Rydell Harrison, Leslie Crotty, Tom Lambert, Janelle

Wilk, Cathie Rinaldi, Rob Makowski, Diane Bristol, Cindy Eastman, Jason Malagutti and Tom DiStasio.

Discussion: None
Opposed: None
Abstained: None
Vote: Motion Passes

F. Regular Session (8:25 p.m.)

Agenda Item: F.1
Subject: COVID-19 Related MOU Between Board & Cafeteria Union
Motion Presented By: Ms. Wilk
Motion Seconded By: Ms. Eastman
Text of the Motion: Madame Chair, I move that the Board approve of the Covid-19 emergency closure related Memorandum of Understanding between the Board of Education and the Watertown Cafeteria Union Local 1094 of Council 4, AFL-CIO to ensure that employees receive annualized paychecks through June 17th, 2020.
Discussion: None
Opposed: None
Abstained: None
Vote: Motion passed

Agenda Item: F.2
Subject: Covid-19 Related MOU Between Board & Secretaries Union
Motion Presented By: Ms. Rinaldi
Motion Seconded By: Ms. Eastman
Text of the Motion: Madame Chair, I move that Board to approve of the Covid-19 emergency closure related Memorandum of

Understanding between the Board of Education and the Watertown Educational Secretarial Union Local 1303 of Council 4, AFSCME, AFL-CIO to ensure that employees receive annualized paychecks through June 17th, 2020.

Discussion: None
Opposed: None
Abstained: None
Vote: Motion passed

Agenda Item: F.3

Subject: Covid-19 Related MOU Between Board & Paraprofessionals Union

Motion Presented By: Ms. Bristol
Motion Seconded By: Mr. Malagutti

Text of the Motion: Madame Chair, I move that Board to approve of the Covid-19 emergency closure related Memorandum of Understanding between the Board of Education and the Watertown Federation of Paraprofessionals Union Local 3960 to ensure that employees receive annualized paychecks through June 17th, 2020.

Discussion: None
Opposed: None
Abstained: None
Vote: Motion passed

Agenda Item: F.4

Subject: Covid-19 Related MOU Between Board & Teacher's Union

Motion Presented By: Ms. Bristol
Motion Seconded By: Mr. Malagutti

Text of the Motion: Madame Chair, I move that Board to approve of the Covid-19 related Memorandum of Agreement between the Board of Education and the Watertown Education Association regarding the continuity of educational opportunities.

Discussion: None

Opposed: None

Abstained: None

Vote: Motion passed

Agenda Item: F.5

Subject: Superintendent Authorization to Execute COVID-19 Related MOU on Behalf of the Board with the Custodial Union Should Need Arise

Motion Presented By: Mr. Lambert

Motion Seconded By: Ms. Eastman

Text of the Motion: Madame Chair, I move that Board to approve of granting Dr. Harrison the authority to execute a Covid-19 related Memorandum of Understanding between the Board of Education and the Custodial Union to ensure that employees receive annualized paychecks through June 17th, 2020.

Discussion: None

Opposed: None

Abstained: None

Vote: Motion passed

G. Adjournment

Agenda Item: G.1

Subject: To adjourn the meeting

Motion Presented By: Ms. Rinaldi

Motion Seconded By: Mr. Makowski

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

Discussion:	None
Opposed:	None
Abstained:	None
Vote:	Motion Passes

The meeting adjourned at 8:33 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Mindi Davidson
Recording Secretary

Janelle Wilk
Secretary of the Board