

**Regular Meeting  
Stafford Board of Education  
Stafford Elementary School Cafetorium  
Limited In-person Meeting and Electronic Meeting- via Zoom  
February 8, 2021, 6:30 p.m.**

**Board Members Present (in person):**

Ms. Kathy Bachiochi  
Mrs. Jennifer Davis  
Mr. Mike Delano  
Mrs. Andrea Locke, Secretary  
Ms. Laura Lybarger  
Mr. George Melnick  
Ms. Sonya Shegogue, Chairperson

**Also Present (virtual, except as noted):**

Mr. Steven Moccio, Superintendent of Schools  
Mr. Steven Autieri, Director of Curriculum and Instruction  
Mr. Jonathan Campbell, Assistant Principal, Stafford Middle School  
Miss Allie Curtin, Student Representative  
Mr. Ryan Duffy, Student Representative  
Mrs. Peggy Falcetta, Principal, Staffordville School  
Mr. Dean Fortin, IT / Network Coordinator (in person)  
Mr. Damian Frassinelli, Director of Athletics and Recreation  
Ms. Anna Gagnon, Principal, West Stafford School  
Ms. Caroline Hargraves, Assistant Principal, Stafford Elementary School  
Mr. Timothy Kinel, Assistant Principal, Stafford High School  
Ms. Beth LaPane, Supervisor of Building Services  
Ms. Trish Lustila, Director of Pupil Services  
Ms. Mary Claire Manning, Principal, Stafford Elementary School  
Ms. Susan Mike, Principal, Stafford Middle School  
Mr. Marco Pelliccia, Principal, Stafford High School  
Ms. Diane Peters, Business Manager

***The meeting agenda and copies of all Board meeting materials were posted on the district's website ([www.stafford.k12.ct.us](http://www.stafford.k12.ct.us)) prior to the meeting, in accordance with the requirements for electronic meetings. Audience members were able to participate by phone utilizing the phone number provided on the meeting agenda. The recording of this meeting is available on the district website.***

**Item I. Call to Order- Establishment of Quorum**

The meeting was called to order at 6:36 p.m.

**Item II. Pledge of Allegiance**

Ms. Shegogue led the Board in the Pledge of Allegiance.

**Item III. Secretary's Report- Approval of Minutes**

Regular Meeting, 01/25/2021

Mrs. Locke made a motion, seconded by Ms. Lybarger, that the Board approve the Secretary's Report for the regular meeting held on 01/25/2021. Ms. Bachiochi, Mrs. Davis, Mr. Delano, Mrs. Locke, Ms. Lybarger and Mr. Melnick voted for the motion, which carried.

**Item IV. Consent Agenda**

- A.     **2019-2020 Bills and Grants- 02-05-2021, \$4,840.00**
- B.     **2020-2021 Bills and Grants- 02-05-2021, \$183,952.60**

Mrs. Davis made a motion, seconded by Mr. Melnick, that the Board approve the items listed in the consent agenda, as presented. Ms. Bachiochi, Mrs. Davis, Mr. Delano, Mrs. Locke, Ms. Lybarger and Mr. Melnick voted for the motion, which carried.

**Item V. Correspondence**

**A.     Curriculum Committee Reminder**

Ms. Shegogue read the Curriculum Committee meeting reminder that was posted on the agenda.

**B.     Board Meeting Reminder**

Ms. Shegogue read the Board meeting reminder that was posted on the agenda.

**Item VI. Board Reports**

**A.     Student Representatives' Report**

Miss Curtin and Mr. Duffy provided updates from each of the schools, as well as the athletic and music departments.

Ms. Shegogue added that the boys' JV and Varsity basketball teams won their opening season games. She wished the girls good luck on their games later in the week.

**B.     Curriculum Committee (Chairperson- George Melnick, Laura Lybarger and Kathy Bachiochi)**

There was no report from this committee.

**Item VII. Superintendent's Reports**

**A.     Update Regarding Learning Model and District COVID-19 Cases**

Mr. Moccio provided the Board with an update via the portal regarding the number of students attending in-person vs. full-remote, as well as the number of cases of COVID-19 the district has experienced to date.

The table below was included with the information posted in the portal and details the number of students attending in-person vs. full-remote, as well as the number of cases of COVID-19 the district has experienced to date.

Location	Total Enrollment	In-Person	Remote	Chronic Absenteeism (>10% of student days)		Total Cases (staff & students)	
	as of Feb 5	as of Feb 5	as of Feb 5	Hybrid	Remote	as of Jan 21	as of Feb 5
Staffordville	115	102	13	10	1	3	3
West Stafford	131	113	18	29	1	4	6
Stafford Elementary	377	304	73	43	20	15	15
Stafford Middle	343	265	78	6	12	11	16
Stafford High	382	269	113	24	9	17	19
District Staff	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	4	4
Totals	1348	1053	295	112	43	54	63

Mr. Moccio said that since the last Board update (January 25, 2021) there have been 15 additional cases over an 18-day period. He said that the new cases are following the same pattern- the transmission is occurring outside the school community. Mr. Moccio said that he also included graphs in the backup material, which illustrate the data points that he utilizes to make decisions.

Mr. Moccio said that following the last Board meeting he sent out a survey to staff to parents regarding the learning model. He shared the results with the Board members via the portal and shared the results with the audience during the meeting. He said he will be following up with another survey regarding the Wednesday remote day. Mr. Moccio said that before making a decision regarding adding additional in-person learning days for students, he will look at the data issued by the State this coming Thursday.

Mr. Melnick asked about the current learning model PK – 5. Mr. Moccio responded that those students are attending school four (4) days per week, with remote learning on Wednesdays.

#### **B. Self-Funded Insurance Update**

Board members were provided via the portal with a report regarding the status of the district's self-funded health insurance program, as of December 31, 2020. Mr. Moccio said that the information regarding the dental account was not yet available.

Mrs. Peters reported that the receipts in the self-funded insurance account have decreased. She said that the decrease is most likely due to the fact that all district employees are now on the high-deductible plan, which has lower premiums. She said that the claims are also lower as compared to last year, which is a positive trend.

Mr. Melnick asked about the insurance increase [that is included in next year's budget] and how much the 15% increase affected the budget. Mr. Moccio said that the increase of 15% as compared to the 3% increase that was initially budgeted, translates to approximately \$353,029, as was presented in previous budget documents. Mr. Melnick asked if the district should investigate going into the State plan that the town utilizes. Mr. Moccio stated that other options were investigated, including the State plan. He said that it was projected that the State plan would be equivalent to a 30% increase in the premiums.

**C. Continuation of Discussion Regarding the 2021 – 2022 School Budget and Potential Reconfiguration**

Mr. Moccio reviewed a PowerPoint presentation regarding the proposed budget, which was provided to the public the previous Friday via the district website.

Mr. Moccio reviewed the *Budget Comparison Report*, which detailed the district budget maintaining the current configuration, as compared to the district budget should Staffordville School be closed. Mr. Moccio explained that the *Budget Comparison with Explanation of Variance Report* is available as a hyperlink in the PowerPoint presentation for anyone interested in additional granular detail regarding the budget.

Mr. Moccio reviewed the object code comparison report for each budget category. He reminded the audience that additional details are available in the *Budget Comparison with Explanation of Variance Report*. Mr. Moccio also reviewed the budget trends, enrollment trends and comparisons (including town population), basic layout maps for Stafford Elementary School and West Stafford School, and transportation information. Mr. Moccio said that his recommendation, and the recommendation of the leadership team, is that the Board adopt the budget that includes the closure of Staffordville School, based on the following:

- Increased coherence of educational experiences
  - Classroom instruction, routines, and services provided
  - Ability to equalize class sizes and balance student need
  - Consistency of supervision across a grade level
- Ability to maintain a small community school as an entry point to the district
  - Maintain similar class sizes
  - Maintain 100 PreK slots
- Confidence in district staff to provide assistance and support
- Expanded and equitable access to FRC and STEAM programming
- Continued ability to meet NAEYC accreditation standards
- Ability to maintain or reduce the amount of time students spend on buses
- Maintaining of district programming and activities for 200+ athletes and 150+ band students
- Ability to provide consistent bandwidth access and wireless connectivity
- Addresses declining enrollment across the district
- Fiscally responsible budget in alignment with historical funding increases

Mr. Moccio thanked everyone that helped to prepare the budget. He said that reconfiguration comes with challenges, and there are a lot of moving parts, but he feels that he and the team have already started working to address many of the issues.

Mr. Melnick asked if the Board looked at any other areas that might be cut rather than those items on the list that the leadership team prepared. Mr. Melnick said that he is opposed to closing a school and would like to look elsewhere for the cuts, rather than sports and music, which always seems to be on the list. He said he doesn't want to see a school closed.

Mrs. Davis said that the list of cuts included many items other than sports and music, including staffing positions. She agreed with Mr. Melnick that it's an emotional issue. She recognized that sports and music have been on the lists in the past, but she said that there has been movement on those items by asking parents to pay to offset costs. Mrs. Davis said that losing positions and programs is more important than

keeping a school open and it would be too late to move forward with the closure if the Board of Education waits for the Board of Finance to make a decision regarding reductions. She thanked Mr. Moccio and his team for the well-done presentation. Mr. Melnick agreed that the presentation was well done, but he didn't agree with closing a school. He said that it is more than an emotional issue and that in the future the school may be needed. Mr. Melnick said that there's also a rumor going around that the Board wants to build a new school.

Mr. Moccio stated that he openly said that building a new school should be a consideration for the district down the road, but not at this time. Mr. Moccio also said that there are positions on the list of reductions, including teaching positions, a school nurse and a maintenance worker. He said that mid-day pre-kindergarten runs, although not mandatory, were not listed as a reduction due to the impact on families and their ability to access the pre-kindergarten program.

### **VIII. Public Comment**

A member of the audience stated that she is a parent and asked if the Board is voting for this based on their own opinion, or if they are listening to the actual voters who have elected them. She said that both of her girls work with paraprofessionals, and she does not want the teachers and paras to lose their jobs. She said that these staff members have helped her daughters succeed in the district. She said that the Board needs to think about the students with special needs and their academics as well.

A member of the audience stated that she has a child that attends West Stafford School and a younger child that does not yet attend school. She said that her concern is that if the Board does not close a school so many programs, teachers and positions will be eliminated that when her 2 year old gets to school, there won't be anything for her to do. She said that music is a big part in her family's life, and if things continue to be cut to save the school, by the time her daughter gets to middle school there won't be anything to read or write about because athletic and music programs aren't being funded. She said that she begs and pleads with the Board to keep the programming, keep Stafford a competitive school and town with those around us, and do what is right for the students in our town. Her son also spoke about how much he loves music. She asked that the Board remember that every decision they make is for the little ones, who love music, art and their teachers.

A member of the audience stated that he would really appreciate it if the Board collaborated with the town regarding closing the building. He said that he did some research regarding school transitions. He said that during the first year when you reconfigure there is lower student achievement, which is concerning when combined with the lower reading and math scores (COVID Slide). He said that if you want to act in the best interest of the kids, you need to keep that in mind. He said that you could have a detrimental impact on the students that are having a difficult time, so be mindful of the timing of closing Staffordville School. He said that he looked at surrounding towns' budget increases (Ellington, Somers, Mansfield), which are higher than Stafford's, even with keeping Staffordville School open. He asked that the Board consider those items when voting on the school budget.

A member of the audience said that she has been listening on all of the meetings and feels that we are prepared to answer a lot of the questions that people ask. She said that she has children that have gone through transitions. She said that change can be hard, but sometimes it is harder for the adults and older students, but with the proper support they can be successful. She said that with regard to the older students,

we need to set them up to succeed, and once programs are removed from the budget it is nearly impossible to get them back. She said that the programs are an important foundation for college, job and life skills.

Miss Curtin, Board of Education Student Representative, said that she went to Staffordville School, and she loved the school. She said that she didn't love the school because of the building, but because of her teachers and her friends. She said that as a student she would be crushed if her teachers were laid off, or if any programs that were part of her or her little brother's education were taken away. She said that she would also rather not see a school close, but she said she feels that it comes down to what is best for the students- a building or the teachers who shape them as students.

**Questions and Comments as Submitted through the Zoom Chat Feature:**

Does SES have the space to house the 1st graders and the support during this possible transition for staff and students. We are talking about the impact on WSS and SVS, but what about SES.

George, thank you for fighting for our kids and our school

I would strongly encourage the Board to please not close the Staffordville School. Now is not the time for such a large change.

We love you George and thank you for fighting for our kids!!!

I also would state that you can't assume you know what the Board of Finance is going to do based on past behavior. This is not a normal situation for anyone and we can't base our decisions based on what happened when things were "normal"

What if the music and sports programs can not be utilized next year again due to covid?? How does that affect the budget?

kids are resilient. the staff at ses are going to make sure these transitions are so easy. I understand the emotional part but we need to see the larger picture here.. we are talking huge program cuts.

I would like this board to go forward and see what the finance board says, it would not be in the best interest for the students at all. It is not easy for any child to transition to another school.

what other areas..can he give an example

I would also like to know is this just a one year budget shortfall? I understand the need to make cuts- I just don't think this is the year to make the change.

I also would like a long range plan on what the plan is for the school for the future.

First, Thank you Mr. Moccio for the very informative presentation. The truth of the matter is that our schools have been underfunded for years and the teachers, paras, & admin have done more with less every single year. As a town we have to decide to fund the excellent schools that we are used to, or we will lose

programs, teachers, and quality of the education for our children. It's a painful choice but we need to make the decision to continue to fund a high quality education for our children.

Please stop saying "you know what the Board of Finance is going to do - we have been down this road every year" I think you owe it to the town to bring this before the Board of Finance considering it is such a big change.

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Mr. Melnick said that he doesn't want to make it sound like keeping a school open means that he doesn't support sports and music, as his children were involved in both. He said that he was also a coach for 27 years. He said that he would like to keep the school open and look at other areas for cuts other than art, music and paraprofessionals.

Ms. Shegogue said that she whole heartedly believes that no Board member that volunteers their time and gives their heart and soul to making decisions all year long to support the students and all the staff, wants to close a school, lose programs, or lose teachers. She said that every budget season they say that if they could they would never choose to take anything away from students; they would want to add or expand. She said that sometimes they have to make tough decisions.

Mrs. Davis said that she agrees with everything that Ms. Shegogue said and that she appreciates Mr. Melnick's position. She said that ultimately the voters put the Board members there to make the best decisions for the children in the district, which are sometimes very difficult. She said that we all know how the budget seasons and referendum go. She said that the reality is that there is a strong coalition of "no" votes toward our budget regardless of the budget that is presented. She said that there is also a group of supporters and "yes" votes, for which the Board is appreciative. She said that after the pandemic, with the state of the economy and so many people out of work, that the Board of Finance will not support a large increase in our budget. She also noted that the surrounding towns' budget increases that were quoted by the audience member were proposed budget increases, not approved budget increases. She said that she appreciates everyone's comments.

Ms. Lybarger said that she appreciates what everyone has had to say. She said that she puts a lot of stock in what the administrative team has put together and their recommendations. She said that they have recommended that the Board move forward with the reconfiguration and that the Board members should put some emphasis on that when they are each making their decisions.

#### **Item IX. Old Business**

There was no Old Business.

#### **Item X. New Business**

##### **A. Possible Approval of the 2021 – 2022 Budget for the Stafford Public Schools**

Mrs. Davis made a motion, seconded by Ms. Bachiochi, that the Board approve the 2021- 2022 budget for the Stafford Public Schools that reconfigures the school district and takes Staffordville School off line, as presented by Mr. Moccio. Mrs. Davis, Mr. Delano, Mrs. Locke, Ms. Lybarger and Ms. Shegogue voted for the motion. Mr. Melnick opposed the motion. The motion carried by majority vote.

**Item XI. Personnel Matters**

Mrs. Locke made a motion, seconded by Mrs. Davis, that the Board add an item to the agenda to discuss the interviews for the Director of School Facilities (executive session anticipated) that took place during the special meeting prior to the regular meeting. Ms. Bachiochi, Mrs. Davis, Mr. Delano, Mrs. Locke, Ms. Lybarger and Mr. Melnick voted for the motion, which carried.

Mrs. Davis made a motion, seconded by Mrs. Locke, that the Board enter executive session Ms. Bachiochi, Mrs. Davis, Mr. Delano, Mrs. Locke, Ms. Lybarger and Mr. Melnick voted for the motion, which carried. The Board entered executive session at 8:30 p.m. Mr. Moccio was invited to attend.

Mrs. Locke made a motion, seconded by Mrs. Davis, to return to regular session. Ms. Bachiochi, Mrs. Davis, Mr. Delano, Mrs. Locke, Ms. Lybarger and Mr. Melnick voted for the motion, which carried. The Board returned to regular session at 8:42 p.m.

Ms. Lybarger made a motion, seconded by Mrs. Davis, that the Board appoint Mr. Jason Gerum to the position of Director of School Facilities. Ms. Bachiochi, Mrs. Davis, Mr. Delano, Mrs. Locke, and Ms. Lybarger voted for the motion. Mr. Melnick opposed the motion. The motion carried by majority vote.

**Item XII. Student Matters**

There were no Student Matters.

**Item XIII. Adjournment**

Ms. Bachiochi made a motion, seconded by Mrs. Davis, to adjourn. Ms. Bachiochi, Mrs. Davis, Mr. Delano, Mrs. Locke, Ms. Lybarger, and Mr. Melnick voted for the motion, which carried. The meeting adjourned at 8:44 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,  
Christine C. Marinelli, Recording Secretary  
(In Person)

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Sonya Shegogue, Chairperson

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Andrea Locke, Secretary