I. CALL TO ORDER
   A. The meeting was called to order at 7:07 PM with the Pledge of Allegiance

II. PUBLIC COMMENT
   Alison Brett, 11 Stanley Drive, as a parent and educator, I am completely taken back by the discussions that have taken place at our last couple of board meetings. As a community, we have never had to handle a pandemic and there will always be pros and cons to every decision that is made. However, we need to work collaboratively, and that is something that is not happening. Parents, Educators, and Administration should all be a part of the reopening plan. The division that has taken place is heart breaking, and I hope that we all can place our personal feelings aside and begin to put the students of Seymour first. With that being said, it was very upsetting to hear at the curriculum meeting and passed meetings that we continually focus on students who are struggling and have never mentioned those who persevered, took responsibility for their learning and excelled. Where is the data on the percent of student who would have met eligibility for Honor Roll? Why is this not being shared? We need to celebrate the successes as well as look to assist those who are struggling. However, lowering the level of expectation for students is not going to solve the rate of failing. Engagement will, and that begins at the top. What is the district family and or community engagement plan? What are the steps that need to be taken to keep our students engaged in their learning? These questions need further investigation. Yes clubs/sports however, that is only a small component to a larger problem. We need to continue to keep our level of expectation high because, it’s our responsibility to keep pushing our children/students to prepare them for the real world.

Tara Burn, 11 Amber Drive, as you move forward with the process for hiring a new Superintendent of Schools, I urge the Board to strongly consider candidates who will always put the needs of students first.
The candidate should also possess excellent two-way communication skills. A Superintendent of Schools needs to foster strong relationships with students, families, staff and the community. They need to be open to constructive feedback when they make decisions. I understand that finding the right candidate can be a challenging process, but I feel that Seymour schools (and our kids) will benefit from an administrator with these effective leadership qualities. Thank you.

Erin Perry, 16 Country Club Road, Good evening, I am writing in to express my frustration over the middle school (and high school) not opening till the middle of April. I’m happy my elementary child finally was brought back full time, but it shouldn’t be so long for the rest of the students to follow suit. More and more students are struggling at home. It’s great the vaccines are coming soon, but I hope that wasn’t a reason to wait so long to open all the schools full time. What if for some reason the vaccine schedule gets delayed, are we going to push it back even more? More and more students are being brought back early because they are struggling. We need to put all our students first and bring them back sooner than the middle of April. Thank you for your time.

Vicki Babineau, 54 Briarwood Road, Dear BOE Members ,it is my hope that with the Governor just announcing that gatherings of 100 people indoors may resume as of March 19, that our back to school plan can be adjusted. As of now, my middle school and high school children are not allowed to return to full time learning until April 12. It’s frustrating to think people can go to a concert, a sporting event, a wedding or a restaurant but our children in Seymour are not allowed to school to be educated. Thank you

Megan Krushinski, 211 Mountain Road, Good Evening Board of Education Members, I am commenting again to express how disappointing it is that the Seymour Education Association leadership was once again left out of the return to full in-person learning discussions with administration. The best way to maintain strong labor-management relationships is by continuous dialogue yet over the last couple months, there has been little to no conversation about the return to full in-person learning. Teachers have reached out to the SEA leadership with ideas, concerns and questions in hopes that timely and meaningful discussions with Central Office administration would have taken place. It is important to realize that the SEA is made up of approximately 190 teachers who educate the children of Seymour. Please keep in mind that means that there are approximately 190 different feelings and opinions about the return to full in-person learning. It would be impossible to have a discussion with that many teachers so the need for representatives to bring those views to the discussion table is imperative. But when there is no seat at the table, those feelings and opinions are not accounted for. The SEA leadership needs to be part of these important discussions going forward. Thank you for your consideration.

Carrie Wilson, 62 Briarwood, School reopening: With numbers in CT going down, why can’t you open SMS & SHS sooner than 4/12? The governor is allowing more people at gatherings & arenas, my son can play team sports, but we can’t go to school 5 days a week? Why not have the students stay in one classroom & teachers change classes to avoid hallway crowding? Put plexiglass in front of teachers like they have at stores & restaurants. Review the protocols that other districts have in place that have been in person school all year! Talk to other health experts. Our children are suffering!! We NEED the option to return to in person school 5 days a week immediately! Thank you
III. DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE ACTION

A. Schools Reopening

Mr. Wilson reminded the board that we had a plan in December that was then revamped and shared with the Board and the community to bring the children back into the buildings slowly. Mrs. Tencza said we have already phased in the high needs and/or struggling students. The administrators were tasked with talking to their staff and getting their opinions. They supported the bifurcated approach to bring back K-2, then grades 3-5. The plan is thoughtful and was created on getting the students back into the buildings safely. The principals each talked on what is currently happening in their buildings. K-2 is back in the elementary buildings, it has been a positive week. Mr. Olechna states staff is happy to have the students back and is looking forward to the return of grades 3-5. It has not been without challenges. Drop off and Pick up times have been problematic due to the amount of parents driving their children. CLS has already had two classes placed in Quarantine until contact tracing could occur. In an all hands on deck approach due to the lack of substitutes, Paraprofessionals, Language Arts Consultants, Counselors, SRBI teachers and administrators have been covering classes for teachers that are out due to quarantine or for other unrelated absences. Mrs. Feige concurred with Mr. Olechna but added she wanted to thank the staff especially the custodians for their hard work in sanitizing the buildings enabling us to bring the students back safely. Mr. Strumello asked the board if there were any questions for the elementary principals at this time. Mrs. Bruno asked that the principals let the board know of the class sizes so they are aware of the numbers. Mr. Champagne asked how they were handling sub coverage. Mr. Olechna said when a teacher is out on quarantine but can teach they put another adult in the classroom to physically monitor the students. If there is a Distance Learning Teacher that is in the same grade level they use that teacher, if not then they go with a rotation of other staff. Mr. Olechna also stated that it is not just the teachers, he is currently trying to hire 6 paraprofessionals as well as a building substitute. Those people are important in the support of the students. Mrs. Roden said the middle school currently has 270 students in each cohort and another 40 students are expected back full time on Monday. Mrs. Freimuth said they enjoyed having the students back in class and the students are eager to be there. Mrs. Bruno asked about class sizes in the middle school as well. Mrs. Roden said that at a full return the spacing for each student would be 3 feet by 3 feet. The capacity in the cafeteria is 100, so overflow was set up in the foyer to allow eating there and to keep the students in teams. Mrs. Roden also has coverage problems when teachers are out. Mr. Freund said they want the students back full-time as well but they have 617 students. 158 have already chosen to be Temporary Full Distance Learners which is 26% of the population. One of the biggest challenges to bringing the students back is the size of the classrooms. To maintain 3 feet distance you can have no more than 20 students per class, currently 88 classes have more than 20 students in them. 67% of the English classes have more than 20 students. Hallways are currently one way but you still have all of the students in the hall every time the bell rings. Staffing is also a concern. They have been using all faculty to monitor classrooms. He said a return of all students at this time is quite scary and you have to look at what you consider an "acceptable risk". Ms. Harmeling said while the data is commendable why is this new, these numbers could have been shared in September. She also suggest we raise the substitute pay and higher more substitutes to help with coverage. She said the students need
to be in school. Mrs. Bruno asked if students could be given 3 choices; distance learning, coming back full time or staying hybrid and would this eliminate some of the problem. Mrs. Bennett states that overall the return of students to schools has gone very well. The nurses and administrators have worked very hard. Seating charts both in school and starting March 8 on the buses will make contact tracing easier so less students and staff will have to quarantine. She says the high school has more students testing positive than the others schools. There have been 35 positive cases in the high school. Mrs. Bennett wants the athletes to be careful and to continue to wear their masks as COVID can cause cardiac issues. COVID can be transmitted through masks. The 15 minute exposure rule is when you are at rest, not when you are exercising. Dr. Curtiss felt that our plan is cohesive and in accord with the guidelines set forth by Public Health. He felt that while the COVID rates are coming down we don’t know why. Until this trend holds it would be unwise to rush into opening everything back up. Mrs. Bruno said the CDC and American Academy of Pediatrics are recommending the reopening of schools due to anxiety and depression issues among students. Dr. Curtiss said that while that is true, many students are also suffering anxiety about coming back to school. Mr. Wilson stated it is a fine line. The vaccine is going to be available next week for teachers. This will allow the teachers that are exposed to be exempt from quarantine. The April 12 date with a slow approach for the reentry of the high school is the best approach. We can put the tents back outside to help ease the crowding in the cafeteria which is one of the biggest concerns at that level. It will allow staff time to be vaccinated as well. After discussion the board thought the middle school students could safely be brought back in, they would stagger the days with 6th grade coming back on March 8, the 7th grade on March 15th, and the 8th grade on March 22. Ms. Harmeling wanted to know who gave full power over this decision to the Superintendent. Mr. Strumello said the state did and read the attached letter. Mr. Strumello says the letter clearly states that the final decision rests with the Superintendent after consulting with the Board.

MOTION: (Ms. Harmeling/sec., Mr. Garofolo) to direct the Superintendent to move up a phased approach to the return of the middle school with Grade 6-March 8, Grade 7-March 15, Grade 8-March 22nd.

MOTION: (Mr. Champagne/sec., Ms. Harmeling) to limit each board member to 2 statements or questions.

SO VOTED

AFFIRMATIVE: 9-0 all in favor

Mr. Champagne wanted to know if 1 week between grades was enough time. Mr. Wilson felt, due to the nature of SMS, he would be willing to try it and monitor the outcome. Mr. Stanek asked Mr. Wilson since the final say rests with him if he were agreeable to the motion. Mr. Wilson was agreeable.

MOTION: (Ms. Harmeling/sec., Mr. Garofolo) to direct the Superintendent to move up a phased approach to the return of the middle school with Grade 6-March 8, Grade 7-March 15, Grade 8-March 22nd.

SO VOTED

AFFIRMATIVE: 9-0 all in favor

The return date for the high school is April 12. Ms. Harmeling wanted to know how the surrounding towns could have their high schools back. Mr. Strumello read a list of 30 schools
in the state. Most of the high schools are doing hybrid; the ones that have returned full time have a much higher percentage of distance learners than we do. Mr. Wilson said that we are the only high school doing a 3-2 hybrid split to offer more in-person instruction. Ms. Harmeling asked how the date of April 12 was selected and what is going to be different on April 12 than on March 12 other than a tent being in place to eliminate crowding in the cafeteria. As long as we are giving full transparency, she would like the parents to decide what is an “acceptable risk”, for their own students. The high school students need to be in school. Mr. Wilson said the vaccine is one factor in the April date. The weather outside permits outside seating is another factor. Mr. Stanek felt that Mr. Wilson is listening to the boards and if he feels April 12th is the best day he is in favor of the administration. The board would like Mr. Freund to poll his community and send a survey to the parents to see what they would like is in regards to their children returning full time to Seymour High School.

B. Updates
   1. Superintendent Vacancy
   2. Business Manager Vacancy
MOTION: (Mr. Hatfield/sec., Ms. Harmeling) to table B1 and B2 until Monday, March 1, 2021 at the regular board meeting

   SO VOTED

IV. ADJOURNMENT
MOTION: (Ms. Harmeling/sec., Mr. Champagne) to adjourn meeting at 9:39 PM.

   SO VOTED

AFFIRMATIVE: 9-0 all in favor
Via Email

February 22, 2021

Ed Strumello
Chairman
Seymour Board of Education
98 Bank Street,
Seymour, CT 06483-2892

Re: Authority for Decision to Transition Between Remote/Hybrid/Full in Person Learning

Dear Mr. Strumello:

You have inquired about the Board’s role in deciding whether to transition from and between full remote learning, hybrid learning and/or full in person learning, including delaying such.

While the Governor (via executive order) and Commissioner of Education (via guidance) have permitted alternatives to full in-class instruction during the Covid-19 pandemic, neither articulates who, as between the Superintendent and the Board of Education has the authority to make such decisions. Since the right is not specifically reserved in the Board, and the Superintendent is responsible by statute (C.G.S. §10-157) for the day to day operations of the schools, it is our belief that the authority to make such decisions resides in the Superintendent. We note that in our experience most, if not all, of the districts we are involved with such decisions have been made by the Superintendent, in most cases after consulting with the Board. We certainly cannot emphasize enough the role of the Board in providing input based on community sentiment. However, we do believe that ultimately it is the Superintendent’s decision to make.

Sincerely,

Floyd J. Dugas, Esq.

FJD/md