

MINUTES OF THE SPECIAL WOODBRIDGE BOARD OF EDUCATION MEETING

Wednesday, August 26, 2020

Via WebEx [https:// woodbridgeps.webex.com/woodbridgeps/j.php?MTID=m4ba4d38095c9cfbae1ed77d0feff5e75](https://woodbridgeps.webex.com/woodbridgeps/j.php?MTID=m4ba4d38095c9cfbae1ed77d0feff5e75)

Meeting Number (access code): 146 940 6138

Meeting password: afT4sZrFu33

CALL TO ORDER: Ms. Piascyk, Vice Chair called the meeting to order (7:0 PM).

BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT: Ms. Lynn Piascyk, Chair; Mr. Dan Cowan, Ms. Lor Ferrante-Fernandes, Ms. Maegan Genovese, Secretary; Mr. Jeff Hughes, Dr. David Ross, Ms. Joyce Shavers, Vice Chair, Dr. Michael Strambler and Dr. Jeffrey Townsend.

STAFF: Mr. Robert Gilbert, Superintendent; Ms. Christine Syriac, Interim Superintendent; Cheryl Mammen, Special Services Director; Al Pullo, Director of Business Operations/Services; Analisa Sherman, Principal; Doreen Merrill, Assistant Principal; and Marsha DeGennaro, Clerk of the Board.

MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC: Beth Heller, First Selectman; Sandy Stein, BOS; Joi Prud'homme, PTO; Linda Acheson, Barbara Ahern, Arianne Buzzard, Melissa Caporossi, Dan Chase, Nicole Chick, Megan Cofrancesco, James Crawford, Larissa Crocco, Maria DePalma, Taylor DaSilva, Jeanne Dempsey, Joseph DePalma, Dara DiCapua, Carrie Fanelli, Lisa Farnen, Kim Franklin, Stephanie Goldberg, Louise Golden, Allison Grabowski, Beth Greene, Peter Halsey, Kris Hart-Rooney, Kristen Horvath, Emily Jacober, Maureen, Krawec, Janine Lempke, Katie McCollom, Aimee Meacham, Heather Minardi, Jean Molot, Visna Ngov, Jason Nolan, Lori Patrick, Christine Renzoni, Nicole Rizzo, Elisa Rosner, Tim Rourke, Meghan Saunders, Jackie Scalia, Michelle Shepard, Nancy Smerekianicz, Christina Thompson, Mary Vincitorio, Michelle Waldron, Shannon Wyman and Cathy Zdrowski, Teachers; Melissa Blackwell, Jennifer Cooper, Kit Dunbar, Shari Foldy, Lauren Kenefick, Suzanne Sugarmann, Wendy Glynn, CSEA; Vito Esparo, Facilities Manager; Stacey Katz, Nursing Supervisor; Khalid Ali, Patricia Alonson, Erin Angelucci, Judy Baldwin, Emily Banach, Robert and Jen Bayer, Adrienne Betz, Betty Brown, Sebastian Buisine, Christine Campbell, Paulo Campos, Angela Chernesky, Anthony Chick, Linda Christy, Sabrina Coppola, Carmen Corvigno, Hamster Dad, Joy Drakonakis, Kris Edwards, Gillian Fattal, Pua Ford, Sara Forman, Robin Froehle, Jessica Gianfredi, Michelle Goglia, Joan Grogan, Rebecca Holcombe, Monika Kaczmarczyk, Jennifer Kapo, Young Kyu Kim, Amy Kinton, Kristy Laydon, Alexis Loss, Jeffrey Luck, Ruchi Jain, Michelle Kline, Heidi McNally, Aubrey Meyenburg, Dena Mortensen, Smith Mowry, Erin Oleskey, Justin Parker, Tahera Parvez, Stacie Rivard Pedigo, Jacqueline Pilar, Chris Reichart, Jane Roddy, Bina Roginsky, Cara Rosner, Diane Schroeder, Maria Shevelkina, Dr. Shari Storeyguard, Alison Valsamis, Enrene VanTonder, Erin Williamson, community.

Return to Campus Letter

Interim Superintendent Syriac indicated administration had met with the WEA Executive Board to discuss the concerns raised in the August 14 letter. In addition, numerous conversations have been held with various staff members to address individual concerns. It is hoped that upon conclusion of the scheduled professional development training days some of the angst being expressed will be alleviated. The suggestion that the district develop a new reopening plan based on hybrid instruction two days prior to staff returning is simply not feasible at this stage.

In addressing the concern raised in the letter regarding staff returning to in-person instruction, it was noted that we should be using facts to guide us and currently the transmission rates in Connecticut are very low and bringing students and staff back has limited risk involved.

In addressing the WEA going straight to the Board with their concerns it was noted that there is a process in place that needs to be followed. Concerns are first presented to administration, if not adequately addressed, then to the Superintendent and if still not satisfied then it would go to the Board. This process is not being followed. It is clear that administration is in process of addressing the concerns raised by staff and it is not the place of the Board to address the issues of the letter if administration has already accomplished that.

Similar to other districts across the state, Beecher is in the middle ground area, which is challenging to navigate successfully. Total Distance Learning is not on the table for consideration. There are a large number of families who have expressed their desire to have children back in school. There are also 59 teachers who have expressed their concern for in-person learning, and hopefully, the Board has the opportunity tonight to answer some of the questions.

Reopening Plan

The reopening plan was developed in collaboration with the entire administration, numerous staff representatives (teachers, paras, nursing, custodial and clerical), parent / community members, the BOWA transportation coordinator, school medical advisor and the Quinipiack Valley Health District. It was an incredible group of people who put in countless hours of work with teachers sacrificing their vacation and well as family time to assist in the development of this comprehensive plan. The CSDE mandated that all districts submit a plan with three components – In-Person, Hybrid and Remote Learning. This is the same plan that was presented to the Board several times and subsequently submitted to the CSDE. Bethany and Orange have also opted for in-person learning, five days a week as well. Due to scheduling complexities, Amity will be utilizing a hybrid model. Should it become necessary our proposed hybrid model would align with Amity.

With approximately 75% of Woodbridge parents indicating a preference for in-person learning, a decision was made to focus on in-person instruction with a remote parent option component as defined by the CSDE. The remote parent option will run as a separate section and will have individual grade level assignments K-6 and special education. Teachers conducted student placement for both programs during the summer months with smaller class sizes to allow for social distancing. Advertising for staffing vacancies commenced although there are still positions remaining to be filled. In Woodbridge staffing two programs is not financially feasible nor prudent logistically and there will be significant financial impact on the budget as none of these positions were budgeted for.

The start of the school year is always important but it is even more crucial this year. When school closed in March, teachers knew their students as individuals as well as learners. Teachers need the opportunity to know their students as learners, their strengths and challenges. Students need this opportunity to build a rapport and bond with classmates as well as their teacher to create a firm foundation for learning. In anticipation of further closures, either short-term or long-term, it is crucial that we prepare all our students and parents for what remote learning will look like, what they can expect and what the differences may be from in-person instruction. It is imperative that we work together through each step to provide that same level for success this year that we would do in any other year.

The Board was urged to trust administration to proceed with in-person instruction as originally planned. Current metrics indicate in-person instruction is a viable option. In addition, utilizing minimum days for the first week will allow administration and staff to gather feedback, make adjustments where necessary and have the flexibility to create new routines to adhere to protocols. While there are many viewpoints, the WEA's suggestion that we switch to a hybrid plan two days before the planned opening of school is not warranted. There is no way to predict what the future will hold. If and when it becomes necessary, we will be fully prepared to shift to hybrid but not now.

MOTION #1 – IN-PERSON PLAN

Vote to support the in-person plan as presented by Interim Superintendent Syriac just now.

Mr. Cowan

As there was no second to the motion, Mr. Cowan withdrew his motion.

WITHDRAWN

It was noted that this was a special meeting and as such changes could not be made to the agenda nor was this item noticed to the public for action. Interim Superintendent Syriac also indicated the CSDE did not require Board approval of the Reopening Plan and a motion was not necessary to continue moving the district forward as outlined above.

Questions were raised relative to building capacity, how the building would function if it were at 100% capacity, if we could safely educate 100% of the students in the building, if another survey was necessary, class size ranges and financial impact given staffing challenges.

- Students and staff will be traversing in both directions to minimize traffic within hallways.
- Enrollment numbers will be monitored closely to ensure parent choice. There are 5-6 sections at every grade level with larger classes also having additional support from teacher assistants.
- Each student has been assigned a base homeroom to ensure class sizes remain small. Class sizes range from 12-14 in the lower grades, 14-17 in the intermediate and 23-34 in remote learning. Schedule adjustments will be made by administration as needed and parents have been asked to provide administration with a minimum of one week notice prior to switching from remote to in-person or vice versa. Given our current set-up, should it become necessary, we are able to move to hybrid fairly quickly.

- Based on the amount of parent feedback received, it does not appear that another survey would be beneficial at this time. Communications to staff and parents have occurred on a regular basis and will continue into the coming weeks.
- Despite all the planning it is anticipated that changes and tweaking of routines and protocols will be necessary. We are still have eight (8) additional certified teacher slots to fill, the cost of which is in the range of \$137,000, so there is little doubt that the current budget will be impacted. In addition, we did not meet the criteria to receive additional funding from the CSDE for PPE expenses.

Ms. Katz provided over overview on CDC protocol compliance. Information will also be available on the web site. Parents are urged to be vigilant in checking their children daily and monitoring symptoms. Students should stay home if they are not feeling well. Any student experiencing a temperature of 100 degree or more will be sent home immediately. As part of the professional development activities, staff will be trained in the dressing and removal of PPE. Approximately, \$70,000 of PPE is available and PPE packets have been specifically designed and placed in various areas throughout the building.

Discussion ensued for optimizing the remote learning experience and how that format will differ from what was offered in the spring. The remote learning schedule will look different than our traditional schedule. Lessons will be recorded lessons and instruction will be provided to students either in small groups or one-on-one. There is an expectation for more live teaching as well as individual student check-ins. There will be intentional focus on the social / emotional needs of students and curriculum pacing guides have been revised as a result. Curriculum lesson content and objectives have been modified based on grouping assignments of students and abilities. Informal assessments, end of unit assessments and star tests will be used to monitor and adjust curriculum as deemed appropriate. A number of outdoor areas have been identified and marked as student learning classrooms. The structure for recess has been adjusted and allows for only 2-3 classes to be assigned to a given area. Students attending in-person learning will interact with their homeroom teacher and/or specialist(s) while remote learners will only interact with their remote teacher. The overall goal of both in-person and remote learning is to ensure student success at every level.

Certified Leave of Absence Requests

Interim Superintendent Syriac noted that three certified staff members were requesting a leave of absence for the 2020/21 school as a result of concerns on returning to the building during the pandemic. It was the recommendation of administration that the leaves be granted.

MOTION #2 – CERTIFIED LEAVES OF ABSENCE

Move that we accept the leave of absence requests from Aimee Meacham, Nicole Chick and Nicole Rizzo for school year 2020/21 school year as clarified in their emails to the BOE.

Mr. Cowan
Second by Ms. Ferrante-Fernandes
UNANIMOUS

MOTION TO ADJOURN: (9:19 PM)
Mr. Cowan
Second by Mr. Hughes
UNANIMOUS

Recorded by Marsha DeGennaro, Clerk of the Board