

MINUTES OF THE SPECIAL WOODBRIDGE BOARD OF EDUCATION MEETING

Monday, November 11, 2020

Via WebEx <https://woodbridgeps.webex.com/woodbridgeps/j.php?MTID=m1d183aaffc2ed9603d5222a899a7600f>

Meeting Number (access code): 146 555 5605

Meeting Password: e3qNfvg9Xg3

CALL TO ORDER: Ms. Piascyk, Chair called the meeting to order (6:32 PM).

BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT: Ms. Lynn Piascyk, Chair; Mr. Daniel 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: 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: Dr. Jonathan S. Budd, Incoming Superintendent; Dr. Gaeton Stella, Former WSD Superintendent; Dr. Joseph Erardi, Search Consultant; Karen Wolujewicz, QVHD; Beth Heller, First Selectman; Sandy Stein, BOS; Dr. Tom Hander, BOF; Barbara Ahern, Sylvia Antonellis, Arianne Buzzard, Melissa Caporossi, Dan Chase, Nicole Chick, Megan Cofrancesco, Kristina Conroy, Taylor DaSilva, Christa Demetro, Kristen DeManche, Joseph DePalma, Maria DePalma, Jeanne Dempsey, Dara DiCapua, Madison Eucalitto, Carrie Fanelli, Lisa Farnen, Kim Franklin, Robin Gerber, Jeanette Glennon, Stephanie Goldberg, Taylor Gowisnock, Cheri Guerra, Peter Halsey, Kris Hart-Rooney, Liz Heagney, Kristen Horvath, Emily Jacober, Elena Lavigne, Allison Lemieux, Monique MacDonald, Kathy Marlor, Aimee Meacham, Jean Molot, Lanna Moore, Leigh Mulligan, Teresa Nakouzi, Jennifer Naylor, Lori Patrick, Rose Piscatelli, Christina Renzoni, Nicole Rizzo, Elisa Rosner, Tim Rourke, Meghan Saunders, Jackie Scalia, Michelle Shepard, Nancy Smerekanicz, Christina Thompson, Heather Trofimchik, Harley Ventura, Mary Vincitorio, Michelle Waldron, Kayla Widmeyer, Sarah Wislocki, Shannon Wyman, Cathy Zdrowski, Teachers; Jennifer Cooper, Janet Criscuolo, Kit Dunbar, Shari Foldy, Wendy Glynn, Cedric Jeffries, James Mase, Laura Sexton, Suzanne Sugarmann, Peter Tallardy, CSEA, Aisling Fagan, Nursing Supervisor; Vito Esparo, Facilities Manager; Abigail, Patricia Alonso, Chrissy Anton, Tammy Arotsky, Nancy Atwood, Azimal, Julie Baldwin, Emily Banach, Barbara Beaman, Katie Behr, Adrienne Betz, Melissa Blackwell, Sharon Brostrom, Sebastian Buisine, CB, Christine Campbell, Paolo Campos, Kevin Cartee, Linda Christy, Chris, Beth Cohen, Matthew Cohen, Claire Coleman, Sabrina Coppola, Isabel Corredor, Jill D'Amico, Jay Dahya, Rebecca Dallrymple, Dorothy, Stephen Drew, Eric, Ryan Errico, Michael Fitzgerald, Pua Ford, Robin Froehle, Sam Gambardella, Gary, Margaret Gilshannon, Michelle Goglia, Melanie Gregory, Joan Grogan, Nicole Graas, Melanie Gregory, McKenzie Granata, Kathryn Griffiths, Alyssa Guirguis, Erin Hofstatter, Ruchi Jain, Stephanie Jacobson, Johana, KB, Bryan Kier, Lisa LaMonico, Terry Landau, Murielle Lamour, Lana, LDC, Libby, Manya Lisse, Jeffrey Luck, Tamara Lyhne, GM, Nancy Malafronte, Mandy, Mark D, Sameet Mehta, Aubrey Meyenburg, Michelle, Dena Mortensen, Smith Mowry, Don Nguyen, David Novick, Erin Olesky, Jacqueline Pilar, Joi Prud'homme, Stacie Rivard-Pedigo, Tahera Parvez, Jane Roddy, Bina Roginsky, MR, Justin Parker, L. Reichart, K. Rosen, Cara Rosner, RR2383, Amber Saffo, Alli Schaefer, Diane Schroeder, Steve Sholtis, Joanie Smith, Ellen Spark, Sumi, Tomaszdm, Alison Valsamis, Jenn Wellman, Matt Wheeler, Erin Williamson, Edward and Michelle Whitbread, Call-In Users 2, 3, WS369, community.

Appointment of New Superintendent

Chair Piascyk provided an overview on the process and work of the search committee in selecting a superintendent. The search process included the hiring of JE Consulting to conduct the search and involvement of multiple community forums, staff meetings as well as a stakeholder survey. Through this process the Board received 27 applications and interviewed 9 applicants with one candidate emerging as a fit for the Woodbridge School District. The committee selected Dr. Jonathan S. Budd, currently the Assistant Superintendent in Trumbull, as their finalist.

MOTION #1 – APPOINTMENT OF SUPERINTENDENT (BUDD)

Move that we appointment Dr. Jonathan Budd as the Superintendent of the Woodbridge School District effective December 14, 2020.

Ms. Piascyk
Second by Ms. Shavers
UNANIMOUS

The Board extended a sincere welcome to Dr. Jonathan Budd. Dr. Budd expressed his appreciation to the committee and looked forward to being part of the Beecher community.

BRS Covid Status

Interim Superintendent Syriac apprised the Board on the latest CSDE recommendation issued in late October under Addendum 4. The guidelines advocate for staying the course with in-person instruction and to assess the metrics in early December. The guidelines were recently revised to allow for consideration of mitigating efforts within a district as part of the overall metric. It is important to be clear about what the criteria is and what are the specifics of the criteria that would require transition to a different model of instruction. Concerns have been expressed by staff regarding the Hybrid model and there are voices advocating for full remote instruction. Unfortunately, over the last week, Woodbridge, as a town, changed to level Red, with BRS remaining as “Orange”.

Ms. Karen Wolujewicz, Director of Quinnipack Valley Health Department (QVHD), reviewed the metrics associated with closures and the various designation specifics within the categories of Red and Orange as a town and as a school. While the Town is Red, the school is Orange and the metrics still favor in-person learning for students. Woodbridge is fortunate that Beecher resides on a large campus with significant acreage and a fairly spacious school facility. There is no evidence of “in school” transmission and based on contact tracing case investigations, there are no outbreaks within the school setting. While there are community spreads, it is primarily through sports teams, family pods, socialization / social activities and exposure outside of the community.

It was noted that is a combination of all the mitigation factors that help in reducing transmission / spread. The mitigation factors include not only the wearing of masks but social distancing, cleaning / disinfection, hand hygiene and co-horting. Both students and staff have been extremely compliant in adhering to the protocols as well as the wearing of masks, hand washing etc. While it is important to pay attention to rising numbers, we do not have a crystal ball nor can we predict or control what the future will hold. Based on our current mitigation strategies and metrics, the best choice is to keep students in person for as long as possible provided we are able to ensure the safety of both staff and students. Based on family feedback, students are performing much better with the in person model versus the remote learning model. Further, it is important to the emotional well-being of children that they are in school with teachers and peers. Based on individual need and circumstances, approximately 20% of our overall student population has opted to participate in remote learning. It is also important that before removing the right of 80% of our students to attend in person instruction, we establish a viable metric validating a change in direction.

Concern was expressed for playing the “waiting game” for an outbreak within the school to occur before there is any movement to a more restrictive learning model. Baseline levels were low and now there is full expedient growth across the board with Beecher having its first case as well. While families may be comfortable sending their children into the building, the reality is we are exposing staff, who do not have the option of staying home, to a lethal virus. We know that there will be children in the building who are infected. What is the threshold for choosing an alternate course, is it possible for contact tracing to identify all the cases, and when is the optimum time to move to a more restrictive educational environment for the protection of staff and community. The Board still has the option to make different choices locally based on what they believe is right for the district.

While the Hybrid plan does have challenges, it allows for in-person learning to continue on a smaller scale and provides benefits for social emotional support for students. There are some children whose only refuge is school. It remains unclear what our metric should be for making a different decision and whether we should wait for a spread to occur within the building before making the decision. Unfortunately, neither the CSDE nor the Health Department has a “magic” number nor formula for rendering local decisions.

Ms. Wolujewicz left the meeting (7:41 PM).

While there was general consensus to continue with the recommendation from Interim Syriac that the week of the Thanksgiving Break remain Hybrid, and the week following the break be fully remote, sentiment existed for more discussion to move to a different instruction model. There is no established threshold or metric for determining when we should do something different than in person instruction except waiting for an outbreak within the school.

Interim Superintendent Syriac noted the Hybrid model is challenging for staff as the majority of teachers do not teach in-person and remote simultaneously like other districts. We are prepared to move to a Hybrid model on a moment's notice, however, there is nothing indicating that requires imminently moving in a different direction. We are continuing to review data weekly, in consultation with QVHD and the Department of Health, and make decisions accordingly. Each decision is based on a combination of various factors, there is simply no magic number. It was also expressed that the Board should trust the guidance and recommendations of administration as they are the education experts.

MOTION TO ADJOURN: (8:13 PM)

Dr. Ross

Second by Mr. Hughes

UNANIMOUS

Recorded by Marsha DeGennaro, Clerk of the Board