

# MINUTES OF THE SPECIAL WOODBRIDGE BOARD OF EDUCATION MEETING

Monday, July 20, 2020

Via WebEx Meeting Number (access code): 146 320 4770

Meeting password: H9JyTsHxQ33

**CALL TO ORDER:** Ms. Piascyk, Vice Chair called the meeting to order (7:04 PM).

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

**STAFF:** Mr. Robert Gilbert, 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. Martin, Kulldorff, Harvard Medical School; Dr. Alison Galvani, Yale Professor of Epidemiology and Public Health Director for the Center for Infectious Disease Modeling and Analysis; Dr. Shannon Martinello, Pediatrician and School Medical Advisor; Mr. William Donald, Van Zelm; Beth Heller, First Selectman; Sandy Stein, BOS; Joi Prud'homme, PTO; Linda Acheson, BeeJ Ahern, Nicole Chick, Jeannie Ciarleglio, James Crawford, Larissa Crocco, Kristin DeManche, Jeanne Dempsey, Joseph DePalma, Carson Echeverry, Carrie Fanelli, Lisa Farnen, Kim Franklin, Robin Gerber, Stephanie Goldberg, Allie Grabowski, Beth Greene, Kris Hart-Rooney, Liz Heagney, Kristen Horvath, Emily Jacober, Elena Lavigne, Janine Lempke, Bill Letsch, Monique MacDonald, Kathleen Marlor, Katie McCollom, Aimee Meacham, Heather Minardi, Jean Molot, Lanna Moore, Teresa Nakouzi, Visa Ngov, Jason Nolan, Lori Patrick, Christine Renzoni, Nicole Rizzo, Kris Rose, Elisa Rosner, Meghan Saunders, Jacquie Scalia, Michelle Shepard, Susan Simoniello, Nancy Smerekanicz, Christina Thompson, Mary Vincitorio, Michelle Waldron, Sarah Wislocki, and Cathy Zdrowski, Teachers; Jennifer Cooper, Janet Criscuolo, Shari Foldy, Wendy Glynn, Laura Sexton, Suzanne Sugarmann, CSEA; Vito Esparo, Facilities Manager; Marsha Ackerman, Chrissy Anton, Tom Akdeniz, Julie Baldwin, Emily Banach, Lauren Betlinski, Sharon Brostrom, Sebastian Buisine, Paulo Campos, Linda Christy, Jay Dahya, Jennifer Dougherty, Eric Erkenbrach, Ryan Errico, Lauren Esposito, Mabel Flickinger, Pua Ford, Sara Forman, Susan Freudson, Allison Gavaletz, Jennifer Gelbrand, Eric Gershon, Michele Goglia, Melanie Gregory, Alyssa Guirguis, Michael Haas, Kelly Halstead, Tom Handler, Mike Holland, Brooke Hopkins, Stephanie Jacobson, Ruchi Jain, Monika Kaczmarczyk, Stacey Katz, Nicanor Kohncke, Steven Lawrence, Kristy Laydon, Lisa LaMonico, Qing Liu, Alexis Loss, Jeffrey Luck, David Madigan, Christa and Greg Mann, Dr. Shannon Martinello, Heidi McNally, Scott Miller, Stacy Moran, Dena Mortensen, Bridget Nichol, Erin Oleskey, Bethany Park, Tahera Parvez, Andrea Polinsky, Whitney Randall, Dr. Mohini Ranganathan, Elizabeth Roberts, Jane Roddy, Cara Rosner, Jeffrey Rossi, Allison Schaefer, Josephine Shamaly, Maria Shevelkina, Sharon Stahl, Dr. Shari Storeyguard, Dawn Tomaszewski, Kristen and James Turkosz, Lisa Vitale, Marissa Westbrook, Erin Williamson, community.

As suggested at the July 15 special meeting, community experts were invited to share their expertise perspectives as part of the Reopening Plan discussion.

## **MOTION #1 – MODIFY AGENDA**

Move that discussion on the Reopening Plan, Item 4.3.1 and 4.3.1.1, be moved to Item 1.2 after Call to Order.

Mr. Cowan

Second by Dr. Townsend

**UNANIMOUS**

## **GUEST SPEAKERS**

Dr. Alison Galvani, Yale Professor of Epidemiology and Public Health and Director for the Center for Infectious Disease Modeling and Analysis;

Dr. Martin Kulldorff, Bio Statistician and Professor of Population Medicine at Harvard Medical School and Brigham Women's Hospital

Dr. Shannon Martinello, Pediatrician and School Medical Advisor

Mr. William Donald, Van Zelm HVAC

Dr. Galvani explained transmissions and noted that a majority of recent transmission is through people not exhibiting symptoms. Covid has already killed 140,000 people and it affects the heart, lung and brain. The guidance to stay 6 feet apart and wear masks reduces risk, although it is not 100% effective. Sneeze droplets are able to travel up to 20 feet and it lives on surfaces longer than originally thought and in lower temperatures and humidity. The potential for increased cases in colder

temps is a reality. Children are drivers of other respiratory infections as well. The likelihood of young children being able to wear a mask and not touch their face during an 8 hour school day is not plausible. It is impossible to control exposure to children, household family members, elderly relatives and other adults all who could all be at risk. Schools should remain closed for in-person learning until a vaccine is found or the pandemic is over, which is not in the foreseeable future. In-person learning should not be important than the lives of teachers. School resources should be devoted to effective remote learning experiences to keep everyone safe.

Dr. Kulldorff indicated that he is currently working with the Center of Disease Control in Atlanta and NYC Health Department. He noted the risks to students, teachers / other staff and family members comparing pneumonia, influenza and Covid-19. It was stated that numbers related to Covid may be lower as a result of school closures across the country. Given present numbers, Covid appears to be a low risk to students and has a minimal risk difference from other professions for teachers / staff in the age group 20-50 years of age. There is a much greater risk to older staff members (65+) as well family members living with a child. Closing schools until the pandemic is over is not realistic. The pandemic will likely not be over until there is a vaccine or sufficient numbers of immunity which remains an unknown at this time. There have been successful reopenings in Sweden and other European countries as well and he noted the differences for how they navigated infection spikes.

Mr. Donald explained the HVAC ventilation system, air filtration aspects and control systems. There is ability to monitor conditions within individual classroom spaces on a daily basis and adjust humidity and air quality controls accordingly. Van Zelm is working on identifying changes to HVAC controls in compliance with the CSDE reopening guidelines, including increased air filtration levels of outside air. HVAC equipment and performance will be evaluated on a routine basis to ensure efficiencies are in full compliance with reopening guidelines.

Dr. Martinello noted the importance of the health and well-being of children and families. The mental health of all ages has been impacted by Covid. Linking healthcare to employment and social services to schools places a burden on school systems. Covid is not going away, and while vaccines may be possible, it is not likely that will not occur by the upcoming school year. Currently, the overall numbers are indicating there is a low percentage of children being infected. BRS is fortunate and does have a high-quality HVAC system, lots of outdoor space, a robust PTO / community, faculty and a Board of Education to assist with the challenges. While student risks appear to be low, we cannot discount the risk to the adult population and students and staff are indispensable. If mandated for in-person instruction, it is crucial to maximize air flow, social distance for students and teachers and well as the adult community in the building, as adults are more likely to infect each other rather than be infected from a child. Maximizing outdoor spaces would be ideal. Cohorting and hygiene/masking techniques will be important as well. Neighborhood cohorting could also be beneficial for limiting potential exposure. Masks are a must and there are limited contraindications to masks. We are positioned for in-person instruction, however, if infection rates increase either locally or state-wide that could change. If children are going to be physically present with staff for in school learning, it is imperative that everyone share the responsibility for keeping each other well: if you are sick, you must remain home; if you travel you should quarantine; if you have trace contact, you must quarantine. Covid is not going to magically disappear. If we are going to keep schools open it is important for everyone to maintain social distance, wear masks and be responsible community members.

### **REOPENING PLAN UPDATE**

Superintendent Gilbert provided an update on the plan presented several days ago. The plan has been communicated to both parents and staff with livestream sessions scheduled with each group in the coming days. Districts are still awaiting further guidance from the CSDE on the parent option for remote learning as the some of the specifics are still unclear. We are continuing our focus on creation of a robust remote learning option based on feedback from the spring. In accordance with the CSDE mandate, the full reopening plan will be submitted to the CSDE at the end of the week. Implementation and planning details are occurring as well as fine-tuning procedures and protocols to ensure safety for staff and students both in and out of the building areas. Staffing concerns are also being reviewed. Based on current mandates, several new policies will be submitted for adoption. Administration will be attending several webinars on acceleration as part of the remote learning component. Budget implications are being identified and have been submitted to the CSDE as requested.

The CSDE has granted three additional teacher preparation time at the start of the school and as a result adjustments will be made to the current school calendar. Adjustments to the calendar will include the addition of three staff days August 26, 27 and 28. While these days were originally student days, the first student day will now be August 31. On August 31 half the student population, inclusive of those with last names A-K, will be in session. On September 1, students L-Z will attend in session, all students will begin attending on September 2 and the entire first week be minimum days with a 1:10 dismissal.

It was noted that an additional Board meeting may need to be scheduled in August to address the above items. Questions arose regarding comparisons among other countries and the United States as similar protocols were followed, student school ages were consistent and death rates were in the middle. Views were expressed for transmission rates among children to children, children to adults and adults to adults, death classifications and infection rates / odds ratios. Further discussion occurred on the impact of decisions on the community, discretion of the individual school district in choice options for staff and parents in selection of remote learning versus in-person instruction, consequences for violation of CSDE direction, exploration of outdoor models of instruction, clarification on distance learning and responsibility for implementation, family preference for safe in-person instruction and the range of risks associated with each of these decisions.

### **MOTION #2 – MODIFY AGENDA**

Move that we modify the agenda and move Public Comment, Item 2.4 to this portion of the agenda.

Mr. Cowan

Second by Ms. Genovese

**UNANIMOUS**

Drs. Galvani and Kulldorff and Mr. Donald left the meeting.

### **PUBLIC COMMENT**

The Board acknowledged receipt of written communications from the BRS Kindergarten, Grades 1, 2, 3, 4 teams and specialists, Jean Molot, Aimee Meacham, Nicole Chick, Surabh and Pradmaja Vilekar, Patricia Alonso, Chrissy Anton, Kathleen Jo Corbin, Melissa Federico, Michelle Goglia, Nicole Graas, Aryeh Herman, Monica Kaczmarczyk, Marie McDaniel, Aimee Meacham, Erin and Christopher Oleskey, Donna Schuster, Dr. Shari Storeyguard, James and Kristen Turkosz, Amanda Tyma, the WEA and their reopening plan follow-up survey.

Maria Madonick spoke regarding cohorting and advocated for a strong distance learning plan. Parents with children in different schools still mix at home, which compromises cohorts at all levels. A strong distance learning platform that occurs concurrently with a brick and mortar experience allow for a seamless transition for students to rotate between both in person instruction and home. A strong distance learning platform will also provide support for students critically ill as well as for future snow days. Also, the PTO has provided and expanded several grants for teachers for shading and seating equipment for outdoor classroom use. It is hoped a student outdoor safety protocol will be developed and shared in the near future.

Nicole Chick is a BRS parent and teacher. It is evident there are strong opinions about the opening of BRS. The Kindergarten team is concerned regarding play and social interactions that will be removed from the daily schedule as a result of adherence to CDC guidelines. In addition, Kindergarten teachers would be the frontline providers for implementation of CDC guidelines to four and five year olds who in a new and strange environment for the first time. There is significant stress for both teachers and students in dealing with this type of anxiety as well as the fear for the potential for bringing the virus home to their own families. School will no longer be a place of normal socialization or routine as nothing is normal in a global pandemic. Given current statistics, there is potential for 16 students to be positive within the building at any given moment, thus spreading the disease to their homes and families as well as teachers and their families. There is still so much that is not known about this virus. Why risk opening a building when it makes greater sense to start the year in a distance learning plan. There are no easy answers nor is there a “one size fits all” model. Distance learning is the best possible option that allows teachers to do their job, in the safest way possible for their health, as well as that of their students and families.

Aimee Meacham a BRS parent and teacher urged everyone to read the posted letters, especially those from BRS teachers. She cited the Governor’s press conference noting that it is highly likely Connecticut will revert to full distance learning at some point in the future. Why risk lives, wasting time and energy as well as district resources on a “wait and see” approach that places teachers as guinea pigs in a state experiment. The focus has been on data and numbers. She urged everyone to remember that she is not a number, she is a person and her children are not a number, they are people just like her students.

Jean Molot a teacher and resident noted that teachers want to be teaching in classrooms, however, given the current pandemic that would not be safe. She noted that teachers are working in a large building, with small groups of students in small areas. She asked that Board members ask themselves if they would be comfortable working every day in a conference room with 20 other people for over six hours a day five days a week.

Dr. Shari Storeyguard noted it is clear that government mandates will determine to what degree children will have in-school learning or home-school learning. While, many are waiting for the call to be home schooling, we should be thinking

creatively about how we can have in-school learning that maximizes safety and minimizes risk. Outside learning is the safest way for teachers and students to have the lowest transmission risk and offers children an engaged meaningful education. Thoughtfully planned small group instruction in outdoor learning is optimal. BRS is fortunate that there are large shaded fields with each classroom having outdoor access. Pavilions, tables, benches, fans, yoga mats and lap desks could be donated by parents and the community. Different types of instruction could occur in and around pavilions. Masks could be worn while under the pavilion and taken off when outside of the pavilion, thus minimizing the length of time worn. Children could enter and exit through the pavilions thus limiting contact within the building and in hallways. If in-school learning is mandated to occur, this is an attainable goal through small cohorted group instruction as long as our community numbers remain low.

Cathy Zdrowski requested to present the follow-up WEA Survey which clearly indicates that the position of BRS teachers is to have only remote learning occur.

Questions were raised for developing a more robust remote learning model as well as an outdoor model. A dedicated and focused approach for enhancing the remote learning platform will be the priority of administration in the coming days. Feedback will be sought from parents, teacher assistants as well as teachers. It was noted that outdoor learning environments create different challenges and variables for staff and students inclusive of medical concerns as well as massive curriculum changes. Achieving successful learning requires a very delicate balance of indoor / outdoor learning experiences in both environments.

It was noted that specifics for implementation of the remote learning platform have not yet been presented. The Board did not feel that sufficient progress was being made. Time is of the essence and without this information no one will know the details and what is the best option and/or approach. What are the concrete steps that have been taken to enhance what is guaranteed to be a core component of teaching this year. Who will actually be teaching distance learning. Which curriculum elements will actually be adapted. It remains unknown how many staff members will return nor which calendar changes will become necessary. Administration noted that changes are unfolding daily with many constraints and a myriad of unknown variables. The Reopening Plan was developed in compliance with the CSDE mandate requiring all districts to submit a plan that adhered to their specified template and inclusive of all components. The CSDE mandates that each district allow for three options: In-Person Learning, Hybrid and Distance Learning. the direction from the Governor and Commission of Education is that school districts will be back for In-Person instruction beginning in the fall as well as an offer of distance learning at the same time to those students medically challenged Administration and staff are working on every scenario simultaneously to ensure there is a balanced approach in each area and that the plan allows for interchangeability at any given time and at a moment's notice.

Discussion ensued for what the role of the Reopening Committee was and if it was possible to add additional Board members to this Committee as currently, the Vice Chair is the only representative serving on this committee. The Board needs reassurance that all voices are being heard and it is unclear that all opportunities are being maximized. A suggestion was made have a separate subcommittee formed to focus solely on outdoor learning components. It was also noted that the main goal should be to support the direction of the Superintendent for the safe reopening of the school. Time is short and too many subcommittees with too many different directions will not accomplish much of anything.

### **MOTION #3 – REOPENING COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP**

Move that we add a second board member on the Reopening Committee.

Dr. Ross

Second by Dr. Townsend

**UNANIMOUS**

It was agreed Ms. Shavers would be the additional representative on the Reopening Committee.

### **BOARD CHAIR VACANCY**

As a result of the resignation of Dr. Fleischman on July 21, 2020, the Board Chair position is vacant. A suggestion was made to have equal party representation for the positions of Chair and Vice Chair as well as shared leadership responsibilities to guard against politicalization.

### **MOTION #4 – NOMINATIONS FOR CHAIR**

I nominate Lynn Piascyk to serve as Chair of the Woodbridge Board of Education.

Mr. Cowan

Second by Mr. Hughes

**MOTION #5 – CLOSE NOMINATIONS FOR CHAIR**

Move that we close nominations for Chair.

Ms. Piascyk

**MOTION #4 – NOMINATIONS FOR CHAIR**

*I nominate Lynn Piascyk to serve as Chair of the Woodbridge Board of Education.*

*Mr. Cowan*

*Second by Mr. Hughes*

**UNANIMOUS**

Ms. Piascyk was elected Chair. With the election of her as Chair, a vacancy was created in the Vice Chair position.

**MOTION #6 – NOMINATIONS FOR VICE CHAIR**

I nominate Joyce Shavers to serve as Vice Chair of the Woodbridge Board of Education.

Ms. Genovese

Second by Mr. Cowan

**MOTION #7 – CLOSE NOMINATIONS FOR VICE CHAIR**

Move that we close nominations for Vice Chair.

Ms. Piascyk

**MOTION #6 – NOMINATIONS FOR VICE CHAIR**

*I nominate Joyce Shavers to serve as Vice Chair of the Woodbridge Board of Education.*

*Ms. Genovese*

*Second by Mr. Cowan*

**UNANIMOUS**

**CORRESPONDENCE**

Ms. Genovese acknowledged receipt of a letter from the WEA Attorney / CEA representative asking for details on the reopening, one out-of-state letter and one in-state letter encouraging Beecher to divest the police and putting those resources and monies to support black and white students; a letter requesting that the Board review Cheshire's reopening plan and expressing concern that the survey conducted was too limited.

**CONSENT AGENDA**

**MOTION #8 – CONSENT AGENDA**

Move that we approve the consent agenda as presented.

Ms. Genovese

Second by Dr. Strambler

**UNANIMOUS**

**REPORTS**

*Update on Interim Superintendent Search* – Ms. Piascyk noted that an interest inquiry was sent out to each of the qualified individuals on the list provided by the Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendent's. The Board has reviewed the resumes of those candidates who expressed an interest and will begin the screening and interviewing process shortly.

*PTO Update* – Ms. Prud'homme noted that all sixth grade yearbooks were delivered. They are in process of reviewing the financial reports from last year and are having discussions for how to find creative ways to support students, teachers and staff in the upcoming year. The PTO has approved \$9,000 in teacher grants to provide flexible outdoor seating and shading, social distancing within classroom structures and purchase of more inclusive and diverse book titles.

*Superintendent's Report* – Superintendent Gilbert highlighted the hiring of two special education resource teachers – Olivia Olsen (one year only) and Robin Querker; two classroom teachers – Jeanette Brito for Grade 6 and Nina Triplett for Grade 4. Positions still in hiring process include a teacher assistant, the part-time speech, psychologist and art as well as the full-time music positions. The Ad Hoc SRO Committee held its first meeting with the next meeting being July 27.

*BRS Update* – Ms. Sherman indicated the summer scholars and extended school year were running virtually. As part of the effort to provide social emotional learning support, Wellness Wednesdays has been created for staff and students will be receiving a personal letter from her via U.S. mail. Administration is attending webinars and workshops throughout the

summer including topics on acceleration, distance learning and Title IX. Class assignments will be disseminated in the second to third week in August.

Upcoming Meeting Presentations – annual Wellness / Tools for School Plan. There was general consensus that this would be deferred as the primary focus of both the Board and administration should be the Reopening Plan.

Finance Committee – Ms. Shavers noted \$105,000 surplus in the 2019/20 budget that will be returned to the town. Unanticipated expenses include Covid and a \$25,000 subsidy to the Café. Line item transfers to reconcile the 2019/20 budget were reviewed.

**MOTION #9 – LINE ITEM TRANSFERS**

Move that we approve the 2019/20 line item budget transfers as presented by administration.

Mr. Cowan

Second by Ms. Shavers

**UNANIMOUS**

CABE Liaison Report – Ms. Genovese noted the recent CABE communication regarding the role of the Board during Covid as well as providing a vast array of resources and a webinar on *Reopening Operational Planning Tool Kit for Board Members*.

**PUBLIC COMMENT** – None

**MOTION TO ADJOURN:** (10:12 PM)

Mr. Cowan

Second by Dr. Ross

**UNANIMOUS**

Recorded by Marsha DeGennaro, Clerk of the Board