



SPECIAL BOARD MEETING

01/31/2022 [07:30 PM-09:30 PM]

SPECIAL BOARD MEETING

1. Pledge of Allegiance

Mr. Latham began the meeting at 7:30 pm with the pledge to the flag.

2. Roll Call

Members in attendance included: Bob Latham (President), Melanie Gurgiolo (Vice President), Josceylon Buchs, Neil Connelly, Randy Gale, Greg Lamay, Karen Mallah, Geoffrey McInroy, Dan Serfass (Superintendent), Jeff Ammerman (Secretary) and Chris Harris (Solicitor). Laurie Kennedy joined remotely.

Community/Staff Attendees are available on the attached list.

3. President's Remarks

No report

4. Superintendent's Remarks

Mr. Serfass did a presentation going over the COVID data for both Cumberland County and the school district. Numbers are going down in the county, but are still in high spread. The August resolution says masks stay on until the county is in moderate spread. In person learning is priority. The decision to close is a local decision.

Recommended updates to the Health and Safety Plan include affirming that the local school officials have the authority over learning options and masking policies. There would be a special meeting of the school board when the student/staff active case counts approach DOH building thresholds that warrant consideration of moving to remote learning. Contact tracing and reporting will continue. The school district will provide KN95 masks to students without masks or those who prefer them over the paper masks. Pilot a voluntary COVID diagnostic testing option for students and staff. Current mitigation efforts will stay in place.

ESSER funds will be used for the cost of the KN95 masks. The possibility of free masks will be researched.

There is no cost to the school district for the COVID testing and the goal would be to keep kids in school or get them back to school faster after being contact traced. It would also save families time and money to secure tests elsewhere.

There is concern about faculty and staff being out due to COVID spread. The faculty has been flexible about covering other's classes when needed. The substitute fill rate some days is only 55-60%.

Mr. Serfass shared that there was a comparison done between the student absentee rates from January 2020 versus January 2022 and it is higher in 2022.

The Health and Safety plan is being revisited because it needs to be updated at least every 6 months to proceed with the additional ESSER funding.

Masking will be revisited at the February 7th Work Session. Decisions will be made on a month by month basis. There will be ongoing consideration of data and observation of other school districts' actions and the outcome of those actions.

The August resolution tied masking to the county data whereas the updated Health and Safety Plan is not tied to county data, but instead the decision of the board based on school district cases. The Administration and Board will still be seeking guidance from the Department of Health.

5. Public Session for Comment

Michael Vogel, Chestnut Street, expressed concern over the lack of advertisement for the Special Board Meeting. Asked if the students and staff would have to take multiple tests due to the possibility of false negatives.

Kathleen Bruder, 351 N. 29th Street, stated that the meeting should have been better advertised. Expressed concern about the testing program and the possibility of a student being tested without parent consent. Urges the use of checks and balances. Feels there is too much concern about what DOH recommends if it is a local decision.

Marc Scaringi, 243 N. 27th Street, commented that masking doesn't work since there was an increase in cases in December and January while a mask mandate was in place. Expressed concern that the case count does not only include those who have tested positive.

Josh Ford, commented that the meeting wasn't well advertised. Expressed concern over not having enough teachers and reported that there was a class without a teacher twice last week.

Caroline Machiraju, stated that there was no advertising of this meeting. Asked if anyone has done a comparison of the physical effect of the disease compared to the mental damage of the mask mandate. Asked what happens with students that have false positive test results with no symptoms.

Jackie Sastre, commented that she thought the meeting was about revising the Health and Safety Plan so the students wouldn't have to go remote anymore. Stated the Health and Safety Plan should be consistent throughout the different schools in the district. Commented that a parent should be informed before a student was given a KN95 mask to wear.

Beth Kern, N. 24th Street, commented in favor of continuing to use masks as the community transmission is still high. Stated that if guidelines are in place, an emergency board meeting should not be necessary to close a school. Guidelines should be based on countywide numbers as people interact with others outside the school district and immediate community.

Katey Pearson, North 25th Street, stated that she had a difficult time finding out about this meeting and nobody knew about the meeting in August. She feels masks do not work and PCR tests do not work.

Greg Pearson, Lenox Street, commented that he was at meeting in August and the board wanted to follow CDC guidelines at that time, but those guidelines didn't work. He feels more focus should be put on overdoses.

6. Health and Safety Plan (Discussion & Vote)

Mr. Latham announced there would be an Executive Session after the meeting for a personnel matter.

Mr. Gale made a motion, seconded by Mr. Connelly to approve the Health and Safety Plan.

The board discussed the importance of transparency and better advertising for future emergency meetings. KN95 masks will be available along with the paper masks we have in stock and pediatric masks.

Mr. Lamay stated that he is not comfortable with a mask mandate. He will vote against this variation of the Health and Safety Plan.

Mrs. Gurgiolo commented that her aim is to provide students with in person learning. For that reason she will be voting for this plan.

Dr. Mallah stated that her first priority is in person learning and she would like to follow science and the CDC recommendations for masking. She will vote for this plan.

Mr. Latham commented that this plan keeps building closures in our hands.

Mrs. Kennedy stated that she supports most of the plan, but doesn't believe she is qualified to tell parents what is right for their children. If the resolution does not pass, the language about having the board make the decisions locally should be brought back.

The motion passed with a roll call vote of 7 Yes and 2 No, with Mrs. Kennedy and Mr. Lamay voting No.

7. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned 9:05 p.m.

Special Board Meeting Attendees

Monday, January 31, 2022

Brian Lownsbery
Megan Wert
Minke Kooistra
Kerry Martin
Mark Zeigler
Kathleen Bruder
Michael Vogel
Katey Pearson
Greg Pearson
Kris Latham
AJ McElwee
Rendy Knepper
Tina Langzettel
Josh Ford
Marc A. Scaringi
Alissa Packer
Kate Murray
George Diehl
Claire Pelella
Ayesha Ahmed
Beth Dillon Kern
Jaclyn Sastre
Betsy Gayner
Micki Kautz
Brant Underwood
Tanae Crandall
Mary Kane
Laura Wilkins
Jennifer Hoover
Autumn Reely
Elizabeth Mathias
Denise
Tanya Rhen
Maureen McHugh
Joe Marcus
Joe Vogel
Anita Burton
Mark Seidenburg
Craig Welfer
Meredith Bowen

John Langzettel
Holly Keich
Tania Brungard
Margaret Conners
Melissa Rhen
Kathryn Speaks
Robert Shaw
Gary Speaks
Diana Comp
Angela Episale
Caroline Machiraju
Bryan Burton
Joe Harner