

The Regional School District 13 Board of Education met in special session on Wednesday, July 29, 2020 at 6:00 PM remotely.

Board members present: Mrs. Booth, Dr. Friedrich, Mr. Hicks, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella and Mr. Roraback

Board members absent: Mrs. Caramanello, Mrs. Geraci, Dr. Taylor and Mr. Yamartino

Administration present: Dr. Serino, Superintendent of Schools and Mrs. DiMaggio, Director of Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment.

Mr. Moore called the meeting to order at 6:00 PM.

Pledge of Allegiance

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

Approval of Agenda

Dr. Friedrich made a motion, seconded by Mrs. Petrella, to approve the agenda, as presented.

In favor of approving the agenda, as presented: Mrs. Booth, Dr. Friedrich, Mr. Hicks, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella and Mr. Roraback. Motion carried.

Public Comment

None.

Approval of Minutes

A. Board of Education special session meeting - July 22, 2020

Dr. Friedrich made a motion, seconded by Mr. Roraback, to approve the minutes from the July 22, 2020 special session meeting, as presented.

In favor of approving the minutes of the July 22, 2020 special session meeting, as presented: Mrs. Booth, Dr. Friedrich, Mr. Hicks, Mr. Moore and Mr. Roraback. Motion carried, with Mrs. Petrella abstaining.

Next Board Meeting - August 5, 2020 at 6:00 PM

Strategic Plan for Reopening and Recovery Process

Dr. Serino explained that the reopening plan was shared with parents on Friday and the Reopen20 mailbox has gotten quite a bit of feedback and questions. They hope to be able to get through all of the questions and comments by Friday and put out an FAQ on Monday. Dr. Serino emphasized how much they value the feedback and questions from parents.

Dr. Serino also noted that she got the impression that parents felt that they could choose to have their children go to school in person, do the hybrid model or to do distance learning and she wanted to clarify that the only option was to go to school in-person. If parents opted out of that, the students would learn remotely at home. The Governor has now given districts some flexibility due to the fact that some

districts cannot meet the health and safety guidelines and schools can now follow the hybrid model. Dr. Serino added that some districts are considering the hybrid model for high schools, because of the size of the schools and data about incidence and transmission rates in that age level. She noted that District 13 is also talking about whether it makes sense to move to the hybrid model at the high school level.

The expectation is to open in person to the greatest extent possible. If a remote learning design is implemented, 50 percent of the time should be synchronous (live connection with the teacher). Dr. Serino and Mrs. DiMaggio recorded a video update this afternoon. As they get more information about the number of staff and students returning, they will continue to update. There has also been a strong urging to make decisions regionally.

The superintendent's group has also requested a protocol by which decisions are made on several issues: (1) the incidence rate in town that will allow students to come back in person; (2) the incidence rate that would force the district to go to a hybrid model; (3) the incidence rate or increase that would call for a full school closures. That information should be available tomorrow as well as the protocol that will be followed if a case is identified in school.

Mrs. DiMaggio explained that remote learning has been designed to somewhat mirror what students would get in school. A remote teaching team was created, consisting mostly of literacy and math coaches, the science specialist and the enrichment teacher. They will be divided into grade levels and will provide the recorded videos for the students as well as log on with students in small groups during the synchronous piece. Mrs. DiMaggio assured that the students at home will get a robust education, however there will be no related arts at this time.

Mrs. DiMaggio explained that they have discussed the high school starting with the hybrid model. That has been designed to have students enter the buildings in alphabetical cohorts, with cohort A attending school in person on Mondays and Tuesdays (with distance learning on Thursdays and Fridays) and cohort B attending school in person on Thursdays and Fridays (with distance learning on Mondays and Tuesdays). On Wednesdays, everyone will have a distance learning opportunity.

The distance learning schedule for the high school has been modified from the in-person schedule. While the students are in the building, they will follow an eight-period day. The distance learning students will have periods one through four on day one and periods five through eight on day two.

At the elementary level, they would like the students to attend school in person, but if hybrid became necessary, they would follow the same type of schedule as the high school with two separate cohorts.

Dr. Serino hoped to have more guidance from the state by next week's meeting and will have a recommendation for the board at that time.

Mrs. Petrella asked about related arts and Mrs. DiMaggio explained that students who are attending in person would, in fact, get related arts as well.

Mr. Moore asked if the state has abandoned making a statewide decision about going with the hybrid model and Dr. Serino explained that they are not sure what the guidelines will be. She also mentioned that the health data is now showing incidence rates in children younger than high school and they need to monitor that carefully. That data may push the need for the hybrid model in the middle school as well.

Dr. Serino then explained that Mr. Pietrasko has updated the website with the proper phone numbers for tonight's meeting.

Mrs. Petrella suggested that the superintendents request the ability to move to the hybrid model without any conditions as it seems to make the most sense to her, with smaller populations of students in school. Mrs. Booth felt it would be double the work for teachers and would be difficult for parents having their children in school for only two days. Mrs. Booth also thought it seemed as though Strong students would only be learning from 8:00 until 11:30 if they don't participate in band or chorus. Dr. Serino will ask for Mr. Sadinsky's comments and get back to Mrs. Booth. She also explained that Mrs. DiMaggio and her team have been working on how distance learning days can be as connected for students as in-person days. They have also been looking at creating teacher cohorts so there is a team approach.

Mr. Hicks asked if the district is still adhering to FERPA guidelines and Dr. Serino explained that they are. Mr. Hicks applauded Dr. Serino and her team for putting the plan together in such a timely manner. Dr. Serino recognized that parents are looking for more information on the educational design and they are working on that. Part of finalizing the plan includes contract negotiations with the teachers' union. They feel that the most important part of all of this is that the students have a teacher that is focused on them, paying attention to them, is aware of where they are socially and emotionally, is able to work with them and understand who they are as learners. Dr. Serino wants to diminish the fragmentation that the teachers have by trying to do multiple things at one time, as much as possible. She wants teachers to feel safe, be aware of the students in class, to create an instructional design that works within the framework and have the ability to reconnect with their colleagues and students. Dr. Serino explained that they are beginning an informal conversation with the union tomorrow and has asked Mr. Moore and Dr. Taylor to join in.

Review of 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 Strategic Coherence Plan

Dr. Serino reviewed the areas where the district met the improvement strategies and those that are still in progress. Project-based learning fits in well with distance learning, if that becomes necessary. They continue to work on restorative practices at Strong with Steve Fitzgerald in the leadership role and equity work continues as well. The administrative team had a full-day training session with legal counsel in areas related to bullying. The first phase of the Portrait of the Citizen was shared and the school-based design teams began before school was closed. They continue to work on transition planning. Dr. Serino did mention that they were not able to implement the expanded partnership with China and Middletown.

Vote to amend 2020-2021 School Calendar

Dr. Serino stated that the district had been slated to start on September 1, 2020 and asked the board to amend that to start on September 3, 2020 to allow for training and preparation for teachers. Both Thursday and Friday of that week would be shortened days for students. No other changes were made to the school year though they are looking at what would have been the Friday of the Durham Fair.

Mr. Hicks made a motion, seconded by Dr. Friedrich, to begin school on September 3, 2020 and add two additional professional development days to the start of the school year.

In favor of amending the school calendar to include school beginning on September 3, 2020 and adding two additional professional development days to the start of the school year: Mrs. Booth, Dr. Friedrich, Mr. Hicks, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella and Mr. Roraback. Motion carried.

Review of CAFE mask policy

Mr. Hicks reviewed the CAFE mask policy this afternoon and would like to bring it forward to the board as a first read even though the Policy committee has not had the opportunity to review it as a group. Mr. Moore had sent this policy to everyone about three weeks ago and it had been included in the announcement of tonight's meeting. Mr. Moore did feel that there were a few parts of it that are inconsistent with some of the district's planning. He encouraged everyone to review it closely. Dr. Serino stated that the administrative team will look it over and cross reference it with the district's plan. She would also like to review the policy with the Health Director. Dr. Serino would suggest that the board have this as a first read at next week's meeting and Mr. Hicks suggested the Policy committee meet just prior to next week's meeting.

Committee Reports**A. Policy Committee Meeting - July 22, 2020**

Mr. Hicks reported that most of the policies that the committee reviewed were COVID-related and all of the items were voted and passed unanimously. No changes were made to language.

Mr. Hicks made a motion, seconded by Dr. Friedrich, that the full Board of Education adopt policies A 1, 2 and 3 and revisions 1 through 14 as a group.

In favor of adopting policies A 1, 2 and 3 and revisions 1 through 14: Mrs. Booth, Dr. Friedrich, Mr. Hicks, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella and Mr. Roraback. Motion carried.

B. Playground Committee Meeting - July 23, 2020

Mrs. Booth reported that the Playground committee is meeting again this Thursday at 6:30 PM. They had discussions about the type of surface for the courts at Memorial and have a couple of quotes to review. The Lyman playscape has been ordered and will hopefully be installed by September 1st. Work continues on options for Memorial.

C. Educational Resources Committee Meeting - July 29, 2020

Mr. Moore explained that the committee met earlier today, but did not have a quorum. They discussed the proposed solar array on Johnson Lane in Durham. The town and school district could benefit from electrical rate reductions due to the solar power and they are estimating a 40 percent reduction. The district would need to indicate their support of the project since they are a major power user. This would still have to be approved by PURA (Public Utility Regulatory Authority). If the project moves forward, the district would have to negotiate an agreement with the utilities to purchase the power at a different rate. This has no impact on the energy savings contract.

The board generally agreed to have either Dr. Serino or Mrs. Neubig sign an agreement of interest.

Dr. Serino also encouraged the ERC or the full board to have a discussion about the sub rates and also reaching out to retired teachers to see if any would be interested in supporting the remote work.

Communications

Mr. Moore had received a letter from Maya Liss and Dr. Serino responded. They also received a letter from John and Elizabeth Waterman and both Mr. Moore and Dr. Serino responded. Bronwyn Commins had a question about the search for the superintendent.

Mr. Moore has communicated with the search consultant and has received a series of documents that he will forward to board members. The search committee will need to meet with the consultant sometime next week. They will try to get the advertisement out by the weekend, so Mr. Moore encouraged everyone to get any comments to him as soon as possible.

Dr. Serino added that there are several questions from the Reopening mailbox that she will address.

Public Comment

Nicole Ercolani, from Durham, apologized if she sounded frustrated last week. She certainly does not believe this is an easy job for anyone. Mrs. Ercolani was impressed with the plan that was submitted last week. She explained that she is an essential worker and wanted to dive into that because she felt the response had been vague. She still feels that way, but understands the need for flexibility. She will have to put her daughter in full-time daycare if the district goes to the hybrid or distance learning model and wondered if the district had any recommendations as to how they can utilize that time at daycare effectively for education. Mrs. Ercolani found it very difficult to come home from work and have to have her daughter sit in front of the computer screen. She remembered Dr. Serino mentioning the possibility of National Honor Society students volunteer at some of the daycares. Mrs. Ercolani does understand that the cost of daycare is not the responsibility of the school board, but would like to see a little empathy and/or acknowledgment that this is an issue for a lot of parents. She does not feel it is a good enough solution to simply say that everybody is struggling. She has also reached out to state and local representatives and will share any information she gets. Mrs. Ercolani also understands that the final decision rests with the state, but she would like to see a more detailed plan for distance learning.

Mr. Moore explained that those types of questions will probably be addressed in the individual school plans and remote learning plans. Dr. Serino will reach out to Mrs. Ercolani about ways the district can support childcare centers.

Adjournment

Mr. Hicks made a motion, seconded by Dr. Friedrich, to adjourn the special meeting of the Board of Education.

In favor of adjourning the meeting: Mrs. Booth, Dr. Friedrich, Mr. Hicks, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella and Mr. Roraback. Motion carried unanimously.

Meeting was adjourned at 7:00 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Debi Waz
Alwaz First

Public Comment Received Via Email**From:****Date:** July 31, 2020 at 9:37:53 AM EDT**To:** ryamartino@rsd13.org, jroraback@rsd13.org, mcaramanello@rsd13.org, rmoore@rsd13.org**Subject:** please let the kids go back to school full time

Good morning. I wanted to express my concern that our district is leaning towards the hybrid model for the high school level. This model only gives them 80 minutes per week with their teacher with two 40 minute classes. Barely enough time to take a test or do anything substantial. We have a small high school and I know you are putting measures in place to keep everyone safe in the building. Please just let the kids go back to a full day of school. Our numbers of infection are low in CT. Do we even have any cases in town? I feel we will be doing so much harm to students by keeping them out of school. We could lose kids to depression, drugs, and suicide in the name of keeping them safe from the slim to none chance they will get sick from COVID. I am a teacher and want to return to my building full time. I disagree with what my union is doing with the protests and caravans. I know my district has put a ton of safety measures in place for staff and students. I know R13 has put those safety measures in place as well. Please let the kids go back to school in the fall. I lie awake at night worrying about my children missing out on a year of high school (and perhaps middle school?) that they will never get back. Thank you for taking the time to read this.

Cindy Nick