

AUGUST 13, 2020
WILMETTE, IL
SPECIAL MEETING

A Special Meeting of the Board of Education was held on Thursday, August 13, 2020, at Wilmette Junior High School Auditorium, 620 Locust Road, Wilmette, Illinois. The meeting was called to order at 7:00 p.m. with President Lisa Schneider-Fabes presiding.

Members Present: Lisa Schneider-Fabes, Jon Cesaretti, Frank Panzica, Amy Poehling, Mark Steen (remote), Ellen Sternweiler, Erin Stone

Members Absent: None

Administrators Present: Kari Cremascoli, Corey Bultemeier, Tony DeMonte, Heather Glowacki, Katie Lee, Kristin Swanson

President Fabes opened the meeting addressing the community regarding the challenges of dealing with a global pandemic these last six months. Challenges she noted included social distancing, wearing masks, cancelling significant events, cancelling vacations, and dealing with fear and health concerns. Children have had to cancel camps, sports, graduations, and be at home all the time with their parents. Last March teachers had to pivot to remote learning in 72 hours. Students had to grab their technology and backpacks and begin working from home indefinitely.

President Fabes stated the Board of Education committed to the short and long-term health and safety of the entire District. The Board is committed to developing a plan that considers health and safety as a priority and guides reopening for in-person learning as public health professionals, educational experts and data dictate it is safe to do so. The Reopening Planning Committee, Advisory Task Force and administrative council of the district made recommendations that led to the 2020 Reopening Plan. The plan was designed with three flexible adaptable models, in-person, hybrid, and remote learning and was developed so the District could shift seamlessly between the models at any given time. President Fabes noted the plan is a roadmap. The details will change as conditions and guidelines change. The plan will be assessed weekly while communicating with educators, health officials, and the community. The Board is charged to balance in person learning with remote learning. She explained opening schools during the time of COVID is an incredibly heavy task. Especially in a climate of fear and social unrest. There are no right answers or guarantees and no risk-free scenarios. Students will enter an educational setting that is totally different; respecting safety measures that prevent gathering in a normal way. It is time to embrace the new normal, to support and encourage children to accept and adhere to new safety measures, and get excited about in-person instruction. For remote learners this is a unique opportunity to develop connections with peers across the District. President Fabes acknowledged and thanked staff and administration for their flexibility and commitment to children. She asked the community for their patience, compassion, and grace as the 2020-2021 school year begins.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Ann Rodas, Wilmette Education Association (WEA) President, spoke about the new school year plans. She stated she is a Spanish teacher beginning her ninth year in District 39 as a fourth-grade teacher. She spoke on behalf of the WEA noting many teachers had concerns about returning to school during the COVID pandemic. The WEA was grateful to the Board of Education and Superintendent Cremascoli for considering revising the reopening of schools to begin in a slow, gradual manner to implement safety and health protocols across all learning environments. She stated remote learning was the best choice for learning at this time yet the WEA would accept the compromise of the revised opening.

Max Schanzenbach, Wilmette, thanked the Board, Superintendent, teachers and committees that worked together to create a common sense, science-based plan based on expert recommendations that accommodated varied preferences for families.

Victoria Shoemaker, Wilmette, stated she was pleased with District 39 developing a carefully thought out reopening plan. She was disheartened by the WEA letter and disappointed with the decision to delay of the start of school for students.

Anne Hart, Wilmette, said she served as a parent representative on the task force over the summer. She thanked the superintendent, volunteers, and administrators who dedicated their time and expertise developing the reopening plan. She noted safety was forefront and the priority from Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE), Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) and included all data and science available. The committee was encouraged to participate with questions and challenges to provide safe options for families. She was proud to live in Wilmette and participate on the committee.

John Albright, Wilmette, noted there is a lot of information on all sides of this pandemic. He said families that do not agree with the science should choose remote learning for their families and continue to allow others to choose in-person learning. The majority of experts and organizations support in-person learning. He reported the isolation of students last spring led to depression, child abuse, substance abuse, and suicide.

Kara Flemming, Wilmette, supported the well thought out and balanced reopening plan. Scientists reinforce the benefits of in-person learning with minimal health risks. She said people can make individual choices. She respectfully endorsed the original plan and giving the option for remote learning.

Elizabeth Pendergrass, Glenview, spoke in support of the original plan. She noted her elementary child felt depressed and isolated after remote learning last spring. She said science supports in-person learning and the disadvantages outweigh the advantages of in-person instruction.

Jenny Rosene, Wilmette resident, District 39 teacher and parent, spoke to clarify that in-person education will still occur with a slightly slower roll out than originally designed. She had concerns about registering her child for the hybrid option. The gradual start will allow her child to get accustomed to the new environment and wearing a mask all day. She thanked everyone for the revised reopening plan.

Louis Keiler, Wilmette, stated he and his wife are physicians going to work every day with N95 masks dealing with COVID patients. He noted his family follows protective measures and they do not have COVID19. He stated he hears more about the risk to adults than the risks to children as they are least likely to spread the virus. He noted the various strains of this virus and other viruses have occurred and will continue in the future.

Dawne Berkman, Wilmette, thanked the task force for extraordinary work over the summer that went beyond what was asked from Center for Disease Control (CDC). She asked that in-person learning continue to be an option to families.

Gwen Faulkner, District 39 teacher loved the proposed revised reopening schedule that puts the safety of children first by letting them feel safe in their new environment and build confidence in returning to school. She said teachers will work every day to make children feel safe and engage in learning.

Dr. Heather Glowacki and Mr. Tony DeMonte read written public comments submitted via email.

Communications submitted that supported in-person/hybrid education were from: Katie Carrier, Beth and Kevin Feeley, Kevin and Melissa Dahm, Lisa Breen, Amanda Myers Svarczkopf, Steve Schneiderman, Nicole Schneiderman, Stephanie Sebor, Carla Benigni, Carol Anne Enright, Laurel Flatt, Michelle Miller, Kersten Weber Tatarelis, Jennifer Jacobsen, Alesha Romatier, Jeanne Keiler, Kasia Pore, Amanda Jacobson, Louis Keiler, Rick and Kara Kosloskus, Jay Schwartz, Lisa Lang, Niamh Whelan-Reiter, Laura Hemmer, M.D., FASA, Samantha E. Weissbluth, Erin Chastain, Gary

and Barbara Diamond, Christina Ballester, Sara Winstanley, Stephanie Foster, Jeremy and Shannon Page, Stephanie Dahl, Emma DeCosta, Jennifer Sontag Bressler, Lisa Cox, Danielle Rosen, Drs. Steven and Kelly Bachta, George Touras, Silviu Nistor, and three anonymous submissions.

Communications submitted that supported remote education were from: Ben Tolsky, Sarah Titterton, Carlos Mena, Donna Elphick Pemberton, Christina Body, Rich Fisher, Emily Abraham, Owen E. MacBride, Support Staff Union (SSU) President Cathy Peach, Doug Pemberton, and Jennifer Manning, Erin Heywood, Heather Cartwright, Jody McWilliams.

Communications submitted that supported having a choice/option between remote and in-person/hybrid education were from: Jessy Ferdman, Colin Rogers, Aimee Koski, Eliza Fisher, Adriana Gabriel, Robin Cook, Scott and Stephanie Orzoff, Giselle Cotait, Julie Adrianopoli, and one anonymous submission.

Communications submitted that supported a gradual reopening were from: Sara Lapidus, Oxana Bartholomew, and Seth Krantz, M.D.

Communications submitted that pertained to other concerns regarding health, safety, vaccines, teachers, class assignments, trust, returning to full remote education, and meeting procedures were from: Kevin Williams, Ryne Estabrook, Vicki Ehle, Lynne Touras, Dan Magestro, A. Fogel, Valerie Jeanne Braun, and Malaika Myers.

Louis Tyler, Wilmette, asked if the District had explored commercial options for remote learning.

Victoria Shoemaker, Wilmette, shared her frustration with not being aware of changes to the reopening plans. She requested the District continue with the in-person instruction as outlined in the July 30th presentation.

Malaika Myers, Wilmette, agreed with the frustration of hearing public commentary for several hours on a revised plan that had not been shared and for conducting public comments before the plan was presented.

Max Schanzenbach, Wilmette, thought public discussion was regarding the reopening plan rather than a revised plan. He requested the meeting be extended for further public comment following the presentation.

DISTRICT 39 REOPENING PLAN DISCUSSION

Dr. Cremascoli thanked everyone for their comments and input. She noted that this evening's presentation provided a planning update and proposed calendar adjustments for the start of the school year. She acknowledged and appreciated the hard work of the Planning Committee, Advisory Task Force and Administrative Council throughout the summer in helping to guide the development and design of the District's reopening plan. These teams relied heavily on research and science in their work. The District continues to receive and review ongoing available health and safety guidance updates on a daily basis. Guidance continues to evolve and the District continues to incorporate the new information into the plan to ensure everything is being done to keep students safe, to keep staff and the community safe, and to provide the very best educational services possible. This is ongoing work. The Plan as presented on July 30th continues to be updated, taking into account guidance updates as well as feedback from many stakeholders. The District received an immense amount of feedback to inform improvements. Commitments were set by the Board to offer in person learning as much as possible, while ensuring that all safety and health guidelines are followed. This has never wavered. The District has firmly adhered to the health guidelines, some of which have presented significant challenges; yet, the District has been up to the challenge and ready to tackle them. Dr. Cremascoli noted the reopening plan was presented via a video and slideshow as well as through the Reopening Guide, and the FAQs continue to be updated, including most recently on August 11th. She stated the plan is well-developed and proceeds with a commitment to ongoing review/improvement as the world around us continues to shift. Ongoing review will be conducted and revisions added to acknowledge changes and shifts guidance and data. She stated the District must continue to react to, respond to, and plan for, the updated guidance that occurs, while attending to the health, safety, wellbeing, and social

emotional needs of all. The plan was presented using guidelines for Phase 4, knowing this phase may change. She noted highlights from ISBE on learning standards and in-person learning, continue to be revised. The District will implement ISBE and IDPH guidance and best practice, including social distancing, masks, symptom checks, continual and deep cleaning, and organizing students in pods during their educational day. Social emotional needs are also a factor in the forefront. The plans were developed to easily pivot between models as needed as the data evolves.

Dr. Cremascoli provided reopening planning updates, beginning with updates on enrollment and staffing. Dr. Cremascoli provided a snapshot of enrollment commitments. She noted the majority of families (79%) elected in-person education and 21% elected the full enhanced remote learning program. Each elementary school will have 4-5 sections per grade level for in-person instruction, and the District will provide 3-4 sections per grade level for fully remote education district-wide. The middle school will have four houses per grade level for in-person instruction and one house per grade level for the fully remote learning, with some specialists who cross over. The junior high school will have 3 five-person teams per grade level for in-person instruction and 1 three-person team per grade level for the fully remote program.

Dr. Cremascoli explained the preliminary survey from staff members indicated 5% may need accommodations or have medical conditions that would limit their return to work. Currently, 14% of certificated staff and 4% of support staff noted they may need medical accommodations or require a leave of absence. Leaves include medical accommodations, childcare leaves under the Family First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA) and leaves of absence in accordance with the Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA). She explained leaves of absence have created some staffing complications and the District is working to finalize staff assignments, student placements, and to hire additional certified and support staff.

Dr. Cremascoli next reviewed updated planning related to the ever-changing guidance. Guidance updates are being provided regularly, frequently, several times daily. The most recent guidance updates include: New health guidance for schools released - Illinois Department of Public Health, August 13; New guidance on face masks for children – American Academy of Pediatrics, August 13; Close Contact Definition Update - Cook County Department of Public Health, August 6; Quarantine Guidance Update - PolicyLab Paper on Evidence and Considerations for School Reopenings, August 6; and Updated guidance on school reopening Learning Recommendations – Illinois State Board of Education, July 23. The updated definitions of “close contact” as well as the updated guidance for quarantines have been particularly noteworthy and challenging for many. The District must be constantly reviewing and revising District protocol as well as the FAQs. Each prompts careful consideration and reevaluation. Updates to the District’s health and safety plans have included updated protocol as well as additional technologies to support health and safety. These updates included renewing Cleaning Protocols – Daily, Nightly and Specialized, Ventilation (35-40% Air Exchange Rate) and Upgraded Filters, Heat Advisory Protocol, COVID Response Plan (including quarantine restrictions), Access to Rapid Testing, School Operations Protocol, and FAQs and Ongoing Input.

Dr. Cremascoli reviewed the plan and designed preparedness to pivot based upon the Governor’s Restore Illinois Plan, guidance from ISBE/IDPH, the Cook County Health Department advisement, and the District’s ability to implement the health and safety guidelines and protocol. COVID-19 surveillance data review as well as additional metrics that will be used to guide district adjustments. Preparedness to pivot is critical, along with the District’s ability to safely implement the health and safety guidelines and protocol.

The District has identified several key needs to support its success. These needs include: Support for our Faculty and Staff (Professional Development for Remote Instruction and New Classroom Approaches, Training on Protocol, Guidelines and Plan, and Opportunity to Practice Both), Support for our Students (Direct Training, Opportunity to Practice with Support, and Transition Support), Preparedness for All to Pivot, Community Commitment to Support Well-Being of All, and Grace and Understanding. Dr. Cremascoli stated this is a completely different learning environment for both in-person and remote learning. The District must be prepared to support staff and students in transitioning.

Dr. Cremascoli noted calendar adjustments included adjusting the first week of the school year, the week of August 24th, to be dedicated to professional development and training for staff. A staggered, progressive approach to welcoming in-person learners back to school with training, practice, and direct support. The week of August 31st will be full remote instruction for all District 39 students. The District wishes to ensure everyone is prepared for success in the anticipated need for adjustments and pivots for individuals, classrooms, and schools. The enhanced fully remote programming will continue as in-person learners begin to transition back to school. During the week of September 7th one class per grade level of elementary students will attend each day this week for a half-day of instruction while 5-8 grades will follow the hybrid schedule two days of the week and the remote schedule the other two days. Remote instruction will be held on Monday, September 14th for all students, followed by each student attending one day per week for in-person instruction. Students will attend in-person twice per week in the elementary schools beginning the week of September 21st while grades 5-8 begin the full implementation of their in-person hybrid model. Beginning in October all students will be participating in full implementation of the in-person model designed for their grade level. Dr. Cremascoli stated weekly reviews of local and regional metrics and data will be assessed to adjust plans as needed. Guidelines from ISBE, IDPH, CDC and the governor will be followed. The plans were developed to pivot between models as metrics change.

Board member discussion included support and appreciation for the work put into the plans, giving people in the community grace to alleviate anxiety and tension, the gradual re-entry into schools being a sensible decision, all stakeholders having unwavering dedication and flexibility has been impressive and a great strength in dealing with an imperfect situation, the phased in approach was a reasonable and wise step, being resilient and teaching children to be resilient, gradual re-entry allows teachers and students time to get comfortable in their environments, allowing enough time for students and teachers to be comfortable as long as it isn't too much time, getting all students in school full time is difficult so to allow additional time to get kids in school safely is justified.

APPROVE THE AMENDED 2020-2021 SCHOOL YEAR CALENDAR

Dr. Cremascoli reported the school year calendar had to be amended to reflect Wednesday, August 26th as an additional Teachers Institute Day. Thursday, August 27th and Friday, August 28th reflect Remote Planning Days (RPD) as allowed by the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE). The October 12th Teachers Institute Day reflects a Remote Planning Day. November 3rd is Election Day and the Illinois Election Board has mandated this date to be a non-attendance day.

Mr. Panzica moved, seconded by Mr. Steen to approve the amended 2020-2021 school year calendar.

On a roll call vote on the motion, voting “yea” – Jon Cesaretti, Frank Panzica, Amy Poehling, Mark Steen, Ellen Sternweiler, Erin Stone, Lisa Schneider-Fabes; voting “nay” – none; absent –none:

Motion Carried.

Being no further business, Mr. Panzica moved, seconded by Mr. Steen to adjourn the special meeting of the Board of Education. The meeting adjourned at 10:42 p.m. by **General Consent**.

President

Secretary