

Minutes
Board of Education Special Meeting
July 20, 2020
6:30 p.m.

Board Members Present: Linette Dooley, Chairman Christopher Lent, Michael Maziarz, Joseph Napolitano and Christine Sposito

Board Members Absent: James Chakulski, Jr. and David Crim

Others Present:

Kristen Bacon, Lauren Barsom, Karen Butzgy, KC, David and Jessica Callahan, Karen Caputo, Michell Cassano, Lisa DeWitt, Shawn Douisi, Tammy Ekstrom, Toni Espinosa, Bob Fowler, Tom and Nela Franco, Superintendent Maria Geryk, Drew Guild, Alyssa Gwinnell, Heather, Hill, Nina Holmes, Gina Jarvis, Jen, Kim, Allie LaCroix, Amy Lapsis, Jennifer Laraia, Laura Lawton, Gillian Lyon, Melissa Mal, Helen Martin, Anna Matthews, Christa McManus, Brenda Morey, Jessica Neumut, E Niemczyk, D Nolette, Karen O'Hearn, Judy Ortiz, Kate and Tom Pierro, Karen Piro, Courtney Provost, R, Jessica R, Rachel, Nelisa Reagan, Kate Riquier, Carolyn Ritchie, Kate Rutledge, Fayne Sears, Barbara Stoner, Tammy, M Taylor, Jenny Vazquez, Dan White, Patricia Whitman and Barbara Wilson

I. Call to Order

Chairman Lent called the meeting to order at 6:33 p.m.

II. Pledge of Allegiance

III. Presentation – Reopening School Plan

Chairman Lent welcomed everyone to tonight's special meeting. Comments and questions about the reopening plan will follow the presentation. The Comments from the Audience portion of tonight's meeting will be up to 20 minutes. Chairman Lent said there will be another opportunity to hear from the audience near the conclusion of the meeting. Chairman Lent also welcomed Christine Sposito in her new role as Board of Education member. She often attended meetings as an audience member and is now on the Board. Ms. Sposito thanked Chairman Lent, saying she is very excited to be involved in this role.

Superintendent Geryk opened her presentation by thanking everyone for attending via Zoom. Questions and comments may be written in the Chat window and will be addressed following the presentation. Any unanswered questions will be followed up.

Since closure in March, staff have been working incredibly hard in this totally new model of instruction. Staff are accustomed to working with students face to face, so teaching remotely has felt almost unnatural. Superintendent Geryk thanked the families and students. Everyone went from traditional school to a remote experience in one week, which exemplifies the dedication of everyone involved.

The plans developed to date are based on State Department of Education directives and guidelines. Advisories come in daily. We completed a lot of the summer cleaning early, which allows us to get ready for the fall. We are meeting with the State, working with the Department of Health and purchasing protective equipment.

Districts were asked to create a plan that addresses three models:

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- Full-time instruction with increased health and safety protocols
- Hybrid learning plan – if we are directed to reduce attendance to 50%
- Fully remote model

The goal was that with these models, based on Department of Health data, we could move from one model to another as seamlessly as possible. Currently we anticipate going back to school full-time in the fall. Additionally, we will provide educational opportunities for families who opt to not return in the fall. Requirements and guidance have changed dramatically throughout the time we have been out. We do not know if we will be asked to be flexible again as we wait to hear from the State.

Reopening Working Groups were created. Their goals and priorities were to

- Identify existing challenges and needs
- Engage stakeholders to hear their ideas and priorities and
- Consider multiple potential plans of action, including the logistics and resources involved, and make a set of policy recommendations to the Leadership Team.

Reopening plan guiding principles were

- To safeguard the safety of students and staff
- Equity, access and student supports
- Effective stakeholder communication
- Rigorous and engaging instruction for all learners

Staff and students are expected to:

- Screen before leaving home
- Wear face masks that fully cover your nose and mouth
- Practice effective handwashing
- Practice proper sneeze and cough etiquette
- Practice appropriate social distancing in school

As materials become available, they will be sent home to families. While it will feel “different” in all these models, staff will provide a calm environment for our students.

Face covering is a requirement for students, staff and visitors. Face shields are not needed for students, but they will be used by some staff. There are a few exceptions for the use of facial coverings – anyone who has trouble breathing, or anyone who is unconscious, incapacitated, or otherwise unable to remove the mask without assistance; and anyone who has a medical condition making it unsafe to wear a face covering. We will individually address cases where face coverings cannot be worn. Clear plastic barriers will be installed in appropriate locations.

Classrooms will be organized to maximize social distancing between student workplaces. Desks will be arranged forward facing. Available spaces in each school building will be repurposed for instruction to the greatest extent possible.

Porter will designate patterns for directional foot-traffic within the corridors by markings on the floors. Use of lockers for the middle school will be suspended indefinitely. Porter Paws bags will be provided to each student to hold individual school supplies and individual instructional materials. Opportunities for recess will continue, but use of shared equipment and playscapes will be suspended

at the start of the 2020-21 school year. Each classroom will have their own recess equipment, such as balls, to use.

Anyone with high-risk symptoms associated with COVID-19 should stay home. These symptoms include a fever above 100°F, new unexplained loss of taste or smell, respiratory symptoms or gastrointestinal symptoms. Protocols to return to school may be symptom-based, test-based or time-based.

There is an isolation room containment protocol for symptomatic cases in school. Students exhibiting symptoms during the school day will be immediately sequestered to a designated isolation room that is monitored by a school staff member. This is not the school health office. The student will remain in this location until a parent or guardian arrives to sign the student out of school. The student will be escorted to the exit for the parent to sign the student out. Disinfection and cleaning procedures will be initiated when the student is release from an isolation room.

The three models of learning are on-campus learning, hybrid learning, and remote learning.

On-Campus Learning – Minimal/no spread of virus

- All students have option of attending school 5 days per week
- Safety protocols and procedures in place to ensure staff and student safety
- Superintendent and school nurse monitor health data in collaboration with EHHD

Hybrid Learning – Moderate spread of virus – reduced student attendance

- Per local Health Department advice, the number of students attending school is reduced throughout the use of an alternating schedule
- Instruction is shifted to 50% capacity, with alternating in-person attendance and remote learning
- Safety protocols and procedures in place to ensure staff and student safety
- Superintendent and school nurse monitors health data in collaboration with EHHD

Remote Learning – High virus spread – full distance learning

- Per local Health Department advice, student learning is completely shifted to remote learning from home due to significant transmission rates
- Instruction is shifted to primarily synchronous learning from home
- All school events and athletics are cancelled
- Superintendent and school nurse monitor health data in collaboration with EHHD

Instructional format for students returning to Porter School:

- Grades PK-8 will be organized in cohorts by classroom teachers
- Academic support staff and related arts teachers will primarily push into classroom spaces to support student learning and provide related services
- Efforts will be made to limit the number of cohorts staff are assigned
- Outdoor learning spaces will be available
- Physical education classes will occur outdoors whenever possible, or in spaces that allow for maximization of social distancing. Locker room spaces will not be utilized

Instructional format for students whose families opt for remote learning:

- Students will continue to gain access to instruction through either live stream and/or recorded instruction based on availability
- Assignments and assessments will be posted through a learning management system (Google Classroom, See Saw)

Instructional format for hybrid learning:

- Students will follow an “A-Day/B-Day” schedule rotation
- Students learning remotely will be assigned activities to reinforce, extend or develop learning from lessons. This instruction may be delivered through synchronous (live) or asynchronous learning through See Saw, Google Classroom, and/or Zoom
- Students may also engage in small group or individual virtual meetings with academic support specialists, special education teachers or other related services staff
- Students learning on-campus will participate in classroom lessons with instructional staff adhering to health protocols

Instructional format for remote learning:

- All instruction will be delivered through a synchronous (live) and an asynchronous learning model through See Saw, Google Classroom and/or Zoom. Synchronous learning is where instruction and learning happen at the same time, but not in the same place. Asynchronous learning is where instruction and learning do not occur in the same place or at the same time.
- Staff will meet face-to-face virtually with students in large and small groups or individually
- An instructional schedule will be tailored to the students at each grade level

IV. Comments from the Audience (Bylaws of the Board #9300)

Time allotted for public participation is twenty (20) minutes; time allotted for an individual speaker is three (3) minutes.

Chairman Lent thanked attendees for submitting comments and questions through the Chat feature of Zoom. He would like Superintendent Geryk to respond to questions from Board members before she answers questions posed on Chat.

Ms. Dooley asked when temperatures would be taken. Ms. Sears said parents are asked to check their child’s temperature and screen for any symptoms, reiterating that anyone with a temperature over 100°F should stay home. Responding to Ms. Dooley’s questions, Superintendent Geryk said there are rooms without air conditioning. Air is not to be flowing on kids or circulating in that way. However, the ventilation is excellent with a strong air exchange. The air only goes in and out, it does not circulate throughout the building. Ms. Dooley said it is not easy to wear a mask when it is hot and some kids need air conditioning for health conditions.

Responding to Ms. Dooley’s questions, Superintendent Geryk said buses will run at full capacity and will not be cohorted. Ms. Cavuto is working with the bus company to see how many kids are on each bus. There will be assigned seats and kids will sit with family members. Families are encouraged to drive their kids to school if possible.

Superintendent Geryk said there will be devices for students in the fall, which will eliminate sharing. Amplification systems will be available in most classrooms. Equipment for teachers who will be Zooming in to other classes and home will be in place. Water fountains will not be available, so some

families may opt to fill water bottles from home. Foggers cannot be used to disinfect due to people having allergies, etc.

The classes that may not be available due to COVID-19 are Life Skills, chorus and instruments due to the stringent requirements that are to be in place. However, the schedule is not done yet. We will try to be creative with scheduling related arts.

Ms. Sposito thanked the Leadership Team for their hard work. She asked about short-term and long-term closures. Will this be a district or state decision? Will these days be handled like a snow day? Will distance learning take place or will days be made up? Superintendent Geryk said it will be a Department of Public Health decision based on the situation. It may be based on cohorts. Analysis will determine if a class is closed for 2 – 5 days or if the whole school will be. She said that even if kids are not in the building, they will still be receiving their education. At this time it is hard to know if these days will need to be made up. We will know better in about three weeks.

Ms. Sposito asked about live video teaching. Superintendent Geryk said live instruction from the teachers is expected. This may need to be negotiated with teachers. Teachers will have to get together to see what this looks like because different age groups have different needs.

Regarding the district website link designated to the re-opening, Ms. Gwinnell said this will not be on the site until a plan is set. A re-opening site was created, but the plan is not on it yet. Not going to lockers will not cause the students to carry large backpacks throughout the day because they will be staying within the same area throughout the day.

It is possible students will not be allowed to ride multiple buses on a set schedule, which may cause difficulty for some working parents. Ms. Caputo said she is in the process of collecting data, which is why parents are strongly encouraged to submit the survey. We want to try to accommodate working parents while being sure drivers and students are safe. She noted some districts have decided there will be no option to have students ride multiple vehicles, even though it is a consistent schedule.

Mr. Maziarz thanked Superintendent Geryk for putting this all together. His first question was about mask breaks and if it is following CDC guidelines to have masks worn by all visitors and kids. Superintendent Geryk said there will be scheduled mask breaks. Individual students will need their own breaks in terms of safety and protocols. Expectations are to the letter of the Department of Health.

Mr. Maziarz asked about the school calendar. Superintendent Geryk said the goal is to have days before school starts for staff training for procedures to be put in place and time for teachers to plan. He then asked if she feels we are financially able to do all she wants to with everyone being in five days per week. She said, based on a survey completed for the state, the district would need an additional four teachers, a nurse and custodian. She would love to have bus monitors. Once a teacher becomes ill, we will have to pay teacher subs. She estimated the additional costs would total \$600,000. We will have to think about creative options.

Mr. Napolitano asked if she received guidance about households who have a member diagnosed with COVID. Will they have to stay home for two weeks? Ms. Sears answered, saying if somebody has had close contact with somebody with COVID, they are expected to be quarantined for 14 days. There is no definitive answer right now, and each will be decided on a case by case basis.

Mr. Napolitano asked about students wearing masks during gym. Superintendent Geryk said they will not wear masks, but will practice social distancing outside.

Ms. Dooley asked about the impact all this will have on our policies or bargaining unit agreements. Superintendent Geryk said she just received a lot of information from Shipman and Goodwin. She will review this information as others work on the Teaching and Learning.

Ms. Dooley asked about food services. Superintendent Geryk said funding and guidance comes from the federal government. Meals will be delivered to classrooms. We will need a cart and staff to distribute.

Chairman Lent said we are allotted 20 minutes for audience questions and comments. Another opportunity for questions will be on Wednesday at 3:30 p.m.

Tony Franco asked what the thresholds are to move from on-campus to hybrid to remote. Superintendent Geryk said the state has directed we open fully in person. Changes are made by the state, working with our health department.

David and Jessica Callahan, 105 West Street, asked how the district plans on handling cohorts in relation to children with different intellectual levels. Will parents have a say in their child's cohort group if they feel there needs to be a change? Superintendent Geryk said the needs of all children will be reviewed. Cohorts are based on recommendations by previous classroom teachers.

Tom P asked if a child may start remotely, then have the option to return to in-school learning and vice versa. Yes. Parents may make these decisions in either direction. Advance notice of one week is requested because we may need to adjust cohorts. Families have this right.

Tony Franco asked if students will be taught what was lost during remote learning. In the fall assessments will be used to see skill levels. Interventions will be provided.

Selene said her biggest concern is kids will fall behind if they are learning from home.

Karen O'Hearn, 41 Doubleday Road, asked what the instruction will look like for students whose families choose to keep their kids home. Superintendent Geryk said this is still being developed, but will include some real-time live instruction as well as lessons done through See Saw, etc. More will be provided by the Teaching and Learning subcommittee.

Carolyn Ritchie asked about ensuring symptom screening compliance prior to school entry (especially for students). Is there consideration for a second level of screening, once in school? The answer is we cannot ensure families and staff will comply. We are not planning on a secondary screening at school. Teachers will have an opportunity to take a look at the kids to see if anyone is feeling under the weather. We will have a lot of training for staff and a lot of information will be going home to families.

Nina Holmes, 7 Scalise, asked Superintendent Geryk to please describe how mask breaks look and the proposed frequency. Will masks be required during recess? If a child tests positive, will the entire school be notified and will the cohort of the child be required to quarantine? Superintendent Geryk

said there will be morning and afternoon breaks. Social distancing will assist in determining if masks are worn. If there is a positive COVID-19 diagnosis, Eastern Highland Health Department will be notified. Families will be informed, while being mindful of privacy.

Lisa DeWitt asked if it would be possible to hold a parent meeting after work hours as opposed to 3:30 on a work day. Yes, early morning or late in the day options will be available.

Michael Cassano asked what the purpose of the Porter Paws bag is, if the students have book bags. Superintendent Geryk said backpacks go home. Porter Paws bags stay in school and do not cross-contaminate.

Jenn V asked if you intend to keep your child home for the start of the year, can/should you still fill out the forms about transportation etc. for later in the year if they start attending. Yes, please fill out the transportation form, even if you stay at home initially.

Kate Riquier said she is concerned about teachers (and faculty) being able to balance all this. Will additional staff be hired? This is an immense undertaking. Superintendent Geryk agreed this is an immense undertaking. She is concerned about what this requires of a school system to do all this well. We must take into consideration health and safety aspects as well as educating children. Yes, there will be additional staff hired if we need them, depending on staffing patterns.

David Callahan asked if the district can provide a definitive study that shows long term mask use is NOT harmful to children. Superintendent Geryk said her job is to take health guidance provided by the experts in the field. She knows teaching and learning and must rely on others when it comes to health.

Ashley O'Connell said she arrived late and is asking if a hybrid learning option is available, as other schools are offering, especially for preschoolers. Superintendent Geryk said we are currently required by the state to open full-day. Parents may opt to have their students at home. Right now a hybrid option is not offered.

Lisa DeWitt asked if children who are quarantined for any reason will be able to use distance learning. Yes.

M Taylor asked if a meeting will be held to address special education services and individual student development plans and how they will be impacted during all three models. Questions about special education services may be directed to Director of Student Services Barbara Wilson. Individual IEPs will be reviewed. Ms. Wilson said there is a statewide directors' meeting tomorrow, where they will receive guidance on special education. Case managers will be in touch with anyone who has accommodations via an IEP or 504 plan. FAPE will be adhered to.

Christa McManus, 553 Route 87, asked if classroom cohorts will be somewhat based on "districting" to whatever extent possible – so that the kids on the busses will be some of the same kids in their classes. An answer is not available at this time because data is still being gathered.

Christa McManus asked if Porter bags are being provided, does that mean the children are not allowed to have their own backpacks. What exactly are "recess bags"? Are they for individual use? How will the materials be sanitized between uses? Backpacks will still be needed, but less things go

home and come back. Recess bags are net bags with balls, etc., for cohorts. Sanitizing will be done between classes as much as we can. We will have additional staff on through the day to do cleaning throughout the day. Pre-k and kindergarten will have a bin for “clean” toys and “dirty” toys to be sanitized.

Chairman Lent thanked Superintendent Geryk for answering all questions posed.

V. Action Items

(Consent) A consent agenda is presented by the Chairman at the beginning of a meeting. Items may be removed from the consent agenda on the request of any one member. Items not removed may be adopted by general consent without debate. Removed items may be taken up either immediately after the consent agenda or placed later on the agenda at the discretion of the assembly.

- a. Approval of June 1, 2020 Minutes
- b. Approval of Special Meeting Minutes June 15, 2020
- c. Payment of Bills and Expenditure Report
- d. Approval of the appointment of Daryn Rush-Grade 4 Teacher, Mehera Ortiz-.6 Elementary Music Teacher

Ms. Dooley MOVED, Ms. Sposito SECONDED to move a. Approval of June 1, 2020 Minutes to VI. Action Items (Discussion & Action).

MOTION CARRIES 5:0

Ms. Dooley MOVED, Ms. Sposito SECONDED to approve b. Approval of Special Meeting Minutes July 15, 2020; c. Payment of Bills and Expenditure Report and d. Approval of the appointment of Daryn Rush-Grade 4 Teacher, Mehera Ortiz-.6 Elementary Music Teacher

MOTION CARRIES 5:0

VI. Action Items (Discussion and Action)

- a. Upcoming Administrators Association Contract Negotiations (7/1/18-6/30/21)

Chairman Lent said the current contract is in effect 7/1/2018 through 6/30/2021. The members who agreed to negotiate on behalf of the Board are Chairman Lent, Mr. Maziarz and Ms. Sposito. Discussion followed about the next steps.

- b. Review of Revised 2020-2021 School Calendar

Superintendent Geryk said the Commissioner of Education recommends waiving the 180 day rule this year. We are looking at 177 days, with three days being added at the start of the school year for teachers to be trained and for them to put plans and lessons in place. Students would start Wednesday, September 2, 2020. The first three days will be early release. This would be consistent with Bolton’s start date. E.O. Smith starts on September 3, 2020. Thursday, June 10, 2021 is the scheduled last day.

Mr. Maziarz MOVED, Ms. Sposito SECONDED to approve the 2020-2021 school calendar.

MOTION CARRIES 5:0

c. Approval of June 1, 2020 Minutes

Ms. Dooley noted that page 3 has an error. It states, “Mr. Crim MOVED, Mr. Napolitano SECONDED . . .” Mr. Crim was not present at this meeting. It was agreed this will be tabled until the August meeting to research who made this motion.

VII. Correspondence/Communications

a. FIPAC Non Lapsing Account Resolution

Chairman Lent said there is updated language in the Memorandum of Understanding to address a change in the amount a district may set aside in a non-lapsing account. The MOU allows us to set aside the current maximum amount without having to go through a formal process every time the amount changes.

b. The View Article

The View is published quarterly. This article is recognizing our graduates and taking the time to say thank you to our staff on behalf of our students and families.

VIII. Board of Education Upcoming Meetings

- Monday, August 3, 2020, 6:30 p.m., BOE Subcommittee Meeting
- Monday, August 3, 2020, 7:30 p.m., BOE Regular Meeting

IX. Superintendent’s Report

Superintendent Geryk gave this update:

- Summer cleaning is out of the way. The remainder of the summer will be spent preparing for alterations.
- Cameras have been installed
- Generator is underway
- Ceiling tiles project is progressing
- Truck was purchased
- 8 new bathroom sinks have been installed
- We are fixing multiple sinks or toilets that were leaking
- The exterior will be cleaned and painted
- Awnings are lined up to be painted
- Permanent walls are being put in place in classrooms upstairs.
- Asbestos abatement in tiles before new tiles are installed (instead of carpet)
- Replacing tables with desks in classrooms
- Classrooms will need some furniture removed to make place for desks
- Panther Paws in the hallways – nice for the students to see something familiar
- Can families help provide tents or canopies to be used by kids while attending class or eating lunch outside?
- Water fountains are being turned off

Superintendent Geryk said the family who previously requested information to pay tuition for their child to attend Porter has opted to not pursue this. She also shared that St. Mary's in Windham has closed. There was discussion about establishing a tuition rate. This will be discussed more thoroughly at an upcoming meeting.

X. Comments from the Audience (Bylaws of the Board #9300)

Time allotted for public participation is twenty (20) minutes; time allotted for an individual speaker is three (3) minutes.

No one wished to be heard.

XI. Columbia Board of Education Member Remarks

Ms. Sposito said she appreciates all the hard work. Porter is doing a great job and are very responsive to e-mails. Superintendent Geryk agreed more will most likely be coming.

Ms. Dooley said she knows how incredibly hard Superintendent Geryk and the Leadership Team have been working based on the amount of information she has been receiving. It is extremely difficult to balance everything and it is very much appreciated.

Mr. Napolitano expressed his gratitude as well. He said guidelines keep changing and it must be hard to keep on top of it.

Mr. Maziarz congratulated our new teachers, saying we are looking forward to them joining the district. He also congratulated our graduates. He thanked everyone involved in the COVID-19 planning and said health and safety is paramount.

Chairman Lent thanked everyone for all their hard work. Consensus is the district is on the right track, balancing safety needs and education, trying to be nimble wherever possible to adapt and make changes as necessary.

Superintendent Geryk thanked the Board members for their continued support. A plan is in place that meets the needs of our children and staff.

Ms. Gwinnell said she always says we can't do this alone. She extended a big thank you to the parents who came to tonight's meeting. She looks forward to seeing them as the summer continues.

Chairman Lent concluded this portion of the meeting at 8:45 p.m., saying the Board will be going into executive session.

IV. Adjournment

Mr. Maziarz MOVED and Mr. Napolitano SECONDED to adjourn.
MOTION CARRIES 5:0

The Board adjourned at 9:30 p.m.

Approved 8/17/2020

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Respectfully submitted,
Christopher Lent, Chairman