

EASTON BOARD OF EDUCATION MEETING SPECIAL MEETING

Location: Virtual Meeting via Zoom

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/81642169429?pwd=dkRjR0s0V1EvVjZ3Wmh5R2dZbUNRdz09>

Meeting ID: 816 4216 9429 Password: 06612

July 27, 2020– 7:30 p.m.

Minutes

ATTENDANCE

Board members: Stinson, Goldstein, Chieda, Hicks, Parker

Administration: McMorran, Pierson Ugol, Reiss, Fox Santora, Kaplan, Brownstein, Mohr

Others: 50 members of the public and staff

J. Stinson called the meeting to order at 7:31 p.m.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Motion: move that the Easton Board of Education approve the minutes from the July 14, 2020 Regular Meeting as submitted. Parker, Goldstein. Approved. Unanimous.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Lynn Loesch, vice president of the paraprofessional union, read a letter from the membership addressed to the Board stating that paraprofessionals would like to participate in the reopening plan. They were asked for feedback on Distance Learning in June; however, while parents were surveyed, paraprofessionals, in their roles working closely with students, were not included in the creation of a reopening plan. They request that the district not rush into reopening, rather take the needed time to assure a safe return.

John Macaluso, teacher at Helen Keller Middle School and co-president of the Easton Education Association, read a letter to the Board on behalf of the membership. The letter acknowledged the tremendous work that went into the reopening plan, however wished that teachers were a more integral part of the reopening plan. He shared his experience taking a tour of HKMS. The reality of what classrooms look like is in sharp contrast to the warm environment teachers work to create. He shared concerns conducting small groups and individual conferences in a safe manner. The fun and happy place students know is now intimidating. The membership believes the plan outlines a premature return. A survey of teachers indicates the following concerns: need for daily temperature checks, ample masks?, a protocol for testing staff and students, how bathrooms will be monitored, how common areas will be monitored, social distancing, the ability for students to follow the rules: masking and six foot social distancing, the protocol for requiring a 14 day quarantine. The staff raised the issue of substitutes since, of late, they are hard to come by. Many work in multiple districts, increasing exposure. Regarding ventilation: the staff feels ventilation is questionable and would like a third party to inspect the HVAC quality at both buildings. This is imperative because the safety of our schools impacts students, staff, and the entire community.



Lara Fayek, Wilson Road, Easton: the Fayek family is joined by the following five other Easton families (Tara & Saj Kahn, Julia & Victor Mejia, Liz & Joe Plastina, Devon & Jud Wible, and Jenny & Drew Chieda) in donating a sum of \$2,250 to Samuel Staples Elementary School to jump start instruction targeted to support racial diversity. The money will be spent on age appropriate read-alouds in PreK- 5 classrooms. Money is also earmarked for staff development. Ms. Fayek stated that she has had conversations with Dr. McMorran and Mrs. Fox Santora on this topic.

BOARD MEMBER COMMENT

None.

DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE ACTION: FILLING BOARD VACANCY

Katy Reed stepped down, and the Democratic Committee nominated Devon Wible to fill the board vacancy. Ms. Wible introduced herself, highlighting a twenty year career in education. She has been a high school teacher in New Jersey, in a community similar to Easton. She now works in curriculum development for a company that is affiliated with 3,000 schools. Ms. Wible also has experience with remote learning.

Motion: move that the Easton Board of Education approve the nomination of Devon Wible to fill the Board of Education vacancy. Goldstein, Chieda. Approved. Unanimous.

Ms. Wible cannot vote this evening. She must first be sworn in.

DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE ACTION: DONATION TO SSES IN SUPPORT OF RACIAL DIVERSITY

Mrs. Fox Santora described Mrs. Lara Fayek as an inspired thinker as a result of conversations with Mrs. Fayek regarding equity. She is excited to accept the donation made by six families, including the Fayeks, in order to provide resources, including professional development for teachers in how to address equity issues with particular age groups.

Motion: move that the Easton Board of Education accept a donation of funds (\$2,250) to Samuel Staples Elementary School in support of racial diversity. The donation was made by six Easton families. Goldstein, Chieda. Approved. Unanimous.

DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE ACTION: REOPENING OF SSES AND HKMS

Dr. Pierson Ugol explained that the focus of the presentation will be on the building-based reopening plans. Students are scheduled to return on August 31st. Four days prior, staff will be trained on health and safety protocols and will be oriented to the building. Discussions regarding social and emotional support will occur as well.

Samuel Staples Elementary School building-based plan: Mr. Brownstein began the presentation by reminding everyone that the document that is shared is a work in progress, updated as recently as this evening. A written form from each building will be available in a few weeks. Desk dividers were purchased. Face shields will be available for all students and staff. Students will be a member of three different cohorts: their homeroom, the cafeteria, and the bus. Before and after school programs will not be in place. Athletic groups may meet outside only. SSES has added a part time custodian to help the daytime custodian; a cleaning log will be kept.

HVAC was checked by Honeywell and was reported as "functioning properly." If there are problems, a classroom may need to be relocated. Desks will all face in the same direction and will be between five to six feet apart. If there are smaller numbers of students, more space between desks will be provided.

Buses: Families are encouraged to drive students to school. Masks will be required on buses. Students will be assigned seats by the order in which they board. Orderly social distance exiting will include having students in the back of the bus exit first.

Dropping off students: The whole front of the school will be utilized. Different entrances will be used by different grade levels.

Picking up students: To ensure social distancing, students will wait in three separate areas (determined alphabetically).

Early pick-up: Parents will wait in the silo; there will be no lobby pick-up.

Lunch: Students will have 30 minutes to eat; there will be ten minutes between lunch waves to allow for cleaning between shifts. Students will be seated six feet apart; three classes will eat in the cafeteria, two classes in the small gym. Kindergarteners will eat in their classroom. Recess will happen in two different cohorts. Meals will be prepackaged. Mask breaks will happen during lunch and outside recess.

Schedule: The day will begin with Community Building (to include social- emotional learning). Specials will occur in the homeroom classroom, physical education will take place outside or in the gym. If moving to a hybrid model, the daily schedule will stay the same. Specials will require a rotating schedule for the two days a week.

Helen Keller Middle School building-based plan: Ms. Mohr shared that each grade will be considered one cohort. Only the water filling stations will be operational; therefore students need to have a refillable water bottle in school. School doors will open at 7:55, which is a change. Bathrooms will be designated per grade level. Students will not use lockers due to locker congregation. The locker room will not be in use, therefore students will not be changing for physical education. Students can carry backpacks with minimal supplies. Hallways will be marked and passing times will be staggered by grade. Classroom doors will be propped open at the beginning and end of class; bathroom doors will be propped open with consideration of privacy. Student desks will be four to five feet apart, in compliance with guidelines. For science classes and Project Lead the Way, dividers were ordered.

Buses: One bus at a time will be unloaded; students will enter and exit the building in different locations according to grade. Dismissal will be staggered. If students are tardy, they will enter by the main entrance. Students will have assigned seats on the bus, filling the bus from back to front.

Parent pick-up changes will be similar to SSES: staff will collect name cards in order of arrival.

Early pick-up cannot happen fifteen minutes prior to the end of the school day as that will interfere with the dismissal process.

Food service: There will be two separate lunch waves per grade. Students will have assigned seats, two children per table. Students need not wear masks during lunch. There will be a limited menu. Students will spend 15 minutes of their 30 minute shift outside.

Scheduling: Transitions will be minimized. The schedule is new. There will be a two-day block schedule: Blue Day and Yellow Day. In two days, students will have had all subjects. This schedule works similarly with the all-in or hybrid models. The day will start with PRIDE, which will include arrival and Advisory, a time to allow students to stagger arrival and begin the day in a calm, settled manner. At the end of the day will be Homebase with the same cohort that includes ELT (Extended Learning Time) and a

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staggered dismissal. Executive functioning lessons that teachers and students have requested can happen during this time. Academic blocks will run from 60-65 minutes. Students will have a different FPA class each day for 55 minutes, and this will extend all year. SOAR will be 60 minutes on Yellow Days. This is technology-based training to promote comfort with new technology requirements. A variety of services to support students emotionally, behaviorally and academically will occur during this time. In a hybrid model, the Blue and Yellow Day schedule stands. There will only be one lunch wave per grade level. Students will have two- 30 minute FPAs in a given day.

Dr. McMorran encouraged parents to continue to submit questions for an FAQ (87 questions submitted so far) that will be posted on the district website. He also stated that all presentations will be on the website.

Mrs. Del Conte presented a look at reopening for students who receive special education services. In an all-in model, the IEP will be met; some services may be remote. In a hybrid model, some students will need to come in all four days. These students may be in a self-contained setting. She is awaiting state guidelines for more direction. In an all-out remote learning situation, the Case Manager will be the point person. Instruction will be both synchronous as well as asynchronous. The IEP will be complied with as much as possible.

Mrs. DelConte explained key terms: "Homeschool" is formally withdrawing the student. "Homebound" is at-home instruction for medical reasons and requires medical documentation. "Temporary Learning from Home" is an option for parents. If selected by parents of a student with an IEP, the IEP services will be provided to the greatest extent possible. The IEP is designed for a brick and mortar setting.

Clear face masks have been purchased. SpEd Staff will be working with students to teach how to use PPEs. Staff who work with students with high needs will have gloves, face shields and extra barriers. The use of scrubs is being discussed. Videos will be used to teach students procedures when riding school transportation. Some students may be the first on and off the bus. There may be mixed cohorts in the special education environment. The state says districts have until October 1st to catch up on assessments. Currently some testing is being done in person. BASES will have no cooking activities or personal hygiene (daily living skills) lessons that require close contact between staff and students. PPTs will be conducted virtually. Parents are essential to the development of the IEP.

Preschool guidelines are slightly different: The staff will work with families to teach students to use masks. These young children are able to keep masks on for extended periods of time.

The Office of Early Childhood offers the following guidelines:

- Teach students to wash hands (before and after playground use.)
- Toys that cannot be sanitized will not be used.
- Only 14 students per space. (Easton is under 14.)
- Holiday celebrations and presentations will be postponed.
- Recess time will be staggered.
- During snack time, students will be 6 feet apart.

G. Goldstein thanked the administration for their work and asked what will temporary learning from home look like? Dr. Pierson Ugol stated that the district is committed to providing resources to the extent possible. Students can receive a bag of resource materials. Students would not necessarily have daily contact with their teachers. Google Classroom is a means of communication for older students. The administration is working with the teacher's association on how to provide access for students. It will not

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be limited to the Connecticut Learning Hub; students will have access to lessons and the teacher. Student work will be parallel, based on district curriculum, and it will be graded. The challenge is that teachers cannot prepare lessons for in school as well as at home. Dr. McMorran spoke of having cameras filming specific times within the school day so as to capture key lessons. What is being considered now is a live feed from classrooms not panning across students, just the teacher. The teacher would present the lesson followed by students, at home, working independently. J. Chieda expressed that this issue is a source of anxiety for parents. As described, this is not the Connecticut Learning Hub alone though this is also not fully flushed out Distance Learning. Parents are going to need to help their children. Decisions need to be based on what is best for each family.

R. Hicks asked if the plan is similar to Redding. Dr. Pierson Ugol responded that the Redding team is working on their presentations. Principals in both towns have met. There are commonalities. R. Hicks also asked about Distance Learning plans. Dr. Pierson Ugol shared that what is planned for is called Distance Learning version 2, which will consider all the feedback received. Wednesday afternoon professional development for teachers will be invaluable time for teachers to improve upon the model. R. Hicks asked if teachers could use their classrooms during Distance Learning. In a full Distance Learning model, Dr. Pierson Ugol responded, teachers are home. In this model, she continued, we want to equip teachers with more tools at their disposal. They are currently getting estimates for technology resources.

G. Goldstein offered that the public would like information about how decisions will be made to switch the model. Dr. McMorran responded that if you wish districts to make their own decisions, write your representatives. There was some discussion that Hartford may allow districts to determine the mode of instruction.

J. Chieda asked about transmission of the virus in the school setting, what the protocol will be. The response was that it will depend on the situation. The administration will always defer to medical experts, awaiting further word from the Department of Health. She added that families are waiting for this information to make decisions. J. Chieda expressed concern about the sterile classroom environment and requested that whatever can be done to create a welcoming environment will be appreciated by students/families. Ms. Fox Santora said there are no restrictions on decoration of walls however alternate seats, reading tables and kindergarten stations are removed.

Recognizing that most diagnostic assessments usually happen in the beginning of October, J. Parker suggested getting started a little sooner than usual in light of the uncertainty of this school year.

J. Chieda asked if any outdoor furniture was purchased. Dr. McMorran stated that money was tight but a 30 foot tent will be ordered for HKMS. There is talk of doing the same at the elementary school.

DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE ACTION: BOARD OF EDUCATION COMMITTEE REPORTS AND RECOMMENDATION, A. SUPERINTENDENT SEARCH AND B. NEGOTIATING COMMITTEE

R. Hicks shared an update on the Superintendent search. There were a total of 30 applications. From a group of six first-round interviews, three finalists were selected. All three boards will have an opportunity for an extended question and answer before making a recommendation.

Negotiating Committee: J. Stinson shared two conversations on the horizon:

- Impact of re opening plan
- Union contract coming soon

J. Chieda asked when the composition of the Negotiating Committee will be changing. She requested inclusion as membership on this committee has remained the same for some time. J. Stinson shared that as Board Chair he has the authority to change the composition of the Negotiating Committee, though the current group has the experience needed to enter negotiations. J. Chieda shared that the remaining board members all have backgrounds in education. J. Stinson appreciated the feedback and will have a further discussion with J. Chieda.

REPORTS

Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction: Dr. Pierson Ugol reported on the results of the Parent Survey, though the deadline has been extended to next Wednesday. It is important for families to read the plan and complete the survey, though responses to this survey are not binding. This information is needed to balance classes and bus runs.

-56% of Easton families responded

-84% responded that they will send their children to school

-15% responded that they will not send their children to school

Transportation was a 50/50 split (driving/using the bus), which Dr. Pierson Ugol expected.

Families are requesting social-emotion support.

She continued that she is trying to answer every email she receives. Many questions will be answered on the district website FAQ.

Samuel Stapled Elementary School: Mrs. Fox Santora shared an update on new hires:

- Physical Education= full time
- Long-term substitute teacher for a grade 4 teacher
- Kindergarten teacher= full time
- Office Assistant

She still needs to hire recess/cafeteria supervisors.

There are currently 70 enrolled kindergarten students. Twenty packets have not been returned yet which would be considered unusual in other years. Mrs. Fox Santora anticipates a class total of 80.

J. Parker raised the issue of current enrollment decreases (SSES) and increases (HKMS), however all felt that it was hard to analyze this data as parents are waiting to make decisions regarding this school year.

Helen Keller Middle School: Mrs. Kaplan shared that the 8th grade math hire resigned, but she is pleased to say that she hired a new math teacher from Shelton with four years of experience. The SSO position, previously thought to be filled, remains a current vacancy. The school nurse is expecting in mid-August, and a very experienced nurse will fill that role.

Director of Finance & Operations: Scott Reiss reported that the district received a reimbursement from First Student for \$60,000. There is approximately \$500,000 unspent funds. By the end of August, Mr. Reiss will be able to close out this fiscal year.

Health insurance: June numbers: \$700,000 as predicted in June as people are getting services performed

Director of Special Education: J. Del Conte shared an update on new hires:

- School psychologist= part time (shared with Redding Elementary School)
- Junior Bridges teacher

There remain some paraprofessional openings.

J. Del Conte shared a new format for reporting current numbers of students in Special Education. The Board liked the concise manner in which the information was shared.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Carolyn Oppenheim, Hunting Ridge Road, Easton: a careful consideration of the hybrid model. She is more concerned about high school due to the amount of moving around. She thanked everyone for their work.

BOARD MEMBER COMMENT

J. Parker wished Dr. McMorran best wishes, as this is his last Easton board meeting. He reiterated the importance of knowing where students are (academically) at the beginning of this school year and suggested beginning diagnostic assessments earlier than done in previous years.

J. Chieda stated that every detail that goes into building community is important: signage and verbiage. She thanked Dr. McMorran. She loves the block schedule at HKMS. She thanked Ms. Del Conte for the details of her presentation.

J. Stinson thanked all administrators for their thoughtful and careful work. He credits Dr. McMorran for helping him grow in his understanding of the many facets to consider in educating the students of Easton.

Dr. McMorran thanked the Easton Board. He deeply admires how they keep children at the center of decisions and how they disagree respectfully. He hopes they will continue to collaborate to continue that culture.

Motion: move that the Easton Board of Education meeting be adjourned. Goldstein, Hicks.
Approved. Unanimous.

The meeting was adjourned at 10:43 p.m.

Submitted by,
Gretchen Goldstein
Easton Board of Education Secretary

Recorded by,
Liz Rimkunas