

Filed subject to approval

EASTON, REDDING, REGION 9 BOARDS OF EDUCATION SPECIAL MEETING

July 20, 2020 - 6:00 p.m.

Virtual Meeting via Zoom and viewable via YouTube

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Minutes

ATTENDANCE

Board Members:

Easton: Stinson, Goldstein, Parker, Hicks, Chieda

Redding: Parkin, Whaley, Pilato, Hoffman, Reilly, Oulton, Hocker

Region 9: Johnston, Graziano, Berry, D'Agostino, Denny, Williams, O'Brien, Pampel

Absent: Reed

Administration: McMorran, Pierson Ugol, Reiss

Others: Approximately 522 members of the staff and public via Zoom and YouTube, and the recording secretary

After some technical difficulties:

Redding Board of Education meeting was called to order by C. Parkin at 6:24 p.m.

Easton Board of Education meeting was called to order by J. Stinson at 6:24 p.m.

Region 9 Board of Education was called to order by T. Johnston at 6:25 p.m.

PUBLIC COMMENT

C. Parkin read aloud a letter from Amanda Neville of Black Rock Turnpike, Redding, in which she stated that she had two comments: 1) she is so pleased that there is now a Diversity Task Force so that our children will be learning about what we need to do in society and that anti-racism should be a large part of our curriculum; 2) she was told by someone who answered the phone at Central Office that there would be no distance-learning option for students in ER9 and her understanding is that the State is allowing distance-learning for any student who wants it. In her letter, A. Neville also suggested: that in-building schooling be for the children of essential workers and children with special needs only; that if we go into lockdown, then the bus drivers should become meals on wheels drivers and could check on the students in their homes; and, that we should delay the start of school by two weeks.

C. Parkin read aloud a letter from the Executive Board of the Redding Education Association in which they stated that they have significant concerns about the reopening plan, that the union has not been asked to be a working member of this effort, and that a return to normal is a myth considering that everyone will be wearing masks and staying three feet away from one another. The letter included a dozen data points from a staff survey about concerns and ideas for reopening.

Julianne Licamele, Wells Hill Road, Easton, said that she wanted to thank the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Task Force and show support for their work. She said that she thinks they are off to a great start, but wanted to point out a few things after listening to their meeting: on-going anti-racist and intersectional training for all staff, BOE members and Task Force members must take place and be revisited frequently; and that their charge should be revisited once community members join the Task Force since right now it is not diverse. J. Licamele also said that the District should consider DEI when implementing COVID-19 policies.

Abbie Winter, Old Orchard Drive, Easton, asked about the origins of the \$45,000 allocated for diversity issues and the Task Force. J. Stinson explained that the Public Comment time was just for comment and does not include the back and forth of questions with BOE members.

Devon Wible, Wyldewood Drive, Easton, asked about the policy regarding teachers who travel to current COVID-19 high risk areas and asked for more communication and transparency if school goes back to distance learning; she said that transparency will help her to know what is going on. D. Wible also said that the pandemic has impacted people in different ways and that students should be serviced in different ways, and thanked everyone for their hard work.

Kathy Thompson, Mile Common, Easton, said thank you for all the hard work and had three questions: 1) is the influx of students into Easton being considered for class size; 2) what is the thinking that will trigger the shifts into the different models; and, 3) how will masked students be protected from non-masked students?

Sarah O'Dell, Black Rock Turnpike, Redding, said thank you for all of this work. She also said: in terms of the Diversity Task Force, to include the youngest students in the new curriculum; she has many questions and concerns about masking; and she was surprised to hear the letter from the representative of the Redding teacher's union about not being included in the re-opening planning.

Beth Natt, Maple Road, Easton, first said thank you for all of the anti-racism work, that this work is very important. She said that she is a pediatrician and that she hopes the district is partnering with local pediatricians in the reopening plan; that pediatricians have thoughtful and feasible rules for patients when every cold will be a potential COVID case. She asked the district to reevaluate the absentee policy.

Jennifer de Jesus, Laurel Drive, Easton, first said thank you for all you're doing to get us back on track and then said she wanted to piggy-back on what Dr. Natt had said. She asked about the protocol for students with cold symptoms and the protocol for positive test results in students and staff. J. de Jesus also said that she is on the fence about the virtual vs. in-school options.

Elizabeth Boyce, Silver Hill Road, Easton, said thank you to the staff at Barlow and that her children had a fabulous time with distance learning. She asked about whether or not there is a deadline for opting out of the school building and opting for distance learning, and if there is an option for starting out with distance learning and then going into the building.

Robin Abramowitz, Morehouse Road, Easton, said that she agrees with Dr. Natt in that with the cold and strep season upon us, and kids missing a lot of school, we should reevaluate the district absentee policy.

T. Johnston read aloud letters from: Cheryl Pulley, Dr. Kristin Sardana, Danielle Garivito, Brian and Kristin Rose, Victoria Erickson, David Steinberg, Karen Bricker, Abbie Winter, Paul Wista, and Vanessa Visners; the letters voiced concerns about reopening, face masks, special services, school lunches and distance-learning.

BOARD MEMBER COMMENT

J. Chieda said that she's been thinking a lot lately about the idea of space and she implores all three Boards and the community to openly hear the plans and set a tone of mutual respect.

C. Parkin said that he'd like to acknowledge the ER9 administration, especially Stephanie and Scott, and that he greatly respects their hard work. He said that he echoes J. Chieda's statement about space. C. Parkin acknowledged Dr. McMorran and thanked him for all of his hard work in our district.

DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE ACTION: DIVERSITY TASK FORCE CHARGE

H. Whaley said that the Task Force on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion had met last week and established their charge. She thanked the community members who attended the meeting for their comments and suggestions. H. Whaley presented the written charge of the Task Force. A discussion ensued about the Task Force that included details such as the age of students involved with the task force, what groups of people are included in the charge and training for involved parties. H. Whaley explained that they would like students from all of the schools to be involved -- acknowledging that this would look different for different aged students -- and that the Task Force is committed to reaching all students who feel marginalized, including those who differ in race, gender identification, sexual orientation, religion and are socially challenged. H. Whaley said that the goal is to have all Task Force members and BOE members receive training in this field. Several BOE members said that they would like to see some different members of the community involved and that communication about, and for, this Task Force is critical.

Motion: move that the Easton Board of Education accept the charge of the Task Force on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion as stated. (Chieda, Goldstein). Approved. 5-0-1 (Hicks abstained).

Motion: move that the Redding Board of Education accept the charge of the Task Force on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion as stated. (Reilly, Whaley). Approved. Unanimous.

Motion: move that the Region 9 Board of Education accept the charge of the Task Force on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion as stated. (Graziano, O'Brien). Approved. Unanimous.

DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE ACTION: ER9 2020-2021 REOPENING PLAN TO BE SUBMITTED TO THE STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION BY JUNE 24, 2020

Superintendent of Schools, Dr. Tom McMorran, started by saying that Dr. Pierson Ugol had been charged with this task of coming up with a plan for reopening the schools. He said that they have met with teacher representatives, and that we have to view this as a plan and it will continue to grow with more input from community stakeholders.

Assistant Superintendent of Schools, Dr. Stephanie Pierson Ugol, said that she acknowledges the great challenge that we are now in and wishes she could give a plan with all certainty, but that she could not. She said that she hopes the plan provides some comfort and that the State has charged every school district with coming up with three plans for three models:

All In (Brick & Mortar with option for temporary learning from home); Hybrid (Distance Learning & In Person Learning, divided alphabetically with two days in and three days out); and, All Out (Distance Learning). Dr. Pierson Ugol said that the plans will continue to be developed and that students have the option to opt-out within the All In model.

Dr. Pierson Ugol presented a detailed plan for all three of the models. Within the All In and Hybrid models, the focus areas will be: Health & Safety, Facilities, Food Services, Transportation, Scheduling, Academics, and Social/Emotional Learning & Support. Health & Safety details include: personal protective equipment, use of physical barriers, hand-washing & use of hand-sanitizer, social distancing, participation medical exemptions for students and staff, ventilation, temperature screening, and health data & change in status. Facilities details include: entry and exit and common areas, nursing & isolation room, visitors, bathrooms, and fields and equipment use. Food Services details include: staffing & supervision, server, and the cafeteria & other eating areas. Transportation details include: PPE, cleaning, drop off/pick-up, ridership, and scheduling. Scheduling details include: training, and ongoing professional learning and curriculum planning. Academics details include: reentry, assessments, curriculum review & revision, materials, physical education/wellness, music, art, STEM & library media, intervention, and temporary learning from home. Social/Emotional Learning & Support details include: support systems, reentry, and program & resources. The All Out model will focus on: scheduling and time expectations for students and staff, synchronous instruction, parent technology training made available, curriculum revisions, counseling support, and social & emotional learning.

Dr. Pierson Ugol said that a survey with four questions will go out to ER9 parents in late July. A lengthy discussion took place with several questions from BOE members concerning ill students at school, communication of positive COVID cases, contact tracing, special services, students who need to leave the school building for a prolonged period of time, volunteers, viewing the inside of classrooms before the start of school, the absentee policy, the district supply of masks, and the impact of Monday holidays on the Hybrid model. Dr. McMorran and Dr. Pierson Ugol fielded the many questions. In short: ill students will need to be picked up within 30 minutes of a phone call home; notes from the school nurses will be sent out for positive cases, with more guidance still to come from the State; school nurses and the town department of health will conduct contact tracing, with more guidance still to come from the State; special services will still be provided; academic accommodations will be made for students who need to leave the building; there will be no volunteers allowed in the buildings and very limited guests; building administrators are working to provide secure views of classrooms for students to lessen the anxiety; they have not received guidance from the State on relaxing the absentee policy; there is a 30-day supply of PPE and more have been ordered; and, there are a few Friday holidays to counterbalance the Monday holidays.

T. Johnston suggested that there be another Q & A session for the community. Dr. Pierson Ugol said that that was definitely a possibility. Dr. McMorran suggested that a document with the many questions from the community -- and answers -- be shared with the community.

Motion: move that the Easton Board of Education approve the District Reopening Plan for filing with the State Department of Education with the understanding that the plan continues to evolve and is subject to change and that the administration will report any material changes to the plan to the Board promptly. (Goldstein, Parker). Approved. Unanimous.

Motion: move that the Redding Board of Education approve the District Reopening Plan for filing with the State Department of Education with the understanding that the plan continues to evolve and is subject to change and that the administration will report any material changes to the plan to the Board promptly. (Hocker, Whaley). Approved. Unanimous.

Motion: move that the Region 9 Board of Education approve the District Reopening Plan for filing with the State Department of Education with the understanding that the plan continues to evolve and is subject to change and that the administration will report any material changes to the plan to the Board promptly. (Williams, O'Brien). Approved. Unanimous.

Another lengthy discussion took place about the use, concerns and purchase of live-streaming cameras for use by the teachers in the classrooms. Dr. Pierson Ugol said that they are working with the teachers and the union to resolve their concerns, and that using the live-streaming cameras is what most area districts are doing. S. Reiss expressed that the timeline for ordering the cameras is now.

Motion: move that the Easton Board of Education accept the financial estimate for additional expenses for the reopening of schools as presented by the Director of Finance & Operations. (Parker, Goldstein). Approved. Unanimous.

Motion: move that the Redding Board of Education authorize the Director of Finance & Operations to make transfers to cover staffing and supplies related to reopening outlined at the July 20 meeting without increasing overall spending for the 2020-2021 fiscal year. (Hoffman, Reilly). Approved. Unanimous.

DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE ACTION: PROPOSED POLICY REGARDING THE USE OF FACE COVERINGS

A discussion took place regarding the legalities of requiring masks, the extent to which masks can become an object for bullying or a status symbol, and medical exemptions from the policy.

Motion: move that the Easton Board of Education accept Policy 4118.237, Face Mask Coverings, for the 2020-2021 school year. (Parker, Chieda). Approved. Unanimous.

Motion: move that the Redding Board of Education accept Policy 4118.237, Face Mask Coverings, for the 2020-2021 school year. (Reilly, Oulton). Approved. Unanimous.

Motion: move that the Region 9 Board of Education accept Policy 4118.237, Face Mask Coverings, for the 2020-2021 school year. (D'Agostino, Graziano). Approved. Unanimous.

DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE ACTION: MODIFICATIONS TO ER9 2020-2021 CALENDAR DUE FOR COVID-19

Dr. Pierson Ugol spoke about the need for a half-day every other Wednesday for professional development for staff and to convert three days in August to professional development days. A discussion took place on whether or not to approve an initial four Wednesdays or every Wednesday.

Motion: move that the Easton Board of Education approve an amendment to the 2020-2021 calendar to provide for early dismissal on the days of September 9, September 23, October 7 and October 21, 2020 for staff professional development. (Parker, Goldstein). Approved. Unanimous.

Motion: move that the Redding Board of Education approve an amendment to the calendar to provide for early dismissal on the days of September 9, September 23, October 7 and October 21, 2020 for staff professional development. (Hocker, Reilly). Approved. Unanimous.

Motion: move that the Region 9 Board of Education approve an amendment to the calendar to provide for early dismissal on the days of September 9, September 23, October 7 and October 21, 2020 for staff professional development. (O'Brien, Graziano). Approved. Unanimous.

Motion: move that Easton Board of Education convert August 26, 27, 28, 2020 to professional development days for staff and the first day of school for students to August 31, 2020. (Goldstein, Parker). Approved. Unanimous.

Motion: move that Redding Board of Education convert August 26, 27, 28, 2020 to professional development days for staff and the first day of school for students to August 31, 2020. (Hoffman, Whaley). Approved. Unanimous.

Motion: move that Region 9 Board of Education convert August 26, 27, 28, 2020 to professional development days for staff and the first day of school for students to August 31, 2020. (O'Brien, Williams). Approved. Unanimous.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Brenda Phelps, Indian Hill Road, Redding, said that she would like to see the mask policy include the word "solid." She also thanked the Board for their efforts and said that this is a matter of life and death.

Angela Caes, Deer Hill Road, Redding, asked about a plan for increased enrollment and a need for more teachers. She said she would like to see real numbers for enrollment. She also said that she would like to see guidance on the usage of the RES playground and strongly recommends that enough PPEs are ordered for the fall and winter.

T. Johnston read aloud four letters that had been emailed to him during the meeting from Cheryl Cowherd, David Anterer, Jonathan Hopkins and Traci Camlucci.

BOARD MEMBER COMMENT: None.

RECESS TO EXECUTIVE SESSION TO DISCUSS: TERMS OF SEPARATION AND RETIREMENT OF SUPERINTENDENT, DR. THOMAS McMORRAN

Motion: move that the Easton Board of Education recess to Executive Session. (Hicks, Chieda). Approved. Unanimous.

Motion: move that the Redding Board of Education recess to Executive Session. (Hoffman, Reilly). Approved. Unanimous.

Motion: move that the Region 9 Board of Education recess to Executive Session. (O'Brien, Graziano). Approved. Unanimous.

The Boards recessed to Executive Session at 11:41 p.m.

RETURN TO PUBLIC SESSION FOR POSSIBLE ACTION ON ITEMS DISCUSSED IN EXECUTIVE SESSION

The Easton, Redding and Region 9 Boards of Education returned to regular session at 12:11 a.m.

Motion: move that the Easton Board of Education and Dr. McMorran agree that his last day of service shall be July 31, 2020. The Board thanked Dr. McMorran for his service and dedication to this district. (Chieda, Hicks). Approved. Unanimous.

Motion: move that the Redding Board of Education and Dr. McMorran agree that his last day of service shall be July 31, 2020. The Board thanked Dr. McMorran for his service and dedication to this district. (Hoffman, Whaley). Approved. Unanimous.

ADJOURNMENT

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

Motion: move that the Redding Board of Education meeting be adjourned. (Hoffman, Whaley). Approved. Unanimous.

Motion: move that the Region 9 Board of Education meeting be adjourned. (O'Brien, Berry). Approved. Unanimous.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 12:13 a.m.

Submitted by,
Juliette Berry, Secretary, Region 9 Board of Education

Recorded by,
Sarah Ota