

LYME-OLD LYME SCHOOLS

Regional School District #18

A Private School Experience



in a Public School Setting

Special Board of Education Meeting

March 16, 2020

Board Present: Diane Linderman, Chairwoman; Martha Shoemaker, Vice Chairwoman; Steven Wilson, Secretary; Rick Goulding; Mary Powell St. Louis; Suzanne Thompson

Board Present Via Telephone: Stacey Leonardo; Jennifer Miller; Jean Wilczynski

Administration Present: Ian Neviaser, Superintendent of Schools; Mark Ambruso, Principal of Lyme-Old Lyme Middle School; James Cavalieri, Principal of Lyme Consolidated School; Michelle Dean, Director of Curriculum; Melissa Dougherty, Director of Special Services; Kelly Enoch, Principal of Mile Creek School; Holly McCalla, Business Manager; Jeanne Manfredi, Assistant Principal of Lyme-Old Lyme High School; John Rhodes, Director of Facilities & Technology (outgoing); Ron Turner, Director of Facilities and Technology; James Wygonik, Principal of Lyme-Old Lyme High School

The meeting was called to order by Chair Linderman at 6:00 p.m. The purpose of the meeting was to hold a meeting to discuss issues related to the closing of schools due to the COVID-19 virus.

Mr. Neviaser gave an update on the information and guidance they are receiving on the COVID-19 virus from the State Department of Education and various health organizations.

1. School Calendar

Mr. Neviaser reported that in a normal school year, the Lyme-Old Lyme Schools schedule 183 days of instruction for students, and the teachers are contracted to serve 187 days. Today, the State Department of Education issued an executive order stating that Connecticut public schools will not be required to fulfill the 180-day requirement to complete the school year. Mr. Neviaser explained that he was seeking Board approval to have the flexibility to determine the number of school days and teacher workdays for the remainder of this school year based on guidance from health organizations and federal and state government bodies.

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MOTION: Dr. Goulding made a motion, which was seconded by Mr. Wilson, to provide the superintendent with the flexibility to determine the number of school days and teacher workdays for the remainder of the 2019-2020 school year based on guidance from the CDC, LedgeLight Health District, the State of Connecticut and any other federal or state governing body.

Mr. Neviasser fielded questions from the Board and discussion ensued on the various scenarios should the closing of school extend beyond the two weeks. Mr. Neviasser stressed that information received from the state is fluid and updates/changes are common. The state is considering the allowance of distance learning being counted as school days for students and staff, and the administration has been diligently working on this initiative should it be needed.

Discussion followed on the contracts for the different bargaining units (certified and non-certified). Teachers are salaried employees and contracted for 187 days and days missed are normally made up at the end of the year. The non-certified employees (10-month) are hourly paid employees. Mr. Neviasser asked for Board consideration to annualize the payroll of hourly, school year employees. This would allow for consistent pay through the end of June and would eliminate the need for these employees to file unemployment and only collect about 60% of their wages.

Mr. Neviasser also discussed the possibility of closing the facilities for all employees, noting staff that have the capability to work remotely and those who would not. This scenario is also part of the administrative planning process.

There was Board consensus (but no formal action) to support the hourly employees and annualizing the payroll of these staff members. Many Board members voiced the importance of keeping good relations with the staff as they will want these employees to return to their positions when school resumes.

Regarding the status of the bus drivers and cafeteria workers (non-district employees), Mrs. McCalla, Business Manager, reported that Chartwells Food Service's compensation to employees is based upon the monies made by the food service program. During a shutdown, no revenues are generated; therefore, their employees will need to file for unemployment. Mrs. McCalla will reach out to M&J Transportation to determine their plans for compensating employees.

VOTE: the Board voted unanimously in favor of the motion to provide the superintendent with the flexibility to determine the number of school days and teacher workdays for the remainder of the 2019-2020 school year based on guidance from the CDC, LedgeLight Health District, the State of Connecticut and any other federal or state governing body.

2. Distance Learning Waiver

Mr. Neviasser explained that given the growing concerns over prolonged school closure due to COVID-19, he would like to request a waiver from the State Department of Education to utilize distance learning to educate the students during this closure. Currently, the state does not recognize distance learning as a

counted school day, but that they are considering distance learning as an alternative to educating students and having it recognized and counted as a school day. Due to contractual obligations, teachers would be unable to teach remotely if the day was not counted as a school day. Mr. Neviasser reviewed a letter to the Commissioner of Education that was requesting the State waive their current legislation on distance learning. Mr. Neviasser clarified why some districts' requests for waivers were denied due to the absence of some language in their requests, which has been rectified. Mr. Neviasser also reported that he has been advised by Attorney Tom Mooney on best practices on this issue.

The various issues that are involved with distance learning were discussed: access to Internet; special education instruction; contractual issues; development of opportunities for learning for all grade levels including preparedness for advanced placement exams; the vast amount of computers, iPads, books, instruments, etc., that need to be supplied to students; and training of staff

Mr. Neviasser stressed the importance of giving the administration time to implement the distance learning program noting that the SDE was not even allowing this a week prior.

Communication to parents was discussed with several Board members asking that the Superintendent increase his correspondence to more than once a week. Some Board members expressed concern over distance learning not being in place already. Mr. Neviasser reported on a parent survey going out on distance learning and meal opportunities the following day.

Mr. Neviasser updated the Board on the training of staff on distance learning. Currently, many staff members are already providing learning opportunities to their students in the interim until a formal learning process is in place. Mr. Neviasser explained the plan to have the teachers return to work on March 18,19 and 20 for professional development on using the distance learning tools and resources and to prepare staff on making instruction available remotely to the students. Many of the Lyme-Old Lyme students are already equipped with devices, and the vast majority have Internet access from their homes.

Mr. Neviasser updated the Board on their process of getting computers and iPads into the students' hands as soon as possible with an expected date to implement of Monday, March 23. Mrs. Dean, Director of Curriculum, further explained what they are doing curriculum-wise to support distance learning instruction and the work behind the scenes of the technology staff.

Mr. Neviasser reported on a "just received" email from Dr. Cardona, Commissioner of Education, which indicated that the district would not need a waiver for implementing distance learning as the state was moving forward with allowing this to take place. The state is also allowing districts to end school on their regularly scheduled end date, which for Region 18 is June 19.

The Board made the following motion, despite the latest information from the State, in the event that the Superintendent would need their permission to request a formal waiver from the state on distance learning.

MOTION: Mrs. Shoemaker made a motion, which was seconded by Dr. Goulding, to approve the superintendent's submission of a waiver for distance learning to the Connecticut State Department of Education.

VOTE: the Board voted unanimously in favor of the motion.

In light of the various questions and concerns from the Board, Mr. Neviasser reviewed the following list of administrative discussions that have already occurred and follow-up tasks that are being put into place during the COVID-19 shutdown:

- The best way to provide services during the shutdown from non-classroom staff such as occupational and physical therapists.
- How to deal with staff absenteeism and substitutes.
- Absence Management software utilization.
- Student medications.
- Musical instruments distribution; are there a sufficient number; ensuring they are returned.
- CDC guidance – short-term closures have been found to be ineffective; they are recommending 8-20 weeks of shutdown.
- FEMA reimbursement – tracking expenses should this become available.
- Survey to see if interest in meal opportunities for students.
- Survey on at-home technology capability.
- Centralization of teacher, school-wide, district-wide communication to parents using Google Classroom, School Messenger and Canvas.
- Building usage requests; currently the school buildings are closed to the public.
- The capability of 12-month employees (i.e., payroll, accounts payable, etc.) working from home.
- Annualizing payroll of hourly, school year employees; working on memorandum of agreement with the AFT union.
- Stipends for spring sports.
- Requests to donate sick/personal time to those employees who need it.
- Report cards – end of marking period was March 13 for elementary students; teachers will be working on report cards during the three days of professional development (March 18-20).
- Compensation for long-term substitutes – not salaried employees – paid per diem.
- Spring sports – CIAC meeting on March 18; there is a growing push to find some solution to get students exercising during this interim period.
- Digital learning for special ed students; status of PPTs; adherence to IEP.
- Administering of tests remotely.
- Outplaced facilities that service district students that are closing.
- Technology issues – device distribution, acceptable usage, passwords and QR codes.
- Distribution of learning packets, computers, etc.; recommendation to do alphabetically by family name so as to avoid large crowds in the buildings at one time.
- Teachers who are dealing with their own childcare issues.

- Illness reporting; legality of taking temperature of staff members.
- Status of AP, SAT, SBAC testing.
- Internet access and assistance for those that do not have it at home or for those that have limited data plans.
- Usage of applications (i.e., Zoom) that do not meet privacy laws.

Mr. Neviaseer updated the Board on some misinformation that was reported in the New Haven Register regarding the meeting of area superintendents at LEARN and their decision to close schools effective on March 16 for a two-week period.

Discussion followed on whether the school schedule would run through June 30 or the scheduled last day of school of June 19 should the shutdown continue longer than anticipated. Mr. Neviaseer advised that decisions such as this cannot be made at this time due to much uncertainty and the evolving status.

There being no further comments or questions, the special meeting adjourned at 7:23 p.m. upon motion by Dr. Goulding and a second by Mrs. Shoemaker.

Respectfully submitted,

Steven Wilson, Secretary