



Special Meeting
Avon Board of Education
34 Simsbury Road, Avon, Connecticut

Mission Statement

Our mission is to inspire in each student a joy and passion for learning and a commitment to excellence, personal integrity, and social responsibility.

Wednesday, July 22, 2020, 6:00 pm

via Remote Meeting

Avon Board of Education
34 Simsbury, Avon, Connecticut 06001
Via Zoom

Minutes

Attendance

Members Present: Jackie Blea; David Cavanaugh; Board Chair, Debra Chute; Board Secretary, Jeffrey S. Fleischman; Jason Indomenico; Bogdan Oprica; Lisa Seminara; Board Vice Chair, Jay Spivak; Laura Young

Members Absent: none

Administration Present: Dr. Bridget Heston Carnemolla, Superintendent of Schools; Roberto Medic, Director of Human Resources; Heather Michaud, Director of Fiscal Affairs; Donna Nestler-Rusack, Assistant Superintendent

I. **Call to Order**

Deb Chute, Board Chair, called the meeting to order at 6:01 pm.

II. **Pledge of Allegiance**

After the Pledge of Allegiance, a roll call of Board members was also taken. Chair Chute read the District's Mission Statement and addressed the benefits of meeting virtually, which will be continued in the future to allow ease of access to not only Board members, but the community in whole, as well as reserving the Community Room at Avon High School for classroom use. Chair Chute also acknowledged the efforts of the Superintendent and her administrative team in creating a three-fold plan of reopening (fully reopening, a hybrid version with partial in school and partial taught remotely and fully remote learning) in the Fall to be submitted to the State by July 24th. Board members were able to tour model classrooms in all five school buildings with the guidance of Mr. Medic and Dr. Rusack. It was obvious the custodial staff is working hard to create the safest environment for everyone. The purpose of tonight's special meeting is to discuss and approve the plan that was created with input from teachers, Board of Education members, security, staff, parents and student feedback. Chair Chute expressed appreciation to all the careful detail given to the plan and confirming we are in compliance with the State's expectations at this time. It is understood changes and flexibility will be needed to make the plan better and safer. We are planning for a full reopening but recognize that future executive orders can change that. The letter and plan was sent out to everyone for their review the previous night.

Chair Chute also acknowledged Director of Pupil Services, Dr. Kimberly Mearman, who has given notice to move on to another opportunity. Superintendent Carnemolla also recognized Dr. Mearman’s insightful and highly professional services for students with special needs in the District, especially being recognized as the exemplar during the recent phase of remote learning. Dr. Carnemolla wished Dr. Mearman well in her “dream job” at CREC. Dr. Mearman replied that although she hoped to help launch the reopening plan, the opportunity presented itself at an unexpected time. Dr. Mearman thanked everyone for all the opportunities at the District that has helped her become a better individual and professional.

III. Approval of Minutes

A. Board of Education Regular Monthly Meeting, June 16, 2020

Jackie Blea moved to approve the June 16, 2020 minutes of the Board of Education Regular Monthly Meeting. Jay Spivak seconded the motion. The motion carried by unanimous consent.

IV. Communication from Public

Greg Wolfe, TBS parent residing at 5 King Richards Court, wrote about his concern of kids being required to wear masks at their individual desks during instruction which seemed extreme and ultimately detrimental to the learning process

Brynn Mandel, RBS parent residing at 35 Chevas Road, wrote about her concerns in reopening Avon’s schools and to err on the side of caution taking into account everyone’s physical and socio-emotion health including for the health of our greater community. Ms. Mandel stated that it is critical that we do what is best, not necessarily easiest and use innovative, out-of-the box thinking to meet the current context and challenges, to meet students’ learning, physical and social-emotional needs. The goal for school should center on two key principles: returning students to school for the social-emotional health issues noted by the American Academy of Pediatrics and giving students quality instructional face time so desperately missed in distance learning. Ms. Mandel suggested that an unconventional school schedule be offered to minimize unnecessary down time so that students feel safe and ready to learn versus being shuffled around, frenzied, exhausted, anxious and worried. To segue back to school as reassuring, uplifting and grounding to students which required innovative, perhaps complicated changes to in-person schedules was also suggested. Ms. Mandel hoped that emphasis on quality time over quantity of time by considering an early-release schedule would allow young kids to go home a little early to move and recharge after sitting in same-facing desks most of the day, and where older students use the time to do work, connect with teachers for help, conduct study halls or independent reading tasks, etc. This will also minimize the “highest risk” time spent indoors among groups of people. Ms. Mandel added that the WHO is acknowledging the dangers of indoor spaces and aerosolized virus as well as stage guidance that still cautions against gathering indoors. Ms. Mandel asked why the Board of Education and other meetings are being conducted virtually when stating it is safe for students and teachers to be back in the classrooms. Ms. Mandel found it illogical to consider a “normal” six-and-a-half-hour school day for any of our students or staff, that as much social distancing and cohorting as possible, exceeding recommendations, was needed not only for public health but also for the grounding force that these steps have on the psyches of students and staff. Ms. Mandel concluded that we must reduce class sizes, send students to school in ways that maximizes cohorting and avoid exposing children and educators to needlessly long, draining school days that could end earlier to the benefit of all and that we implement best-practices guidance for reopening school. It is in the interests of the students, the teachers, and the community as a whole to consider how we transition kids back to school in a way that truly meets all their academic, emotional, physical and social needs, and assures

everyone’s health and wellbeing both physically and mentally. Ms. Mandel asked that we come together as a community to meet the demands of this challenge safely, logically and thoughtfully.

V. Consent Calendar

- A. 20-21/01 Approval of Contract for Assistant Superintendent
- B. 20-21/02 Approval of Contract for Director of Human Resources
- C. 20-21/03 Approval of Contract for Director of Fiscal Affairs
- D. 20-21/04 Approval of Contract for Director of Operations
- E. 20-21/05 Approval of Contract for Director of Security & Safety
- F. 20-21/06 Approval of Contract for Director of Nutritional Services
- G. 21-21/07 Approval of Contract for Assistant Director of Nutrition Services
- H. 20-21/08 Approval of Contract for Assistant to the Superintendent
- I. 20-21/09 Approval of Contract for Assistant to the Assistant Superintendent
- J. 20-21/10 Approval of Contract for Bus Driver/Courier
- K. 20-21/11 Approval of Contract for Certified Occupational Therapist Assistant (COTA)
- L. 20-21/12 Approval of Contract for Coordinator of Internships and Transition Programs
- M. 20-21/13 Approval of Contract for Database Coordinator
- N. 20-21/14 Approval of Contract for Driver/Courier, Part Time
- O. 20-21/15 Approval of Contract for Human Resources Specialist
- P. 20-21/16 Approval of Contracts for Occupational Therapists
- Q. 20-21/17 Approval of Contract for Payroll Specialist
- R. 20-21/18 Approval of Contract for Senior Network Administrator
- S. 20-21/19 Approval of Contracts for Technology Support Specialists

Jason Indomenico moved to approve items 20-21/01 through 20-21/19 on the Consent Calendar as presented, Laura Young seconded the motion.

The motion carried by unanimous consent.

VI. New Business

- A. 20-21/20 Avon Public Schools Blueprint for Reopening

Dr. Carnemolla reviewed the process for building the Blueprint for Reopening, including building a taskforce which divided the overall operations and safety management, and the teaching and learning district-wide and in response to individual schools. The District is required to send in a plan with checklists of requirements though the District’s plan is above what the state has required being intense and comprehensive in detail giving both a vision and direction of where the District is going. The one page summaries will give everyone easy understanding to what is being done in every individual area. The reopening checklists will keep the District on track and frame the work. The Blueprint is based on the CDC, CSDE, the State of CT, Farmington Valley Health District and the District’s own Reopening Task Force Committee. The Superintendent stated that Avon Public Schools is planning for a full reopening in the Fall of 2020, which is the expectation of the State and State Dept. of Education for all school districts. It was also told to superintendents that any plans submitted that did not have a full reopen plan with 177 school days and 900 school hours would not be accepted by the State. Avon’s plan not only meets but exceeds state requirements.

Mr. Medic spoke on the plans to reopen in regards to Facilities and Operations and appreciated the time and efforts put in by the members of each committee, which included administrators, teachers, custodial staff, paraprofessionals, other staff members, members of the Board, members of Town government, Assistant Town Manager, and many who volunteered their time. Mr. Medic highlighted the Facilities and Operations requirements:

- How do we group students – we will utilize a cohort model where PreK-6 will be grouped by class; grades 7-8 will be grouped by team and grades 9-12 will be grouped where feasible based on schedules that students take.

- How do we set up classrooms to support social distancing for our students and staff – each building poses small nuances and differences so specific set ups were needed for each classroom. 3 feet or more of spacing was achieved in all classrooms. The District is also committed to purchasing desk shields to create distinct spaces and aid in social distancing.
- PreK Requirements – governed by the CT State Dept. of Education and the Office of Early Childhood with specific requirements the District must meet. Desk shields would pose a risk in PreK and not required by the Office of Early Childhood.
- Cleaning and Sanitization – this is a high priority. Director of Operation, Myles Altimus, has worked with his staff to create cleaning schedules and logs that will monitor and track cleaning of classrooms, offices and bathrooms including high touch surfaces. Allocating custodial staff from 2nd shift to 1st shift will aid in the meeting the cleaning requirements while students are in school.
- What will recess look like – recess will be designed to provide social-distancing opportunities and mask breaks. Schools are working on schedules that allow for cohorts to access outdoor areas when possible. Also looking on implementing procedures and policies regarding handwashing before and immediately following recess as well as how to ensure proper social distancing even when outdoors.
- Visitors – changes will be made and recommend that campuses be closed as many of the outdoor spaces will be used for instruction. Visitors will still be permitted for instructional purposes, PPTs, etc., but suggest virtual meetings to the greatest extent possible. Face masks and following of social distancing protocols will be required of all visitors.
- Health Protocols – One of the most important mitigating factors is to stay home if sick. Students, staff and parents/guardians will be asked to self-monitor for any symptoms of Covid-19 prior to departing from home. Face masks or cloth coverings will be adhered to as required by the State of Connecticut and must cover both the mouth and nose. Opportunities for multiple mask breaks will be implemented during the school day. Masks will be available for staff and students who have forgotten their masks. Social distancing is required and how it will be transitioned during arrival and departure as well as transitioning students within the building are being fine-tuned but the key is to try to achieve 6 feet of distance when possible. Protocols will be released regarding frequent hand washing or hand sanitizing. We realize some of the protocols will need to be taught to our students especially in the younger grades and will be reviewed with all our students during the first 6-8 weeks of school. The school nurses and office staff will be monitoring for potential cases and oversee containment protocols. Students and staff should stay home when sick; students and staff should stay home if experiencing any Covid-19 symptoms and should stay home if they have come into contact with someone who has tested positive for Covid-19. Students and staff should follow guidance from the CDC and state of CT regarding travel restrictions. The District will share resources including protocols of when to stay home and other information from public health agencies as well as the state of CT and the CDC.

Ms. Michaud shared briefly areas concerning Nutrition Services and Transportation.

- Nutrition Services is in a consortium model and guidelines are refined to fit each District and school.
- The Director of Nutrition Services is required to identify eligible students under the National Free and Reduced School Lunch Program and must follow all guidelines put forth through the USDA for our meal programs.
- Avon is moving towards a cloud based software program that will enable staff, parents and students to preorder their meals up to a week in advance.
- All meals will be a “Grab & Go” style with a contactless payment exchange at the registers.

- Lunch will be managed using cohorting social distancing protocols of 14 feet between groups within a combination of classrooms, gymnasiums and the cafeterias depending on the schools.
- Student desk shields will also assist with mitigating any additional concerns at lunch tables.
- Students must wear face coverings or masks while in the cafeteria unless they are seated and consuming their meal.
- Lunches will be staggered to reduce the number of students.
- The same safety protocols will be expected while students are on the buses and even while waiting for the bus at shared bus stops.
- Students will be required to be wearing a face mask prior to boarding the bus.
- Bus monitors are being looked into for the first four to six weeks especially for the lower grades.
- A distance of 6ft is to be maintained while boarding and students will be boarded from the back to the front and unloaded from front to back to lessen the amount of passing of students.
- Currently working with transportation company to allow enough time between bus tiers for the added time needed to safely load and unload buses.
- The “status” of student transportation will be determined by the State and the District may need to change to lessen the number of students on a vehicle. Currently the District has been designated a low status.
- Bus drivers will have a supply of disposable masks for those who forget and after each run bus drivers will be sanitizing the buses using CDC approved products.
- Students will be expected to cohort on the buses where they ride to and from school utilizing the same bus in the morning and afternoon daily.

Dr. Nestler-Rusack spoke on the structures and schedules used in Teaching and Learning.

- Employed the cohort model grouping students by class or team where each functions independently and separately as much as possible.
- Currently working on the logistics while finding the balance of delivering instruction in this new normal.
- The task forced looked at how to seamlessly teach from one model to another (full in class to hybrid to remote).
- A variety of instructional methods will be used to support student learning including APS grade level standards; differentiated instruction; and technology and digital learning platforms will be part of in-person instructional practices in order to provide a smoother transition to remote learning if needed.
- Assessments will inform instruction and monitor student growth utilizing universal, formative and summative assessments.
- Student Supports will continue to be available in the Fall for students identified through Student Assistant Team IEPs, 504 Plans and any interim learning plans that were in place during the Spring.
- The Social-emotional learning will continue as a key part of the instructional core and focus area. How do we build those relationships with our students and their families as they come back and if we have to go back to remote learning we want those relationships there.
- Social-emotional forums will continue with Second Step implemented in grades PK-6; Community Conversations in grades 7-8 and Advisory Groups in grades 9-12.
- School teams will continue to provide support for emergency/crisis response for students.
- Chromebooks will be 1:1 with students in grades 7-12 assigned a Chromebook to use in school and to take home. Students in grades PK-6 will be assigned a Chromebook to use in school and will be able to take the device home during an period of remote learning.

- Electronic instructional resources will be utilized as much as possible to limit the sharing of materials.
- Staff will be provided professional development and students will receive direct instruction to build their technology skills.

The basics of the Models of Learning was reviewed by Dr. Carnemolla.

- The In School Learning of operating at 100% capacity is dependent on the State's Minimal/No Spread of Virus of Virus Contained determination.
- Utilizing a cohort model when possible.
- Classrooms are set at a minimum of 3 feet distance between students as well as utilizing the desk shields when possible for cautionary measures.
- Athletics & after school activities will follow state and CIAC guidelines. Some activities may be held remotely when possible depending on space needed with consideration of recommendations to close schools completely to allow for sanitizing.
- Parents can opt to temporarily register their children for remote learning in lieu of returning. Another survey will be sent to homes regarding this to aid in the District's planning.
- Buses will run at full capacity.
- Cohorting is strongly encouraged for grades K through 8 and where feasible at the high school. The idea of cohorting at Avon High School is not feasible for the most part. After running numerous scenarios at the high school, taking into account high schools schedules and the numerous courses offered, the possibilities are too broad.
- Hybrid Learning Model – Schools would operate at 50% capacity learning in person, and 50% of students learning remotely on an A/B rotation. Athletics may continue with adjustments based on state & CIAC guidance. Extracurricular activities will be canceled or moved to virtual only. The school day will retain as normal day as possible.
- Still exploring what it would look like on the technology end to be able to bring our students at home into the classroom potentially with the use of webcams and googlemeets especially in middle school and high school grades. Grades K-6 will need to look differently and need to consider smaller group instruction while they are at home.
- A website, with a dedicated landing page, is being designed to house all our reopening information.
- The work of both task forces were acknowledged as well as the District's administrative team, faculty, and staff. The Board of Education's support was appreciated as was the collaboration with the town staff and Farmington Valley Health Dept,

The Board members discussed the points of the reopening plan, which included:

- Contract tracing – FHVD will follow the protocols of the CDC, not incumbent on the District to do the tracing,
- Surveys – It was suggested to allow different branching of surveys to address multiple children or issues in a family.
- Board members voiced appreciation of the opportunities to tour the schools and to address concerns.
- District spending – whether the District has an estimated amount of additional anticipated cost to reopen safely and does FEMA or the CARES Act cover some of the cost. What is the impact of this to the taxpayers in Town? The CARES Act is going to the first phase of technology for Chromebooks of approximately \$83,000. All expenses for supplies, equipment and payroll are being tracked for FEMA and will go quarterly through the Town. The District has already put through over \$200,000 to FEMA. The District budget has been frozen allowing only essential items to go through as a precaution. The desk shield will be

very costly for the amount that needs to be procured with over \$75,000 already slated for certain needs to reopen safely not counting bus and lunch monitors.

- Cohorting at the high school – would like to see an attempt made. Levels would need to be consolidated or collapsed and courses limited in order for true cohorting. Cohorting for lunch, staggered schedules, utilizing larger areas of the schools and other mitigating areas are being looked at.
- Social/Emotional Supports – How will that be implemented in the District as a support for all families? This is a priority that is being looked at and there will be an update coming out shortly.
- Having parameters through the unknown – what parameters or thresholds do we have to reach for each model to be utilized? No matrix has been seen from the State or CDC regarding the parameters. It currently depends upon the trends and transmission which is low enough to reopen. Currently, what model to use in reopening is not a decision that is made on a local level.
- Are there psychological impacts on wearing facemasks and what is the message we are sending to the children about endangerment?
- Specific school communication to help parents in their decision-making – Each building is currently working on a draft of plans that piggyback on the District plans. Specific details such as teacher assignments is not ready to be released however, lunches, drop off, pickup and other logistical details will be released shortly. The school based basic plans will be given to parents before the surveys of whether parents plan on sending their students back to school must be submitted.
- Sample classrooms – photos and videos will be made available to parents by individual schools.
- Outdoor classrooms – PGS, RBS and TBS have designated outdoor classrooms created by PTOs and Avon Education Foundation that provide opportunities to be utilized to get students outdoors as much as possible.
- Working on a shortened schedule at the high school level – when students have an open at either end of the school day they will be allowed arrive later/leave earlier.
- Self-quarantine – are there contingency plans and substitutes in place? The Farmington Valley Health Dept. would be contacted and determined on a case-by-case basis. The District is looking into the substitute situation should faculty not be able to return. There needs to be a viable substitute pool. Teachers/faculty are called upon often to cover for their colleagues if possible.
- Complying with the State – Acknowledgement was given on the District's diligence in complying with the State requirements.
- Is the plan allowing for the safest possible return to the building for the staff and students? The plan does allow for the safest possible return based upon what the District is required to do. The desk shields and face shields are examples of how the District has gone above what is required. But guarantee cannot be given that no one will get sick whether with the flu or with Covid but the District is moving forward to follow all directives to mitigate the risks of transmission.
- Remoting in seamlessly – Teachers do need to have adequate preparation time to transition to remote learning. It is not set that a student can automatically remote in should they get sick.
- Student lunches – Families that are eligible and qualify for free and reduced lunch may preorder through the system and there will be one location in Avon where they can come and pick up meals.

- The Board is not endorsing any particular plan but to put forth the plans to meet the requirements by the State and waiting for guidance to tell the District how to open schools.

Chair Chute moved that the Avon Board of Education hereby approve the submission of the Avon School Reopening Plan to and as required by the State Dept. of Education recognizing that the plan is meant to be a fluid document that will likely evolve based on the public health data trends. The Board hereby further authorizes the Superintendent of Schools to revise the reopening plans as may be required by additional executive orders, CDC protocols and/or other state mandates. Laura Young seconded the motion. The motion carried by unanimous consent.

B. 20-21/21 Possible Revision to School Calendar

Dr. Carnemolla explained the revisions to the calendar and the change to 177 school days required by the State to allow for preparation and training for reopening of schools. The first day of school has now been changed to a half day on Monday, August 31st. Tuesday, Sept. 1st will also be a half day. Schools will also be totally closed on Election Day.

Jackie Blea moved to approve the revision to the 2020-2021 School Calendar as presented, Jason Indomenico seconded the motion.

The motion carried by unanimous consent.

VII. Communication from Avon Board of Education Members

Board Chair, Deb Chute, thanked everyone for all their efforts and dedication evidenced by the communications late into the night.

VIII. Adjournment

David Cavanaugh moved to adjourn, Lisa Seminara seconded the motion.

The motion carried by unanimous consent and the meeting adjourned at 8:27 pm.

Minutes prepared by Shirley Moy, Board Recording Secretary

Minutes respectfully submitted by Jeffrey S. Fleischman, Board Secretary

Jeffrey S. Fleischman, August 2, 2020

Board minutes are approved at the next regular monthly Board meeting, and any corrections to the minutes, if needed, will be made at that time.