

Approved Minutes  
SCHOOL BOARD WORK SESSION  
Albany Area Schools – ISD #745  
Blattner Energy Arts Theatre  
October 28, 2020

1. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order by Chair Winkels at 6:03 p.m.

2. Roll Call

Present: Winkels, Kreuzer, Hansen, Carbajal, Paulsen, Sand, Pennie

Absent:

3. At Home Learning Days and Teacher Professional Development

Regarding the previously approved calendar revision five at home day students and professional development for teachers the teachers and administration provided feedback on how this has been working. Information was shared with the board from building administrators and educators. These days give great value for teachers to share the successes of what is working well within classrooms and lesson development, learning from others. There is lots of collaboration with colleagues, reviewing data, planning time with co-teacher, PLC time, meet CE/TDE requirements, and discuss state testing. Schedules / guidelines for parents to help better manage education on Wed for younger learners. Project based learning for younger students have been successfully implemented. This has also strengthened culture and relationships during a difficult time. Teachers were very thankful for the allocation of this time and are requesting of the board more time like this. There was good discussion surrounding student benefits, family concerns, childcare constraints, and other factors. The board expressed its gratitude for educators during these challenging times. Kreuzer extended a heartfelt thank you for stepping out of comfort zones to increase the technology and connections with students despite the digital challenges. The teachers recommended increasing the Wednesdays they are allocated to conduct more of the aforementioned activities, and the board will consider this request, along with balancing the needs of district families/parents.

4. Safe Schools Learning Plans

The board engaged a very in-depth discussion surrounding learning models and what is best for Albany Area Schools.

For member Sand, she is very concerned the actions of the greater community in not following social distancing, masking, etc is driving numbers and unfortunately affecting the data that drives decision making. Ultimately Sand stated she has a preference to see kids in school – not giving up hybrid learning.

Member Kreuzer discussed the challenges of filtering through the data, remove bias/politics. He reminded the board we are here to provide the best educational environment for kids. There is no perfect answer, but he feels the decision merits being made at the board table. He also recommended including a parent survey to measure the parent’s comfort level, with the volatility in cases within our school and area. Ultimately we owe it to the students and parents to provide the best learning environment, respecting the wishes of the majority, while respecting safety.

Member Hansen feels that school is a very safe place, especially with the district's excellent adherence to guidelines. He is concerned about all moving parts if kids are forced quarantined.

Another concern is a disparity created unintentionally by quarantine. When looking at these numbers it is shocking. As much as he prefers in class learning, if everyone is distance learning – there is more equal access

Carbajal again reiterated that this is a very difficult decision, and took time to explain the rationale of the incident response committee and SI making the recommendation. We can always bring them back when things simmer down, and we really need to respect data. Carbajal was OK with distance learning for now, but has an approach/model to move fast to get into building when numbers come down. Mr. Carbajal recognizes the challenges of families and sees all sides of decisions we make.

Pennie stated numbers are likely not going away, and she has a preference to stick with hybrid, really watch numbers adjust if necessary. She expressed concern if they go against the numbers – can that impact our funding or other ramifications.

Paulsen discussed the data suggests young kids generally don't get sick. He has a concern if it is transmitted from kids to staff, and also encouraged consideration for the district if there is a liability issue – if we choose to go against state recommendations.

He also indicated it does not make sense to not have kids here academically but allow them to participate in Athletics / Activities.

Winkels provided a recap of the board member's input. He firmly believes school is the safest place for students and staff. We are doing well here, in terms of positive cases within, the school is doing well. If we send the students home, will numbers go down? In his opinion, the answer is likely no – the kids that can get around will, and many parents need to go to work and piece together a plan, oftentimes, at best, another family or grandparent to watch kids.

The safest place, best practices are at school. Children have been very good at adhering to the safety protocol and would prefer if we could stay in a hybrid model. There are plenty of sacrifices here with many carrying extra burdens. With activities, those kids will likely get together regardless – but at school more restriction, rules and a safer environment.

One question brought up was to ensure the best environment for special education students. Discussion was engaged surrounding state rules/guidelines relating to special education students is being interpreted as having some/additional flexibility to bring in these students. These students have access to bussing and a plan is being developed.

Mr. Johnson indicated the number is “one data point” as decisions are made. Are we able to staff the building, do we have outbreaks, can we still implement safety standards? This is a very real question. We are currently exceeding three data points, but there seems to be a little flexibility for districts, but there is a looming political fear that there may be a change in approach after the election.

Carbajal also suggested if allowing spectators we need to do our part, and strictly enforce mask wearing and safety protocol.

Mr. Johnson – at this time, the standard is most districts are still doing activities. Activities and athletics provide a safety net for students and allows them to do better with anxiety and depression. We cannot provide these opportunities via distance learning. Students have signed participation contracts to ensure safety. Parents have helped significantly with transportation. Mr. Buntje stated most schools are continuing in some way; however, rules are not fully black and white. Some additional technological flexibility has been implemented with things like math team.

The board recommends having a special meeting, with the board discussing and likely decided on an educational model. The meeting will be posted soon, so we can meet notification requirements, and also look at data tomorrow, gain feedback from the Incident response team, and at the pleasure of the Chair, he will make the final decision to convene a special meeting.

## 5. Facilities

The district continues to explore elementary space and a proactive solution -- CHI communications have picked up and we meet up next week with early childhood and kindergarten staff. Also, we will connect with CHI and the realtor on progress. Data is being requested from our financial team and MDE as it relates to this space and financial rules / funding.

The next board meeting is currently scheduled for November 11<sup>th</sup> – which is Veteran’s day. November 10<sup>th</sup> is being proposed as an alternative meeting date – the decision will likely come at the next board meeting.

## 6. Adjournment

Agenda completed at 8:24pm.

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Matt Kreuzer, Clerk