

GATEWAY REGIONAL DISTRICT SCHOOL COMMITTEE

The Gateway Regional School District will provide an exemplary education that challenges all students in an instructional setting appropriate to their needs.

All visitors attending the school committee meeting should sign in at the security booth.

REGULAR MEETING MINUTES

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 8, 2021

Middle School 112/114

7:00 P.M.

7:00PM I. OPENING OF MEETING

Call to order: Sarah Page, Chairperson

BLANDFORD

Terri Garfield
Keri Morawiec

CHESTER

Jeana Briggs
Jason Forgue

HUNTINGTON

David Lubbers
Pegg Dragon

MIDDLEFIELD

MONTGOMERY

RUSSELL

Tara Balboni
Sarah Page
Lyndsey Papillon

SECRETARY

Stacy Stewart

CENTRAL ADMINISTRATION

Kristen Smidy, Superintendent
Stephanie Fisk, Business & Finance

ADMINISTRATIVE COUNCIL

Martha Clark, High/Middle Assistant Principal
Megan Coburn, Chs,Lit Principal
Jason Finnie, Middle/High Principal
Kurt Garivaltis, Pupil Services Director
Deanna LeBlanc, Curriculum Director

STUDENT REPRESENTATIVES

Joseph Pisani

OTHERS: Amy Porter, Sean Heffernan, Wendy Koivisto, Alexis Batra, Kenneth Silberman, Amy Thornton, Jenna Kakimoto, Misty Robitaille, Dawn Von Deck, Andrew Bowersox, Neil Keeney

- Mrs. Page opened the meeting at 7:00 p.m. and read a brief statement regarding her feelings about the committee and the protocol she expects at meetings.

7:05PM II. PUBLIC INPUT

(Guests attending the meeting may address the committee. There is a three minute time limit per guest)

- Misty Robataille said as a Gateway staff member, masks are being mandated and she stands behind the district. But as a parent she feels that students cannot learn. She believes it should be up to the parent. She also believes it should be up to each staff member.
- Kayla Brady followed up with what she said last time. She is anti mask, not anti vaccine. Who are you to say my child needs to wear a mask? Who is going to be held liable. There are so many things that make zero sense.
- Andrew Bowersox disagrees with everything that he has just heard. My daughter is going to go to school. She might get sick and she might not. He is not concerned about himself. He could pick up the delta variant. The best way to combat this is to go into a lockdown; so we take some risks to get to school. Masks decrease the viral load. May not stop you from getting the disease but it could stop you from dying.
- Dawn Vondeck disagrees with the mask mandate. Her grandson needs to see facial expressions. It changes the child's perspective. She also has a child who is 13 who got the vaccine so they didn't have to wear a mask. She can't imagine having a preschooler who is learning. Our bodies will build up the antibodies we need. You have to go by your instincts.
- Sean Heffernan disagrees with the mask mandates. He said the teachers are here to fight against the parents. He talked about carbon dioxide ratios. It is pretty alarming to him. His daughter comes home every day with a wet mask. You are not giving another option. You should be putting safety first. Why isn't there another option? You are supposed to be standing up for our kids. Last year you could home school, this year you can't. The proof is here, the teachers showed up.
- Ken Silberman said he understands the frustrations of parents, but the mask mandates are for the majority. His wife works in a hospital and sees what happens. He doesn't want to see that happen to the children. If we can do something, why wouldn't we? He believes there should be other options. Teachers are fighting for their jobs, salaries and lives.
- Kendra Gregerson works in Chester. Scientifically the national institute of health for people doing surgeries has a study that found out masks don't stop the transmission. They keep them on during surgery because it makes them feel safe. She is against the mandate on the vaccine. No studies state that you are better off vaccinated.

7:15PM III. STUDENT COUNCIL INPUT

- Joseph Pisani - thanked Brian Forgue for making it possible for him to be here. He has been on student council for 3 years and is class president for the class of 2024. The senior parking spots are positive. They painted them to express themselves. After school busses busses are back and a lot are interested and will be able to participate because of the help with transportation. He is going to say it is a student opinion if the majority believe it. He represents all students, not just one. There is a pretty positive feeling among the students. They are optimistic and happy to be back in the building. He will send out a google form before the next meeting asking basic questions to get a better understanding of where the students stand.

7:25PM IV. PRESENTATIONS/REPORTS/RECOGNITIONS

A. New Superintendent Induction Program Presentation

- Mr. Sullivan is the mentor for Ms. Smidy. He was the Hampshire interim superintendent last year and worked with Kristen; now he is her coach/mentor. The program is sponsored by MASC and paid for by the DESE, a grant and the district. It's a 3 year program to support new superintendents. There is a curriculum they follow. They spend time getting to know the district. They go through a process getting to know culture, stakeholders, enrollment trends. Then there is a report of entry where findings are presented how the district looks to her. It will include strengths, opportunities and where you need to dig deeper. This spring to summer - develop a 3 year plan. 2nd year - how do you make strategies, how to hold people accountable, provide support - school committee governance. They meet in person twice a month. They also meet with their colleagues. There are 36 new superintendents.

B. Fall Athletics Update

- Mr. Bonenfant said fall sports are in full swing. We have gone to online forms and moved to having a soft deadline. We had a lot of late sign ups. He closed sign ups on 5/31 and we had 7 cross boys and 13 girls. For soccer we had 17 boys and 16 girls, so it put us in a varsity only program. As of tryouts we could conceivably have two teams. As of the 3rd the boys are up to 27. The schedule is being put together with 6 committed games. Only Gateway and McCann have modified JV teams. We can use a mini bus to McCann, Hampshire and Pathfinder. All 4 teams are paying. Girls are at 16 right now. He would like to get a couple more games - 8 is his goal.
- Mrs. Briggs heard there is after school bussing. She has a 13 year old and picking up 3 other boys was very difficult.
- Mr. Finnie said bussing is linked to the afterschool program. Hoping to expand in middle school and high school. We may be able to tap into it once we know what the after school program numbers are.

- Mr. Forgue asked what is the typical ratio from May 31 to sign ups on 9/3.
- Mr. Bonenfant said everyone rushes at the last minute. Also part of it is having a physical on time when you have to wait a month. Having the sign ups earlier.
- Mr. Forgue asked Mr. Bonenfant if he reached out to anyone from GYAA for suggestions on anyone who might be interested.
- Mr. Bonenfant said we advertised to 6, 7, and 8 (three different grade levels) and social media. He didn't want to burden anyone else.
- Mr. Forgue doesn't see where the burden is.

7:40PM V. UNFINISHED BUSINESS/ACTION ITEMS

A. Health Curriculum Update

- Mrs. Smidy said a student provided feedback and we have a new health teacher this year. We are working together with her to see that some of the student's concerns are being addressed.

B. Hockey Co-op Update

- Ms. Smidy said the co-op was approved; athletic director approved. It is waiting for PVIAC formal approval of PVIAC

Mrs. Balboni made a motion seconded by Mrs. Garfield to approve the Hockey Co-op with Southwick.

- Mr. Forgue said the parents are responsible for any fees.
- Mrs. Smidy said that is correct.
- Mr. Lubbers asked what the fee was.
- Mrs. Page said every school and sport is different.

Mrs. Balboni made a motion seconded by Mrs. Garfield to approve the Hockey Co-op with Southwick.

Motion Carried (VOTE) Yeas 9 Nays Abstain Absent (Roll Call Vote)

Yeas: Tara, Jeana, Pegg, Jason, Terri, David, Keri, Lyndsey, Sarah

C. Start Time Update

- Mrs. Smidy said we received three letters from students with regards to a later start time. She has reached out to Amherst and Northampton. Superintendent Provost from Northampton has 20 years of research and they are piloting it. She had a meeting with him scheduled for last week but it was rescheduled due to mold.

D. Approval of Updated Graduation Requirements

- Mrs. Smidy said Mr. Finnie shared this last time. Graduation requirements are approved based on his recommendations.

Mrs. Garfield made a motion seconded by Mrs. Morawiec to approve the updated graduation requirements.

- Mrs. Dragon asked what things were considered, a lot of schools have mixed programs.
- Mr. Finnie said the main reason was that we went from a 7 period to a 6 period schedule so they needed to make credit adjustments. Instead of getting 70 credits they are only getting 60 so it is clear how much is required for each grade level. 60 minutes for every class. Vocational programming will have a period and a half. A rotation of physics and chemistry is offered in a double block.
- Mrs. Dragon said the amount of requirements in CT were much different.
- Mr. Forgue and Mrs. Morawiec said they are probably weighted differently. English and math is a 4 year .40 credits in each. Plus there could be 10, 5 and 2.5 credit classes.
- Mr. Finnie said we went from 7 periods to 6 periods. The time on learning is still the same. 6 periods are better for core classes.

Mrs. Garfield made a motion seconded by Mrs. Morawiec to approve the updated graduation requirements.

Motion Carried (VOTE) Yeas 8 Nays Abstain 1 Absent (Roll Call Vote)

Yeas: Tara, Pegg, Jason, Terri, David, Keri, Lyndsey, Sarah

Abstain: Jeana

E. Approval of Handbooks

- Mrs Smidy said Mrs. Clark went over this at the last meeting.

Mrs. Balboni made a motion seconded by Mrs. Papillon to approve the student handbooks.

Motion Carried (VOTE) Yeas 9 Nays Abstain Absent (Roll Call Vote)

Yeas: Tara, Jeana, Pegg, Jason, Terri, David, Keri, Lyndsey, Sarah

8:00PM VI. NEW BUSINESS/ACTION ITEMS

A. Costa Rica Field Trip - Preliminary Approval (Enc.)

- Mrs. Batra is here to talk about it. This is her first year doing this. EF Educational Tours has been around for 55 years. The trip will be open to spanish 2, 3, and 4 but if 1 was interested they might be able to go. The trip is \$2,675 For early enrollment there is a \$200 discount. The cost includes everything except souvenirs. One chaperone paid for each 6 students that go. If there are not six, it will be prorated. They are allowed to pay over time. There are a couple of extra excursions. Safety and cost are the biggest

concerns. They choose locations based on safety. You can get insurance for pre and post departure protections. Risk free enrollment (families by feb 1 2022) tremendous educational value.

- Mrs. Balboni said the school has gone before and the trip has been more rustic.
- Mrs. Batra said students who want graduate credits can pay for them. She has a detailed experience.
- Mrs. Morawiec asked about the duration of the trip.
- Mrs. Batra said 9 days and two are travel.
- Mrs. Papillon has a student who is in Spanish 1 who might be interested in going.
- Mr. Forgue asked if there is a cap on the number of students.
- Mrs. Batra said 6 per chaperone.
- Mrs. Garfield said before they go on the trip there should be clarity on refunds. There was an issue with EF Tours years ago.
- Mr. Forgue said that is the insurance company, not EF Tours.
- Mrs. Batra will get definite insurance options.

Mr. Forgue made a motion seconded by Mrs. Morawiec to waive the two-meeting rule to vote on the Costa Rica Trip.

Motion Carried (VOTE) Yeas 9 Nays Abstain Absent (Roll Call Vote)

Yeas: Tara, Jeana, Pegg, Jason, Terri, David, Keri, Lyndsey, Sarah

Mr. Forgue made a motion seconded by Mrs. Balboni to give preliminary approval to the Costa Rica Trip.

Motion Carried (VOTE) Yeas 9 Nays Abstain Absent (Roll Call Vote)

Yeas: Tara, Jeana, Pegg, Jason, Terri, David, Keri, Lyndsey, Sarah

B. Budget Transfers (Enc.)

- Ms. Fisk said 99% are because of contractual and staffing changes. There are insurance changes. There are health insurance increases because of so many new staff and cherry sheet changes.
- Move to the next agenda.

8:10PM VII. CONSENT ITEMS 8/25/2021 (Enc.)

Mrs. Morawiec made a motion seconded by Mrs. Papillon to approve the minutes of 8/25/2021.

Motion Carried (VOTE) Yeas 9 Nays Abstain Absent (Roll Call Vote)

Yeas: Tara, Jeana, Pegg, Jason, Terri, David, Keri, Lyndsey, Sarah

8:20PM VIII. COMMUNICATIONS

A. School Committee

- Mr. Forgue is not a fan of masks and not a scientist. He comes from a standpoint of what gets the kids in school. What happens to the state funding if we don't follow the mandate? What does it mean to each individual community? The attorney says funding will go away and every town and taxpayer will pay for it. We are talking about 1/3 of our budget. He doesn't want his taxes to go up that much. He wants to get that information out there. It comes down to more than mask or no mask. He asks to have this on the agenda.
- A parent in the audience said there are exemptions by law. Kids who played sports stopped because of the mask mandate when they came to school. Her son had a headache at the end of the school day from the mask.
- Dawn VonDeck said her grandson has a backache from carrying all his books around. Why are lockers not allowed?
- Mr. Finnie said that is what we had done last year so we decided to temporarily suspend lockers until we have more information. They can accommodate students. He just needs to know about it.

B. Chairperson - None

C. Superintendent

Central Office Update (Enc.)

Reminder: First Joint Budget Meeting is December 8, 2021

Policy will be reviewing the following policies at the first policy meeting:

B Policies, Facilities Use, and Donations.

- Mrs. Smidy provided her update about covid on how commissioner riley is not allowing online learning, numbers for our regional, as well as statewide. She has met with four of the six selectboards. She also included updates on safety, personnel and budget.
- Facilities use - committee meetings schedule policy under B section - facilities use in terms of fees outside organizations - she wants to make Gateway the hub of the community - several donation policies that need to be looked at. December 8, 2021 is the first joint budget meeting.
- Mrs. Dragon if there was an easy way to find where to send letters. She said everyone should be writing to Commissioner Riley, she would encourage you to if you haven't. You still have to write even if you don't get the answers you want.
- Mrs. Smidy said we would get a DESE link to send letters regarding Masking:
COVID19K12ParentInfo@mass.gov
- A Gentleman in the audience 105 requirements and exceptions - no one can challenge or deny admission to a public place, or a restaurant . There is an exception.

D. Assistant Superintendent - None

E. Administration

- Mr. Garivaltis said our preschool numbers are at an epic high since we have reopened the program. Littleville is capped to the specific needs and has 20 students on a wait list. Does it make sense to consider making a 4th program?

F. Town - None

8:40PM IX. COMMITTEE REPORTING

A. Superintendent's Evaluation

B. Legislative Liaison

C. Policy Subcommittee

D. Building Liaisons

- Littleville - Keri
- Finance and Facilities - Terri
- Curriculum - Peg, Jason
- High School - Tara
- Middle School - Sarah
- Chester - Jeana
- Special Education - Jeana

8:50PM X. OTHER BUSINESS/ITEMS FOR NEXT AGENDA

Future Agenda Items

9:00PM XI. INFORMATION

Information

The warrant signing committee had reviewed the following warrants, found them to be in order, and approved them.

Warrant

AP#1012 \$48,749.61

PR#005 \$441,655.69

AP#1015 \$29,968.15

XII. EXECUTIVE SESSION - none

XIII. ADJOURNMENT at 9 p.m. unless extended by majority vote.

Mr. Forgue made a motion seconded by Mrs. Balboni to adjourn at 8:47 p.m.

Motion Carried (VOTE) Yeas 9 Nays Abstain Absent (Roll Call Vote)

Yeas: Tara, Jeana, Pegg, Jason, Terri, David, Keri, Lyndsey, Sarah

Respectfully Submitted,
Stacy L Stewart
School Committee Secretary.