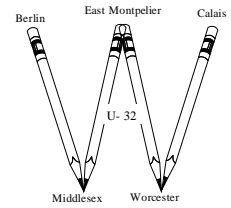


Washington Central Unified Union School District

WCUUSD exists to nurture and inspire in all students the passion, creativity and power to contribute to their local and global communities.

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Bryan Olkowski
Superintendent



Washington Central Unified Union School District Special Board Meeting Approved Minutes 7.30.2020

Present by Teleconference*:

Board Members: Flor Diaz Smith, Lindy Johnson, Scott Thompson, Diane Nichols-Fleming, Dorothy Naylor, Stephen Looke, Chris McVeigh, Kari Bradley, Jonas Eno-Van Fleet, Townes DeGroot

Administrators: Superintendent Bryan Olkowski, Technology Director Keith MacMartin, U-32 Associate Principal Jody Emerson, Principal Alicia Lyford, Principal Casey Provost, Principal Aaron Boynton, Principal Cat Fair, Director of Curriculum Jen Miller-Arsenault, Director of Student Services Kelly Bushey, HR Coordinator Carla Messier

Others/Public: David Delcore (Times Argus), David Lawrence, Glenn Gannon, Caitlin Morgan, Lisa Stoudt, Ursula Stanley, Kathy Christie, Robin Gannon, Nicolle Schaeffer, Mary Monteith, Michelle Ksepka, Jill Drury, Tammy Joslyn, Betsy Parah, D Hann, Doc Gordon, Sherry Lewton, McCreeden, Corinne Stridsberg, Ellen Dorsey, Jenn Ingersoll, Sonya Rhodes

- 1.0 Call to Order: Scott Thompson called the meeting to order at 6:10 p.m
- 2.0 Welcome
 - 2.1. Reception of Guests: Scott Thompson welcomed those present. He suggested that, in light of Stephen Looke needing to leave before 6:30, the board discuss the leave procedures from the work of the subcommittee first on the agenda.
 - 2.2. Public Comments: This is noted below
- 3.0 Review Staff Leave Procedures: Stephen Looke reported that the subcommittee had met on Friday and had created a bulleted list of items for the board to discuss (details not hashed out; merely concept). Superintendent Olkowski had prepared a memo, dated July 27, 2020, and had provided a draft document *Return to Work and Leave Information 2020-2021*. The four items:
 1. create space in the district for teachers to be able to bring children to work with them- a supervised space, so they can access their remote learning from their own district, if their schedules are not in synch
 2. allow staff from our district, where there is space, to enroll their children in our district

3. allow certain number of staff to select discretionary leave (as well as what is provided through statutory law to all who are eligible)
4. consider hiring independent auditor to evaluate leave requests

Superintendent Olkowski reviewed the memo he had shared for consideration at this meeting, outlining the above.

Stephen Looke indicated that the subcommittee endorsed all four of the options and felt that they are valuable for the board as a whole to discuss and consider.

Superintendent Olkowski indicated that the options allow for flexibility for WCCUSD to open for in-person learning, five days a week. He spoke about the different types of leave; specifically, “intermittent leave,” for example, if teachers are faced with child care issues due to schedules that are not synchronous with their children’s. He stated the challenge of not knowing how many staff members would request such leave. He stated that options #1 and #2 offer options so that teachers are not in need of requesting intermittent leave. He spoke about the issue of child count/ tuition if students attend WCUUSD due to option #2 - he had discussed this with the AOE and, without legislative action, the money would not follow the child. He also stated, for example, there would be possibility that a staff would want their child to attend the school in which they work, but the space/ availability might be in a different school in the district.

Chris McVeigh indicated that the challenge right now is not knowing the number of children we might be accommodating, or the number of staff who might request leave.

Dorothy Naylor asked whether neighboring school districts have indicated what their schedules are going to be yet. Superintendent Olkowski stated that they are still making these decisions based on local feedback and changing circumstances. He stated that the Secretary of Education had told superintendents today that the health and safety guidance will be updated in coming days and the result may be more restrictive, or less restrictive; it is still unknown.

Scott Thompson asked whether the group had particular preferences or recommendations based on the options that were discussed. Chris McVeigh stated that the subcommittee had wanted to bring this discussion to the full board.

Lindy Johnson stated that flexibility is key right now, as we are getting ready to receive new guidance around social distancing requirements; this will change how many students we can accommodate, and may change school districts’ schedules.

Superintendent Olkowski stated that he would like to form a path forward, and adjust as needed, as new information and guidance becomes available.

Flor Diaz Smith stated that, since the state has not provided updated guidance yet, we are going to need to be flexible, and trust our teachers and staff, and families.

Jonas Eno-Van Fleet thanked the subcommittee and administration for outside-of-the-box thinking; he clarified that five-day in person for students K-8 was not an order from the state, but was a recommendation. Superintendent Olkowski indicated that our school district is able to provide five day in person for students K-8; not all are able. Jonas Eno-Van Fleet expressed concern and wonder around the implications of bringing more students into the buildings; and he also wondered what is the science behind the idea of 3-feet versus 6-feet distancing. He brought up issues such as equity (if some, but not all are offered options), safety, staff considerations.

Kari Bradley stated that we have an obligation to provide teaching; he would like to continue to consider flexible options. There is much we still don’t know, and won’t know until staff and parents make decisions, and students attend.

Dorothy Naylor expressed challenges around staffing, around substitutes. She thinks it is important to allow teachers to stay with their students.

Chris McVeigh indicated that we continue to deal with moving pieces and that we may need to move forward, for example, and offer discretionary leave, and see where it goes. Flor Diaz Smith stated that she supports the option of teachers/ staff enrolling their children in their own school buildings. She stated that under these circumstances she does not believe that tuition money following the student can be a priority and that neighboring schools are in similar situations; there is a “we’re all in this together” approach.

Public comments:

Robin Gannon: Will we cap the number of students that can be enrolled in each classroom?

David Lawrence: It is very challenging to find out when meetings are scheduled. The website does not provide an easy way to know. He indicated that, even though he will be keeping his children at home, he is interested in this process. He hopes that the policy document that the state is going to provide will address what is meant by quarantine, and how widely spread is the need to quarantine. He stated that it appears that the decisions are made with discretion at each local board, and not as an edict from the state.

Corinne Stridsberg: would like to see minutes from the task force meetings to be better able to participate and ask questions. She indicated that if a variety of students are attending or coming into the building, then we need to be aware of the many different possible exposures.

Dorothy Naylor indicated that when considering the option for students from other districts to attend, we were thinking of a designated space for the student, whether it be a classroom in which the student enrolls, or whether it be a designated space for the student to work with supervision remotely.

Ursula Stanley: have we done contract tracing for each school? When students from different schools go home, there is a great deal of cross-contamination.

Chris McVeigh stated, it is his understanding that the state guidance is that there will be in-school learning, but the configuration is left to local districts.

Superintendent Olkowski stated that the guidance from the state indicates that children learn best when they are at school and there is some compelling guidance around the social/emotional value. He stated that the question is, if you can’t provide daily in-person instruction, what is the reason? Other school districts have compelling reasons, for example, facilities issues.

Townes DeGroot stated that he believes students want a sense of normalcy, and a sense of safety. He stated that when we went to online learning in March, there was a loss of relationships and connections. How can we prioritize safe relationships at school?

Scott Thompson asked board members if they are ready to make some decisions or provide some guidance? Or do we need more time and/ or more information?

Kari Bradley asked some of the details of “discretionary leave.”

Bryan Olkowski clarified: typically, unpaid leave of absence for a certain period of time.

Lori Bibeau added: if the board opted to continue to try to cover insurance, the cost is estimated between 10-25K for a full year. Typically when people are on unpaid leave, the district has not paid insurance benefits. The employee is eligible to participate in a Cobra plan. Typically, unpaid leave indicates unpaid benefits as well.

Kari Bradley moved to adopt the four provisions on the bottom of page 4 of the packet:

In addition to the mandated state and federal statutes for leave the WCUUSD school board will consider the following:

- 1. Allow WCUUSD teachers to enroll their children in our schools only if their child's school is doing remote learning or a remote learning hybrid.***
- 2. Offer remote learning center(s) for teachers' children so that they can attend their school remotely only if their child's school is doing remote learning or a remote learning hybrid.***
- 3. Provide an independent auditor for leave requests.***
- 4. Provide discretionary leave for staff to submit request by _____. The board will set the number of leaves that will be provided as to not upset the school and still meet the needs of our students. This may need to be held be lottery.***

and that the first three we adopt as written, and #4 we amend: provide discretionary unpaid leave for staff, date determined by superintendent... the superintendent will set the number of leaves. Seconded by Flor Diaz Smith.

Discussion: Flor Diaz Smith indicated that she has concerns around not providing insurance benefits in the circumstance of discretionary leave, especially in light of COVID19. She spoke about the possibility of setting criteria to define discretionary leave. Superintendent Olkowski stated that he does not recommend setting very specific criteria to define discretionary leave; this is a case by case consideration. He has been working under the assumption that unpaid leave indicates unpaid benefits. Superintendent Olkowski spoke about the benefit of having an independent auditor consider leave requests. Chris McVeigh reiterated that the idea is to have consistency of decision making.

Chris McVeigh suggested a friendly amendment to the motion, for #4: “for staff who are taking discretionary leave position will be available to them, upon end of leave.” Kari Bradley and Flor Diaz Smith agreed with this amendment.

Superintendent Olkowski asked Carla Messier if she had any input or comments about the provisions. She indicated that the CBA has a provision that provides certain parameters around leave. Chris McVeigh reminded her that discretionary leave falls outside of any of the mandatory leaves that are included in the CBA.

Chris McVeigh suggested that we modify this motion to include that it is in response to the current pandemic circumstances during the 20-21 school year, and subject to extension as necessary. The board agreed on the following verbiage: “During the 2020-2021 school year, and due to the COVID19 pandemic, the district will adopt the following:”

Lori Bibeau asked for clarification: are options 1-2 open to teachers but number 4 open to all staff? Superintendent Olkowski stated that his original thinking was only for teachers, however he realizes that this is unclear. When he spoke with the union, this subject came up.

Dorothy Naylor asked whether we know how many staff members live in towns outside WCUUSD? Superintendent Olkowski indicated that we have tried to make estimates but we do not know as this is a dynamic situation.

A vote was called on the motion, as amended. The verbiage as amended reads:
During the 2020-2021 school year, and due to the COVID19 pandemic, the district will adopt the following:

In addition to the mandated state and federal statutes for leave the WCUUSD school board will consider the following:

1. Allow WCUUSD teachers to enroll their children in our schools only if their child's school is doing remote learning or a remote learning hybrid.

2. Offer remote learning center(s) for teachers' children so that they can attend their school remotely only if their child's school is doing remote learning or a remote learning hybrid.

3. Provide an independent auditor for leave requests.

4. Provide discretionary unpaid leave for staff to submit request by a date determined by the superintendent. The superintendent will set the number of leaves that will be provided as to not upset the school and still meet the needs of our students. This may need to be held by lottery.

For staff who are taking discretionary leave, position will be available to them, upon end of leave.

This motion carried, with seven in favor, and one vote of “no.”

Jonas Eno-Van Fleet stated that he appreciates the desire to go back to school in person, but Vermont is in its current state related to COVID19 because we have done a good job of keeping people away from each other. He fears that this is undermining that effort, as well as putting at risk the children of neighboring districts who may enter our schools and increase their own exposure. He appreciates the creative thinking and the efforts of the administration but he does not support this motion.

4.0 Personnel (Action)

- 4.1. Approve New Teachers, Resignations, Retirements, Leave of Absence and Change in FTE: **Diane Nichols-Fleming motioned to appointment Sarah Wetzel as Berlin Special Educator. Kari Bradley seconded.** Lindy asked that the nomination forms be included in the board packets. **The motion carried unanimously.**

5.0 Executive Session for Student Matter: **At 7:47, Kari Bradley moved to go into Executive Session for the purpose of discussing a student matter. Seconded by Chris McVeigh, this motion carried unanimously.**

At 8:07 Flor Diaz Smith moved to leave Executive Session. Seconded by Chris McVeigh, this motion carried unanimously.

Dorothy Naylor moved to support the administration's recommendation regarding the student matter. Seconded by Flor Diaz Smith, the motion passed unanimously.

Superintendent Olkowski responded to an earlier comment about whether there will be a limit to class size, and he assured those present that he will follow up on this.

Superintendent Olkowski said regarding questions about the meetings being warned that the meeting was appropriately warned, even though it was decided to hold the meeting just last week. Superintendent Olkowski apologized for the trouble with the Zoom link at the

beginning of the meeting. Superintendent Olkowski said that the district's COVID-19 website was going to go live soon, and that the principals of the schools send out weekly emails, that these are school specific to the communities, but that we've been so busy trying to do the work in front of us that we haven't been posting the newsletters posted on the school websites, and that will be fixed soon so that the community can see the information. There will be a contact us page on the website.

He noted that he had received ten pages of questions about reopening - from the teacher's union - he will be working on trying to address these questions. Some of the decisions from this meeting will help to answer some of the questions.

He thanked the board for the work and the direction.

Scott Thompson reminded: Wed., August 5th will be a regular board meeting. The agenda will largely be focused on reopening. He invited board members to bring questions to the meeting so that the discussion can be rich and consider all angles.

Lindy Johnson asked how much turnout there was at the recent forum in Adamant. Scott Thompson indicated that about a half dozen people attended. The substance that resulted from the meeting will be included in questions for the board at the next meeting. He noted that Superintendent Olkowski asked for any questions as possible in advance so that he and his staff can try to prepare to answer.

Flor Diaz Smith stated that a community forum will be planned at the next board meeting - the tentative date is August 19th.

David Lawrence offered his help in coming up with better ways to keep the public informed about board meetings. Lindy Johnson suggested that board members post to their own community's Front Porch Forum to let the community know that board meetings are scheduled for Wednesday nights for the time being, and to direct them to WCUUSD for more information. Dorothy Naylor suggested that each town designate a person to be sure that this gets posted in each town.

6.0 Adjournment: The board adjourned by consensus at 8:18 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Lisa Stoudt, Board Recording Secretary
Jonas Eno-Van Fleet, Board Clerk