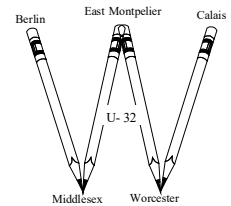


Washington Central Unified Union School District

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 July 22, 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, George Gross, Jaiel Pulskamp, Jill Olson

Administrators: Superintendent Bryan Olkowski, Technology Director Keith MacMartin, U-32 Principal Steven Dellinger-Pate, U-32 Associate Principal Jody Emerson, U-32 Student Affairs Director Amy Molina, Principal Gillian Fuqua, 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, U-32 Special Services Coordinator Julia Pritchard,

Others/Public: Julie Kiefer, Caroline Grace, Christine Babcock, Claire Gallagher, Daniel Diddlemeyer, David Delcore (Times Argus), Benjamin Weiss, Lisa Hanna, Nicolle Schaeffer, Robin Gannon, Alyson Mahoney, Jennifer Campbell, Heather Bower, Rick Agran, Christine Hertz Hausman, Danielle Laquerre, Deanna Murray, Heather McLane, David Lawrence, Brian Albee, Aanika DeVries, Betsy P, Cari Wilson, Christina George, Glenn Gannon, Janice Hood, Caitlin Morgan, Elizabeth Wirth, Amanda Morse, Ted Nathanson, Kelly MacMartin, Pietro Lynn, Lisa Stoudt, ORCA Videographer, Cari Wilson, Christine Babcock, Julie Kiefer, Kelly MacMartin, Caitlin Morgan, Alden Bird, Ted Nathanson, Michael Sherwin, Alden Bird, Megan McLane, Beth L, Sonya Rhodes,

1.0 Call to Order: Scott Thompson called the meeting to order at 6:05 pm.

2.0 Public Comments: Scott Thompson encouraged members of the public to make any comments now, as Zoom chat comments are closed for this meeting.

David Lawrence noted that most of the meeting will be held in Executive Session, but clarified that there would be time for the Board to discuss the matter in public session? He asked if that would occur.

Scott Thompson agreed there would be some post-Executive Session by the Board, and that there ought to be opportunity for the board to provide comment after the Board comes out of Executive Session.

Julie Kiefer had no comment, but would have a question at the end.

Scott Thompson said that now is the time for public comment.

Julie Kiefer is just here to listen.

Daniel Diddlemeyer said that it puts the public and the staff at a disadvantage about this, as the public has little information about the subject at hand, but is being asked for comment.

Scott Thompson said he agrees, that there is no good way to do this, that it is hard to ask questions about something you don't know about, but that the meeting should just go with it and see where it takes us, but to make opportunities in the future, perhaps not in this particular meeting.

Rick Agran taught journalism at Johnson State and had a partner who was a public policy reporter, and learned in looking at these things that public policies get made best transparently. The Governor's office has done a good job making data available on its website; he was curious if there was a repository of data for teachers/ staff to look at to see what the science indicates to see how policy is being made?

Scott Thompson indicated that we will take public comment now but make attempts to provide answers later in the meeting.

Danielle Laquerre: As a parent and staff member, we don't really have information as to what is going on? What is expected? School starts soon - where do we stand? There has been very little communication; feels left out of the communication. Is there a plan to have staff and parents come together to discuss concerns - like a public form opportunity?

Ben Weiss: Indicated that recently the staff was sent a survey; he did not feel comfortable completing it - he didn't understand the meaning or intent of the survey - made it difficult to answer the questions. He has talked to other staff; he's not sure everyone has been interpreting the survey questions the same; he cautions the board or the administration against using the data, as he does not think there was clarity to those who completed it. Ben W offered to work with the board if they would like to work together to craft other surveys/ solutions.

Lisa Hanna: Wondering what objectives are, for this meeting tonight?

Lindy Johnson explained that the board is meeting, and intends an Executive Session to discuss details around staff who are not able or willing to return in person, specifics around using leave, etc.

Scott Thompson stated that the board intends to have an open meeting after the Executive Session and to continue discussion in open session.

Daniel Diddlemeyer: What support will be available to staff when/ if a staff member dies? What will be the plan for staff illnesses and absences? What about long term student

absences due to illness? If we are planning to go back, why are we meeting online now? Certain people are offered the opportunity to meet online, others aren't. How are groups selected, to discuss the plan for returning to school?

Deanna Murray: If I am exposed and I need to quarantine, how will my absence be dealt with, with my class, with a shortage of subs as it is? Also how will this be explained to students? Asked about logistics such as lock down drills, other safety measures. How can we ensure that parents aren't sending children who have been in contact with someone with COVID? How are we going to trace that? Are we going to receive hazard pay for what is being expected?

Flor Diaz Smith: Many of these questions, we as a board have not been able to discuss yet. The point of the meeting is to get legal counsel and to answer some questions. The board is here to see how to remove barriers to be sure to provide the resources to go back to school. She cited the numbers in Vermont re: COVID19; we are in a position to be able to contain and trace COVID19. She reiterated that we are all in this together; we certainly do not want to harm anyone; we need to be flexible; need to be able to have this conversation. We have not been able to have it yet; she assured that there is nothing going on behind the scenes.

Lisa Hannah: A challenge for teachers is that, if your objective is to talk about leaves of absence, we received the survey with little context, so we are uncertain about asking for leaves of absence at this time. She feels this might be true for others too. She feels that, as teachers, we don't know what has been discussed yet. And if some of these issues have not been discussed yet, then it's past due; the clock is ticking.

Ben Weiss: Maybe to schedule a meeting with the board and interested members of the association? To discuss and to surface these basic concerns. In the CBA it does talk about parameters around leaves of absence; not sure the language as it stands applies under these circumstances. Asked the board to consider, when talking about leave of absence tonight, keeping in mind that there may be work ahead with the association about how to make this work.

Lindy Johnson: Was not under the impression that the board is intending to make policy, but was wanting to become informed about leave requests that have already been received, and how this will work. She reiterated that there is no hidden agenda.

Ben W: Given the context of the survey, you may be getting a different number of people responding to the idea of a leave of absence; reiterating that he did not think the context of the survey was well communicated.

Deanna M: Did not personally take the survey; was uncomfortable taking it as it is; would like an opportunity to respond.

Danielle L: Reiterated the request to have another opportunity to complete the survey.

Rick A: Felt the same about the survey - asked for some transparency; this would empower us to answer in a more informed way.

Alyson Mahony: Completed the survey but did not feel that it was accurate - she chose "what she wished for" but is not sure it reflects reality. How can we make decisions about

whether to request a leave when we do not yet know what our job will look like? She spoke from the perspective of an allied arts teacher who moves from one building to another. The Agency of Ed has suggested that we reduce movement from building to building in light of COVID19. Her sense of safety might influence how she responds to the survey.

David Lawrence: Concerned that we have heard multiple times from teachers that they are afraid of retaliation if they express their true feelings. It is important that teachers are ensured that their true input is valued and that they will not be retaliated against.

Scott Thompson thanked those present for providing input; it will be important to factor this insight in when considering the information to be shared during Executive Session.

3.0 Executive Session for Personnel

3.1 Employment Practices Advice of Legal Council

Flor Diaz Smith moved at 6:44 to go into Executive Session, including superintendent, legal counsel, principals and central office administrators, for the purpose of discussing personnel issues. Seconded by Jonas Eno-Van Fleet. This motion carried unanimously.

Chris McVeigh moved to leave Executive Session, and Stephen Looke seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously at 8:10 pm.

Scott Thompson shared that the board had heard from attorney regarding questions/ concerns around leave. The board will decide “how to reckon with this.”

The question of leave is embedded in the challenge of the pandemic; we need to figure out how to proceed with the leave policy, taking into account all of the unknowns, uncertainties, contingencies. Scott invited board members to provide input or to begin the discussion around the topic of leave in light of COVID19.

Flor Diaz Smith stated: Minimum guidelines that were provided to administrators: best practice is to have kids in school; do we have the resources to open schools safely and with equity in all of the schools? We want to create a subcommittee to work on this, once we have more information.

Superintendent Olkowski: The leadership team had been working with the Task Forces to develop an opening plan. We are trying to figure out where to start, in a situation that is dynamic; the leadership team had provided a lot of ideas: prioritize k-8 live instruction every day - and ask what can we do at the high school? They had waited until last week when the guidance was provided re: remote learning, including the idea of hybrid model. It comes down to implementing CDC guidelines along with guidance from the Vermont Agency of Education. If live instruction can't be carried out at high school, what can we do in the way of hybrid model?

Superintendent Olkowski stated that 72 people are on the task forces, most of which are teachers. He is trying to have local voice, along with the guidelines from the Agency of Education and the CDC. The looming concern - you can have all of the plans in the world but if you don't have the workforce to carry out the plan, what are the solutions?

Superintendent Olkowski stated that the survey was just to get an aggregate idea from the work force. It was meant to provide a big, broad picture. This is a challenging situation for all, for teachers, parents, administrators, board members. We've been fortunate enough to have a school

board that cares about the students as well as the staff. The challenge is how to meet the needs of staff as much as possible within the confines of the law and within the confines of our budget.

Stephen Looke moved that the board recommends that legal statutes, guidelines, contract language, governs the leave policy. (what is currently in writing is what we are going to use for our guidance.)
Seconded by Flor Diaz Smith.

Discussion: Stephen stated that we don't have enough information at this time; would be interested in establishing a group, tasked with exploring any potential options other than what currently exist legally or within the contract, and to report back to the board in a very short period of time.

Chris McVeigh suggested that a leave policy should be created that goes beyond what we currently have in place, given the current circumstances (COVID19). He agrees with the desire to have a very quick turnaround time, to provide some information to teachers as soon as possible. He would also like to advocate that any and all minutes from Task Force meetings be made public on the website. He noted to the staff: the board recently adopted a "Non-retaliation/ Non-retribution Policy;" he urges them to become familiar with this policy.

Superintendent Olkowski: The Communications Task Force will be posting all information from all of the Task Forces on a website, which is hoped to go live at the end of this week, or during next week.

Stephen Looke withdrew his previous motion.

**Stephen Looke moved that a subcommittee of the board be established to explore leave options beyond what is approved by statute and contract, and that the board establish a specific timeline for this subcommittee to report to the board no later than next Wednesday (July 29).
Seconded by Chris McVeigh.**

Diane Nichols-Fleming clarified: The group will do the business between today and a week from today? Yes - that is the intention.

Kari Bradley: Asked Superintendent Olkowski - are you concerned about this timeline? Also who is likely to serve on this committee?

Superintendent Olkowski indicated, after the subcommittee meets, he would like to meet with the union and leadership before it comes to the board. He would like to seek input from staff. Is all of this possible between now and next Wednesday?

Stephen Looke volunteered to be part of the subcommittee.

Jill Olson: Given how quickly we need to move, not sure we can have multiple steps in the process. Might need to flesh all of this out in a public board meeting. Is there a board meeting scheduled for next Wed., July 29?

Lindy Johnson: We don't usually meet in July. Jill O thinks that we should schedule board meetings every Wednesday for the foreseeable future.
Would like to have the document that is proposed, available at least one day before the board meeting.

Flor Diaz Smith: We do need to have the union representation at the table. What is the availability of Pietro?

Chris McVeigh volunteered for this subcommittee.

Lindy J: Her understanding was that Pietro was going to provide a template; we don't need his presence while we work on this document - would like his feedback before we take action on the document, of course.

Dorothy Naylor would like to be on the subcommittee.

Chris McVeigh suggested that the subcommittee work this week, and hope to meet with the union next Monday or Tuesday, then the board meeting might need to occur later next week (as opposed to Wed.)

Scott Thompson reminded the board that open meeting law indicates that we not do board business by email.

The board discussed that creating a procedure versus a policy is practical under these circumstances. Superintendent Olkowski suggested that the board could take action to create policy from the procedure, eventually - but creating policy takes a longer period of time (have to warn ten days in advance.) The current task would be to flesh out procedure.

Jill O: Thinks that a subcommittee that size would be allowed to communicate via email to work it out - without violating open meeting law - would like to hear from legal counsel. Stephen Looke stated from his recollection that it does not work with open meeting law, will meet via zoom as an open meeting. He noted that if he runs the meeting it will be for the committee to do its work; will not be a public forum (though public is welcome to attend.)

Scott Thompson reiterated that the subcommittee will do the work; the superintendent will do the part of seeking input from others (e.g. union/ staff).

Jonas Eno-Van Fleet indicated that he would like for the board to express its values and to provide guidance on the leave policy; however, the board has not had an opportunity to do this yet. He would like to be sure that the values in the leave policy are in harmony with the values of the board (e.g. around the topic of reopening schools, and the wellbeing of students and staff). Stephen Looke indicated that priorities have been stated, at the previous board meeting: best practice for students to be at school, equity for all students, resources to operate safely, evidence based practice.

Jonas Eno-Van Fleet asked when the board had delineated these priorities. Flor Diaz Smith reminded that at the previous meeting the board had discussed the superintendent's memo listing priorities. Jonas Eno-Van Fleet indicated that he doesn't remember the board coming to some sort of agreement or having deep discussion about listing priorities.

Jill Olsen indicated that she had thought that the board had discussed and agreed upon the guidelines in the memo.

Jonas Eno-Van Fleet indicated that, given that the administration is putting a plan together, if we are following the administration's lead, the board will not be providing detailed input on the plan, the subcommittee should be taking the administration's suggestions and guidance about leave as closely as possible. And the board can consider this at the next board meeting.

Stephen Looke indicated that the motion was to create options for leave that could be adopted by the board, that will be shared with the union before the board hears it, to give more information to consider other than statutes and contract. The board can decide to be as narrow or broad as they want to be, based on the options that come to the board next week.
The motion carried unanimously.

Special Board meeting next Thursday July 30.

Flor Diaz Smith moved to nominate Stephen Looke, Chris McVeigh and Dorothy Naylor to serve on the subcommittee, as discussed. Seconded by Jill Olsen. This motion carried unanimously.

Stephen Looke asked Superintendent Olkowski to warn a meeting of this subcommittee on Friday July 24 at 6 p.m. Superintendent Olkowski will check with legal counsel to be sure that this meeting needs to be warned.

4.0 Personnel (Action)

- 4.1 Approve New Teacher, Resignations, Retirements, Leave of Absence and Change in FTE: Lindy Johnson moved to approve the hire of Elizabeth Wirth as COVID19 Coordinator for the 2020-21 School Year. Seconded by Flor Diaz Smith.** Discussion: Diane Nichols-Fleming asked if this creates a vacancy. Superintendent Olkowski - yes this creates a 0.5 FTE vacancy which will be posted.
This motion carried unanimously.

Superintendent Bryan Olkowski shared that the Regional Superintendent's Group has been discussing the possibility of changing the student start date - pushing it to a later date. He would like to vet this and discuss it further with the Leadership Team; but he wanted to give the board a heads up about this ongoing dynamic.

Jill Olsen asked to be sure to get Wed. board meetings on our calendars from Michelle K - as it helps with planning.

5.0 Adjourn: The board adjourned by consensus at 9:09.

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