



USD 232 BOARD OF EDUCATION
OFFICIAL MINUTES -- SPECIAL MEETING

USD 232 Administrative Office, 35200 W 91st Street, De Soto, KS

YouTube channel: <https://bitly.com/usd232youtube>

December 21, 2020

The meeting was called to order at 6:00 p.m. by the President, Mrs. Danielle Heikes. A quorum of the Board was present. Board members and administrators present were as follows:

Board Members:

Rick Amos
Bill Fletcher
John Gagnat
Danielle Heikes
Stephanie Makalous
Ashley Spaulding
Rachele Zade

Administrators:

Alvie Cater, Assistant Superintendent of Administrative & Educational Services
Wendy Denham, Board Clerk/Executive Assistant to the Superintendent
Carrie Handy, Director of Human Resources/Elementary
Dr. Frank Harwood, Superintendent

Those in attendance recited the Pledge of Allegiance.

President Heikes noted this meeting was called to discuss and possibly act on the Coming Back Together Plan, the 2020-21 School Calendar and other COVID related matters.

Superintendent Harwood shared statistics on substitute fill rates in November and December received from Morgan Hunter, the substitute teacher pool and number of active substitute teachers. He noted that the district is not asking Morgan Hunter to provide substitutes for secondary positions when teachers are teaching remotely. He added that the Kansas Bureau of Investigation (KBI) background check is what takes the most time in processing applications for emergency substitute licenses.

Superintendent Harwood talked about the COVID testing pilot program offered through the Kansas Department of Health & Environment (KDHE) in which the district is participating. After it started he said the district found out the state is now paying for PCR testing. He said the district has now done three weeks of testing volunteers, starting with 110 volunteers and now is average about 100 per week; as of today, Dec. 21, have had only one positive test result.

Superintendent Harwood shared a chart showing student and staff quarantines and isolations by week since September 16th. He noted that at this point the district does not have evidence of someone being identified as a close contact becoming COVID positive in a classroom setting. He said the district has seen student to student and adult to adult spread that did not result from a classroom setting.

In response to inquiries from Stephanie Makalous and Ashley Spaulding, Dr. Harwood said he could look at gathering aggregate data from September through December to see comparisons between elementary, middle school and high school quarantines and isolations.

Superintendent Harwood reviewed USD 232's current Kansas School Gating Criteria metrics (Absenteeism, Percent Positivity, Two Week Cumulative County Incidence Rate, One Week County Incidence Rate Trend and Regional Hospitals) which places the district in the Yellow category. He noted that the Mid America Regional Council (MARC) does not include Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) ICU beds in total ICU bed capacity, whereas the Kansas Department of Health & Environment (KDHE) does include NICU ICU beds in its total. He then showed a graph of the six week trend.

With regard to the Kansas School Gating Criteria, Dr. Harwood said each metric is currently assigned a score based on the color category: Green = 1, Yellow = 2, Orange = 3, Red = 4. The scores are then averaged; no weightings are applied. The result is rounded to the nearest whole number to determine the recommended color category. Dr. Harwood said the Advisory Committee has talked about student mental health at every meeting and how to include it in the metrics. He said in recognition of the concerns regarding student social emotional needs, the recommendation is to shift the color categories down two points. Instead of averaging the scores for each metric, they would be totaled using a scale to determine the recommended color category. He noted that the committee does believe schools are able to deal with higher community spread. He said this is not a change in the Kansas Schools Gating Criteria, but rather a change in how it is interpreted. Superintendent Harwood then shared a second review of USD 232's current Kansas School Gating Criteria using the recommended scale which also places the district in the Yellow category.

Rick Amos asked if there are plans by the Kansas COVID Workgroup for Kids to make any changes to the Kansas Schools Gating Criteria. Superintendent Harwood explained that no changes have been made to date, but the Advisory Committee is monitoring the Johnson County Department of Health & Environment (JCDHE) to see if changes are recommended to its gating criteria.

Ashley Spaulding noted that while students are still being exposed, she didn't see that schools are contributing to the use of ICU beds.

Agreeing with Mr. Amos, President Heikes said it might be time to go to the Kansas COVID Workgroup for Kids to ask if it has considered updates to the criteria.

Dr. Harwood said the district does have evidence of adult to adult COVID spread in the schools, even with mitigating factors in place. He said there is no evidence at this time of student to staff spread. In response to Mr. Amos and Mrs. Heikes' comments, he said he would be reluctant to have the Advisory Committee make recommendations to the Kansas COVID Workgroup for Kids. He reminded the Board about the mitigating strategies the district is using: masks, social distancing, hand hygiene and outside air exchange. When the district returns to the full on-site learning environment, social distancing within the classroom will not be possible. He also pointed out that as it gets colder, the exchange of air may have to be reduced in order to maintain classrooms at reasonable temperatures.

Ashley Spaulding said it should be some encouragement for staff to see that there is no evidence of student to adult COVID spread.

President Heikes challenged the Board to take the evidence to the Kansas COVID Workgroup for Kids. Superintendent Harwood said that he will bring it up to the group. He also suggested that once staff start getting vaccinated the COVID Advisory Committee could factor this data in the weighting.

Board members talked about other things like student grades that could be included in the weighting criteria.

Superintendent Harwood said it was the consensus of the Advisory Committee that the district not adopt the Kansas Board of Education approved change that puts elementary students in session when the district is in the Red category. He said the recommendation now is that the district be in the yellow category and if this is approved, then the Board will need to decide when to implement it. He said they could implement it on January 5th when students return from winter break, or with the start of second semester on January 20th. He then shared pros and cons with both dates. He said the board could also postpone a decision, or make a contingent decision.

Rick Amos asked if Superintendent Harwood could share what changes are being considered to the Hybrid learning model. Dr. Harwood said one of the things talked about was the high schools doing A/B/A/B and middle schools doing AA/BB, but he didn't want the secondary schools to be using different schedules. He said the high schools have started doing nesting. He said if staff had until January 20th there would be more time to explore other methods of instruction delivery.

Bill Fletcher asked if the district could look at doing a schedule like the Olathe School District with half students in the a.m. and half in the p.m. Dr. Harwood said Olathe's high schools are doing am/pm schedules while middle school students are doing an every other day schedule.

Dr. Harwood said that the Hybrid learning model is safer because it allows for social distancing, but is much harder on staff and students. He noted that Remote learning is more consistent than Hybrid.

Bill Fletcher said the Board could eliminate the Advisory Committee right now and bring students back fulltime.

President Heikes said she would be interested to know if the district has had any spread where both individuals are wearing a mask. She said if students are in class when in the Hybrid learning model she would like the students who are remote to be participating the whole class period.

Ashley Spaulding said the district needs to give secondary teachers time to prepare for the Hybrid learning model and start it second semester.

Rachele Zade said she would support starting second semester, but with a changed Hybrid learning model.

Ashley Spaulding said the Advisory Committee recommendation is a great start in adapting and moving toward on-site learning.

President Heikes said she would like to see more data on staff spread.

President Heikes opened the floor for patron input.

Alison Phillips, Shawnee, noted that she works with children that are being sexually exploited and abused. She said what she is seeing with kids right now is very alarming. Suicide rates across the country are rising at alarming rates and in our area. Online sexual solicitation of children is up 98.66% compared to this time last year. She shared some of the real life consequences of students not being in school. She encouraged the district to get kids back in front of mandated reporters.

Alisa Ayers, Kansas City, MO, Star side Elementary, addressed patrons who make comments about teachers quitting if they don't like teaching in this environment. She encouraged the community to adhere to Centers for Disease Control (CDC) guidelines. She noted that teachers are handling far above their normal workload. She asked the Board to think about decisions they can make that help teachers and keep them safe.

Jennifer Wackerla, Olathe, Lexington Trails Middle School teacher, noted that no learning model works better than fully in-person. She asked the Board to consider bringing students back in phases, starting with 6th graders. She said it pains her to see her 6th graders falling behind academically.

President Heikes declared a five-minute break at 7:49 p.m.

The Board returned to open session and President Heikes called the meeting back to order at 7:54 p.m.

Superintendent Harwood reiterated that the recommendation is to move to the Yellow category.

Board members were in agreement with directing Superintendent Harwood to implement more time students are engaged when in the Remote learning environment.

Rick Amos asked how the district is helping students who are struggling with Remote learning. Superintendent Harwood said the administration is identifying students who need to come into the schools for more supervision while they are in Remote learning.

Mrs. Danielle Heikes moved to accept the recommendation to use the scaled scoring method for the Kansas Schools Gating Criteria, as adopted by USD 232, and move USD 232 to the Yellow category as of January 20, 2021.

Mrs. Stephanie Makalous seconded.

Carried 7/0.

Superintendent Harwood said currently January 15th is a full day for pre-K through 8th grade students and a half day for 9th – 12th grade students, with a half work day for high school teachers. He recommended having January 15th be a half day (afternoon) staff collaboration for all grade levels with elementary students attending onsite and secondary students attending remotely in the morning. He explained that the Kansas State Department of Education has waived the number of school hours equal to the number of hours used for professional development up to 20 hours. He also said he would recommend the Board not do anything with scheduling flexibility they have before March to ensure there are enough days for inclement weather; in addition he does not recommend adding days to Spring Break.

Mrs. Stephanie Makalous moved to change the USD 232 2020-21 School Year Calendar so that January 15th will be half day staff collaboration in the afternoon; with students in grades K-5 attending on-site and students in grades 6-12 attending remotely in the morning.

Mrs. Ashley Spaulding seconded.

Carried 7/0.

Carrie Handy, Director of Human Resources/Elementary, said FFCRA stands for Families First Coronavirus Response Act and has been in place since April. She shared reasons that a staff member can take FFCRA leave. Currently employees have used over 2500 hours of FFCRA. She said the administration would like to see this program continued for employees after it expires on December 31st through the remainder of the school year. Superintendent Harwood pointed out that FFCRA is a government program that may end up being renewed.

Stephanie Makalous asked if the district knew what it would cost. Dr. Harwood explained that substitute costs would be the biggest part of it, as well as actual loss of work. He said the maximum would be \$43,023 based on current figures.

Ashley Spaulding asked where the dollars come from. Superintendent Harwood said the district has fewer substitutes coming in on a regular basis, compared to the previous year, which would offset the expense.

Mr. Rick Amos moved that USD 232 continue to provide benefits of the Families First Coronavirus Response Act until such time it is reauthorized by the federal government or through the end of the 2020-2021 school year.

Mrs. Rachele Zade seconded.

Carried 7/0.

President Heikes adjourned the meeting at 8:27 p.m.

January 11, 2021
Date Approved

Wendy S. Denton
Clerk, Board of Education
Carole Heikes
President, Board of Education