



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>

November 16, 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
Tara Harmon-Moore, Coordinator of Nursing Services
Dr. Frank Harwood, Superintendent
Gail Holder, Principal, Mill Valley High School
Brandon Riffel, Director of Technology
Sam Ruff, Principal, De Soto High School
Brian Schwanz, Director of Human Resources/Secondary

Those in attendance recited the Pledge of Allegiance.

President Heikes noted this meeting was called to act on a recommendation from the superintendent's COVID Advisory Committee pertaining to the Kansas Schools Gating Criteria.

Superintendent Harwood shared a PowerPoint presentation with the following slides: Survey summaries (Coming Back Together feedback and Social Emotional and Character Development survey results), Academic Summaries (FastBridge skills diagnostic assessment data showing a grade level comparison from the Fall of 2019 to Fall of 2020 and first quarter grade comparisons), Staffing (first quarter substitute fill rate comparison) and Kansas School Gating Criteria metrics which are currently in the Orange category. Dr. Harwood said the COVID Advisory Committee discussed weightings for certain metrics but due to the high numbers of quarantines and isolations for students and staff, as well as decreasing availability of substitute teachers, weightings are not being recommended at this

time. He said the committee also discussed a recommendation to separate middle school and high school as part of the Gating Criteria, but this was not supported by a consensus of the committee. In conclusion he said it is recommended that the Board accept that USD 232 is in the Orange category of the Kansas Schools Gating Criteria with elementary students continuing in the On-Site Learning Environment and secondary students moving to the Remote Learning Environment beginning November 30, 2020. In addition, Dr. Harwood recommended that the Coming Back Together plan be revised to not allow outside facility rentals when the district is in the Orange and Red categories.

Board members were given an opportunity to ask questions.

Superintendent Harwood spoke about various ways the district is addressing substitute vacancies with administrators that are licensed, teachers filling in when on Plan time, and asking student teachers to pursue emergency substitute licenses. President Heikes asked for clarification on other licensed staff who will serve as substitutes. Dr. Harwood said it refers to administrative staff in the buildings and at the administrative office that are licensed. He also said that teachers who give up their Plan period to substitute are getting compensated for it.

Bill Fletcher inquired about onboarding of emergency substitutes. Superintendent Harwood explained that the process is fairly quick once the license is issued. Mr. Fletcher suggested the district hire graduating students as substitutes. Dr. Harwood said the district is looking into this.

Rick Amos asked how many student teachers were asked to pursue a substitute license. Carrie Handy, Director of Human Resources/Elementary, said at this time the district has asked thirteen. Mr. Amos also asked what it cost for an emergency substitute license. Mrs. Handy said \$120. She also said fingerprinting is done in-house.

Superintendent Harwood noted the district is also having a hard time filling paraprofessional and custodial substitute positions.

Ashley Spaulding asked what the current absenteeism rate is. Superintendent Harwood said it is 2.9% lower than last year. He said 32% of student quarantines happened just last week.

President Heikes asked why two classrooms were quarantined last week. Superintendent Harwood said if there is more than one student in a classroom diagnosed (in the case of these classes there were more than 5) the whole classroom could be quarantined.

Rachele Zade asked what the protocol was if students are sent to school sick. Superintendent Harwood said if they come to school symptomatic they are sent to the nurse for evaluation. She also asked if using MARC to determine ICU capacity was a change in the Gating Criteria. Dr. Harwood said he didn't believe it was a change in the criteria, rather a change in where the data for the criteria comes from.

Bill Fletcher asked why the committee didn't recommend to split middle school and high school. Superintendent Harwood said because of the current rate of spread.

Ashley Spaulding asked Superintendent Harwood to explain what the Orange category means in regard to learning plans. Dr. Harwood said when in the Orange elementary students can be On-Site or Hybrid and secondary students will be Remote only.

In response to a question from Stephanie Makalous, Superintendent Harwood explained that the schedules would remain the same for secondary students, they just won't have an on-site day. The whole class would be together doing the same thing more often than if they are in the Hybrid model.

Rick Amos expressed frustration with the number of D's and F's shown for secondary students in the first quarter grade comparison and the district not identifying this sooner. He asked how these students can be helped if the district stays in Hybrid or moves to Remote learning. Superintendent Harwood said within a few weeks of the start of school these students are identified and staff start to work with them one on one. He also pointed out that as bad as the grades look now, they were worse in week six. He said the staff will look into whether it is an issue with students not completing the work, or not knowing how to do the work, and the administration will look at bringing in students who need additional support.

President Heikes said she thinks about schools around the nation that are strictly virtual and how the district could look to them to provide tips. She also said paying teachers to give up their plan time to assist students that need one-to-one assistance is a good idea. Superintendent Harwood said the staff have been offering assistance, but it has been very underutilized by students that need it. Mrs. Heikes asked if other Johnson County districts are seeing the same drop in grades. Dr. Harwood said they are seeing similar impact.

Bill Fletcher asked if the district was in the Orange at the August 24th meeting. Superintendent Harwood said that after much discussion the Board chose to be in the Yellow category.

President Heikes opened the floor for patron input. The following individuals spoke to the board:

Tracy Gervais, Shawnee, pointed out that the district has data now showing that having kids in school does not increase community spread. She also expressed concern with using different data than what is on the Kansas Department of Health and Environment site. She said it is clear students do much better with in-person instruction.

Kristy Milman, Olathe, expressed frustration with not knowing anything about the Advisory Committee that is making recommendations. She said the Board was elected to make these decisions. She asked the Board to remember their primary role is to be looking at what is best for the kids and

suggested the Board talk about how to keep kids in school. She also said Morgan Hunter who the district contracts with for substitute teachers adds complication to the substitute process.

Shelley Thomas, Shawnee, said there are more kids in the hospital for mental health reasons than there is COVID. She cited an increase in domestic violence and drug and alcohol abuse. She said if schools are closed the virus is still going to be here so people need to learn to live with it. She said teachers can do it safely. In conclusion she asked the Board to do what it can to keep kids in school as much as possible.

Brent Smith, Shawnee, Student Council President at De Soto High School, said he didn't believe COVID was being spread in the schools and noted that students are doing really good at wearing masks. He said the Board gave students and families an option to be remote and feels other families need to be given the option for on-site learning noting that students do not learn well online.

President Heikes said the Board received 153 written comments submitted through the online portal and saw an uptick in emails last week as there was an increase in community spread. She said, as has been the case all year, the comments are split with some requests to keep the learning environment as it is and others requesting that the Board follow the Gating Criteria.

President Heikes declared a three-minute break at 7:42 p.m.

The Board returned to open session and President Heikes called the meeting back to order at 7:46 p.m.

President Heikes clarified the formation and function of the Advisory Committee. She said three board members sit on the committee as ex-officio members and each board member submitted patron names to Superintendent Harwood for the committee. Dr. Harwood did select staff that sit on the committee. Mrs. Heikes said the purpose of the committee was to provide medical, mental and public health information. She said the committee meetings are not held publicly as it is the superintendent's committee which allows members to speak openly. She pointed out that the committee does not make decisions, the Board does.

President Heikes said all students that are in the D and F category are met with continuously throughout the quarter. She added that teachers are working very tediously with these students.

Bill Fletcher thanked patrons for communication.

Stephanie Makalous commended the staff for keeping the transmission in schools low.

John Gagnat said staff have gone above and beyond through all of this. He also thanked patrons for their input.

Rachele Zade expressed concern that mental health was still not taken into consideration.

Ashley Spaulding noted that the goal of everyone is to get students back in the schools where they learn the best. She also said she worries about the mental health of students put into quarantine. She added that the Board can't try to figure out what is best for one set of students as it has to look at the big picture. She said the district has to figure out how to help students that are struggling with grades or mental health.

Bill Fletcher said the students want to be in class.

Danielle Heikes asked how the district can keep buildings open when 32% of the total quarantines was just last week and there is a shortage in substitutes. She said the Board can do things to help mitigate the spread, or make a decision that would lead to a sudden shut down.

Rick Amos pointed out that USD 232 is one of the few districts in the area that have had kids in the schools since day one. He said the Board decided on a Gating Criteria to follow and asked Superintendent Harwood to create a committee to give advice. Mr. Amos said while there is no right decision, it really comes down to staffing and being able to educate our students. He said no-one is denying that students do better in the classroom, but if going remote gives us an opportunity to get on top of the curve and get through the holidays with hope for improvement in January.

Stephanie Makalous agreed with Mr. Amos. She said she would rather see our own teachers provide instruction, even in a remote environment, because it would be hard to bring in substitute teachers for remote instruction.

Ashley Spaulding said she doesn't like the thought of going remote as she has two kids in secondary schools. She said the entire community needs to work together to get the spread under control.

Bill Fletcher said the district needs to get the students back in the schools now or may not be able to until Spring.

Rachele Zade said it is hard for patrons when they see that bars, restaurants and stores are open, but schools are closing. Ashley Spaulding said it's a little different in that COVID isn't as disruptive in those settings as it is in a classroom setting.

Danielle Heikes shared concern with students having a number of different substitutes in their classroom. She suggested that if the district keeps elementary on-site and moves secondary to remote, secondary staff can substitute at the elementary schools. She stressed that the district needs to maintain consistency in the classroom.

Bill Fletcher said he would like to separate middle schools and high schools.

Rachele Zade said the district could affect the hospital numbers even worse by having students go remote.

John Gagnat said it appears that students are safer in school with mask mandates in place and the community is who needs to get on-board about being careful in what they do. He also mentioned that the mental health of parents is also a concern as they deal with remote learning.

Danielle Heikes said the community spread is high enough now that the district may not be aware of the impact in schools yet. She said her concern is with staffing and how the district keeps the doors open when it can't fill open positions right now.

Rick Amos said he doesn't see an immediate resolution to getting the staff needed. He added that district teachers and staff have done an unbelievable job, but the COVID spread has come to a point where it cannot be controlled anymore. He asked Superintendent Harwood how remote learning impacts special needs students. Superintendent Harwood said the district can utilize staff to make sure students with special needs that are attending every day now would continue to do that in order to get the services they need. He also pointed out that the district would work with students that have little to no internet service by setting up places where they could come in to work during the day.

Bill Fletcher said the district could speed up the substitute process by hiring substitutes directly rather than using Morgan Hunter. Superintendent Harwood said the district can work with Morgan Hunter to try to reduce the time in getting substitutes in place. Mr. Fletcher asked if the elementary and middle schools could be fully staffed should just the high schools be moved to remote. He also pointed out that the Health Department said it was better to keep the kids in the schools. Superintendent Harwood said that was the Health Department's position two weeks ago, but he didn't think that would continue to be their recommendation now because of the community spread going up in the last two weeks.

John Gagnat asked if teachers would teach from school or home if the district goes remote. Superintendent Harwood said they would teach from school unless quarantined in which case they would teach from home. He added that a substitute would only be needed if the teachers are sick and unable to teach.

Rachele Zade asked if the recommendation to go remote was to take effect November 30th. Superintendent Harwood said that is correct.

Mrs. Stephanie Makalous moved to accept the recommendation that USD 232 is in the Orange category of the Kansas Schools Gating Criteria with elementary students continuing in the On-Site Learning Environment and secondary students moving to the Remote Learning Environment beginning on November 30, 2020, and to change the Coming Back Together plan to not allow outside facility rental when the district is in the Orange or Red categories.

Mrs. Danielle Heikes seconded.

Roll Call Vote:

John Gagnat – No

Rick Amos – Yes

Bill Fletcher – No

Stephanie Makalous – Yes

Ashley Spaulding – Yes

Rachele Zade – No

Danielle Heikes – Yes

Carried 4/3.

Mr. Bill Fletcher moved to change the middle school learning environment to Hybrid.

Mrs. Rachele Zade seconded.

In response to a question from Rick Amos, Superintendent Harwood said this would be an amendment to the Gating Criteria.

Ashley Spaulding said she was willing to bend at the August meeting, but in looking at current metrics she doesn't feel comfortable with making a change to the Gating Criteria in the current situation.

Rachele Zade said things are not black and white with COVID.

Stephanie Makalous pointed out that the Board has told families they would follow the Kansas Gating Criteria.

Rick Amos said in reading the comments submitted there was a common theme about following the criteria and not changing it.

Danielle Heikes said in absence of solid evidence she has to follow the rubric put before the Board.

Ashley Spaulding said the Board isn't acting on the recommendation out of fear, but rather the best knowledge available at the time. She added that patrons who chose on-site for their kids seem to think that means they will be in school full-time, but she clarified that On-Site means kids could be On-Site or in the Hybrid learning model depending on the Gating Criteria.

Bill Fletcher said the Board took a chance in August. He suggested the Board do it again and allow middle school to stay in the Hybrid learning model.

Rick Amos said he struggles with breaking from the Gating Criteria. He noted that there is five weeks left this semester and the district needs to mitigate now with the hope to get everybody back in January.

Roll Call Vote:

John Gagnat – Yes

Rick Amos – No

Bill Fletcher – Yes

Stephanie Makalous – No

Ashley Spaulding – No

Rachele Zade – Yes

Danielle Heikes – No

Failed 4/3.

President Heikes adjourned the meeting at 8:58 p.m.

12/7/2020
Date Approved

Wendy S. Senham
Clerk, Board of Education

Danielle Heikes
President, Board of Education