

A Special Meeting of the Board of Education, Seaford Union Free School District, was held on Sunday, June 6, 2021, via Zoom and in the Board of Education Conference Room in the Manor Elementary School at 1590 Washington Avenue in Seaford, New York.

PRESENT: Mr. Bruce A. Kahn - President
Mr. Kevin Devlin - Vice President
Ms. Andrea Parisi - Trustee
Ms. Natalie Pedisich – Trustee
Ms. Stacie Stark - Trustee

Ms. Carmen Ouellette - District Clerk (via Zoom)

ALSO PRESENT:
Dr. Adele V. Pecora
Mr. John A. Strifolino
Ms. Mary Anne Sadowski – Attorney (via Zoom)

At 6:48 p.m., the President of the Board of Education opened the Special Meeting. As the first order of business, Board President Bruce Kahn led the audience in the Pledge of Allegiance.

OPEN MEETING

Board President Bruce Kahn advised everyone that this meeting was called to discuss what happened with the Governor and the letter from the Department of Health to the CDC. He went on to say that the news claimed that a letter was sent waiving all the requirements effective tomorrow as far as masks go and making it optional for schools which is not the case. Mr. Kahn stated that the District received an email from the State Education Department to clarify that masks are still required in the schools pursuant to the reopening plans. He went on to say: They did indicate that assuming the response from the CDC it is possible that the governor will announce tomorrow or another date that those new mandates will be in effect urging people to wear masks but not requiring them. At this time a letter is in the process of going out from our Superintendent informing the public about that. The Task Force met this afternoon at 4:00 o'clock and Dr. Pecora will update us on what they discussed; then we will discuss what our future actions will be.

OPENING REMARKS

Dr. Pecora:

We had a brief meeting with the Task Force, and we were looking at both the letter that Dr. Zucker had written as well as the most recent message that came out from New York State Education Department in the afternoon today.

It was pretty clear from the New York State Education Department that we should really be in a holding pattern right now. Within it, it explicitly says the State Education Department has been in communication with the Executive staff regarding the attached document (which was letter from Dr. Howard Zucker, the New York State Commissioner of Health) - according to the conversations with the Executive staff the intent of this letter was to obtain a response from the Center for Disease Control regarding different standards for summer camps and schools. It has not changed any of the existing arrangements.

The letter does a very nice job of posing the question – there seems to be different requirements for summer camps than there are for schools - why is this and it would be our intent to even the playing field to make them all the same with your approval. However, there has not been any approval, there have been no changes in executive orders, and as stated by the New York State Education Department, therefore schools should continue to operate under their existing procedures until further notice. No changes have been or will be made by the Executive until after Monday June 7th to afford the CDC an opportunity to respond to the letter.

Basically, we are told by one government agency (New York State Education Department) which we follow their guidelines that says do not make any changes in your protocols until you hear further and until this clarification. I think everybody is anticipating an Executive Order from the Governor saying that the regulations have changed, and people should go in and then change their reopening plans. Right now we have a reopening plan that's filed with the New York State Education Department that says that masks are required so theoretically we would meet with the Reopening of Schools Task Force and change the language in the reopening plan. Then the Board, as it has in the past, would vote on the revised reopening plan and then we would put it in place. That's really the sequence of events. This is very hard to do with a flip of the switch because there are people on both sides of what their wants are in this situation.

Every decision that we've made has been because we followed the guidance from these governing state agencies. The problem is right now it appears that the State agencies are giving conflicting messages, so we need the State agencies to get on the same page and issue us guidance. We have done this in the past – always adhered by that - done that which is permissible. If the Governor does change the rules and if the Governor allows for people to have choice with regards to wearing masks or not wearing masks and that door is open, then as a District we would decide, since it's permissible, whether we would move forward with that.

DR. PECORA (cont'd)

If we did move forward with that then we would need to put in place protocols to keep everybody safe. It is not as easy as just saying some will come with masks and some don't come with masks. We have children that are immune-compromised and as everybody knows you meant you wear a mask to protect others not necessarily to protect yourself. Even if those children wear masks that's going to be part of the solution.

We have to have conversations with families. Even if families have a choice if a parent says I want my child to wear a mask and then the child gets to school and takes the mask off, how are we supposed to establish protocols.

Do we have to send out a survey to all parents by teacher? Do we have to have a list of who wants and who doesn't want a mask? Is it on the honor system for kindergarteners? Is it the same rules for a child in 12th Grade?

We have kept schools safe because we have been very responsible about making sure that all our protocols were aligned and making sure that we protected all different stakeholders. I am not opposed to removing masks; I am not opposed to giving choice. But if we move forward with removing masks, we have to develop the protocols to do it well. Administrators and the teachers have to be consulted.

Say I have a kindergartener and I know I want my child to wear a mask. Well how do I communicate that? How do we enforce that? What's the responsibility of the teacher? What's the responsibility of the principal? What's the responsibility of the parent? All those things we need to think through because otherwise we're going to create a very frustrating last two or three weeks of school.

As I said before – if we are given permission we've always done that which we've been allowed to do but that doesn't mean we will be able to flip a switch and do it immediately because we have to do it in a thoughtful careful way so that everybody feels safe and secure to the best of our ability. It's going to take us some time to update our plan and it's going to take us some time just to get those things in place I mean we're not talking weeks but once the declaration is made it's going to take us a couple of days.

Bruce Kahn:

We should try to start tomorrow planning and not wait until we actually get something from the Governor.

Dr. Pecora:

We already started laying the groundwork for the Reopening of Schools Task Force today. We already are going to have a team meeting with the administrators at 9:30 tomorrow morning. We are already starting to think along those lines as to the things that need to be changed and we started in anticipation that that would happen. We've have already begun those discussions. Planning has started and it will continue through tomorrow. We are not going to wait for the Governor to release this before we start planning.

Bruce Kahn:

Bruce Kahn asked if anybody wanted to add anything. He stated that at some point the Board would need to vote on this again. He went on to say that he had asked attorney Marianne Sadowski to come up with a resolution. He also went on to say that he did not think the resolution was sufficient for what they were just talking about and asked if the Board wanted to either modify the resolution or want to wait until we have more information and then vote on it.

The Board felt that they should wait until more information was provided, to find out what the guidance will be and what in the Reopening Plan needed to be changed and that is what we base our resolution on.

Dr. Pecora:

Dr. Pecora advised that the Reopening Committee did not make any decisions but if the Governor changes the plan, then the Committee will look at what is issued. She went on to say that we don't know what he's going to say at this point. If he lessens the mask restrictions, then we will look at lessening the mask restrictions in the District, but we haven't gotten this far as saying that without seeing exactly what is required.

Mr. Kahn:

Mr. Kahn asked attorney Mary Anne Sadowski to weigh-in as to how the District would need to do this, so we are all on board.

Mary Anne Sadowski:

Whenever you modify your reopening plan you have to engage your stakeholders and I think that's what Dr. Pecora is talking about in terms of not being able to flip a switch. First, we know what Dr. Zucker's letter to Dr. Wilensky says. We do not know how that is going to be translated either by an Executive Order or by the Department of Health updating the guidance that applies to schools. Until we see that it is difficult to engage your stakeholders.

The process really should be to get as ready as you can and start engaging the stakeholders now in anticipation of something being issued. Then your reopening plan has to be redeveloped with updated information that is vetted through the stakeholders again. Then the board adopts the revised or modified reopening plan.

Bruce Kahn:

I don't know if you heard Andrea's question. How long will it take for us to adopt the plan after the Task Force meets?

Mary Anne Sadowski:

You have to develop the modified plan. For purposes of processing timeline it says quickly. The Board can meet on less than 24 hours' notice as you know with the consent of each of the members of the Board. The important part of the timeline is getting the guidance and incorporating that into an updated reopening plan. As Dr. Pecora said, that's not necessarily a flip of the switch. That does require some thought. Even what Dr. Zucker has in his communication with Dr. Wilensky - there is still open questions regarding how to implement that which the reopening plan should address.

Dr. Pecora:

One of the considerations that is not or is silent in Dr. Zucker's letter is the effects of transportation. Right now we have no idea whether masks should or should not or can or cannot be worn on buses. Overall, the Governor has not made any changes with regards to transportation. We know that it's one of the highest transmission places – on a school bus. In the past, with masks on and some of the protocols we've had in place and looking at the time that children are on buses together, we've been able to hold this at bay. If masks are not on in a school bus and somebody has COVID, we are going to be looking at quarantining that school bus which basically will mean quarantining the school because you just don't have children in an isolated class. All the work that we've done to sit people by cohort in Middle School and in the Elementary schools will go out the window if you have a whole bus load of kids that have to be quarantined. I am assuming he's going to say that you have to wear masks on buses. If he says you have to wear masks on buses, it's as simple as you have to wear masks on buses so who is going to enforce that? The bus driver is supposed to be paying attention to driving the kids; he's not supposed to be paying attention to that.

I'm not opposed to releasing restrictions as long as we have an Executive Order and we have direction that we can do so. I'm not against this at all but I'm definitely against not doing it in a thoughtful and safe manner. So once the kids come into school, especially at the elementary age, you need to respect the opinions of all families. If you don't want a mask and that's the choice and it's legal, then fine you don't want a mask. How do we keep the youngster with a mask if the kid doesn't want to wear a mask and the parent wants one on? You don't just say okay everybody shows up and it's going to go the way all the parents wanted. That is why we are meeting with the administrators tomorrow. If mask restrictions are lessened, what are we going to do. We are going to take recommendations from the administrators, and we are going to put the Task Force together. We have a meeting scheduled for June 10th. If we have to have it sooner, we will call one sooner. I am not looking to halt, stall or delay anything. I am looking to do this in a thoughtful and deliberate manner. We've done such a great job all along. It's going to be 7 or 8 days in school for the High School kids before they enter into their exams, maybe 8 days for the Middle School kids and I think we have 15 days left for the Elementary kids. My fear is the unintended consequences of this. If the direction is to lessen the restrictions that's fine but I have received some emails from senior parents asking why would we consider releasing this because even if my child wears a mask, if someone else who does not wear a mask gets sick, then my child will need to be quarantined and misses graduation – prom – play-offs....and it wasn't my child's fault. I am sensitive to that – I have to be able to listen to all stakeholders.

The answer is not that everybody goes remote especially at the Elementary level. That is not just a flick of a switch either. We spoke about that at the Task Force meeting.

DR. PECORA (cont'd)

We understand people's frustration with wearing masks. We have always done that which is permissible but to do that which is permissible we have to do it well. Our reopening plan was a very solid reopening plan, but it took months to build. We had great success keeping our schools open because it was deliberate, and it was smart. I have no problem taking masks away, but I do not want to wind up with a situation where people are upset because their kids are precluded from things. Everyone has to go in with eyes wide open knowing the benefits and the risks. We are finally at the point that the entire senior class is going to be at graduation ceremony at the Tillis Center. Some people are worried that it's not going to happen for them if we start to change things up at the last minute. I understand the frustrations of a kindergarten parent that don't want their child wearing a mask. We had a brief discussion about would we even consider doing different things in different buildings because there's less social distancing at the High School and maybe just keep a mask requirement at the High School. We need to do what the Department of Health says when I call on a contact tracing. These are all things to consider.

The other frustration is right now we are dealing with contact tracing and six feet apart. With the guards up people could sit three feet apart but contact tracing was still six feet. We are looking to keep everyone safe. We spent the last month planning end of the year activities in anticipation that things would open up. It really pains me that anyone in the community thinks that anybody at this table doesn't want the kids to be the healthiest and happiest they can be. That is why we are here. It is not just flipping a switch. I don't know how you look at the family that does have a child that's medically fragile immune-compromised and say well you know we just don't have a plan for you in the moment. You have to have a plan as best you can predict the scenarios and that's why we called a meeting for the Task Force today. We have to talk about things, and we do not even know the rules yet.

Mr. Kahn:

Even if we have masks on at the High School, when you see the kids outside of school, they are not wearing masks. Some could still end up quarantined for prom or graduation and it had nothing to do with school.

Dr. Pecora:

At this point in time on it would be I think less of a conflict if we knew that students wouldn't be quarantined in our building. Nothing is perfect and there may be times we have to quarantine but in general we wouldn't need to quarantine.

Mr. Kahn:

It's very frustrating to everyone. You see the headlines on the news – no masks effective Monday. As a Board we all agree that we follow the guidelines. As soon as we can follow the new guidelines, we would like to get answers on that.

Dr. Pecora:

I would too except we're going to have to think about some of those things that I mentioned. What do we do at the High School – do we do that separately or do we treat it the same? These are some of the things that we can discuss, and the Task Force can recommend it. Then we can make suggested changes to the Plan and the Board can approve it. We will try to get this done as quickly as possible

Mr. Kahn:

That's all we can ask.

There being no further business, a motion was made by Mr. Devlin, second by Ms. Stark, to adjourn the Special Meeting at 7:16 p.m.

**ADJOURN SPECIAL
MEETING**

No Discussion.
All Ayes
Motion Carried.

Mr. Kahn:

I'd like to thank everybody for coming down on short notice. A special thank you to our Superintendent - she was away this weekend and she spent a lot of time over this weekend making phone calls, answering emails so thank you.

Respectfully submitted,

Carmen T. Ouellette
District Clerk

Andrea Parisi
Vice District Clerk