

**BRISTOL WARREN REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE  
VIRTUAL BUSINESS MEETING MINUTES**

**Monday, August 16, 2021**

The meeting of the Bristol Warren Regional School Committee was held in-person, with virtual public access through Zoom Conferencing, on Monday, August 16, 2021. Chairperson Marjorie McBride, called the meeting to order at approximately 7:05 p.m.

**Present:** Marjorie McBride, Chairperson; Tara Thibaudeau, Vice-Chair; Sheila Ellsworth, Treasurer; Victor Cabral, Secretary; Nicky Piper. Carly Reich, Sarah Bullard, Erin Schofield, and Karen Cabral; Robert Hicks, Ed.D., Interim Superintendent; Diane Sanna, Ph.D., Assistant Superintendent; Thomas Wood, Director of Facilities; Rose Muller, Director of Technology; Mary Ann Carroll, Esq., District Solicitor; Lee Ann Beaupre, Human Resources Manager; Diana Campbell, Recording Secretary.

I. **Open Session**

\_\_\_\_Chairperson McBride called the meeting to order at approximately 7:05p.m.

II. **Opening Business**

\_\_\_\_Chairperson McBride invited all present to join in the recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag.

III. **Accolades**

Team Awards

The School Committee and Interim Superintendent Hicks congratulated the MHHS Girls Softball Team for their achievement of becoming the 2021RI State Runners Up.

Head Coach: Craig Giarrusso, CIC, Assistant Coach: Nick Mendillo, and the athletes, Julia Allen, Reily Amaral, Caleigh Bouchard, Sydney Crowell, Sophia Ferolito, Mary Gerhard, Alice Grantham, Gabrielle Hollands, Logan Levesque, Samantha Malafronte, Madison Razzino, Julia Rensenhausen, Hanna Rodrigues, Kylie Rolando, Isabel Savinon, Cloe Simmons, Serena Sousa, Grace Stephenson, Jayda Sylvia, Katie Vieira, Elsa White

Ms. Thibaudeau explained the difficult, but successful season for the MHHS Wrestling Team. She led the School Committee and Interim Superintendent Hicks in congratulating them on their achievement of becoming the 2021 RI State Champions and Division Champions.

Head Coach: Eric Francis, Assistant Coach: Michael Perreira, Ryan Fazzi, and the athletes, Elijah Bland, Ethan Bland, Patrick Pitts, Matthew Campo, Brian Conway, Carson Correia, Ethan Delehanty, Mason Furtado, Riley Furtado, Nick Gomes, Cory Grifka, Liam Mallon, Drystan McClain, Brock Pacheco, Jenness Atley, Cole

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Rybak, James Thibaudeau, Craig Veader, Joshua Vitullo

Individual Awards

The School Committee and Interim Superintendent Hicks congratulated the following athletes on their recognition as Individual athletes. Congratulations were issues to:

WINTER 2021

- Providence Journal All-State Hockey, 1st Team, Hobey Baker, Coaches Association All-State - Kat Barker
- Hobey Baker Award Boys Hockey - Jared Rego
- Providence Journal All-State Gymnastics, Second Team - Nora Prendergast
- Rhode Island Basketball Coaches Association, All-Division Selections: Bruce McGuire - 1st team, Mason Almeida - 2nd Team, Parker Camelo - 3rd Team
- Rhode Island Gymnastics Coaches Association, All-Division Selections: Nora Prendergast - 1st Team, Reese Pavao - 1st Team, Maria Tucciarone - 2nd Team, Brooke Ramella - 3rd Team, Caroline Nash - 3rd Team
- 2021 Rhode Island Hockey Coaches, All-Division Teams: David Benevides - 1st Team, Tim Byrn - 3rd Team
- 2021 Rhode Island Track Coaches, 3rd Team All-Division - Medium Schools
- 4x800 Relay - Sonia Bradley, Scarlett Drawbridge, Karsyn Medeiros, Emma Serbst
- Rhode Island Track Coaches Award - Carsyn Medeiros
- ALL-ACADEMIC AWARD - Ella Drawbridge, Kiley Bouchard
- Rhode Island Basketball Coaches Association, All-Class Selections: Abby Razzino - 1st Team, Elsa White - 2nd Team
- All-Division Selections: Abby Razzino - 1st Team, Elsa White - 1st Team, Isabel Savinon - 2nd Team, Reyn Ferris - 2nd Team, Lauren Pais - 3rd Team

SEASON 3 - 2021

- Rhode Island Football Coaches Association, All-Division Selections Division II-B: 1st Team - Mason Almeida, AJ Brooks, Jordan Pompey, Atley Jenness; 2nd Team - Bruce McGuire, Brock Pacheco, Patrick Pitts, Aidan Ramalgia

SPRING 2021

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- 3X State Wrestling Champion, Providence Journal, 1st Team All-State 2021 - Cory Grifka
- State Runner-Up High Jump, 2nd Team All-State 2021 - Hunter Heyden
- State Wrestling Runner-Up, Providence Journal, 1st Team All-State 2021 - Brock Pacheco
- Providence Journal, Wrestling 2nd Team All-State 2021 - Atley Jenness
- Softball 2nd Team All-State 2021 - Reily Amaral
- US Lacrosse Academic All American, United Soccer Coaches Association, All-Scholar 2021 - Ben DiChiappari
- 2021 All Tournament Volleyball Team - Brady Thibaudeau
- Wrestling Coach of the Year Award - Eric Francis
- Wrestling Assistant Coach of the Year Award 2021 - Mike Perreira
- Volleyball Coach of the Year 2021 - Warren Rensenhausen
- Baseball Brian Fell Award 2021 - Ethan Leary
- Cy Young Award 2021 - AJ Jones
- Baseball League MVP 2021 - Ryan Nappi
- Girls Lacrosse All Rookie Team Division I 2021 - Abigail Razzino
- Rhode Island Girls Lacrosse Coaches Association, All-Division Selections, Honorable Mention Division I - Katherine Barker
- All-Academic Division I - Emma Hoyle, Kyra Boucher, Katherine Barker, Gillian Greenslade, Annie Krzywicki
- 2021 Rhode Island Boys Lacrosse Coaches, All-Division Selections: David Benevides - 1st Team, Tim Byrne - 3rd Team
- US Lacrosse Academic All-State RI - Oliver Browne, Timothy Byrne, Jameson Canario, Nathan Chin, Jacob DesRoches, Joshua deWolf, Ben DiChiappari, Colin DosSantos, Jackson Harney, Jake Marshall, Nathan Marshall, Jared Rego, Jack Silva, Tristan Tamulaites
- 2021 Rhode Island Boys Volleyball Coaches: 1st Team All-Division - Brady Thibaudeau, 1st Team All-Division - Noah Rocha, 2nd Team All-Division - Bruce McGuire, 3rd Team All-Division - James DeMello
- 2021 Rhode Island Track Coaches: Hunter Heyden 1st Team All-Division (Eastern Division) // 2nd Team All Class (Class B) // 2nd Team All-State 3rd Team All-Division 4x800 Meter Relay Sonia Bradley, Karsyn Medeiros, Hope Tyska, Briana Moreira
- Rhode Island Softball Coaches Association, All-Division Selections: Reily Amaral - 1st Team, Grace Stephenson - 1st Team, Jayda Sylvia - 2nd Team, Logan Levesque - 3rd Team, Gabby Hollands - Honorable Mention
- Rhode Island Baseball Coaches Association, All-Division Selections: AJ Jones - 1st Team, Ryan Nappi - 1st Team, Matt Brackett- 2nd Team, Cam Connor- 2nd Team, Ethan Leary - 2nd Team
- Rhode Island Wrestling Coaches Association: Nick Gomes - 100 wins, 1st Team League, Liam Mallon - 100 wins, 1st Team All League, Cory Grifka - 1st Team All-League, Josh Vitullo - 2nd Team All-League, Brock Pacheco - 2nd Team All-League, James Thibaudeau - 2nd Team All-League, Mason Furtado - JV State Champ, Ethan Delanontay - JV State Champ

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Ms. Christy Belisle, Director of Athletics, expressed her pride in the athletes who did a great job in spite of a difficult year in sports. They supported each other and made the District, the School, and their parents proud! Next season starts Monday. Go Huskies!

**IV. Consent Agenda**

All items under the Consent Agenda were considered to be routine by the School Committee and will be enacted by one motion. There will be no separate discussion of these items unless a Committee member requests, in which event the items will be withdrawn from the general order of business and considered in the normal sequence on the agenda. Consent Agenda items are received and filed with no discussion or further action taken.

- A. Approval of Contract for Director of Student Support Services
- B. Approval of Homeschool Requests (13 families, representing 20 students)
- C. Approval of Teacher Positions for 1st Grade (Hugh Cole) & 2nd Grade (Colt Andrews)
- D. Approval of Requisitions over \$5000

MOTION: Mr. Cabral made a motion to approve the Consent Agenda; seconded by Ms. Thibaudeau. The Motion passed unanimously.

**V. Presentations**

- A. Interim Superintendent's Presentation on Opening of Schools

Dr. Hicks explained to the remote audience how to find the presentation on the District website, [www.bwrsd.org](http://www.bwrsd.org).

He reviewed the previous year setting policy and making the schools as safe as possible. This year's goal is to get every student into the classroom and to avoid quarantine. He reviewed the guidance that has been issued by the State and the CDC:

Promote vaccination, the leading health strategy to dealing with the virus. There are two clinics planned for vaccination, Tuesday, August 17 and Thursday, September 9, with the possibility to offer a third if there are some who choose to get their first vaccination on September 9. The current rate for the District is 44% vaccinated. We have a strong vaccination rate among teachers and that's a positive thing.

Physical distancing guidance is changing. It encourages stable groups, especially in the non-vaccine eligible (elementary) classes. It's recommended with mixed groups, that you layer multiple prevention strategies: hand washing, masking, ventilation etc. No need to quarantine if groups are 6-feet apart, but the requirement is 3 feet between stable groups. No distancing where students are vaccine-eligible (grades 7-12). This will be tricky at the Middle School because

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one grade is not vaccine-eligible, but two grades are. Additionally, the physical barriers guidance has been dropped.

Face coverings are strongly recommended indoors regardless of vaccination status, for everyone, except for those under 2, those with a disability, and for those who face a work-place risk. That is the State recommendation. The CDC recommendation is for masking to continue in those communities where the case rate exceeds 50 per 100,000. The current case rates for the District are 45.6 for Bristol and 104.7 for Warren, for a regional rate of 64.5. A lot of Districts have had a lot of conversations about linking case-rate to masking. For Bristol-Warren, we will bring similar recommendations to the School Committee in the future and continue to review that policy on a quarterly basis. He then displayed some of the comments that he received from the public in the previous week for the audience to read. He noted that around the country, some schools have had to go back to on-line learning. He stated that the District will take precautions to avoid that option.

Screening: RIDOH recommends that case rates of 50-99, that 25% of non-vaccinated be tested weekly and case rate of 100+ of non-vaccinated, that 50% be tested weekly. The District will continue to offer BINAX testing with parent consent. It's unclear how to determine who has been vaccinated to plan who should be tested.

Ventilation: Currently our HVAC air turnover is 6 cycles per hour; all HVAC filters are changed on a 6 month cycle. The District will begin running the HVAC system one week before school opens. Supplemental HEPA Purifiers will remain in place and fresh air dampers will be opened to the max. Due to anticipated bottle-neck of HEPA filters, the District has ordered them.

Cleaning, Disinfection, and Hand Hygiene: The guidance has changed to account for recent studies that have shown that the disease is not transmitted via touch as much as was originally thought. The guidance recommends that cleaning once per day is typically sufficient, along with cleaning and disinfecting immediately when someone is sick. Hand sanitizer will be available at school and bus entries. Students will wash their hands and sanitize before lunch and snacks.

When someone is sick, it's recommended 7-day testing with quarantine (return on day 8 with a negative test). Close contacts would be anyone who was within 6 feet for 15 minutes. Students and staff will not need to quarantine if they are fully vaccinated or diagnosed with COVID within 90 days. If all of that applies and contact: K-12 students, in an indoor classroom, maintain 3 feet distance. They do not need to quarantine.

On the bus, there are no capacity restrictions. They are considered stable groups. Masks are required by federal law. The District will continue with

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seating charts and open windows. Close contact is considered the seats in front, behind and the same seats across the aisle.

Additional considerations are:

- Distance learning option is no longer required. Those who opt for an available distance option do so at their own cost, except for medically fragile individuals.
- Medically fragile individuals should plan individually with the school.
- If eligible, PLEASE get vaccinated.
- Visitors and group indoor events will be modified. There will be more updates on this at the next meetings.
- We will continue to use virtual meetings where possible.
- General, not daily attestation forms.
- Lunch supervision and space is being explored - Principals want to get their gyms back. There will be more information on this next week.

Next steps:

- The Administration is developing a plan/policy that will be presented to the School Committee for their consideration on August 23, with a RIDE submission of the plan by August 27.

Discussion:

Ms. Reich had questions on how the positivity rate was going to be determined, but understands that the information will be coming later.

Ms. Piper asked if the Health forms that parents fill out each year, with immunization data, can be used to determine if a student has been vaccinated. Interim Superintendent Hicks deferred to School Nurse, Ms. Ellen Estrella to respond. She explained that the forms were developed many years ago before COVID, so there is no block to check for a COVID vaccination. She stated that parents can provide that information, but the District cannot go “fishing” for the information. It can be helpful if parents provide it, especially when determining who needs to quarantine when someone gets ill.

Ms. Schofield asked for clarity on who decides what the District is going to do. Attorney Carroll explained that last year Superintendent Brice made the decision to mandate masks in the schools, before the State came out with their own requirements. She further explained that Dr. Hicks asked her if he had the authority to do that, so she will be doing that research for him and will have an answer for Ms. Schofield and the public after that.

Chairperson McBride stated that it’s important to her that the students go to school every day. She wants to avoid quarantine as much as possible because they missed so many days last year. She stated that if masks are mandated, then there should be an end-date or circumstance to determine when such a mandate will end. Next week she will want to see a plan that gets the District to the end.

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Ms. Thibaudeau asked how the success of having or not having a mask mandate will be evaluated. Secondly she asked about recess and outdoor gym - what would it look like if masks are mandated? Will they still need to wear them during recess and outdoor gym? Thirdly, she asked for the data on the past nine months: how many classrooms were quarantined, were there classrooms quarantined more than once, what was done for virtual learning, how many students were tested positive. She would like to see the data collected from last year. She mentioned that a lot of elementary school parents are worried about their children who are not eligible for vaccination. She also wanted to know the District's plan for distance learning.

Interim Superintendent Hicks answered some of her questions: Distance learning will not be available except for medically fragile students. Also, the plan for masks will be an indoor plan and will not have an impact on the outdoor activities.

As for a way out of the situation, the positivity rate is the way out. As the positivity rate goes down, the need for masks will go down. Ms. Thibaudeau asked if the whole community's positivity rate, given the number of nursing homes in the Towns, would be skewed by the infection rates of the nursing homes. Would that have an impact on what happens in the schools? Interim Superintendent Hicks stated that he only has the data from the Department of Health. He will do what he can to get the data for the Committee.

Ms. Thibaudeau also asked for the cost of the distance learning option, if that should become a necessity.

Ms. Ellsworth if a classroom is quarantined, and the distance has been 3-foot distancing, does that mean the whole class will have to be quarantined. The answer is, "yes". Following up on that, does that mean that the students will miss 8 days? The answer is, "yes". The students will continue to learn using Google Classroom and other accommodations. Will there be an option, if the whole class is quarantined will the teachers be able to use Distance Learning. Hicks will look into it.

Ms. Ellsworth asked about "mask breaks", stating that they are necessary especially if the students are wearing them for 6 hours straight. She further stated that the School Committee is not medically qualified to make this decision.

Chairperson McBride clarified that the purpose of this portion of the meeting is to ask questions so that the Administration can come back with the answers at next week's meeting.

Ms. Cabral asked about cleaning and disinfection of the buildings that will happen immediately when someone is sick. She asked how it will be determined when it's necessary to clean. Ms. stated that the District will follow the stated

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guidelines re: probable case symptoms, except with parent consent they will do BIMAX testing to determine if further testing is suggested. Ms. Cabral further asked about the cleaning. If a child shows symptoms, the custodians will clear the area where the student was. Then if it's determined that the child tested positive, then a more thorough cleaning will be done.

Ms. Bullard related a question from a parent about insurance liability coverage -- what happens if the District disregards recommendations? Should the District consult the insurance companies to determine liabilities should the District not follow CDC Guidelines. Hicks will ask the insurance company when he meets with them.

Mr. Cabral stated that he believes that anyone who has not been vaccinated should wear a mask. What happens when a student comes in and declares that they are not going to wear a mask. Hicks stated that theoretically students should not be in class without a mask. He stated that the student will be provided with a mask or he/she will be asked to go home. Student will not be suspended, but cannot be in class.

**VI. Public Comment**

Jessica Almeida, Bristol, stated why she feels masks should not be mandated in the District. She read several potential adverse effects of mask wearing. She also stated several additional facts about the virus and the CDC. She urged that masks not be mandated.

Geoffrey Berg, a physician from Warren, requested that both sides listen to and respect the opinions of the other side. He stated that the Delta variant is particularly harmful for young people, so the data from previous versions of the virus no longer apply. Since more than half of students are unable to be vaccinated, that puts them at risk. He cited his source for information on the virus as national and international medical publications that are used by all physicians for guidance. He stated that for every medical situation there is a risk-benefit decision to be made. Is there a risk to wearing or not wearing a mask? He stated that there is virtually no risk to wearing a mask. Masks are worn full-time in Asia, even without the COVID virus. He suggested that the mask could be seen as a dress code requirement, temporarily -- similar to shoes and shirts.

Daryl Gould, parent from Warren, spoke in opposition to a mask mandate. He stated that a lot of the information he has heard re: the masks is not true. They do not work. He cited his experience as the owner of a company involved in identifying and correcting indoor environmental problems that are biological in nature. He also spoke about the impact of masks, causing depression and anxiety in children, especially those with special needs. He stated that some parents are leaving the district to homeschool or to move to private schools because of the issue of masks.



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Fennessey, Warren, stated that recent data do not support that we are still in a pandemic situation, citing the data on recent deaths, new cases, and ICU capacity. He opined that masking is an attempt to control other people's lives. He warned the Committee on treading on parental rights. He does not feel that the Committee is getting correct data re: vaccines (stopping the spread of the virus), and should not be making decisions on it in their official capacity.

Bran/Trish Millard, Bristol, sells respiratory products. He asked the SC to make masks optional for the schools. He noted that there are no studies that show that masks are not harmful to students, noting that there are some studies that say that long-term that is not the case. He urged the committee to consider the long-term impact in making their decision.

Victor Bullard, Bristol, is angry as a student in the District. She does not understand how people want to stop the virus, but not take measures necessary to stop it, such as masking, social distancing, etc. For many people personal choice means a lot. Unfortunately, many are more willing to put personal choice over the health and safety of others. This is where it becomes selfishness. She related a story of a fellow student who is immunocompromised. She asked how he could stay safe if others are able to opt out of masks. It's a matter of living free vs. death for some. She stated that the option to not wear a mask because it's uncomfortable, does not go above other people's lives.

Alane Torf, a physician at Bristol Medical Center, strongly in favor of mandated masks in schools. She shared several anecdotes and studies to illustrate that mask wearing decreases the chances of a person getting the virus. She also stated that though children are not as vulnerable to the virus, when they do get it the results can be devastating. One sick child can infect classmates and family around them. The Delta variant spreads more quickly. It's impact has been noted recently by the sharp increase in children in Georgia and Florida in the month of August. A simple mask will save lives. She encourages the Committee to consider the health of the children in the schools above all else.

Margaret Richards, suggested that the Board consult with health professionals for guidance in making their decisions. She pointed out several organizations, the Center of Disease Control, the American Academy of Pediatrics, the RI Chapter of the Amer, Office of RI Governor, RIDOE, and RIDOH, that are urging universal masking in schools. She supports the idea of a tiered plan, following the latest data from the CDC.

Jane Govnic, Bristol parent, feels that suggesting that masks not be mandated is unconscionable. She would prefer that students not have to wear a mask, but feels that it's necessary to protect everyone. She pointed out that Roger Williams University is mandating masking, even though 90% of its population is vaccinated. She hopes the School District does the same.

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Sheila Dobbyn, commented about the importance of the decision to be made by the Committee. She noted that masks were effective in the Bristol Warren schools last year and they should be continued in the new school year. Especially for the youngest students, with Not wearing masks now will not get us to where masks will not be necessary. Short-term sacrifice now will get us there. It's a difficult choice but should be made on the side of wearing masks. The policy can be revisited later. She suggested that the option of virtual learning be set up for those that don't wish to wear masks in school.

Sherry Ledsworth, parent from Bristol, spoke emotionally about the importance of this issue for her to choose to wear masks. She spoke of her son who had issues with his ears and hearing while wearing a mask and the effects of masks on the students for the long term. She asked that the School Committee consider this when making their decision.

At this point, Chairperson McBride spoke directly to a member of the audience, noting that he had interrupted several times and for that reason, she was removing him from the Public Comment list of people who would be invited to make a comment. She then called on Mr. Ledsworth to give his comment.

Jacob Ledsworth, parent from Bristol, spoke about his concerns about the impending mask mandate. He pointed out that there is little risk for students under 18 to contract the virus. He feels that the mask mandate is really to protect the adult population. He outlined some of the impacts of masks on the students. He suggested that the committee make a decision that will have normal childhoods without affecting their learning process and long-term physical and mental health. He strongly disagrees with the mandate to wear masks in schools.

Olivia Park, student in BWRSD, discussed her difficulty in adjusting to distance learning. She felt excluded because of her intolerance to wearing masks. She pointed out the air quality in the classrooms and how the masks make it difficult to learn under those circumstances. She felt the burden of COVID should not be on the shoulders of the students. She cited a German study that described the impact on the health of students who wore masks full-time during the school day. She encouraged everyone to go outside.

Vanessa Desjardins, parent from Bristol and registered nurse, spoke about the vaccination status of students and the decisions made by others. She explained that her son had to quit football because of difficulties at practice while wearing a mask. She encouraged the Committee to make masks optional so parents can make their own decisions on whether or not their children should wear masks.

Brian Chidester, teacher and parent from the District and VP of the BWEA, spoke about a survey of teachers. He reported that 92% (of 240 members) were vaccinated. Re: Distance Learning, he reported that 82% are opposed to hybrid teaching, 14% think it's unavoidable, and 4% aren't opposed to it. 42% of

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respondents feel that all should wear masks; 34% felt that only the unvaccinated should be required to wear masks. 76% of respondents feel that all children under 12 years old should wear masks. For those children over 12 years of age, the respondents pointed out the difficulty in forcing a 2-tier rule for vaccinated vs. unvaccinated students and the discipline issues that could result. He noted that it is the position of the BWEA that everyone be safe and healthy.

Chairperson McBride closed the Public Comment portion of the meeting.

**VII. Adjournment**

Motion was made by Mr. Cabral; 2nd by Ms. Thibaudeau, to adjourn the meeting. All approved the motion. The meeting was adjourned at approximately 9:25 pm.

**Respectfully submitted,**

**Victor Cabral, Secretary  
/dbc**