

**Work Session Meeting
December 7, 2020**

Opening

Call to Order

At 6:05 p.m. School Board President Michael Marasco called the December 7, 2020, Caesar Rodney School District Work Session Meeting to order.

Roll Call

Members present in addition to President Marasco were Vice President, Ms. Jessica Marelli, Board Members Mr. Dave Failing, Dr. Joyce Denman, Mr. P. Scott Wilson, and Executive Secretary Dr. Kevin Fitzgerald.

Adoption of Agenda

Mr. Failing made a motion to adopt the December 7, 2020 agenda as presented. Ms. Marelli seconded the motion and after roll call, the motion carried 5-0 (Marasco, Marelli, Failing, Wilson, and Denman).

Update on School Re-Opening

President Marasco asked Dr. Fitzgerald about today's report from Governor. Delaware Public Health (DPH) has new data released. All of Kent County is still red status with the other counties also moving to red status. Numbers have gotten worse since last week. The state is seeing increased numbers of positive cases. Governor Carney stated he wants school districts to consider taking a pause on hybrid learning from 12/14 and ending on 1/11. Most districts have moved in this direction. In regards to operations, we have been challenged because of Covid positive cases and/or staff who are quarantined.

President Marasco reflected back to last week. He feels the Board made the right decision at that time. After speaking to several principals and parents he understands the challenge to manage operations.

Mr. Failing thanked the district staff and administration for piecing this all together. He continued to state the quarantine numbers are high and this affects many people. We are containing the spread and he agrees with President Marasco on the performance of the staff. The spread is coming from the community into the buildings. He stated he wants the kids back in school but he understands the challenges operationally. Our staff have been asked to do some much more. Now is time for positivity and we need to thank them. We were correct in predicting the spike over the holiday. We should deal with the facts in a positive way.

Ms. Marelli stated last week she was hopeful we could open to a hybrid format this week. We made that decision due to the increase in cases. She stated the numbers have gotten worse. She is disappointed with the Governor's statement about going remote until the 11th. She is open to discussion but is disappointed about the decision to go remote. She continued to state we have to do what we have to do at this time.

Dr. Denman stated she also gave thanks the staff and expressed how grateful she is for all of their hard work. Operational challenges are real. Principals and teachers can only do so much. She referred back to the summer when our opening plan was pretty good. At this point, the data has shown significant spread from the community. She continued to state she was very proud of all staff members. She is also disappointed but stated we can't will the virus away. We must go with the data and make a decision.

Mr. Wilson stated agree with going with the data. He stated the data suggests schools need to be open. Children have a low chance of getting the virus and staff are getting it from outside the schools. You can't hide from the virus. He continued to state kids are better off in the buildings. Increase challenges exist with operations but he believes we should be in a hybrid format. DPH is all over the place and changes their recommendations frequently, but they are not mandating anything. The importance is for our children to get an education. We have taken the necessary precautions. He referred to his wife who is a teacher and stated he understands the need for schools and the operational challenges. The depression, social isolation, etc. is causing more long-term harm.

President Marasco agreed but his concern is the operational challenges in each school. He mentioned students may end up doing remote learning in the buildings with the staff shortage. It's a tough situation. He stated he is happy with the positive feedback with the remote learning running simultaneously with hybrid. He feels remote has stepped up the game and he feels the quality will remain.

Tara Faircloth gave an update on remote learning. Professional development for remote instruction was done well and extensive training with teachers has been done. This is ongoing. Resource teachers have been working to meet the teacher's needs. Consultants are also being utilized. We have adjusted based on our current status. She gave kudos to several staff members on her team. They are pushing out reminders for staff for the most current instruction information.

President Marasco stated based on the state hot spot and operational challenges, he feels we should go remote for two weeks before winter break. It is not optimal, but a wise decision to go to remote learning. The quality of hybrid models and operational challenges exist and it is not fair to continue to open and close back up.

Mr. Failing stated he agrees with why kids need to be in school. It is very important. He asks if we can staff adequately. Buying extra time for remote learning is the most responsible decision right now with the hope that we can get back to hybrid relatively fast.

President Marasco asked about the work session meetings and which dates the Board would like to meet. He reiterated tonight's discussion leads to going remote until the 14th and then have winter break. He would like to continue the weekly meetings.

Ms. Marelli shared some parents have stated that Europe has been in school the whole time. She continued to share that the rest of that country is completely shut down. They are prioritizing education. She has concerns about traveling over winter break and another spike is a concern. She asks for consideration from the Board on going to remote learning before the break with remote learning for the week after break. Her preference is hybrid learning until the break and going to remote for the week after break. But she understands the Governor's recommendation. Mr. Failing stated extra there will be exposure over the break. Ms. Marelli stated she would be more comfortable if there were no traveling, but the community will travel.

Mr. Wilson stated the discussion about after break is premature. There's no guarantee cases will go up. He continued to state that we can lead or we can follow. He agrees we should only pause for the shortest period we can. He continued to state with a vaccine or not, the virus is not going away. It is going to spread. The more things open up more cases we will see. He suggests a time frame to have students quickly return to school. He stated the data shows hospitals and testing, not school data. He believes we should look at a week or bi-weekly review. Some students would be better off if they are remote in our buildings instead of being in their homes.

Dr. Denman asked about testing protocols. Is there a discussion about helping districts with a robust testing program? Dr. Fitzgerald stated DPH was working with East Side Charter as this was a pilot. The districts are looking into this. This testing would be voluntary. We have had those discussions with DPH and it is worth looking into.

Lt. Col Wilkerson thanked everyone for their passion. Military families are trying to manage remote learning. He shared families need to plan on what they will need to do. Longer periods and a timeline are better for families to plan ahead.

President Marasco stated the Board can continue to meet and make informed decisions. Mr. Wilson would like the Board to reevaluate before winter break for a decision on 1/4/21. Stability is understood, but children outside of the base are also a concern. If we pause, he would like to look at this again for after winter break. He stated we need to find creative ways for the operational challenges. If we plan to pause until after winter break, we can come up with a plan for those challenges. Parents miss the school social interaction. He understands it is frustrating and feels we should limit remote learning.

Dr. Fitzgerald stated the principals and all staff have been very creative in keeping schools open. We have kept operations going and we are continuing to be creative with staff shortages. He continued to state we are committed to our students. We may need to take a step back and review. He shared the dates of winter break. Lt. Col. Wilkerson stated the staff can't recharge over winter break not knowing what the plan is for after winter break. They need to know before the winter break.

Dr. Denman thinks we should consider the week after winter break. Experts stated there will be a spike. She is in favor of making a decision tonight. We need to decide to plan accordingly. President Marasco stated the weekly work sessions will be difficult with the winter break.

Dr. Denman made a motion to stay with remote learning until Jan. 11th but corrected this date to be Jan. 8, 2021, with going into hybrid learning on Jan. 11.202. Mr. Failing stated we must be aggressive with getting the students back to school. He seconded the motion and after roll call, the motion carried 4-0 (Marasco, Marelli, Failing, and Denman) with one opposed (Wilson).

President Marasco stated the Board work sessions will continue on 12/14 and 1/4/21. Ms. Marelli stated we will need time for families to plan accordingly. She also would like the Board to commit to a date to reopen in hybrid learning. Lt. Col Wilkerson recommended Tuesday the 5th to allow for more staff attendance data. The Board decided to keep the meeting date on Monday, 1/4.

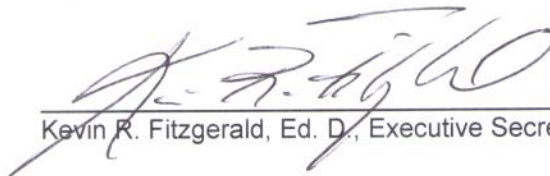
Dr. Fitzgerald shared the district would like to send the next parent survey out tomorrow. Dr. Tamara Toles-Torain, Executive Assistant to the Superintendent, shared this survey is for parents to decide future instruction for their learning setting and to request transportation. It is only for those making a change and will be available via the online survey software.

Executive Session

At 7:02 p.m. Ms. Marelli made a motion to go into Executive Session and for the meeting to be adjourned without returning to the general session. Dr. Denman seconded the motion and the motion carried 5-0. (Marasco, Marelli, Failing, Wilson, and Denman).

Adjournment

At 8:05 p.m., Mr. Marasco adjourned the meeting.


Kevin R. Fitzgerald, Ed. D., Executive Secretary 12/15/20 Date

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