

**Work Session
March 30, 2021**

Opening

Call to Order

At 6:02 p.m. School Board President Michael Marasco called the March 30, 2021, Caesar Rodney School District Work Session to order.

Roll Call

Members present in addition to President Marasco were Vice President Jessica Marelli, Board Members Mr. Dave Failing, Dr. Joyce Denman, and Executive Secretary Dr. Kevin Fitzgerald. Mr. P. Scott Wilson was not present.

Adoption of Agenda

Mr. Failing made a motion to adopt the March 30, 2021 agenda as presented. Dr. Denman seconded the motion and after roll call, the motion carried 4-0 with one absent (Marasco, Marelli, Failing, and Denman).

Discussion Items

President Marasco started the conversation. He mentioned the last meeting where a discussion took place for returning students to school five days a week. He stated although this is a great effort from the team., The Board recognizes this is too big of a disruption at this time. The Board continues to make tough decisions and they are committed to having in-person learning this fall. The mystery is how it will look. The vaccinations given and the Governor will play a part. The board is definitely exploring ways to have in-person learning for the fall. They will be reactivating the committee and adding stakeholders to collaborate. They plan to bring in expert input well in advance of the start of next semester. They are committed to figuring out all challenges. They would like to make in-person learning happen while being aware of our limitations. The Board wants everyone to move forward and be on the same team.

Mr. Failing added for us to do this, we need the state to give us funding for staffing and busses. We will need this support. We want them back in school, but understand some may not want to return. We will certainly need that support.

Dr. Fitzgerald gave some stats for this past week. We currently have eight staff quarantined and our students remain in line with the state dashboard which does not report below eleven. We are reconstituting the instruction committee for consideration for next year. We should have tentative plans by the end of May with a plan for several contingencies. We are planning to involve stakeholders in the decision-making process. Dr. Fitzgerald continued to share the state assessments are still on hold, but the longer it goes, the less optimistic we are. There must be a public hearing for a waiver. We have been given a shortened window for testing. Currently, we are at a crossroads. We continue to support the Secretary of Education and we support postponing the state assessments. We are making plans if we are required to give it. As a reminder, accountability is not tied to the students or staff this year. It is just measuring student progress. He reminded the Board that remote (or at home) testing is not an option for test-takers, they must come into the building to test. We are reluctant to take instruction time away from our hybrid students. We are simply continuing the Secretary of Education discussion, but it will be the Federal Government's final decision.

Mrs. Tara Faircloth, Director of Instruction and Curriculum, gave the Board an update. At this time we are not able to have only one cohort. There are added challenges for the 3 ft. social distancing requirement. Mainly students can't eat in the classroom. We continue to brainstorm if there is a need for this in the fall. We don't want that as an obstacle for us. Our principals have looked at their rooms and are looking at what is best for their students. We continue to explore options, but having one cohort is not an option at this time. Transportation is still part of the conversation. We continue to review those possibilities.

Mr. Failing asked about the 3 ft. social distancing, those who may test positive, and quarantine rules. Dr. Tamara Toles-Torain, Executive Assistant to the Superintendent, stated the 3 ft. requirement changes the DPH response for exposure requiring the whole class to quarantine. This also applies if the teacher tests positive.

President Marasco reminded the Board that our secondary students are moving from classroom to classroom. So any isolation requirement is a concern.

Ms. Marelli asked Dr. Jason Bonner, Transportation Supervisor, about the bus requirements and the 23 pupils on a bus. Dr. Bonner stated there have been no changes. It is still 23 pupils on a bus with the seat behind the bus driver must be vacant. The school district has an obligation to provide bussing to our students by law. Those students outside the walk zone must have transportation provided. We have tried double bus runs, but there are limitations with having enough drivers that can do this is a problem. We are operating at full capacity. The Allen Frear Elementary run is overfilled. Ms. Marelli asked about people seeing empty buses. Dr. Bonner stated there are two runs which include one for elementary and one for secondary. The elementary run is full, where the secondary run may not be full. Elementary schools are full but those students are not visible. Secondary runs have approximately 15-18 on a bus. Including those who are absent that day, this is the max. We can't add more students.

President Marasco left the meeting and Ms. Marelli took over running the meeting for President Marasco.

David E. Robinson Elementary School

Mr. John Laznik, University of DE, gave a presentation on the evaluation done of the district's elementary schools. Looking at Robinson Elementary, it will be ready for the fall of 2021. He began by stating he has preserved current boundaries and shared information on feeder patterns for the elementary levels. He shared data including enrollment, capacity, and the immersion programs. Star Hill, Brown, and Frear are over capacity. The challenge is the uncertainty for kindergarten enrollment with students staying home remotely. McIlvaine currently represents all kindergarten students. A comparison for the last four years was shared. Birth statistics were also shared. Robinson Elementary could assist with capacity issues. There are some potential solutions with Robinson Elementary allows for 600 students. Preserving the current boundaries, his proposal is to make Robinson Elementary the new school for the Star Hill students in the fall of 2021. It stays in the feeder pattern. The Spanish Immersion Program could go to Robinson Elementary which has a larger capacity for students. This is more in line with feeder patterns. This would also allow for Star Hill to be a flex space for this year and possibly an early childhood center later. The District could bring other programs there. He stated we are trying to look at past and future information at this time. This doesn't solve all problems but allows for capacity relief.

Dr. Denman asked for more clarification on the elementary feeder patterns. Mr. Laznik stated they are digitalized for discussion purposes. This was done for the demographic area and/or balancing. Over the next four years, we could add Spanish Immersion students to Robinson Elementary.

Ms. Marelli asked about the over-capacity numbers of McIlvaine. Currently, they are 75 students over their capacity. Last year they were 111 over. Birth statistics predict they will be over capacity for a while. Dr. Fitzgerald mentioned the 2-4 yr. old students in the early childhood program. They could also move to Star Hill. There is a need to expand the early childhood program at Nellie Hughes Stokes Elementary and the John S. Charlton Schools. We will continue to identify students at an earlier age. This is a plan for one year for us to evaluate. Star Hill would be flex space this fall. Then we would re-evaluate the elementary schools. Ms. Marelli asked for the early childhood student numbers. She continued to inquire about what we could do for the elementary schools that are over capacity. She stated she may be in favor of moving Star Hill to Robinson Elementary for one year allowing time to re-evaluate.

Mr. Laznik shared we have 212 elementary students currently coming from outside the district. It is the control the district has moving into the next year's school choice numbers. Ms. Marelli would like to see relief for Brown and Frear. Dr. Toles-Torain asked if these numbers include the pods in these schools for classroom space. Dr. Fitzgerald stated the special programs could move. We could also tweak the feeder patterns to see what adjustments we can make. More growth is coming. We just don't know when that will be here.

Dr. Denman stated the 3 & 4 yr. old students are not included in the Stokes and Charlton numbers. We would need state money renovations for Star Hill. Dr. Fitzgerald stated this is a first look at the presentation.

Everyone thanked Mr. Laznik stating it is greatly appreciated. It is the first step with how we reshape our elementary schools in the future.

Middle School Realignment

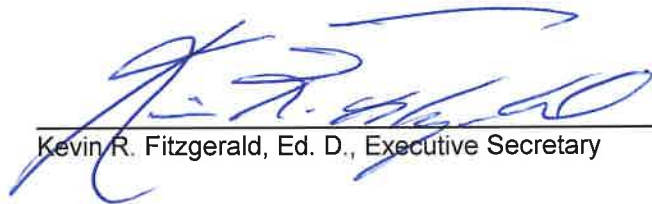
Dr. Micheal Noel, Assistant Superintendent/HR Director, shared there were no further questions over the last two weeks. Ms. Marelli asked when we will notify parents. Dr. Noel stated this would happen when Board approves the plan. Dr. Fitzgerald included this will be on the April agenda as an action item.

Executive Session

There was no Executive Session.

Adjournment

At 6:49 p.m. Dr. Denman made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Mr. Failing seconded the motion and after roll call, the motion carried 3-0 with two absent (Marelli, Failing, and Denman).


Kevin R. Fitzgerald, Ed. D., Executive Secretary 4/20/21
Date