

**Work Session
April 12, 2021**

Opening

Call to Order

At 6:05 p.m. School Board President Michael Marasco called the April 12, 2021, Caesar Rodney School District Work Session to order.

Roll Call

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

Adoption of Agenda

Mr. Failing made a motion to adopt the April 12, 2021 agenda as presented. Ms. Marelli seconded the motion and after roll call, the motion carried 4-0 with one absent (Marasco, Marelli, Failing, and Wilson).

Discussion Items

Dr. Fitzgerald gave an update on COVID stats. Prior to the break, we had 92% attendance with a few staff members quarantined. Student numbers are still within the range of the state dashboard.

President Marasco began the discussion by giving the Board's preliminary intentions for the start of the 2021-22 school year. He reminded everyone that August 24th is the start date for CR. The Board definitely would like to get kids back full-time (in-person) all five days of the week. He stated as a district we have done our very best and successfully provided hybrid instruction. He wanted the community to know they are planning to come back in person. His belief is we would have approximately 75% of students wanting to come back in person, but this depends on the Governor's call for a remote option. He suggests the planning be done at the building level having principals come up with their individual plans. He wants the principals to reach out to parents. Teams of teachers and support of the District Office team would be needed. There are a lot of questions and challenges. He is aware that additional state funds are needed for more equipment and bussing. The Board would like to start those legislative discussions now. We need to be aggressive now to make this happen. The Board realizes every school district in the state is dealing with this. It is achievable and we have excellent staff in place to make it happen.

Dr. Denman joined the meeting.

Mr. Failing agreed with President Marasco. There are lots of challenges ahead. He believes we have learned a lot of things that can help us plan better to pull this off. He suggests we provide in-person instruction five days a week (full days) with a remote option if parents still need that. An option could be providing staff for only remote learning. These staff members would only teach remotely. Another option is to offer vaccinations at the school building level. The more vaccines we have the faster we can get back to normal. He believes we should encourage getting vaccines. He stated we should be the leaders in this and take the information we currently have and plan as much as possible now.

Ms. Marelli shared a great way to start is to survey our parents and students. We need to get a good grasp of what the community wants. What does 75% of returning students realistically look like? She feels we should be able to offer 100% coming back in-person, full-time. She stated we already know who prefers in-person learning. We need to know who still prefers remote.

President Marasco asked about providing a survey.

Dr. Fitzgerald asked the Board if the Governor says to come back 100% are we offering both remote and hybrid options? He reminded the Board that committees are currently being formed with community members,

board members (if they wish), and staff members. The plan is to have a survey by the middle of May depending on Governor. We are all in agreement to have 100% of our students come back on Aug 24th. We also understand that some parents may not be ready. He asked the Board if we would still offer remote services. He mentioned the Kent County Consortium providing online services. It is difficult to staff based on students staying home. We are moving forward with a survey and on the assumption, we will be 100% open.

President Marasco agrees that they want 100% of students back, but this has challenges. He feels this will be difficult to enforce. Realistically, we may have to have a remote option. He strongly supports a survey at the principal level. This should be done quickly and returned to the Board fast. He would like an elementary and secondary survey created by the principals.

Dr. Denman stated we should provide data to parents on vaccinations sharing as much information as possible. Ms. Marelli wasn't sure if this is possible, but we can give thoughts on what may happen in the fall. She feels a survey result will be a high number of in-person returning students. She agrees we need to have possible numbers before we can start planning and later we can deal with the Governor's restrictions.

Mr. Failing stated there are big questions to ask. There are issues with social distancing, buses, meals, and vaccinations, etc. He believes the state must be more flexible. Now is the time to project and start working on the plan.

President Marasco also stated we need additional nursing staff and mental health services. He would like CR to take the lead and get legislators in our buildings. We should talk about state support for returning in person. We need to instruct principals to come up with what their needs are for returning. Dr. Fitzgerald shared we have already started the process. He is unsure of a quicker turnaround time to get surveys if the principals create this. He assured the Board we will expedite this matter the best way we can. We continue to work with the Department of Education (DOE) with the Cares Act funding and the ways to utilize it. We are ahead of most other districts in the state. We plan to finish this year strong and find the best way to open next year.

President Marasco agreed we have handled the restraints the best way we could. We have learned many new things including technology. We have an amazing staff and tremendous resources at the District Office. The lack of decision-making at DOE and the Governor's Office has been the problem. He doesn't foresee a change in that before August. He believes we need to look at other ways to get things done quicker. He stated the principals know their parents and students the best.

Dr. Fitzgerald shared his frustration. He stated we have learned there are other ways to provide good education. Our departments have worked closely with all buildings. We are looking at making modifications. We would be happiest if we bring everyone back, but we understand the challenges and know it will take a total team effort. There is a lot of uncertainty and we want to improve on what we have done and make it even better next year.

President Marasco continued to state we need to look at projections now and make those plans. Could remote only teachers be an option? We need to utilize the principal and have them take the lead with a survey and bring that information to the Board.

Mr. Failing is not critical of the Governor as he made the decision to keep people safe. We have all tried to do the best we could do. We are not reversing that decision. He believes educators are the experts for education. There are a lot of variables. He reminded the Board that we will need funding.

Mrs. Kim Judy, Director of Business and Finance, stated we have received one allotment of Cares Act money. Dr. Denman asked about what things are in place for this money. Mrs. Judy stated there has been collaboration at the district level. She doesn't think anything has been denied for any request. Funds are allocated for all requested items for everyone's needs. Dr. Denman stated we should share this in the survey. Principals can state we have done this and this to prepare for returning students. We know there will be a small group that may not want to return and we need to meet those needs, as well. Asked about what age vaccines are available. Marasco asked if we could have one of our schools as a vaccination site.

Ms. Marelli clarified her previous statement. The survey is simply a gauge of what the community wants. More importantly, is to have surveys back before committees begin their work. This gives leverage when we talk to legislators. A survey with real commitment can come later.

Dr. Fitzgerald is concerned that the school's surveys would not be consistent. This should be a joint effort. Ms. Marelli stated this needs to be out now and we simply can't wait six weeks for it to be distributed. We have

to have a basis to start planning. Dr. Fitzgerald stated we could create this by end of the week with information returned next week. Ms. Marelli stated she has heard some districts have decided that remote students are not eligible for sports, extra activities, etc. She wondered if this could be an option. Dr. Fitzgerald stated the survey phrasing needs to be clear. One question could simply do you want to come back in person? Then we could follow up as needed. Current percentages of remote students were shared with the Board.

In conclusion, Mr. Failing stated we need to keep it simple. Two questions including the vaccination site option should be the survey. He suggested the following.

- 1) "The Caesar Rodney School District is in the early planning process for the beginning of next school year. And if we offer in-person learning and offer remote learning at the beginning of next school year, what would be your choice at this time?"
- 2) "The Caesar Rodney School District is looking into the possibility of having a vaccination site. If it was offered, would you be interested in sending your children (16 and above) to that site?"

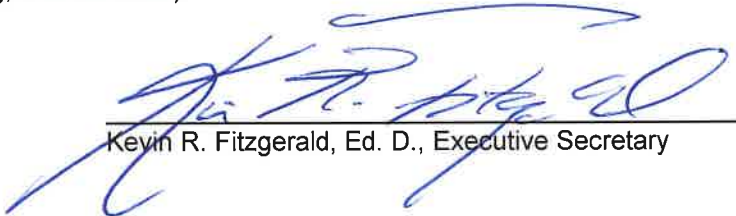
Dr. Fitzgerald stated we will create that and share this with principals with the intention to distribute the survey by the end of the week. The goal is to have results by the next meeting.

Executive Session

There was no Executive Session.

Adjournment

At 6:59 p.m. Mr. Failing made a motion to go adjourn. Dr. Denman seconded the motion and the motion carried 4-0. (Marasco, Marelli, Failing, and Denman).


Kevin R. Fitzgerald, Ed. D., Executive Secretary 4/20/23
Date