Work Session
May 10, 2021

Opening

Call to Order

At 6:02 p.m. School Board President Michael Marasco called the May 10, 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, 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 May 10, 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

CRHS Graduation

Dr. Sherry Kijowski, CRHS Principal, shared based on the additional guidance from the Governor's office & the Department of Public Health (DPH), we will have two ceremonies (9 am & 11 am) instead of four. This is roughly 256 grads per ceremony with four guest tickets per grad. They will be using both sides of the stadium. She continued with reminders on other senior activities. This Saturday will be the parade and promenade. These will be open-air events at the school and focusing on post-graduation plans, etc. There will be banners on buses and a DJ will be present. If the weather is not good the date pushes to Sunday. Mr. Failing asked if the parade was for just seniors. Dr. Kijowski confirmed all events are for seniors only. Families are permitted. Dr. Fitzgerald asked about securing tickets for graduation. Dr. Kijowski explained tickets will be available and signed out by the student or a family member the week before graduation. Information for ordering caps and gowns will go out via social media posts. Dr. Kijowski continued to share information on guest tickets for the Honor Cord Ceremony and Senior Awards Night. Honor Cord (4 tickets per student) will be held in the stadium and awards night (two tickets per student) in the auditorium.

Elementary Realignment

President Marasco asked about the potential for realignment. Dr. Michael Noel, Assistant Superintendent/Director of HR, and Mr. John Laznik, University of Delaware, joined the meeting. Mr. Laznik is currently working on a plan utilizing the Star Hill Elementary (SHE) building. They are recommending a phase one realignment for next year with a full realignment the following year. They have considered the feedback received. The recommendation for the 2021-22 school year is to open the David E. Robinson Elementary School (DER) with SHE and include overflow from other schools. The overcapacity at Allen Frear Elementary (AFE) will be addressed. For the 2022-23 school year they will look into SHE and DER elementary schools and assign students based on capacity and programs. The approval for elementary full realignment would be in the fall.

Dr. Noel stated the goal is to get most kids back in 21-22 with alternative learning space. They are looking into different scenarios. They are working through a proposal for realignment for elementary schools allowing for more balance moving forward. President Marasco likes the idea of using SHE as an alternative location for learning space. He is excited to see what Mr. Laznik and his team will come up with.

Dr. Failing thanked Dr. Noel and Mr. Laznik for working with the Board. There was a lot of insight given and he has a different understanding now. He is pleased with the direction. Dr. Denman agreed. She included we are fortunate that DER was ready and we can start back with proper rules in place. She also thanked Mr. Laznik for providing more information. This will minimize future student moves. Ms. Marelli agreed with the direction of the plan moving forward.

Update on School Reopening

Dr. Fitzgerald introduced Mrs. Tara Faircloth, Director of Curriculum and Instruction. Mrs. Faircloth gave some updated plans for reopening the schools with the current COVID restrictions.

Her team has met with principals to see how many students per classroom and what additional staff is needed. We can accommodate 100% of students back. McIlvaine Early Childhood Center (MCI) is approaching capacity and they are carefully watching this. At the secondary level, there will be a nine-period day. This allows us to not provide "room and zoom" instruction. This is still a work in progress but she stated constant communication is key. The main concern is lunch. They are determined to make it happen but are waiting on final guidance. They have several different plans for consideration. Summer programs are being planned in all grade levels. Pencil and paper packets will also be available this summer. They are piloting a breakfast idea at MCI where they would send breakfast home the night before so students can eat at home before school. The main goal continues to be getting students back 100%. Additional staff will be needed. They are finalizing this now and will work with Human Resources for job postings.

President Marasco inquired about how the nine-period day schedule is being received. Mrs. Faircloth explained the teacher's union (CREA) has stated feedback is mostly positive. This means smaller class sizes and no more "room and zoom" instruction with a 40 minute period. The principal support is also positive. She explained "room and zoom" instruction. This is when hybrid and live instruction happen at the same time with teachers teaching both live and student remotely at home.

President Marasco asked about the three feet social distancing requirement for eating areas. Mrs. Faircloth asked DPH for flexibility to cohort students. They are confident they can manage the three-foot requirement by maximizing space. Dr. Denman asked about the summer programs. Mrs. Faircloth stated we will recruit students of need. Kindergarten needs to be face to face and MCI will be hosting students. Elementary is the same. Schools have called families. There will be online options available with teacher assistance for credit recovery at the secondary level. Social skills will be addressed. Before and after-school programs are available at all levels.

Mr. Failing thanked everyone for sharing all of that time with the planning. He stated funding is available and the instruction team is working hard. We will allow them to work and we all will continue to communicate well. he shared that we are all "driving the bus" now. It is not just one person.

Dr. Jason Bonner, Transportation Supervisor, gave an update on busing for the 2021-22 school year. They are frantically planning for next year. They are preparing to have a three-tiered system in place for next year. Each level would have its own start bell. All buses can do all runs at all levels in this system. He stated we need to use drivers more efficiently. He met with some contractors regarding this plan. Several contractors present shared they were not interested in doing three tiers. Another shared they are not thrilled and mentioned a need for additional funding. They are not confident they will have drivers to start the year. Currently, we are six drivers short in CR. Mr. Failing asked about the distancing rules changing. Dr. Bonner stated we would then have two runs. The John S. Charlton School (JSC) has exclusive buses for their special needs students.

Dr. Fitzgerald asked what we could recommend securing more drivers. Dr. Bonner is working with the Director of Business and Finance, Mrs. Kim Judy, to retain and recruit drivers. The CR salary hourly rate is the lowest in the state. We need to revisit full-time benefits to recruit. We would not pull drivers from contractors. We currently have 15 van drivers and we hope to offer an attractive package to make them bus drivers. Dr. Fitzgerald asked if the state is working with transportation supervisors for a solution. Dr. Bonner met with legislators recently. The legislators have asked the Governor for more funding for a three-tier option. They are aware and sensitive to our problems.

The conversation continued regarding contractors and the three-tier plan. The reason this is not attractive is that their drivers would be behind the wheel more. It would push drivers to full-time status and they would be entitled to receive benefits. Even with the funding we still can't provide drivers. If DPH lifts the 23 on a bus restriction, we won't have to go to a three-tier system. Dr. Bonner continued and stated we have no spare buses. The purchasing of more buses is being considered for CR. Routes and possible new drivers were discussed. Advertising plans for drivers were also shared.

President Marasco asked about other districts as a comparison and CR being the lowest paying for drivers. Dr. Bonner stated generally contractors don't offer benefits and most districts are having the same concerns. Salary scales were discussed. Approximately everyone else is offering $6 more per hour.
Ms. Marelli inquired about siblings not sitting together on the bus. Dr. Bonner shared current guidance states every student is one student to one seat. Recently, this is now being re-evaluated. We will be able to move to siblings to sit together, but we don't have the official word yet.

Mr. Failing asked about the number of buses in the district. 80+ buses are from contractors. Dr. Bonner shared that every year we look at the same problem of driver pay. We push to increase but the JFC has limited funds and they prioritize. Dr. Bonner continued to share we often lose drivers to DART because they offer a pension position.

President Marasco asked for a funding update. Mrs. Judy stated we are looking at the budget to make sure we are covered in the areas of need. This is in conjunction with what we have already used. More guidance with where students will be going would allow for us to budget better. Staffing is the biggest chunk and transportation is also a large portion. Facilities Management is something we are waiting on for guidance. This includes storage needs, as well.

Dr. Fitzgerald announced the CDC just approved the Pfizer vaccine for 12-15 yr. olds. Rite Aid has contacted CRHS to offer a drive-thru clinic on May 19th and the Board supports this. Dr. Kijowski will work to get this information out. Dr. Denman asked about families receiving the vaccine. Dr. Fitzgerald stated the last time they offered it to families and we would recommend this. Mr. Failing thanked Rite Aid and said they have a great plan in place for this administration.

Base Liaison, Lt. Col. Michael Mariotti, joined the meeting.

Executive Session

At 7:10 p.m. Mr. Failing made a motion to move into Executive Session. Ms. Marelli added to the 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 4-0. (Marasco, Marelli, Failing, and Denman).

Adjournment

At 8:45 p.m., Mr. Marasco adjourned the meeting.

Kevin R. Fitzgerald, Ed. D., Executive Secretary 5/18/21 Date

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