

Board of Education Special Meeting

September 27, 2021 6:00 PM

Deerfield Primary School Library

1100 Deerfield Blvd., Blair NE 68008

Information concerning the Open Meeting Law, Chapter 84, Article 14 of Nebraska State Statutes, was posted in the meeting room at a location accessible to members of the public and is attached to the online agenda for viewing. The online agenda can be viewed by visiting the Blair Community Schools website at www.blairschools.org. The meeting notice was published in the Washington County Pilot-Tribune & Enterprise on Tuesday, September 21st, 2021.

1. Call to Order

Mrs. Kari Loseke, President, called the Board of Education Special Meeting to order at 6:00pm.

2. Roll Call

Present Board Members: Steve Callaghan, Ginger Fredericksen, Kari Loseke, Deb Parks, Brittney Gunderson, Denise Cada, Laura Ronning and Bob Schoby.

2.1. Approval of Absent Board Members

Motion Passed: I move to approve absent Board Member Brandi Petersen passed with a motion by Brittney Gunderson and a second by Deb Parks and the vote was unanimous.

3. Ad Hoc COVID-19 Committee

The COVID-19 Ad Hoc Committee met on Tuesday, September 21st at 7:30am at Deerfield Primary in the Administration Conference Room. A Zoom Link was also available and three (3) committee members met via Zoom.

Ad Hoc participants were: Kari Loseke, School Board President; Deb Parks, School Board Policy Committee Chair; Brittney Gunderson, School Board Member; Megan Harding, K-2 Principal; Kyle Johnson, 3-5 Principal; Brett Schwartz, 6-8 Principal; Tammy Holcomb, 9-12 Principal; Dan Hutsell, Activities Director; Randy Gilson, Superintendent; Dr. Danielle Ladwig, Director of Learning; Dr. Ryan O'Grady, Director of Student Services; and Tom Anderson, Director of Operations.

The purpose of the meeting was upon the request of Blair Community Schools Board of Education to have an Ad Hoc Committee be appointed by Board President, Kari Loseke, to review the effectiveness of the 2021-22 Blair Community School's COVID-19 Return to Learning Plan and provide recommendations to the Board of Education.

The Ad Hoc Team reviewed current COVID-19 cases at Blair Community School and throughout Washington County. The committee also evaluated layered COVID-19 preventive procedures, and considered Blair Community Schools parents input into mediations. In July, a School Reopening Plan was shared along with a parent input survey. 212 responded to the survey. At the time, 86% of parents responding supported the School's Reopening Plan, which did not require students or staff to wear face masks. Only ten responded at the time that they wanted BCS to have a face mask requirement.

In September 2021, a second survey was sent to all parents and families of Blair Community Schools students. 721 parents who represent over 1300 of our total 2262 students responded to the survey. 70% of respondents are in favor of keeping face coverings optional. Just 35% recommended for Blair Community Schools to require a Universal Mask Mandate for all

students and staff. About half responded that they would be in favor of a hybrid masking requirement.

Principals reported that teachers are stressed, tired, and spend approximately an hour extra per day dealing with COVID-19 quarantines and communication. Principals are spending half to 80% of each day dealing with COVID-19 contact tracing, communication with parents about quarantines, and developing plans to support student academic, social, emotional, and physical concerns related to COVID-19 illnesses. Principals share that academic improvement is suffering from the effects of COVID-19 much more this year than last.

All principals agree that not having defined black and white procedures for preventing and dealing with COVID-19 cases has made the 2021-22 school year much more disruptive than 2020-21. The prior year, all students were required to wear masks and quarantines were clearly defined. This year, quarantines are optional based on students self-reporting symptoms and positive COVID-19 cases are much greater.

There was no question that getting and keeping students in schools is the primary goal of each Ad Hoc Committee member. Principals wanted cut and dry criteria for preventing COVID-19 and dealing with COVID-19 positive cases.

The Ad Hoc Committee asked that the School Board plan a Special Board meeting for Monday, September 27 at 6:00 p.m. They recommended that Blair Community Schools continue to utilize all layers of mediation in the Return to Learn Plan, but that the plan be revised to include the following:

"Recommendation to keep masks optional for all students and staff. If there is a COVID-19 positive case in a classroom, masks* will be encouraged. If two students test positive for COVID-19 within a 14-day time period, masks will be required for all students and staff in that classroom or activity** for up to 14-days beginning from the day the COVID-19 positive person was last in attendance. BCS will follow Board Policy 508.03-R1-Communicable Diseases Procedure*** for students who are symptomatic or refuse to wear a mask. Without a State of Nebraska Directed Health Measure, BCS will not conduct contact tracing or require students who are not COVID-19 positive to quarantine."

*BCS will provide multiple (three-layered) breathable disposable masks each day for students and staff who are required to wear face coverings.

**Masks are required for locker rooms and on side lines, but not during active participation in the activity.

***Communicable Diseases Procedure:

Blair Community Schools will follow Policy 508.03R1-Communicable Diseases Procedure, for students who are symptomatic or refuse to wear a mask.

Communication about small group learning:

Small group learning is critical to the academic achievement and mental health of all students. Teachers will continue pulling students into partnerships and small groups. When the length of a small group is longer than 15 minutes or teachers feel that there will be prolonged close contact, teachers will ask, but not require, students to mask for that small group.

Communication AND phone call when COVID-19 is present in the home:

The health department recommends self-monitoring at home for 10-14 days when COVID-19 is present in the home as well as isolating the positive family members. BCS does not require

quarantine but encourages a few days at home or masking if possible. This is a household decision, and you will be supported whatever you decide.

Statements were heard by the school board, administrators and Dr. Gilson. They thanked the parents for taking time to complete the survey and providing the feedback. The Ad Hoc Committee was able to use the results as they considered recommendations for modifications to the Return to Learn Plan. It was clear the top priority of the committee is to keep the kids in school and decrease the number of daily absences. They have all received a tremendous amount of public opinion as to how the school should or shouldn't be dealing with COVID-19. While public opinion has been strong in opposition to masking, there have been those who are in favor of mask mandating. It is the job of the school board to do what is best for all students in the community.

Motion Passed: I move to approve the modifications to the Blair Community Schools 2021-22 Reopening Plan as follows; to keep masks optional for all students and staff. If there is a COVID-19 positive case in a classroom, masks will be encouraged. If two students test positive for COVID-19 within a 14-day time period, masks will be required for all students and staff in that classroom or activity for up to 14-days beginning from the day the COVID-19 positive person was last in attendance. Blair Community Schools will follow Board Policy 508.03-R1-Communicable Diseases Procedure or students who are symptomatic or refuse to wear a mask. Without a State of Nebraska Directed Health Measure, Blair Community Schools will not conduct contact tracing or require students who are not COVID-19 positive to quarantine passed with a motion by Steve Callaghan and a second by Brittney Gunderson and the vote was unanimous.

4. Adjournment

The Board of Education Special Meeting adjourned at 6:48pm.

Motion Passed: I move to adjourn the meeting at 6:48pm passed with a motion by Laura Ronning and a second by Deb Parks and the vote was unanimous.

Angie Conety
Board Secretary

Randall Gilson, Ed.D.
Superintendent