

SAULT STE. MARIE AREA PUBLIC SCHOOLS
SAULT STE. MARIE, MICHIGAN 49783
SPECIAL MEETING, BOARD OF EDUCATION
Phone 906/635-6609

Minutes – Tuesday, October 6, 2020

86. **I. CALL TO ORDER**

President Smith called the meeting to order at 5:30 p.m. in the Sault Area Middle School, 684 Marquette Avenue, Sault Ste. Marie, MI 49783

A. ROLL CALL OF BOARD

Board Members Present: Daniel L. Smith, Melissa S. Pingatore,
Jay D. Wilson, Joseph A. Cochran
Board Members Virtually Present: Lisa A. Young, Christine M. Curtis
Absent: Martin R. Wolski

Member Wolski joined the meeting virtually at 5:32 p.m.

87. **B. ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA**

It was moved by Member Wilson, supported by Member Cochran, that the Board of Education move to adopt the agenda as revised.

Add: II A. 1. Athletics – Steve Lockwood
2. District Learning Plan – Dr. Tim Hall

Yeas: Wilson, Smith, Pingatore, Cochran, Curtis, Young, Wolski
Nays: None
Absent: None
Motion Carried.

II. COMMUNICATIONS

88. **A. REPORTS TO THE BOARD**

1. Athletics - Steve Lockwood

Mr. Lockwood presented an update from MHSAA on the reduction of spectator limits at inside and outside sporting venues.

Mr. Lockwood reported effective today, 20% of the seating capacity or up to 500 spectators are allowed at inside venues with fixed seating. He

confirmed the high school gym has a capacity of 1200, which allows for 240 spectators. He further confirmed that coaches, band members, cheerleaders, and players are no longer counted in the spectator limit.

Mr. Lockwood reported schools will continue to plan for 2 spectator tickets per player and away coaches will submit their list to the home team coach so the home school can plan for subsequent seating available on a first come first serve basis at the gate or door.

Upon inquiry from Member Curtis, Mr. Lockwood confirmed the number of available seating includes the retractable bleachers and effective today, all of the seating will be made available so spectators can practice social distancing as much as possible.

Upon inquiry from Member Smith, Mr. Lockwood indicated the district may be asked to host quarterly or regional finals which would require additional planning for spectators and cleaning, but he is not aware of any expectations at this point.

Upon inquiry from President Smith, Mr. Lockwood reported he has not had any athletes pass out or complain because of wearing masks. He indicated all of the athletes have been really good with following instructions and there hasn't been any issues.

2. District Learning Plan- Dr. Tim Hall

Mrs. Karen Senkus from the Chippewa County Health Department reported on the matrix of data used to support the possible need to close school due to COVID-19.

Dr. Hall stated the district remained open last year with 92-84% of students in attendance when the surrounding schools had to close due to illness. He indicated the district would most likely not wait until attendance dropped to 75% before closing.

Mrs. Senkus reported the following data is factored in the COVID matrix, which was developed with the Michigan Department of Health & Human Services and will be tweaked by the department as necessary, to support the decision for a school closure due to COVID: the number of positive COVID cases and risk factors in the state, county, local area, and at school, the percent of student absences at school, the number of positive cases, deaths, hospitalizations, and visits related to COVID per mile.

Upon inquiry from President Smith, Mrs. Senkus confirmed the state data used in the matrix is pulled from different departments.

Upon inquiry from President Smith, Mrs. Senkus reported the number of COVID cases, recovery rates, and contact tracing factors (such as when cases peaked) are part of the matrix in determining an area's risk factor.

Upon further inquiry from President Smith, Mrs. Senkus reported all of the county's data is used in determining the risk factor for a specific area, but the health department would also take into consideration what the data is for that specific area before making a recommendation to close a school.

Upon inquiry by Member Cochran, Mrs. Senkus reported the county COVID rate (which includes probable cases) is 85 and the total of recovery cases is 68.

Dr. Hall reported on the October 2 Governor's Executive Order 2020-192 to place the region back to Phase 4 effective October 9 at 12:01 a.m. after a surge in COVID-19 cases in the Western Upper Peninsula.

Dr. Hall reported shortly after the Executive Order was placed on October 2, the Michigan Supreme Court declared executive orders placed by the Governor after April 30 to be unconstitutional.

Dr. Hall reported on October 5, the Michigan Department of Health & Human Services (MDHHS) made it a requirement for all students who are more than five years of age to wear masks while in school effective immediately.

Dr. Hall reviewed the Phase 4 Hybrid learning plan in the initial Return to School Plan/Roadmap.

Dr. Hall reported the county map of COVID cases across the U.P. indicate the virus is moving our way and the district needs to continue to do its best to keep students and staff safe.

Dr. Hall reported he recently met with administrators, teachers, union representatives, managers, and staff about the current situation, and it has been determined that students and staff have done a great job following mask and sanitization guidelines along with the increased cleaning and disinfecting of the buildings, and the group feels the current Return to School Plan is working and there is no reason to move to a hybrid education plan at this time.

Dr. Hall confirmed he had consulted with attorneys from MASB and Thurn to confirm the MDHHS's order remains in effect until it either times out, is thrown out, or is revised by legislation.

Dr. Hall stated the Board is faced with either moving back to hybrid learning or keeping with the existing procedures and requiring students in grades kindergarten through 5 to wear masks all day.

President Smith announced the Board has basically two decisions to make, move to the hybrid learning plan or keep operating as is.

Member Cochran indicated he feels it is practical to have our students wear masks, as the transition could be smooth if the virus does come in from the west.

Upon inquiry from the Board, Dr. Hall stated it could take 3-4 days to transition fully to the hybrid model. Discussion ensued on the model of teaching.

Member Cochran stated he wasn't in favor of the hybrid model.

Member Wilson stated he didn't think the virus was big enough of a problem in this area to warrant a change. He stated enrollment numbers are up, and Dr. Hall has been doing an awesome job with making educational plan accommodations. He further indicated that he thinks the community is happy with the way the district is operating, and he doesn't want to get into a fiery mask wearing discussion. He stated he would like to make a motion to continue with the existing plan as it is working great.

Member Wolski stated he would like to continue with the existing plan and tweak it if necessary as we go along. He indicated the existing operations were working well and to keep moving forward.

Member Curtis stated the existing plan is working well for families, but she is not opposed to adjusting the plan if needed as she wants to ensure staff and students are safe.

Member Pingatore stated as long as we do not have any students or staff with COVID, she thinks the current plan is working and is reasonable.

President Smith stated he is glad the Board is all on the same page, and feels the Hybrid plan is a good alternative, but the numbers do not warrant a move to it at this point.

Dr. Hall indicated if the Board wants to add an action item, the Board needs to amend the agenda to add the item.

89. **III. REVISION TO THE AGENDA**

It was moved by Member Curtis, supported by Member Wilson, that the Board of Education amend the agenda to add action item *Phase 4 of the Return to School Plan*.

Yeas: Wilson, Smith, Pingatore, Cochran, Curtis, Young, Wolski
Nays: None
Absent: None
Motion Carried.

90. **IV. PHASE 4 OF THE RETURN TO SCHOOL PLAN**

It was moved by Member Wilson, supported by Member Pingatore, that the Board of Education amend Phase 4 of the Return to School Plan by removing the hybrid scheduling and continue face to face instruction as in Phase 5.

Yeas: Wilson, Smith, Pingatore, Cochran, Curtis, Young, Wolski
Nays: None
Absent: None
Motion Carried.

Upon inquiry from Member Curtis, Dr. Hall reported Tom Nelson and Ron McKechnie felt staff could increase cleaning without too much trouble. Dr. Hall reported DM Burr has been very helpful with all that the district has had to go through.

Dr. Hall raised for discussion the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services' order that all students in grades kindergarten through 12 wear masks all day.

Upon inquiry from Dr. Hall, Mrs. Karen Senkus of the Chippewa County Health Department reported the department agrees with MDHHS on the validity of having all students wear a mask as a precautionary measure to help stop the spread of the virus. She indicated that she couldn't expand any more on what Dr. Hall had already reported.

Upon inquiry from Member Young, Mrs. Senkus indicated she is looking for a more in-depth interpretation on if the MDHHS order includes phases.

President Smith inquired on the district's liability if the Board chose not to follow MDHHS's order for all students to wear masks. Dr. Hall reported the Board and individual members have broad governmental immunity, but if the Board chose not to follow the MDHHS directive, there is the potential that the district could no longer enjoy its immunity. Discussion ensued on the probable "domino effect" if an outbreak did occur.

Member Wilson stated the majority of communication he has had with parents indicate they don't want their young children to wear masks. He stated he is in favor of keeping things exactly the way they are as the district is doing well, enrolment has gone up, the community is happy, and he'd like to keep the school plan the way it is.

Member Cochran indicated he is aware a lot of people don't like to wear masks, but felt it was a good compromise in trying to keep everyone safe. He further noted that the directive expires October 30, which is less than 15 school days out, and then the Board could revisit its position then.

Dr. Hall reported if there were no changes between now and Monday, the order would still be in place, but it would be hard to say what could happen.

Member Wolski stated he would like to stay with the way the district is currently operating.

Member Young stated she would like to stay with the current way of operating for students in grades kindergarten through 5 and not require them to wear masks when they are in their classroom or cohort group. She further questioned MDHHS's order to include our county in its order as we have been stable.

Member Young indicated increased cleaning was a good idea, but suggested postponing the decision to make young children wear masks as there isn't any scientific evidence that is safe for them.

Member Curtis stated if MDHHS recommends wearing masks, the district should follow its order and err on the side of caution, but as soon as it expires or is appealed, the district could go back to not requiring them.

President Smith indicated no one would want to look back and say they should have had our kids wear masks because now they are sick, or if we had followed the state rules, we would not have lost funding.

Member Cochran suggested the district err on caution and follow the order.

President Smith stated he agreed with Member Cochran's point and there needs to be some give and take as we work through all of this.

Upon inquiry, Dr. Hall indicated the Board only needs to make a motion if they don't want to follow the state order.

91. V. ***MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES ORDER***

It was moved by Member Wilson, supported by Member Young, that the district stay the way it currently is and not require students in grades kindergarten through 5 to wear masks while they are with their cohort group.

Yeas: Wilson, Young, Wolski
Nays: Smith, Pingatore, Cochran, Curtis
Absent: None
Motion failed.

President Smith stated as a district, the Board needs to look at the safety and security of all the students and realize the Board can revisit it after the October 30 deadline.

Superintendent Hall confirmed the district would continue to operate as in phase 5, with additional cleaning, but with all students wearing masks.

Upon inquiry from Member Young, Dr. Hall indicated the mandate from Governor Whitmer is likely to be challenged, but legal counsel advises until the MDHHS' order expires on October 30, or is modified, or is thrown out, schools are bound by the order.

Upon inquiry from President Smith, Dr. Hall stated some outlying districts are requiring students to wear masks and others not, but he expects there will be transitions to wearing more masks on Monday per MDHSS's mandate.

Upon inquiry from Dr. Hall, Member Wilson indicated students in kindergarten through grade 12 are wearing masks at Rudyard School.

92. VI. ***AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION***

School Nurse Mary Michaels thanked the Board for deciding to include students in grades kindergarten through fifth to wear masks. She stated our community has done so well with the virus because of the plan and combined efforts by our stores and businesses requiring masks, citizens wearing them, and the border being closed. She noted it also helps support our physicians and hospital. Mrs. Michaels stated we need to keep a strong hold on our efforts if we want to keep moving forward. She indicated all of the masks, handwashing, and social distancing does help protect each other. Mrs. Michaels stated she understands Mrs. Young's side, but feels the Board's decision to have students and staff wear masks is the safest plan.

Lissa Kipka reported she supports the Board's decision in having students in grades kindergarten through five also wear masks while things are escalating. She indicated it is a small compromise to protect other kids. In reference to parents choosing to not have their child wear masks, she indicated she doesn't want to get

to the point of not wanting to send her kids to school because someone else doesn't want his or her child to wear one.

93. **VII. FUTURE PLANNING**

October 12 - Regular Board Meeting - 7 p.m. – Middle School
November 9 - Regular Board Meeting - 7 p.m. – Middle School

94. **VIII. ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business to come before the Board at 6:39 p.m., it was moved by Member Cochran, supported by Member Wilson, that the meeting be adjourned.

Yeas: Wilson, Smith, Pingatore, Cochran, Curtis, Young, Wolski
Nays: None
Absent: None
Motion Carried.

Daniel L. Smith, President

Melissa S. Pingatore, Board Secretary

Judy L. Sirk, Recording Secretary