

**Work Session  
November 29, 2021**

**Opening**

Call to Order

At 6:08 p.m. School Board President Michael Marasco called the November 29, 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, Mr. P. Scott Wilson, and Executive Secretary Dr. Kevin Fitzgerald.

Adoption of Agenda

Mr. Failing made a motion to adopt the November 29, 2021 agenda as presented. Ms. Marelli seconded the motion and after roll call, the motion carried 5-0 (Marasco, Marelli, Failing, and Denman).

**Discussion Items**

District Realignment Plan

Mr. Failing stated he reviewed the comments and noticed keeping the continuity after the pandemic was the main concern. He stated the district has struggled with social distancing mandates but doing the best we can. He continued to state anytime a student moves to another school time is needed for readjustment. Property value, distance to travel, and bussing were some additional concerns. We have higher density in some areas and this is why we were moving schools to avoid overcrowding, etc. He feels the district has done a great job with the realignment plan. He asked if there was something we could do to move easily into this. He stated we are aware of the challenges but the move has to be done. He is in favor of moving forward to get this done within the next month or two. He shared a school choice option for older elementary students.

Dr. Fitzgerald stated realignment means some staff members would also move to other buildings. This is difficult to do if you ease into the change. There are a lot of considerations regarding having a two-year plan. We would have to take a look at what it would take to see how we could roll that out to make it as smooth as possible. He feels it was in the best interest of staff and students to move forward now. Everyone will continue to receive the same quality of education. He appreciates the time that has gone into creating this plan. He stated if the board wants to take more time, it could mean some families would split up creating more disruption.

Ms. Marelli stated we started this plan five years ago. In her mind, we have built a school and now we need to fill it. It has been a long time coming and we have done this in stages to date. She likes the detailed list of concerns she received. Bussing is a huge concern and this should be discussed with Dr. Jason Bonner, Transportation Supervisor.

Mr. Kevin Thompson, Director of Student Services, stated Dr. Bonner can't create the actual routes until late February if this plan is approved. He has talked with Dr. Bonner about the lengths of routes, etc. Dr. Bonner stated it does take about six weeks to actually set routes. He looks at the most direct routes and how to get from point A to point B. East to the west is easy, but north and south are not direct routes. Once approved, he can load this into his system and come up with the routes. President Marasco stated all schools are centrally located in the district. Bus time may increase or decrease by a matter of minutes and can be manageable. Ms. Marelli asked if the new feeder pattern makes Dr. Bonner nervous. Dr. Bonner stated the middle school is easy. The new Stokes feeder is more land which could mean more busses. He sees nothing catastrophic ahead and it should be no problem creating the routes.

Mr. Failing stated the walkers wanted to remain walkers which they have tried to do. The committee has looked at the building's capacity and walkers among other logistic issues. He shared we have looked at all concerns several times. The Board understands the concerns and has looked into all of them with a lot of effort done by everyone. There are a lot of logistics that are involved. Continuity was the Board's main consideration. President Marasco agreed with Mr. Failing. He shared if you look at the feeder patterns now and what we are proposing to do, the continuity has been considered.

Dr. Denman stated change is hard for everyone and also comes to students when they change teachers, etc. each year. It just may be a different building now. Ms. Marelli shared all district resources are the same and schools are modeled the same for CR. There will be familiar faces in all of the buildings. This will continue throughout the district. Everyone will have the same educational experience.

Dr. Fitzgerald stated class size is the consideration. We have tried to get the numbers lowered to have smaller class sizes. This allows the opportunity to have fewer students in each classroom. He stated each new student begins their educational career at McIlvaine Early Childhood Center (MECC) and then they go to different elementary schools while all coming back together at Caesar Rodney High School (CRHS). As a large CR community, everyone goes separate ways for elementary and then comes back together. Ms. Marelli stated smaller class sizes benefit our staff too who provide valuable education to our students. President Marasco stated we have the same high-quality goals and same education throughout the district. He feels we have done a very thorough job on this.

Mr. Failing shared some of the public does not know how hard the administrators are all working to educate their children. This is a tremendous effort on their part. The Board takes their criticisms and the public needs to know how hard they are working for your kids. He suggests they should get more involved and be part of the solution to see what it takes. Our track record for the middle school shows people are very pleased with that result. He wished more parents were listening in tonight.

Dr. Denman asked about the comments regarding immersion. Mr. Thompson shared we have brought this back to the table. We have addressed the Immersion Program concern with students moving to balance this out. Regardless of what program you are in, you would still change schools. There are less than 25 immersion students (out of the 1-5 grade populations) affected based on equity who will change immersion programs. They will also change grade levels before that time. The Immersion classes will stay at 25 or less now allowing for the best instruction.

The board asked if the elementary school principals have heard any other concerns. Mrs. Julie Lavender, Allen Frear Elementary School Principal, stated she has heard the same bussing and immersion program concerns. The Board has already addressed them. Mrs. Ashley Holmes, W.B. Simpson Elementary School Principal, stated parents are concerned about the immersion program asking if students would be with new students. This was her only concern. Ms. Darisa Everett, Star Hill Elementary Principal, stated parents would like to know earlier rather than later for school choice purposes. Mr. Freeman Williams, Nellie Hughes Stokes Principal, has not heard any other concerns but that a decision should be done soon. Dr. Susan Frampton, W.R. Brown Principal, stated she has not heard anything different from what has already been mentioned.

Dr. Fitzgerald reminded the Board that the district has closed all schools (except for two schools: WBS & SHE) for school choice at the last meeting. He stated once we move students after realignment then we can see where we have more space and would use a waiting list. There may be a lottery option. We would explore different options. School Choice was closed because our schools are growing with families moving into the realigned elementary schools. We need to have space for those who move into the attendance area.

Mr. Failing stated while we have expanded and built a new school we are still playing catch up. Dr. Denman stated her family had a realignment happen to her children in the past and it worked out fine. President Marasco said we need a solid plan in place for the betterment of our students. He would like to move forward with the plan.

#### 2021-22 SY Updates and School Supports

Dr. Fitzgerald shared the updated COVID statistics. Antigen testing and a stay in school policy are being explored through the Department of Education (DOE). This would mean our buildings would need to be open

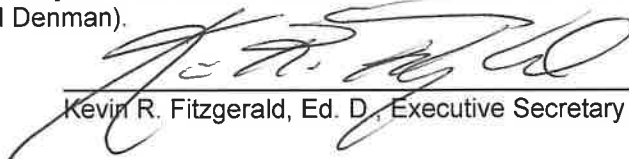
on Sundays for this testing to occur. Space would need to be available for testing as well. With the face mask mandate now, few are being quarantined. If the Department of Health (DPH) removes the face mask mandate in the future, it could mean those who test positive would have to quarantine for 8-10 days. He informed the Board that this should be on their radar for future consideration.

### **Executive Session**

There was no executive session

### **Adjournment**

At 7:10 p.m., Mr. Failing made a motion to adjourn. Ms. Marelli seconded the motion and the motion carried 5-0. (Marasco, Marelli, Failing, Wilson, and Denman).

  
Kevin R. Fitzgerald, Ed. D, Executive Secretary  
Date 12/9/21