Work Session
September 13, 2021

Opening

Call to Order

At 6:07 p.m. School Board President Michael Marasco called the September 13, 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

Dr. Denman made a motion to adopt the September 13, 2021 agenda as presented. Mr. Failing seconded the motion and after roll call, the motion carried 4-0 with one absent (Marasco, Marelli, Failing, and Denman).

Discussion Items

School Opening 2021-2022 SY

Dr. Fitzgerald gave an update on the current COVID statistics for the district. He referred parents to check our online statistics which are updated on the website.

President Marasco asked for an update on homebound students. Mrs. Tara Faircloth, Director of Curriculum and Instruction, stated we currently have ten students on medical homebound with four homebound teachers hired for support. Assignments are giving by the student's regular teacher and the homebound teacher provides the added support. Each school looks different on which teachers are providing the homebound instruction. She added the district is offering www.tutor.com hours for our students. We will purchase additional hours as we need them. If a student becomes quarantined the administrator works with staff to make sure the assignments are posted and there is a combined effort with the parent to make sure the student receives instruction. Dr. Denman asked about ten students and if this is different than a normal year. Dr. Fitzgerald stated we always have medical homebound students. The challenge is getting the staff to work homebound with students. We currently have some retirees working. President Marasco asked for an update on substitutes for absent staff. Dr. Fitzgerald stated it depends on availability through Kelly Services.

Mr. Failing shared the dashboard positivity numbers for today and that this will change. Dr. Fitzgerald shared that by the end of the week they will be higher. Looking at the dashboard, the numbers vary in the different buildings but overall the numbers are much lower than the community numbers.

He continued to give kudos to Dr. Tina Sander-Loftus, John S. Charlton Principal, who had 30 absences in one day. Although these were not all COVID-related. She did a great job notifying her parents immediately if someone tested positive. He stated it was all hands on deck. Even Mrs. Faircloth showed u and covered a classroom. Mr. Failing stated the average numbers paint a picture. The reality is that it is very difficult and it puts a lot of pressure on all staff. He acknowledged how hard the leadership is working.

Dr. Denman asked for an update on the antigen (rapid) testing. Dr. Fitzgerald shared there was no update available from last week. This data is provided once a week but we have been pleased with the service. Dr. Fitzgerald added our school nurses have done a remarkable job with the day-to-day issues, contact tracing, etc. He is very proud of the entire staff working together so we can keep our schools open. He gave

credit to all staff involved. President Marasco added the teams are making it work. Kids are so happy to be back and parents are appreciative.

Dr. Fitzgerald announced that the rider pride committee has suggested and we are moving this date to April 12th. Most activities usually take place inside, so this allows us to be in a better situation. This does not impact CRHS Homecoming at all. We are moving forward with those plans.

The discussion continued regarding transportation issues and concerns throughout the district.
Dr. Fitzgerald shared we still don't have enough drivers and we have some student behavior concerns. The bus contractors are struggling. He shared we were contacted this afternoon that four drivers were not available today for afternoon runs. Three bus routes were effective. Dr. Jason Bonner, Supervisor of Transportation, and his team covered three of those drivers. Parents have been understanding. He continued to state it is tough to react that quickly. Mr. Failing asked Dr. Bonner what the Board could do for him. Dr. Bonner explained that currently we are plagued with mechanical issues. Three buses are still being worked on. We are borrowing buses from other districts. Offering health care is a huge help and we have six applicants for bus drivers right now. But we have also lost two and a possible third. Drivers are leaving because of low pay even with benefits. His drivers stepped up and ran extra runs today. 420 students were impacted today with the loss of those drivers.

Dr. Fitzgerald asked about athletic runs. Dr. Bonner continued to state it is very grim and getting worse. Contractors are giving back athletic runs. Coach buses could be a consideration but pricey. Most drivers are working to get our students safely and efficiently to and from school.
Discussion continued about how many buses we have and how many we need. Dr. Bonner shared we have 12 reliable buses and the rest are borrowed. We have 10 new buses coming. The market is depleted. The Board asked what other outlets are there outside of DE. Dr. Bonner explained that each state has a specific code for their state's buses. The buses ordered are specifically for DE. We simply need to keep the buses we have on the road. He shared 25 would be ideal. President Marasco inquired about how many drivers are needed. Dr. Bonner stated we need one more driver (18 total). The biggest competitor is places like Wawa which offers higher pay. He shared there is no easy answer and we need to be creative. He continued to state at this point, we are in the bus business and we need to be fiscally responsible and hire a mechanic to assist with the repairs needed.

Mr. Failing stated having a mechanic in-house is best. Timing is critical for repairs. Dr. Bonner shared we can research DelDOT for the mechanic levels, etc. and we will work from there for the job description. Dr. Denman asked if we could have a mechanic on retainer. President Marasco feels we need more than one. Mr. Failing agrees and they could assist with preventive maintenance. Fees would be less Dr. Bonner stated this year we will be 300% more than last year for maintenance expenses. President Marasco asked for the timeline to have a mechanic on staff. Dr. Fitzgerald shared we have a rough outline started and with permission, we can move forward with posting the vacancy next Wednesday. Mr. Failing stated we could have more parents pick up and drop off. Dr. Denman asked about possible reimbursement for that assistance. Dr. Fitzgerald stated we do not have that capability at this time. Dr. Bonner stated we need to look for other outlets to recruit candidates. He shared word of mouth is working well with the driver community. Social media reposting is helping. The "Indeed" platform is another option. Dr. Denman asked about other districts having mechanics on staff. Dr. Bonner shared those districts that have mechanics.

Ms. Marelli asked about the needs of the mechanic. Mr. Failing stated a mechanic would need a facility, tools, and some inventory built up. Dr. Bonner has done repairs on current buses himself. Mr. Failing stated we need to be competitive when offering benefits.

Executive Session

There was no Executive Session.

Adjournment

At 7:01 p.m. Dr. Denman made a motion to adjourn. Mr. Failing seconded the motion and the motion carried 4-0 with one absent. (Marasco, Marelli, Failing, and Denman).

Kevin R. Fitzgerald, Ed. D., Executive Secretary Date

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