

**Work Session
August 23, 2021**

Opening

Call to Order

At 6:03 p.m. School Board President Michael Marasco called the August 23, 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

Ms. Marelli made a motion to adopt the August 23, 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

School Opening 2021-2022 SY

Dr. Jason Bonner, Transportation Supervisor, shared we have received 20 bus contracts now but will possibly have up to 27. We are moving in the wrong direction. 99% of our students currently have rides to and from school. We are being creative with double runs, etc. Our fleet is 10 buses short. We are borrowing buses from other districts. There are 10 buses ordered and these will arrive in late November and at the end of January. In the meantime, we are joining the other district in the state-wide event getting students to and from schools. He continued to share we have had a 350% increase in maintenance since last year. The good news is our buses will roll and we are ready to go.

Dr. Denman inquired about who pays for the 10 buses ordered. Dr. Bonner confirmed the state pays 90% and we pay the rest. Ms. Marelli asks how much a bus actually costs. Dr. Bonner stated the average bus with no bells and whistles is \$88,000. If we order a bus from the state bid it is bare bones. They are all diesel buses and there is no option to choose differently. Diesel fuel is cheaper than propane.

Ms. Marelli confirmed we have 50 routes or 25 contracts. Dr. Bonner stated our total routes with contractors is 117 routes if we are fully staffed. We are making it work with 97 buses and multiple runs. He is appreciative of the Board's approval to offer full-time employment to our drivers as this has helped our situation. We have candidates for full-time drivers.

Mr. Failing asked what is the lead time on ordering buses. Dr. Bonner stated we ordered in August and they arrive in November. When we ordered last Monday, those buses will arrive in January. The supply chain is slow in every industry. President Marasco asked if that timeline is reasonable. Dr. Bonner confirmed it is normal. The discussion continued about borrowing buses from other districts. Some have an end date and some could be recalled back to the districts. Dr. Bonner continued to state some are only available for a few weeks and some can be ours for the duration. They will be used until the new buses arrive. Ms. Marelli asked about the borrowed buses and their condition of disrepair. Dr. Bonner gave a brief report of the borrowed buses by district. Dr. Denman asked about the Christina bus's life span. Per Dr. Bonner, the bus life span is 10 years. Dr. Fitzgerald stated we begged the Department of Education (DOE) for their support. We appreciate their support. Other superintendents are not happy about losing drivers to us and are looking for more ways to recruit in their districts.

President Marasco asked if we still needed van drivers. Dr. Bonner stated we need van drivers. They transport over 200 students, so we need ten but currently have only six. The requirements to be a van driver are driving students to and from school. These are pre-k students ages two, three, and four. They would transport three-four students from home to elementary schools and continue with more. Each van driver

reports three times a day with a minimum of five hours at approximately \$14-\$15 per hour. No special license restrictions but they need certification like a taxi or limo driver would need. The district assists with this process. The drivers would never get out of the driver's seat as parents load and unload.

Mr. Failing continued to share that diesel engines when sitting will rust etc. We need to keep running and they would be good. Dr. Bonner shared we take all buses to a dealership for service. We pay top dollar for top service. Ms. Marelli asked for clarification on why we need so many van drivers. Dr. Bonner stated this is due to the EIP (Pre-K) Program as it has grown tremendously. There are immersion students and some Charlton students that also use the vans. He stated most are the pre-k program. The McKinney-Vento students are transported by a vendor service.

Dr. Noel, Assistant Superintendent/Human Resources Director, gave an update on staffing and enrollment numbers. We have experienced significant growth in schools. Allen Frear Elementary (AFE) is going up and are currently at 678, McIlvaine Early Childhood Center (MCI) is up to 514, Magnolia Middle school (MMS) is up to 413, Postlethwait Middle (PMS) is up to 610, Fifer Middle School (FMS) is at 792, Robinson Elementary (DRE) is at 482, Star Hill Elementary (SHE) is at 170. Overall we have 7,789 registered students. This does not include the base students. Tomorrow will be day #1 with students and we will do headcounts to see how many are actually in seats. This is very important information to provide the resources we will need. We are in pretty good shape with filling vacancies. We are setting up interviews for paraprofessionals for added support. Currently, we need two Spanish immersion teachers. Those we previously hired have returned to Spain. These are difficult positions to fill, but we will make the necessary adjustments. Dr. Fitzgerald added we have seen a surge at MCI of new students. We are following the Center for Disease Control (CDC) guidelines, planning, and hoping not to go over at MMS but the people keep coming. We do expect those late arrivers and we will look at actual bodies in seats. Dr. Tamara Toles-Torain, Executive Assistant to the Superintendent, stated we have over 8,300 students with base schools included. President Marasco asked about the max number allowed for MMS. Dr. Fitzgerald stated we have hit that with 400 but we will make it work. We are still trying to meet those CDC guidelines. All principals have contingency plans in place.

Mrs. Tara Faircloth, Director of Curriculum and Instruction, and Mr. Kevin Thompson, Director of Student Services gave an update on the homebound process and quarantine process. For homebound instruction to a student with medical documentation, we typically have the instruction offered three-five hours, but this year we have increased this to five-ten hours with support via ZOOM. If quarantined, we would follow a similar pathway as homebound. Teachers will be asked to provide support first. If not able to do this, we will have a school-wide person available as homebound teachers. We have interviewed four teachers and they are being paid from ESSR funds. The principal will reach out to staff first to see who wants to provide support. Some students that attend school at this time will have welcome back packets provided for them. Mrs. Faircloth continued to share it is important to have team building, etc. to ease anxiety. Ms. Marelli shared an email she received from a parent regarding an entire class quarantine. Mr. Faircloth stated we would consider ZOOM as an option for a whole class. She continued to state we will need to work through this case-by-case. She shared all teachers have very different thoughts on this type of instruction. But she reminded the Board that every student who may be quarantined will have access to a teacher and will have instruction. Ms. Marelli asked about those students who are actually sick and at home. She asked if extra time would be available to do that work. Mr. Thompson stated we would treat them the same as if they are sick with an illness and out of school. He continued to state homebound could be an option with doctors' medical notes. Dr. Fitzgerald stated we are waving the doctor's note for those quarantined and will provide homebound instruction. Those truly sick and can't participate in school, we would extend the time to complete assignments. He shared we are also looking for other ways to instruct these students other than ZOOM. Mr. Thompson continued to state we currently have three students who have requested homebound. Two have an end date and one is for the whole year. He shared this is not unusual. These can be chronic conditions preventing them from attending. Mrs. Faircloth stated we have approximately 50 quarantined for the start of the school year. President Marasco asked about providing homebound services last year. Mr. Thompson explained these students simply couldn't attend school due to a medical condition. We have posted vacancies and interviewed staff to provide homebound during the school day as well as the evening hours. We have talked with the principals and encouraged our staff to provide homebound instruction since they know their students. The quarantine piece has us relying on staff stepping up for some coverage. Ms. Marelli asked if a student is not vaccinated and doesn't feel comfortable with attending in-person would they also be able to go on homebound. Dr. Fitzgerald stated they could with medical documentation. President Marasco inquired about what it would take to quarantine a whole class. Dr. Fitzgerald reminded the Board that we have been informed by the Department of Public Health (DPH) that there may be new guidelines. The expectation is that our students wear their masks in school. He believes the quarantine time would then be lessened. Those students with medical excuses for not wearing a mask may play a part. The cafeteria is another issue with social distancing.

This is in the hands of DPH as for the guidelines that are in place. We will continue to make adjustments accordingly. We ask for parents to be understanding and our staff to be patient.

Mr. Failing stated we now have Chromebooks and we now have the skill set to fall back on to keep instruction going. He still thinks getting the students back in person is the right decision. It is good to hear there are many plans in place and he is confident we will meet those challenges.

Executive Session

There was no Executive Session.

Adjournment

At 6:52 p.m. Ms. Marelli made a motion to go to adjourn. Dr. Denman 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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