

**Work Session
August 16, 2021**

Opening

Call to Order

At 6:03 p.m. School Board President Michael Marasco called the August 16, 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 August 16, 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. Fitzgerald informed the Board that the base has mandated mask wearing for students and staff with the social distancing of 3 feet apart in the classroom. Students must have a medical reason for not wearing their mask and they would be 6ft apart. Should there be an outbreak, The Department of Public Health (DPH) looks at the social distancing of those students involved. Parents may apply for homebound instruction. Due to the risk of transmission of those in quarantine, we are mandating the health screener is required for all. Parents should self-monitor their children. We will have antigen (rapid) testing and clean high-touch areas every two hours. Nightly deep cleaning and air filters will be replaced. We encourage hand-washing and bottled water is available but water fountains are not. In the cafeteria, you do not need to wear a mask while eating, but you are unable to sit directly across from someone. You may sit diagonally or 3 feet apart nose to nose. All district transportation will have mask wearing for all students and drivers. He continued to share there is a lack of bus drivers. Parents should transport students when possible. The district asks for parents to bear with us due to the lack of drivers. Dr. Fitzgerald continued to state our goal to get everyone in schools five days a week. Anything parents can do to assist with this is greatly appreciated.

President Marasco asked about COVID testing. This is still available but it is up to DPH if we are a testing or vaccine site. To date, they have said yes. Antigen (rapid) is available in all schools but not every day. This is voluntary. No cost for this testing through the state. Vaccinations are given on Wednesdays & Thursdays as long as DPH approves.

President Marasco asked about transportation numbers and if this has increased. DR. Fitzgerald stated yes, but they must wear a mask. Dr. Denman asked for clarification on antigen testing availability. Dr. Fitzgerald stated we are working with the company. Our goal is to have this available every day but depends on the availability of the testing company. More information will be coming.

The discussion continued with President Marasco asking about the cafeteria and social distancing in all schools. Dr. Fitzgerald stated Fifer Middle School has made adjustments on where students will eat. All other schools can do this. He stated parents want to make sure their students are safe. Principals have stepped up and are maximizing the space they have. He is very pleased that students outside are not required to wear a mask.

Mr. Failing had no changes or suggestions on the plan at this time.

Ms. Marelli asked about the busing routes turned back in to us and if we would need to use three-tiered start times to allow for buses to do triple runs. Dr. Fitzgerald stated everything is on the table, but we don't want to

do this with only a week before school starts. We are looking at minimizing the impact. The district just received word that contractors have turned over six contracts to us. This is also being done in other districts. There are simply no drivers available. The Appoquinimink School District has offered a \$4,200 bonus and still had 16 routes turned back in. all districts are in a difficult position. We don't have buses. Dr. Jason Bonner, Transportation Supervisor, is working on the plan now and including other administrators. Dr. Fitzgerald continued to state we don't want to go to three-tiered start times, but we may have to look at this in the future. Ms. Marelli mentioned the many phone calls she has received asking about the mask mandate. President Marasco stated we may need to look at expanding the area for walkers vs the bell time change. Dr. Fitzgerald stated he will look at this with the state code and Dr. Bonner. We are advertising for van drivers and bus drivers.

Ms. Marelli asked if the schools can put something out about providing the need for parent transportation asking them to contact the transportation office so we know who is providing their own transportation. Dr. Fitzgerald stated we will have transportation work on that suggestion.

Dr. Fitzgerald shared the mask mandate regulation has come out which states that all schools that serve students K-12 must wear masks regardless of vaccination. He continued to inform the Board that this carries the force of law according to the district attorney. We will treat failure to wear a mask as a dress code violation. There are specific disciplinary actions for each offense. This includes giving the student a mask, isolation for non-compliance, parent pick up, and parent conferences. For those students who don't have a mask but willing to wear it, we will be able to provide this. Dr. Fitzgerald continued to state while we understand some people don't believe in the mask. But if this is something that allows us to bring our students back, we need to comply. It is a state mandate and it does carry the force of law. We don't want to have schools shut down. We want to give students every opportunity possible to keep them in school.

President Marasco agrees but feels the 4th offense is slightly excessive. He shared many have reached out to him. He understands the majority are reluctant but will wear one while in school to allow us to learn in a school setting.

Dr. Denman stated most complaints about masking are wearing a dirty mask and air-breathing. She asked if the principals and our staff could have a mask break for students. Just like tissues we should make sure we have masks available so they may dispose of the old one and get a new one. Dr. Fitzgerald stated we have additional PPE available. We will investigate what DPH says about the mask breaks. Mr. Kevin Thompson, Director of Student Services, stated we purchased a lot last year and the community has donated masks. We are in good shape with the inventory. He also shared that mask breaks were done last year and will be included this year.

Mr. Failing stated we have heard a lot from the public. Whether you agree or disagree, we are all sick of the mask and COVID. He stated the majority agree it is the best thing is to get kids back. The students lost a lot last year. As a Board, they have met for months regarding their stand and they are locked to the board decision. The focus continues to be getting kids back in school. Personally, he and his family will live with mask mandate. They are following the protocols and being respectful of being safe for others. He asked the public to reconsider a protest. This is not going to benefit our children. We need every opportunity to catch the kids up. He asked that they take that fight to the governor and the legislators. We are struggling with a lot of challenges. If there is a fight to be had, he asked they do not do it in our schools but instead take it to the governor.

Ms. Marelli felt the same. She stated as a parent she doesn't want to wear a mask. As a board member, she must follow the mandate. If we do not we will have schools shut down. She believes this is good for teachers, all kids, and our staff. She has spoken with many teachers. They have stated the mask doesn't really get in the way and they didn't have a problem with the mask. What is important to her is that the administrations use the outdoor spaces we have. President Marasco stated the big picture is to get them in school and keep them in school. If it takes a mask to do that, we need to do that. He shared we have incredible teams in our buildings and the use of outdoor classrooms is a creative way to get people outside. He is confident this will happen. The focus of his conversations with the public stated it is something that the governor and legislators have done and we should send the message to them.

Mrs. Tara Faircloth, Director of Curriculum and Instruction, stated we would like to offer the same interim procedures as we did last year for the first interim. For the first marking period, we changed by giving an assessment and used this as an interim for parents. This gives parents a snapshot of where their child is and areas of growth needed. Dr. Denman asked for more clarification. Mrs. Faircloth stated this would be just for

the first marking period. Our students need to learn how to interact with one another and a lot of teaching needs to happen. She stated it is hard to get letter grades in the first weeks. Using the assessment instead allows teachers to use the data. Parents will know where they are performing and have access to the data.

Ms. Marelli asked what the report looks like. Mrs. Faircloth stated the report shows student performance with an explanation on the grade level targets and it is easy to understand. Ms. Marelli liked the idea of the assessment at the beginning of the year. Great way to see how successful the students are. She stated out teachers do a great job identifying strengths and growth needs.

Dr. Fitzgerald stated the policy for a virtual board meeting for those with disabilities will be on the agenda tomorrow. He gave a brief explanation. Three readings for the policy will be done now that the law was put into effect. Dr. Denman likes having this option. She stated Board members should be present, but attending virtually it is very easy to listen and participate. Mr. Failing agreed. More participation for all and he stated this is a silver lining of COVID that we learned how to make it work. Dr. Fitzgerald continued to share those with disabilities would be able to participate. But we need to verify the individual to make sure they are who they are. It is up to the board to accept virtual meetings. But we have obligation to provide the opportunity to those with disabilities.

Dr. Fitzgerald gave a reminder about the David E. Robinson Elementary School (DRE) dedication on Wednesday at 10 a.m. and we are anticipating a large number of people attending. Once we meet an agreement with the Magnolia Middle School (MMS) purchase we will do the same for them.

Executive Session

At 7:07 p.m. Mr. Failing made a motion to go into executive session and to adjourn without going back into general session. Dr. Denman seconded the motion and the motion carried 4-0 with one absent. (Marasco, Marelli, Failing, and Denman).

Adjournment

At 8:23 p.m., President Marasco adjourned the meeting.


Kevin R. Fitzgerald, Ed. D., Executive Secretary Date 8/17/21

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