

# Seneca Valley School District



## SCHOOL BOARD ACTION MEETING

In Person - Seneca Valley Intermediate High School Auditorium - 7:00 p.m.

### MINUTES

November 9, 2020

- I. **CALL TO ORDER** by Mr. James Nickel, Board President, called the meeting to order at 7:12 p.m.
  - A. **Moment of Silence** – Mr. Nickel opened the meeting with a moment of silence.
  - B. **Pledge of Allegiance** – Allison Noto, a fourth grader at Evans City Elementary School, continued the board meeting initiative, *I Led the Pledge*, by reciting the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag.
  - C. **Roll Call** – Roll call by Ms. Lisa Mislán, Board Secretary, showed the following members in attendance. Ms. Leslie Bredl, Mr. Eric DiTullio, Mr. Timothy Hester, Mr. Michael Jacobs, Mr. James Nickel, Mr. Frederick Peterson, Jr., and Mr. Jeff Widdowson. Ms. Kathy Whittle was absent.

Others present included Dr. Tracy Vitale, Superintendent of Schools; Dr. Matthew McKinley, Assistant Superintendent of Secondary; Dr. Sean McCarty, Assistant Superintendent of Elementary; Ms. Kyra Bobak, Human Resources Director; Ms. Lynn Burtner, Business Manager; Ms. Linda Andreassi, Communications Director; Mr. Randy Miller, Buildings and Grounds Director; Ms. Heather Lewis, Athletics Director; Ms. Annie Mersing, Director of Advancement; Mr. Aaron Johnson; Ms. Yvonne Dobrzawski; Ms. Lauri Pendred; and a press representative.

## 2. INFORMATION REPORTS

- A. **Student/Staff Recognition** – Ms. Linda Andreassi announced the following student recognition: Rishika Raman, a fifth grader at Evans City Middle School, recently wrote and published “Sonia’s Journal: A Stream of Thoughts.” The book features Sonia and her sisters and their many adventures, including secret vacations, hair-terror, zany pranks, and so much more! Her year-long journal is a breezy trip into the world of a young girl and her stream of thoughts. Miss Raman and her book, which can be purchased on Amazon, were recently featured on KDKA-TV’s evening news.
- B. **Dates to Remember** – Ms. Andreassi announced the following dates to remember:

November 11	Veterans Day
November 13	SVAOC End of First Trimester, Grades K-6
November 18	End of First Trimester, Grades K-6
November 20	First Day of All PIAA Winter Sports
November 25 – November 30	Thanksgiving Break: District Holiday, No school for students and staff
December 7	School Board Reorganization Meeting, 5:00 p.m., IHS Auditorium

C. **Agency Reports**

1. Vo-Tech – Mr. Nickel/Mr. Fred Peterson, Jr. reported that all is going well at the Vo-Tech, though it is currently closed. The Emergency Plan was and how it is being implemented was discussed. Mr. Nickel was acknowledged for his contributions to the Joint Operations Committee over the past few years. Mr. Nickel will stay on as an alternate while Mr. Jacobs will take his place, along with Mr. Peterson, as a representative.
2. I.U. IV – Mr. Eric DiTullio does not have an update at this time.

D. **Legislative** – Mr. Peterson reported that at the state level, lawmakers will reconvene to sort out last details of the state budget. In addition, a House bill that would separate young victims of sexual assault from their perpetrators has been signed by Governor Wolf and will become law in 60 days.

E. **Financial Reports**

1. Operations
2. Senior High Activities
3. Intermediate High Activities
4. Middle School Activities
5. Athletics
6. Food Service
7. Tax Collections
8. Capital Projects Funds

F. **COVID-19 Update** – Dr. Vitale provided an update as follows:

Butler county Superintendents met with the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) today at 10 a.m. The Pennsylvania Department of Health (PADOH) has moved Butler County to the “substantial” designation. It is recommended that districts move to a hybrid or full-remote model. A total of 38 counties across the state are now on the substantial list. The PADOH used the following metrics to move our rating to substantial:

- **Incidence Rate:** Incidence Rate is based on cases per 100,000 within last seven days. Butler county incidence rate is 111.2 new cases in the last seven days.
- **Polymer Chain Reaction (PCR) Percent Positivity Rate:** Butler county is at 8.1%.
- **Outbreak Rate:** When there are two or more cases in a congregate setting, there is an investigation. A congregate setting can be places of work, businesses, schools, or events.
- **Community Spread:** Butler county data is forthcoming.
- **Age Breakdown with Positive Cases:** Butler county data is forthcoming.
- **Hospital Preparedness**

PADOH is recommending that all schools in the substantial designation go to hybrid or full remote, which was also recommended in the moderate designation. If we move into a second full week in the substantial designation, the PADOH will recommend full remote instruction.

This is a local decision. The PADOH does have the authority to move districts to full remote learning if school transmission can be proven or if they need to step in to protect the public in any other way. The Seneca Valley dashboard was updated at the end of the day today, as follows:

- Fifteen active student cases K-12
- Thirteen inactive student cases (cleared or completed 14-day quarantine)
- Two active staff cases across the district
- Seventeen total active cases in the district, students and staff
- Twenty-three inactive cases

Dr. Vitale added the following statistics per school building:

- Senior High School: Nine total cases among approximately 1,000 students
- Intermediate High School: One active student case; three inactive student cases
- Ryan Gloyer Middle School: Three active student cases; three inactive student cases; six inactive staff cases
- Evans City Middle School – 0 cases
- Haine Middle School: 0 active student cases; one inactive student case; 0 staff cases
- Haine Elementary School: One active student case; one active staff case
- Rowan Elementary School – 0 cases
- Haine Elementary School – 0 cases

Regarding our elementary schools, we have seen few positive cases in grades K-6. The age distribution of COVID-positive cases increases in children ages 13 and up. With few cases at the elementary schools, we have found that almost every case has been through family transmission. There is no proof of in-school transmission. That could also mean that many elementary students are asymptomatic and simply not being tested, or that parents are keeping their symptomatic children at home for 14 days.

Dr. Vitale noted that the number of student quarantines is becoming more concerning. Five days a week of in-person instruction has caused significant contact which causes a 14-day quarantine by the PADOH. There are currently 400 students who are in quarantine based on being near a close contact who subsequently tested positive. Additional students are being quarantined because of a family exposure.

Dr. Vitale added that staffing is becoming a concern. Many teachers are impacted by quarantines. At Seneca Valley, we have a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with our professional teacher union in place where teachers can provide instruction from home if they are not sick. We are fortunate that this group worked together proactively and collaboratively on this MOU.

Dr. Vitale stated that every hospital in the region is seeing significant increases in case numbers and staffing issues. Cases are higher now than the peaks seen in April and July.

Dr. Vitale noted that the Butler county COVID case count is up another 208 cases over the weekend and that cases within the Seneca Valley zip codes are up by more than 50 since Friday.

The school board has a level of local control. Dr. Vitale believes it is our duty to bring the numbers down in our community. If we do not make some changes, we will not be able to keep our schools open and that decision could be made for us by the PDE. Dr. Vitale is asking that we move to the Cohort learning model as of Wednesday, November 11, 2020.

3. **PUBLIC COMMENT** – Mr. Aaron Johnson stated that after this evening's discussion thus far, his questions have been answered and he had no further comment.

- 4. **APPROVAL OF MINUTES** – Approved the following meeting minutes:
  - A. **Work Session** – October 5, 2020
  - B. **Regular Meeting** – October 12, 2020
- 5. **TREASURER’S REPORT** – Approved the treasurer’s report.
- 6. **GENERAL FUND BILLS** – Approved the general fund bills.  
Grand Total: \$1,477,617.35
- 7. **CONSTRUCTION FUND BILLS** – Approved the construction fund bills  
Grand Total: \$2,481,124.24

Mr. Nickel motioned, seconded by Ms. Harrison, to approve minutes, treasurer’s report, general fund bills, and construction fund bills. The motion carried on a roll call vote with those present voting in the affirmative and Ms. Whittle absent.

8. **ADMINISTRATION ACTION**

- A. **Board Policies** – Approved the following board policies:
  - 1. Policy 902 – Publications Program, revised, first reading – Ms. Andreassi
  - 2. Policy 903 – Public Participation in Board Meetings, revised, first reading – Ms. Andreassi
  - 3. Policy 907 – School Visitors, revised, first reading – Ms. Andreassi

Policies to be retired:

- 4. Policy 248 – Sexual Harassment Students, retire, first and final reading – Ms. Kyra Bobak
- 5. Policy 348 – Sexual Harassment Administrative Employees, retire, first and final reading – Ms. Bobak
- 6. Policy 448 – Sexual Harassment Professional Employees, retire, first and final reading – Ms. Bobak
- 7. Policy 548 – Sexual Harassment Classified Employees, retire, first and final reading – Ms. Bobak
- 8. Policy 248.1 – Unlawful Harassment Students, retire, first and final reading – Ms. Kyra Bobak
- 9. Policy 348.1 – Unlawful Harassment Administrative Employees, retire, first and final reading – Ms. Bobak
- 10. Policy 448.1 – Unlawful Harassment Professional Employees, retire, first and final reading – Ms. Bobak
- 11. Policy 548.1 – Unlawful Harassment Classified Employees, retire, first and final reading – Ms. Bobak

- B. **Resolution to Sue JUUL Labs, Inc.** – Approved the commencement of a civil suit, as part of a multidistrict litigation, against JUUL Labs, Inc., and other distributors and marketers of vaping products arising from the design, marketing and advertising of vaping products targeting minors and, for such purpose, approve the contingent fee agreement with Frantz Law Group, APLC, Dillon McCandless King Coulter & Graham, LLP, and Tucker Arensberg, P.C.

- C. **Vo-Tech JOC Representatives and Alternate** – Appointed Mr. Frederick Peterson, Jr. and Mr. Michael Jacobs as Butler County Area Vocational-Technical School Joint Operating Committee (BCAVTS JOC) representatives and Mr. James Nickel as BCAVTS JOC alternate.
- D. **Agreement for Slippery Rock Transition Achievement Program** – Approved the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education agreement for Slippery Rock Transition Achievement Program.
- E. **Racial Engagement Strategies, LLC Proposal** – Approved the Racial Engagement Strategies, LLC proposal for services through June 2021, pending solicitor review.

Mr. DiTullio noted that the policies we are retiring have been superseded by policies we have recently passed regarding sexual harassment.

Mr. Peterson asked about the expenses related to the JUUL litigation. Mr. Hoffman confirmed that Seneca Valley would incur a fee only if there is a positive monetary recovery. The district is responsible, upfront, only for gathering and providing data.

Mr. Widdowson asked if the JUUL litigation will put an extra burden on the administration during a very busy time in the District. Dr. Vitale noted that Mr. Hoffman will be doing much of the work. Mr. Hoffman confirmed that administration would not need to be present, in person, during any of the litigation meetings.

Ms. Bredl asked for a summary of the Slippery Rock Transition Agreement. Mr. Miller stated that we have partnered with Slippery Rock for the past three years in this job skills program for special needs students. The students attend the university, with a job coach, a few days per week in classes where they learn job-related skills that foster independence. There is one student in the program this year, which is fewer than in previous years.

Mr. Nickel asked Dr. Vitale for an overview of the Racial Engagement Strategies, LLC Proposal. Dr. Vitale stated that this proposal extends the work we are currently doing with Dr. Trisha Gadson. The proposal extends the training for our teachers and administrators. We will also be looking for feedback from students, alumni and parents on various strategies so that we can design actionable forward steps. Ms. Bobak added that this ongoing work will take us to the next level in these five areas of focus that includes action plans.

- Assessment of Learning Community
- Promoting Inclusive School Development
- Training and Professional Development of Leadership and Staff
- Community Engagement Strategy
- Final Report and Recommendations

Mr. DiTullio motioned, seconded by Mr. Peterson, to approve board policies, resolution to sue JUUL Labs, Inc., Vo-tech JOC representatives and alternate, agreement for Slippery Rock Transition Achievement Program, and Racial Engagement Strategies, LLC proposal. Motion carried on a roll call vote with those present voting in the affirmative and Ms. Whittle absent.

- F. **Instructional Model Change for Secondary Students** – Students in grades 7-12 will go back to the cohort model beginning Wednesday, November 11, 2020 thru Monday, December 7, 2020. Teachers will livestream in every class every day. The Superintendent and school board will closely monitor the COVID-19 data and make adjustments, as necessary. The superintendent continues to have the authority to temporarily close individual schools or change instructional models based on the emergency authorization given to her in a public vote by the Board on August 10, 2020.

Mr. Nickel noted that we have seen varying opinions about keeping our district open five days a week vs. returning to Cohort or full remote learning. He added that a balance is necessary, in conjunction with the data. The mental health of all students must always be considered. Mr. Nickel is supportive of this motion as we have seen some of the numbers spike. He noted that for about 3,000 students in grades K-6, we have virtually no reported cases.

Mr. Nickel noted that our goal has been to keep as many students in person for as long as possible. He added that it would be prudent, now, to move to Cohort for grades 7-12. The number of quarantined students went from 180 to over 400 over the weekend. These children are isolated, in their homes, which has a negative impact on their mental health. Cohort can better protect them while still providing the opportunity for inperson instruction.

Mr. Hester supports this measure, as stated, but would like us to continue to follow the recommendations from experts and science. He does not feel this motion goes far enough and believes that elementary schools should also be looked at before those numbers begin to spike.

Mr. Widdowson agrees with Mr. Hester's comments. He added that the PADOH recommendations do not exclude elementary schools and social distancing at the elementary schools is very difficult. He added that we have a duty to protect all the staff as well. Mr. Widdowson cannot support the motion as it currently stands.

Ms. Bredl believes that all students need five-day engagement. Cyber or livestream is still an available option for families who would prefer to keep their children at home. The infection rate has been minimal considering the size of the district. We do not know if Cohort will bring the numbers down. The number in quarantine is of concern. Ms. Bredl supports the motion for grades 7-12, but the data does not support K-6 moving to Cohort. Ms. Bredl asked if the quarantine numbers could be added to the SV dashboard.

Ms. Harrison agrees with Ms. Bredl and believes most parents want their children in school five days per week.

Mr. Peterson stated that there is much information we just do not know yet. Because this disease is invisible, it is difficult to react to. Its most infectious period is when there are no symptoms. Moving to Cohort for grades 7-12 is a good strategy of prevention and is in favor of the motion.

Mr. DiTullio stated that he is a proponent of five days in-person instruction. However, going from 180 to 400 in quarantine in just a couple of days is of concern. We need to reduce the spread to reduce the number of students in quarantine. They cannot participate in sports or even go to work. Quarantining affects other family members as well. Grades K-6, especially, need in person instruction. Mr. DiTullio added that we are fortunate to have Mr. Peterson, who has a career in public health and infectious disease, as a consultant. Also, Dr. Vitale is on the board at Butler Memorial

Hospital where she brings to the board additional information and resources as it develops. DiTullio is in support of this motion.

Mr. Jacobs stated that the measures we have put in place have been effective at limiting transmission within the schools, both secondary and elementary. He supports this motion.

For clarification, Ms. Harrison added if numbers were to spike at the elementary level, similar action would be taken.

Mr. Peterson asked that the District be sure we are always supporting special needs students .

Dr. Vitale confirmed that the senior high school will remain out this week and added that a letter will be sent this evening if the motion is approved. She added that our special education, life skills students will continue in person four days per week. Cohort is not perfect, but we have improved, especially with livestreaming which is like teaching two classes at once. Dr. Vitale stated that it will be difficult to add accurate quarantine numbers to the dashboard. We will try to do so but it may not be a daily update.

Mr. Widdowson repeated that he voted no because he does not feel that the motion goes far enough and should include K-6.

Mr. DiTullio motioned, seconded by Mr. Nickel, to approve the instructional model change for secondary students. The motion carried on a roll call vote with seven affirmative votes, one no vote, and one absent.

## 9. INSTRUCTION

- A. **Conferences** – Approve virtual conferences.
- B. **Grant Disbursement** – Granted permission to apply for and disburse, if approved, the Helping Kids Mini Grant Program funded by Sourcewell and the School Superintendents Association (AASA) in the amount of \$2,500 to further equity in the virtual learning environment and offset the cost of WiFi hotspots for families in need. Requested by Ms. Annie Mersing, Director of Advancement.

Mr. DiTullio thanked Ms. Mersing for finding and applying for this grant.

Ms. Harrison motioned, seconded by Mr. DiTullio to approve conferences and grant disbursement. The motion carried on a roll call vote with those present voting in the affirmative and Ms. Whittle absent.

## 10. BUSINESS/FINANCE ACTION

- A. **December Bills** – Authorized administration to pay December bills.
- B. **Supplies and Equipment Bids** – Authorized administration to seek bids for supplies and equipment for the 2021-22 school year.
- C. **Joint Purchasing Agreement MIU IV** – Approved the Joint Purchasing Agreement with the Midwestern Intermediate Unit IV for 2021.

- D. **Budget Transfers** – Approved budget transfers.
- E. **Artificial Turf Contract Award** – Approved FieldTurf USA, Inc. through Keystone Purchasing Network (KPN) vendor agreement for the installation of artificial turf at the upper middle school practice field in the amount of \$795,065.22. Solicitor has reviewed and approved the final agreement.
- F. **Hope Learning Center Agreement** – Approved the Hope Learning Center agreement to provide school-based ACCESS services through the 2020-21 school year.

Mr. Jacobs motioned, seconded by Mr. Peterson to approve December bills, supplies and equipment bids, joint purchasing agreement MIU IV, budget transfers, and Hope Learning Center agreement. The motion carried on a roll call vote with those present voting in the affirmative and Ms. Whittle absent.

- 11. **PERSONNEL ACTION** – Personnel items were discussed in an executive session held prior to this meeting.
  - A. **Appointments** – *Classified* – Steven Baldinger, Megan Reno, Robin McMahan; *Supplementals* – Michael Whitico, Jeffry Richards, Evelyn Vogel, Taylor Bowers, Jonah Blackwood
  - B. **Contracted Services** – Emily McGoey
  - C. **Leaves** – *Professional* – Kayce Monteleone, Shay Houser, Carrie Ehrenberger, Abigail Russell, Wendy Carson; *Classified* – Caitlin Whitney, Sandra Suski, Miranda Squire, Sarah Wolfson, Shelby Grosclaude, Jennifer Fiorenzo, Patricia Scherz, Christi Rice, Karen Helmecci
  - D. **Retirement** – *Professional* – Julie Mann

Mr. Widdowson motioned, seconded by Ms. Bredl, to approve personnel appointments, contracted services, leaves and retirement as listed above. The motion carried on a roll call vote with those present voting in the affirmative and Ms. Whittle absent.

- 12. **COMMUNICATION** – Communication was received from the following:
  - A. Ms. Catherine Vandermer – COVID-19 cases
  - B. Ms. Karli Szweda – Questions about shifting to livestream learning
  - C. Ms. Deirdre Dows – School board meeting livestream link
  - D. Mr. Mark Bidoli – Concern about RGMS school closing and remote learning
  - E. Ms. Kristie Long – Request for cohort or remote learning model
  - F. Ms. Jennifer Edwards – Request for hybrid learning model
  - G. Ms. Lisa Scalone – Request for hybrid or remote learning model
  - H. Ms. Rachel Petelin – Request for cohort learning model



**13. MISCELLANEOUS**

Mr. DiTullio provided a Pennsylvania Public School Employees' Retirement System (PSERS) Board election update stating that the voting ballots have been designed. The timeline for election is before end of the year. He added that there is a virtual meeting on Thursday to determine the asset allocation for the PSERS' pension fund. It is being negotiated to lower the return rate. This has an immediate impact on the PSERS' rate that would come to the taxpayers. Thursday's meeting and contact information can be found on the PSERS' webpage.

Mr. Peterson extended congratulations to SV Boys' Soccer Team.

Mr. Widdowson thanked Mr. Pearson, Director of Transportation, for his quick response in getting a recent transportation issue resolved.

Mr. Nickel noted that the entire board is working hard to do their best for the entire district and thanked everyone who called in to this evening's meeting.

**13. ADJOURNMENT** – With nothing further to come before the Board, Mr. DiTullio motioned, seconded by Mr. Peterson to adjourn the meeting at 8:51 p.m. The motion carried on a voice vote with those present voting in the affirmative and Ms. Whittle absent.

Mr. James Nickel, School Board President



Ms. Lisa Mislán, School Board Secretary