

## POTTSVILLE AREA SCHOOL DISTRICT

Board of Directors  
Virtual Zoom Special Board Meeting  
August 11, 2020  
Academic Center/Zoom  
7:00 p.m.

Present: Dr. Blankenhorn, Dr. Cardamone,  
Mrs. Dewitt, Dr. DiCello, Mr. Moran,  
Mr. Quandel, Mr. Shields, Mr. Urban,  
Ms. Wytovich, Dr. Gerace, Acting  
Superintendent; Mrs. Lombel,  
Asst. Business Manager/Board  
Secretary, Atty. Kevin Reid, Solicitor  
Mr. Rismiller, Mr. Mattea, Mrs. Mohl,  
Mrs. Hummel, Mr. Maley, Ms. Brennan

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The meeting was called to order at 7:00 p.m. by President Noble Quandel.

After the Pledge of Allegiance, President Quandel welcomed everyone in attendance.

Mr. Quandel reminded the public that the public comment period is not a question and answer period, but rather the opportunity for the public to submit comments to the Board. Public comments will follow our public comment procedures which require members of the public to identify themselves by indicating name and address and we will read comments consistent with all aspects of our public comment policy. With our meetings now being conducted virtually until further notice, you can submit comments via the Q & A feature.

President Quandel announced that the Board held an Executive Session via Virtual Zoom for the discussion of personnel matters.

Under Public Comment, Dr. Gerace read the following comment from James C. Bohorad:

"It is my understanding that you will be discussing fall athletics at tonight's school board meeting. Ultimately, the PIAA, after consulting with Governor Wolf, will vote as to whether fall sports should continue. However, I am writing to respectfully request that you allow fall sports to resume at this time, and then allow the PIAA to vote in a few weeks. The PIAA spent the past three months working with its health and safety committee to determine if it would be safe for students to play, and to come up with guidelines and safety measures to ensure that this could occur. The Pottsville students have been practicing for approximately six weeks now, and they have been complying with all guidelines, and the students have been safe. My son is senior soccer captain, and I know firsthand that temperatures have been taken at every practice, and any student athlete who may feel the slightest bit sick is told to stay away that day. The kids wear masks when they are not on the field, and the process has worked.

I have been in contact with students and coaches from other sports, and I know they are treating their practices the same way. The coaches feel that they can monitor and enforce the guidelines, and clearly they seem to be working. There is no question that COVID is a serious matter, and clearly my son's health and the health of all the student athletes is most important. However, the medical professionals at the PIAA believe that there is a safe way for these sports to move forward. It is important to also look at our location. Schuylkill County has seen low numbers compared to the rest of the state, averaging approximately four or five new cases a day based on my review of the statistics each day. In addition, the Schuylkill League, after significant discussions, felt that it would be safe to continue with sports as long as guidelines were followed, and voted to allow sports to continue.

As I'm sure you know, students are depressed these days. It's difficult for anyone not to be depressed. Their lives, just like ours, have been turned upside down. Allowing them to participate in sports will give them at least a small sense of normalcy. Sports will motivate them to perform better in the classroom, and honestly, putting the kids into a controlled environment with strict safety measures is safer for the kids than being out in the public with no established safety measures with their friends.

These are crazy times right now. No one knows what tomorrow, next week, or next month will bring. But for now, the PIAA is analyzing the ability of fall sports to continue. While they are doing so, they have authorized teams to continue informal practices. Dr. Lombardi, Director of the PIAA, gave an extremely interesting interview yesterday on Penn Live. With a PHD, Dr. Lombardi made it clear that academics are the most important issue about school. But he also discussed all the benefits of athletics, and the fact that he feels that sports can continue as long as the athletes and coaches are careful and follow all guidelines.

From a personal standpoint, as many of you know, and as I stated above, my son, Dylan, is a senior captain. He and the other three seniors have worked extremely hard for the past three seasons and this summer to get to this point. These boys are all intelligent students and good leaders. They have made it clear to their teammates that they must follow all guidelines. My son is already extremely disappointed that he will not be returning to school full time at this point for his senior year, but he understands there would just be too many students indoors at one time if everyone came back together. I am hopeful that sports will not be taken away, as he and his classmates will be devastated. Soccer and most other sports are different though, since you are talking about a small number of student athletes participating in an event outside.

I would ask that you please allow sports to resume and continue at Pottsville, as long as the athletes and coaches continue to be safe and follow all guidelines, and then let's see how the PIAA and governor act when the PIAA reconvenes in a few weeks.

On behalf of my wife, Gina, and my son, Dylan, we thank you for your consideration. Sincerely, James C. Bohorad"

The Administration and the Board discussed the District's reopening plan options for the upcoming academic 2020-2021 school year.

Dr. Gerace discussed the three options for reopening the district in the fall: total reopening, blended reopening and remote learning. The blended option would have children attending school two days a week and the other three days would be virtual learning. If the district would go with total reopening, health and safety concerns would be reviewed for students who may need to opt out of total reopening and would go to virtual learning. The teachers and students will be using the Google Classroom platform.

Dr. Gerace said that the option the district is focusing on is the blended model. This model allows for social distancing while offering the students a chance to interact with each other. Dr. Gerace said the state has designated each county as having low, moderate or substantial levels of transmission based on the incidence rate of positivity. Schuylkill County has received a moderate designation. Dr. Gerace explained that these trends are followed over a long period of time, not week to week. Because of this moderate designation, the recommendation would be hybrid or virtual.

With this blended or virtual opening masks will be enforced and every classroom will have hand sanitizer. The cleaning supplies and disinfectants were decided by the head custodians and pandemic team. Temperature checks will be taken. School Buses will have assigned seats, face coverings will be needed. Windows will be cracked. Bus drivers will sanitize in between bus runs. Dr. Gerace noted that lunch schedules are altered, along with changes in seating and the use of disposable trays and cutlery. Mrs. Caitlin Mohl, the district's pandemic planning coordinator and acting middle school principal, said that the district has an amazing comprehensive pandemic team. All cleaning products are approved by the Department of the Environmental Protection for eliminating the virus. They are extremely effective and there are sprayers to cover large areas. Mrs. Mohl said the district officials have been able to work to provide Wi-Fi hotspots throughout the community including fire companies. Dr. Gerace said there are access points outside of district buildings.

The Board members discussed the importance of enforcing masks, social distancing and keeping children safe. Dr. Gerace noted that the Department of Education will be issuing guidance in the coming days if a student would test positive for covid. Ms. Brennan, Special Education Director, noted that all IEP's will be followed with a possibility of some adjustments.

The Administration and the Board discussed Sports and Extracurricular Activities for the upcoming 2020-2021 school year.

Mr. Eric Rismiller, Athletic Director, said that the trainers are doing a great job with monitoring student athletes. There are temperature screenings and a recommendation that voluntary workouts be no longer than two hours long. This includes athletes, cheerleading and band members. Solicitor Kevin Reid cautioned that there is a risk of exposure to the virus at voluntary practices.

Mr. Rismiller along with Mr. Mattea, Assistant Athletic Director, are concerned that athletes will go to other places to work out and will have a high risk of exposure.

The Board of Directors discussed the long term effects of a student contracting the virus and the importance of following the guidelines of the Governor, Department of Health and Pennsylvania Department of Education. If the district chooses to have voluntary practices, the district is going against these agencies. An additional discussion was on allowing students athletes to continue voluntary practicing.

President Quandel said more discussion was needed with the administration on athletics and extracurricular activities. There were no votes taken at the meeting. The Board will approve the reopening plan at the August 18, 2020 Board meeting.


There were additional public comments:

Josephine Kwiatowski - "If the district votes to go to the hybrid plan, what PPE is the district going to provide for the faculty and staff?" "If the district goes with the hybrid model, how many positive cases will the district allow before a shutdown, and will this be done by building or the district as a whole?"

Noelle Hanerfeld - "Will covid testing be required to students and school facility prior to starting a blended school deployment in order for entry to school be allowed?"

Linda Maskerines - "Why can't you make a decision. This is not fair to anyone."

There being no further new business, on motion of Mr. Urban, seconded by Mr. Moran, the meeting adjourned at 8:40 p.m.

  
Patricia A. Lombel (Date)  
Board Secretary