

**Inter-Lakes School Board Special Meeting
Inter-Lakes Middle/High School Community Auditorium
1 Laker Lane, Meredith, NH
December 18, 2020**

MINUTES

I. CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Richard Hanson called the meeting to order at 6:02 p.m.

II. RECORD ROLL

Members Present:

Mr. Richard Hanson, Chair
Ms. Lisa Merrill, Secretary*
Mr. Charles Hanson*
Mr. Duncan Porter-Zuckerman*
Ms. Nancy Starmer
Ms. Raven Strother, Student Rep.

Administrators Present:

Ms. Mary Moriarty, Superintendent
Mr. John Martin, Technology Director

Others Present:

Jason Cornelissen, Auditorium Manager
Public

Members Absent:

Mr. Craig Baker
Mr. Mark Billings

*Remote attendance

III. PUBLIC INPUT

Chairman Richard Hanson commented that he wanted to make sure that decisions made regarding the status of in-person or remote learning other than in an emergency situation are made by the Board with the opportunity for public input. He noted the Board received some criticism when there was a misconception that a prior decision to switch to remote learning had been made by the COVID-19 Response Team.

Tonight, the Board will discuss a proposal to shift from in-person to remote learning from December 23 to January 8 that was first spoken about at Thanksgiving. Mr. Hanson said a meeting was held with leadership of the Inter-Lakes Education Association two days ago. Union representatives spoke of the stress felt by faculty and staff and the pressures being experienced as a result of the pandemic. Hanson said it is well known he has been focused on keeping kids in the classroom but noted COVID-19 positive cases are increasing. Feelings of stress and fear have been communicated to the Board. A way to address that is to have an extended period of remote learning that would provide time after the Christmas break to see if there is a flood of cases.

Mr. Hanson stated that the Board will invite public input, then discuss the proposal further before taking a vote.

IV. NEW BUSINESS

A. Proposed School Schedule

Under the proposal, December 23, 2020 would be a Full Vacation Day; January 4, 2021 is a Teacher/Paraeducator Workshop Day; January 5-8 Full Remote Learning. Athletic practices would be allowed to continue during Full Remote Learning and students enrolled at the Huot Vocational Technical Center in Laconia would continue to attend with transportation provided.

Sarah Thompson thanked the Board for the countless hours of public service as well as the sacrifices made by the District's teachers and custodial staff all working for the benefit of students. She said she is the parent of a Kindergartener and also works as a Reading Specialist in another district. She stressed the importance of keeping kids in school, to prevent students from falling behind with remote learning. She asserted that the SAU has been pushing remote learning adding that students have been home for 12 days with no data released to show this was the best decision. There was no survey of families to get a feel for how remote learning was working and the administration issued repeated statements that the District was being prudent. She argued that the safest place for kids was in school with their cohorts. Out of school, kids go to other places and face further risk of exposure.

Sheri MacMillan who identified herself as an Art Teacher at Inter-Lakes Elementary School said worry among staff was at an all-time high and thanked the Board and the administration for their support.

Britney Waldrip commented that remote learning is a far cry from students being in the classroom with their teachers, face-to-face.

Lindsay Weiner thanked the Superintendent for making the decision to have a snow day yesterday and today and not going remote. She also thanked teachers Ms. Bannon and Ms. DeTolla for the creative ways they have engaged her kids. She also commended District staff and faculty for their efforts to keep kids safe and engaged.

Ashley Bullard, North Sandwich said remote learning for an extended period of time when COVID-19 cases are skyrocketing allows for more long-term planning and is less stressful than waiting for an email or phone call.

Board member Lisa Merrill, Meredith thanked the staff, parents and facilities staff for their work during a highly anxious time, even for members of the Board who are responsible for people ages 3-70 in our schools. The Board has been open and honest and done live streaming to engage the public, commenting that as she has an underlying condition, she is uncomfortable coming to the auditorium. In both Moultonborough and Laconia, both Districts closed their schools after Thanksgiving. She said she supported closing for a few days to protect the District's staff.

Board member Nancy Starmer, Sandwich, said she lives in a neighborhood of teacher, is herself a former teacher and administrator. When teachers get stressed it gets relayed to their students. A lot of the stress teachers are experiencing comes from what they see is happening to their kids. The constant switching from in-person to remote learning is really hard on the kids and Starmer said she has been worried about the unpredictability factor. As important as it is to have kids in school predictability – when we are able to say when we will be – and when we won't be in school is important, she said. Starmer said she supports the proposal as it makes sense to make the decision based on COVID-19 cases and the stress and strain of unpredictability.

Board member Duncan Porter-Zuckerman, Sandwich, said he supports the proposal as reasonable and prudent give the real numbers that have changed based on a variety of measures of where this disease is going. He agrees with Starmer that predictability is important.

Mr. C. Hanson, Center Harbor said he agrees with the points that have been articulated. He recounted that he has a 77-year-old friend who is now in the hospital

in Wolfeboro who likely got COVID-19 from a young person. He said the virus is in our backyard and that he totally supports the proposal.

Student Representative Raven Strother, Sandwich, said she too supports the proposal but is sensitive to the difficulty young students can experience with remote learning. She suggested more thought be given to how the community can support younger learners.

Mr. Porter-Zuckerman said he appreciates that all families have certain strengths, sharing that he has a Kindergartener and a Second Grader and that his family has purposely chosen to remain remote during the pandemic. He has observed first-hand the incredible care, confidence and skill with which his children are being taught and asserted that remote learning is not the black hole that some people in the community are painting it as.

Chairman Hanson commented that it is not right or wrong that the Board struggles with but rather, a balance. If the District does not choose to shift to an extended period of remote learning, Hanson said, he fears increased infection rates will force the entire rest of the year to remain remote.

Chairman Hanson said he was also quite moved by the leadership of the teachers who spoke more to the stressors than the science. Staffing remains a problem and a problem that is only going to grow worse as more people are required to quarantine.

V. PUBLIC INPUT

Sarah Thompson said she is a teacher because she chose the profession. It is hard for parents who already need to be flexible. She questioned how the District can assume COVID-19 cases will definitively rise. She again urged the Board to wait two weeks before making the decision.

Superintendent Moriarty said one of the things that staff is experiencing is that some families are making very good decisions while others are exposed to vectors. It is not an effort to pass judgment but behaviors can bring the virus back into the schools. The proposal creates a buffer and to make the decision earlier gives families time to plan. Pivoting from in-person to remote learning is difficult. On Monday and Tuesday there were two additional cases, but the District gained an addition to the bubble by two snow days followed by the weekend. The District is continually working to improve remote learning.

No further public input

Ms. Starmer moved, seconded by Ms. Merrill, to approve the proposed school schedule from December 23, 2020 through January 8, 2021 as presented. The vote was unanimous.

VI. ADJOURNMENT

Ms. Merrill moved, seconded by Ms. Starmer, to adjourn the meeting at 6:39 p.m. The motion carried unanimously.

Respectfully Submitted.

Bea Lewis Wheeler
School District Clerk

Amended 1/12/21