

NORTHBROOK SCHOOL DISTRICT 28
MINUTES of a BOARD of EDUCATION
SPECIAL MEETING
HELD TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 10, 2020

A special meeting of the Board of Education, District 28, Cook County, Illinois, was held via electronic format on Tuesday evening, November 10, 2020. Board members, administration, and staff attended via an online Zoom video conference. The public was able to attend via a live-stream audio link through the District 28 YouTube Channel.

President Tracy Katz Muhl called the meeting to order at 7:02 p.m.

Present:

Jennifer Gallinson
Michael Gilmore
Tony Forchetti
Michelle Kohler
Lou Gross
Mara Silver-Schack
Tracy Katz Muhl

Absent: none.

Also present were: Dr. Larry Hewitt, Superintendent; Dr. Kris Raitzer, Asst. Superintendent; Jessica Donato, Chief School Business Official; Michelle Jackson, Director of Learning; Dr. Kelly Sculles, Director of Student Services; Terry Ryan, Communications Director; and Ramsin Israel, District Computer Technician.

A special provision of the Open Meetings Act as amended by Gov. Pritzker allows the board to meet remotely in the interest of public safety while providing a live audio stream to the community.

VISITORS' COMMENTS

Dr. Hewitt read three public comments submitted via the public form on the website. An anonymous entry from 'Concerned Staff Members' thanked the board for holding a special meeting to consider remote learning for the holidays. Citing health metrics from IDPH, Cook County and Northfield Township, difficulty in obtaining subs for teachers in quarantine or experiencing symptoms, and the probable increase of social contacts among teachers and students due to the holidays, the commenter was in favor of pivoting to full remote learning until the second semester.

Another anonymous comment from 'Concerned Teachers' also urged the Board to consider fully remote learning until second semester.

An 8th grade student wrote about how happy he was to be in school and urged the board to do everything possible to keep students in school.

A fourth comment inquired about the link to the YouTube channel where the meeting was being streamed.

DISCUSS HEALTH METRICS/SURVEY DATA for REMOTE LEARNING OPTION

Dr. Hewitt stated there are several issues to discuss for in-person students and staff as the holiday season approaches. The Northfield Township superintendents have been working on many extremely challenging issues the pandemic has created and they continue to brainstorm, problem-solve and make adjustments as needed.

Dr. Hewitt provided the following overview:

Since the beginning of the school year, we have been monitoring the community health metrics, regionally, locally and within District 28. We have implemented changes in processes and procedures in response to Illinois Department of Public Health and the Cook County Department of Public Health guidelines, and surveyed families and staff about travel plans.

The first indicator shows the trend for positivity rates during the past three weeks is increasing. Region 10 of Cook County, Northfield Township and Northfield Township plus adjacent ZIP codes rates are now designated as 'substantial community transmission.'

The second indicator is internal metrics. Student and staff absences per day have been rising for the past four weeks. The average number of absences last week were: 67 students and 12 staff members per day.

The third indicator is based on the Holiday Survey conducted among the parents and staff. Between traveling, getting together with others outside of the immediate family, and college students arriving home, we have a significant number of households whose social bubbles will be expanding.

These confluence of factors: rising community transmission, rising absence rates for students and staff, the upcoming holiday season where the social bubbles of staff and families will grow dramatically, and the recent CCDPH recommendation lead to the decision to temporarily pivot to remote learning beginning after Thanksgiving break through the two weeks after winter break. This allows for a 2-week natural quarantine period following winter break, which also places us at the end of the first semester. Dr. Hewitt indicated that this will give the district the best option for returning as healthy as possible to in-person instruction for the

second half of the school year beginning January 19.

Board members asked questions, including:

What is the potential of the COVID test talked about at the last meeting?

Dr. Hewitt said he is not confident at this time about the logistics or benefits given the turn-around for testing results.

Are staff absences impacting the ability to secure substitutes?

Dr. Hewitt said the substitute pool is naturally lower than it has been in the past. Some substitutes have opted out during the pandemic. During the first few weeks of school, a smaller number of subs was needed. As the absences have increased, more teachers are covering colleagues' classes during their plan times. As the need for subs increases, that strategy is increasingly difficult to maintain. Additionally, district office administrators are making themselves available to substitute if needed at our schools.

Can teachers who are quarantined teach remotely to students in the building?

Dr. Hewitt said the teacher can continue to teach but that doesn't alleviate the problem of onsite supervision for students.

Can some of the special needs students and staff continue to hold in-person learning?

Dr. Hewitt said that will be evaluated as we move forward.

Can staff members work in the building?

Yes, staff members can teach remotely from their classrooms if they wish. Health and safety protocols will remain in place.

Will RLA students continue to have materials pickup?

Do we need to do that for in-person students who pivot to remote?

We will continue materials pickup with current RLA students, taking all the precautions we have been. For those students pivoting to remote, teachers would most likely provide students with the materials they need to complete the semester when school dismisses Nov. 20.

Has there been enough professional development?

The district has offered ongoing training since August. Most recently classroom aides were trained on technology and Zoom so they can continue to support teachers. Elementary teachers will utilize two days of professional development on Nov. 23 & 24 when the junior high is conducting parent-teacher conferences. Junior high teachers utilized the institute days in October for training while elementary was conducting parent-teacher conferences. The state provides five remote learning planning days, and the district has used three. We may use another day on Monday, Nov. 30 to give our teachers another day to prepare.

We expect to return for the second semester, with the two weeks after winter break serving as a natural quarantine for families and staff. It is possible we could return earlier if infection rates as a whole drop significantly, but health experts do not expect that to happen.

President Katz Muhl thanked everyone for participating in this special meeting, which was set at the October board meeting when infection rates were lower.

Dr. Hewitt thanked the board members for their questions and said he will continue to explore testing options.

Board members agreed that everyone wants kids back in school as soon as possible.

(Adjournment)

At 7:55 p.m., it was moved by Member Gilmore and seconded by Member Silver-Schack that the Board of Education adjourn.

On a roll call vote, the following voted Aye: Members Gilmore, Silver-Schack, Gallinson, Forchetti, Kohler, Gross, Katz Muhl. Nay: none. Absent: none. Motion carried.

Larry A. Hewitt, Secretary

Tracy Katz Muhl, President