



MINUTES

Wisconsin Rapids Board of Education
Educational Services Committee
510 Peach Street · Wisconsin Rapids, WI 54494 · (715) 424-6701

Mary Rayome, Chairperson
John Benbow, Jr.
Katie Bielski-Medina
Troy Bier
Larry Davis
Sandra Hett
John Krings, President

August 2, 2021

LOCATION: East Junior High School Cafeteria, 311 Lincoln Street, Wisconsin Rapids, WI

TIME: 6:00 p.m.

BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT: John Benbow, Jr., Katie Bielski-Medina, Troy Bier, Larry Davis, Sandra Hett, John Krings, Mary Rayome

OTHERS PRESENT: Craig Broeren, Roxanne Filtz, Steven Hepp, Aaron Nelson, Brian Oswald

Call to Order

John Krings called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

I. Public Comment

The following individuals made public comment:

- Matt Peeters – supports requiring masks in school to keep kids attending in person
- Mike Derrie – opposes mask mandates and vaccinations
- Adam Stublaski – opposes mask mandates
- Jamie Miller – supports the Board's adoption of masking children under 12 and allowing the Superintendent to have authority to move in the best interest of students to keep them safe and attending in person
- Becky Kressin – supports optional masking and opposes having the Superintendent being given the authority to use his discretion to make decisions around mitigation measures and instructional models and schedules; also has concerns around the District's entering into the proposed contract with US² for equity related support
- Samantha Franz – urged the Board to conduct a meeting during which true dialogue with constituents can occur and make decisions in accordance with the feedback of those they represent; opposes masking; questions money being spent on equity training as well as who and how many staff members will be required to take it
- Erin Michels – questions what the criteria will be to decide when universal masking will be required; noted her positive experience with how training in the District has been handled over the years; mentioned the positive gains her virtual students made in the past year
- Brock Maddox – read a statement regarding parent groups rejecting lockdowns and forced masking
- Raneef Graf – opposes mask mandates and questioned what the end game is when other illnesses and children deaths claim more lives than COVID-19 does
- Laura Ewell – opposes mask mandates, vaccinations, Critical Race Theory and infringements on personal freedoms; urged the Board to research for truth and not succumb to lies
- Tony Dowiat – feels the Board is hypocritical in "following the science" when physical distancing and mask wearing is not adhered to by them; in terms of Critical Race Theory, he believes that world history shows evil is color blind and the narrative to engage in hatred and divisiveness needs to stop; stated the Board needs to remember that taxpayers are the employers, and the Board are the employees
- Mike Schedgick – opposes mask mandates stating they are an infringement on freedom and harmful to children; urged the Board to make wise choices
- Lynn Derrie – believes that Critical Race Theory/equity is a joke and harmful; wants the Constitution to be a topic focused on and taught in schools

II. Actionable Items

A. Possible Action on Plans Concerning Mitigation Measures and Instructional Approaches for the 2021-22 School Year

Superintendent Craig Broeren stated that the District's primary goal is to ensure that students are receiving in-person instruction during the 2021-22 school year. The plan is to begin school on September 1 with all students attending five days per week, in person. With regard to mitigation measures, the District's medical advisors and Wood County Public Health recommend that the Center for Disease Control (CDC) and American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) guidelines be followed which includes universal, mandated masking of all children and staff aged 2 and up regardless of vaccination status.

The Board's previous action of July 12, 2021 lifted the masking requirement across the District and allowed for optional masking for individuals aged 12 and older effective July 13, 2021; and optional masking for ages 11 and under from July 13, 2021 through the end of summer school at which time circumstances would be evaluated and a determination made about masks in this age group for the start of school. Neighboring districts have signaled that their plans are to begin the year with optional masking. Cases of COVID-19 are on the rise in the area, but nowhere near what they were during the prior year. Mr. Broeren stated that the administration's recommendation is to begin the year with masks being optional for all age levels, yet strongly encouraged for unvaccinated individuals. He believes that with the knowledge gained from last year in terms of successful mitigation measures utilized, case counts can be closely monitored with adjustments made swiftly and appropriately to curb spread. In order to move quickly during the fluid circumstances presented by COVID-19, the recommendation includes authority for the Superintendent to implement any or all mitigation strategies necessary (which may include a return to required masking as warranted) to maintain in-person learning and a safe and healthy learning environment. This authority would also allow the Superintendent to move classrooms, schools, or the entire District between virtual, hybrid, or other instructional models and/or schedules deemed appropriate given the circumstances.

Mr. Broeren explained that quarantine procedures would continue to be followed as required by Public Health. The District's baseline approach will be to conduct business in similar fashion as it did during the final weeks of the 2020-21 school year, which included strategies such as:

- ♦ encouragement of proper hand washing/sanitizing
- ♦ having individuals stay home when sick
- ♦ physical distancing to the extent possible
- ♦ well-maintained ventilation systems with increased ventilation to maximize indoor air quality
- ♦ hand-touch water fountains will be disabled while touchless bottle fillers remain active
- ♦ increased cleaning levels in accordance with District expectations will continue
- ♦ contact during lunch periods minimized between multiple classrooms at the elementary level to keep groups in cohorts for the purposes of contact tracing
- ♦ expanded periods of lunch at the secondary level to thin out numbers in the cafeteria
- ♦ masking on busing will be in accordance with a current Federal Order which District contractors are obligated to follow

Committee members discussed the recommendation. Consideration was given to:

- Success in the prior year to hold in-person instruction with precautionary measures in place, and the knowledge gained from the experience about what works
- Benefits of in-person instruction for students
- Current level of case counts (21) in WRPS geographic boundaries
- Level of community participation in mitigation measures, with consideration of an article written by the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) which states that COVID 19 policies are intended to mitigate, not eliminate risks. Because school transmission reflects but does not drive community transmission, it is vitally important that communities take all necessary measures to limit community spread of COVID-19 to ensure schools can remain open and safe for all students. The Committee reflected upon the community's role in helping schools remain open for in-person learning
- Surrounding school district plans
- Acknowledgement that there are differing opinions on the masking matter
- Appreciation and respect for the opinion of District medical consultants and public health
- Masking rates and the fact that there were no cases during Summer School, although the learning environment is significantly different during summer
- Confidence in the administration to monitor the situation closely and move swiftly to make adjustments and recommendations as necessary to maintain safe, healthy school learning environments; however, if the administration believes a change in mitigation measures and/or instructional models is needed, a special meeting should be called to enable the Board to be the one making the final decision

Motion by Troy Bier, seconded by John Benbow, to:

- 1) **have students begin the 2021-22 school year attending 5-day, in-person instruction at all levels;**
- 2) **have masks/face coverings be optional for all age levels, yet strongly encouraged for unvaccinated individuals;**
- 3) **approve of granting authority for the Superintendent, based upon District and local circumstances, to implement any or all mitigation strategies necessary to maintain in-person learning to the degree possible and maintain a safe and healthy learning environment for students and staff;**
- 4) **approve of granting authority for the Superintendent to move classrooms, schools, or the entire District between virtual, hybrid, or other instructional models and/or schedules deemed appropriate given the circumstances.**

Ms. Hett requested a friendly amendment to the motion to have the authority stipulated under "3" and "4" to be vested in the Board, not the Superintendent. Both Mr. Bier and Mr. Benbow accepted the friendly amendment. The official motion will now read:

ES-1 Motion by Troy Bier, seconded by John Benbow, to:

- 1) **have students begin the 2021-22 school year attending 5-day, in-person instruction at all levels;**
- 2) **have masks/face coverings be optional for all age levels, yet strongly encouraged for unvaccinated individuals;**
- 3) **vest authority in the Board, based upon District and local circumstances, to implement any or all mitigation strategies necessary to maintain in-person learning to the degree possible and maintain a safe and healthy learning environment for students and staff;**
- 4) **vest authority in the Board to move classrooms, schools, or the entire District between virtual, hybrid, or other instructional models and/or schedules deemed appropriate given the circumstances.**

Motion carried on a vote of 6-1. Mary Rayome voted no.

IV. Updates

A. Seclusion and Restraint Annual Report

Steven Hepp, Director of Pupil Services, presented the annual Seclusion and Restraint Report to the Committee. Historical and current data was shared, with an additional data set on where incidents were directed (toward staff, self, other students, etc.). An overview of District training and resources was shared. A focus for 2021-22 is to ensure that training cycles are maintained to keep certifications current with prioritized training for pertinent staff members.

B. District Equity Related Services Contract

Mr. Hepp presented a proposal from US², Inc. to provide equity related support services to the District. The cost of the contract is \$20,500.00 which would be paid for using District Flow-through dollars. Engaging with US² for equity-related services will help the District develop action steps to address racial disproportionality in educational placement. As a District identified with significant racial disproportionality, 15% of its IDEA budget must be allocated to address student needs. Under the proposed contract, US² will provide training and support to teachers in their practice. District level training of administration is also included in the agreement. All staff will have the opportunity to receive training if they are interested.

The Committee questioned who makes the determination on the District's disproportionality identification. Superintendent Broeren provided an explanation around how the District was identified through federal and state initiatives which changed the "cell size" used to calculate and determine disproportionality based upon student demographics. Numerous districts across the state have been similarly identified and are working to address and meet federal requirements. The state of Wisconsin is one of the worst performing states in terms of the achievement gap between students of color and white students. As a result, exploring ways to address equity concerns, fully meet the needs of students regardless of race or other demographic, and ultimately close the achievement gap is not unique to the District. Mr. Broeren further explained that when the topic of equity comes up it can be misconstrued or conflated with the topic of Critical Race Theory. He clarified that equity has to do with finding ways to meet the needs of kids regardless of skin color or other factors, and Critical Race Theory is not taught within District schools. Effectively addressing equity concerns, particularly when it comes to doing so for non-white students, may at times be done best through engaging with a consultant such as US² for proper coaching and support since they have extensive experience in this area.

V. Consent Agenda Items

ES-1 Action on Plans Concerning Mitigation Measures and Instructional Approaches for the 2021-2022 School Year

VI. Future Agenda Items/Information Requests

Agenda items are determined by the Committee Chair after consultation with appropriate administration depending upon other agenda items, presentation information, and agenda availability.

Future agenda items/information requests include, but are not limited to:

- Parent CII Representatives (September)
- ESSA Update (September)
- ACP Update (October)
- New Course/Curriculum Modification Proposals – Discussion (November)
- ECCP/SCN (November)
- School & District Report Cards (November)
- New Course/Curriculum Proposals – Decision (December)

Mr. Krings adjourned the meeting at 7:25 p.m.