



MINUTES

Wisconsin Rapids Board of Education
Educational Services Committee

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

August 3, 2020

LOCATION: East Jr. High, 311 Lincoln Street, Wisconsin Rapids WI
Cafeteria

TIME: 6:00 p.m.

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

ADMINISTRATION PRESENT: Craig Broeren, Daniel Weigand, Brian Oswald, Roxanne Filtz, Dani Scott, Ed Allison, Phil Bickelhaupt, Steve Hepp, Kelly Zywicki, Nic Sydorowicz

I. Call to Order

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

II. Public Comment

McKeon Lucas, Lincoln High School student, athlete, and Student Council President, commented on his support for the safe reopening of schools under the two-day per week plan as presented, with an end goal to ultimately get students back to school for five days per week instruction. The ability to be back in person impacts student achievement, future college plans, food distribution, and provides a safe environment for students – particularly those facing domestic violence, which Mr. Lucas states has increased since the pandemic began while students have been confined at home. Mr. Lucas expressed his full support to require mask wearing in school to prevent viral spread, even if the Governor’s Order to wear masks expires. He believes disciplinary measures similar to those affiliated with the student dress code should be implemented to ensure compliance.

Paula Reaves, representing the Wisconsin Rapids Education Association (WREA), spoke about the growing number of COVID-19 cases in the community which is prompting the WREA to request that the Board take action to begin the upcoming 2020-21 school year with students learning off-campus through virtual means. WREA leadership has been involved in numerous meetings throughout the summer with administrators, teaching staff, and medical professionals with an end goal of being able to open schools as safely as possible. However, WREA is very concerned about schools becoming super spreaders of the virus in the community once they convene in September. If schools reopen in person, they believe there is potential risk to individuals suffering illness or death, negative impacts likely to be experienced by an already fragile local economy if businesses end up being forced to close, and possibly overwhelming the healthcare system with increased numbers of COVID cases. These factors would be far more detrimental to students and families than virtual learning. WREA understands the need to open schools for educational purposes, the mental well-being of students, and to provide safe spaces and food for children during the day; however, until the virus is under control in the community, WREA believes schools cannot be opened safely. Once school is open, WREA strongly supports a district-wide mask mandate with strong language that states masks are mandatory indoors unless eating or drinking, or alone in a room with exceptions

made for students and staff with medical issues. In concluding remarks, Ms. Reaves stated that since there is no plan being considered for shortened school days or using a phased-in approach, WREA recommends a virtual start to the school year to give families and teachers time to prepare for off-campus learning while also providing the community with an opportunity to reverse the COVID trend which might in turn allow schools to reopen for in-person instruction. By September more will also be known about whether the Governor's mask mandate and other measures are working. Ms. Reaves acknowledged that while this might be difficult given all of the contradictory disinformation circulating, WREA believes the Board will make a decision based upon what they feel is best for the community.

David Keech, teacher at WRAMS, addressed the Committee to express strong support for the WREA reopening plan that has been shared with all Board members. He encouraged the Board to consider the plan which uses a tiered approach and which he believes offers a more concrete and systematic approach than what has been proposed. Mr. Keech would like clarification about whether or not the District's proposed plan mandates masks to be worn during all periods of time except occasions when students or staff are eating or drinking. He supports a strong mask mandate that is enforced. Mr. Keech questioned how transportation partners feel about reopening, and what protocols will be followed if students show up at bus stops exhibiting COVID symptoms. Mr. Keech questioned where the Wood County Health Department stands on the reopening plan, and if they are taking the lead on school reopening as he has seen occurring in other counties. Lastly, Mr. Keech questioned who would be the decision-maker and what criteria would be used when the plan is adjusted since it states that the "plan will remain fluid based upon local circumstances and will be adjusted as necessary;" and he questioned how many staff members must be out ill or on quarantine for plans to be adjusted, and how this would be determined.

III. Actionable Items

A. District Reopening Plan for 2020-21

Craig Broeren, Superintendent, presented the WRPS Reopening Plan for the 2020-21 school year. Numerous Reopening Committee meetings have been held throughout the course of the summer involving over 70 individuals from every building across the District including administrators, professional staff, and support staff, Wood County Public Health Department representatives, local medical professionals, and transportation and business partners. Many of these individuals are also parents to children in the District. Wood County Health Department has not taken a lead with regard to the establishment of District plans, but have been intrinsically involved. The overarching goal of the committee has been to determine whether or not school could return to a 5-day, in person format beginning in September. Circumstances surrounding the pandemic have been evolving since the committee began meeting in June, and will continue changing in the days and months ahead. As a result, having a fluid plan that takes local circumstances into account as decisions are made by the Superintendent is extremely important. There is no specific criterion that will drive decision-making in this regard since there are numerous factors that will need to be considered based upon the circumstances at hand. Changes will be made in conjunction with public health and be based upon what is in the best interest of the students, staff, and the greater community. Priorities focused on in the plan include safety, flexibility, and communication.

Mr. Broeren provided an overview of survey data collected from both parents and staff members over the course of spring and into summer. The information has been helpful to inform decisions related to the plan.

The Reopening Plan, if approved, will have students attending as follows:

- ♦ Grades 4K-5 return to in-person instruction, 5 days per week with precautions in place
- ♦ Grades 6-12 return under an alternative A/B cohorting schedule with precautions in place
- ♦ K-12 fully virtual/off-site learning option will be available for students and families not comfortable returning to school, or in case schools are unable to remain open
- ♦ Plan will remain fluid based upon local circumstances and will be adjusted as necessary

Mr. Broeren provided details about the recommendation and options presented, covering topics related to attendance, special education, safety measures and the school environment, face coverings, transportation, social and emotional health, meals, and athletic/co-curricular activities. Committee members took the opportunity to ask questions around the instructional models, staff member options if they have underlying conditions preventing them from returning to work, safety measures being implemented, and face coverings being required. With regard to face coverings, Mr. Broeren explained that efficacy of face coverings is not something he would debate; however, he fundamentally disagrees with how wearing them has become a heavily politicized topic that puts kids in the middle. A Legacy Foundation grant was written with support and assistance from local physicians which would provide three masks for each secondary level student, and five masks for each elementary student. The Committee discussed the requirement for face mask use, and signaled their support for a student/staff mask mandate even if the Governor's Order expires or is overturned in some capacity. Legitimate reasons for students needing to opt out, such as in cases of medical necessity, would be allowed and handled on a case-by-case basis.

Mr. Broeren introduced Dr. Lisa Olson, Board Certified Family Medicine, and Dr. Amy Falk, Board Certified Pediatrician, who provided their medical and scientific expertise to the Reopening Committee and have been serving in a consultative fashion to individual schools as they develop their individual building plans for reopening. Dr. Olson and Dr. Falk, who are also parents of children attending WRPS, provided an overview of their involvement with the District during the planning process. At the present time they support the goal of returning students to classrooms in September, citing numerous factors surrounding a student's educational experience besides academics that contribute to overall student growth and success such as social emotional development, reliable meals, structure, therapy, physical activity, and much more. They also expressed concerns with the potential for further increasing the divide between children of different socio-economic backgrounds in a fully off-campus learning model. While no plan will be foolproof or infection free, the plan presented for the Committee's approval is reasonable with the safety and precautionary measures being recommended. The physicians urged the Committee to approve a universal masking mandate for students and staff regardless of whether a State order is in place, citing scientific evidence which supports their effectiveness. Lastly, they expressed the need for our community at large to do their part by engaging in public health official recommendations made at the state and federal level concerning physical distancing, limiting social contacts, hand washing, and utilization of face coverings in public to mitigate widespread viral transmission.

Mr. Broeren and Committee members expressed deep gratitude to the physicians for lending their expertise and numerous volunteer hours to guide the District in developing reopening plans that bring students and staff members back in the safest manner possible.

In discussing the plan, Committee members signaled full support for the masking mandate and the reopening plan as presented. While acknowledging feedback that Board members have received from staff, the plan's approach and the inclusion of mandatory masking provides a functional model to start out the school year under. One item of concern raised by Ms. Rayome which she would like to be monitored is in the fact that elementary teachers will be in classrooms full time, five days per week with little volunteer support since there will be limited access to schools by volunteers. Other commentary by Committee members involved the need for community members to become involved to do their part to mitigate viral spread, and the disappointment in societal politicization of mask wearing.

- ES-1 Motion by John Benbow, seconded by Sandra Hett to approve of the 2020-21 Wisconsin Rapids Public Schools Reopening Plan including the Legacy Foundation grant award as presented; the requirement for students and staff to wear face masks during the school year; instituting a waiver of Lincoln High School student parking fees for the 2020-21 school year; and authorization for Superintendent Broeren to move between instructional models as necessary. Motion carried unanimously on a roll call vote.**

B. Renaissance Learning Contract for 2020-21

Roxanne Filtz, Director of Curriculum & Instruction, presented a proposed contract to purchase Renaissance Learning products for the 2020-21 school year which include STAR Math, STAR Reading, and Freckle Math. Ms. Filtz described the screening frequency of screenings and how results are utilized to monitor and determine student progress. Results from screenings is particularly helpful in deciding whether or not a student needs intervention or acceleration. Freckle Math helps K-12 teachers differentiate instruction to reach every student at their own level. This program was piloted last year by classroom teachers who found that the resource paired nicely with their core curriculum materials, and the level of student engagement was high.

ES-2 Motion by Larry Davis, seconded by Troy Bier to approve of the contract with Renaissance Learning for the 2020-21 school year in the amount of \$38,356.60, to be paid for from Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Funds (ESSER) as these programs will allow for continuity of instruction and learning for both on-site and off-campus instruction. Motion carried unanimously.

C. Happy Numbers Contract for 2020-21

Ms. Filtz presented a proposed contract to purchase Happy Numbers, which is an adaptive, online math program to be used in grades K-5 across the district. This program includes a thoughtfully designed progression of skills, concepts, connections, and tools that students acquire to ensure a firm foundation for middle school and beyond. The program was utilized last year throughout the District with great success, and will be a helpful resource during the ongoing pandemic should off-campus learning become necessary.

ES-3 Motion by Katie Bielski-Medina, seconded by Troy Bier to approve of the Happy Numbers contract for the 2020-21 school year in the amount of \$10,590.00 to be paid for from Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Funds (ESSER) as the program will allow for continuity of instruction and learning for both on-site and off-campus instruction. Motion carried unanimously.

IV. Updates

A. Pitsch Early Learning Center

Dr. Dani Scott, Director of Pupil Services provided an update on the possibility of utilizing the Pitsch Elementary School building as a District Early Learning Center in the future. With the Boys & Girls Club vacating the facility, the site could potentially be used to house both early childhood and some District 4K classrooms. Advantages for creating an Early Learning Center were shared along with a potential timeline for the Center to be up and operational for the 2021-22 school year. Committee members had an opportunity to ask questions.

B. Seclusion and Restraint Annual Report

Dr. Scott provided the required annual report on the number of incidents of seclusion and physical restraint that occurred in District schools during the 2019-20 school year up to the point of building closure due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the total number of pupils involved in the incidents, and the number of children with disabilities who were involved in the incidents. Dr. Scott shared historical data, training capacity, and future training plans along with a 2020-21 training schedule.

C. 1:1 Initiative at Wisconsin Rapids Area Middle School (WRAMS)

Phil Bickelhaupt, Director of Technology, provided details about the 1:1 Initiative being implemented at WRAMS in response to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Student and parents will have an opportunity to participate in a WRAMS Chromebook Care Program similar to the initiative at Lincoln High School (LHS). The main difference will be in the fact that students at LHS can keep their Chromebooks upon graduation for a minimal cost. Choosing to enroll in the Chromebook Care Program is optional, but could result in a significant savings for the student/parent for costs associated with repaired or replaced devices. At the moment there is a backlog for districts who are ordering devices as they prepare for the potential move to virtual learning. Fortunately, new devices were ordered for WRAMS after being approved by the Board in April, 2020 and should be available for student use at the beginning of the school year in September.

V. Consent Agenda Items

- ES-1 2020-21 WRPS Reopening Plan, Legacy Foundation Grant, Face Mask Mandate, and Superintendent Authority to Move Between Instructional Models**
- ES-2 Renaissance Learning Contract for 2020-21**
- ES-3 Happy Numbers Contract for 2020-21**

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.

- Parent CII Representatives (September)
- ESSER Update (September)
- ESSA Update (September)
- Phonics Units of Study Update (September)
- ACP Update (October)
- New Course/Curriculum Proposals – Discussion (October)
- ECCP/SCN (November)
- Elementary Social Studies Acquisition and 3rd Grade Curriculum (November)
- New Course/Curriculum Proposals – Decision (November)

John Krings adjourned the meeting at 7:59 p.m.