



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

February 1, 2021

LOCATION: Board of Education, 510 Peach Street, Wisconsin Rapids WI
Conference Room A/B

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: Ed Allison, Phil Bickelhaupt, Craig Broeren, Tom Crockett, Roxanne Filtz, Tracy
Ginter, Steve Hepp, Ronald Rasmussen, Dani Scott, Ashley Tessmer, Betsy Van
Berkel, Jennifer Wilhorn

I. Call to Order

Mary Rayome called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

II. Public Comment

There was no public comment.

III. Actionable Items

A. 2021-2022 District Strategic Plan

Craig Broeren, Superintendent, and members of the Strategic Plan Committee presented the Wisconsin Rapids Public Schools' (WRPS) 2021-22 Strategic Plan. In an effort to streamline the process a bit, the administration included a narrative for each objective so that the Committee had a preview of progress prior to the meeting. Committee members indicated they found the narrative to be a helpful addition to the background material. Progress toward goals as well as next steps were shared. The timeline under a number of tasks/action steps was modified and dates were changed to accommodate for the inability to make anticipated progress under the circumstances of the on-going pandemic.

ES-1 Motion by John Benbow, seconded by Troy Bier to approve of the 2021-2022 Wisconsin Rapids Public Schools' Strategic Plan.

Motion carried unanimously.

B. Board Policy 672 – Purchasing Procedures/Competitive Pricing for First Reading

Roxanne Filtz, Director of Curriculum and Instruction, and Phil Bickelhaupt, Director of Technology, presented recommended changes for Board Policy 672 – Purchasing Procedures/Competitive Pricing. There are a number of areas in the current policy that are redundant. The administration reviewed sample policies from other districts to determine their processes and current purchasing authority limitations. The recommendations being made to Policy 672 for first reading provide a clearer understanding of the procedure to be used by the administration during the procurement process, and increases purchasing authorization levels to better align with trending costs of curriculum and technology products. The language to give preference to local vendors if service, quality, delivery time, and price are comparable with other vendors has been maintained in the policy.

ES-2 Motion by Troy Bier, seconded by Larry Davis to approve of recommended changes to Board Policy 672 – Purchasing Procedures/Competitive Pricing for first reading.

Motion carried unanimously.

IV. Updates

A. AGR Mid-Year Report

Ms. Filtz presented 2020-21 Achievement Gap Reduction (AGR) mid-year information to the Committee. The report contains information on each school's implementation of the AGR contract requirements, performance objectives, and success in attaining the objectives. Additional information around Benchmark Level progress in Reading and math was shared. Ms. Filtz explained how timelines tied to AGR reporting impact progress measurement reporting when the District's first and second trimester schedules end in late November and early March but the State requires reporting at the end of a traditional semester, which is mid-January. With the COVID-19 shutdown beginning in March, 2020 and the pandemic continuing, student learning loss is a concern and focus for the administration and staff. Results from data collected at the end of the second trimester will be shared in a future meeting. Assessment data of students receiving virtual instruction is currently undergoing evaluation, and information about this group's performance will be shared at the Committee meeting in March, 2021.

B. Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund (ESSER II)

The Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act, 2021 (CRRSA), was signed into law on December 27, 2020 and provides an additional \$54.3 billion for the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund (ESSER II). ESSER II is a formula grant and will be awarded in the same proportion as each state received funds under Part A of Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). Ms. Filtz explained that the District's portion of ESSER II funds is estimated to be \$3,155,275.00. Unlike the first round where districts were required to manage the funding allocation for private/parochial schools, these schools are instead able to apply directly to the DPI for ESSER II funding in this second round which relieves the District from having to act as their fiscal agent. ESSER II funds can be used for the same items as CARES Act dollars; however, having Local Education Agencies (LEAs)

address learning losses in marginalized groups is stressed, and new areas where expenditures can be covered include school facility upgrades to implement precautionary and viral transmission mitigation measures as well as costs dedicated to increase student engagement.

C. State Testing Updates

Per the latest release from the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, requirements for the 2020-2021 administration of statewide assessments remain unchanged under state and federal law. Therefore, plans are underway for in-person testing to occur to meet these state and federal requirements. This includes developing a plan to assess students who are receiving remote instruction. Off-campus virtual testing options without school district proctors are not allowed within the Wisconsin State Assessment guidelines, and logistics are being worked out to accommodate for in-person testing.

D. Gifted and Talented Educational Services Plan (GATES)

The Gifted and Talented Educational Services Plan (GATES) document has been updated with minor modifications to revise names and contact information due to changes in personnel. The updated document can be found on the District webpage.

E. Seclusion and Restraint State Data Report

Dani Scott, Director of Pupil Services, reported that in December of 2020 districts across the state were required to report seclusion and restraint data to DPI for the first time. Seclusion and/or restraint are viable response options when a student is in immediate danger of hurting themselves or others. Utilization of seclusion and/or restraint is always a last resort for staff, and the techniques are only used by staff trained in nonviolent crisis intervention. The data being reported may be artificially low due to the shutdown caused by the pandemic in March, 2020.

Tom Crockett, School Psychologist, along with Betsy VanBerkel, Cross-Categorical Teacher and Steve Hepp, Assistant Director of Pupil Services, updated the Committee on the status of seclusion and restraint training initiatives involving staff.

F. Virtual Student Enrollment Numbers

Ms. Filtz provided the Committee with updated student enrollment numbers for off-campus learners. Ms. Medina raised a question around parent notifications when students are not in attendance as required. Principal Rasmussen shared some details around the process involved if this occurs.

G. Cohort Schedule at Lincoln High School and WR Area Middle School

Superintendent Broeren explained that the administration has been exploring the possibility of moving from the current A/B cohort schedule at the secondary level to a phased-in return to 4-day in person instruction with a goal of potentially being back to 5-day in person instruction by the end of the school year. As the pandemic continues, Mr. Broeren described a lack of leadership at the state and national level to assist schools as they continue to navigate the pandemic under very difficult circumstances. Each district is left to collect and collate any available information and perform

individual outreach and engagement with Public Health officials and medical professionals as they continue to make decisions based upon known data.

Based upon some recent studies conducted, and in learning about other similar-sized districts that have had success in implementing a 4- or 5-day in-person instructional model, there is evidence to support that moving in this direction at Lincoln High School (LHS) and at Wisconsin Rapids Area Middle School (WRAMS) is feasible and can be done safely. The social-emotional well-being and mental health of students is one compelling reason to consider getting students back to more in-person days as soon as possible as long as it can be done in a safe manner.

Mr. Broeren has been working closely with Wood County Health Department Director Sue Kunferman and the District's medical advisors, Dr. Amy Falk and Dr. Lisa Olson, to examine data and consider the feasibility of expanding the in-person day schedule. Information collected around COVID spread as it relates to schools indicates that the precautionary measures in effect are working as intended, and not exacerbating viral transmission in the community. Anecdotal evidence gathered from other schools who are meeting 4 or 5 days in person and employing the same precautionary measures, but allowing less than the 6' physical distancing as recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), reveal similar success to the District in mitigating viral spread as it operates under the A/B cohort model. Modifications to close contact and quarantine requirements for classroom settings (not lunchroom areas or when physical contact occurs such as in co-curricular/athletic activities) could potentially keep students in school even if they were in a classroom alongside a COVID positive peer as long as masks were worn properly for the entire time – only the COVID positive person would need to be excluded. The Department of Health Services (DHS) and Department of Public Instruction (DPI) continue to recommend that schools follow CDC guidelines; however, individual school districts have the ability to work with local Health Department officials and choose less distance than the guidelines recommend.

The Committee was updated on the fact that staff vaccinations will not likely be available until after March 1, 2021, and this will be based upon vaccine supply. This pushes staff member vaccination completion out to mid-April if shots get administered during the first part of March. In a recent survey of staff with 591 responding, 65.3% (386) indicated they intend to be vaccinated; 14.4% (85) do not intend to be vaccinated; 2.9% (17) have already been vaccinated; and 17.4% (103) are uncertain about whether or not they will get the vaccine. Clinical trials for vaccinations in children are on-going, and only the Pfizer variety is available to adolescents ages 16 and up. Vaccinating the younger population will likely not happen for at least another year, and only if the vaccine gets approved and parents choose to allow it. Precautionary measures with masking, physical distancing, frequent hand washing, etc. will likely continue well into the next school year.

Superintendent Broeren explained that the strategy to increase in-person instruction at the secondary level is being considered in a phased-in approach so that it can be monitored closely and adjusted as needed. He firmly believes that students need as much in-person time in school as possible for both their academic and social emotional well-being. Daily structure and supervision are important for student success. In speaking with Public Health and the medical consultants, one aspect being considered

to return students in the safest manner possible is through the implementation of surveillance testing of both students and staff who are willing. The PCR test being considered would involve a non-intrusive nasal swab, with a certain number of tests being conducted each week. The test would only be administered to staff who consent, and to students whose parents have provided consent. Testing would provide a scientific baseline to measure the presence of COVID in school, and would begin a few weeks prior to bringing students in for more days under the 4- and 5-day approach. The cost is \$70 per test which typically provides results within 24 hours, and it is possible that ESSER II funding or a potential outside grant could help defray the expense. Details around what an acceptable threshold would be in terms of surveillance testing are still being determined. Mr. Broeren stated that working toward additional in-person days prior to the end of the school year, rather than waiting for September, will help to better inform decisions about school start-up in the fall. If the school year ends under the cohort schedule, it is likely the new year will begin under the same schedule. If necessary, a switch back to the A/B cohort schedule can occur fairly quickly this spring since both LHS and WRAMS are well-adjusted to and familiar with working under this model.

Committee members discussed the 4- and 5-day phased in approach. Commentary and concerns surfaced around:

- The importance of precautionary measures in schools continuing to be adhered to and followed even if the mask mandate from the State is removed
- Whether District funding could be impacted if CDC guidelines are slightly modified in the approach
- The potential for District liability to increase if state and federal guidelines are not followed
- How transportation might be impacted with additional students riding together – how full would the buses be?
- The social-emotional and academic benefits for students to be in-person more days
- Concerns around staff willing but unable to be vaccinated prior to additional days being implemented
- Consideration and concern around the variant strain of COVID which spreads more easily and quickly
- The stress and unrest students and families might endure if an abrupt reversal of the 4- or 5-day approach needs to take place
- The current approach has gone well to provide students with in-person instruction while maintaining healthy and safe school campuses – there are risks to changing the approach
- The logistics of maintaining proper physical distancing at certain times such as lunchtime with twice the number of students in the building will likely be difficult to adhere to
- Baseline surveillance testing sounds like a good idea if staff and students/parents are willing
- Consideration needs to be given toward whether the cost for surveillance testing is the best way to utilize dollars
- Who will be performing the surveillance testing, and how much will this cost in labor
- What gating metrics around surveillance testing would be appropriate – what threshold would make a return to the A/B cohort schedule necessary
- Concerns were expressed around contributing to community spread
- Staff member input and feedback is valued and should be considered where possible; Mr. Broeren explained that he does value staff input and feedback and has their safety in mind as decisions are made, however there are multiple meetings and information being gathered to keep things moving forward which occurs during times when staff members are already working with a full plate, doing the jobs that they were hired for; much of the information he has recently become aware of developed in rapid fashion. When staff members reach out to him, he does listen and does value what they have to say; ultimately he always has the best interest of students in mind when considering issues at hand – having students attending himself, he fully understands how kids are impacted by decisions being made and wouldn't put a plan forward that he feels is unsafe
- Staff and parents should be surveyed to ascertain the level of willingness to participate in surveillance testing
- Some students may not feel comfortable in scenarios like the lunchroom where they must remove their mask in order to eat around even more people – how would the needs of these students be addressed? Principal Rasmussen did mention that lunch period(s) would likely be added to the schedule to help alleviate concerns

- A great deal has been learned from the A/B cohort approach, and if safety procedures can be employed that will help a 4- or 5-day approach be successful, it should be given careful consideration
- The emotional well-being of students is a concern given the fact that the software filtering system used to detect unhealthy student communication has seen increased activity
- Could increasing the days of in-person instruction raise the number of requests for virtual instruction transfers, inflating program numbers
- Why do both LHS and WRAMS – would it be better to focus on one to begin – for a variety of reasons, this approach could add extra complicated layers for families
- With the highest level of precautions taken, it behooves the District to try something to move forward to increase in-person instructional hours for students
- Students needing in-person instruction in the worst way are suffering greatly – truancy is worsening in many of these cases and achievement gaps are widening – their success hinges on having as many in-person days as possible

Committee members would like additional information around surveillance testing and perhaps a survey of parents and staff members to gauge their willingness to consent to testing. Mixed feelings were expressed about moving toward a 4- and 5-day approach when things seem to be going well; some had strong feelings about staying the course with known factors since it seems to be going well, while others recognize the potential benefits in trying it.

Mr. Broeren reiterated that he understands the thought around leaving things as is because it has proven to be a safe approach; however, he also believes it is important for the District to position itself well for the start-up of school in September. He will survey staff members and parents by Monday, February 8th to get a feel for their inclinations about moving toward a 4- and 5-day in person approach, as well as their attitudes around surveillance testing. Mr. Broeren stated that Dr. Falk and Dr. Olson as well as Sue Kunferman from Public Health plan to be in attendance at the February 8, 2021 Board meeting to participate in the discussion and help answer any questions Board members may have.

V. Consent Agenda Items

Committee members will be asked to decide which items should be placed on the consent agenda for the regular Board of Education meeting.

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:

- Central Oaks Charter Status (March)
- Counselor Curriculum Maps (March)
- Early College Credit Program/Start College Now (April)
- Code of Conduct Updates (April)
- Agenda Planners (May)
- Elementary Social Studies Acquisition (May)
- Elementary math Acquisition (May)

Ms. Rayome adjourned the meeting at 8:10 p.m.