

December 7, 2020

The board meeting of the Berwick Area School Board was held on Monday, December 7, 2020, via virtual zoom meeting. The meeting was called to order at 7:15 p.m. by President, Mrs. Susy Wiegand.

PRESENT: Mrs. Susy Wiegand, Mr. Keith Hess, Ms. Carol Bodwalk, Mr. Joseph DeMelfi, Mrs. Maryann Kovalewski, Mr. Jon Morell, Mrs. Brenda Post, Mr. Ronald Robsock, Mrs. Sandra Slavick

ABSENT: None

Also **PRESENT:** Mrs. Wendy Kupsy, Ms. Renee Jilinski, Attorney Bull, Mr. Steven Christian, Mr. Robert Croop, Mr. Benton Culver, Mrs. Wendy Daily, Mrs. Pamela Hegland, Mrs. Janet Kovach, Mrs. Jennifer McHale, Ms. Amy Melchiorre, Mr. Gregory Michael, Mr. Joseph “Bo” Orlando, Mr. Randy Peters, Mr. David Robbins, Mr. Patrick Sharkey, Ms. Jill Shipman

Moment of Silence – Wayne Strausser (previous board member who was the longest serving board member in the district) and Elizabeth Canouse (employee)

Flag Salute

Reading of the Minutes:

On motion of Maryann Kovalewski, seconded by Keith Hess, we dispense with the reading of the minutes of the previous meeting on November 9, 2020 as everyone had received copies prior to the meeting. Motion carried. All members voting “Aye”. “Nay” - none and no abstentions.

Financial Report:

On motion of Keith Hess, seconded by Jon Morell, we approve the financial/treasurer’s report as presented. Motion carried. All members voting “Aye”. “Nay” - None and no abstentions.

Budgetary Transfers:

On motion of Keith Hess, seconded by Carol Bodwalk, we approve the budgetary transfers on page 22. Motion carried. All members voting “Aye”. “Nay” - None and no abstentions.

Presentation of the Bills:

On motion of Keith Hess, seconded by Jon Morell, we pay the bills as listed.

ROLL CALL VOTE: “Ayes” – Ronald Robsock, Brenda Post, Keith Hess, Jon Morell, Carol Bodwalk, Sandra Slavick, Maryann Kovalewski, Joseph DeMelfi, Susy Wiegand

“Nays” – None

“Abstaining” – None

Motion carried.

Superintendent's Report: Wendy Kupsky

On November 23rd, the State and along with the Department of Health (DOH) issued new guidelines for all the school districts to be following. The school district had to sign an attestation form, which was that we were going to follow the rules. If you chose not to sign the form, then you had to go to immediate remote instructional model. We have been following the rules/guidelines, we went ahead and signed the form. It is posted on our district website, attached to our health and safety plan. Some of the updates have been changed. It's called the responding to cases. Recommendations are for Pk-12 schools following identification of cases of COVID 19. Some of the changes are that they now are breaking down cases by buildings by the size of the building: small, medium and large. Cleaning and disinfecting contact tracing and quarantine recommendations, closing certain areas of a school building or the entire school if necessary. When closing the entire buildings, length of closure may vary, based on actually all the things that I listed above. One of the things that would change, previously when we shut down in the end of September into October, any case that was being identified as being positive even though we were closed down. At that time, we were still counting cases in a 14 day rolling window. Now if you are in remote instruction and the person is not in attendance, that case does not count as one of the cases for the 14 cases of the rolling window. Just in two months, that is something that has changed. During this period of time, when we chose to stay closed for an extra week and didn't come in the Wednesday before Thanksgiving and we didn't come back until today, the students were not in the buildings for a grand total of 12 days. Faculty had come into the buildings on December 1st and they were teaching from their classrooms. We had positive cases over the holiday break. Nescopeck we had two. Salem, we had none. WBE, we had zero over the holiday. Middle school, we had one. High school, we had three. During the week when we were doing remote instruction, we had no cases that were reported for anybody who was going into the buildings. Starting tomorrow, Nescopeck and Salem has everyone back. WBE has two in quarantine. At the middle school, people that are able to be back but are still staying off, we have one. At the high school, we have one that is remaining in quarantine. I want to commend our parents and our families for communicating with the principals and teachers. We have the ability to instruct students remotely. It is a good option for the students. Today it was announced at the Wyoming Valley Conference winter sports are going to be postponed for competitions until January 4, 2021. We had already made that decision for January 2nd but the recommendation with the conference is to be January 4th. During this time, we can have voluntary practices probably on a week to week basis. They have to have 15 days of practice prior to competition. PIAA was going to have a meeting March 6th.

Maryann Kovalewski – I have concerns. Columbia County is holding its own. Luzerne County numbers are out of control. We have 3 ½ out of our 5 schools in Luzerne county. That is why I am concerned. We have not seen the post-Thanksgiving spike, then we go into Christmas, then we have the post-Christmas spike. Are we better off doing what some of the other schools have done and just keep everyone home until January 4th and do total remote? I don't know. I know in person instruction is by far the best. I don't like working remotely. Is it better for the students to be here a couple of days and go out and be here for a couple of days or is it best to say let's just go virtual? I don't know the answer to that.

Susy Wiegand – Today, Dr. Fauci recommended to have as much in-person instruction for children all around the nation. He is one of the top leaders speaking for this whole pandemic. We should keep an eye on the numbers and if we can see that it is not safe for our staff and children. We will take that into consideration but the in-person instruction is so important for the kids. We

truly have not had a spike; I don't know how we can justify that change. We have a lot of parents that are happy to see the kids back in school.

Joseph DeMelfi – I think that we as a board has to feel comfortable with where we are heading and what we are doing as a district. I think we are on top of it as this point. If we are not comfortable, we need to say that.

Jon Morell – You should follow the zip codes. The numbers that are high are Hazleton, West Hazleton and up that way that have the higher numbers. I think we are doing the right thing. The longer we can keep the students in the classroom, the better off they will be.

Keith Hess – I don't know if anyone saw the article in the newspaper today, that failing grades are up because of the shuffle of the remote learning. The kids are not picking up like they should be.

Wendy Kupsky – We were one of the first districts to shut down earlier. I don't have a problem with responding to cases. If we get the cases, I contact DOH, I follow the rules. They are closing by buildings. If you recall, we closed the entire district.

Maryann Kovalewski – The selective closing may be the way to go.

Wendy Kupsky – It is important to note that if a significant or a wide spread outbreak may require moving to a more remote based instructional model. At the elementary level, we are not hybrid yet and we could go hybrid to then increase the amount of social distancing. Those are things that they are saying. If we can get our cleaning done in a certain amount of time, you can come back as soon as three days then your rolling window completely starts all over again. I sent out an email to the district about the new CDC guidelines and hours later they changed it. Their recommendations are now per their most protective recommended quarantine period which is 14 days. Quarantine can end after a ten day period if no symptoms have been reported during daily monitoring. You can end it at seven days if you have gotten tested at five days and you had negative result. I will go with what the board directs. I am in constant contact with our administration. Today was a normal day with sub coverage. If we have cases, we respond to it immediately.

Joseph DeMelfi – How many students do we have in quarantine?

Wendy Kupsky – Right now, we have 22 at the high school, 31 at the middle school, 7 at WBE, 3 at Nescopeck and 7 at Salem.

Jon Morell – That is quarantine. They haven't tested positive?

Wendy Kupsky – That is quarantine due to exposure.

Maryann Kovalewski – That is family exposure rather than community exposure?

Wendy Kupsky, Susy Wiegand and Sandra Slavick – Yes.

Wendy Kupsky – With DOH, it's one of the same with a rolling window. At the middle school and high school, it is easier to manage because they are hybrid. At the elementary, we still don't have the teachers live if a child is out.

I wanted to remind everyone, December 23rd will be the exact same way we did it for Thanksgiving. The elementary students will be off and virtual for 1/2 day in the morning. Secondary will be synchronous.

There is going to be a large donation that has been made to students by an anonymous donor. It is going to be a function that is going to be sponsored by the Teen Center for holiday cheer that is going to brighten some of our children in our community. It's going to brighten their Christmas. We are super grateful and truly pleased for this person in our community. The guidance counselors are working to identify the families that are in need of that generosity.

Public Comment:

Unknown – Should the parents have a say if our kids attend school? What if we want virtual learning options?

Wendy Kupsky – Yes. There is an option. You can reach out to Wendy Daily for virtual options.

Joseph DeMelfi – How is our equipment holding up?

Wendy Kupsky – Everyone has devices. Right now for the teachers, we are getting new Surface Pros out to them. If a child has a problem with their device, they contact their building.

Emily Scranton – I agree with Mrs. Kovalewski with going virtual. I doesn't feel comfortable about the situation and we are scared.

Danielle Alexander – I feel the community concerns are not being addressed. We need to be proactive and not reactive.

Karen Finucan – I am the middle school teacher that tested positive for COVID and have been working from home since the day before Thanksgiving. I want to express my gratitude that I have been able to continue to work from home while being sick with COVID. We are able, at the middle school, to be able to work from home using our Surface Pros. However, my concern is that it has been expressed that according to the DOH that I have been able to return but choosing to stay home. That is inaccurate. According to the DOH, Allie Wood who I spoke to today and according to the CDC website, you have to meet the requirements in order to return. The requirements are: the quarantine time, not having a fever, having your symptoms improving. I have expressed to the middle school and Mrs. Kupsky that my symptoms have not improved and I am on an inhaler and medicine for breathing issues with the symptoms of COVID. I am grateful that I can work from home, I also want to make the school board aware that if I was capable of coming back in and continuing my job, and I would. I am unable to return due to my symptoms. They have not gotten better. In fact, they have increased in aspects of the symptoms of COVID. I wanted to make that very clear. It is not a choice to stay home. I would rather be with my students in school. I am unable to do that with my symptoms.

Jon Morell – I do agree that the guidelines do say with no fever for at least 24 hours and being symptom free along with the quarantine. That's the guidelines and that's what we know the district is following.

Wendy Kupsky – I have consulted with Allie Wood at DOH.

Jon Morell – If her symptoms aren't better, than she should not return to work.

Wendy Kupsky – We have had 30 some teachers that we have been able to allow to telework from home. I don't want them to come in if they are not well.

Elizabeth Frye – Phone calls about positive cases, why are we not getting them now?

Wendy Kupsky – If a student or teacher is remote, the guidelines state they are not considered a case. Last week when the students were doing lessons at home, if any of the staff or faculty would have tested positive during that time, I would have made those robo calls. If you are physically in the building during the infectious time, that is when you make that call. All the infectious cases were over Thanksgiving, not when we were physically in the buildings.

Joseph DeMelfi – Berwick area is not as effective as some of those that you were talking about. We are being proactive to control it. I think we are keeping a handle on it right now.

Jon Morell – I think if we go fully virtual, I think we are doing our kids a disservice.

Sandra Slavick – We have to think about the parents who have to find babysitters and people to watch the kids on virtual.

Wendy Kupsy – I have been approached, if we do have to go virtual, what we can do to support the health care workers in our community for child care so the healthcare workers can go to work. If we do go virtual, that would be something that I would try to do to help out with.

Public Comment on Agenda Items: None.

Agenda

General:

Approve Items G-1 through G-2 With One Motion

G-1 Approval of the second and final reading of Policy #702.1 Crowdfunding. (enc.)

G-2 Approval to accept a \$4,500 grant from the Central Susquehanna Community Foundation for a Healthy Workplace for the 2020-2021 school year. \$1,500 was designated for the High School, \$1,500 for the Nescopeck Elementary School and \$1,500 for the West Berwick Elementary School.

On motion of Ronald Robsock, seconded by Keith Hess, we approve Items G-1 through G-2 With One Motion. Motion carried. All members voting “Aye”. “Nay” - None and no abstentions.

Extra Curricular:

EC-1 Approval to establish and accept the by-laws of the Students Together Fighting Cancer Club. (enc.)

On motion of Jon Morell, seconded by Keith Hess, we establish and accept the by-laws of the Students Together Fighting Cancer Club. Motion carried. All members voting “Aye”. “Nay” – None and no abstentions.

Transportation:

T-1 Approval of James Castillo as school bus driver for FishingCreek Transportation for the remainder of the 2020-2021 school term.

On motion of Keith Hess, seconded by Jon Morell, we approve James Castillo as school bus driver for FishingCreek Transportation for the remainder of the 2020-2021 school term. Motion carried. All members voting “Aye”. “Nay” - None and no abstentions.

Personnel:

Approve Items P-1 through P-13 With One Motion

- P-1 Approval to accept with regret the retirement of Brenda Yohey as part-time paraeducator, effective January 16, 2021. (enc.)**
- P-2 Approval to accept the resignation of Ashley DeLieto as part-time paraeducator, effective November 26, 2020. (enc.)**
- P-3 Approval to accept the resignation of Olivia Dawson as an exclusive district substitute, effective December 11, 2020. (enc.)**
- P-4 Approval to accept the resignation of Nicole Russo as Title I Teaching Assistant, effective December 9, 2020. (enc.)**
- P-5 Approval for employee #2663 to take unpaid Family Medical Leave (FMLA) from March 9, 2021 through March 12, 2021. (enc.)**
- P-6 Approval for employee #2244 to take unpaid Family Medical Leave (FMLA) from January 4, 2021 through February 28, 2021. (enc.)**
- P-7 Approval for employee #2953 to take unpaid days from December 16, 2020 through January 29, 2021. (enc.)**
- P-8 Approval of Megan Dalo as volunteer girls' basketball coach, pending receipt of appropriate paperwork.**
- P-9 Approval to hire Brittani Shaffer as part-time paraeducator, pending receipt of appropriate paperwork. Compensation will be at the rate of \$13.12 per hour.**
- P-10 Approval of the status change of Shayla DiPasquale from day-to-day substitute teacher to exclusive district substitute teacher, effective December 7, 2020. Compensation will be at the rate of \$20.00 per hour.**
- P-11 Approval of Kenneth Marshman as volunteer boys' basketball coach, pending receipt of appropriate paperwork.**
- P-12 Approval of Chrysogonus Curry as assistant boys' basketball coach. Compensation will be at a stipend of \$2,000.**
- P-13 Approval of William Phillips as volunteer advisor for the Students Together Fighting Cancer Club.**

On motion of Keith Hess, seconded by Jon Morell, we approve Items P-1 through P-13 With One Motion. Motion carried. All members voting "Aye". "Nay" - None and no abstentions.

P-14 Approval to hire Ariel Harro as a temporary professional employee, effective December 8, 2020. Ms. Harro will be employed as an Elementary Teacher at the Bachelor’s Step 1, \$41,337 prorated. (ROLL CALL VOTE)

On motion of Keith Hess, seconded by Jon Morell, we approve to hire Ariel Harro as a temporary professional employee, effective December 8, 2020. Ms. Harro will be employed as an Elementary Teacher at the Bachelor’s Step 1, \$41,337 prorated.

ROLL CALL VOTE: “Ayes” – Brenda Post, Keith Hess, Jon Morell, Carol Bodwalk,
Sandra Slavick, Maryann Kovalewski, Joseph DeMelfi,
Ronald Robsock, Susy Wiegand

“Nays” – None

“Abstaining” – None

Motion carried.

P-15 Approval to hire Domenique Verrastro as a temporary professional employee, effective December 8, 2020. Ms. Verrastro will be employed as an Elementary Teacher at the Bachelor’s Step 1, \$41,337 prorated. (ROLL CALL VOTE)

On motion of Keith Hess, seconded by Ronald Robsock, we approve to hire Domenique Verrastro as a temporary professional employee, effective December 8, 2020. Ms. Verrastro will be employed as an Elementary Teacher at the Bachelor’s Step 1, \$41,337 prorated.

ROLL CALL VOTE: “Ayes” – Keith Hess, Jon Morell, Carol Bodwalk, Sandra Slavick,
Maryann Kovalewski, Joseph DeMelfi, Ronald Robsock,
Brenda Post, Susy Wiegand

“Nays” – None

“Abstaining” – None

Motion carried.

Reports:

Committee Reports: None

Old Business:

Keith Hess – Senate Bill 1216 that the Governor signed before Thanksgiving. The school bus contract will be paid even if we shut down. We can deduct any variable costs, however, there are a few organizations like PSBA and PASBO that will have to develop those variable costs are. I talked to Mrs. Jilinski and we are going to pay our contractors at full contract rate depending on what the variable costs are once we know more. Doing it this way we are getting our full subsidy from the State, basically what happened in the Spring. Whether we shut down or not, the bus contractors will be paid.

Regional Greenhouse Gas initiative (RGGI) – This is a partnership between Northeastern Mid-Atlantic States. It reduces carbon emissions from fossil fluid power plants. This entails carbon credits that are bought and sold on the market amongst these States. This brings the carbon plants in a competitive line with nuclear. DEP is looking for input if RGGI is made part of law.

Deadline for that is January 14, 2021. I suggest we put in a comment that we are in favor of it. I

myself will do it and I can present it to the Board at the next meeting. We can get the Board's input and have a decision by deadline on January 14th. We know what can happen if the nuclear power plant shuts down. They can't compete with natural gas. Anything we can do to help our tax base is worth doing. I will work something up and present it in January. It's all on line.

Wendy Kupsky – Did we ever zoom with that person?

Keith Hess – No. I talked to him at length in the last week.

Sandra Slavick – I think information is good. Get the information for us.

Renee Jilinski – I have two things that are informational from a budget standpoint.

By the middle of this month, we will be made whole with the State in regards to the property tax relief that we have that was basically withheld as the Social Security payment from the third quarter of the previous fiscal year. All that will be received by December 15, 2020.

New Business:

Keith Hess – Recently House Bill 703 was signed law by the Governor on October 29, 2020. All school directors' emails must be made easily available on the district website. This needs to be made available by June 26, 2021. Contact Steve Christian to set up your email.

Wendy Kupsky – I will make sure Mr. Christian reaches out to you so you can log in. It will then be posted on the district website.

Keith Hess – They will be subject to right to know. If anyone is interested, see Mr. Christian.

Public Comment:

Charles Stimeling – Families and myself feel it is not safe.

Nicole Siegel – I feel you are not trying to prevent.

Summarization of Executive Session: Susy Wiegand

None

On motion of Ronald Robsock, seconded by Keith Hess we adjourn the meeting. Motion carried. All members voting "Aye." "Nay"- none and no abstentions.

Meeting adjourned at 8:06 p.m.

Janet K. Kovach, Secretary to the Board