

A Special Meeting of the Board of School Directors of the Williamsport Area School District of which all members were duly notified and of which due public notice was given as required by Act 84 of 1986, was held on Tuesday evening, October 27, 2020, beginning at 6:13 p.m. in the Auditorium of the Williamsport Area High School, 2990 West Fourth Street, Williamsport, Pennsylvania.

The President, Lori A. Baer called the meeting to order with the following members:

PRESENT: Lori A. Baer, Patrick A. Dixon, Jennifer Lake, Jane L. Penman, Star Poole, Barbara D. Reeves, Marc D. Schefsky, Nancy S. Somers, Adam Welteroth.

ABSENT: None

PRESENTATION TO THE BOARD

Dr. Bowers presented information on where the district was in March 2020 and where we are today. He shared how the district had to quickly shift to a remote education model in the spring, develop a Continuity of Education Plan, a Health & Safety Plan, and create several different learning platforms. At our October 6 meeting the Board asked that families be surveyed regarding their preference of staying in the hybrid model or returning to school 5 days a week. A strong majority – 65% indicated that they want students to return to 5 days a week of in-person instruction. The hybrid model allowed the district to practice and maintain health and safety procedures, provided students and families with the ability to learn to access and navigate Schoology, the new learning management system; and it accelerated the launch of a 1:1 learning platform for the students. With the hybrid model also came rising concerns regarding significant absentee increases, achievement gaps, course failures, and loss of opportunities for our students. Moving forward we need to continue to mitigate and navigate the risk, while making sure we are addressing our mission. The administration is recommending that we bring students back to in-person instruction 5 day a week and provide additional support systems for students who need credit recovery, remediation, and intervention. Remote learning may continue for those already enrolled and demonstrating success. We understand COVID still exists but we have tools in place with our 1:1 so that if periods of quarantine occur, we are prepared. The bottom line is we were addressing a health crisis and we did everything we could to address this but now we have to look at whether we are meeting our mission. We would be taking on more of a risk but we will diligently continue to adhere to our health and safety plan. There could be times when we have to quarantine for a day or two or for 14 days. We understand this and are prepared. Every person on the Board, our administrative team, our teachers and our staff, and everyone in this audience wants to do what is best for students. We all have the same goal.

PUBLIC COMMENTS REGARDING RETURNING TO SCHOOL

Several individuals signed up to speak at tonight's meeting. District residents signed up to speak tonight expressed their support, concerns, and opinions regarding returning to school for 5 days of instruction or remaining in hybrid: Christopher Helmrich, Jason Lepley, Jamie Spencer, Faith Gates, Prynne Sidleck, Jennifer Wilson, Nicole McEntire, Megan Collins, Jennifer Thomke, and Samantha Schaefer.

President Baer called for a recess at 7:35 p.m.

The meeting reconvened at 7:45 p.m.

Public comment continued with district residents Nicole Day, Jeff Yeager, Frank Scarfo, Elenore McDonald, Dana Kaleto, Tauhni Reynolds, Sarah Crossley, Jen West, and John Scholnick addressing the Board and sharing their support, concerns, and opinions regarding returning to school for 5 days of instruction or remaining in hybrid.

BOARD DISCUSSION/MOTION

President Baer thanked everyone for their comments and asked the Board if they had any questions or comments. The Board members shared their concerns and thoughts. Administrators were asked to provide additional feedback on what they are observing. Dr. Pardoe said that he has definitely seen ongoing improvements by teachers and increased live/recorded lessons. The concern is with student participation and no matter how robust the program is, it won't matter if student participation is lacking. Mr. Felix shared that he is seeing much of the same thing from the elementary side. Lessons are much more robust over the last week or so but students are not connecting. Parents are helping at off times but the real issue is absenteeism. Mr. Fisher shared that the CTE staff has created a hybrid model but are presented with challenges in the remote setting due hands on activities.

Dr. Penman made a motion to consider approving the elimination of the Hybrid Learning Plan and returning grades K-6 students to in-person learning effective Monday, November 2, 2020 and grades 7-12 students to in-person learning effective Monday, November 9, 2020. The Remote Learning Platform will be used in a limited capacity and will be reserved for those students who have a demonstrated need or who have shown proficiency with the Remote Learning Platform. Marc Schefsky seconded the motion. Roll call vote. Motion carried 7-2 with Ms. Poole and Mrs. Reeves voting against the motion.

Upon motion made by Mr. Welteroth, seconded by Dr. Penman and carried the meeting adjourned at 9:01 p.m.

Wanda M. Erb, Board Secretary