

DECEMBER 14, 2020
WILMETTE, IL
REGULAR MEETING

A regular meeting of the Board of Education was held on Monday, December 14, 2020 at the Mikaelian Education Center, 615 Locust Road, Wilmette, Illinois. President Lisa Schneider-Fabes called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

Members Present: Lisa Schneider-Fabes, Jon Cesaretti, Frank Panzica, Amy Poehling, Mark Steen, Ellen Sternweiler, Erin Stone

Members Absent: None

Administrators Present: Kari Cremascoli, Corey Bultemeier, Heather Glowacki, Katie Lee, Kristin Swanson

President Fabes Opening Comments

President Fabes stated providing a high-quality instructional environment requires the participation and commitment of all stakeholders; staff, teachers, administrators, parents, students and the broader community. “In times of crisis, we need to work together and rely on each other even more. Currently this necessary partnership is under strain. It’s imperative that we all take a minute to reflect on where we are and collectively commit to course correct. We want to come out of this pandemic as one District, one village. She said there are two causes for this fracturing worth noting. Our children’s educational and extracurricular experiences are neither what we expected nor what we hoped for. Work, home, school and our social interactions have changed in profound and unexpected ways. While no two human experiences are the same, we all share in this collective struggle, disappointment, and loss. We are all juggling multiple roles and challenges. The stress that living through COVID has caused, means many of us are short on patience or even angry. Those feelings impact our wellbeing and how we see and treat each other.”

President Fabes noted with human contact being severely restricted and communication coming via email or screen, makes us feel less connected, more isolated. It makes it easier to communicate with others in ways we otherwise wouldn’t do if we were in person. The stress, combined with a lack of human contact, has resulted in a breakdown of civility and humanity. Evidence of this breakdown has occurred during board meetings; many public comments have become attacks on specific members or groups in the community. The language and the sentiments contained in these emails can be unacceptably cruel. The lack of civility is evident through social media where parents, community members, teachers, and staff make comments about specific members or groups in hurtful ways or depict District members engaging in COVID unsafe behavior. Recipients of the communication take screen shots of those texts, Facebook posts or tweets and share them broadly, often times adding their own commentary. This behavior fractures our humanity and further amplifies the missing civility among us, sometimes without the author even realizing the far reach of their words. What is written on social media has rippling impact far beyond the author’s intended initial audience. We know this. We teach our kids this. But, we often fail to live it within our own lives. There is also a lack of civility with the administration in meetings or via email. President Fabes noted she has seen and heard exchanges that are accusatory at best and degrading at worst.

President Fabes stated whether negative comments are posted on social media, read aloud during a board meeting, or in a private email to the administration, the impact includes undermining morale, causing emotional distress, creating distrust, and lessening motivation. These communications tear us apart at the very time we need to be coming together to support one another, working towards a common goal: providing the best education possible for all students during a global pandemic.

President Fabes stated in these difficult times, we all need to double down on our humanity. In doing so, we should treat those around us (both in-person and remote) with kindness and assume that they are doing their best. It is in that spirit that we ask you to exhibit kindness and respect when you communicate with any member of the D39 community, whether on social media, in-person, or via private email. This does not mean to stop questioning, advocating or sharing. It doesn't mean you need to agree with what is happening or that you approve of someone's behavior or performance. It means do unto others; treat them the way you want to be treated, and assume goodwill.

President Fabes stated she has asked the administration to make immediate changes to the procedures for public comment at the board meetings. Starting tonight we will no longer read comments submitted via email. Rather, comments submitted by email will be distributed to board members via email and posted on the website as part of the board packet under 'Written Communications'. If you would like to make a comment during the board meeting, you may come to the board meeting in person, or make a comment using zoom, provided you have turned your microphone and camera on. The same restrictions on time apply. Whether you submit your comments in writing or share them in person or on zoom, please consider our request to be kind, be respectful. We ask this of our students and we are their models.

In closing President Fabes said, "It takes a village, and in this village, let's all keep working together to give our children the best possible education. Let's end this pandemic strong together."

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Principal Becky Littmann videotaped Central students who led the Pledge of Allegiance.

APPROVE THE MINUTES

Mr. Panzica moved, seconded by Mr. Steen, to accept the minutes of the November 16, 2020 Board of Education Meeting and the November 30, 2020 Special Meeting minutes. The minutes were approved as submitted by **Unanimous Roll Call Vote**.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Evita Vulgaris, Wilmette, expressed her concern and disappointment for Wilmette schools having less core instruction time than some neighboring districts and asked administration to revise the in-person/hybrid plan.

Public Comments submitted via Zoom:

Kim Buckley, Wilmette, spoke on behalf of herself and husband Mark Buckley to send a heartfelt thank you to teachers, nurses ('pandemic warriors'), staff, board members, and Superintendent Cremascoli for their commitment to the community, for working in insane conditions, and offering endless compassion. She noted her shock at comparisons to other feeder districts when populations are so disproportionate in comparison to Wilmette.

Christopher Wiesorick, Wilmette, asked administration and the board, to recognize students are struggling, are very unmotivated, as they enter the homestretch into New Trier High School. He requested more in-person instruction and more time spent with teachers in core subjects.

Board Committee Reports

Facility Development – Mrs. Poehling reported the committee met as part of Committee of the Whole on December 7th. Joe Papanicholas of Nicholas and Associates reported on the Romona and McKenzie KEEP39 construction projects. STR Architects issued their 60% design review and an updated budget increase of 3.5% was reported. The current total for both schools is \$7.9M with McKenzie's budget at \$4.4M and Romona's budget at \$3.5M. Nicholas is working with the STR design team to identify potential

alternates to reduce costs. Mr. Papanicholas stated \$244K (4%) of the total \$7.9M is for contingency allowance. Both projects are scheduled to begin in spring and be completed by August.

Mr. Papanicholas also reported on the junior high second floor air conditioning project. 50% of the project design and construction documents will be completed in January with the final budget completed in February. Bids for the air conditioning project will be held in March. The Board supported moving forward with all three construction projects.

The Facility Development Committee also discussed KEEP39 options presented by administration. The administration has considered and review options for enrollment in KEEP39 if the Board were to determine that the immediate pursuit of the two necessary construction projects was not possible. Administration believes the District can financially support these projects and are in a sound fiscal position to be able to do so this summer. Proceeding toward accomplishment of these projects was recommended. Nonetheless, the administration developed a contingency plan for KEEP39 enrollment in the event that construction was not possible.

Dr. Cremascoli stated to ensure all kindergarten students have an equitable opportunity to enroll in KEEP39, the administrative team developed a variety of options. Each option was considered to evaluate feasibility, access, equitability and impact. The best option available, if the Board decides not to pursue construction, was presented and discussed. However, there are identified risks and disappointments that will be realized as well. If the team were to assume typical enrollment and sectioning for fall, no construction at Romona or McKenzie, approximately 80-96 students enrolling in kindergarten at each school, and 4 classrooms available for kindergarten programming at Central and Harper while 2 are available at McKenzie and Romona, the District could pursue allocating 2 classrooms for each school's kindergarten with KEEP39 enrollment and 1 classroom for two half-day sections of academic kindergarten only. These spots would be allocated by lottery if interest exceeded space available, and some students who wish to enroll in KEEP39 may need to attend a school other than their home school. The detailed proposal would make KEEP39 available equitably to all students across the District, but there would not be sufficient spots for all students to enroll. A lottery would be conducted to allocate the KEEP39 spots. Other options presented included offering KEEP39 at each school as space allows or not offering KEEP39 programming in the upcoming school year due to space constraints and the ongoing needs associated with the pandemic.

The Board expressed appreciation for the detailed contingency plans, however, after reviewing construction and the related finances associated with funding the projects, the Board expressed support for ongoing work toward issuing construction specification and bid documents. A final decision regarding construction at Romona and McKenzie in the summer of 2021 will not be made until February.

School Finance – Mr. Cesaretti reported Mr. Bultemeier provided a report at the Committee of the Whole meeting on the five-year financial projections covering fiscal years 2022-2026. The projections show the Operating Funds ending above the 40% threshold established by the Board of Education for each year. The three construction projects the District is considering are included within this projection. With the end of additional COVID-19 expenditures being uncertain, FY 2022 projection also provided for an ability to absorb COVID-19 expenditures for another year, if needed, and/or to support additional intervention support for students who may need it within the post-COVID environment. Major assumptions were included in the financial information. Mr. Bultemeier reviewed the revenues noting the majority of revenues are accrued through property taxes and current fee structures, and expenditures largely spent on salaries, benefits, and health care costs. He noted the projects for 2022-2025 is a working document that continues to be reviewed to decide where the largest needs lie.

Mr. Bultemeier reported in light of the financial projections and District priorities for student learning and programming, the administration recommended proceeding with the three construction projects presented for consideration.

Strategy – Mr. Steen reported the Strategy committee met as part of the December 7th Committee of the Whole. Dr. Campbell of Safeguard Surveillance, LLC provided the Board with an overview of the recommended surveillance screening program. This program is being implemented at New Trier. It is a saliva-based screening program. The test is not diagnostic, but rather intended to serve as a rapid test that can provide screening and add an additional mitigation strategy to identify and isolate asymptomatic and pre-symptomatic individuals. The Metrics Advisory Team suggested consideration of screening testing programs within District 39 as there is concern that high levels of external community spread may increase the risk of positive cases within schools. The District plans to initiate this program on a trial basis in December with a small cohort of students and staff. Following a successful trial, the District plans to launch the program district-wide in early January to support a safe transition back to school following winter break. This screening program will cost the District \$11 per test, plus resources for logistical management and oversight of the program. The District will cover the costs of participation in this screening testing program for students and staff, and will offer parents the opportunity to contribute to the cost of testing for their child.

Mr. Steen reported Miss Katie Lee provided a follow-up report to the In-Person Learning Program Review report that was presented at the Board of Education meeting. That Board of Education report provided survey results while this report shared the work of a committee who met to develop recommendations and an action plan on December 1st.

The four recommendations included ongoing improvement to adherence to health and safety protocols such as social distancing and mask wearing and to provide ongoing guidance on quarantine guidelines for students, families, and staff; addressing the social emotional needs of students; addressing the needs of 5-8 students who require additional support academically during the remote learning day within the hybrid model; increasing the positive impact of in-person/hybrid learning on staff's personal well-being. The Board agreed with follow up recommendations.

Mr. Steen stated the Board spent a substantial amount of time discussing opportunities for in-person instruction for the weeks of December 14th and January 4th. The Board reviewed metrics and carefully considered operational challenges. After much deliberation, the Board settled on offering in-person instruction for all grades the week of the week of December 14th, and doing a planned adaptive pause to in-person instruction the week of January 4th in order to support a smooth, successful and safe transition back from winter break along with implementation of the District's COVID-19 testing programs. The week of January 4th provide saliva screening tests to ensure the safety of students and staff. The Board recommended coming back to hybrid/in-person for the week of January 11th pending future metrics.

Liaison Reports

CRC Report – Mr. Steen reported the CRC committee reviewed the Consortium for Educational Change (CEC) recommendations for developing a multi-year strategic plan. The committee discussed the best recommendations to emphasize and how the CRC might best support those needs. The CRC has a number of talented members whose expertise can promote the CEC recommendations. The group assigned specific committee work for the next meeting to be held January 5th.

Educational Foundation – President Fabes reported the Educational Foundation hosted guest speaker, Linda Diekman, of Central School who thanked the Foundation for funding the Sora Program, a digital media platform used in schools. The Foundation's Annual Appeal is underway. The Annual Appeal is crucial to obtain funding as normal fundraisers cannot be held due to the pandemic. The Foundation is looking into hosting its famous Bingo and Trivia nights via video platform. A Gripp Grant was given to the

Romona Mud Cafe, a year-round nature rich kitchen-like space to use for curriculum lessons and collaboration space. The Village of Wilmette partnered with local business to support local charities in an event called “The 12 Days of Giving”. Portions of purchases made on December 3rd, 4th, and 5th went to D39 Educational Foundation. The Foundation Fine Arts committee is looking to highlight students’ positive experiences that emerged during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Illinois Association of School Boards (IASB) – no report.

Legislative Update

Ms. Stone reported on bills reported at the federal level: a bill called “Keeping All Students Safe Act” was first introduced in 2009 under the title “Preventing Harmful Restraint and Seclusion in Schools Act” which never passed. This retitled bill would enact a national ban on restraints that restrict breathing and require other restraints only be used where there is an immediate risk of extreme physical harm. A one-week stopgap funding measure passed in the House last week extending government funding until Friday, December 18th to avert a government shutdown. Reports indicate bipartisan support for an additional stimulus package are pending.

INFORMATION ITEMS

A. Written Communication

Dr. Cremascoli stated the Board received written communication from Lauri Fisher, Dr. Rucha Patel, Soo Romanoff & the Wilmette Parent Group, Lisa Cox, Shannon Geier, Nora Joyce, Rachel Heiligman, Molly & Peter McDermott, Michelle Bâby, Chris Woehrle, Jennifer & Chris Latimer, Cindy Levine and Wendy Zun on behalf of League of Women Voters, Christine Peterson, Abby & Steve Karasick, Courtney Greene, Michele Coffey, Evita Vulgaris and Christopher Wiczorek.

B. Administrative Announcements

Second Semester Enrollment Update

Dr. Glowacki stated families were asked to complete a form by November 30th indicating any changes to/from in-person/remote learning placement for second semester. Principals are reviewing data and are in the process of making preliminary adjustments to student/teacher placement. Most families have elected for their students to stay in their first semester placement (3,232 students). This is approximately 96% of total enrollment. 90 students (2.7%) across all grade levels have requested a change from remote learning to in-person learning. 18 students (0.5%) across all grade levels have requested a change from in-person to remote learning for second semester. Principals believe all requests can be honored. At this time, there does not appear to be a need for additional staff. Most importantly, no changes in teacher assignment are expected for students maintaining first semester enrollment. Principals are committed to creating the fewest disruptions for students as possible. To accomplish this, it is possible that classes within specific grade levels could have varying enrollment numbers per classroom. Keeping students with their first semester classmates and teacher is a greater priority than having the same number of students in each class. In fall concerns about remote class sizes were reviewed in a few specific grade levels. For second semester, class size will range from 15-23 in grade 1 and from 16-23 in grade 3. These grades were experienced enrollment that was more significant in first semester. Placement is ongoing and numbers could shift, but currently the class sizes within these grade levels are within District’s guidelines. Families will be contacted by their principal to affirm second semester requests and by mid-January, families will be informed of teacher assignment.

Dr. Cremascoli stated administration continues to explore options for the hybrid model at 5th-8th grade that includes use of in-person learning on Mondays, half-day schedules, preference for a full day of instruction in the hybrid model along with other options for consideration, although it may not be possible or in the best interest of students. She said some inaccurate information was shared regarding neighboring districts’ in-person programming and asked that the community recognize each district has

its own challenges such as physical space, enrollment, curricular program offerings, and staffing. Each district has a different model and is doing their best to maximize learning for students in light of these challenges and resources and models.. Of the 5 feeder districts, 3 districts are operating fully remote since before Thanksgiving until after Winter Break. Winnetka is offering ½ day programs each day with core instruction in each subject area every other day; Glencoe offer in-person half-day instruction, Avoca is similar to Wilmette having remote learning on Mondays and alternating in-person student attendance for full-days Tuesdays through Fridays. Sunset Ridge has half-days of in-person instruction and Kenilworth is on a shortened daily schedule with students going home just before lunch. Every district is also dealing with remote transitions due to quarantines, exposures or other needs. She noted all feeder districts superintendents meet regularly, support each other and collaborate during these unprecedented times. They compare and work together and, across the township, students are continuing to learn and grow. District 39 continue to make improvements to our fully remote and in-person models, and appreciate the detailed feedback, review and action plans developed through the recent targeted evaluations of each program. District 39 looks forward to implementing those identified action steps.

COVID-19 Testing Update

Dr. Cremascoli stated District 39 is preparing to launch a COVID-19 screening program in January through Safeguard Surveillance, the testing program implemented at New Trier High School. This program will provide free weekly saliva-based screening for COVID-19 and will be available to in-person students and staff as an additional layer of mitigation protection. Participation in this program will be optional but strongly encouraged for all in-person students and staff. After the initiation of the program, a review will be done to possibly extend testing further. Additional information will be provided regarding registration for this new COVID-19 screening program.

Ambry PCR testing for COVID-19 continues to be available through the school nurse office to students and staff who are symptomatic or have known exposure to COVID-19. The District is also preparing to host another Ambry PCR bulk testing event on January 6, 2021 for students and staff who are concerned about exposure, experiencing symptoms, or have traveled.

Metrics Reopening Advisory Team Update

Dr. Cremascoli stated the Metrics Reopening Advisory Team conducts a weekly meeting to study important school-relevant metrics of COVID-19 and the District's Reopening Plan in order to guide adjustments to reopening efforts and improvements in health and safety protocol. Expected to meet the first week in January. The Metrics Team reviewed the most recent D39 Metrics Dashboard and full report. The Metrics Team discussed COVID-19 testing for students and staff, reviewed internal metrics for staffing and operations, considered metrics of COVID-19 community spread, and discussed future adjustments to ongoing review of metrics. Administration will enhance the District's live data over the next few weeks and, after winter break, will be considering revision to the information in the weekly metrics report to ensure that the most salient and useful metrics are the focus of the weekly report.

Freedom of Information Act (FOIA)

The District received the following FOIA requests:

- Jeff Axlerod, dated November 6, 2020, requesting lists/spreadsheets and documents created after January 1, 2020 containing information about families who have withdrawn children from the District to either homeschool or attend another educational institution; also requesting documents created after January 1, 2020 containing requests to change from remote learning to in-person or vice-versa.
- Jeff Axelrod, dated November 16, 2020, requesting records discussing COVID-19 saliva tests from January 1, 2020 to present.

- Jeff Axelrod, dated November 20, 2020, 12:10 p.m., requesting a list of staff resignations for any reason along with dates of resignation and copies of resignation letters and other documents explaining the reason for resignation from October 29th to the present. Also requested were any documents requested for leaves of absence. Also requested any documentation about suspected or confirmed COVID-19 exposure, suspected or confirmed cases for D39 staff from October 29th to present. Also requested documents about students fully or partially withdrawing from D39 schools for any reason.
- Jacob Shorr, dated December 1, 2020, requesting all public comments read at the November 30, 2020 Board of Education meeting including all public comments received but not read.

President Fabes encouraged administration to hire additional help with to process the number of FOIA requests.

C. Annual Business

1. Five-Year Financial Projections

Mr. Bultemeier stated the five-year financial projections cover fiscal years 2022 to 2026. The projections show the Operating Funds ending above the 40% threshold established by the Board of Education for each year. The three construction projects the District is considering are included within this projection. With the end of additional COVID-19 expenditures being uncertain, FY 2022 projection also provided for an ability to absorb COVID-19 expenditures for another year, if needed, and/or to support additional intervention support for students who may need it within the post-COVID environment. Major assumptions were included in the financial information. Mr. Bultemeier reviewed the revenues noting the majority of revenues are accrued through property taxes and current fee structures, and expenditures largely spent on salaries, benefits and health care costs. He noted the projects for 2022-2025 is a working document that continues to be reviewed to decide where the largest needs lie.

Mr. Bultemeier reported in light of the financial projections and District priorities for student learning and programming, the administration recommended proceeding with the three construction projects presented for consideration. The Board expressed support for proceeding, acknowledging that a final decision to award the bids for construction at Romona and McKenzie would not be made until February.

Mr. Panzica thanked the administration for providing a viable alternative, though perhaps not desirable options for KEEP39 at Romona and McKenzie. The KEEP39 revenue was forecasted out at \$1.8M - \$1.9M going forward. The Board will be considering at some point transitioning to full day kindergarten.

Additional Board discussion included trends regarding new property growth and continuing to watch new individual property projects which impacts revenue. Upon reflection over the years of worrying about pension cost shifts and rising insurance costs, the Board never anticipated weathering a global pandemic. Due to the past and present Boards' fiscal stewardship to be able to stay on track to invest in properties, afford the personal protective equipment (PPE), and hire additional staffing is commendable; many districts have not been so fortunate.

D. Board Policy Review

1. Second and Final Reading of Board of Education Policies 5:10 *Equal Employment Opportunity and Minority Recruitment*, 5:100 *Staff Development Program and Professional Opportunities*, 7:10 *Equal Educational Opportunities*, 7:180 *Preventing Bullying and Other Aggressive Behaviors*, and 7:185 *Teen Dating Violence Prohibited*

Dr. Cremascoli stated no changes were recommended for second reading and policies are ready for Board approval.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Evita Vulgaris of Wilmette, continued to compare Kenilworth, Winnetka, and Glencoe in-person educational time with the Wilmette in-person/hybrid plan, and believes Wilmette 5-8graders are receiving less in-person core subject instruction.

Christopher Wiesorick, provided calculations comparing school district calendar days and instructional hours.

ACTION ITEMS

A. Consent Agenda

Mr. Panzica moved, seconded by Mr. Steen, to approve the personnel report dated December 14, 2020 which included licensed full-time employment of **Peggy Leen**, effective December 7, 2020; educational support personnel full-time employment of **Carrie Diamond**, effective December 1, 2020; **Yenifer Duran**, effective December 14, 2020; **Jessica Leonard**, effective December 2, 2020; educational support personnel resignation of **Nadine Fiorito**, effective December 18, 2020; **Beatrice Kulp**, effective December 4, 2020; **Jessica Leonard**, effective December 2, 2020; **Nathan Mack**, effective December 18, 2020; **Nordis Nelson**, effective December 2, 2020; **Edwin Zamora**, effective December 3, 2020; licensed retirement of **Jeanne Gierke**, effective the end of the 2021-2022 school year; tenured leave of absence of **Gayle Wasserman**, from January 4, 2021 to the end of the 2020-2021 school year: approve as second and final reading of Board of Education Policies 5:10 *Equal Employment Opportunity and Minority Recruitment*; 5:100 *Staff Development Program and Professional Opportunities*; 7:10 *Equal Educational Opportunities*; 7:180 *Preventing Bullying and Other Aggressive Behaviors*; and 7:185 *Teen Dating Violence Prohibited*: approve the accounts payable for bills listed between November 17, 2020 – December 14, 2020 in the following amounts: Educational Fund \$270,280.02; O&M Fund \$324,231.50; Debt Service \$735,971.25; Transportation Fund \$98,495.50; Capital Projects \$392,865.00; Tort Fund \$241,171.00; total all funds: \$2,063,314.27: approve the manual checks issued between November 17, 2020 and December 14, 2020 in the following amounts: Educational Fund \$575,703.69; O&M Fund \$16,438.48; Transportation \$(174.01); Tort Fund: \$3,500.00; total all funds: \$595,468.16.

On a roll call vote on the motion, voting “yea” – Jon Cesaretti, Frank Panzica, Amy Poehling, Mark Steen, Erin Stone, Lisa Schneider-Fabes; voting “nay” – none; absent – Ellen Sternweiler:

Motions Carried.

CONFERENCE ITEMS

Old Business

1. Board Work Regarding Equity - no update.

New Business

None

Good and Welfare

Mr. Panzica presented Dr. Cremascoli with a smiley face mirror to use to greet members of the Friday Morning Metrics team, recognizing Dr. Cremascoli’s efforts in facilitating this collaborative, productive and important work.

Ms. Stone appreciated President Fabes meeting comments and listened to D39 music teachers “Lean on Me” and was overwhelmed by the incredible music program in District 39. She noted everyone wants the best for kids and agreed that everyone should lean on each other and end the pandemic stronger together.

Mr. Steen spoke on behalf of entire Board, including some community collaborators. As the approach to winter break comes near, there is a sense how this pandemic might play out and perhaps a small sense of optimism is in the air. He presented the administration with a video of District 39 students thanking D39 for their hard work.

Being no further business, Mr. Panzica moved, seconded by Mr. Steen, to adjourn the regular meeting of the Board of Education. It adjourned at 9:01 p.m. by **General Consent**.

President

Secretary