

**DANBURY BOARD OF EDUCATION MEETING  
WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 24, 2021 - 7:00 PM  
VIRTUAL MEETING VIA ZOOM  
LIVE STREAM**

**PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

The Chairperson, G. Cooper, called the meeting to order at 7:05 pm and those assembled recited the Pledge of Allegiance.

**ROLL CALL**

Present: Joseph Britton, Rachel Chaleski, Kate Conetta, Gladys Cooper, Loren Daly, Joseph DaSilva, Richard Jannelli, Kathleen Molinaro, Albert Russo, Amy Spallino, Kathryn Hodgdon

Also Present: Dr. Pascarella, Courtney Leborious, Kelly Truchsess, Kevin Walston, Dr. Casimiro, Kim Thompson

**PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

- Lisa Ruffles - parent of three school aged children
  - After a very long and challenging year in regard to Covid, it appears things are starting to head in the right direction. With Governor Lamont's most recent announcements, I would hope the Danbury district is looking to expand on our current hybrid schedule as soon as possible. Larger districts such as Hartford have made a decision to return to five days starting March 1st for PreK-9. They are keeping 10-12 on a hybrid schedule for now. Other districts such as Norwalk are already operating with their elementary students in-person full time. We should be implementing a similar plan for getting our K-5 students back on a 5-day schedule for families who choose to return and then hopefully build from there. Between our hybrid schedule, quarantines and snow days, these kids are barely back on any real level to have the impact we need. We missed our opportunity to return in the fall and I hope we don't make the same mistake again. It very much concerns me that our efforts to close the educational gap has only widened this past year. Have you seen an increase in students performing below grade level? If yes, what is being discussed and/or planned around getting students adequately prepared to pass by the end of this school year? Lastly, our district received grant money through the Emergency School Relief Fund under the Cares Act. How will that money be used in helping us not only recover (resources for students) but also meet ongoing CDC guidelines and plan for future pandemics yet to be seen?
- Alison Benincasa
  - I again ask that the Board of Ed evaluate and find a way to get the children into school. Data from surrounding districts, the country, and even now world wide does not support the continued remote education and rather supports in person education and schools being low risk for exposure. My elementary kids are suffering academically and socially. Give us the freedom and choice to put them in full time.

- Steven and Paraskevi Rountos
  - We need to get our children back in school full time this year for their emotional, mental and educational health. We have 3 children in the DPS system: a freshman in high school, a 6th grader and a 1st grader so we are witnessing what is happening to our children across all three school levels. We have been patiently and consistently doing our part to protect our families and our neighbors over the past 12 months. Mental health issues are growing across our community. Recently our own family's collective mental health has deteriorated, and we believe that the lack of in-person education is driving much of it. One of our sons (a high honors student) is suddenly unmotivated and disinterested in online learning even though he is engaged when he goes in-person. Both of our other sons tell us that they are bored with remote learning and try to find other ways to occupy themselves during online class time. We have personally seen the negative impact that this detachment is having on their willingness to learn and more importantly their base of education which they will need to build on in future years. We do not think that the DPS hybrid model is meeting the needs of our children and we question why there hasn't been more discussion about going back to full in-person instruction. The Board of Education would be negligent in their responsibility to our children if they do not give families the choice of full time in-person instruction during this school year. The Board of Education needs to explain to us using specific Covid statistics why most other large school systems in the state including Stamford and Hartford have gone back full time in-person but we have not heard of any plans proposed by the BOE for this to happen in Danbury. Again, we need to get our children back in school full time this year for their emotional, mental and educational health.
- Teresa (last name withheld)
  - What is the plan for the special education students to attend in person school for 4-5 days? Especially those who had been identified to attend in person 4 days back in October. Many surrounding districts are already at 4 -5 days. It is critical for some in this population who have limited interaction, and / or those students who require support that are just too difficult virtually and creates frustration.
- Kathy Snow
  - A lot has happened in the past few weeks! I would first like to extend my sincerest congratulations to Dr. Sal. It has been a pleasure to know you and I hope you enjoy a very much deserved and well-earned retirement. I would also like to mention that I am in support of the school budget that will be presented to the City Council and was happy to see the committee on community outreach has met a few times and is working to put together a one-page summary type document of the budget highlights. Separate from the budget I would like to request that some of the CARES money be used for long-term fixes versus short term pandemic solutions. Things like water fountains with re-filling stations and light sensors in rooms. A few years ago, I asked about removing the hallway doors into bathrooms; similar to the mall or the movie theater. Of course, there would need to be privacy partitions from the hallway and there would still be stalls with doors but removing the hallway doors would eliminate a physical touch point. This could also help reduce vaping. I ask the Board to please look into using some of

this money toward long term benefits. My next question is regarding getting students back in school. Using round figures, about half the student population is fully remote and the other half is hybrid. Of the hybrid population, we are at 25% of students in the buildings; blue cohort on Monday/Tuesday and orange cohort on Thursday/Friday. Can we please get to the point where both cohorts are in the building at the same time, which would be the 50% capacity that the District submitted as the plan to the State back in July? I believe that plan allows for 50% of students to be in school as it only had 2 groups: Group A which was live instruction of 50% of students in school and Group B: Distance Learning with 50% of students at home. Our current model of 25% of students in buildings was from a surge in Covid back in July. We seem to be going in the right direction as the numbers of new confirmed cases of Covid from the State website. Kathy O'Dowd has said in prior meetings that the spread of Covid is not due to being in school. I believe she has been tracking all schools since this started including the Catholic schools and science has shown that Covid is not spread from being in school. With everyone wearing masks and using desk shields as well as the numerous other strategies in place, I would hope the District can flex and get more students back in school, especially since there has been so much learned about Covid. Now is the time for the District to move in the right direction and get our kids back in school. My final question is what is the plan for next fall? I expect that 100% of students will be in the buildings full time for a full school day, especially since all teachers and staff are able to get the vaccine. I am asking this as we all know how quickly time passes and my understanding of Policy P6114.81: Emergency Suspension of Policy During Pandemic, under Temporary Powers Granted to Superintendent of Schools, item #2, the last sentence ends with "the authority will remain in effect for the duration of the 2020-2021 school year or until repealed by the school board". It seems as the Board is going to keep this in place for the duration of the school year so I am formally asking the Board to begin discussions now to ensure all students are back in school full-time in the fall.

- Katie Williams
  - Given the dramatic decrease of cases here in Danbury, in conjunction with the announcement that teachers will begin to be vaccinated starting March 1st, I would like to know when Dr. Sal and the Board of Education plans to have students return to five days of in school instruction. Other districts across the state are using the current data, proving that schools are a safe place for our teachers and children, to support their decision to bring students back into school full time. For instance, Hartford will be welcoming back students in grades K-9 starting this coming Monday, March 1st for full in person learning. As a point of reference, Hartford is currently seeing a rate of 30.5 cases of COVID 19 per 100,000, which is very similar to that of Danbury, which is at a rate of 30.2 cases per 100,000. In addition, districts such as Norwalk (37.8/100,000), Bethel (23.6/100,00), Brookfield (29/100,000), and New Fairfield (27.8/100,000) have all been successfully running 5 days of in school instruction at the K-5 levels, with minimal transmission being seen within their school buildings. Furthermore, Newtown (20.1/100,000) is in full time for grades K-12 and New Milford

(19.9/100,000) will be transitioning their students back to full in starting on March 1st. Danbury, hesitated in September when all but two districts in the state began the year in the hybrid model. I do not want to see Danbury, again make a misstep in their decision by not following the guidance and reopening at minimum k-5 to five days of in person instruction soon. The CDC’s newest guidelines urge districts to bring at minimum the K-5 students back full time when community transmission is moderate to low, which would be at a rate of 10-49 cases per 100,000 or a positive testing rate of 5-7.9%. Again, Danbury is currently seeing a transmission rate of 30.2 cases per 100,000, and a positive test rate of 2.58%. Those indicators put us well within the guidelines set by the CDC to bring, at minimum, our K-5 students back to school full time. As a parent I was struck by the dramatic change in my son's personality and overall mood when he was able to return to school in the hybrid model. He is a loving and fun spirited kid, and it wasn't until then that the negative effects of this extended time away became fully transparent. After his first day back, he was chatty and giddy. He had a renewed passion for his work and wanted to share everything that he had learned. The days that are remote are even harder, because in his words “it’s so much more fun when I’m in school”. When they went remote because of weather my son had a complete breakdown because he missed his in-person days. This is traumatizing to watch as a parent, and completely unnecessary, since the guidelines show that he should be in school. He comes from a household with two parents that are in the field of education. He has the full attention and support of myself, who is a former Danbury teacher and still he has struggled mentally and academically. There is no substitution for in person learning and given the downward trends in cases, the low transmission of the virus within school buildings, the teachers accessibility to the vaccine, and the guidance of other towns in the state, I implore you to bring our students back in for full time learning.

**At this time, K. Conetta read the Mission Statement and the 2020-2021 District Goals.**

**CONSENT CALENDAR**

**EXHIBIT**

MOTION: K. Conetta moved, seconded by A. Spallino that the Board of Education approve the item on the Consent Calendar, Exhibit 21-18, through 21-22- as recommended:

**MINUTES**

2/9/21 Board Workshop	21-18 (pg.4)
2/9/21 Finance Committee	21-19 (pg.30)
2/10/21 Regular Meeting	21-20 (pg.31)
2/11/21 Community Relations Committee	21-21 (pg.58)
2/17/21 Policy Committee	21-22 (pg.59)

R. Chaleski stated that there are two different version of the school budget history (page 53 and page 13). Asked if the correct version could be forwarded to the Board.

11 Votes Yes: Rachel Chaleski, Kate Conetta, Gladys Cooper, Joseph DaSilva,

Albert Russo, Amy Spallino, Kathleen Molinaro, Loren Daly, Joseph Britton, Richard Jannelli, Kathryn Hodgdon

**Motion carried at 7:22 pm**

### **EDUCATIONAL STAFF REPRESENTATIVES REPORTS**

- DSAA: Dr. Kristy Zaleta, President asked all administrators to share their silver linings with the Board.
- ESL: Supervisor Mrs. Swift
  - Despite the challenging year, the K-5 ESL/Bilingual staff have been able to have consistent weekly professional development with technology, new curriculum implementation, and assessment alignment. Teachers have been able to meet in small groups to strategize and determine best practices when teaching English Learners. SIOP Coaches have been able to assist teachers by joining synchronous sessions to demonstrate the SIOP model, interactive teaching methods with remote learners, and more. The department has been able to tighten up curricular needs and be on the same page with the extra time allotted for planning and professional development.
  - Due to the above, English Learners, K-5, have been able to participate actively in remote learning. Students have learned a tremendous amount of technological skills. Our youngest learners are able to access Google Meets, Google Classroom, type, click on links, and more. Our attendance in ESL classes have been high and students are speaking more than ever due to the implementation of our new curriculum.
- Supervisor Dr. Mead
  - A true focus on the standards in mathematics at the K-5 level - as well as finally slimming the standards. The weekly GLMs with two math coaches have provided more focused PD with teachers than ever before. The six STEM coaches have worked tirelessly to provide coherent lessons and appropriate practice for approximately 250 teachers and 5000 students at the elementary level! she could not be more proud to be a part of this incredible team of instructional leaders!
  - Also - the ability to integrate Science this year has been a huge silver lining as well -- the integration has increased engagement for our teachers and students.
- Supervisors Mrs. Swift & Principal Dr. Epple
  - After completing midyear teacher evaluation conferences with teachers. Teachers overwhelmingly reflected that they have very close relationships with their students and families. In fact, they are saying that they have never been closer to their students and their families! Additionally, some teachers are reporting a stronger sense of grade-level community across all families as teacher assignments had to change.
  - \*Teachers continue to be amazed at the technology skills and flexibility that our elementary students are demonstrating. She is amazed at the technology skills and flexibility that our teachers are demonstrating too! They've reported a lot of pride in the tech skills they have obtained this past year.
  - \*Teachers (and she shares their perspective) are so happy to have SEL in the forefront! The SEL resources are plentiful and the PD is paying off. Two thirds of

my teachers took the Yale SEL Course and loved it. Many have commented that it not only solidified the foundation of their beliefs in SELF but also helped them personally. Students are demonstrating a comfort level and ability to express themselves appropriately AND ACCURATELY while identifying effective coping strategies!

- \*Our grade level teams (in building and across the district) have never been so aligned and on track with curriculum implementation. Collaboration is high.
- \*Our lunch waves with only a maximum of 36 in each lunch wave, provide students the opportunity to enjoy a more peaceful and calm socialization time.
- Shelter Rock Principal Ms. Marchial
  - We have increased our efforts to celebrate our students. We have maintained our monthly Student of the Month program. Teachers select a student and then the class has a Morning Meeting to announce the selected student. The teacher reads a summary of why the student was selected and then the parents are given the teacher's summary. In addition, all our students - Hybrid and DL, have been enjoying "Spirit Days" twice a month. Students are photographed (observing all protocols) during these events for our school yearbook. Teachers are being creative with mask breaks for the students, games like Simon Says or Eye Spy provide the children with social interactions and fun. We also have teachers who are coordinating "Movie Nights" with the permission of parents and teachers spend a Friday or Saturday night virtually watching a movie. All siblings are welcome to these events.
- Stadley Rough Principal Mr. Cerlick
  - At Stadley Rough Elementary Parent communication has been a top priority for all our staff. All of the teachers have been using many different apps, emails and live meets to communicate with parents. All of the hard work that is happening in classrooms and updates about our school are being communicated instantly throughout the day. The "silver lining" is that I feel there is more parent communication than ever before, and I feel we have established a new way to keep parents more informed and be more a part of the classroom. Everyone has been utilizing technology more than ever before and it has helped all of us see a different side of our families.
- Mill Ridge Primary Principal Ms. Tarsi
  - One of the things that our school is doing a great job with or a challenge that we are overcoming is getting our families involved despite not being able to have them come to the school. In some ways it seems that the ability to join events and meetings virtually helps families to attend because they don't need childcare, can attend from work and can attend more flexibly.
  - We have tried having a "special conversation" or a "guest speaker" at our PTO meetings recently and have had fantastic attendance. We had presentations on reopening, the importance of attendance and how attendance is monitored in the in-person and virtual environments and lastly a presentation addressing "Can I Send My Child To School?" This presentation was about when it's okay to send your child in and when you should keep them home. It focused on sick day guidelines, quarantine rules and who to contact for more information. Our PTO

attendance has hovered somewhere between 30-65 families in a given month, which is considerably higher than past years.

- Additionally, we've been working with our families to plan fun and engaging events for our students both during school and after school to try and bring our students together. I think our school is doing a great job of celebrating special events and building community, despite the challenges of us not all being together. Some of the things that we have been doing are:
  - \*Virtual Story nights with staff reading to the kids
  - \* Virtual Family BINGO Night
  - \*Bi-monthly Spirit Days
  - \*Dress Up day for the 100th Day of School
  - \*Kindness Week
  - \*Virtual Holiday Concert that we live streamed and watched together as a school all at the same time
  - We are really making the most of the situation and still working very hard to build in memories and school experiences for our students. We are also trying to build a welcoming school environment despite the fact that we cannot physically invite our families in.
- King Street Primary Principal Dr. Rocco
  - Student independence and confidence in their use of technology is growing exponentially. I love hearing the student comments to the teachers, Gr. 3- "Ms. B when you come into my breakout room can you be sure to mute because I'm going to make my flipgrid." Grade 1- "Ms. W, I couldn't get into my special. Can you pop the link in the chat again for me?" Grade 2- When the teacher was having some tech difficulty, a student said, "Hold please" and started humming the Jeopardy theme song.
  - Hybrid: Students eating in the classroom with the teacher present has helped to build relationships. Great conversations take place in these small group settings that would not be possible in larger groups.
- King Street Intermediate Principal Dr. Hislop
  - King Street Intermediate celebrates a 600% increase of parent attendance in our virtual parent and family engagement nights: Fam-tastic Math Game night in January, and Rally for Reading in February. One more night in March is planned. Information about our nights can be found on our campus website, using the Intermediate tab.
- Special Education Supervisor Ms. Campbell
  - A handful of our neediest self-contained elementary students returned to school with no tolerance for wearing a mask. Through staff collaboration and family support, the students are now wearing their masks during the school day. Their tolerance was built up over time as the school days passed. The staff maintained expectations and the students rose to the challenge.
- Danbury High School Asst. Principal Ms. Daniels
  - Enabling student voice, connection, and leadership during our SEL time with DHS documentary series
  - Development of the DHS Virtual Peer Tutoring to support students with distance learning outside of school hours

- Reengagement /return of chronically absent students through teacher and admin outreach outside of the school day
- Danbury High School Asst. Principal Dr. Roy
  - Something good that has happened this year is that teachers and administrators are more adept at using technology and virtual environments to differentiate learning for students. Teachers have developed lessons that allow students to progress at an individual rate while gaining personalized feedback and time with teachers through regular class time and FLEX periods at the high school.
- Reach/Endeavor Principal Mrs. Dinardo
  - Students are admitting they are glad they are in school and that their work is improving.
- Westside Middle School Academy Principal Dr. LaBanca
  - We have used Wednesdays to host our normal school wide events: Peace Poster, Invention Convention, Science & Engineering Expo, History Day, and GeoChallenge. We have created a system for evaluating projects, living with students and community volunteers (as judges). We have successfully interviewed all 750 WS students. We compliment our events with a public-facing website and wacky and zany opening and awards ceremonies on YouTube ([youtube.com/franklabanca](https://youtube.com/franklabanca))
- Broadview Asst. Principal Mrs. Rinaldi
  - Though challenging, this time has also brought some positives.
  - Through the use of technology, I have seen many more students responding during the lessons. Students who in the past may have been too shy to respond in front of the entire class are now responding in PearDeck, DESMOS, chat boxes and other online platforms. Not only do the students get a safe place to respond, the teachers are also receiving in the moment formative assessment information.
  - In addition to increased student engagement, I have also seen increased parent communication. Teachers are communicating more frequently with parents and have been using apps like Talking Points to help navigate language barriers.
- Rogers Park Principal Dr. Zaleta
  - RPMS was able to participate in the American Bar Association Diversity Outreach program this year. This is a program that in the past has only occurred in the major city that the ABA holds its annual conference - usually Chicago or NYC. Due to covid the program was expanded across the country. I was put into contact with one of our teacher's aunts, who is a retired judge, and we hosted 5 diverse female judges last Wednesday for a 90 minute session with our Social Justice Club. Students learned about the three branches of government, the Rule of Law, and Judicial Independence. They broke out into small groups and had the opportunity to ask the judges questions and then as a whole group again for a final Q&A session. Both the students and the judges enjoyed the experience and we are looking forward to working with them again in the future. In fact, one of the judges was from CT and she and I have already started brainstorming how we can work together in the future with not only our students but also our parent community by hosting a naturalization ceremony at our school.

## **STUDENT REPRESENTATIVES**

- DHS Representatives: Jake Goodwin
  - Since the last time we spoke, DHS has gone to a hybrid model. Students were able to enter the building for the first time since March of 2020. We are so excited by how well it is going. The weather does seem to be getting in the way.
  - Danbury HS Boys Track and Field begins in four weeks, and students can contact Mr. Murray for more information on how to try out.
  - The DHS PTO has been putting together an “Adopt a Senior” program where parents and community members will be assigned a Senior to send a small gift each month until June.
  - During the large snowstorm in the beginning of February, Dr. Tucci put together a snowman contest where students submitted images of their snowman as a historical figure. She received over 20 submissions!
  - The History Honor Society is putting together a project based around student experience during the pandemic. They are asking that students send in images, videos, or documents that outline how they dealt with isolation. This project is in partnership with the Danbury Historical Society.
- ACE Representatives: Chris Johnston
  - The ACE Showcase Website, which is under design, will highlight student writings, paintings and all things creative that has been created and is being managed by Joanne Tolles. Joanne and her poetry students are already planning our annual spring coffeehouse, which will be a venue for students and staff to read original pieces of poetry, display artwork, and host musical performances. We would like our creativity to be on full display on our Alternative Center for Excellence YouTube channel.
  - ACE would like to publicly acknowledge and congratulate our students of the week for the week of February 8th - 12th: Kat Cruz and Samantha Siguencia.
  - ACE would like to acknowledge Tyler Scherer, Jenn Sedeno, Jason Llanos and Brian Galarza for earning honors for semester 1. Our high honors students were Josh Poulin, Chris Pais, Kristen Villani, Spencer Robbins, and Jaylyn Batista. And congratulations to Brianna Villani for earning distinguished honors.
  - Lastly, Kyle Trocolla and his students have organized an ACE Care Kit Drive with donations being dropped off this week (Feb 22nd-26th). ACE is collecting donations of new socks, individually packaged snacks, hand warmers, disposable face masks, gallon ziplock bags, bar soap, bandaids, wet naps and mini water bottles. Drive through donations can be dropped in the ACE Care Kit bin at the bottom of the steps at the entrance (parking lot side).

## **ACTION ITEMS**

### A. January 2021 Operating Results and Analysis (General Funds/Grant Projects)

MOTION: J. DaSilva moved, seconded by K. Conetta that the Board of Education approve the January 2021 Operating Results and Analysis (General Funds/Grant Projects) in accordance with 21-23(pg.60)

11 Votes Yes: Rachel Chaleski, Kate Conetta, Gladys Cooper, Joseph DaSilva, Albert Russo, Amy Spallino, Kathleen Molinaro, Loren Daly, Joseph Britton, Richard Jannelli, Kathryn Hodgdon

**Motion carried at 7:39 pm**

B. Policy 1312.2 Community Relations Appeals

MOTION: R. Chaleski moved, seconded by A. Spallino that the Board of Education accept for first reading Policy 1312.2 Community Relations/Appeals, as recommended by the Policy Committee. 21-24 (pg.71)

J. Britton stated that in the actual language of the policy, when says “The Superintendent shall review any complaint and conduct”, it doesn’t put a burden on the district to review it in a certain amount of time. Recommended a phrase with a timeline.

J. Britton stated that the language that says “The Board may but, is under no obligation to, review the policy, amend or refer the policy”, he doesn’t see the point in having “but is under no obligation to”. J. Britton felt that might unintentionally influence the Board when reviewing the results into an investigation or complaint on a policy.

J. Britton stated that the language that says “Must be signed” implies that a name should be attached and asked if it was possible for people to give anonymous complaints.

K. Walston stated that the committee did go back and forth about the Board being or not being under any obligation. The committee’s intention in that line was just to make it clear to the community that it doesn’t mean that by submitting a complaint, that there is an obligation to change the policy. Will bring back to the committee for discussion.

K. Thompson stated that there are a lot of mandatory processes where we have to do investigations on complaints (bullying, Title IV violations, sexual harassment, etc.) that require us by law and by policy to go in and conduct investigations and review the policies. This policy was intended to plug one hole which came out of if we have other programs and there is a concern by a parent, we didn’t have a policy to plug that gap that provided for a parent or caregiver to come into the Central Office and have a conversation on that.

R. Chaleski stated that the base of the policy came as a recommendation from CAFE and was tweaked with the help of all committee members.

J. DaSilva stated that he specifically added the line about the Board being under no obligation because it is important that the person filing the complaint knows that as well. It needed to expressly say that we were under no obligation. The recommendation of it needing to be signed was from CAFE. If you are not putting your name on a complaint, it cannot be taken seriously to be investigated, in J. DaSilva’s opinion.

11 Votes Yes: Rachel Chaleski, Kate Conetta, Gladys Cooper, Joseph DaSilva, Albert Russo, Amy Spallino, Kathleen Molinaro, Loren Daly, Joseph Britton, Richard Jannelli, Kathryn Hodgdon

**Motion carried at 7:48 pm**

C. Policy 6159 Instruction/Special Education

MOTION: K. Molinaro moved, seconded by K. Conetta that the Board of Education accept for first reading Policy 6159 Instruction/Special Education, as recommended by the Policy Committee. 21-25(pg.72)

11 Votes Yes: Rachel Chaleski, Kate Conetta, Gladys Cooper, Joseph DaSilva, Albert Russo, Amy Spallino, Kathleen Molinaro, Loren Daly, Joseph Britton, Richard Jannelli, Kathryn Hodgdon

**Motion carried at 7:49 pm**

D. Policy 6171 Instruction/Special Education

MOTION: K. Hodgdon moved, seconded by J. DaSilva that the Board of Education accepted for first reading Policy 6171 Instruction/Special Education, as recommended by the Policy Committee. 21-26(pg.75)

11 Votes Yes: Rachel Chaleski, Kate Conetta, Gladys Cooper, Joseph DaSilva, Albert Russo, Amy Spallino, Kathleen Molinaro, Loren Daly, Joseph Britton, Richard Jannelli, Kathryn Hodgdon

**Motion carried at 7:51 pm**

**SUPERINTENDENT’S REPORT**

- CUBE’s Virtual Day on the Hill (March 17th) 21-27(pg.76)
  - Those interested in attending can contact K. Pompano.
- Governor’s Proposed School Funding Proposal
  - This does impact the City. We have over 65% of indigent students. We have a real need.
  - Modified ECS Grant included groups that were very needy and difficult to fund with operational budgets. Our plan was a ten-year plan for Danbury. The ESSA money coming to us was that it was to be used for items that would mitigate the pandemic impact. Some of it could be construction, life safety work but the majority should be spent on students, closing gaps, focusing on standards that we were not approaching and even some PD work with teachers. The Governor is taking advantage of whether or not we are required to do that. In his position, that money can be used for operations. The State Department has asked us to put together an ESSA Grant that really focuses on the intent, telling us that it may change in the future.
  - Three areas that we articulate are the regression from the equity principle, the ESSA money and the fiscal cliff.
  - One-time sources creates nothing but a tremendous disadvantage when that money doesn’t come into the district any longer.
  - If this budget goes through, we will be facing something three years down the road that will be terrible on the taxpayers, town, and our students.

- Tried to bring that attention to the Governor to no avail.
- The significant cliff is not boding well in Hartford with many legislators.
- Incumbent on this Board to express to our delegation the impact this will do on our education program. If this creates the cliff (unless taxes are raised) we will lose staff and student to teacher numbers will be higher in classrooms.
- There are towns gaining money where urban settings are losing money. Very inconsistent. \$109 million loss and holding ECS money for two years by pausing causes havoc and inequity for our kids in terms of equal access to a curriculum.
- In regards to the ESSA money, we will put together a recommendation that will mitigate our pandemic loss. The State Department already said if something happens to the governor's budget and we have to use those funds, we may have to recalibrate the ESSA money.
- The Public Relations Committee may want to take this up in terms on how to move forward.
- Dr. Pascarella has some interviews with reporters, meeting with the PTO and has sent this to the legislators. He will do all he can to fight hard and let people know how this will impact our students.
- Any questions can be directed to Dr. Pascarella.
- K. Conetta asked for clarification. If they freeze this funding we are looking at a \$2.7 million freeze for next year and another \$2.7 million for the following year so a loss of over \$7.5 million over the course of the next two years that should be coming into Danbury. Dr. Pascarella confirmed those numbers.
- J. DaSilva stated that he has spoken to Representatives Godfrey and Arconti, both of whom were less than pleased with the notion of pausing this funding. They were going to work to see what they could do to change this. Will keep those conversations going.
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## **DISCUSSION**

- Hybrid Extension - In Person Learning
  - Dr. Pascarella stated that in the beginning when we looked at our challenge for returning in the Fall, the main issue was space. That has not changed. It put us in a position to move towards hybrid for safety. The advice he was following was advice of the medical advisors.
  - If we knew then what we know now, he thinks the lens would change somewhat.
  - Had a meeting last week with medical advisors.
  - There is some specificity that indicates that we should look at this differently. We should look at this in a way that uses the best practices he is hearing from surrounding towns.
  - There are 228 classrooms in our district that are over the minimum that could not achieve either the three foot or six foot minimum for social distancing.
  - We have an opportunity to expand some time for our students to be in school.
  - K. Prunty stated that the Covid cases is 23.7 cases over the last 14 days per 100,000, with our positivity rate being at 4.6% over the last 14 days. We are in a better place than we were even a few weeks ago. Have been monitoring school cases with K. O'Dowd and her team. That seems to have been very effective. Community spread is still happening but much lower than a few weeks ago.

Danbury is now part of the statewide program where we are monitoring wastewater and any traces of the virus in wastewater as an early indicator of what's to come in the following weeks in terms of new cases. That is also showing a downward trend of viruses being shed in wastewater. All around, indicators are looking a lot better.

- K. O'Dowd stated that we do have an aggressive contact tracing protocol in the palace. Starts with identification of a positive case. That information goes to the school nurse, the principal, Dr. Pascarella, Cabinet, K. O'Dowd, Dr. Fong and K. Prunty. Contact tracing begins with who the person is, where they have been in the building, where they have been in less than six feet of distance for 15 minutes or more. If they have been riding a bus versus parent transport (student). Once all that data is gathered, letters go out to the school community, identify direct contacts by a red alert robocall. Letters go out through school messenger so they can be translated into Spanish and Portuguese. Principal gets back a report from the school messenger so any parents who did not receive the message can be followed up by a direct phone call from the school. Ask that people stay in quarantine and be tested. Those results are brought back to the school nurse to confirm that everyone is safe to come back on the identified date. Work in collaboration with K. Prunty and there is further contact tracing on her end.
- K. Thompson stated that earlier this week the governor opened both aged 65+ and educational sector employees to get vaccines. HR has run lists of everyone who receives a paycheck. Sorting and focusing on those who are in buildings working with students. Those who are working remotely will not get vaccinated at this time. Will upload lists on 3/1/2021 with the assistance of K. O'Dowd and K. Prunty. Once lists are entered and uploaded, staff will get automated email from CDC to register in VAMS. K. O'Dowd will work with HR to see the quickest way to get staff vaccinated. Possibility of school clinics. Will report back to the Board as progress goes.
- K. Prunty stated they are still waiting for confirmation of allotment and allocation of vaccines. As soon as she hears, she will share that info with K. Thompson.
- Target allotment is all of the staff identified done within the first two weeks. Completing all vaccinations within the month of March is the goal but she wants it sooner. She has put in a request to cover everyone in the district via the list provided by K. Thompson and K. O'Dowd.
- K. Molinari asked about April vacation and people traveling to other states. Will there be a protocol for when they return? K. O'Dowd stated that there is a CT travel advisory which states that anyone who travels is required to have a negative Covid test either 72 hours before returning to CT or test any time when returning, they have to quarantine until those results are clear. K. Thompson stated that the concern is that we will see ourselves with a number of people who may be required to quarantine and that will put a stress on our system. Dr. Pascarella stated that he does not intend on cancelling Spring Break.
- R. Chaleski asked if there will be awareness made to families on the risk of travel? Will there be designated clinics for teachers getting vaccines? For the teachers working remotely because they have an underlying condition, perhaps

they can be vaccinated so they can return to the building. Dr. Pascarella stated that is all being worked out in HR.

- J. DaSilva asked in case we cannot do clinics for staff or set up our own vaccination site, will staff be afforded personal days to get vaccinated. K. Thompson stated that she is not sure, and they are working hard on getting clinics working around school hours. Also giving serious thought to timing on days of week because of side effects from the vaccine. People do have an option when signing into VAMS to sign up for an appointment anywhere else. We would ask that they do what they can to avoid the work period because we could see some significant stressors.
- Dr. Pascarella stated that this good news should impact the purpose of bringing our students back to school.
- We are studying deeply in terms of the needy group returning. Looking at returning students back on Wednesdays and looking at lengthening the other days.
- Looking at some other options for increasing the number of days. We keep hearing of districts that are in full in-person. Calling those districts and can't get good answers because what they say on air and what is really happening is not always accurate. Calling around to other districts for best practices to increase the amount of time. Our data now is matching the data of these towns, in the fall we were 4x and 5x the infection rate.
- K. Walston stated that originally, as part of the reopening plan, they had included 6 feet feasible but at minimum three feet. Three feet comes from the American Academy of Pediatrics. CDC was saying six feet. Other districts are using the three feet social distance guideline, allowing 18 - 20 students in a classroom. They have removed as much excess furniture from classrooms as possible to try and maximize the space. We are learning from local neighbors that they are getting a high number of students in their classrooms, higher than what we now have in our Blue and Orange cohorts. We have some opportunities now to revisit our own classroom layouts and principals will be visiting classrooms to see the maximum number of students in our classrooms. Three feet appears to be the number other districts are using as a guideline.
- Dr. Pascarella stated that DHS is the largest highschool in the state. Not comparable to Norwalk and Hartford, where they have multiple high schools.
- Challenge of lunch which impacts schedules. Looking at elementary schools in terms of increasing time.
- K. Truchsess stated that the high need SpEd students are students who require more time in-person to receive their instruction. Predominantly students who attend self-contained classrooms. The level of support and instruction is best in-person. Looking to return these students four days a week. This will be a staggered start. Starting on 3/1/2021, the K-5 population of high needs SpEd students will be brought in. 3/8/2021, the 6-12 high need SpEd students will be brought in. For the preschool population, the percentage accessing in-person instruction right now is lower and we were afforded the opportunity to bring in all preschool students four days a week. Staff were made aware on 2/24/2021. Cabinet met with medical advisors to make sure they felt that this was appropriate and safe to do so. Notification will go out to families on the morning of

2/25/2021. Everyone has worked hard to get this initiative off the ground. Right now, these students will be coming on Mondays, Tuesdays, Thursdays and Fridays. If the district moves to bring students in on Wednesdays, these students will increase to five days a week.

- Dr. Pascarella stated that they did speak to the union representatives for administrators and teachers. They're enthusiastic in bringing students back. They understand the value of that.
- Dr. Pascarella stated that his team is studying the numbers and hoping by next week, can work some logistics for Wednesdays as the first step and extending the day.
- Dr. Pascarella stated that more information on cleaning of facilities will follow.
- J. DaSilva asked about the new CDC guidelines with the four-status chart, how do you make that work at the highschool? K. Prunty stated that the recommendation is three feet when possible. Best practice is six feet. Basically, whatever is feasible within three and six feet.
- Dr. Pascarella spoke about the difficulty with lunches and impossibility of social distancing.
- J. DaSilva asked how many kids are there in an average class? Dr. Pascarella stated that 228 are over the 20 students per classroom, 104 of those are K-5. The highschool has about 50 classes that pose that challenge.
- Dr. Pascarella said that we have about 37% of our students in Distance Learning. Those choices are made on parent choices. As we move towards a more aggressive in-person model, we may have a number of Distance Learning students who want to return to in-person learning. That will pose another challenge.
- R. Chaleski stated that she has heard rumors that not everyone is not respecting social distance at DHS? Dr. Pascarella stated that he has not heard of any issues, other than the one or two issues of students refusing to wear masks. Dr. Casimiro stated that she has heard positive feedback from the high school. Students have had to get used to the norms and protocols, just like anyone else. K. O'Dowd stated that her office is at the high school and they have had no problems.
- C. Leborious stated that there was a survey done through NEA and a majority of staff reported that they were satisfied with the masking and social distancing in general through the schools.
- Dr. Pascarella stated that we may have to have a partial hybrid program. There will be mixing and matching creative solutions. By next week we will be looking at expanding to Wednesdays. One cohort would come three days in and then two days at home and then the other cohort would switch the following week until we can expand it safely.

### **INFORMATION**

- Form-Community Relations Appeals Form 1312/1312.2
  - Form shared with Board members.

### **BOARD CHAIRPERSON'S REPORT**

- Discussion -- Returning to In Person BOE Meetings

- G. Cooper stated that in discussion with Dr. Pascarella, looking at going back to in-person meetings beginning 4/7/2021, if it is deemed safe. Working in consultation with the medical advisors. This may not be held at BBAC as the space is limited. More information will follow.
- G. Cooper attended a workshop on 2/18/2021 that CABE held on diversity, equity, and inclusion. Was a very interesting workshop.
- G. Cooper visited RPMS last week and everyone that came into RPMS was making comments on how clean the building looked. Asked that the custodians are made aware of the positive comments.

### **BOARD REPORTS, COMMUNICATIONS AND COMMENTS**

- R. Chaleski stated that the Policy Committee met last week. Reviewed and recommended policies put forth to Board members at this meeting. Wants to make sure members are set to convene regular monthly meetings starting with 3/3/2021 at 6pm. K. Walston agreed.
- K. Conetta stated that the Community Relations committee has met twice and is making good forward progress. Goal is to educate the community on the budget that was approved. Reconvening on 3/4/2021. Dr. Pascarella asked K. Conetta to make the cause letter part of the 3/4/2021 meeting.

### **EXECUTIVE SESSION**

MOTION: K. Conetta moved, seconded by A. Russo that the Board of Education convene in Executive Session for the purpose of discussing personnel matters and pending litigation.

**Motion carried at 8:47 pm**

### **PUBLIC SESSION**

The Board returned into Public Session with no action taken.

### **ADJOURNMENT**

The Board of Education adjourned its Meeting of February 24, 2021 at 9:47 pm.

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Kathleen Molinaro, Secretary

(Meeting was videotaped)