

**DANBURY BOARD OF EDUCATION  
SPECIAL MEETING  
WEDNESDAY AUGUST 26, 2020- 6:00 PM  
VIRTUAL MEETING  
LIVE STREAM**

English:<https://youtu.be/3mVOaiga6kQ>

Spanish:<https://youtu.be/OLLDsJvOrb4>

**PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

The Chairperson, G. Cooper, called the meeting to order at 6:02 pm and those assembled recited the Pledge of Allegiance followed by a moment of silence.

**ROLL CALL**

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

Absent: Loren Daly, Kim Thompson

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

**PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

- Dane Reese, Ph.D.
  - As a Ph.D. educator at Danbury High School with over thirty years of classroom and administrative experience, I hope you will find my comments regarding the reopening of schools to be of value. No-one can deny the importance to young people of learning face to face in a stimulating environment. I found online teaching to be supremely challenging, an immense workload, and less effective and engaging than I would like. However, it is a near statistical certainty that if schools are opened in person, even in a hybrid model, one or more students, family members, staff, or their family members will die. The impact of a death in a family, whether of a child, a parent, or a spouse, is devastating and irrevocable. Imagine being the person whose decision results in such a horror. We may all be spared this calamity if we just bite the bullet and endure one semester using the fully online delivery platforms that we already have in place, having spent 3 1/2 months developing the systems and training the students, parents, staff, and administration in their use. That would be the wiser, safer, more compassionate, and more human course of action.
- Candace Phaire
  - I wanted to know if there were any plans to require staff and children to submit a negative Covid-19 test (within 3 days) prior to allowing them to enter school buildings. If not, could that be considered given the increase in cases in Danbury?
- Barbara Webber

- As a retired teacher and interested grandparent, I would suggest that the district have a series of training videos for those who will support students for Distance Learning. It should include basic digital training to access the lessons. It should include intros to all sites that are used. There should be perhaps separate workshops for primary, intermediate, and middle school. They could either be on YouTube or Zoom. Total Distance Learning means all hands on deck! The intro training needs to start with the assumption that the participant knows nothing about Distance Learning. Perhaps there could be an initial training in Zoom sessions, and then those who were trained could then offer training sessions to others in English, Spanish, Portuguese, etc.
- Kim McGrath
  - For the students that chose Distance Learning during the survey, will they be automatically moved back into virtual classes within their respective schools? If not, is there a way to request this change?
- Christine Fournier
  - When will we get a better picture of the plan for elementary school's day? How much live teaching will happen throughout the day? Will kids who selected full Distance Learning before the district chose to open full Distance Learning still get assigned to a virtual classroom or will they be assigned to a teacher in their building?
- Daniela Nero
  - How will this be different from the end of last year's Distance Learning? Will the kids have a certain schedule of classes, and daily expectations? Will the classes be taught live by their actual school teachers? Will there be one-on-one meetings with their teachers on a weekly basis? Are they going to be in actual live classes over Zoom or Google? Are you going to follow a regular curriculum or modified? I have a daughter going into 6th grade (Broadview) and another going into 3rd (Stadley Rough) and am extremely disappointed and concerned with this decision because the end of last year was extremely disappointing as far as Distance Learning went.
- Helen Marie Quinn
  - How is the district going to handle SpEd kids on IEPs? How will all of their services be handled and covered?
- Tracey Reda
  - What are the ages we can sign up for Distance Learning childcare? Is this being offered for free to parents that would like their child to be with others while doing Distance Learning?
- Sara Cohen
  - The availability of chrome books for all students who do not have adequate devices or how to go about obtaining one hasn't been mentioned in a while and is now more crucial than ever since the decision of moving to an all Distance Learning model. Will they be supplied and if so when? Also, does the district

have any plans to compensate families that aren't eligible for government assistance programs for all of the extra internet and energy use required for Distance Learning? I am working from home and require the internet. With my son needing his own connection now as well, we will have to purchase a more expensive plan for faster service just to be able to keep up. Working families are enduring more hardships than ever now and we are already paying for public education per our taxes. We can't afford to upgrade our service. Will we keep having to foot the bill for our children to receive this new form of "public education". Our two income households will likely have to become a one income household due to Distance Learning. We can't bear these extra costs as well. Our energy bill was 6% higher during the Distance Learning months in the Spring. You can't expect families to fund all of these decisions that they aren't given a voice in, you're setting us up for failure.

- Michelle DiMauro
  - Since parents lives are changing on a dime and working parents are struggling to find childcare, is that the expectation of the teachers as well? Teachers should be required to sign in for a full work day without distractions. Teaching is a job and their own children shouldn't be at work with them. They should need to find childcare on a dime's notice like the rest of the working parents.
- Anna Valinoti
  - Will students in elementary school have an actual assigned teacher from their school? Will students be seeing and getting instruction live from their teacher on assigned "in person" days or is the format changing? If this becomes "assigned" tasks like in the Spring, I'm not sure my son will learn much. How will he be taught? My husband and I do not have degrees in teaching and as much as we want to help, we are limited in teaching a nine year old. What support is there, not only for students but, for parents to better assist their children? Are students expected to be on the computer from 8am to 3pm, Monday through Friday or will they be able to do some work on the weekends?
- Chantal Kocot
  - We have opted for Full Distance Learning for our 5th grader and understand the massive effort that was required for planning the hybrid model, however, there has been very little to no information communicated on what the full Distance Learning would look like. What I heard was there would be a DPS teacher assigned and there would be live instruction. Now that we are all in full Distance Learning, my questions are: will my son be assigned a teacher from his school or still any teacher from the district? Is Edgenuity still the platform for Distance Learning? If October determines those who originally opted for Hybrid to go back to that model, how will this affect those still opting for full Distance Learning if their assigned teacher is also teaching in class students? What more can you share

about what "live instruction" looks like? Is it interactive, or are all students muted? For full Distance Learning, what is the approximate teacher to student ratio? How do full Distance Learning students get matriculated back to the classroom?

- Theresa Giberson
  - Can you please address childcare options, frequency, tuition etc? Additionally, doesn't Pembroke meet the requirements of less than 16 per class? Can you please revisit by school? I worry about the Kindergarten students. My son can barely write his name and recognize letters. Distance Learning will be impossible for them. What's the plan? He is shy and I can't see him interacting virtually by any means. Will there be a virtual meeting with the teachers? Will the school year pick up where last year left off? I know my daughter missed half of her 1st grade class. Will 2nd grade pick up where they left off?
- Wendi McCabe
  - I believe wholeheartedly that with proper guidance we can still do in school learning. Simple steps like have all kids tested before school starts, check temps daily, wear masks, sanitize as soon as they walk in the building, have sanitizing stations set up in classrooms. Yes it will be a bit more of an effort, but these kids need to be in school. They need to interact with their peers and teachers. There is more to learning than just sitting in front of a computer.
- Jacqueline Glynn
  - Thank you for all the work you have done during these difficult times. We have two children in elementary school. As a parent who will have to work from home during Distance Learning, are you able to provide a schedule or outline of what a day of Distance Learning will look like? How many hours during the day will our children be on the computer? How many hours will be spent learning from a teacher?
- Kristen Saumell
  - What about the social and emotional well being of our children? On your district surveys, didn't the majority of parents state that they wanted their children to return to school in person, in some capacity? Isn't it hypocritical to say it's safe for people to send their children to these full day daycare programs but not send them to in person school? Specifically, what is the Distance Learning program going to look like for elementary school students? Is it really good for them to be in front of a screen for hours each day?
- kmackey@.....
  - When Danbury schools were originally using the Hybrid plan, for those that chose all Distance Learning, it was mentioned that the children will have a designated Distance Learning teacher from the district—it was not guaranteed that they'd have a teacher from their own school. Now that Danbury is doing all Distance

Learning, does that change the teacher assignments? Will my child now have a teacher from her school?

- Carol Corcoran
  - I am a single mom of 2 kids, a senior who just graduated DHS and an incoming junior at DHS. I want to express my disagreement with the decisions being made lately due to Covid-19. I want my voice heard. I want in school learning, not Distance Learning. My daughter needs to go to school to feel connected and to feel normal. She wants this too. She will wear a mask, keep her distance, and only go two days a week if necessary - but please after agreeing to all of these concessions, I want you to keep your word. Back and forth decisions, one day yes and next day no, has elevated our emotions and anxieties. My daughter's sport, which was done successfully all summer, has now been cancelled. I do not agree with that decision either. Quarantine the ones affected and let the majority choose to play sports or not, and choose to go to school or not. Seems to me all these decisions take away my choices and are based on more fear than anything else. Why can't you test kids for fever and temperature like the businesses and doctors offices? Or test them for Covid-19 once a week? Giving up on school learning is not acceptable to me. Don't put us at a disadvantage again because of a few people that are positive. Move forward, we accept the risk. We feel strongly that we need to get back to normal as much as possible!!!
- Darlene Murphy
  - I'm writing this to express my extreme displeasure and anger regarding your decision to start the 20-21 school year on 5-day Distance Learning. While I understand and agree we all need to be cautious and take precautions to protect our children, ourselves and our community, but to keep businesses shut or at limited capacity, be afraid to set foot out one's front door and to keep kids out of a school building and out of a classroom because of a virus that 99% of the human race will survive, is mind-boggling. This virus, just like the flu, is here to stay and will ebb and flow, peak and wain, and we all need to live with it and go back to our lives fully. That being said, the fact that DPS, the BOE, and Dr. Sal has changed course on reopening schools three times in five weeks is very distressing and quite frankly frightening. It seems the fear-mongering narrative being perpetuated by the Mayor, the media, unions and frightened parents is being listened to and acted on yet logic and common sense are not. We all agree Distance Learning in the Spring was a disaster. It certainly was better than nothing, but not at all what kids need or deserve. We've been told Distance Learning this Fall will be completely revamped, synchronous, more accountability, etc. Well, now we as parents have no choice but to hope and pray this is the case. When DPS announced on July 21st that schools would reopen on a 5 days a week in-person schedule, we knew it was too good to be true as much

resistance was instantly received and this ridiculous hybrid model was created. Fearful parents and teachers already had options (full Distance Learning or homeschool), but those of us who want our kids in school, whose kids want to be in school, who understand the benefits far outweigh the risks, were given one option to have their kids in school part-time. Here we are, two weeks before school is to start, and the 69% of us (per your pie charts, who, ironically, are the majority) who want our kids in the classroom are angry, frustrated, and confused, as due to a small uptick in cases here in Danbury and the recurring fear-mongering, the Hybrid model has been replaced by the full Distance Learning model, to be revisited on October 1st we are told. Why are the parents who want and need their kids in a classroom not being heard? Clearly, no one making these decisions takes into consideration what's best for kids mentally, emotionally, academically, and socially, Nor do you take into consideration the fact that many/most parents work, be it remotely from home or outside the home. Either way, they need their kids in school! The Board has offered no helpful resources to parents who are now scrambling to find alternative care and coverage for their children, which comes at a significant expense, emotionally for the children and monetarily for the parents. An added expense in spite of the school taxes already paid. This alternative care will very likely be in a setting with kids and teachers/workers from different schools, locations, parts of the city and/or state, thereby creating a much larger and potentially much more harmful exposure than if kids were put in their respective schools five days a week for full day, in-person learning. The lack of logic again is mind-boggling. This decision needs to be rethought and reconsidered as our children, society, and the future of our community, state, country, and world are being greatly damaged more so than this survivable virus would ever cause.

- Tikirulz21@....
  - Will the EBT cards be used again for the 3 days each week that kids won't be in school?
- Melissa Tunno
  - My children struggled greatly during the Spring 2020 pandemic with their learning. My high school senior, who was very disciplined and dedicated to her studie,lost interest in trying to learn virtually, which is very concerning recognizing the importance of education and preparation for their future. My high school freshman struggled greatly with focus and anxiety. The learning was very much a struggle that my son gained nothing through the process, other than becoming frustrated and even more negative about trying to learn without the support of a trained professional. We all did what we could during those times and we respected what had to be done and did it for the temporary period. My son is ready to go back to learning in school face to face because he struggled so

much. Not all children can learn via the virtual method, no matter even if the curriculum is able to be given the chance to be prepared appropriately. No one model fits all students. Some students have an IEP or 504 plan and are required by law to receive their services. Many children, even those who do well and enjoy school, become disengaged and lose their desire to grow academically. Furthermore, not all parents can quit their jobs to offer their children the support they need to learn virtually. We have to work to continue to pay our bills and taxes and to meet the basic needs of our children so they don't have to focus on primal needs but instead can focus on learning and developing themselves to eventually be a provider. Additionally, not all parents are equipped, prepared or have the slightest clue how to begin serving as the lone, face to face, in person academic support person. The world must continue to turn, as that in itself is a valuable lesson for our children to learn and experience to be able to adapt to situations as the real world will certainly ask that of them. Children need an in person learning option. Those parents who elected this option, knew the risks involved and made the decision knowing such, preparing to comply with whatever rules were set in place to allow this in person learning, if so chosen. Just as the businesses and community had to adapt to the new normal, so must school systems. It seems as if there are two sets of rules, one that the schools operate under and one that the rest of the world operates under. For example, look at daycare centers, they had to figure out a way to make it work 'in person' because they don't have public funding. Their customers had to return to work and hence they had to come up with a way to sustain their services. How is it that we can require low wage workers to work eight, ten or sometimes even longer shifts in stores, and restaurants interacting with all different people all day long but can't continue to educate our children in a setting where they can learn and stay positive about education? These kids are our future. We can't throw in the towel and say, it is just too risky or complex, we owe it to them to offer a face to face learning option, if the parent decides on such. Furthermore, as I am sure you are aware other school Boards in the area have made the decision to continue on with in person learning options. I believe our children deserve the chance for their academic, social, emotional and mental needs to be met.

- Ccitizen48@....
  - Is anything being done about teachers who are hosting learning pods for Distance Learning in their homes while also teaching Distance Learning? This seems extremely unethical and if Danbury is concerned at all about equity of education, this should not be tolerated and the educators involved should be terminated.
  
- Donna Bosworth

- As a special area teacher in two of our elementary schools, I want to sincerely thank you for your concern and support of our students and staff in the decision to start the year in Distance Learning. As teachers, we are keenly aware of the enormous pressure that you face in these decisions, which impact so many in our community. You know that we all want to be with our students - I don't know of any teacher who is happy or prefers Distance Learning. It is a completely new mode of teaching, essentially a different job than what we went to school or trained for, that we needed to acclimate to very quickly, and requires much more time and effort to do. We know all of the pitfalls and issues that Distance Learning creates for our students and their families. However, it is clearly necessary, given our population, facilities (ventilation issues and overcrowding), staffing levels and monetary constraints. Among the many considerations I am sure that you had, one that parents might not realize, is that Special Area teachers like myself, teach at more than one school (usually between two and three, but some music teachers go into eight to 10 buildings weekly). My caseload is 30 unique classes each week across six grade levels, with about 650 students. To see students in person, I would have been pushing into their classrooms, potentially breaking cohorts and cross-contaminating hundreds of students. With the evolving information just released yesterday, the virus seems to be more aerosolized than originally believed. There were numerous complications to in-person learning such as this one example. Thank you for making these tough decisions, and keeping our students, their families and the greater community, safe. It is understood that public schools have traditionally stepped up to fill in gaps left out of the broader social safety net, and we often continue to do more with less, because we do love and care about the students who are entrusted to us. We promise to continue to work hard and do all that we can to teach our children, support their social and emotional health as much as possible, and rally together to press our elected officials (city, state and federal) to provide the services that our families so desperately need right now. With the decision of Distance Learning, we lower the risk of becoming gravely ill ourselves, or spreading it to the most vulnerable amongst us. Please continue to follow the science, and speak with those of us who work directly with the students, trusting us to do what is best for all of Danbury's children and our community.
- Connie Hope
  - I am very passionate about education and the well being of all children. I have watched over many many months as our children took blow after blow. I have watched as everything they had to look forward to was snatched from them. I have watched as everything they knew changed. I have watched them being told one thing only to have that change time and time again. I have felt powerless. All of my kids struggled over the past five months and I'm sure there are countless

others that did as well. I can tell you first hand Distance Learning did not work! My children haven't received an education since early March. What we did have was loneliness and frustration, as we tried to just make it through the year. My 10 year old cried almost daily, spending hours trying to complete busy work without proper (if any) instruction. Often she would start at nine and not be done until I forced her to stop at dinner time. My teenagers were forced to muddle through, with little to no instruction. They ended up developing a "whatever" attitude to just survive the year. Mind you, these are all very self motivated learners, with two parents who were available to them much of the time. If this is how poorly it went for children as fortunate as mine, can you imagine the less fortunate in our area. What about those kids? The kids who not only come to school for an education. The ones who when they walk through those doors, finally are safe and cared for. Where teachers and staff can provide for the needs otherwise neglected. Have we forgotten about those kids? Who's going to pick them up, like I've done time after time for mine over these months? This poor, knee jerk decision to shut down schools will impact many children and families. I have already told my employer that due to Distance Learning, I will need to take a leave of absence. I simply can't leave them to fall on their faces in frustration again. Though I don't know how much good I can do for them all, even with multiple degrees in education, I do not mind sacrificing for my kids. I would do it a million times over. But I can't help all the others out there. That's why I write now to you to appeal for those who don't have voices shouting from their corner. The children's social and emotional well being are also being overlooked. My youngest hasn't been with her peers in five months. Unacceptable! That's simply not healthy in her development. All of my kids have struggled emotionally over the past months. This breaks my heart. They need to go to school. They need to be with their teachers who love them. They need to be with their peers. We have prepared our children well. The safety protocols are in place. We have done what was asked of us. As a community, we got the numbers down and kept them down. Yes, I understand there was a slight jump in numbers but that was not in situations where safety protocols were being followed. That's like comparing apples to oranges. I ask you all to do everything in your power to get these children back into school. It can be done. It needs to be done and well before October 1st. If not, I fear the further damage that the poor decision making of our leaders will have on this precious group of children and their families.

- Traci Bruno
  - My son will be an incoming junior at DHS and plays multiple sports. My immune system is compromised yet I've still chosen to send my children to school and have elected to let my son participate in sports, as well as summer conditioning at DHS for football. I have observed, all summer, the precautions every coach and

league has taken to provide a safe environment for our children and I have felt safe in letting my son participate in all conditioning workouts held by DHS coaches and staff members. I am concerned that with Distance Learning, my son will not receive the same education he would if he was in school learning and I pray that this year is better than the Spring. We as parents understand that the school did the best they could in the Spring but now we have had ample time to plan so why is there still no clarity? Your recommendations for caution are noted, however the parents who chose in school learning should get the final say for their own children, just as those who chose to distance learn. I am aware of every single risk there is in leaving my house, going to the store, and letting my children play sports or return to school and I am ok with it. I do feel as if we are forced to distance learn, we should at least have the option to continue with sports. The option was there previously for those that chose to distance learn and therefore should remain. These kids have worked hard to follow the guidelines set forth by leaders to continue to flatten the curve, and as a whole, have done a phenomenal job. Please do not punish them for that. They deserve so much more than your immediate dismissal. Precautions are in place for a reason. Coaches, Athletic Directors, teachers, parents, and most of all the children are more than capable and willing to carry them all out so please give them a chance to prove it. Sports motivates these kids to do better and be better. They need this now more than ever!!! Please know that I support all fall sports as they've been played in previous years. Let the kids play and return to school.

- Cheryl R Radachowsky
  - It's been challenging times for high school student-athletes and coaches since the middle of March when sports were turned upside down due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Seasons were lost in the spring, many athletes never had that last one moment in their high school career or for their team, and the constant uncertainty has lingered into the summer months. Players, coaches and parents were all committed to practicing and playing safely. They did everything the state, city and school leadership asked them to do, and I believe they were successful in doing so. A few months of conditioning gave hope that things would return to some type of normalcy in August. Earlier this week, our local leadership, Mayor Mark and Dr. Sal, put a pause on Danbury High School sports. Wait, they had done everything the state, city and school leadership asked them to do?! That wasn't good enough. And now, they may not have the opportunity to play while their neighboring cities, towns and states are able to. Let's provide solutions to how they can play instead of just cancelling altogether. Many DHS athletes have been playing in summer leagues for baseball, soccer, softball and basketball and competing in other sports such as track. So these athletes have a sense of what they need to do to stay healthy and have a season to play for. I'm hopeful sports can begin soon for all the kids in Danbury. The mental strain of not being with their classmates, teammates and coaches has been tough on many. For many high school kids, including my two Juniors, school sports are their way of doing better

in school, earning a chance to play at the college level and to have some normalcy in their lives. While high school sports isn't the end-all, be--all of anyone's life, they certainly help young people grow in so many ways.

- Melissa Fox
  - Will the food service distribution continue or will SNAP benefits kick in again? Last week a mailing was supposed to go out to all families, no one has gotten anything, did the information not go out? Please go over in much more detail what a day of learning will look like. Will teachers still be working from their classrooms?
- Stephanie Abdella
  - I believe our children should be on the Hybrid Model. Distance Learning did not teach my children anything and my honor roll now incoming freshman really struggled. Also I do not think elementary students should have to be logged in during school hours because many parents, like myself, have to work. How can I work and be home to help my child with Distance Learning? I do not need childcare as I have a 15 year old and a seven year old, but my 15 year old can't help my seven year old while completing his own work. Please reconsider having the elementary children log in during a certain time and maybe allow all assignments to be due by the end of day so parents can work with the students and still be able to work. Also, I don't understand why our high school students aren't allowed to continue conditioning when there were no incidents since they started in July.
- Caleb Schlissel
  - How will commitments to extracurricular activities be maintained? There are a variety of students who are greatly disheartened by the indefinite suspension of all activities (especially robotics). Given the intricacies of Danbury High School's robotics program, there are a plethora of limited, but suitable ways in which the organization can continue to thrive. Regardless, robotics is simply one example of a club that could function during COVID. How will judgment on the status of specific extracurriculars be administered? What is the reasoning behind preventing smaller groups of students to meet under social distancing measures? Is there a plan for evaluating the safety of extracurriculars in the future? Extracurricular activities comprise an extremely significant facet of the educational experience, and they must not be ignored when making decisions for the 2020-21 school year.
- Cynthia Little
  - My son is a Junior at DHS. He's been playing football ever since he was seven years old. He loves football. Throughout the years, playing football taught him accountability, discipline, life skills, and teamwork. He knows that in order for him to play football, his grades have to be at a certain average so he works hard to keep his grades up so he can play football with his teammates. Please, please let football continue this season. All the coaches are taking all necessary precautions and safety for our kids and for their families as well. Please don't take this season away from our kids. They need this!
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- Kathy Snow

- I'm writing tonight, not about the decision to begin school entirely virtual, but rather about high school competitive teams - other than sports. Specifically the Robotics Team at DHS. And before I begin, please understand I am a huge proponent of sports as my son is also an athlete. My plea to the Board of Ed and school administrators is this: allow non-athletic teams and clubs the same ability to meet that sports teams have been given. I know everything is on hold regarding sport conditioning for at least two weeks, but when they are allowed to begin again, the same consideration should be given to other teams. The district has said in the past how much it tries to achieve equity and equality when it comes to things such as school funding. I want to ensure the same level of equity and equality is given to its own students when it comes to teams during this Covid pandemic. Please let students on all teams practice, train and compete, both on and off the field! The physical and mental well-being of our children is critical during this trying time.

### **ACTION ITEMS**

#### **A. Policy 1250 – Visits to the Schools**

MOTION: R. Chaleski moved, seconded by K. Conetta that the Board of Education accept for first reading Policy 2150 – Visits to the Schools, as accepted by the Policy Committee. \_\_\_\_\_ 20-78

R. Jannelli abstained.

#### **Motion passed at 6:33 pm**

#### **B. Policy 5141.8 - Face Masks/Coverings**

MOTION: K. Conetta moved, seconded by J. DaSilva that the Board of Education accept for first reading Policy 5141.8 – Face Masks/Coverings, as accepted by the Policy Committee. \_\_\_\_\_ 20-79

R. Chaleski asked if K. O’Dowd was able to get information from the State on what masks were approved, as discussed at the last Board meeting. K. O’Dowd stated that there was no additional guidance from the State on masks. The only masks that will not be approved at this time are masks with ventilation valves.

#### **Motion passed at 6:36 pm**

#### **C. Policy 6114.81 – Emergency Suspension of Policy During Pandemic**

MOTION: K. Molinaro moved, seconded by J. DaSilva that the Board of Education accept for first reading Emergency Suspension of Policy During Pandemic as accepted by the Policy Committee. \_\_\_\_\_ 20-80

J. Britton asked for clarification that first reading is not an adoption of the policy. G. Cooper stated that Board members take the policy to read and then it is brought back to the Board for final approval.

J. Britton stated that while he agrees with the emergency plan, he did not see an end date on when the Board would take that delegated authority back, or if there would be a vote to end the emergency powers.

K. Walston stated that when the governor's order subsides, so would the policy.

R. Chaleski stated that the policy is a living document where you can modify it at any time. These policies being voted on are only temporary and can be repealed at any time by the Board.

K. Hodgdon abstained

**Motion passed at 6:41 pm**

D. Policy 6114.82 – COVID Emergency Measures

MOTION: A. Russo moved, seconded by A. Spallino that the Board of Education accept for first reading Policy 6114.82 – COVID Emergency Measures \_\_\_\_\_ 20-81

**Motion passed at 6:43 pm**

**DISCUSSION**

- Danbury Public Schools Reopening Plan Update
- Medical:
  - Dr. Pascarella stated that the reason DPS went to the Distance Learning model was because of medical reasons with the uptick in Covid-19 cases.
  - There is no knee-jerk maneuver. It is with mind and soul that we look at what it is that we are doing. The recommendation came from medical individuals for our local situation.
  - Parents have asked how could you safely have pre-school but you don't have classes. In pre-school, there are ten to a class with no transportation and many other limits that schools can not replicate when we do return.
  - In person learning was our priority and intent until things changed in such a manner that presented itself with a decision needing to be made for the safety of our students.
  - K. O'Dowd introduced:
    - District Medical Advisor, Dr. Fong.
    - Danbury's Director for the Department of Health, K. Prunty.
    - Danbury's Medical Advisor, Dr. Begg.
  - Collaborations started back in March. Connecticut initially did a wonderful job by staying home, social distancing, wearing masks, washing hands and being mindful. As a result, we proved that it works and we were able to flatten the curve.
  - As the curve flattened and not as many cases were reported, people got comfortable and relaxed in their practices. Have seen domestic traveling from hot spots as well as international travel in and out of Danbury.

Recent power outage that lasted more than a week resulted in more communal living. The mitigation strategies were relaxed and that contributed to the uptick in numbers.

- Data that is made to the public comes from the State Department of Health. They report on a county wide basis, not a local basis. County numbers dilute data that we see in Danbury.
- On or about 8/10/2020 is when we started to see a rise in numbers. Danbury was at one to two cases a day and slowly rose to 20 a day and last week in the 40's per day. Very concerning and met as a group to review data. Felt that in light of everything, the best recommendation to Dr. Pascarella was the move to Distance Learning.
- Very concerning that a lot of positive results are seen in children. Over a two week period, 17% of positive cases in Danbury were children from infancy to adolescents. We know that children carry a higher viral load. So even if they are asymptomatic, they are capable of spreading that to their parents, grandparents, teachers and others in the community.
- Mitigation strategies we've done before can be done again. Go back to being mindful and we can flatten the curve and make it safe for children to go back to school.
- K. Prunty stated that this is something that has been discussed for a very long time. 83 cases in July and 268 in August (as of 8/26/2020).
- Started seeing an uptick in the middle of July. After the power outage, a small uptick became a very large one. July positivity rate was just over 1%. Most recently, a positive rate of 7%. Increased testing as of 8/21/2020. Conducted well over 2000 tests since 8/22/2020. Starting to get some of those results.
- With the testing that started on 8/21/2020, positivity rate of 8.5% and 5% from the two testing centers. The seven day rolling average of new cases in 100,000 people is 22.7. Compared to state metrics (low, moderate and high), that is right on the high which is to recommend full Distance Learning.
- Comparison of age breakdown from June, July and August. Largest increase has been the 0-9 age group. Since 8/12/2020, four infants have tested positive. Compared to four infants testing positive through the entire pandemic (a total of eight now). All from different households and all through family spread.
- Dr. Begg thanked parents for their passion and interest. Understands the emotional well being of children's needs and the huge burden to parents. Has been practicing emergency medicine at Danbury Hospital since 1993.
- When looking at data, younger populations are at risk but they are not the ones who have severe complications. What they do is pass it on to family members. This is not fear mongering, just data sharing. Danbury Hospital ICU had almost 100 people on ventilators and over 1000 who were discharged from Covid-19. They saw organ failure, neurological damage and other issues from which they will never be the same. In the Flu Pandemic of 1918, the numbers were almost the same with the curve.

While we are seeing a spike in some cases, there is a lag of a few weeks. Even if we do Distance Learning, we are still worried of an increased number of deaths in patients who get Covid-19.

- When we add on the idea of all the children in school (even with the policies of handwashing, masks and social distancing), the lessons learned across the country (for schools that have started early) are already turning to Distance Learning because of large outbreaks. Recommendation is that the risk is too high if we go back to Hybrid Model. Feels that we need to pause for a few weeks.
- Dr. Pascarella asked why not just take temperatures and test students?
- Dr. Begg stated that by the time you have a temperature, you are already pretty far along in the illness. Superspreaders are the ones who don't have a temperature but still carry the virus with some symptoms. Screening helps identify those who are really sick but doesn't capture everybody by any stretch. When testing people, just because they are tested this week doesn't give a clean bill of health for the next week. The tests for high risk groups are not 100%. Number of false tests is getting better but not 100% correct. In the hospital setting, patients have to test negative twice before doctors are comfortable sending them back to the general population. While it would be a big burden if we tested everyone, that still would not give a level of safety given the increased rise.
- Dr. Fong stated that temperature is a screening test. Like all screening tests, there are false positives and false negatives. Temperature is not a diagnostic test. The challenge right now is that the diagnostic test has a time lag. There is no test right now that is accurate in giving results in a few minutes or one hour.
- Only proven mitigation actions that are effective are wearing a mask, washing hands frequently, social distancing and avoiding crowding. When you have a close environment and circulation of air, any infectious particles will stay in the air for a longer period of time. Challenge is that the younger they are, the more likely that they carry the particles but do not show symptoms. They can carry and pass it on to others. No simple way right now with a quick test to help identify these children.
- We are having the hottest summer on record. Kids would not be able to learn properly in classrooms with heat because we do not have air conditioning in every school. These are points to be considered. No good solution and no good one size fits all. Ideal situation is Hybrid Model and the hope is that when the data is analyzed on 10/1/2020, see what we can do to improve the situation.
- Dr. Pascarella stated that it seems too disruptive to have kids in school for a week or two and then move to Distance Learning, which is what is happening in schools across the nation who have already opened up.
- J. DaSilva asked to address if Covid-19 is like the flu. Dr. Begg said the death rate from flu is one or two in 1000 (.1 or .2%). We have had 4,400 deaths out of 52,000 cases of Covid-19 in Connecticut. That is about 8.5%, much more than the flu. If we had more relaxed policies, and the

death rate was 2%, that means that 20 people out of every 1000 would die from Covid-19. Number of deaths from Covid-19 so far supersedes the number of deaths from almost any tragedy we have faced in this country.

- The pediatric death rate is much lower. We have not had a lot of deaths in the under 18 population but there have been a number of bad outcomes similar to Kawasaki Disease. Public health is about the greater good. While not a lot of kids have died, we need to protect everyone that can be potentially infected.
- K. Molinaro stated that Covid-19 is a virus just as the flu is, but this is a new virus. We have not had a chance for herd immunity or an inoculation against it. Are we saying that there is no safe way to put students back in school until we have a vaccine? Dr. Begg said that the worst case scenario is that we may not be able to get back to school until we have a vaccine. The Pandemic of 1918 was three years before everything subsided. Best case scenarios is that we learn from lessons learned in other countries to get the Covid-19 rate down to a low enough number and with proper testing. Then if we do get a slight outbreak, we can trace all those people and shut it down locally so it doesn't get into a huge event where we have to close down schools. Hopeful that we can potentially open on 10/1/2020 if we can get this recent outbreak under control. This is a fluid situation. Day to day decision as we look at data.
- Dr. Fong stated that if you look at seasonal flu, we can not eliminate it but you don't have to close schools because there is herd immunity. If you vaccinate enough people (over 60%), and you have enough humans who are immune to the infection, the students can go to school. The vaccine helps to keep that herd immunity. That is why it is important to get a flu shot every winter. Not only protect yourself but to also protect the community. Can have a vaccine but will likely not eliminate this virus.
- Dr. Pascarella stated that the pause in athletics is simply because of the pause in town for all sports teams. Dr. Pascarella and the medical team thought we would wait at least this week to see how the numbers are going. Any group that could return would be sports because they have been a model group.
- K. O'Dowd stated that she will be collaborating with K. Prunty to get data. There has been testing every day this week so by 8/28/2020, they will be able to look at results and offer recommendations to sports teams.
- J. Britton asked for a professional opinion on transportation with school buses and crowding. Especially in the fall with the flu season. Would love to get students back in classrooms, but how can we do this safely on the buses?
- Dr. Begg stated that even if you do a great job at school, 20 minutes on the bus where social distancing, handwashing and masks breakdown, you are right back at risk. This is part of the reason why we take a pause until 10/1/2020 to see lessons learned from other districts around the country who were more liberal. Dr. Fong agreed. School buses are potentially the weakest point and need to be addressed when the time comes.

- Educational:
  - Dr. Casimiro spoke about what Distance Learning will look like.
  - There were varied levels of Distance Learning experiences in the Spring. Mainly because of training issues and our inexperience with doing live interactive lessons. Better this year with training and additional guidance for teachers.
  - Google Classroom organizational consistency.
  - Structured schedule with defined meeting times.
  - Organized weekly overview of what to expect for the week.
  - Course syllabus for all classes.
  - Reduced Google Classrooms at K-5 level. Special area classes will be in one Google Classroom.
  - Start up organization and quick connect. Immediately connecting with kids and connecting with families. Building community in the classrooms. Front loading with social emotional activities. Connecting with students and recognizing where they are.
  - Teaching and learning guidebook for teachers has been provided. Clarifies expectations and gives guidance.
  - Live synchronous instruction is the biggest change.
  - Regular classes and courses will be delivered in real time.
  - Virtual interactive lessons.
  - Use of blended learning strategies.
  - Synchronous and asynchronous combination. Synchronous is meeting in real time. Asynchronous means the teacher may post some content for students to engage in at a more flexible time at their pace.
  - Compressed student day taking the above in mind. Abbreviated day with expectation that students will complete independent practice at home.
  - Services will remain intact with modifications (ELL, SpEd, Intervention services).
  - Regular grading in effect, no pass/fail. Want to make sure students are engaged and invested. Honor Roll as well, as long as we can operate efficiently in this environment.
  - Embedded SEL training (Social Emotional Learning). High quality of trauma and Covid-19 related trauma.
  - IXL, RAZZ Kids, Edgenuity. Edgenuity is a resource at the secondary level (6-12) in some courses. Not a platform that we are using in that capacity. Google Classroom will be used as our learning management system.
  - Showed a K-5 sample schedule. Adjustments will be made to make sure that we are delivering the most efficient program that we can.
  - Example: Elementary will start at 8:30. Morning meeting. SEL activities to warm students up to the day. Take attendance. Cover any morning information sharing that needs to happen. Reading. Small group instruction in phonics. A special (art, music, media or PE). Math and math practice. Whole group and small group lessons. Embedding breaks in real time for students as they need. Writing. WIN (What I Need)/ESL/Special

Services. Students will be assigned to specific additional instruction in this block. End of student day at 12:30 for most students. Lunch break in there. Possible to work with some populations and some students for additional small group support. 8:30am - 12pm is the student day.

- At 8am, would like to offer a morning enrichment section for those who are interested (not mandatory). Asynchronous, where students can log in and do a brain engagement activity in art, music or PE setting the stage for what students may see in class that day. Trying to build more opportunities for students to connect.
- Wednesdays are different where they will have a heavy small group day and receive more target independent work with the teacher.
- If a student missed key standards in the Spring that need to be addressed in order to be successful, those will be frontloaded at the beginning of the year and prioritized to make sure that students have a solid foundation as they move on. More SEL in the first few weeks of school and getting students connected in the digital environment.
- R. Chaleski stated that the example shown did not show any transition time between classes. Dr. Casimiro stated that the classroom teacher will build in transition time for the students.
- A letter was sent out to Kindergarten parents that Kindergarten will start on 9/14/2020. Kindergarten students will have the opportunity to attend orientation at their individual schools the week of 9/8/2020. They will have time to learn (with their parents) how to login and navigate during Distance Learning.
- J. DaSilva asked how teachers will deal with students who did not connect last Spring? Dr. Casimiro stated that in the Spring, not everybody was doing live instruction. When you have a live lesson and engaging becomes an expectation, you get a better turnout. In the Spring, students were logging on at any time of day because the work was asynchronous. There is also independent practice support, Imagine Learning, IXL and RAZZ Kids. They are adaptive practice programs. Will be tricky, but teachers will put a structure in place and create an expectation. Students will be marked absent if they do not log on at any point during the day.
- Ways to get the curriculum to students such as mini lessons that are pre recorded that teachers plan to use.
- G. Cooper stated that some parents say their kids are not into Distance Learning or how one teacher may be more engaged versus another one. What type of training is being provided for teachers to make sure everyone is on the same level?
- Dr. Casimiro stated that we haven't physically met with teachers since March so their training has also been virtual. Did quite a bit of training in the Spring through superusers in the district. Identified about 130 of those staff that offered to do workshops on tips and tricks. Some of that skill building helped with smaller engagement strategies and ways to organize classrooms. There really wasn't a vision in the Spring on how to approach blended learning and interactive lessons designed. That was the missing

piece. Now with staff back, there is a blended learning training course with lessons and opportunities for collaboration. How to make lessons more engaged, interactive and how to build more collaboration strategies into lessons. This way students are less passive and more engaged in the learning.

- Blended learning training is most critical.
- Significant amount of safety and health related training.
- Social emotional readiness training prepared by EdAdvance as well as trauma training.
- Training on Edgenuity at the secondary level.
- G. Jasmine stated that device distribution is continuing as it was done in the Spring. Approximately 5,200 students have Chromebooks. High school laptop distribution will be on 8/31/2020. Over the summer, the rest of the windows laptops were received from the Connecticut Partnership. Every 9-12 grader in DPS will receive a windows laptop and turn back their Spring chromebook. Any new students or students without devices will have a schedule based on their school to pick up a Chromebook. Each individual school will send out a notification of when to do that. Could be as early as 9/1/2020 and will be for the rest of the week.
- Kindergarteners will get Chromebooks during orientation and learn how to log in and use Google Classroom, all while having the support they need right there.
- DHS teachers will all receive a new MacBook.
- In addition, the State had an Everybody Learns initiative that they rolled out at the end of July. DPS was awarded 936 new Chromebooks which should arrive in early November.
- 1,137 internet vouchers as part of the initiative for families who have come forth or identified themselves on the survey as not having adequate internet, will now receive a voucher from Comcast for free internet for one year.
- Dr. Casimiro stated that ELL/SpEd students will receive individualized schedules for live instruction by Google Meets. Having those structures enables us to access students more easily.
- K. Truchsess stated that SpEd students will receive a unique schedule which will outline all SpEd and related services. Will be done in a virtual meeting between teacher, service provider and student. These will be done in small groups or one on one, depending on IEP. Schedule around the instruction that is occurring in the classroom. Do not want to pull students from reading or math instruction but want to make sure they get extra support they need through their IEP goals and objectives at a different time. Students will have a Google Classroom page at the PreK-5 level. All related services will be on one Google Classroom page to streamline the places that the students need to go. At the 6-12 level, many SpEd services are done in a co-taught model and that will continue in a virtual environment and students will have individual Google Classroom pages for each of their SpEd or related services that they receive. Really going to

scale up the amount of in person live instruction via the computer. This was very successful in extended school year summer school program so will continue to develop and grow. All the SpEd related services staff are participating in the blended learning and SEL professional development. ELL services will operate very similarly where students will receive their in classroom instruction plus any additional services scheduled around that time.

- Dr. Casimiro stated that parent teacher conferences are on the school calendar and will be held virtually. Need time to work through current startup and then will work on schedule and approach to invite parents in for conferences.
- Dr. Casimiro stated that the district is evaluating the ability to have PSAsT and SATs. PSAsT in middle school was postponed to next school year. Having a conversation with HS on how to do it and do it safely. Will update parents on how they will proceed with PSAsT and SATs
- A. Meade spoke about the Family School Agreement. This is an agreement that will help develop understanding of expectations that will support student success such as parents checking in daily on their child's Distance Learning as well as what we are doing in our schools to prepare and what families can do.
- Helping families become educated on the best way they can support their children. Will be running several different workshops in different languages about setting up and navigating Google Classroom. Start off from the very beginning for parents who have no knowledge up to the parents who have done some of the navigating with their child. We want parents to be prepared to be able to help their students.
- Offering communication strategies for families and for teachers (embedded in teacher PD).
- Curricular program training around literacy, math and science so parents can become more familiar with what the curriculum is and how to support their children. Supporting learning at home. Make sure parents have technology, internet connection and supplies to be successful.
- Offering after school tutoring through Priority School Grant and 21st Century Learning Grant by certified teachers at the end of their day.
- Home page of DPS has a new page on community resources. Moving some of what is on the homepage to that page to make it a little easier to navigate for families to be able to get things that they need like community resources, EBT cards, internet services and training online in multiple languages.
- Also referring parents to 211 which is the United Way info line. Four or five programs offering other alternatives for full day care for children who need it.
- Trying to develop (not finalized) a program with EdAdvance at PAL building for about 54 students. Dr. Pasarella and the Board has also offered schools to have small groups of students in groups of ten to be able to support learning as well. Donating facilities to keep the cost down but

Edadvance would be running those programs. \$50 to \$55 a day. Care-4-Kids will be able to be used for those families that need that. In talks with United Way, through ALICE Fund, to help support families who may be struggling financially to gain some scholarship dollars. Aware of the need, recognize that this is a tough time for families to be able to survive and work through all of this.

- How can you open up daycare when it isn't safe in school? A. Mead stated that if we open up on a Hybrid Model, that entails school buses and more movement during the day. In this daycare model there would be groups of 10 children cohorted during the day. Three groups in the school could use their own separate classrooms so the numbers are much smaller. Wouldn't have opportunities to mingle with other groups. This is following the guidance that has been used in the early childhood centers and it has worked. Different and modified program than what you would see in a normal school day.
- A. Spallino asked how the support for parents will be done? Virtually or in building? A. Mead stated that it will all be done virtually. She has been in contact with other districts who have had good success offering these workshops. Also gives parents an opportunity to experience what their children are experiencing. Different training parents can take including social emotional and looking at depression and suicide. Will be in English, Spanish and Portuguese.
- Dr. Casimiro stated that there are two major challenges moving forward. All students will begin the year with an assigned teacher, however, once we return to in person, staffing assignments may shift based on enrollments, leaves and accommodations. Some students may not continue with the same teacher they start off the school year with. Evaluate as we move forward. We will have to make adjustments as we can.
- Another issue is that many program integrations and technical supports are delayed due to this intense period of digital tool acquisition. Every state in the country is trying to access Edgenuity at the same time so getting technical support, questions answered is slow going. Beyond the level of saturation that most of these companies can handle. If IXL isn't up on day one, we are aware and working through those. Definitely some delays in instances when it comes to technology acquisition.
- K. Walston stated that the team has been working behind the scenes responding to the questions that were shared in the Public Participation section tonight. The Q&As will also be available on the district website as well as the district social media pages.
- Dr. Pascarella stated that the district intended on having clubs and other activities operate to some degree of normalcy, barring anything unusual. Will closely monitor what CIAC recommends.
- Dr. Casimiro stated that this is all still relatively new. Wants families to exercise patience with the beginning of the school year and with the teachers. Give us some time to get started. Teachers are working very hard

and walking into a tremendous amount of training coming up in the next week or so.

- G. Cooper reminded the Board that the next scheduled Board Meeting will be held on 9/9/2020.
- Dr. Pascarella stated there will be an update on building safety at the next meeting.

**ADJOURNMENT**

K. Conetta moved, seconded by J. DaSilva that the Board of Education adjourn its Meeting of August 26, 2020 and the meeting was adjourned at 8:31 pm.

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Kathleen Molinaro, Secretary

(Meeting was videotaped)