

DANBURY BOARD OF EDUCATION SPECIAL MEETING
WEDNESDAY, April 1, 2020- 4:30 PM
Zoom Virtual Meeting

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Co-Chairperson, K. Conetta, called the meeting to order at 4:41 pm and those assembled recited the Pledge of Allegiance.

ROLL CALL

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

Absent: n/a

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

PUBLIC COMMENT

- No public emails/comments as of 4:45 pm.

INFORMATION

- Current Status of District Operations
 - K. Casimiro spoke about the Distance Learning rollout.
 - The original website set up when school closed was designed primarily for the continued practice of what was being taught in school, until the current website of Distance Learning was up and ready.
 - Able to communicate use of the K-12 learning while concurrently developing the continuous learning website. Within a couple of days of closing, the district was able to distribute learning packets to K-5 families.
 - 6-12 students had access to online websites.
 - The pre-launch week was held from 3/23/2020 to 3/27/2020.
 - District was able to get staff trained on continuous learning. All while distributing laptops, getting parents set up on Parent Portals, updating parent email addresses and getting students their emails.
 - District website was updated on 4/1/2020 along the lines of student privacy and guidance on virtual tools.
 - Phases of implementation and staff expectations are included on the website as well.
 - Goal of the first ten days in Distance Learning is to build relationships, connect with students and make sure they are on the other end of the computer.
 - Right now orienting students and families, will get more detailed as connectivity occurs in each of the classes.
 - Compliments from one of the assistants in the Commissioner's office. Quite surprised at what they considered to be a very organized plan and the district is

right on track.

- Because we were up and running with continued learning right after we closed, those days will count for us as educational days.
- Internal capacity with staff members that are called “super users” in Distance Learning. Dr. Frank LaBanca, Principal at Westside Middle School Academy, has taken the lead. 113 DPS staff members have volunteered to support their colleagues in helping with the technological shift to Distance Learning. Also stepped up to lead professional learning were Dr. Kristy Zaleta, Laura Mead and Marc Poliquin to name a few.
- Huge demand for more professional training and staff are eager to get going.
- Every classroom teacher has to have a separate Google Classroom for each of their rostered classes.
- There are some special exceptions such as Special Education, privacy issues and delivery of services.
- Expectation is that teachers post their lesson content by 9am every day.
- Teachers post a message as a way to track attendance and the students have to check in. The district is working through attendance piece and simplifying a way to take an accurate attendance daily.
- At 6-12 level, there are many teachers and students who are already familiar with the Google Classroom platform. District knew the technological shift would be toughest at the K-5 level.
- M. Poliquin, coaches and supervisors are designing a K-5 Google Classroom model.
- Continuing to refine how teachers provide assignments and grade them.
- Next piece is working on what expectations for classroom behavior and etiquette are in the virtual environment.
- Recreating every system for the way that we operationalize and communicate.
- G. Jasmine spoke on the technology rollout piece.
 - There are three phases to the technology rollout happening at the same time.
 - About a month ago all K-5 families received letters encouraging them to sign on to the Parent Portal. On that letter was also the child’s school email. These are already common practices in 6-12 but not K-5. Over 89% of all families are now on the Parent Portal (over the past two weeks). This has increased the capacity in communicating with families.
 - A Chromebook request form was created for each school, available on each school website.
 - Distribution of those Chromebooks have been available at schools in a drive-up fashion. This was a combination of Chromebooks already at the schools and with ones that needed to be purchased.
 - Chromebooks are tracked to which student they are assigned to.
 - Goal was to get a Chromebook to each family. To date every request that has been submitted has been fulfilled.
 - Each school has a help desk to support any issues that may occur.
 - IT workers are helping unbox and prepare devices and then continue to distribute to students.

had as of the day we closed, that puts the district's last day of school for 6/12/2020.

- Current status of work by Labor Groups
 - K. Thompson stated that when we closed abruptly on 3/13/2020, it was unclear if we would continue working. Became clear early on that we would need to move on to a virtual learning model.
 - District had to negotiate essentially new terms and conditions of employment for teachers.
 - The current existing bargaining agreement needed to be modified to discuss the rules of engagement for teachers who would be providing virtual services to students.
 - The first step was to work on a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) with teachers and administrators addressing a lot of points such as the hours of the workday and communication with parents.
 - That was accomplished very early on and operates on the premise that we end on 6/12/2020.
 - Trick is to write agreements broadly enough so that way we can be nimble enough to work around them as changes happen.
 - Paraeducators and tutors MOA was finished on 4/1/2020. Plan is to roll them into the Distance Learning program so they can provide support to students in connection with teachers. Not likely that there is enough for them to do in a full day, so the district is working on intense online learning/professional development for certification.
 - The ELP group has been tricky. Those programs run exclusively on receipts from participation. It is unclear to the district how much longer we can continue to keep them with us. District has provided at least the next two paychecks. Working with A. Mead to see if we can extend their time and involve them with programs under the 21st Century Grant money.
 - K. Thompson stated that Governor Lamont's most recent executive order about paying school employees applies to school day staff with wording of "to the greatest extent possible".
 - Nurses are connecting with students, particularly the high needs students. Also doing a lot of work with the district on keeping records up to date. Many of our school nurses have offered their services to the city.
 - Custodians have been working through this period of time sanitizing buildings and helping with the distribution of lunches/laptops. District needed to provide greater social distancing. The district began split shifts with the custodians. Still paid for eight hours but they are working four hour split shifts.
 - Danbury High School has been closed as of 4/1/2020 for a period of at least 14 days due to a confirmed case. Any staff members with exposure have also been sent home for the 14-day period.
 - Not sure if we will be able to continue to keep the buildings open at all. More information should be available by the next Board meeting.
 - Similar concerns for the school lunch staff on where they have been in terms of interacting with the public.
 - District looked for volunteers from the school lunch program with experience in

preparing lunches at seven different sites across the city. District is reducing staffing at this point. Will use them at a more limited schedule next week and will continue to see how food distribution goes.

- Human Resources and Finance Department teams have been working more or less remotely.
- In the area of new legislation and government orders, there have been new rules on FMLA time in relation for people directly affected by the Covid-19 crisis.
- Benefits Coordinator is currently learning those new rules and guidelines.
- Also working very closely with Cigna. Cigna has been rolling out lots of materials on coping with crisis, telemedicine, tips and webinars.
- Picking up mail several times a week.
- Not a lot of unemployment claims coming in yet. But trying to handle all that virtually for the ones that are.
- Transportation - Busing companies nationwide mounted a serious lobbying effort.
- Governor Lamont issued an executive order, 7R, on 3/31/2020, which requests districts to make best efforts to continue to pay the transportation contracts. It says that when boards of education determine that an amendment to that contract may be appropriate because of this circumstance, boards of education can enter into negotiation to amend the terms of agreement with the terms of covering the cost of the drivers, insurance and anything else that will be critical to reestablish the bus service when the time comes to do so. Executive order also requires bus companies to produce an itemized cost list for the district showing the critical keys to keeping the buses running.
- Board needs to make an amendment to that agreement in order for Dr. Sal to proceed.
- Dr. Pascarella stated that the state is expecting a block grant for Connecticut due to the Covid-19 crisis. With our population percentages on positive cases, Danbury is entitled to quite a bit of money. As that money flows to Hartford, the district hopes to be in line for funds to be reimbursed to us.
- The Governor's order seems clear that we continue to pay educational employees that work during the school day. Bus drivers are not district employees, they work for STA. Governor Lamont is asking districts to pay that portion of the agreement with transportation companies to be able to keep those bus drivers whole. An assurance of continuity and services.
- K. Conetta then read the following motion:
 - That the Board of Education determines that the contracts related to student transportation and for the provision of special education services by a public special education provider and by an approved private special education provider requires amendment to more accurately reflect the actual costs incurred during the duration of the public health and civil preparedness emergencies hereby authorizes the Superintendent and his designees to negotiate and finalize such Amendment in keeping with the Governor's executive order.

K. Conetta made the motion, seconded by J. DaSilva. All in agreement.

Motion Passed at 5:39 pm.

- J. DaSilva asked if the district could use bus drivers like Norwalk did to distribute food to students. K. Thompson stated that it was a model that C. Leborious had looked at that with the cabinet. District found that our current model is the best way right now. Norwalk prepaid their transportation contract, so they had that advantage. As of a few days ago, one of the drivers in Norwalk contracted the virus so they stopped that method.
- K. Truchsess stated that we have about 100 families that cannot access the food sites so a mobile food delivery started on 4/1/2020. A multi day food drop off is occurring three days a week for those families.
- C. Leborious stated that staff have been working on a voluntary basis (two members per site) serving food since 3/17/2020. Offering a five day a week model from 8:00 am to 11:30 am. Looking at a model where workers are out there less frequently. Deliver multiple meals at a time.
- Lunch program is a revenue generating service. School lunch expenses typically run \$500,000 dollars every month. Normally we bring in enough revenue to support that. During this time frame, revenue is less because it's only families that are showing up for food or having it delivered. District is looking at other funding. This will be a deficit area.
- K. Walston stated that Boehringer Ingelheim has a partnership with United Way and through that partnership, Boehringer has offered to support our community. District is now trying to identify areas in town that are not accessing the seven distribution sites. K. Walston has reached out to the Housing Authority to see if they can identify any food insecurity gaps so one of the volunteer groups (US Food Rescue) can help.
- Dr. Pascarella stated that the district is concerned with continuously putting volunteers out to distribute food and the risk of exposure. Working on alternative ways of food distribution. Also working on obtaining PPE materials for volunteers going out on the frontlines to deliver food. Dr. Pascarella wants everyone to realize that we may have to change our model.
- C. Leborious and Dr. Pascarella informed the Board that the technology lease approved back in June of 2019 was to purchase technology, including Chromebooks, for the high school and for teacher support. It was approved by the city to repurpose that lease to use the devices for students rather than staff right now. This movement does fall under the original lease. The City Council has approved this. Hopes are to get devices distributed in a few weeks.
- Budget
 - Impact on current operations
 - C. Leborious stated that the impact on current operations are obvious. Purchase of one-to-one Chromebooks, getting the Distance Learning plan up and running, work that's being done now with food and safety and purchasing of sanitizing materials were not budgeted before. Hoping that the Cares Act will reimburse the district.

- Will see some offset with things we aren't using such as tutors, coaches, overtime, daily substitutes, some supplies and savings on electricity to name a few.
 - 2020-21 Budget request status/referendum
 - C. Leborious stated that with the city, there will likely be a delay on issuance of the budget. Waiting for communication next week. Not likely to be getting the requested \$12 million. City just cannot sustain our request at this time.
 - Some executive orders from the government have been pushed off on due dates for taxes and this may affect the city budget.
 - Granville Street property
 - K. Thompson stated that the Granville lease is just about done. Will have ten classrooms with the possibility of expansion to 14 classrooms if needed.

BOARD REPORTS, COMMUNICATIONS AND COMMENTS

- G. Cooper requested that the Policy Committee and Finance Committee meet.
- K. Walston stated there are still a number of business operations to review. Will reshare that with the committee. K. Walston, R. Chaleski and the subcommittee will discuss and make a date.
- Dr. Pascarella stated that we may want to revisit the policy on graduation requirements.
- G. Cooper asked if there was any feedback from teachers on students doing work?
- K. Truchsess stated that the first three days have been very positive.
- K. Casimiro stated that there have been some growing pains with handing in assignments and attendance, but it is an adjustment. Seeing the learning that's already taking place. Off to a really good start. Excited to see where this can take Danbury in the future and how this can transform teaching and learning in the district.
- G. Cooper asked what procedures do we have in place if the Superintendent gets sick and can't perform his duties?
- K. Thompson stated that there aren't any policies in place. A natural order would be the Assistant Superintendent, K. Walston, would take over. K. Thompson would have to go back and look at bylaws.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

Executive session was not needed because Governor Lamont's executive order from 3/31/2020 made it clear what needs to be done in regard to transportation.

ADJOURNMENT

K. Conetta moved, seconded by K. Molinaro, that the Board of Education adjourn its Meeting of April 1, 2020 and the meeting was adjourned at 6:15 pm.

Kathleen Molinaro, Secretary

(Meeting was videotaped)