

BATTLE CREEK PUBLIC SCHOOLS BOARD OF EDUCATION
Special Meeting
November 18, 2020

Meeting held electronically pursuant to Executive Order 2020-15
Zoom identification number Meeting ID: 868 6339 1938
7:00 p.m.

PRESENT – BOARD OF EDUCATION

Karen Evans
Catherine LaValley
Kyra Wallace
Patty Poole-Gray
Charlie Fulbright
Art McClenney
Jackie Slaby

Present – Administration

Kim Carter – Superintendent
Dr. Chandra Youngblood – Director, Elementary Education
Anita Harvey - Director, District Transformation
Monique Cheeks – Director, Student Services
Mitch Fowler – Director, School Data Systems & Innovations
Nathan Hunt – Communications Manager
Laura Ash – Executive Director
Cheryl Johnson – Chief Executive Officer, Human Resources
Wes Seeley – Director of Grant, Federal Programs and Adult Education
Charles Lipsey – Director, Facilities and Operations

Absent - Administration

Dr. Deborah Nuzzi, Director, Secondary Education
Jeff English – Executive Director

MINUTES

The meeting was called to order by President Evans at 7:02p.m. Karen Evans, Catherine LaValley, Kyra Wallace, Patty Poole-Gray, Charlie Fulbright, Art McClenney and Jackie Slaby were present.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Motion by Vice President Catherine LaValley to approve the Agenda as written.

Trustee Charlie Fulbright supported the Motion.

A Roll Call Vote was taken.

Motion passed 7 – 0

PUBLIC COMMENTS

President Karen Evans read the Public Comments out loud.

Katie Smith

I am just curious as to why Ann J Kellogg proceeded with school on 11/16 when there was no heat in the building.

President Evans thanked Katie for her comments and indicated someone will get back to her.

Melissa Johnson
180 W Pitman Ave
Battle Creek, MI 49017

Thank you Board Members for doing what is right to keep our staff members and students safe. I know it is a hard decision, but cases are going up and will continue. The amount of people in quarantine is overwhelming for our schools and we need to flatten the curve. We need to go fully virtual for a little bit. Our students are ready and have been practicing this at school. We are way more prepared this time around. Thank you!

President Evans thanked Melissa for her comments.

Tyler Gilland
32 East Ave. S.
Battle Creek MI 49017

I want to sincerely acknowledge the teaching and ancillary staff so far this year. You all are fighting an impossible battle every hour of every day. I have never seen a more dedicated group of people... for anything... in my life. You are spent, tired, and beyond exhausted. Yet, you show up every day and give more than you have! You bring phenomenal will and exceptional skill. You are a blessing to the community of Battle Creek!

President Evans thanked Tyler for his comments.

Kristin Moore

232 Deerpath Lane

I can appreciate the efforts and time that went into have face-to-face instruction, but we also need to think of what's being asked of our teachers at the Elementary level. We are told that we should limit the time with family that does not live with us but then we are putting 20 different students in a classroom from 20 different families with that teacher. The operations of the building is not functioning at a learning environment for students and teachers and other adults are being pulled from other areas to cover classes, which is not equitable for other buildings. Thank you for listening and reading my comment.

REPORTS & RECOMMENDATIONS

Extended Continuity of Learning Plan

Superintendent Kim Carter presented the November Board of Education Reconfirmation Meeting, which included the following:

Public Act 149, Section 98a

Statute

Sec. 98a(1)(c) Thirty days after the approval of the plan under subsection (2), and every 30 days thereafter, the district must, at a meeting of the board or board of directors, as applicable, of the district, reconfirm how instruction is going to be delivered during the 2020-2021 school year. Public comment must be solicited from the parents or legal guardians of the pupils enrolled in the district during a meeting described in this subdivision.

Superintendent Carter indicated that, given the timeliness of the 30 days, this is the reconfirmation recommendation.

Reconfirmation Meetings

- Held every 30 days with school board after approval of the Extended Plan by ISD
- Purpose is to reconfirm how instruction is going to be delivered during the 20/21 school year
- Solicit public comment on how instruction is going to be delivered
- Publicly announce weekly 2-way interaction rates at the meeting and post to transparency reporting link

2-way Interaction Reporting Data – September

September rates went up as teachers learned more about making connections, what the requirements were and how to record the interactions. There was an increase from 63% the first week to 76% the last week, which means 76% of students had interaction with a teacher each week.

2-way Interaction Reporting Data – October

October rates increased from 80% the first week to 94% the last week. Superintendent Carter reported she was very proud of all the hard work that teachers and support staff are doing to make sure students continue to participate in education.

In-person Learning Challenges

- While county health officials have shared with us that our efforts to mitigate spread in our schools have been successful, we have begun to feel the effects of community spread operationally.
- The high number of students and staff who have needed to quarantine away from school and work due to exposure in the community have placed significant strain on school operations.
- Since the start of the school year, more than 250 staff members have had to miss anywhere from 2 to 14+ days due to quarantine requirements and/or other COVID-related situations such as awaiting test results.
- Already reduced staff availability will now be further impacted by staff unable to come to work for child care reasons, due to surrounding districts' recent moves to all remote.

Superintendent Carter reported we have had to change different classes, move classes around and even send Directors from the Administration Building to the school buildings to cover when Principals were out.

Recommendations

In response to continued community spread of COVID-19 in Calhoun County, we recommend moving all grade levels pre-K-12 and Adult Education to remote instruction starting Monday, November 23.

- We recommend small group EL and IEP instruction continue with all in-person option, following proper health and safety measures.
- All in-person activities for athletics and extracurriculars for all grade levels are postponed effective immediately as identified under the current Emergency Order from Michigan Department of Health and Human Services.

We did not arrive at this decision lightly, as we know it will cause hardship for families. However, the operational impacts of current community spread make this step essential at this time

Recommendations for a return to in-person instruction are:

- Grades Pre-K-5 and Adult Education return to in-person instruction on Monday, Jan 18.
- Grades 6-12 to move to a hybrid model of in-person instruction on Monday, Jan 25.

Timing is guided by the semester schedule and CCPHD recommendation of a two-week lag time after holiday breaks. We will continue to review the feasibility of these return dates with the School Board during recertification every 30 days.

Virtual Academy will continue being offered as an option for families. To help us prepare for a safe and smooth return to school buildings, families will be contacted during the weeks leading up to transition back to in-person instruction to select the preferred learning setting for their students (i.e. switching from virtual to in-person or vice versa).

Results We Can Be Proud Of

- 1,900+ In-person Students & Staff
 - 1,300 Elementary Students
 - 600+ Staff Members
- Plus secondary students who have been coming into the buildings for individualized learning
- 35 cases have impacted our schools since the start of the school year (1.8%)
- Only 54% have impacted our in-person Elementary Schools
- 6 total student cases in Pre-K-12
- According to public health officials, BCPS safety measures so far have been effective at limiting spread within our schools
- BCPS Elementary Schools have experienced no verified school-associated cases
- Majority of quarantines have originated from community spread/exposure
- We look forward to returning to in-person learning when the effects of community spread have lessened and we are able to continue operating successfully

Immediate Next Steps

We are already acting to ensure community needs are supported as much as possible during this difficult time.

We are in the process of making arrangements for:

- Food Service Team planning for increased meal distribution
- Plans to redeploy staff for Social-Emotional learning checks and academic supports
- Internet access – Working on accelerating Comcast Essentials program to offer free broadband internet access to those who qualify
- Small Groups – Planning underway for K-12 limited small group in-person support for English Learners and students with an IEP

Superintendent Carter indicated with that we are recommending the Board of Education approve a change in the structure of the nature of our education to full remote with Pre-K-12 and Adult Education through mid-January.

Vice President Catherine LaValley asked Superintendent Carter if special ed small group effort has already been in place.

Superintendent Carter indicated they have because, again, our mitigation efforts for spread have been successful and safe. She advised most importantly students with an IEP have a right to a free and appropriate education and IEPs indicate virtual learning is not as effective, so we want to provide an in-person opportunity to families.

Trustee Jackie Slaby asked about the hybrid model for Grades 6-12 starting January 25, noting it was originally explained to the Board back in August that hybrid was not sufficient for our District's need and what changed to lead us in this direction now.

Superintendent Carter thanked Trustee Slaby for asking and said one of the things we are faced with is effective social distancing if we bring all students back at the same time and the only true way we can bring all students back at the secondary level and have safety protocols in place that mitigate the virus is following a hybrid model.

Trustee Slaby asked with athletics and extracurricular activities being paused effective immediately, what is the course for local public schools to make the decision as to when they start back up again. Superintendent Carter responded right now it is due to the Emergency Order and once the three week pause is over, we will bring this issue back to the Board and ask if it's something they want to continue.

Superintendent Carter recommended the Board discuss at the December meeting whether to bring athletics and extracurriculars back in January. Trustee Slaby noted they are on pause until the December meeting and Superintendent Carter confirmed. Superintendent Carter indicated we may bring this matter to the December 7th Work Session since the pause is through December 8th so it might be advantageous to discuss at the December 7th meeting after she receives information from Athletic Director, Charles Seils.

Trustee Slaby asked about internet access, noting the Board made it possible for 1:1 devices for students, but what about internet access, students with IEPs meeting in small groups, contingency plans in place and resources families can access for further questions. Superintendent Carter clarified Trustee Slaby was asking how parents can find out more information if their student has an IEP. Trustee Slaby said yes, in general, after this meeting, if any families have questions about internet and computers, where do they go for direction. If they have questions about IEP or ESL, who do they go to. If they have questions about meals, where do they go for direction.

Superintendent Carter said we can't provide all the details at this moment, but once the Board has made a decision on the Extended Continuity of Learning Plan recommendation, we would move forward with communicating this kind of information to our families. This communication has been sent for translating, pending Board approval and then families will be notified by a robocall, it will be posted on our website and social media posts. Teachers will also be reaching out individually to make sure they know their options. Food information will also be posted on our Facebook and website, so based on the decision tonight, it will activate a lot of planning that will be shared on our social media platforms.

Trustee Jackie Slaby asked how we reach out to families without internet. Superintendent Carter indicated we will make calls out to those families and we have an internal plan for families we can't reach online to make sure they have what they need. This would also be covered in the 2-way interactions that teachers are required to conduct.

Trustee Charlie Fulbright asked if the Board would be voting tonight on going to remote learning effective November 23rd and if that includes the return to school dates as indicated in the presentation. He asked if the Board will have to vote again every 30 days because we don't know what COVID will look like in January. Superintendent Carter responded we will make a recommendation in January whether January 18th is possible to return. She noted there has to be a recommendation to the Board every 30 days indicating whether anything has changed that warrants a change to the recommendation.

Secretary Kyra Wallace asked in follow-up to Trustee Slaby's question about IEPs and hearing that teachers are reaching out to students, is there a process for a parent who believes their child should be tested, should they reach out to the teacher. Superintendent Carter said any parent who believes a child should be tested, should reach out directly to their child's school principal. Principals will still be answering calls.

Vice President Catherine LaValley indicated she wanted to add to what Trustee Charlie Fulbright mentioned and she thinks we have a good plan to offer to parents. She wanted to confirm the Board can expect a return to face-to-face instruction, if possible in January, and that is why it's part of the plan this evening. Superintendent Carter indicated we are recommending a return to in-person learning on January 18, 2021. The rationale for this is that it's the recommendation of the Calhoun Health Department so we can mitigate the spread of the virus.

PUBLIC COMMENT

None.

NEW BUSINESS

Extended Continuity of Learning Plan

Motion by Vice President Catherine LaValley to approve the Extended Continuity of Learning Plan as presented this evening.

Trustee Charlie Fulbright supported the Motion.

President Karen Evans asked if there was any discussion.

Trustee Art McClenney gave kudos to Superintendent Carter and the District for trying to hold school. He noted many families will be affected by this decision and some students will not receive the same quality of education being at home. Trustee McClenney wanted to tell the District he appreciates all they've done to make sure students receive the best education. He commented we know it's a hardship for students to be at home and that was one of the reasons we were one of the last Districts to hold out and try to keep students learning in-person. He closed by saying kudos to the teachers and he was proud of the whole District in these unprecedented times. We keep hearing about a vaccine and he hopes we get it going. In the meantime, we just need to keep our heads up and doing the jobs we are doing. He doesn't think the staff hears it enough, but the Board is in their corner.

A Roll Call Vote was taken.

Motion passed 7 – 0

SUPERINTENDENT COMMENTS

Superintendent Carter thanked President Karen Evans, the Board of Education and the staff. She commented BCPS has the greatest staff on earth. They are lifting all of this in unprecedented times with grace, humility, strength and resilience and she wouldn't want to be any other place. She appreciates the celebrations we are having in remote learning and has been following Facebook feeds showing teachers creating art kits for kids to do art at home, teachers delivering pizzas to students in their homes while practicing social distancing and making sure students know we see them.

Superintendent Carter said we will continue to wrap supports around students, noting this was not the easiest decision for anyone, but we will do our best to make sure all students are successful. She looks forward to working with parents to reach and teach and meet their needs.

BOARD MEMBER COMMENTS

Vice President Catherine LaValley indicated there was one more Public Comment to read aloud.

Vice President LaValley said she is proud that 5 day in-person learning almost made it to Thanksgiving Break and she appreciates that all of the staff has worked hard to provide a quality education to students. She said it has been difficult because COVID messes things up and we have to do what's best to keep everyone safe, which is why the Board made the decision tonight to make sure staff and students are safe. She sends Good Luck wishes for computer learning, noting it is not vacation yet. She is proud of our Elementary teachers who have prepared students for remote learning.

Trustee Charlie Fulbright said he didn't want to feel redundant, but he wanted to thank teachers and Administration for all their hard work. He noted 2020 has been a hard year and all of the staff have been successful in helping students learn. Great Things are Happening at BCPS and remember to wear you mask.

President Karen Evans read the last Public Comment that came in late.

Anthony Pennock

President, Battle Creek Education Association

Good evening. I cannot say enough how grateful I am to work with each and every one of the staff members in Battle Creek, and humbled to lead the Battle Creek Education Association to lift the voices and experiences of teachers to the administration. This calendar year has been the most difficult year for everyone, and especially education. But through the challenges, anger, frustration, and added expectations, you have persevered and risen above for each other and your students, but we must ensure to protect both our students and staff to ensure a high quality education for all students. Thank you for your support and collaboration. As professionals, we are flexible and will provide the best education we can for all students in this new remote environment. We look forward to further working with you to ensure the plan is implemented safely and with fidelity. Thank you.

President Evans thanked everyone for their efforts, and to all the Board members for being available and all Administrators. She shared Mitch Fowler's direction that technology questions for the Elementary should first go to the teachers.

President Evans thanked everyone for joining tonight.

Meeting adjourned – 7:36p.m.

Submitted by
Patti Worden

Kyra Wallace
Board Secretary