

SAULT STE. MARIE AREA PUBLIC SCHOOLS
SAULT STE. MARIE, MICHIGAN 49783
SPECIAL MEETING, BOARD OF EDUCATION
Phone 906/635-6609

Minutes – Thursday, December 3, 2020

140. **I. CALL TO ORDER**

President Smith called the electronic meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. in Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan.

141. **A. ROLL CALL OF BOARD**

Present: Melissa S. Pingatore, Daniel L. Smith, Jay D. Wilson, Christine M. Curtis, Joseph A. Cochran, Lisa A. Young, Martin R. Wolski

Absent: None

142. **B. ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA**

It was moved by Member Wilson, supported by Member Wolski, that the Board of Education move to adopt the agenda as presented.

Yeas: Pingatore, Smith, Wilson, Curtis, Cochran, Young, Wolski

Nays: None

Absent: None

Motion Carried.

II. COMMUNICATIONS

143. **A. REPORTS TO THE BOARD**

Superintendent Hall reported Mrs. Kronemeyer would review the Extended Continuity of Learning Plan and action would be taken later in the meeting.

1. Extended Continuity of Learning Plan (ECOL Plan) – Mrs. Amy Scott-Kronemeyer

Mrs. Scott-Kronemeyer announced the district received another year of the \$500,000 literacy grant for students in kindergarten through eighth grade. She noted the district partnered with 113 schools last year and hopes to continue with that this year.

Mrs. Scott-Kronemeyer confirmed the Board had access to the ECOL Plan and presented the November student attendance rates for remote and Virtual Blue learning by week and grade. She highlighted most of the schools are doing very well with a 90% daily attendance rate.

Mrs. Scott-Kronemeyer reported 23 hotspots were deployed for students who could not otherwise connect or engage in online learning, and paper packets are being mailed for those students with other needs.

Mrs. Scott-Kronemeyer reported the district is monitoring student grades and progress to identify those who may be failing courses and to adopt plans for supports. She stated the district's ECOL Plan is posted to the Transparency site at www.saultschools.org.

Mrs. Scott-Kronemeyer presented student grades distributed by percent for the first quarter.

Upon inquiry from Member Curtis, Mrs. Scott-Kronemeyer reported the district is reaching out to students who have been identified as at-risk.

President Smith confirmed there were no questions.

2. District Survey – Superintendent Hall

Superintendent Hall stated everyone is aware of the MDHHS order that required students in grades 9 – 12 to be taught virtually through December 8 and the Board's decision to include students in Kindergarten through eighth grade. He stated tonight's meeting is to review data to consider how to move forward.

Superintendent Hall reported on a district survey to determine if parents and teachers would feel comfortable if school returned to face to face instruction on December 9, January 4, 18, or 26. The survey also asked if while schools were providing remote learning, would they Strongly Agree, Agree, feel Neutral, Disagree, or Strongly Disagree with allowing students to participate in group activities such as sports, clubs, Driver's Education, etc. The following results were reported:

	12/09/20	1/04/21	1/18/21	1/26/21
Grades K-4				
Parent	47%	14%	12%	27%
Teacher	17%	18%	23%	23%
Grades 5-8				
Parent	31%	19%	19%	30%
Teacher	11%	24%	30%	35%
Grades 9-12				
Parent	25%	17%	19%	38%
Teacher	19%	12%	26%	43%

The following results were reported for allowing students to participate in group activities as long as all safety measures were followed:

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
397	209	193	269	464

144. **B. SUPERINTENDENT REPORT**

Superintendent Hall presented a survey conducted by the SEA on if teachers would feel safe to return to school on December 9. The results indicate 82.9% would not and 17.1% would feel safe. The survey of 105 responders was made up from 41% of high school teachers, 24.8% of Middle School teachers, 19% of grade 2-4 teachers, and 15.2% of kindergarten and first teachers.

Superintendent Hall presented the following data as of December 3.

1. **Confirmed COVID-19 cases:** Staff – 3, Students – 30.
2. **Under Quarantine:** Staff – 4, Students -29
3. **Availability of Substitute Employees:** There is a shortage of subs and even a small increase in staff shortages, would drastically affect in person teacher availability.
4. **County Positivity Rate:**
 - a. 9.5% from testing at Chippewa County Health Department, Bay Mills Health Center, Sault Tribe Health Center, and LSSU Health Center.
 - b. War Memorial Hospital In-house Testing: 10% (19 positive out of 183 tests) on 12/02/2020.
5. **Chippewa County Health Department (CCHD) Input:**
 - a.

	11/03	11/23	12/3
Total Confirmed Cases	124	307	373
Total Probably Cases	98	377	530
Recovered	88	132	240
Deaths	0	4	6
 - b. CCHD remains very concerned about community spread.
 - c. CCHD remains very concerned about post-holiday spread.
6. **War Memorial Hospital Input:**
 - a. Hospital is nearly at capacity and is concerned a rise in COVID patients would create significant issues for non-COVID patients.
 - b. There are 15 COVID patients in the hospital, 2 in ICU, 1 on ventilator and several at other facilities out of town.
 - c. Concerned about community spread.
 - d. Second floor is being used for COVID patients
 - e. Concerned about post-holiday tests and quarantines
 - f. Concerned about increased numbers at the prison and movement of Staff back to their communities

C. AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION

President Smith reviewed the public comment process and recognized the following comments.

Megan Parish reported she has a son in grade 9 and inquired on what the current registration dates are for Virtual Blue if the district doesn't reopen.

Superintendent Hall reported Virtual Blue was initially set up for parents and students to make a commitment and register for a whole semester, then it became too restrictive for some parents so it was opened up, and then it became a logistical nightmare of some students moving in and out. He stated the district now has a quarterly enrollment/departure date so everything can be handled properly, and the deadline for enrolling in the third quarter is December 15.

Kaya Boudoin, high school senior, reported on the results of her Virtual Blue Student Survey.

- 80% felt burdened with school
- 83% were behind because of busy work
- 72% frequently experienced headaches due to the blue light on the chrome books
- 50%+ felt the program will negatively impact their college application
- Only 25% of teachers lecture for the full, half-hour class period and many students feel classes would be better if it was extended by 15 minutes
- Classes are scheduled back-to-back not allowing students for a bathroom break or time to refocus on the next class. They need a little transition time
- Some students are juggling babysitting (because childcare is an issue) or other work while going to school. There needs to be some flexibility on when they can communicate with their teachers
- Students would like dedicated class time to talk with their teachers because many don't feel comfortable emailing or calling between the 1-3p.m. timeframe when they feel other students are contacting them.

Upon inquiry from President Smith, Kaya reported 58 students in grades 9-12 responded to the survey.

Nick Huyck indicated he appreciated the informative information made by the previous student as he had not heard how high school students are doing until now.

Mr. Huyck commented on the less than full education students have been receiving with remote learning over the last two school years. He expressed concern for student mental health and coping skills, and stated parents are looking for an end. He acknowledged the tough decision the

Board needs to make in order to move the district forward and affirmed many students are safer at school than out.

Nick Sprague, high school senior, inquired on the possibility of playing school sports while face to face instruction is closed. Superintendent Hall acknowledged his concern and indicated the Board would most likely address that later in the meeting.

Katheryn Hills, a parent of three who attend Lake Superior Academy and one at Sault Middle, reported on her son is overwhelmed and struggling with virtual learning. She indicated he had emailed some of his teachers with questions and they did not get back with him for several days. She questioned why school could not return to face-to-face instruction when there hasn't been any transmission of COVID associated with attending school in the area.

Marcie Gleason, third grade teacher, reported she and several of her colleagues do not feel safe returning to school with the community spread positivity rates going so high. She stated the teachers are doing their best to provide the best possible education, they allow for breaks during instruction, and the children are doing their best, attending specials and thriving in the temporary environment.

Amanda Lewis, third grade teacher, indicated she strongly agrees with Miss Gleason. She stated she loves teaching and would like to continue to provide a virtual education to her students until it is safe for everyone to return.

Scott Hockersmith reported he has a kindergartener who is doing his best with virtual learning, as well as his wife who is a teacher. He noted he inquired at the previous meeting about the district developing a matrix so everyone could see the criteria and what needs to be accomplished in order to return to face to face instruction. He stated he thought people would do better if they had something to look forward to.

Jane Schied, Middle School Teacher, reported she sympathizes with parents and students who are struggling with all the online platforms, and she knows face to face instruction is better, but the rules have to change because we are living through a pandemic. She stated when people are dying and the health care professionals tell us not to travel for the holidays and not to mix households, how safe is it for teachers with rooms of 20-25 students, crowded hallways, and very little mask compliance to be in school. She questioned the rationale why some people don't want to see that the virus is real. She indicated she doesn't want to have to get COVID to see how she fares with it, and the vaccine is the light at the end of the tunnel.

Owen Bell first stated he believes teachers are doing the best job they can. Then, he referenced a Detroit Free Press article and several state health departments that indicate playing sports is not where you get the super spreaders. He stated kids who play sports are in a controlled group and want to play rather than have to play. He stated kids need sports for physical exercise, mental health, and socializing. He asked the Board to please allow students to play sports even if school is in virtual learning.

Lauryn Wood, high school senior, echoed Kaya's comments about headaches due to online learning, the need for breaks between classes, and the difficulty of not being able to socialize with fellow students. She reported on the anxiety of not being able to go to school face-to-face, working hard but still worrying about earning scholarships, and the loss of playing sports.

Nick Sprague inquired on if the shutdown helped ease the number of cases at Sault High. Superintendent Hall asked Karen Senkus to respond.

Mrs. Senkus indicated she did not have her data with her, but she knows prior to virtual learning there were several quarantines from 1 or 2 cases at the high school and middle school, but now there are more cases at all levels due to family members and contacts. She further indicated that we live in a small community and even though it isn't fun, we need to social distance and follow the CDC guidelines to keep everyone safe.

Jodie and Justin Smith reported on the ease for staff and students to just bring home the common cold and now their concern for reopening school during the increase of community spread COVID cases. They stated it isn't safe for our community at this time.

Annette Welch, high school freshman, reported the high school students are not getting the education they deserve. She indicated she has two teachers who teach the full 30 minutes per class, but the others take attendance and then assign work they didn't explain. She reported some send students to breakout rooms, but work doesn't get done or there isn't any work to do. She asked that the classes be longer, or all teachers teach the full 30 minutes.

Amy Hjerstedt, LSSU Professor, reported LSSU combined their student Thanksgiving and Christmas breaks to help the students get home for the holidays and to keep the communities safe. She indicated the students would most likely not return until the week of January 19.

Gerry Sciacca, Grade 3 and 4 Virtual Blue Lincoln Learning Instructor, reported that Lincoln Learning is an online learning system that our Curriculum Director was able to bring to the district. She explained it is in the top 3 or 5 online systems in the country and all of the students enrolled

in the program are learning above average. She noted there has not been any complaints from parents on giving students too much or too little of work. She asked parents to contact her if they had any questions and thanked the district for bringing such an amazing system to the community.

Upon inquiry from Vanessa Owaski-Patzwald, Superintendent Hall reported the district is following the Return to School Plan except for when the Governor moved the region back to Phase 4 and the district chose not to move to the hybrid plan of instruction.

Candace Pratt reported she had sat in on several of her children's online classes, and the teachers at Washington School are doing a phenomenal job. She indicated she agreed with the student in 9th grade that reported students are trying their best and not getting the cooperation from some high school teachers. She stated one day students had to walk a teacher through how to use Google Classroom or Zoom.

Bonnie Li was unable to connect.

Steve Habusta acknowledged everyone is looking for the school board to make the right decision and there is not one. He thanked the Board for finding a safe way to provide education just as MHSAA had found a safe way for athletes to participate in sports. He indicated the low amount of transmission among fall sport teams and some seniors who are finding it difficult to anticipate education beyond this year if they are not able to participate in sports and earn a scholarship. He stated not all sports are created equal, but he feels safe coaching the swim team. He asked the Board to please listen to the rules MHSAA sets out in allowing student to participate in sports during these difficult times.

Bonnie Li, high school senior, reported all the classmates she had spoken to appreciate their teachers adapting to online education, but stated it is really hard for students to get the education they deserve in the current situation. She reported a lot of classmates are overwhelmed with the work in general, and 30 minutes of class time instruction is not enough.

Kirsten Goodrich was unable to connect.

Lauren Hober, high school sophomore, reported it is difficult for students not to be in school. She asked the Board to focus on student support systems.

Ray DeWitt, LSSU professor, acknowledged the difficulty for teachers to provided online instruction as well as students to respond to it. He indicated teachers receive thousands of emails a day, and it is a different setting with a lot of complexities. He reported most teachers have not

been taught how to teach online. He stated he wanted to provide the Board with a perspective on some of the frustration our students are encountering.

Kristen Goodrich, parent of a Kindergarten student, indicated her husband works for the Department of Corrections and COVID is quickly moving up in the prisons. She thanked Washington School teachers for their instructional interaction and help with keeping the children learning. She stated our community needs to get a better handle on things before we move up to face-to-face instruction.

Michelle Huyck, parent of elementary and middle school students, reported students get easily distracted at home and do not always listen to their parents as well as they do to their teachers. She indicated teachers also get interrupted at their home. She stated students really need to return to face-to-face instruction.

Todd Robertson, high school senior athlete, thanked the Board and Superintendent for having to make the tough decisions. He reported Coach Menard did an excellent job of showing how the largest team in the school could safely play a contact sport with no COVID issues. He asked the Board to continue to listen to MHSAA rules for allowing students to play sports.

Mary O'Connor, high school math teacher, reported she misses being in the classroom with her students but has learned to adapt with the use of a document camera. She stated she has heard of people who have traveled up for Thanksgiving with COVID, and students were not always wearing masks in when they were in school. She indicated it is different being in the classroom than playing sports, and it takes away from her teaching when she is worried about the transmission of COVID among the classrooms. She suggested forming a committee of some teachers and students to collaborate on how to move forward safely.

Jessica Kinney reported on the difficulty of keeping a young student engaged online and the need to return to face to face instruction.

Corry Armstrong, high school junior, reported on a person's esteem and self-actualization, but the greater need for safety and security. He stated no one would want to answer who is to blame if something bad happened.

Kathy Spencer, parent of two high school students, reported her children are happy with remote learning for the time being. She indicated there is a bit more homework, but the school day is shorter. She stated in general, kids do not have as severe of a reaction to COVID as adults, and she would hate for teachers to have to return to the classroom and get sick.

With no other comment at 8:29 p.m., President Smith thanked everyone who spoke during public comment and stated it was refreshing to hear from the students.

III. ACTION ITEMS AND BOARD REPORTS

146. **A. EXTENDED CONTINUITY OF LEARNING PLAN – Mrs. Amy Scott-Kronemeyer**

It was moved by Member Wilson, supported by Member Wolski, that the Board of Education approve the recommendation to affirm the current Extended Continuity of Learning Plan as presented.

Yeas: Curtis, Pingatore, Cochran, Young, Smith, Wilson, Wolski

Nays: None

Absent: None

Motion Carried.

147. **B. REMOTE LEARNING – Superintendent Hall**

Superintendent Hall reported per MDHHS order, students in grades 9-12 are being taught virtually through December 8, and the Board needs to review data to consider how to move forward. He stated the SEA teacher survey was reviewed for consideration and he is looking for some direction from the Board on when to return to face-to-face instruction.

President Smith indicated the difficulty of knowing what the right decision is, but stated if it were personally up to him, kids would have been back in school. He sought input from his fellow Board members.

Member Wolski reported he was in favor of extending virtual learning at least through the holidays and would not mind extending it until the end of the first semester.

Member Curtis stated she appreciated hearing from the students and what they are dealing with.

Member Curtis reported she wants kids back in school, but not until it is safe for them, the teachers, and staff. She suggested returning after the holidays on June 4 if things are not worse. She stated she would like the district to follow MHSAA rules and guidelines for athletics.

President Smith stated if the Board decides not to return to school until after Christmas break, the Board needs to hold another meeting during the holidays to look at current numbers and go from there.

Member Pingatore thanked everyone who spoke up, especially the students. She stated she wants everyone back in school as soon as it is safe, and she is looking at January 4 as a possible return date. She stated MHSAA could be followed for the rules and guidelines on athletics.

Member Cochran reported he completed his college degree online while serving in the military but is aware that virtual learning is not for everyone. He stated he is not in agreement with allowing athletics to remain open while administration does not think it is safe for students to be in the buildings.

It was moved by Member Wilson, supported by Member Young, that the Board of Education support the return to face-to-face instruction on January 4, pending the review of data at a meeting held during the week of December 28, and to leave extra-curricular activities open following safety and MHSAA guidelines.

Yeas: Wolski, Curtis, Pingatore, Wilson Young

Nays: Smith, Cochran

Absent: None

Motion Carried.

148. **IV. ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business to come before the Board at 8:58 p.m., it was moved by Member Wilson, supported by Member Wolski, that the meeting be adjourned.

Yeas: Smith, Curtis, Pingatore, Cochran, Young, Wilson, Wolski

Nays: None

Absent: None

Motion Carried.

Superintendent Hall stated he hopes the audience and parents are confident that the Board is taking the method of teaching seriously and checking data from several sources.

Daniel L. Smith, President

Melissa S. Pingatore, Board Secretary

Judy L. Sirk, Recording Secretary