

Salmon School District #291
Board of Trustees
Special Board Minutes
November 4, 2020

The meeting was called to order by Chairman, Chuck Overacker at 6:00 p.m.

Present were, Chairman Chuck Overacker, Vice-Chair Juniper MacFarlane, Trustee Kellen Miller, and Trustee Tammy Dahle. Trustee Richard Natelson attended via telecommunications. A Quorum was present. Also present were Superintendent Chris Born and Director of Finance, Planning and Program Evaluation, Eileen Holden, and Board Clerk Chaylin Farrand.

Regular Session

Chairman Chuck Overacker led everyone in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Public Input

Betsi Lamoure explained that she felt strongly that the schools should stay open. She said it was foolish to think that students can learn from home when parents are trying to make a living. School is not a daycare, but we provide a service that these parents need. She told the Board that she is a trained educator and is very thankful that other people taught her children.

Mallori Wing explained that she thought the teachers are very divided on this issue because they are being asked to risk their health. This is not something teachers are taking lightly. She said she wants her kids in the classroom with her. She said that being in the portable they tend to hear the life flight a lot and that scares her. Collectively as a community we cannot control how it is being handled but we can in our schools.

Jane Feldhausen explained her concerns for the teachers and the students. She said that hearing the life flight over her classroom is scary. She said she is worried about how many children may be asymptomatic. She told the Board that she has lots of ideas. Feldhausen explained that she felt there was not a set plan if schools were to be shut down. She said that she wants something on paper and would like to be a part of coming up with the plan. She said she felt the Board was putting the community at risk with having the schools open.

Jennifer Coffey emailed the Board members. Trustee Dahle read the attached email.

Action Items

Approve Agenda

Trustee Miller motioned to approve the agenda for the November 4th, 2020 meeting. Trustee Dahle seconded. Passed 5/0.

New Business

Proposed Changes to District COVID Plan

Chairman Overacker explained that COVID is a very serious issue. He said that they were talking about kids staying home. Do we really think if we shut down this school the kids will be isolated? He said he thought they would be at friends' houses and in the public. He explained that he felt shutting down the school would not be effective for stopping the spread. He said he did not know how the teachers were implementing the mandates, but that he felt if the students were in the seat the schools should remain open.

Superintendent Born explained that in July when the issue first came up with a plan the district was mirroring the CDC plan other than they have yellow and orange. Essentially, they are the same per the CDC. In the beginning if the averages of all the counties averaged 50 that got us to red then they through that out. Right now, CDC has no number to get to red. That is what the Board is talking about.

Trustee MacFarlane said that she felt it was irresponsible to not have a number to go into red. She said that she advocates for putting a number to make it possible to go into red. She explained that it made sense to her to have a public official help with coming up with that number. She felt the rate of community transmission was too high.

Lisa Loughran explained that she was the chief nursing officer at Steele Memorial. She explained that she had spoke with EIPH right before the meeting. They recommended the usual, wear your mask, wash your hands, and keep your distance. She told the Board that there had been an increase in COVID cases over the last few weeks, but she wanted to let the concerned teacher know that not all the life flight patients were COVID.

Trustee MacFarlane asked at what point do we need to shut down the in-person learning?

Chairman Overacker asked where all those kids are going to go if school shut down and went online. He asked Lisa if she thought it would curb the spread of COVID.

Lisa Loughran explained in her opinion that she did not think closing the school would curb the spread of COVID. She told the Board that when you have families going to businesses no one is following the regulations. Who is going to say these kids are not going to go to a store?

Trustee Miller said that logically speaking the fact is shutting down the school will curb the spread of COVID in some way. He agreed that the students may still be in the community doing things, but they would not be exposed to the students in the school.

Trustee Miller offered to enforce the mask mandate in the schools if they did not have enough people to do it. He explained he did not see why enforcing the mask mandate was any different than enforcing the dress code or not letting students smoke in the bathrooms. He felt if the masks had been enforced since the beginning, he could not help but wonder if the number of cases wouldn't be so high.

Meriah Baker told the Board that the educators were responsible mask wearers, but they are the ones getting COVID. Jane Feldhausen said she thought the Pioneer students were doing very well with the mask mandate, but felt high school was not.

Superintendent Born explained to the Board that in talking to the other superintendents in the region Salmon seemed to have double the compliance of wearing masks than the rest of the districts. He said that they knew enforcing the masks would be impossible. He told the Board that they have a lot of rules but that does not mean we can stop high schoolers from drinking. He told the Board that the best place for these kids to be educated and safe wearing their masks is in our classroom. We saw how it was not rea successful to teach online in the spring.

Trustee MacFarlane said that she thought a certain level of community spread was too high. She said that she felt the numbers were far too high as it was.

Frank Garrett told the Board that the teachers must pick their battles. The last thing they want to do is kick a student out because they refuse to wear their masks. He told the Board that he is exhausted. He said if our community does not get on board then it is a lost cause.

Trustee Dahle explained that from the beginning the Board has been going by EIPH's plan. The only problem is it keeps changing.

Trustee MacFarlane stated that she was advocating for picking a number for red. She said that they needed to have something.

Trustee Miller asked Trustee MacFarlane if she thought it should be a number for the community or for the school.

Trustee MacFarlane said that she thought it should depend on the community.

Trustee Natelson told the Board that he thought you could look at it two ways. The first being that they keep the school open and let the children have a real education or, they could shut the school down and hold all the children back a year. He said that he did not think they could just limp along the kids like they did last year and just pat them on the back and pass them because of a bad year.

Mel Pena told the board that she was concerned with what was going on. She said in her research she had found that there were a lot of schools that were doing hybrid classes and it was working effectively. There are schools out there that are mandating masks. She said that she did not understand why the school was not taking control of the situation. She said that she hoped, an agreement or plan would come out of this meeting because she does not want to homeschool.

Chairman Overacker said that he thought hybrid learning was not as successful as they had all hoped the last year. He asked if they were really educating the kids or just nudging them down the road. He said that he did not think it was fair for the children to get half of the education that they should be getting.

Superintendent Born asked Lisa Loughran if she were in EIPH what her reasonable number would be to get to red.

Loughran said that it was a very hard question to answer.

Trustee MacFarlane told the Board that her main reason she was concerned was because the hospital has been busy, and school had been shut down because there was not enough coverage.

Chairman Overacker reminded Trustee MacFarlane that the schools were not shut down due to COVID.

Superintendent Born told the Board that there were only 5 cases of COVID when the school shut down. People were out for several other reasons like strep throat, sports, and other personal reasons.

Betsi LaMoure explained to the Board that these kids are going to end up in a daycare if they are not in school. She explained that a 6-year-old child cannot do a worksheet without an adult reading the directions the whole time. If we close school or go to learning online there will not be learning. Kids do not learn online.

Mallori Wing told the Board that the SEA is complaining that the teachers have this impossible decision to make.

Jane Feldhausen told the Board that she does not feel comfortable with leaving a substitute in charge of her class. Our subs/paras are not qualified to cover classes.

Trustee MacFarlane told the Board that she would like to see the schools implement and tightening up the hybrid as much as possible. Lunch in classroom and any other way to keep these kids from being exposed. She said that she, personally, wanted the number for red to be 60/10,000.

Chairman Overacker asked the teachers opinions of the number that MacFarlane had chosen.

Brett Dickerson told the Board that he would like the moral dilemma to be projected onto the community. He said that he did not feel the entire weight of this should be on the board or the educators. The only way this is going to work is if the community takes ownership of our virus.

Kaitlyn Ellis told the Board that she felt they were all in agreement that they need a plan or a number for clarity. She said that none of the teachers there wanted to shut down. But when talking long term or short term shut down it is a lot easier to catch a student up two weeks rather than a month. A short term shut down is logical.

Denzil McKenzie expressed his concern for the growth in COVID cases.

Trustee Natelson told the Board that there is a lot of talk back and forth and that he thought they needed to mandate masks in the schools. He said that having seen what is happening at restaurants people will most likely comply. I don't want to see the school close.

Trustee MacFarlane motioned to create a rate of 60 cases per 10,000 for three consecutive days to move into red. Trustee Miller seconded. Passed 4/1, Chairman Overacker opposing.

Trustee Miller motioned that they use the rate of 60 cases per 10,000 to be implemented on Wednesday the 18th. Trustee Natelson seconded. Passed 4/1, Chairman Overacker opposing.

Trustee Natelson motioned that the schools would be out one week at a time and the rate would be re-evaluated every week after. Trustee Miller seconded. Passed 5/0.

Trustee MacFarlane thanked everyone for being there and asked them to continue showing up.

Chairman Chuck Overacker emphasized the chain of command in regards to suggestions coming from individuals.

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 7:49 p.m.

Chuck Overacker, Chairman

Date

Chaylin Farrand, Board Clerk

Date