

Please Note: These minutes are pending approval.
Board of Education
Newtown, Connecticut

Minutes of the Board of Education meeting held virtually at 7:00 p.m. on August 11, 2021. .

M. Ku, Chair	L. Rodrigue
D. Delia, Vice Chair	T. Vadas
D. Cruson, Secretary	2 Staff
D. Leidlein (absent)	10 Public
J. Vouros (absent)	1 Press
R. Harriman-Stites (absent)	
D. Zukowski	

Dr. Ku called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. and stated it could be accessed by phone and was also being live streamed.

Item 1 – Pledge of Allegiance

Item 2 – Public Participation

Item 3 – Reports

Chair Report: Dr. Ku spoke about the DPH meeting yesterday which provided clarity regarding the mask mandate which remains in place through September 30. We need to address that because our plan will not be consistent with those executive orders. She thanked Mr. Cruson for responding to the many emails. At the meeting, they also spoke about the increasing rates of Covid in Connecticut and the changes since we left school in June. They shared the same mitigation strategies and will continue with some modifications. The one item worth noting was recommending that students seated 3 feet or more from a diagnosed Covid student didn't need to quarantine if they were asymptomatic and were masked.

Mr. Cruson noted that he received an email that people were trying to call but the pin number wasn't working. The correct number was shared with the public.

Item 2 – Public Participation

Ann Marie Gianni, 64 Pond Brook Road, has a daughter in a private school and wants to keep parental choice for masks. Everyone has done an amazing job but children need to take breaks. Children are resilient to this virus. The Wall Street Journal reported on a study about students wearing masks and found them more harmful than good for children. Let parents decide what is best for their children.

Jennifer Malta, 3 Berry Drive, agreed. Wearing masks should be up to parents. They restrict oxygen and trap bacteria. Will school system assume liability down the years if her children get cancer because of wearing masks? Consider this when making this decision.

Liza Leuallen, 10 Wills Road, said there are Covid increases in her hospital and increases in pediatric rates. She supports mandating the wearing of masks.

Julie Russell, 194 Woodhill Road, asked if there was data about the safety of mask wearing to avoid getting the virus why it wasn't shared with parents. There is no scientific evidence for healthy people to wear masks. OSHA data shows masks don't work after 20 minutes because they become moist and cause bacteria. It's dangerous breathing carbon dioxide. There's not enough study to mandate masks.

Mary Dominguez, 9 Farm Field Ridge, said it was worth considering the mask policy for this school year. There's a rise in cases in unvaccinated adults and children. If the CDC

recommended wearing masks indoors, our children should also. She recommended changing the policy.

Justin Birtwell, 13 Roosevelt Drive, wants to keep the mask policy in place. There is credible evidence that the delta variant is impacting public health and there are higher rates in children. The rates are coming down in England. Parents should be allowed to make the decision and not mandate it.

Liza Leuallen said in those countries where rates of illness are lower it's because they only allowed people out at certain times.

Mr. Delia called a point of order.

Dr. Ku said there would be no debate between our public speakers.

Paul Leuallen, 12 Wills Road, advocated for our leaders to listen to public health and not fall under pressure by the public and not be politically motivated. Health opinions are extremely valid. Student anxiety and mental health are affected and he appreciated the district addressing their concerns. Follow the guidelines from the medical experts.

Don Macoco, 27 Hi Barlow Road, said he has been a temporary Newtown teacher and feels the Board of Education is well educated about the public health crisis and supports them in making sure we follow the DPH and Department of Education concerning masking.

Trent Harrison, 59 Platts Hill Road, is a parent who is concerned, a faculty member who is concerned about students and their education and his own safety delivering instruction to them, and union president concerned about staff. The faculty rose to the challenge. We are looking for clear directives across the schools to the furthest extent possible for the teachers to continue to educate the children in Newtown.

Dale Revere, 2 Golden Pond Road, supports mandating masks. If you do not mandate them you should offer distance learning.

Mike Cappola, 26 Beechwood Drive, said the children were happy to go back to school. We should think about times when they have company at home and how they are distancing.

Item 3 – Reports (continued)

Superintendents Report:

Dr. Rodrigue reported on the Administrator's Retreat held at the new EdAdvance/CES Facility, the Workspace CT, in Bethel. The focus was bringing students back and providing emotional supports to feel confident coming back. Jonathan Costa from EdAdvance discussed lessons we learned over the last 18 months. Mrs. Uberti and Dr. Purcaro spoke about Educlimber that will house much of our academic and other data points to identify students who need support. When students come back we need to focus on the confidence we have in students and staff that they will catch up and give them the tools they need to achieve and excel.

Mr. Delia asked about the new executive order.

Dr. Ku said now the Governor is requiring students to wear face masks though his new executive order. Executive order 13 renewed 12A giving the binding guidance that masks must be worn in schools. There was public information from the Governor of the possibility of

changing over the summer, but it has remained in effect. Right now masks are required in schools.

Ms. Zukowski asked if we know locally of the rates.

Dr. Ku said the State provided numbers for Newtown every day.

Dr. Rodrigue said as soon as school starts we will get the data, which changes daily.

Item 4 – Discussion and Possible Action to Authorize the Superintendent to make changes to the Return to School Plan

Dr. Ku said this item was added to allow Dr. Rodrigue to make changes to the plan rather than the Board having to make changes when needed.

Dr. Rodrigue said there is a misnomer that we have some flexibility. Our most important goal is getting students back to school in full and having academic and emotional supports. The only impact on our original plan was changes in the community spread or changes in the Governor's order. Based on current information, we will need to move to masks for now based on the executive order. Masks are required on bus transportation and in the school setting for vaccinated and unvaccinated students and staff. There have been questions on quarantining and the DPH communicated there needs to be a 3 feet minimum when it comes to contact tracing. That will help us with quarantining and avoid the large number of students out as in the past. The 7 days out is acceptable with a 5 day Covid test. Those vaccinated don't need to quarantine. We will still report to those in contact tracing. The SPED department will provide services for their students who are quarantined. We won't have the D cohort but if a student is quarantined we will have a qualified building sub work with students on Google Classroom.

We are working on schedules for lunch and have adequate space for eating. We will also add lunch waves to help with spacing. Some may eat in classrooms occasionally. At the middle and high schools they will look at lunch waves to get students in the cafeterias. We will also continue to bring students outdoors when possible. We will no longer utilize the desk shields this year and encourage mask breaks frequently. Parents will receive information from the schools about the expectations and design of what days will look like for students. We have plenty of masks and disinfecting solution.

The point to drive home is we don't have a choice right now. We will continue to look at metrics with the Health Department and the other executive orders or mandates. Newtown has done an incredible job. She still has to comply with State mandates and let the Board know when choices are provided. She will make decisions with the local Health Director. She hopes that families know that any decision is based on hearing from the health experts and looking at the local health metrics. This is a difficult decision but we have to follow the State.

Dr. Ku said the specific things that need to be changed in our plan right now is the masks being worn in school and on transportation.

Dr. Rodrigue stated that nothing else in the plan has changes except for the wearing of masks.

Dr. Ku said the current changes in the plan and this motion is directing Dr. Rodrigue to make changes without the Board having to vote on the changes.

Ms. Zukowski asked how the exceptions for students whose mask interferes with their education are identified.

Dr. Rodrigue noted that was in place last year and has not changed. Anne Dalton usually looks over these student needs. The family will talk with the nursing supervisor to clarify the exemption for the student.

MOTION: Mr. Delia moved that the Board of Education authorize the Superintendent to make changes to the Return to School Plan. Mr. Cruson seconded.

MOTION: Mr. Delia moved to amend the motion to add the words "as needed" to the end of the motion.

Mr. Cruson suggested adding the words "moving forward" to the end of the motion.

Mr. Cruson seconded the amendment.

Mr. Delia noted that Dr. Rodrigue has always made decisions in the best interest of the students and he was in full favor of this motion.

Mr. Cruson agrees with this and it is necessary for the Superintendent to be authorized to make decisions quickly. He was in support of this and hopes Dr. Rodrigue feels empowered to use this power when we also need to loosen as well as tighten, and that she keeps the Board apprised of changes.

Ms. Zukowski agreed with Mr. Cruson but also wants Dr. Rodrigue to share the reasons for her decisions.

Dr. Rodrigue said she would contact the local Health Director for any changes and the decisions will be made regarding the data they receive.

Dr. Ku noted that Dr. Rodrigue always updates us and looks for guidance from the Board and that many Boards delegated those decisions to the superintendent. We want to have updates and input on decisions as they come up. She is not comfortable with having a choice to wear masks.

Mr. Cruson asked if Donna Culbert considered surrounding areas besides Newtown.

Dr. Rodrigue said the surrounding areas share data.

Mr. Cruson felt because a lot of our staff live in other communities, just looking at Newtown could give us a false sense of security.

Mr. Delia asked Ms. Zukowski and Mr. Cruson if they were not in support of this motion.

Ms. Zukowski said we are in transition right now and understood the need for rapid change but would feel better to put a time limit on it to revisit this motion and have time to get over this uncertainty.

MOTION: Ms. Zukowski moved to amend the motion to include that we review our authorization at our second meeting in October. Mr. Cruson seconded.

Mr. Cruson was still in favor of the original motion. It is in the best interest of the health and safety of the schools that the superintendent be able to make expedient decisions as needed. He was not sure about putting a time limit on it as it puts more pressure on us. He was more comfortable with keeping it open-ended.

After further discussion, Mr. Delia called the question.

Vote on amendment to add "moving forward" to the end of the motion: 4 ayes. Motion passes unanimously.

Vote on amendment to add the October time frame to the motion: 4 nays. Motion fails.

Dr. Rodrigue stated she would not make a change to the plan without the Board being fully aware of its impact. The dashboard with cases will continue to be posted by Anne Dalton.

Vote on main motion: 4 ayes. Motion passes unanimously.

Item 5 – Update on ESSER II and ESSER III Funding

Dr. Rodrigue reported on feedback from the survey sent to high school students, parents, caregivers and guardians, as well as staff. She also provided an update on the SEL and mental health grants for 2021-2022. Kristen Larson also attended.

Mr. Delia thanked Mrs. Larson for attending the meeting. What she does is very important and helps the students and community. .

MOTION: Mr. Delia moved to adjourn. Mr. Cruson seconded. Motion passes unanimously.

Item 6 – Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 9:04 p.m.

Respectfully submitted:

Daniel J. Cruson, Jr.
Secretary

Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) Grants

Update: August 11, 2021



ARP ESSER Plan Stakeholder Feedback

- Spending for elementary schools
- Spending for social, emotional, and mental health supports
- Support for tutoring programs and other afterschool activities
- Health and safety concerns - masks, air quality
- Purchase and use of assessments (e.g., Fountas & Pinnell)
- Feedback from staff and stakeholders

SEL/Mental Health Grants for 2021-22

New Parent Connection grant for NMS Teen Talk Counselor

New NoVo Foundation grant - \$750,000 over 2 Years

- Coordinator for Equity and Inclusion, consulting services, and training
- Kids in Crisis Teen Talk Counselor at NHS
- Social workers and counseling services at NHS
- Support for programs such as Hope Squad and Project Adventure
- Support for mentorship, mindfulness, and other SEL programs K-12

Committee for Children - Second Step program K-8 through 2026

VOCA grant for 12/14 recovery positions - 3rd year of 3-year grant

CHDI support for mental health/trauma support groups in schools

NPS Updated ESSER II Budget

Academic Supports to Address Learning Loss and Recovery		
.5 Math Interventionist 2021-22	Hawley	\$35,068
.5 Math Interventionist 2021-22	SHS	\$35,068
.5 Reading Interventionist 2021-22	Middle Gate	\$32,480
1.0 Math Interventionist 2021-22	NMS	\$76,652
Support for Special Education		
1.0 Special Education Teacher 2021-22 and part 2020-21	Middle Gate	\$56,282
2.0 Special Education Teachers 2021-22	NMS	\$136,832
PD Co-teaching model SPED/General Education	NMS	\$8,000

(Continued) NPS Updated ESSER II Budget

Technology/Digital Licenses		
Licenses for IXL, Lexia Core 5, and Newsela	District	\$134,800
Licenses for Everyday Speech, Edpuzzle, Super Duper Library	District	\$21,992
Coordination with Public Health Departments		
Stipend for Nursing Supervisor for 2020-21	District	\$2,500
Staffing Costs for District Vaccination Clinics 2020-21	District	\$8,672
Improving Air Quality		
MERV Filter Replacement	District	\$25,000
Supporting Academic/SEL Needs of Students		
Behavioral Interventionist for 2021-22	HOM	\$20,388

Ongoing Communication

Will post a new document on the website with ESSER I and ESSER II information - similar to ARP ESSER (ESSER III) document

Will continue to collect data, solicit feedback from stakeholders, and revise plans moving forward.

Application is due August 16th, but there will be opportunities to make budget revisions, and we will post any changes to the website.