

**Inter-Lakes School Board Regular Meeting
Inter-Lakes Middle/High School Community Auditorium
1 Laker Lane, Meredith, NH
November 24, 2020**

MINUTES

I. CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Richard Hanson called the meeting to order at 6:03 p.m.

II. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

III. RECORD ROLL

Members Present:

Mr. Richard Hanson, Chair
Mr. Mark Billings, Vice-Chair
Ms. Lisa Merrill, Secretary*
Mr. Craig Baker
Mr. Charles Hanson
Mr. Duncan Porter-Zuckerman*
Ms. Nancy Starmer
Ms. Raven Strother, Student Rep.*

Administrators Present:

Ms. Mary Moriarty, Superintendent
Mr. Scott Currier, Principal ILM/HS

Others Present:

Chris Mega, Video Recorder
Public

Members Absent:

None

*Remote attendance

IV. PUBLIC INPUT

Chairman Richard Hanson addressed the Letter to the Editor published in the Laconia Daily Sun and email he has received in reference to some of the language used during the School Board's October 27 meeting. Specifically, the use of the term "China virus" by a member of the public and both his and the Board's lack of an immediate response.

He said it was important to recall the context of the meeting that he characterized as fairly intense and animated. He said there was comments made that were potentially hurtful and wrong, and that he was immediately affronted by the use of the term. Given the feelings being displayed during that meeting he didn't believe it was time for teachable moment.

He found the use of the term reprehensible, and said it had the appearance of being a racist remark. He and the Board have been preoccupied over the last two to three months with health safety and supporting the School District, the administration and teachers, adding that all have been under a great deal of stress. Because of those factors he hasn't chosen to publicly respond but said he did find the use of the term inexcusable, inappropriate and indefensible. The School Board however are not First Amendment limiters and people can say things should they so choose. He concluded by commenting that neither he, nor the School Board, recognize racist statements such as that made during their last meeting.

Superintendent Moriarty stated that she is recommending that the School District shift from Full Physically In-Person Tier to Full Remote from Tuesday, December 1 – Friday,

December 4; (Monday, November 30 is a previously scheduled Teacher Workshop Day).

The rationale is to provide a week away from in-person learning - time for COVID-19 issues to surface and a buffer to respond if they arise; providing time for quarantining and PCR testing at a time when COVID-19 transmission in the community is on the rise. The District would return to Full Physically In-Person Tier on Monday, December 7, (Pending no impact on the ability to staff.)

Heather Gray, Meredith, said she favors the Superintendent's recommendation commenting that the switch would give time for people who traveled over Thanksgiving to get tested for COVID-19 to ensure they are healthy before returning to the classroom.

Karen Sticht, Meredith, said she opposes the switch asserting that the purposeful damage being done to students in Kindergarten through Grade 12 by causing chaos and inconsistency into the schedules and daily lives is doing much more damage than would happen if the kids actually get sick.

Ms. Sticht maintained that scientists are saying kids should remain in school and asserted that if the switch to remote learning is made, local students will be out and about shopping or skiing, increasing their chance for COVID-19 exposure.

Julie Hayward, Meredith, said she believes the safest place for kids to be is in school, noting that N.H. State Epidemiologist Dr. Benjamin Chan has said COVID-19 is not being spread in the schools and that the safety protocols put in place are working.

Ms. Hayward asked whether District teachers would be traveling for Thanksgiving.

Superintendent Moriarty responded that some educators have unique needs and that they had met with their building administrators.

Ms. Hayward said keeping students physically in the classroom is paramount commenting that she did not discount all that the administration and teachers have done. She commenting that she believes the administration's recommendation amounted to playing cards before they are dealt.

Mr. Hayman thanked Chairman Hanson for his opening remarks.

A Sandwich resident said she supports remaining in the Fully Physically In-Person Tier. The staff at Sandwich Central School has made education a joy for her daughter. She commended the administration and the School Board for the work that they have done but asserted that school children are a low risk population and need to remain in the classroom.

Melissa Torres, Meredith told the Board they need to think about safety. She wondered how many school district families truthfully disclosed their travel plans for Thanksgiving.

Amanda Lamper, Meredith said remote learning was stressful for children.

Lindsay Weiner, Meredith thanked Chairman Hanson for his opening comments.

Ms. Hayward read a statement from Liz Littell who was unable to attend as she was working. Ms. Littell questioned whether the administration's recommendation was a passive aggressive way to start keeping students at home. Safety protocols are in place and every family has been given an option of picking an educational tier for their children.

Mr. Currier read several email messages:

Corrine Jutton, Meredith thanked Chairman Hanson for his comments and urged the School Board to keep students physically in school citing their need for personal interactions.

Casey Gerken, Meredith said she trusts the SAU to manage the faculty and staff in a safe manner.

Danielle Ralston, Meredith, said she is proud of the work the School District has done to date and that four days of remote learning is a small price to pay for the safety of the community.

V. NEW BUSINESS

A. Proposed School Schedule

Chairman Hanson asked for a motion to approve the modified schedule as proposed by the administration.

Mr. Billings moved, seconded by, Mr. Baker, to approve the modified school schedule from December 1 through December 4, 2020 as presented.

Superintendent Moriarty reviewed statistical data noting to date there have been nine confirmed cases of COVID-19 in District schools; two of which are linked to Virtual Pathways and one confirmed case at the SAU.

Since the start of the school year the District has been able to provide 53 days of Full Physically In-Person learning. In September there were no reported COVID-19 cases; four in October and five in November. The District has asked the N.H. Department of Health and Human Services to review the statistical data it had collected to ensure nothing was being overlooked.

Superintendent Moriarty said there is a lot for people to be proud of and that families, students and staff have all been working together. What is concerning however, is the significant increase in community transmission. The COVID-19 Response Team has been meeting weekly. An infection rate of .8 to five warrants reevaluation. Statistics tracked by Harvard Global Health Institute show that both Belknap and Carroll Counties have fallen into the red zone.

With Thanksgiving, the Superintendent said, people may alter their typical footprint and travel, increasing the risk of bringing COVID-19 into the schools. It is not being transmitted in the schools but filters in via community spread. Those four days of Full Remote creates a 10-day window from Thanksgiving – time for symptoms to show and allows for a seven-day period if people did travel to get tested.

Mr. Billings suggested the COVID-19 Response Team meet on the Monday following Thanksgiving, a day that is already a non-student, to review data. Letting families know there may be a chance of going remote if data shows a need. As a compromise, if there is no compelling reason to be shut down for the following 4 days of that week, the decision could then be made to have students return to school on Tuesday.

Ms. Merrill said they are trying to give parents a heads-up so that they can make their own arrangements instead of experiencing the anxiety of having to make them on Monday.

Ms. Starmer said the statistics were compelling recalling that in one day 19 staff members at Inter-Lakes Elementary School were absent. While science indicates that children tend to get milder cases, that is not so for front line workers and the District doesn't have a stable of substitutes to call upon. The proposal seems to be in the spirit of protecting others. She commented that everyone is doing an amazing job keeping the schools clean and safe, adding that there is a lot to be lauded here. She questioned whether the teachers had been asked for their recommendation.

The Superintendent said teachers want to be with their students and that the District finds itself trying to predict the unpredictable.

Mr. C. Hanson said Thanksgiving marks the first major family holiday since the pandemic began and that while the decision is a difficult one, he believes the proposal has merit.

Mr. Baker commented that the statistics show a .5 per 100,000 infection rate. With approximately 700 kids in class that translates to one case in the school. The transmission rate within the schools is much different than in the community, he stressed.

Mr. Porter-Zuckerman said he supports the proposal based on a review of the state and county infection data. He said he thinks the Board can also look to other parts of the country who are experiencing a dark time, and take the opportunity to take a pause.

Ms. Merrill said she also supports the proposal, noting she served on the COVID-19 Response Team Committee and has heard recommendations from three doctors that really scare her. Four remote days will help keep teachers safe and keep everyone physically in the classroom which is everyone's goal.

Chairman Hanson said he also served on the COVID-19 Committee commenting that he represents the minority view. He said he was obsessed with keeping kids in class. Mr. Hanson said he was especially proud of all of the efforts that have been made to make the District's schools safer than the community. That being said, Hanson noted that doesn't mean that a time won't come when he supports taking a pause and going remote, but that he is not sure that the time is now.

VI. PUBLIC INPUT

Karen Sticht, Meredith, said asked how many students are being sent home with the sniffles or a headache. Both her grandchildren were sent home and had to remain there for four days.

Superintendent Moriarty said she didn't have those numbers, explaining there is a test out option to allow children to return to school before four days elapse.

Yesterday the Superintendent said there were 9 in quarantine at ILES; 21 at the middle/high school, three at SCS, and three at the high school pending COVID tests.

Sticht said if there is a mechanism in place for sending potentially infected students home, that she doesn't see why all schools have to be punished by closing down. She asked whether the COVID-19 Response Team meetings could be held via Zoom so that the public could get a better understanding of the information that goes into their recommendations.

The meeting minutes are posted on the District's Dashboard.

Middle/High School Principal Scott Currier read emailed comments from a number of parents the bulk of which supported the temporary switch in learning tier with some commenting it was proactive instead of being reactive.

Student Representative Strother said she is one of the 18 middle/high school students currently in quarantine. While agreeing that remote learning is not easy, she said, the four days to observe trends will be beneficial, noting that the long-term effects of COVID-19 infection on kids remains unknown.

Mr. Currier read several comments received via email from the public.

No further public input.

The motion on the floor to approve a modified school schedule from December 1 through December 4, 2020 passed 5-2, with Chairman Hanson and Mr. Baker opposed.

VII. ADJOURNMENT

Ms. Merrill moved, seconded by Mr. C. Hanson, to adjourn the meeting at 7:03 p.m. The motion carried unanimously.

Respectfully Submitted.

Bea Lewis Wheeler
School District Clerk