

DUDLEY-CHARLTON REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT

Approved minutes of the Emergency Meeting of the Dudley-Charlton Regional School Committee of Monday, August 10, 2020, held via video conferencing and live streaming.

Video Conferencing – Zoom:

<https://zoom.us/j/98254143877?pwd=SDRUNEF2MnZuMmkyd085aXRHTjRqUT09>

In attendance were members of the School Committee:

Kenneth J. Laferriere, Chair
Pauline J. Aucoin, Vice Chair
Cathleen Carmignani
Jordan Willow Evans
Catherine M. Kabala
Stephanie A. Reed
Jamie L. Terry

Also in attendance were Steven M. Lamarche, Superintendent, Brian J. Ackerman, Assistant Superintendent for Teaching and Learning, Richard J. Mathieu, Director of Finance and Operations; district administrators: Lorinda C. Allen, William F. Chaplin, Daniel S. D’Arcangelo, Jennifer A. Desto, Lori A. Pacheco, Dean W. Packard, Kathleen E. Pastore, Christopher E. Starczewski, Kelly True; 148 Residents via Zoom and Live Streaming; Sandra Sullivan, Secretary.

1. Call to Order

The chair called the meeting to order at 6:03 p.m.

2. Moment of Silence

The chair asked for a moment of silence.

The chair explained that tonight’s emergency meeting has been called for the sole purpose of discussing the updated and revised state-required Reopening Plan.

3. Citizens Forum

Resident Mara Jackson of Charlton, asked for the reason for starting remotely rather than in person or in a hybrid model.

Mr. Lamarche said a remote start provides the safest route back to school.

Parents were assured that all services as required on a student’s IEP will remain intact, regardless of a hybrid or remote plan.

Dr. Ackerman said kindergarten screenings will not be offered this year as the district is employing an evaluation tool. Progress monitoring will be conducted by assessment, instruction and review.

Mr. Lamarche noted there has been a slight uptick in the number of parents deciding to home school their children this year. He said this is not surprising.

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Teachers and administrators will work with students whether in hybrid, remote or face to face as they understand parents may not be educators.

Joellen Burlingame of Charlton said as a parent of a child in the district, she thanked the administrators, and recognized the decisions are difficult and heavy hearted. She voiced support for the plan presented August 4 as it offered balance and risk protocols.

Jason Avakian of Dudley said in view of the limited time kids will be in class that assemblies and story times should be cut short to allow a focus on academics. Mr. Lamarche said SL mitigating all visitors and large groups, no assemblies

Meeting Moderator Mr. Starczewski assisted the committee in answering 42 questions in the chat.

4. Updated Reopening Presentation and Vote

Mr. Laferriere said the charge to consider a reopening plan has been very difficult, and that no school committee member anywhere ever expected to be faced with this type of decision.

Mr. Lamarche presented the updated plan as requested by the Dudley-Charlton Regional School Committee at its meeting of August 5, 2020. The plan addresses the committee's wish to consider a full remote start for either two or four weeks.

Mrs. Kabala voiced support of the plan to offer a break between the cohorts to allow for cleaning and sanitizing. Mrs. Kabala said the two-weeks of remote seem too short, and supported the four-week plan as it allows time to monitor progression or decline of Covid-19 cases in the two towns.

Mrs. Kabala stated all students should go back to face to face school at the same time when the remote phase ends. Mr. Lamarche said bringing the younger students back first allows staff to focus on them during the reentry.

Mr. Lamarche said administrators have worked alongside the DCTA, but that the union will not vet the plan until the school committee's decision.

Mrs. Aucoin was in favor of the four-week remote start. Ms. Evans said she is in favor of the changes, and would prefer a six-week gradual phase in.

Mrs. Allen said an additional speech/language pathologist and an occupational therapist would need to be hired to meet the needs.

Ms. Evans inquired about the general mental wellness of the student body, and Mrs. Allen replied that principals and staff have done a great job reaching out to students.

Mrs. Reed noted this has been the most difficult time for her as a school committee member.

Mrs. Terry said she continues to weigh the comments and questions received from parents as well as the data from local boards of health. As of yesterday, Dudley reported there are school aged children in

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both towns that have the virus. She said she took photos of classrooms showing them set up for distancing. Mrs. Reed said it is not easy trying to plan for different age groups.

Mr. Laferriere requested to find a way to have students meet the teachers during the remote time period, and emphasized that families who want remote can choose remote. Mr. Lamarche said teachers can be accommodated in this way as well.

Mr. Laferriere said the plan represents a starting point. It is not set in stone and it could change at any time. He faulted the state for the way they rolled this out the request for reopening plans.

Mrs. Carmignani thanked the administration for hearing the committee's concerns and those of the community. She expressed appreciation for the time taken regarding this issue. Mrs. Carmignani shared her concerns about the health of our buildings, and said the remote start allows more time to receive and mitigate any issues, as well as for families to plan. If data supports it, Mrs. Carmignani was in favor of moving to the hybrid model.

Mr. Lamarche said tonight's vote is not what he envisions as a school committee responsibility. It is operational in many ways. Mr. Lamarche said the administrative team and Reopening Committee has felt the brunt of opinion and it is impossible to present a plan that will work for everyone. He said this plan is imperfect, but we need a starting point. We want to get kids back to school for full in-person learning.

A motion was made by C. Kabala, second by P. Aucoin to accept the Reopening Plan presented today, revised by the administrative team, featuring a remote start for four weeks, beginning Wednesday, September 16, 2020, bringing in a hybrid start for students in PK – 4 on October 15, and for grades 5-12 on October 29, and this was defeated by a vote of 3 in favor, and 4 opposed on a roll call vote as follows:

Mrs. Kabala said she is concerned about the length of time to bring students in grades 5-12, but did not want that to be the straw that broke the camel's back.

Ms. Evans asked if we go through with this and there is an uptick in Covid-19 cases, does the school committee have power to move back to remote. Mr. Lamarche said the plan allows for change based on information from the boards of health and the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.

C. Carmignani - no
J. Evans - yes
C. Kabala - yes
S. Reed - no
J. Terry -no
P. Aucoin -yes
K. Laferriere - no

Mrs. Reed asked if waiting until October 1 provides sufficient time to gather data to allow grades 5-12 to return on October 15.

The time needed to inspect and remediate any findings within the HVAC system is not clear at this point, as Mr. Mathieu said he is working with at least two potential consultants. They have the means to begin looking at HVAC next week, but they don't know how much time this will take until they begin working.

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Mrs. Carmignani supports a quicker turnaround time to hybrid learning, saying high school students needs to be brought back earlier.

A motion was made by J. Terry, second by S. Reed to accept the Reopening Plan as rewritten and presented this evening, with two weeks of remote learning beginning Wednesday, September 16, 2020, and entrance to hybrid beginning October 1 for grades PK – 4, and October 15 for grades 5-12, was approved by a vote of 4 in favor, 3 opposed on a roll call vote as follows:

C. Carmignani – yes
J. Evans – no
C. Kabala – no
S. Reed - yes
J. Terry - yes
P. Aucoin - no
K. Laferriere - yes

Mrs. Reed said she would like to see us discuss a hybrid plan to move to full days.

Mr. Lamarche said he will communicate the information to families this evening.

Mr. Laferriere said the committee will provide an update at the August 26 meeting.

5. Adjourn

A motion was made by S. Reed, second by C. Carmignani to adjourn the meeting was approved by unanimous roll call vote at 7:33 p.m.

C. Carmignani – yes
J. Evans – yes
C. Kabala – yes
S. Reed - yes
J. Terry - yes
P. Aucoin - yes
K. Laferriere - yes