

Rochester School Board
Special School Board Minutes
July 30, 2020

DRAFT

Members Present Remotely:

Mr. Paul Lynch, Chair
Mrs. Sarah Harrington
Mrs. Anne Grassie
Mr. Audrey Stevens
Mr. Matthew Beaulieu
Mr. Matthew Munn
Mr. David Camire
Mr. Matthew Pappas
Mr. Robert Watson
Mr. Brian Nicholson
Mr. Thomas O'Connor
Mr. Nathaniel Byrne
Mrs. Karen Stokes

Members Absent:

Also Present Remotely:

Mr. Kyle Repucci, Superintendent
Dr. Sandie MacDonald
Mrs. Linda Bartlett
Ms. Cherie Mann

Mr. Lynch called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. on a roll call with a quorum present. Members participated in the pledge of allegiance.

Public Comment

Submitted by Sean McMahon & Vanessa Polychronis:

To the members of the Rochester School Board,

Our family is writing to express our opposition to the home learning option that is being proposed for the 2020 Fall Semester: VLACS.

We know that there are many families in the community who share our concern about schools being reopened for the Fall 2020 Semester and who would prefer to keep their children at home while the COVID-19 Coronavirus continues to be a concern in our country. We wish to share our family's story with you as just one example of the many unique situations families are facing in these times.

Our son, Landon, is going into 4th grade this year at East Rochester Elementary School. Just a few days prior to the pandemic, Landon was approved for an IEP to get extra assistance in reading and writing – areas in which he struggles greatly.

Landon's parents, grandparents, and other close family members are in high-risk categories for COVID-19 due to cancers, diabetes, asthma, and various upper-respiratory issues. Because of the increased risks associated with potentially exposing our loved ones to COVID-19, we feel that remote learning is our only viable option for the Fall of 2020.

We are very concerned about the prospect of using VLACS for Landon's first several months of 4th grade. Because of Landon's special needs in reading and writing, being removed from his teachers during remote learning would be absolutely detrimental to his academic progress. Landon's teachers have spent countless hours developing special learning plans and strategies to help address his weaknesses and strengthen his skills. Those plans and strategies have been very successful so far. Removing those teachers from his educational journey at this juncture would be devastating to his academic growth and development.

As tax paying citizens of Rochester, we urge the School Board to keep Rochester's teachers and educators involved in a virtual learning option for the Fall of 2020, while our country struggles to get control of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Thank you for the work you are doing. We have faith that you will make decisions that prioritize educational needs, as well as the health and safety of our children and Rochester's dedicated team of educators.

Submitted by David Mauser:

Subject: Comments to Rochester School Board pertaining to 7/30/20 meeting

David Mauser, I am a lifetime resident of Rochester, with a grandson entering second grade. I believe that concern about reopening schools during the COVID-19 pandemic should not be limited to students, parents, and teachers, but should also be of great concern to grandparents and the public in general. A COVID outbreak in the schools would rapidly spread to the general public.

I urge the School Board to conclude that Rochester schools cannot reopen safely for in-classroom learning, regardless of attempts at social distancing, without increased risk to the teachers, students and the general public.

Additionally, I urge the School Board to conclude that online schooling (as was done last Spring) is the best available option, and to proceed with implementing that option and concentrate on making it work better, instead of wasting the few weeks remaining on a futile attempt to make schools safe by social distancing.

Even if classroom sizes are reduced to space desks 6 feet apart, and students and teachers are required to wear masks, there are many other situations that would have to be addressed. What measures would be taken to guarantee social distancing (in the following):

- in crowded hallways?
- in cafeterias?
- in restrooms?
- in bus lines, dropoff areas?
- on buses?
- at bus stops?
- when students walk to school?
- on playgrounds?
- when students congregate before/after school, on or off school grounds?

I contend that these issues are insurmountable, especially in the elementary school levels, where the kids are naturally like monkeys climbing all over each other, and do not fully understand the consequences of their actions. You may think that off school grounds behavior is not your concern, but the reality is that the COVID

virus doesn't recognise boundaries, the outcome will be the same. If you require the kids to be present in school, then they have to get there, so off grounds issues are indeed a valid concern.

I acknowledge that we are currently in a "yellow" state where the COVID rate is steady, neither increasing nor decreasing. That is not a good situation, it is just less bad than most of the country. This is not the time to let our guard down, else things could change for the worse rapidly in NH. Peoples' health and lives are at stake. **Additionally, it would be far less disruptive to start the school year with online learning, than to have a failed attempt to reopen classrooms and then have to switch to online learning (again) mid semester.**

In the event that that political pressure requires that classrooms reopen in some capacity, I urge the Rochester School Board to allow parents a choice of whether to send their child to school, or whether (continue) to engage in online learning. The health and safety of each child is ultimately the responsibility of the parents. To do otherwise, leaves parents (who are uncomfortable with school safety) with only one remaining option and that is to pursue homeschooling for their child. In the case of teachers who feel the same way, they would have few choices too; go on strike, retire, or resign.

Return to School Plan and Presentation

Mr. Kyle Repucci, Superintendent, and Dr. Sandie MacDonald, Assistant Superintendent, presented and explained the School Reopening Plan 2020-2021. Discussion ensued and School Board members were given an opportunity to ask questions.

Mr. Lynch moved, second by Mr. Pappas, to modify the school calendars to allow for two additional professional development days at the start of the year. August 11th will be the start date for Maple Street Magnet School and September 3rd will be the start date for all other Rochester School District schools. The motion passed 9-4 on a roll call vote.

YES: Mrs. Stevens, Mr. Pappas, Mr. Byrne, Mr. Munn, Mr. Lynch, Mr. Camire, Mrs. Grassie, Mr. Nicholson, Mr. Watson

NO: Mr. Beaulieu, Mr. O'Connor, Mrs. Harrington, Mrs. Stokes

Mr. Lynch moved, second by Mrs. Stevens, to approve 1:1 technology as presented. The motion passed unanimously on a roll call vote.

Mr. Lynch moved, second by Mrs. Stevens, to approve the Rochester School Department School Reopening Plan as presented. The motion passed 9-4 on a roll call vote as follows:

YES: Mr. Byrne, Mr. Camire, Mr. Munn, Mrs. Grassie, Mr. Pappas, Mrs. Stevens, Mr. Lynch, Mr. Nicholson, Mr. Watson

NO: Mr. O'Connor, Mrs. Harrington, Mrs. Stokes, Mr. Beaulieu

Other

Mr. Pappas explained that the Governor has distributed Cares Act funds to private schools and religious schools. He presented a proposal he came up with to ask the Governor to redirect some of those funds to help public schools. Mr. Lynch asked Mr. Pappas to send his proposal to all School Board members to review and it will be addressed at the Regular School Board meeting in August.

Adjournment

Mrs. Stevens moved, second by Mrs. Grassie, to adjourn at 9:14 p.m. The motion carried unanimously on a roll call vote.

Respectfully submitted,

Kyle M. Repucci
Board Secretary