

**OFFICIAL PROCEEDINGS
OF THE
BRANDYWINE HEIGHTS AREA SCHOOL DISTRICT
BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

September 1, 2020

The Regular Meeting of the Board of Directors of the Brandywine Heights Area School District was called to order at 6:01 pm by President John Tomasi.

The meeting opened with the Pledge of Allegiance.

Board Recording Secretary called the roll:

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| ✓ Mr. Bieber | ✓ Mrs. Henry | ✓ Mr. Tomasi |
| Dr. Carter | ✓ Mrs. Huhn | ✓ Mr. Wagaman |
| ✓ Mrs. Eisenhart | ✓ Mr. Scheetz | ✓ Mrs. Walizer |

Administration Present:

- ✓ Mr. Andrew Potteiger, Superintendent
Mr. Jamison Barnhart, High School Assistant Principal
- ✓ Mr. Matthew Dziunycz, High School Principal
- ✓ Mr. Robert Farina, Intermediate/Middle School Principal
- ✓ Mr. Scott Geist, Director of Athletics
Mrs. Carolyn Hanych, Director of Brandywine Virtual Academy
- ✓ Ms. Stephanie Kelly, Elementary School Principal
- ✓ Mr. Craig Neiman, Business Manager/Board Secretary
Dr. René Reese, Director of Pupil Services
- ✓ Mr. Thomas Voelker, Assistant to the Superintendent
Mr. Michael Wetzel, Director of Buildings and Grounds
Ms. Carly Worman, Supervisor of Instruction and Assessment

Solicitor: Mr. Benjamin Pratt, Esquire

Visitors: Karen Polinsky (Topton), Brian Hohenshilt (Mertztown), Shawn Sterner (Mertztown), Nicole Schantzenbach (Topton), Julia Lawhorne (District Township), Kelly Fronheiser (District Township), Shanna Stein (topton), Megan Kratner (Longswamp), Erin Clark (Mertztown), Walter Sahaydak (Rockland Township), Elaine Schwein (Alburtis), Stacy Kline, Gerald Pino (Macungie), Traci Pino (Macungie), Sophia Pino (Macungie), Maddy Pino (Macungie), Crys McCarty (Mertztown), Jeremiah McCarty (Mertztown), Chris Rehrig (Mertztown), Nichole Capecci, Shaun Lucas, Joline Cerullo (Mertztown), Justin Bollinger, Mark Ambruster, Angela Deysher (Rockland Township), Brenda Fatzinger (Topton), Katie Lucas (Mertztown), Tim Sexton (Mertztown), Christopher Laub (Topton), Heather G (Topton), Erin Clark (Mertztown), Michael Houston (Longswamp), Craig Ronco (Fleetwood), Lisa Ehrets (Breinigsville), Ben Crouse (Mertztown), Jenny Swartzentruber (Alburtis)

BOARD OF DIRECTORS REPORT

A motion was made by Mr. Scheetz and seconded by Mr. Wagaman to approve the Board of Directors Report.

A. BHASD Health and Safety Plan Metrics

Approve updated metrics of the Brandywine Heights Area School District Health and Safety Plan from 50/100,000 to 100/100,000 for the safe reopening of school and the educational process for the 2020-2021 School Year.

B. Rolling Average

Approve the use of a four (4) week rolling average to determine the operational color phase of education.

Mr. Potteiger explained how the first two days of school went with students and explained each item under the Board of Directors Report.

Public Comment

Mr. Tomasi asked for comments from the public.

Shawn Sterner (Mertztown) commented he believes Brandywine Heights School District is the best in the county and his family is fortunate to live in this district. He would like to express his dismay and concern about rumors of going to a red phase and being full virtual and halting extracurricular activities. He understands and appreciates the concerns for coming back to school but given the low mortality risk this virus presents doesn't feel the risk outweighs the benefits. It was difficult enough for last year's graduating seniors never having some of the opportunities of senior year back. He understood the rationale about closing in the spring because of uncertainty of the virus but things are different and now we know much more about this virus. Vaccines are expected to be available within months and hospitals are not overrun. PPE is creating safe environments. The damage of not opening the schools and keeping in person instruction could potentially last forever. Though there are risks to opening and staying open it can be mitigated. Board members should consider the irreversible damage to students and the education system as a whole. It would be an immediate loss in talent. There will be a decline in students if the school does not hold in class instruction. Working adults all accept various levels of risk everyday. Use of sick days/educational sabbatical. Staff are essential workers. Today Berks county sits at an average at 51.9 per 100,000 however the school district sits at 23.6 per 100,000. Mr. Sterner applauds the efforts of putting the health and safety plan together and knows someone will be upset regardless of the decision. In closing he asked the Board to please be courageous and creative and have Brandywine Heights stay open as a hybrid model at the least. Failure to do so will have long term negative effects on community and students. Mr. Sterner commented that the faculty and teachers have options that other people in the workforce do not have. Being a teacher is a great opportunity but it should be a personal decision and not one put on the students at the District.

Gerald Pino (Longswamp township) commented that he knows how hard everyone has worked to get to this point. Mr. Pino commented that he works with youth through a church and as he saw districts one at a time go virtual and he saw the kids sadness because they want to be in school. Kids saw how integral school is to them and missed that. Virtual learning does not have the same impact as in person education. It doesn't reach them as well and it isn't the same experience. The same interactions can't happen over a zoom call. Teachers know when students need attention or when they are hurting and that doesn't come through a zoom call and they really need what the District and school offers for them so please consider how much school and interactions mean to the students. Mr. Pino questioned if from a data metrics side if there is any consideration being made of where the spikes in data are occurring.

Brain Hohenshilt (Rockland Township) has two students in the district and his kids are looking forward to coming in person to school and continuing to do so. The interactions students have while in school are just as important. Mr. Hohenshilt encouraged the Board to make it possible for in person as long as possible. He commented that he would like school to get back to a normal session as soon as possible and be full time in person. Many parents with other jobs don't have the options for sabbaticals or other employment options. If you look at the statistics kids are minimally affected. It is frustrating that an outbreak at a nursing home will affect whether children will come to school or not.

Julia Lawhorne (District Township) questioned why the District is not following CDC guidelines, why the District is not staying with consistency so students can stay in school longer, what the plan is to move to a less restrictive phase, what is the highest number before considering going virtual, and is the District prepared for spikes in the data to happen and go over one hundred. Ms. Lawhorne also commented that she does not think it is a good idea to flip flop between phases.

Mr. Scheetz clarified to community members where the numbers are coming from and what happens if we keep the metric at fifty or change the metric to one hundred. He also explained how the four week rolling average will help the District to be less prone to a high spike in numbers.

Karen Palinski (Topton) commented that she appreciates everything that has been done for students. Her concern is with the constant worry for parents that things will change. She agrees with moving the metric to one hundred and keeping students in school. Ms. Palinski commented that in the two days that students have been in school her 5th grader is a different person and is benefiting greatly from being in school.

Walter Sahaydak (Rockland Township) thanked the Board for everything that has been up to this point and getting kids back into school. Mr. Sahaydak spoke about the potential change to virtual and the effect it will have on BCTC students. BCTC is a hands on learning experience and to change those students to a full virtual environment will really affect those students because they won't be able to go to BCTC in person. Mr. Sahaydak is in full support for changing the metric to 100. He commented that 100/100,000 is misleading and suggested taking into account the percent positive cases and not just the incidence rates. The last few weeks increased but the percent of positive tests actually dropped but it includes negative tests as well.

Jeremiah McCarty (Longswamp Township) commented that he sees the value of in person education and his biggest concern is how he knows the District will stick to a plan and consistency and the number will not change again. He would like to know what is decided is what is going to actually happen.

Chris Rehrig (Mertzown) commented that he agrees with the value of in person education and it is good to have children back in school for a variety of reasons but there is also talk about consistency and maintaining. There is a pattern of concerning behavior of inconsistency. The District talks about virtues and hours that went into the creating this plan and have made an adaptive plan and that was clearly communicated but it gave families in the District seven days to make a commitment for five months and then the plan changed at the last Board meeting. Friday of last week the plan that was in place was ignored. The plan cannot constantly change. Families

have to be accountable for the decision they made and for the District to not be accountable is bad politics. The Board had an opportunity to evaluate the data from the state and make a decision and chose not to change the metric numbers. Yes it is about doing the right thing for the kids but it is also about integrity, trust, and commitment. The school board not being trusted is a bad place to be.

Craig Ronco (Rockland Township) commented that he appreciated everyone coming out to the meeting and all the work that is being done to keep kids in school. Mr. Ronco said he looks at it as a mindset to adapt and change and make the best decisions for the students. Adapting and changing is a positive thing and we should be able to accept these things and roll with it. It shouldn't be a fixed mindset and it should change as needed. The District needs to make the right decision for children and have hope, change, and optimism with something we are learning every single day. We did not have raw real data before, we had numbers to look at but no guidance on how to look at that data. Take the mindset of compassion and gear it to our children. People will forget that you changed your mind because our children will have a better experience. The number is going to change forever because it needs to because as we get better and as we get better at dealing with this virus the plan and numbers need to change so we can move forward.

Michael Houston (Macungie) has two students in the district, he commented he appreciated the efforts and work put into the health and safety plan. He wants the District to change the number to the 100 threshold. Some others expressed how kids were overjoyed and excited to get back to school and there is validity to kids being in school face to face. He asked the Board why students are going to school for a half day and not a full day because he does not understand the logic behind that decision and if it is possible to have a week delay before changing phases. It is impossible for families to change their childcare plans over a two day timeframe. Please consider a week delay for changing phases and give families the opportunity to make the plans they need to make for their children. Mr. Houston commended Mr. Potteiger's commitment and dedication to the school district and his exemplary leadership trickles down through the entire district's staff and teachers. He trusts Mr. Potteiger and if he thinks that is the right thing and trusts him to lead the district and get our kids the best possible education.

Nichole Capecci (Alburtis) commented that the safety of our children is a great factor but so is their education. Interaction with teachers is such a big connection and it helps kids understand what they are learning. Ms. Capecci commented that she greatly appreciates everything and the concerns and steps that are being taken but the interaction is a great help for the kids and think they need that to be successful.

Lisa Ehrets (High School Teacher) commented about her gratitude and appreciation to all parents and community members who came to speak at the meeting. Mrs. Ehrets came to represent members of the faculty who are concerned about the moving of the established board policy of the metrics. The metrics were used when faculty members made decisions to stay in the buildings and there are several concerns about why the district is now choosing to consider moving those metrics to a higher number because it doesn't seem like it is a decision rooted in policy or science. We are already above the metrics that were established. Mrs. Ehrets questioned if the board is going to feel pressure every time the District comes near the metrics because it feels good to be in a school. She commented that she understands everyone is excited to have a taste of normalcy but at what cost. Mrs. Ehrets questioned if the Board had read the email that was sent to them and if they have taken those concerns into consideration

and if the Board is going to move the metrics in the opposite direction when teachers and students start getting sick. Mrs. Ehrets asked the Board to stand by their decision and make the right choice for students, faculty, staff, and administrators.

Erin Clark (Mertztown) commented that she agrees with the threshold and the increasing case amounts to 100/100,000. Ms. Clark questioned if the school district has the ability to raise the metric passed 100. It needs to be stated that one hundred is the highest the metric will go. She commented that her family sent their children back to school. They weighed the pros and cons and accepted the risk. She encouraged the Board to revisit this and increase the metrics and the rolling average because she feels the benefits outweigh the risks. Students need to have one on one interactions with teachers and guidance so when they are virtual they have somewhat of an understanding of what they are learning. Sometimes it is a struggle for parents to help their children with virtual work and the hybrid option gives parents a better chance of being successful.

Christopher Laub (Topton) suggested avoiding going all virtual looking. If we go all virtual and kids have a problem with something there are different ways of things being interpreted when trying to connect with teachers. Kids cannot always understand what they are learning online. How do we expect children to get the help they need if we are completely virtual. Even one day in school is better than going full virtual.

Board Discussion

Mr. Tomasi asked for comments from the Board.

The Board thanked the public for attending the meeting and speaking about their opinions and encouraged attendance at future meetings.

There was board discussion about following the guidelines for the metrics, changing the metric from fifty to one hundred and if the guidelines were to change to a lower number if the district would still follow that guidance as well.

There was board discussion about being adaptive and fluid due to the ever changing information and guidance with COVID.

Mr. Tomasi clarified changes the board has made and how we got to this point. He understood the concern the community had about the wavering decisions and leadership however the biggest concern is that the virus is fluid and there is a lot of information thrown out there on a day to day basis and the decisions are made based on that. As a healthcare provider the hospital is not full of sick individuals and we are seeing a downward trend. Mr. Tomasi commented that he is fully confident in the health and safety plan in regards to what is keeping everyone safe. It is very concrete and well thought out and we do have specific guidelines for if students or staff get sick. The District is in the yellow phase so if we have a case in our building we have guidelines in place that say what happens. There is no leeway on what happens if there are cases in the district.

Mr. Scheetz explained one of the biggest things that is getting lost is the one hundred metric is based on the county numbers not community numbers. Trying to process those numbers in a

short amount of time is a difficult task and he is proud to come to a meeting to discuss changing the metrics. He commented that the District has a policy that dictates what happens if something happens at our schools. What is going on in our school is not something that would be up for debate. If the District adopts a four week rolling average it helps to give parents more lead time because there will be open communication about the metrics. Mr. Scheetz asked the community for understanding and asked the Board to be fluid and do their best with uncomfortable decisions that need to be made.

Mrs. Eisenhart explained there was an outcry from the community to get together and look at the metrics. When the Department of Education and the Department of Health came out with those numbers it came out right before the last meeting and the Board did not have a chance to digest it. To give our kids the best opportunity we need to be able to change based on what we are learning and what we know.

Mr. Bieber asked Mr. Potteiger to explain the full virtual model compared to the spring virtual model. Mr. Bieber explained that the numbers are decreasing however students were not in school and there is not yet a metric for when students are in school and what it will look like in another month. Mr. Bieber clarified that if the District goes into the red phase any PIAA sports would be canceled.

Mrs. Huhn explained the Board does want to actively listen and represent the broader covering of the community. It is public health we are talking about this isn't about our individual families and kids and it is about the community and broader picture that forces us to think about many other people. The issue becomes how that happens without putting the community and families, parents, staff, administration at risk. The data needs to be monitored and looked at and keep a conservative approach. We try really hard at this district to keep a balance between being supportive and attentive to our staff because without them none of this works. The Board is not dismissive in any way to their voice, needs, and safety. Mrs. Huhn asked the Board if there was consideration of increasing the metric to something other than one hundred.

Mr. Wagaman reminded the Board that fifty was not an arbitrary number it was researched. The Board was all in agreement and now the guidelines changed and everything is unexpected. Nobody can plan and everyone has to adapt as needed. The Board hears everyone's concerns but we also have to be held accountable for the safety of everyone involved, including teachers, community members, and families. If the District is going to follow guidelines we should base it off the one hundred and if it comes back different then there is another meeting to make a new decision.

Mr. Potteiger explained why the Administration used 50/100,000 as the first metric and that the reason we are here tonight is because we are using data to make the decisions. The state let each District figure it out and some districts are not even using numbers and data. After we created our own metrics through research and guidance St. Lukes the State created guidelines for the metrics. Mr. Potteiger explained that the staff have the opportunity for other leaves but our staff and teachers are critical to our education process. The District has phenomenal staff and they have been great to work with and an integral part of how we got to this point. Mr. Potteiger clarified how the health and safety plan addresses transitioning back to a less restrictive phase and explains that gives the board the opportunity to analyze the data and decide if we want to change phases. Mr. Potteiger explained the Spring virtual model was an

asynchronous model vs the current virtual model would be a synchronous model where teachers will be doing live teachers with students of the lessons that way teachers can still connect with students on a regular basis. Mr. Potteiger also explained the District will absolutely accommodate families to the best of our ability but asks for flexibility through the process. The District has to bring new guidelines back to the Board if PDE comes out with new guidance and the health and safety plan must be updated and resubmitted. This is not a hard set in stone document.

Mr. Tomasi asked for public comment and board discussion.

Roll call was taken to accept the Board of Directors Report item Board A.

N Mr. Bieber Dr. Carter Mrs. Eisenhart Mrs. Henry N Mrs. Huhn
 Mr. Scheetz Mr. Tomasi Mr. Wagaman Mrs. Walizer

Motion Carried – 6yeas/2 nays/1 absent

Mr. Tomasi asked for comments from Board members and the public.

Roll call was taken to accept the Board of Directors Report item Board B.

 Mr. Bieber Dr. Carter Mrs. Eisenhart Mrs. Henry Mrs. Huhn
 Mr. Scheetz Mr. Tomasi Mr. Wagaman Mrs. Walizer

Motion Carried – 8yeas/1 absent

OTHER BUSINESS

Mr. Tomasi asked for comments from Board members and the public.

ADJOURNMENT

A motion was made by Mr. wagaman seconded by Mr. Scheetz to adjourn the meeting at 8:06 p.m.

Motion carried with all yeas.

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Approval Date

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Craig Neiman, Board Secretary
Chaydeanne Brunner,
Recording Secretary