

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

October 30, 2020

The Special Meeting of the Board of Directors of the Brandywine Heights Area School District was called to order at 5:05 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: Jennifer Scaffidi (Rockland), Leah Shannon (Mertztown), Bryan Grube (Mertztown), Krista Hohenshilt (Mertztown), Michael Geary (Fleetwood), Leo Scott (Topton), Josh Derstine (Alburtis), Dave Berryman (Fleetwood), Chris Rehrig (Mertztown), Biran Hohenshilt (Mertztown), Ryan Shuey (Topton), Jeremiah McCarty (Longswamp), Michael Houston (Alburtis), David Schwein (Alburtis), Kelly Torres (Topton), Janice Ramirez (Topton), Kate Harms (Breinigsville), Cry McCarty (Longswamp), Robert Eisenahrt (Rockland)

BOARD OF DIRECTORS REPORT

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

A. BHASD Hybrid Educational Model

To approve the District education plan to remain in the Hybrid education model. Future educational plan decisions will be evaluated on a case by case basis including community cases, cases within the School District and transmission of cases within the School District under the direction of the School Board of Directors.

Dr. Rajika Reed, Senior Network Director of Epidemiology & Strategy Community Health & Preventive Medicine and Dr. John Hauth, Senior Network Administrator for Sports Medicine from St. Luke's University Health Network, explained COVID-19 Trends and Data, clarification on community spread, how and why the 100/100,000 metric was chosen, the recovery rate of children compared to adults and the long term effects COVID-19 could have.

Mr. Tomasi questioned if we look at the number of the county or if we also look at other scenarios to make the decision, if the district is relying too heavily on the data, and is there any validity to changing from a county data point to a local data point.

Mrs. Huhn asked about the recovery rate of 80% that Dr. Reed spoke about and how that is linked to school aged children. She also asked if there is updated information on the long term effects of COVID-19.

Dr. Reed explained it is very evident that numbers are moving in an upward direction. The data should only be one piece of the decision because there are so many other factors that should be considered. What is being seen in our region is a lot of people commuting and transient within different counties. We have only known about COVID-19 for nine (9) months so our knowledge is very limited, and we are still learning about the disease. What we are telling you is what we know right now we cannot predict what is going to happen. It affects children differently than adults but there is not enough information to make those projections.

The board thanked Dr. Reed and Dr. Hauth for attending the meeting and giving the guidance and expertise on COVID-19.

Board Discussion

Mrs. Eisenhart thanked everyone who has reached out to the board members about the decision to stay hybrid or go virtual. The decision is being made for the whole community, not just one family. IF the model were to be changed it would be based on the board's decision. Brandywine Heights is not trying to be a follower of the other school districts.

We said in the beginning, the plan had to be fluid and change as we go. We have been in this longer than we thought with less cases than expected. One thing that was mentioned is Brandywine isn't being a leader. Mrs. Eisenhart explained she thinks a true leader is looking at all the data and making change when it is needed and when things are difficult. Some community members have asked how they can trust the Board when decisions keep changing but there might need to be a change dependent on new guidelines and new data. We didn't know what reopening a school during a pandemic was going to look like and now we are adjusting like a true leader would do.

Mr. Bieber was concerned that the special meeting was called so last minute and some board members were not informed right away. It is hard to be able to evaluate a decision with such little notice. He is also concerned that every plan that the District has come up with to this point has folded and changed, from the first day of school with the plan that was in place we should have started virtually but the plan was changed and everyone went back to school in a hybrid model. Everyone knew Berks County numbers were going to increase and the meeting should have been called prior to a Thursday evening. He was also concerned for the families in the District needing to change plans to accommodate a virtual schedule on short notice. Mr. Bieber asked for clarification of what a full virtual environment will look like.

A full virtual learning environment will be a teacher livestreaming teaching sessions to their students. There will be break out sessions so students can connect with their peers and teachers on an individual basis if needed. Under no circumstance will students be in front of the screen the entire day. It is designed to be developmentally appropriate.

Mr. Scheetz understood the frustration some of the board members expressed. Many of the emails board members have been getting have been about the District not following through with the original plan. The first change was due to receiving better information and data to make a more informed decision. Now Board members are receiving this outpouring of emails about people wanting the District to remain open in a hybrid phase however the numbers that we are seeing in the county are not supporting that decision. The spread of the virus is at a point where it is going to be difficult to figure out where a positive case is coming from which makes this a dangerous situation. Mr. Scheetz suggested forming a committee to really look at the data and try to come up with a better plan. Mr. Beiber was right that we have known this surge of cases was coming and we need to stick with the plan as it is written until something better is recommended.

Mr. Wagaman commented that the plan was to keep faculty and students safe and the district has done an outstanding job doing so. Where he sees struggles is not the safety aspect however the education side of the plan. The quality of education that is being conducted may not be the best and most conducive for our students. His biggest concern in this outside of the safety of students, is if we go fully virtual there will be a lot of students struggling more so than they already are. He is concerned about elementary school students sitting in front of their computer for eight (8) hours learning how to read and write. He suggested remaining hybrid for a few more weeks and using Wednesdays as a test day for virtual instruction. The hope moving forward is to continue with the rigor of the education process.

Mr. Tomasi asked for differences between virtual learning and hybrid learning. He doesn't think the rigor is there for the hybrid model and thinks students need to have more time with their teachers. A group of stakeholders is a good idea to look into alternative ideas for the health and safety plan.

Virtual learning will increase the time students have with their teachers and all of their sessions will be live synchronous lessons. There was discussion about bandwidth that allows

Mr. Scheetz asked for the cost that would be associated with upgrading the District bandwidth and how long it would take to implement.

To upgrade the bandwidth it would cost approximately \$60,000 and it would take two to three months to make those changes.

Mrs. Huhn suggested that a detailed proposal to upgrade bandwidth be put in front of the board at the administration's earliest convenience. From a board member perspective it is an easy yes for investing those dollars to get that working immediately so it improves students educational experience. Part of good leadership is being able to proactively address and respond to change. She questioned if there was something that happened in the past week that would make the other board members want to move and stay in the hybrid model and not go virtual. The district is reacting to a surge of cases in the county and things are getting worse. No one thinks that virtual

learning is the most ideal option but based off the data it is a good idea to be proactive and have our students learn virtually. There has been no additional guidelines suggested to be able to keep the students in the buildings. Mrs. Huhn asked for clarification on the agenda item and what the board is approving besides the district staying in hybrid. How the item reads is a significant change because the district has been data driven since the beginning and the agenda item is throwing out the data and basing the decisions off somebody's assessment of if it is safe or not. Mrs. Huhn likes the idea of the committee being created, they will be tasked with coming up with suggestions, ideas and procedures to make the health and safety plan better to help drive the decision making during the pandemic.

Mrs. Eisenhart has been a full proponent of keeping kids in school from beginning. There are many things that need to be looked at when making a decision. There has never been a need for a plan like this to be put in place and there is going to be trial and error. We came up with what we thought was right but now Dr. Reed said we can't just go off the number. The District is keeping our kids and the teachers safe. There are many things that could be implemented to continue to keep everyone safe but we cannot just look at the numbers and nothing else.

The current motion speaks to the other factors that should be taken into account when deciding what phase the district should be moving to. It allows us to not have to base the decision solely off of the county numbers since the local numbers haven't been close to what the county is seeing.

Mr. Scheetz commented that if a committee is going to be formed it will need to be done quickly. The motion is written without clear statements which could be dangerous because that lets the decisions solely up to the school board members without any data or information to take into consideration. He thinks the best thing to do would be to continue with the current model and return in a few weeks after the review committee has been put together and comes up with a new plan.

Mr. Tomasi clarified the policy for calling a special board meeting. If there are three (3) board members who ask to have a special meeting, as long as there are twenty-four (24) hours given prior to the date of the meeting, the school board president must abide by that request. Mr. Tomasi likes the idea of the review committee and questioned what stakeholders would be included.

The Department of Health is putting the school districts in the state in a terrible position because there is no guidance and each district must make the decision for themselves. Mr. Potteiger will form a stakeholder committee to review the health and safety plan. The committee will look like the committee that was formed over the summer but smaller and tighter knit.

Mrs. Walizer explained board members are being flooded with emails from community members begging us to stay in a hybrid model. The voices of the community need to be heard. We are all out in the community and exposing ourselves to this virus and taking a chance to even go to the store. Parents who are scared had the choice to send their students to virtual academy. The numbers in the school district prove the staff are doing whatever they can to keep our children safe. Mrs. Walizer is worried about the number of kids who will be home alone if we transition to virtual. The health and safety plan needs to be fluid and ever changing and put faith in the amazing Administration team at Brandywine Heights to make the decision to close if needed.

Mr. Tomasi asked that it be noted in the minutes that Dr. Carter joined the meeting at 5:30pm.

Mr. Tomasi asked for any additional board comment.

Mrs. Huhn and Mr. Bieber advocated for the investment in technology and bandwidth for the district. This is something different than we have ever experienced and there is support for spending money on items that will allow for the highest quality education to be given to our students. Mrs. Huhn also suggested if a committee is convened for them to look at what other districts are doing for their younger student population because they will be the ones who will struggle the most in a virtual environment. She also encouraged families who are struggling to reach out for help, the district has so many staff members willing to help however they can so we can get through these challenging times.

Public Comment

Mr. Tomasi asked for comments from the public.

Jen Scaffidi (Rockland) was happy about hybrid learning because she felt it was safer than full in-person instruction. She is unhappy with the progress students are making in this hybrid plan. The bulk of time is spent taking attendance. This week alone she heard her children talking about topics that were not focused on their education during their live sessions. After attending Mr. Farina's information session this week she believes virtual learning will be a better approach because it will focus on the students' education they are receiving.

Leah Shannon (Mertztown) supports moving to a virtual environment if it is going to help the students in the district but what is going to work for certain children is not going to work for others. She questioned what will happen for children who need learning support and one on one contact with the teachers. A video chat is not the same as being in front of a teacher and her children are struggling. It is easier for some children to be able to ask questions and let teachers know they are not understanding something in person. Ms. Shannon is not hearing discussion about what the students and parents are comfortable with. The District should survey families to see what they are comfortable with and take that into consideration.

Bryan Grube (Rockland), has two (2) children in the high school. Mr. Grube supports the continued hybrid method of learning however understands the validity of sticking with the district's plan. This would allow time for the Administration and the Board to come up with an additional plan. Mr. Grube is uncomfortable using Berks County numbers because the county's communities are so diverse. He suggested using data from the townships that are in the district. He also commented that the metric is always going to be lagging so spending the time and effort on coming up with the perfect metric is not worth it. Mr. Grube likes the idea of creating a committee and suggested there be a support group for teaching staff that are struggling during this time. If a majority of students in a class are failing that should be a red flag that the teacher needs additional support. Mr. Grube thanked the Board and the Administration for the organized way of handling the pandemic and the health and safety plan and for doing a terrific job compared to other districts in the county.

Krista Hohenshilt (Rockland) appreciates the difficulty of the decision the district needs to make. Mrs. Hohenshilt asked the Board to reconsider the 100/100,000 metric and use Berks County as the metric and to instead use the metrics of the local zip codes. The metrics from the county will skew the numbers. Please consider the education and social aspect for children that comes with

moving to a virtual environment. There are consequences that could be detrimental to students both socially and educationally and will increase the stress levels of not only the students but parents as well. Mrs. Hohenshilt urges the Board to send a survey out to families to find out what they would prefer. She is in support of keeping children in a hybrid model and moving to a full in-person environment as soon as possible, especially for elementary school students. Younger aged children are the most affected, and they are not getting the social interaction they need virtually.

Josh Derstine (Alburtis) thanked Mr. Bieber for advocating for sticking to the plan that was agreed upon. He suggested going full virtual for a marking period to keep consistency and because of the unknowns that will be arising. Mr. Derstine commented that he knows this is a struggle and not fun but sometimes we have to do what is not fun and what is best. The health and safety plan that was put in place was a good way for kids to learn how to educate themselves. He encouraged the board to keep the plan and see how well it works.

Dave Berryman (Rockland) appreciates the board members and everyone who has attended the meetings. The District has done an excellent job keeping kids safe, and he supports staying in the hybrid plan at least temporarily to keep consistency for the children and the families, specifically for students in BCTC.

Chris Rehrig (Mertztown) appreciates the colorful discussion amongst board members. My belief is that you are at the receiving end of failures of leadership at the state and national level. Mr. Rehrig sympathizes with the position the district is in trying to come up with a plan. The lack of data and metrics in the agenda item is concerning and the comment about legal liability shouldn't be discussed because the issue we are looking at is the health and safety of our children. We should recognize that our actions impact others and if we want to respect medical professionals, we need to act proactively and in advance. Certainly there is a lot of stress on families however it is no longer about you as a parent it is about your children. Complaining about it isn't going to change anything. Another factor is asymptomatic carriers, people could have the virus and not know. There is a lack of control in the community such as not wearing masks is unacceptable.

Bryan Hohenshilt (Rockland) With great freedom comes great responsibility, if people were that scared then they would not be going anywhere else. Parent's who are fearful of the virus had the option to send their students to virtual academy, it is not right to have to put everyone else's life on hold because some people are scared.

Ryan Shuey (Topton) has two students in the District, one is third grade and one is first grade. His biggest concern is this is the first time he has been able to voice his concerns to anyone. Mr. Shuey suggested there be somewhere that parents can voice their concerns. Maybe they need to happen more often. Extremely time-consuming. He explained he cannot work right now because of the hybrid model and needing to stay at home with his children to help them with their work. This is a tough time for families. He suggested not basing the metrics off Berks County. The population throughout the county is not the same and the statistics will be skewed because of Reading. It is horrible that there has been no direction from the state. He questioned the severity of the virus and how it is affecting children. The bandwidth issue and how the District can improve it should have been discussed months ago. Although teachers are going above and beyond offering everything they can to students and teachers are struggling. A total of one hour a day is not enough and there needs to be more time spent with the teacher. Mr. Shuey is in favor

of the District moving to a green phase to support full in-person instruction and is interested to see how things change in the coming months.

Jeremiah McCarty (Longswamp) commented that the legal liability of the district should not have been discussed. The numbers are rising due to people outside of school not following guidelines and transmitting it between each other, as a result when children go back into school it could be transmitted. The best thing is for people to be careful outside of school and a lot of people's actions are not showing that. Mr. McCarty is in favor of sticking with the current health and safety plan that the district has come up with instead of a thrown together open-ended proposal. If new information comes out that changes anything then it should be brought to attention but there hasn't been new information since the last time the plan was adjusted.

Michael Houston (Longswamp) agrees and disagrees with statements that have been made during the meeting and thinks what has been done in the past few months and moving forward is pioneering. Mr. Houston commented that we are living and working in a fluid world and this has to be a fluid decision. The intention is to support the students and staff and is in support of the current hybrid model. Despite the efforts of the teachers and Administration the students are not getting education in the hybrid model. The main concern is the health and the safety of the students and staff however the education of the students is still paramount in our concerns. What you have done as a board and an Administration team has been exceptional, you have kept the children in school safe and healthy while trying to give them the best education they can get at this time.

David Schwein (Alburtis) the conversation tonight has brought up things that I haven't thought about before. Mr. Schwein called the Superintendent at Hamburg School District and asked what the numbers look like with their students having full in-person instruction. They have had two (2) students and two (2) staff with positive cases. The students need to be back in school for their own health and safety. Mr. Schwein asked if anyone has referenced a study that has looked at the harm of students not being in school and if that has been taken into consideration. He also asked how many kids under the age of twenty (20) have been hospitalized in Berks County. Our kids are safe in the school and to date we have only had three (3) positive tests for COVID-19.

Kelly Torres (Topton) spoke to the Board as a mother of twins in the District that chose to put her children in virtual academy but also as a healthcare provider that takes care of critically ill COVID-19 patients. The experience I have gone through and the strain I am under as a healthcare provider was indescribable which was the driving factor of choosing virtual academy for my children. It is hard for people to understand that the virus is real and out there and it affects people very differently. Although people are saying there hasn't been a lot of cases we are going to see an increase and there will be a surge. Whatever decision is made, do it for the health and safety of the students and families.

Ramirez (Topton) Students have suffered immensely during the shut down in the spring and I think the school has done an amazing job at socially distancing, wearing masks and sanitizing. Ms. Ramirez is in support of the hybrid plan and thinks the students need to be in the classroom. A virtual environment is not anywhere close to the education students get in person. If you look around the community and at the parks you will see children playing. If community spread is the issue then parks are one of the problems. The district should not be using Berks County numbers because Brandywine is such a small community and it doesn't represent our district correctly.

Topton as a whole is a very small community there is not a problem locally as long as there is no big outbreak.

Kate Harms (Longswamp) one of the voices for the parents who are not speaking as much. Ms. Harms is in support of continuing with the current health and safety plan. Some parents like the plan and want to follow the plan. She felt secure in the plan because it was based on data and felt the hybrid plan as working. The county has surpassed the one hundred (100) limit, and we will not get a break from increased numbers for a while due to the holidays. We as a society have not controlled it. School district shouldn't be brought into the rest of Berks. These other places are all part of our community. Ms. Harms doesn't think moving away from the plan at this point in time is a good idea. Contact tracing right now is easy but as we continue on it is going to be harder as cases increase. She does not think it is wise to have the children in-person between the holidays. Moving forward the District needs to keep up with the diligence of making sure the guidelines, such as mask wearing and social distancing, are being followed. Ms. Harms expressed her concern that the District moves in the direction of not including metrics and data in the health and safety plan.

Cry McCarty (Longswamp) parents had the decision to put their children in Virtual Academy if they did not feel safe. I have been to every school board meeting and made the decision to keep my children in school based off the school board and their decisions and will continue to have faith in the School Board. I can tell you I am also an employee of the district and am in the buildings every day. Teachers are doing an amazing job. The plan looks good on paper and parents are super excited that kids are wearing masks and being socially distanced, but they are not all always six feet apart. Everyone cannot be pleased when making a decision for the District. The hybrid plan is great but it needs a lot of work. Children could be in every class but if they do not fill out the attendance form they will be marked absent. In some classes one child will dominate the entire fifteen minutes of learning. The plan that is put into place needs to be followed through with. At the last special board meeting when one of the board members asked if we will follow the guidelines when it doesn't suit the District the community was told yes but now we are trying to change the plan. Ms. McCarty also suggested spending the money to get the ability to livestream in the classrooms because that will make a huge difference for our children.

Robert Eisenhart (Rockland) thanked the Board and the Administration for having the meeting on a Friday evening. He announced in full disclosure that he is the husband of Board member Alexis Eisenhart. Mr. Eisenhart asked if anyone has looked into the long term effects of students not being in schools. He cited two articles about school students and the coronavirus surge. They are being treated as a binary decision and it is not. The virtual education system lacks and is cheating children of a proper education. We need to start asking how we can keep children safe and fully in school.

Mr. Potteiger explained the Administration is constantly evaluating the health and safety plan. We have been in school for approximately forty-five (45) days. As a community and board please know we are very conscientious about everything that is going on and strive to make the best decisions for the students and staff.

Board Discussion

Mr. Tomasi asked for comments from the Board.

Mrs. Huhn questioned if the District should follow the current plan and not approve this motion what the impact of BCTC students would be, as well as extracurricular activities and transportation. She also questioned if there are timelines put into place in the health and safety plan and if the motion would not pass would we move to a virtual environment as of Monday.

Mr. Potteiger explained the essential understanding is if students cannot come to school it is not safe for the other activities such as athletics and extracurriculars. BCTC students would also follow a virtual schedule if the District were to move to a virtual environment.

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

Motion not carried – 3 yeas, 6 nays

OTHER BUSINESS

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

ADJOURNMENT

A motion was made by Mr. Bieber seconded by Mrs. Henry to adjourn the meeting at 8:28 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