

Board of Education Special Meeting August 11, 2020

During time for the public to be heard, the following was expressed:

- Blue/green schedule very challenging for working parents. Please make a fixed schedule.
- Is social distancing possible in high schools? I want to hear a real plan.
- As a teacher, I need to understand if I am at risk, how can I ask to work remotely
- We may want to use this as an opportunity to expand our distance learning so that when we go back to the classroom full-time we cannot have snow days, but distance days.

After many parents expressed frustration about the every other day schedule and asked for a fixed day-of-the-week schedule, Andy George addressed the issue. He said clearly that they have evaluated it from every angle and a fixed schedule means that one of the groups will miss out on many more school days than the other group. It just doesn't add up on the calendar when you plan it out that way. To be equitable and have children in school regularly, this is the plan that works best.

Dr. Lucero opened with an anecdote to express where they are with the planning for the upcoming year. Let's say your family was going on vacation and needed to decide if they were going to France, Spain or Honduras. After much discussion and some research, you decided to go to Spain. Now you have a lot of hard work to do to figure out what cities, how you get from one place to another, what hotel to stay at, what sites to visit and restaurants to eat at. This is where the district is. Much hard work needs to be done in the month ahead.

Dr. Lucero expressed appreciation that state required districts to go through developing all three options and review them with medical professionals. This provided the opportunity to really talk about ability to social distance with health advisors.

Dr. Lucero presented the [SPS 2020-2021 Reopening Plan](#). There have been some changes to the plan since it was initially posted; updated versions are available online. Distance Teaching and Learning Academy information has been changed. The document will constantly change. Updated PDF here:

https://www.stamfordpublicschools.org/sites/g/files/vyhlf3841/f/uploads/sps_2020-2021_reopening_plan_08-11-2020_v2.pdf

-

Here are notes from Dr. Lucero's presentation & the Q & A from the Board thereafter:

- Contact tracing will be when you are with someone for more than 15 minutes.
- Currently going over each floor plan with each principal: where we have 6 feet and where we don't, we won't use those classrooms where we don't.
- Classrooms will be emptied by at least half and more, as other students might choose Distance Learning Academy.
- Understand parents are concerned about the blue/green model. They selected it very thoughtfully. They vetted it with teachers, principals, across the board everyone wanted to go with this one because it was best for the children/students. Tamu then asked Kendra Brown, who oversees childcare for the Task Force, to reach out to community partners and they put together a lot of childcare options, as well as in school ROSCCO. This is the best plan for the health and safety of the children and it the most educationally sound.
- The length of the day is the regular school day length.
- Very close to be able to share what Hybrid Plan looks like. Live instruction, recorded instruction. When will parents know what the instruction will look like? We have cameras in the classroom, can't capture everything. Can't see everything on white board unless share screen. Audio challenges as well. Testing broadband. Will system handle? As soon as we have answers we will share.
- Specialists in the building this week working on extra curriculars.
- Cleaning plan is being worked on this week.
- Sports? Colleagues say if home learning, then why come to school for sports. Tamu doesn't have an issue, but wants to know about CIAC sports decision before making a decision.
- How is the decision going to be made about which children are going to be invited to come 5x a week for special ed, ELL, etc. They are looking at this now. New arrivals, especially.
- 1st Student bus service is committed to getting transportation right for Stamford. Pat Williams will be adjusting the routes as needed if some areas don't have capacity and others do.
- Associate Superintendent Michael Fernandez will be helping all families understand the protocol for what happens when someone tests positive for COVID.
- Assessments on children who did not receive assessments last year will be happening soon.
- Start of year assessments complicated due to last year's closing. Tamu acknowledged support at the state level; CT has been providing guidance on how we do this—assess. They are also providing resources parents can use to

get a handle on where your child is. The state has done a phenomenal job preparing us for assessments.

- 2500 families will get free broadband in the home.
- The 1 to 1 devices will not be in SPS in September. They were able to get a shipment of 1500 from Staples, but many devices may be delayed until December. They will ask families whose children have a device to bring those to school in the meantime.
- Families will need to be patient as we deal with the puzzle. Really complicated puzzle of making up classrooms and groups.
- Apples Preschool has a different plan, information will be coming soon.
- BOE member Fritz Chery asked if the BOE gets to vote on whether we are in-person, hybrid or distance. Fritz said hybrid was his last choice. He then asked if the Superintendent could choose to distance learn through September and phase in to Hybrid thereafter. Tamu said that the Superintendent would have the ability to do that. Tamu said that any district that chose 100% distance would have to make a petition to the state, formally present a case and get permission. Tamu says it is safe to open schools on the hybrid model.
- What happens when we drop our kid off at school on the wrong day? The district is looking into getting the bus to bring student to alternate location (home or childcare).
- BOE rep Nicola Tarzia asked about the every-other-day schedule and said that he has heard from parents that it doesn't work. BOE rep Jackie Heftman addressed him and said that she had personally gone through the calendar trying a variety of combinations and finds that there really isn't another option. Fixed days means that it is not equitable and sometimes kids would miss a week of school in the middle of the fall for no reason.

After the presentation, the Board voted on resolutions to add three, new, full-time staff positions. They did not approve two of the positions: A Coordinator of Distance Teaching and Learning (sort of a principal for the Distance Teaching and Learning Academy) or a Technology Integration and Support Specialist. This created a pretty big stir. Below is the gist of some of the BOE positions in the argument:

- Tamu explained that they had not been able to fund these positions previously, but because they are so necessary, she reached out to the Alliance grant program officers to see if they could make an exception. She was pleased to report they had. The Distance Teaching and Learning Academy needs someone to deal with parents, discipline, teacher concerns, administration, etc. The district has no idea how many children could be in the Academy—potentially

thousands. And there is no one in the district who has dealt with this kind of technology integration: cameras in classrooms, livestreaming, whatever the distance learning academy comes up with as a plan, etc. So, these positions are really needed and she is overjoyed that the grant makers would be able to be flexible.

- As you can see on the attached Agenda with Documents (also here: https://www.stamfordpublicschools.org/sites/g/files/vyhlf3841/f/agendas/08.11.20_special_agenda_wdocuments_0.pdf), those two FTE positions were tied into the same resolution as another position (AVID teacher SPS & WHS). The commonality is that these were all Alliance Grant funded. BOE Rep Fritz Chery made a motion to separate the three positions and vote on them each separately. When asked "Why?" by Mr. George, he said he was not in favor of all three. They separated the three positions and voted one at a time. The two positions I discuss in the bullet above are the ones that failed to pass.
- BOE rep Dr. Hammon voted no. She said that she was not ready to vote on these, it's a lot of money for two administrators. She also said that we should have had these positions weeks ago. We won't be able to get good people for these positions now. Mr. George and Mrs. Heftman reminded her that there was no money for these positions before today and we only decided on Hybrid on Friday. Dr. Hammon needs more time to think.
- Mrs. Pioli asked about the term length on the positions. She also mentioned that she had other questions, which she was unable to ask because board members called the question.
- Mrs. Heftman expressed disappointment. How are we going to put together a distance learning program without these positions? Don't you trust that if Tamu and Amy Beldotti tell us this is what they need then this is what they need? What is the alternative? What do you recommend? If we are telling the Superintendent we don't want to move forward with her idea, we need to come up with our own. Shame on us. She was very upset.
- Mayor Martin spoke up and said that he believed that those who voted no (Tarzia, Chery, Pioli, Altamara, Hammon) seem to just need more time and let's give them a couple of days. It is clear that the district needs these asap.

The new policies were also voted on.