

**Union Area School District**  
New Castle, Pennsylvania  
Public Board Meeting Minutes  
Union Area Board of School Directors  
July 28, 2020

The Union Area Board of School Directors met in public session on July 28, 2020 in the MS/HS Board Room for a Special Meeting at 6:30 PM. The following persons were in attendance:

**Board Members:**

Dr. Michael Hink (Remote)  
Mr. Donald Friend (Remote)  
Ms. Debra Allebach (Remote)  
Mr. John Bertolino (Remote)  
Mr. Arin Biondi (Remote)  
Ms. Roxanne Exposito (Remote)  
Mr. Robert Mrozek  
Mr. John Pacella (Remote)  
Ms. Elizabeth A. Sylvester (Remote)

**Administrators:**

Dr. Michael Ross, Superintendent  
Ms. Linda O'Neill (Remote)  
Mr. Scott O' Donnell (Remote)  
Ms. Samantha Laverty, Business Mgr./Board Sec. (Remote)

**Media:** N/A

**Solicitor:** Lou Perrotta, Esq. (Remote)

**Public:** Nikki Hammet and Valerie Pavelko

**Board Members Not Present:** 0

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**Call to Order**

Dr. Hink called the meeting to order at 6:36 PM.

**Pledge of Allegiance**

Dr. Hink requested those in attendance to join in the salute to the flag at 6:36 P.M.

**Public Comment on Agenda Items (6:38 PM)**

Dr. Hink called for public comment at 6:38 PM. There was no public comment prior to informational items were discussed.

**Informational Items (6:41 PM)**

A. COVID -19 & Health & Safety Plan

Dr. Ross explained the return to school plan. Dr. Ross indicated that the plan the Board is approving allows the District to give parent choice with providing a safe return for students whose parents are comfortable with mitigation from the District such as social distancing, mandatory masks (unless student is unable), increased custodial cleaning, walking patterns in the High School in-between classes, lunches, transportation, etc.

Dr. Ross further explained if parents were uncomfortable with sending students back to the buildings, the plan allows for synchronized and a-synchronized learning from home. The teacher would teach live from the classroom allowing the student to see the lesson as if he/she were in the building. Parents have the choice to change their minds with proper notice and approval from the District.

Dr. Ross also explained what is not on the agenda or in the plan but must also be decided is the calendar change to the District 2020-21 calendar. Dr. Ross indicated the need to properly train teachers with the new online instruction and asked the Board to delay the start of school to as early as September 8, 2020 but no later than October 5, 2020. Dr. Ross indicated if the Board decided to delay the building start date to October 5, 2020 this would allow more time for data and decision making but he also feels the staff and Administration will be prepared as early as September 8, 2020 to educate. Dr. Ross clarified if the Board decided to delay the start within the buildings, then the online instruction still start September 8, 2020.

6:48 PM – Nikki Hammet (217 English Avenue) questioned football and continuing sports but not starting on time and how this works?

Dr. Ross explained that the PIAA regulates the sports and the District follows those guidelines with mitigation plans. Dr. Ross all indicated that the sport teams are groups far less than building enrollment and a shorter duration of time.

6:52 PM John Pacella – Wanted to clarify that Dr. Ross would be ready and staff would be trained to start synchronized learning on September 8, 2020.

Dr. Ross clarified how synchronized learning would work and feels confident the teachers will be ready.

6:55 PM – Valeria Pavelko (516 Avon) Asked Dr. Ross how the online instruction would look for Elementary specifically and working parents.

Dr. Ross indicated lessons would be recorded so if a child is unable to attend live instruction there would be an opportunity at a later time to view the lessons. This would also allow for more room in the classrooms if some children did online education.

Pavelko – Asked about cleaning and when this would happen?

Dr. Ross explained the policies and procedures on cleaning.

Hammet – Stated students need schedules and the online learning is not as effective then in the building with teachers. She does not support or want the start date pushed back.

Mrozek – Asked Dr. Ross to clarify his recommendation

Dr. Ross indicated that the safest plan is October 5, 2020 with having the most information but he is also comfortable with September 8, 2020 or anywhere in-between the two dates.

The Board had dialog from each individual and their opinions and support for the various start dates.

Mrozek advocated for the start of school and cited various institutions and data such as American Pediatrics, CDC, and Buck County and questioned the Board on why they are putting off the start of school? Mrozek further explained that the community voted in the survey and the Board should be doing what the survey results asked.

Friend – Agrees with Mrozek and indicates they are voted to have a say for the community and this is what the community wants so we should start August 26, 2020.

Allebach – The Superintendent and Administration has worked diligently on a plan to return to school. Allebach indicated her concern with student and teachers. She liked the plan of October 5, 2020 to have more time to see how things look.

Sylvester – Supports Administration and Dr. Ross and wants to go with the recommendation of October 5, 2020.

Biondi – stated for the record that Dr. Ross confirm that the Administration is recommending a start date of no earlier than September 8, 2020 and no later than October 5, 2020. Mr. Biondi also asked Dr. Ross if October 5, 2020 would allow more time for Administration to collect data that can be useful to the Administration.

Dr. Ross verified that he recommends those two dates or anywhere in-between and the later of the dates would allow for Administration to plan and use more data.

Biondi – stated since October 5, 2020 would allow more time to plan for the Administration and have more accurate data from other schools, he feels more comfortable with that date. In addition if something were to happen with a shut down by the State then the entire student body would have been trained to use the virtual instruction and seamlessly go back if we had to.

Mrozek - indicated the Board is acting in fear and he feels if October 5, 2020 is the plan now, then it will be pushed back again.

After further discussions Dr. Hink called for a motion to add Addenda item 1 to the agenda for a change in the District Calendar to start online instruction on September 8, 2020 and return to the school buildings on October 5, 2020.

Allebach motioned to add to agenda. Pacella seconded.

Dr. Hink called for public comment.

Hammet – indicated 9 people are making the decision for an entire District and majority do not have students attending.

Roll Call – 6 Yes 3 No (Mrozek, Bertolino, Friend). The motion carried.

#### **Action Items (7:33 PM)**

Allebach moved to approve the Health & Safety Plan as proposed for the 2020-2021 school year. Sylvester seconded (9 yes). The motion carried.

Allebach moved to approve Myers Equipment Corporation in the amount of \$52,843 for a 9 passenger van as received through bids on July 22, 2020. Exposito seconded (9 yes). The motion carried.

Pacella moved to change the District calendar start date to September 8, 2020 and the Health & Safety Plan to reflect this start date with online instruction until October 5, 2020 at which time students can return to the buildings. Sylvester seconded (6 yes, 3 No – Bertolino, Mrozek, Friend).

#### **New Business (7:46 PM)**

There was no new business brought before the Board.

#### **Adjourn (7:48PM)**

Allebach moved to adjourn the regular meeting at 7:48 PM. Sylvester seconded (9 yes). The motion carried.