

Union Area School District
New Castle, Pennsylvania
Public Board Meeting Minutes
Union Area Board of School Directors
August 10, 2020

The Union Area Board of School Directors met in public session on August 10, 2020 on the Football Field for a Special Informational Meeting at 7:00 PM. The following persons were in attendance:

Board Members:

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

Administrators:

Dr. Michael Ross, Superintendent
Dr. Scott O'Donnell, Curriculum Director
Ms. Linda O'Neill (Remote)
Mr. Rob Nogay, MS/HS Principal
Ms. Marisa Federici, Director of Special Education
Ms. Samantha Lavery, Business Mgr. /Board Sec.

Media: N/A

Solicitor: Lou Perrotta, Esq. (Remote)

Public: See attached Sign-In Sheet

Board Members Not Present: 0

Call to Order

Dr. Hink called the meeting to order at 7:02 PM.

Pledge of Allegiance

Dr. Hink requested those in attendance to join in the salute to the flag at 7:02P.M.

Roll Call (7:04 PM)

Dr. Hink called for roll call at 7:04 PM.

Informational Items (7:051 PM)

- A. Dr. Hink welcomed the crowd and explained the School Board Policies and Procedures for the evening.
- B. COVID -19 & Health & Safety Plan

Dr. Ross explained the return to school plan. Dr. Ross indicated that the plan the Board approved 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. This would be different from what the District provided in the spring. Dr. Ross indicated that the District is planning for the virtual option whereas in the spring we had no time.

Dr. Ross stated two options were his recommendation for the Start of School to be no earlier than September 8, 2020 and no later than October 5, 2020. The Board decided on the later start date but the plan is still approved and parents still have choice and therefore, no Board member made a decision outside his recommendations and was not overruled.

Public Comment (7:20 PM)

Tiffany Rosta – Supported the Board decision with her experience in healthcare. Also discussed some concerns for policies and procedures if a child or staff member is symptomatic and allowing time to plan.

Pamela Brown – Healthcare Worker who agreed with the plan and that the virus is real and a threat. One child is one too many. She explained the work behind tracking exposures, risk factors, and how we do not know enough about the virus yet.

Larry Brown – Indicated his recommendation is to delay until January 1, 2021. Leadership is about tough decisions and this is one of those situations. Do not use kids for examples and make the tough decision.

Kelly Peace – Expressed her concerns with the survey and what majority of the community wanted. Did not agree with the delayed start and provided an example with her own son and the hardships of virtual learning for working parents. Ms. Peace also indicated that the online learning at the end of the school year was not acceptable.

Dr. Ross – Explained that at the end of the year there was no time for preparation. However, the District is planning a new virtual learning that will be watching live teachers from the classroom and will look nothing like the spring.

7:35 PM

Dana Cucitrone- Explained her concerns with the delay and how parents are expected to educate with smaller children at home and distractions. Ms. Cucitrone also wanted clarification on who is filmed and not filmed and seen on the camera.

Dr. Ross addressed what live instruction will look like and how the teacher can see students but when students return to the building and the teacher is being recorded no student will be recorded.

Joseph Gunn – Adamant to get back to school and normal but realistic of the situation and supports the Administration on this decision. However, when the students return he asks that Administration and Board of Education stay true to parent choice.

Lisa Cameron – Frontline Worker with COVID-19 in the healthcare field. Discussed the increased cases and the tracking of numbers, traveling, and her concerns on why children are not returning to school. Ms. Cameron indicated that the District is able to properly social distance and volunteered to take temperatures if needed.

Jessica Kosciuszko - Thanks the Administration for their hard work and time on the plan. Indicated she too had voted full time but started to have questions as the time got closer to opening. Shared her personal experience with COVID-19 and how it impacted her and her family. Feels the plan allows the District to take a month and see what happens.

Sherri Pagley – Questioned where the District received their information and who they spoke to regarding their plan?

Dr. Hink – Information was gathered daily (and still occurring). The superintendents discuss this information daily as well as information from the Pennsylvania Department of Education.

Drew McDowell – Thanks the Board for having the meeting to allow parents to express their concerns. However, she does not feel the information provided on the surveys were not valued since the Board went against the majority. The plan leaves working parents with a burden. Ms. McDowell also questioned the daycare students and how online learning will be achieved.

7:54 PM

Ed McDowell – Wanted to know what will happen in 30 days if we wait to find out and will the Board continue to hold kids out of the buildings?

Nikki Hamett – Does not agree with the decision and indicated this will not just end one day. Asked the Board to rethink and revote to return the students back to the classrooms and not delay the start.

Bob Thomas – We need to get back to normal. How can you have sports but no education?

Damian Cassano – Does not agree with the virtual learning. Discussed the Hybrid plan and questioned Dr. Ross if students who are brought back through online education will be brought up to speed at Union.

Dr. Ross – Data supports cyber education schools are not as effective as brick and Mortar but does not have the exact statistics.

8:02 PM

Nick Lutz – Disagrees with the School Board and thanks Dr. Ross for the parent choice. Asked that information like this should be shared on an all call.

Dana Mastroainni – Indicated the students are together outside the building so she did not see a problem for returning to in the building. Also questioned fall sports and how that happens with no education.

Destiny Lee – Concerned for who will take care of her children while she works and still provide the education.

Michelle Shilderly – Concerns with bus transportation and who is responsible for those students to sit in seats, wear masks, and social distance? Will there be increased District personnel?

Dr. Hink explained there is a plan in place for transportation.

Heather Strickler – Supports the Board and their decision. She feels the time can be valuable to see what happens at other Districts and a few weeks will not hurt the kids in the long run.

Greg Townsell – Educator and Pastor with 6 children said he understands the position of the District using caution.

8:27 PM

Mrozek – The Board has wasted the time of parents by surveying and not listening to what they want. There are only 1 or 2 schools not starting on time and we are the smallest and most capable to social distance. Mr. Mrozek thanked the parents for coming to voice their concerns and will make the motion to vote at the next meeting.

Sylvester – (Audio was in and out) Supports the district decision and will stand by her vote.

Biondi – Respects the opinions of others and the polarizing topic with everyone's stress levels high. His vote was only to delay in hopes we can get more data to make a better decision and adjust plans if needed. He respects all the opinions of the people and that is why he loves this community. However, his role on this board is for the safety of all students.

Allebach – Respects all opinions and wants more data and errors on the side of caution. Safety for our students is the main concern as well as our staff so she will stand by her vote.

8:37 PM

Hink – Thanks all the parents and community members who showed up and allowed for any questions. Dr. Hink also indicated the New Castle News is the means of Advertisement as well as the District Website.

Adjourn (8:40PM)

Biondi moved to adjourn the special meeting at 8:40 PM. Friend seconded (9 yes). The motion carried.

Samantha C. Lavery, Board Secretary