SELINSGROVE AREA SCHOOL DISTRICT

BOARD OF SCHOOL DIRECTORS

MINUTES OF MEETING – AUGUST 16, 2021

A special meeting of the Selinsgrove Area School District’s Board of Directors was held on Monday evening, August 16, 2021, at 7 p.m. in the Auditorium of the Selinsgrove Area Middle School, 359 Seals Avenue, Selinsgrove, PA 17870.

The meeting was called to order at 7 p.m. by the President, Mr. Dennis R. Wolfe.

The Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag was recited by those in attendance.

A roll call indicated a quorum with the following members present: Mr. Larry D. Augustine, Mr. William L. Bechtel, Jr., Mr. David W. Hess, Mr. Andrew V. Paladino, Atty. Matthew A. Slivinski (via phone), Mrs. Amelia G. Stauffer, Mrs. Kara L. Taylor, Mr. Kenneth B. Teats, Jr., Mr. Dennis R. Wolfe, and non-voting member, Dr. Frank R. Jankowski, Superintendent.

Others present were:

Mr. John Bohle, Dr. Matthew Conrad, Mr. Erick Decker, Ms. Michelle Garman, Mr. Damian Gessel, Mr. Jeffrey Hummel, Mrs. Susan Lipsey, Mr. Kevin Oswald, Mr. Brian Parise, Mr. Paul Roman, Dr. Jason Schmucker, Mr. Justin Simpson, Mr. J. Michael Wiley, Esq., Ms. Claudia Beaver, Mr. Mark Wolfberg, Mr. Troy Hickman, Denise Hubbert, Dave Malone, Tara Lerch, Bradly Richmond, Rich Zeigler, Swarna Basu, David Richard, Jeff Newberry, Janel Showers, Tiffany Fry, Dan Stuter, Jo Peachey, Jake Lewis, Susan Tamanini, Kathleen Ehrsam, Katherine Furlong, Jennifer Rager-Kay, Maureen Pugh, Michelle Siegel, Tara Diehl, Dave Newman, Seth Martin, Amanda Fromille, Amanda Martin, Scott Kershner, Angela Mowery, Jon Niler, Peter Geipel, Dennis Gemberling, Peggy Nace, David Spearing, and approximately 150-200 interested individuals.

**Announcements:**

Mr. Wolfe announced that the next regular monthly Board meeting is scheduled for Monday, September 13, 2021.

Mrs. Taylor noted that if anyone brought a donation of sneakers to give them to Kara Rumberger or herself.

Mr. Wolfe announced that the purpose of the meeting is not to hold a public debate regarding optional masking versus mandated masking, but rather to hear comments and opinions on the subject. He reviewed the list of Board approved rules and regulations for those individuals desiring to address the Board. He noted that quite a few “request to comment” forms were received, and he explained that individuals making comment will be limited to five minutes.

**Opportunity for Public Comment:**

Denise Hubbert, parent of a first-grade student in the district, addressed the Board regarding the power of choice. She referenced a book titled “What Should Danny Do?” which is about teaching children that they have the power to choose. Mrs. Hubbert commented that she is pro-parent choice.

Dave Malone, parent of a tenth-grade student in the district, commented that masks are not effective at keeping out the virus. He referenced studies showing that masks do not reduce the infection rate. He mentioned psychological issues caused by masking.

Tara Lerch, parent of a son in the elementary school, shared her personal experience with recent appointments at medical facilities and the differing opinions on masking by all doctors. She asked that the Board adopt a policy to allow parents to make their own decision for their own children, and that the Board not decide for hundreds of families on such a controversial and emotional matter.

Bradly Richmond, a High School faculty member and parent of a kindergarten student, spoke concerning the health and safety of all students, particularly K-6 students, under the age of 12, because they are unable to be vaccinated at this time. He commented that his son will be wearing a mask this year as he begins kindergarten. His mask protects others from him, but that it’s a two-way street. Mr. Richmond noted that he hates masks, and he agrees that all masks are not created equally. He also asked for educational flexibility at the K-6 level. He ended by asking that the Board take a preventative stance instead of a reactive stance.

2

Rich Ziegler, parent of two children in the district, referenced statistics of the mask mandate as well as the six-foot social distancing requirements. He questioned why students are not being separated? Mr. Ziegler commented that masking should be optional.

Swarna Basu, parent of fifth and eighth-grade students, spoke in favor of masking. He commented that universal masking is the best tool that is at our disposal. He noted that universal masking should be required regardless of vaccination status. He added that he is in favor of in-person schooling.

David Richard, Professor of Biology and COVID response coordinator at Susquehanna University, spoke in favor of masking. He urged everyone to take the Delta variant seriously noting that it is a far more infectious virus. He remarked that children may die without the mask mandate in place.

At this time, several audience members became upset and shouted profanities. One individual stood and yelled, “With all due respect, that man should not say our children are going to die without facts”.

Jeff Newberry, a parent of two children in the district, named a number of local school districts that have approved to make masking optional. He compared the number of COVID deaths to seasonal flu deaths as well as suicide. He ended by saying that children don’t need masks, they need love.

Janel Showers, parent of multiple children in the district, served as the voice for her children. When she asked five of her children what they thought of masks, a few of their responses were as such: bring back distance learning; they are terrible; it’s horrible for students with glasses; they are annoying and hard to find one to fit my face; and snot gets caught in it. Mrs. Showers asked for the freedom to choose.

Tiffany Fry, parent of four children in the district, noted that the audience is very emotional and clearly divided regarding their opinions on masking. She commented that her children wore masks and still got sick. Mrs. Fry asked that the Board allow parents to be the voice for their children and have the right to choose.

Dan Stuter, parent of a child in the district, demonstrated the ineffectiveness of cloth masks to protect against the “deadliest virus to ever walk the planet”. He reported that the adolescent suicide rate in this country has increased by 30%.

Jo Peachey, a parent of a child in the district, reviewed statistics from the CDC website comparing seasonal deaths from flu (349 children) with deaths from COVID (803 children). She noted that our reactions don’t match what is happening in the world. Mrs. Peachey ended with a quote from Frederick Douglass, “It is easier to build strong children than to repair broken men.”

Jake Lewis suggested referencing the OSHA (Occupational Safety and Health Administration) manual which will tell you what you need to protect yourself from this virus. He remarked that the N95 mask is designed to filter airborne particles, not paper or cloth masks. He commented that this country was built on the freedom of choice and requested that the Board allow parents to make the choice to protect the children.

Susan Tamanini, a pediatric nurse for 41 years, remarked that masks are not useful. They are causing respiratory problems and are the perfect storm for bacterial infections. She noted that children need to build up a natural immunity. She asked where the seatbelts are on busses, if there is so much concern about the safety of children? She ended by saying, let children be children, and let them breathe.

Scott Kershner had completed a request to comment form but chose to pass on the opportunity to speak when called upon.

Kathleen Ehrsam, a grandmother of three students in the district, presented a written copy of her statement which included links to studies on the futility of mask mandates and COVID-19 protocols in schools, as well as several articles. (a copy to be attached and made a part of the official minutes) She asked that the Board not allow fear to drive decisions and policy making and that they stand up for the children by providing what is necessary for their healthy development.

Katherine Furlong reported that a record was set in the nation yesterday in the number of children hospitalized because of the coronavirus. She added that most of those numbers are coming from schools that do not have masking protocols in place.

3

Jennifer Rager-Kay, a physician and parent of a child in the district, commented that masking is not a political issue, but a medical issue. As a physician it is her job to protect a child, no matter what the parents’ opinion may be. She noted that Board members also took an oath to protect and do what is best for the children of this

district. Dr. Rager-Kay stated that the Delta variant is far more contagious, deadlier, and spreads easier than the original virus. She questioned why take a chance to do disaster clean up, when you can do something to prevent it that has little to no consequence? I’m not going to stand up here and rebut all of the ridiculousness that I had to sit and listen to regarding masking. She added that everyone is entitled to their opinions.

Several heated conversations and comments by audience members were made off microphone and without identifying themselves. Mr. Wolfe acknowledged that emotions are running high and asked that comments be made without inciting confrontation and only be made if they feel they have something new to say.

Maureen Pugh commented on how very proud she was of the district last school year with how everything was handled. She noted that she has twins in the district, and like everyone in the audience, they have differing opinions and thoughts on masking. One child chooses to wear a mask and the other does not. The child that chooses to wear a mask gets bullied. Mrs. Pugh asked that parents set an example and to show respect to those with differing opinions and respect the choices that are made.

Michelle Siegel, a Selinsgrove alumnus from the class of 2000, stated that we must remember something in this country, is that science doesn’t work. Science should have never become political, but science must and always be independent. Americans have been masking since the 1800’s. She commented that it is a shame that we are having an argument about whether we should do everything we can to protect our children.

Tara Diehl, a parent of children in the district, admitted to being very opinionated and agrees that the decision should be pro-choice. She commented that her children competed in PIAA athletics while wearing a mask and trying to breathe. A definition of child abuse is interfering with breathing. Mrs. Diehl remarked that there are drugs and narcotics in the district that are killing our children and that she fears human trafficking more than COVID.

Dave Newman, a parent of two children in the district, commented that he kept his children at home last year so that they didn’t have to wear a mask. Now the children are questioning if they will be coming to school this year and he doesn’t have an answer for them. Mr. Newman asked that the Board give parents the right to choose.

Seth Martin, a HS faculty member, commented that he is not for or against mask wearing. He feels strongly that children need to be their own person. Mr. Martin commented that it is difficult to recognize students who are masked as well as read their facial expressions. He noted the children are watching us and the way we treat each other and then they mirror that attitude and bring it to school.

Amanda Fromille, a bus driver and parent of students in the district, offered her perspective as a driver and someone who sees the students every day. She noted that with a mask on she is unable to see cues as to how they are doing. She wants to see all of the beautiful faces on the bus. She recalled back to late 2019 when she only had 20 kids out of 72 on her bus due to the flu, and that schools weren’t closed, and no one was forced to wear a mask. She ended by saying that her children asked her to come to the meeting to fight for them and the right to choose.

Amanda Martin asked several clarifying questions. If masks are mandated, does the mandate carry over to athletes? If masking becomes mandatory, does that eliminate contact tracing? If contact tracing is still in place, what is the backup plan?

Dr. Jankowski shared with everyone the insider’s perspective of what the proposal entails. He commented that the last year and a half have been very tedious, but that we have grown a lot as an educational organization. Dr. Jankowski stated that since the beginning of COVID, we have always taken into account CDC, PA Department of Education, and the PA Department of Health, guidance and recommendations and mandates. He explained that decisions were made based upon whether they were recommendations or mandates. Recommendations give us that flexibility to make local decisions. We were very definitive in our desire to be in-person last school year. The guidance that we had regarding closures last year, not one time last year when we closed for any day because of COVID transmission issue. Every time it was tied to contact tracing. Every time that we have had an opportunity to make a decision using local discretion, we have gone down that path and we continue to want that as an option. When we look at the plan that was proposed last week, it is very similar to last year, except with masking being optional. We will continually evaluate things and take into account the

4

information that is front of us at the moment. We respect the guidance that we receive but may not always follow it. We also respect our ability to make local decisions when it is afforded to us. Our goal is to legitimately respect all stakeholders. We respect all viewpoints. We listen and learn and then make a decision on the information that comes our way. We focus on the goal to maximize the most authentic experience that students

have as part of the Selinsgrove Area School District. We have the desire to take recommendations and make decisions based on the information that is front of us. If we have a decision to make, it will be based upon the data that applies to our situation. He referred to the last notification that was sent out to parents on July 28th, which reads “As you know, education continues to be on the forefront of discussion and debate in society. We ask that you continue to have confidence in our intentions to work with you to provide our community’s students the educational experience that we all desire. The teamwork that our community displayed last year established a positive example for others to witness and refer to in and outside of the region. Whatever unique challenges come our way, we have confidence that we will work together to keep Selinsgrove on the most positive path possible while maintaining a focus on our purpose – the students.”

**Unfinished Business**

**Health and Safety Plan:**

Motion by Hess and seconded by Teats to consider removing from the table the recommendation of the Superintendent to approve the Selinsgrove Area School District’s Health and Safety Plan.

On roll call vote: 8 yes, 1 no (Taylor), 0 absent

Motion by Teats and seconded by Hess to approve the recommendation of the Superintendent to approve the Selinsgrove Area School District’s Health and Safety Plan, as presented (masking optional). (a copy of the plan to be attached and made a part of the official minutes).

On roll call vote: 7 yes, 2 no (Paladino, Taylor), 0 absent

Dr. Jankowski questioned the desire of the Board regarding busing. Does the optional status include transportation? He noted that CDC mandates state that all public transportation requires masking, but that it is a gray area.

Motion by Hess and seconded by Teats to consider making masking optional on school transportation.

On roll call vote: 8 yes, 1 no (Slivinski), 0 absent

**Adjournment:**

With no further business before the Board, the meeting was adjourned at 9:26 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Claudia A. Beaver

Recording Secretary

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