HOPEWELL AREA SCHOOL BOARD

REGULAR WORK MEETING

JANUARY 11, 2021

The Board of Directors of the Hopewell Area School District conducted a virtual meeting on Monday, January 11, 2021. This meeting was recorded.

An Executive Session was held prior to the start of the meeting to discuss personnel. This announcement is being made to be in compliance with Act 84 of 1986, Pennsylvania’s Sunshine Law, as amended.

The meeting was called to order at 7:04 p.m. by Jeff Winkle, Board President.

Prayer and Pledge of Allegiance was led by Mrs. Oblak. Roll call by the secretary followed. Those Directors in attendance were:

Lesia Dobo

Matthew Erickson

Lori McKittrick

Darren Newberry

Kathryn Oblak

Daniel Santia

Jeffrey Winkle

Lindsay Zupsic

Members Absent

Daniel Caton

Also present were: Dr. Michelle Miller, Superintendent, Dr. Jacie Maslyk, Assistant Superintendent; Mr. John Salopek, Solicitor; Jennifer Conrad, Business Administrator; Nancy Barber, Secretary and visitors.

At this time Dr. Miller reviewed items that will be voted on this evening.

**Education/Curriculum/Instruction**: Mr. Winkle, Chair; Ms. McKittrick, Co-Chair

1. Revision to instructional model as of January 19, 2021 to:
2. Resume hybrid learning model of instruction for grades K-12, or
3. Continue of virtual learning model of instruction, or
4. Resume hybrid learning model of instruction for grades K-4 and continue of virtual learning model of instruction for grades 5-12. (**Roll Call**)

1. Revision of hybrid and virtual instructional models as presented, to include the addition of Monday as a virtual learning day for all students when the district is in the hybrid model. (**Roll Call**)

Dr. Miller shared the following as the recommended changes:

Revisions to Virtual Learning Model

1. Students with complex needs based on their IEP have the option to attend five days/week. (currently 3 days)
2. Students with IEPs at the JH and SH who not making necessary growth on IEP would be provided an opportunity for in-person learning to support their growth on IEP goals.
3. Move to Regular Bell Schedule (impacts only the JH and SH students-increases instructional time from 25 minutes to 38-39 minutes per class).

Revisions to Hybrid Learning Model

1. Mondays would be changed to virtual learning days.
2. Special Education students who attended five days during the fall would be invited to attend four days in person (Tuesday through Friday) and attend virtually on Mondays.
3. Students with complex needs based on their IEP have the option to attend in-person instruction on Mondays.
4. Free school privileges for Donnovan Arriola to attend Hopewell High School for the 2020-2021 school year.

**Athletics**: Mr. Caton, Chair; Mrs. Dobo, Co-Chair

Recommendation to approve the following:

1. Resume winter athletic season, effective January 4, 2021. (**Roll Call**)
2. Resume community/athletic winter programs beginning \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_. (**Roll Call**)
3. Appointment of Chris Nee and Morgan Singletary as Unified Bocce coaches, effective January 11, 2021. Payment on completion of season. Stipend is provided to the District by Special Olympics.

**Personnel**: Dr. Erickson, Chair; Mrs. Oblak, Co-Chair

Recommendation to approve the following:

1. Employment of Gary Hutsler, Elementary Assistant Principal, on or around January 20, 2021, at a salary of $75,000.00. (**Roll Call**)
2. Employment of Danielle Thompson as a long-term substitute English teacher at the Senior High School from January 8, 2021 through April 9, 2021. (**Roll Call**)
3. Employment of Christie Davis, long-term substitute cyber teacher, effective January 5, 2021. (**Roll Call**)

At this time Dr. Miller began her review of those items that would be voted on at the January 25, 2021 Business meeting.

**Education/Curriculum/Instruction**: Mr. Winkle, Chair; Ms. McKittrick, Co-Chair

Recommendation to approve the following:

1. Cancellation of Senior High School Mid-Terms for 2020-21 school year.

Dr. Miller shared the following as the rationale for the motion:

* Loss of instructional time to administer exams when we are already impacted by alternative schedule and loss of face to face instructional time.  Students would be better served by teachers moving forward with instruction.  We would prefer teachers use planning time to design instruction rather than focus on developing a high stakes assessment.
* Concerns with meeting adaptations and/or accommodations for learning support students when testing in a virtual environment.
* The potential impact of a 0 on a midterm grade and the impact of a 0 on overall grades for underperforming students and for students who would fail to take the midterms.
* We continue to have difficulty in getting some students to login and complete assignments for a wide variety of excuses/reasons.
* Test Security and validity of scoring given the inherent difficulty in monitoring students taking exams to prevent looking up answers, students texting during testing, and other cheating.
* Unnecessary anxiety on students during what has already been a difficult learning transition.

Mr. Winkle asked if this would harm students for their college path. Dr. Miller shared that she believed the cancellation of midterms would actually boost their grades which would help with college acceptance.

1. Samantha Lash, a student at Slippery Rock University, to complete her student teaching from January 19, 2021 through March 12, 2021, under the guidance of Christopher Keiper.

**Athletics**: Mr. Caton, Chair; Dr. Erickson, Co-Chair

Recommendation to approve the following:

1. Michael Sabat parent/coach for representation at WPIAL Rifle Championships for his daughter Rachel Sabat. Mr. Sabat will incur all costs and transportation.

Dr. Miller shared that Mr. Sabat had done this before with one of his other children.

**Finance:** Ms. McKittrick, Chair

1. Audit Report of the Hopewell Area School District for the year ended June 30, 2020 issued by Hosack, Specht, Muetzel & Wood, LLP, Certified Public Accountants.
2. Resolution #1-2021, a Resolution of the Board of Directors of the Hopewell Area School District, certifying that the District will not raise the rate of any tax for the support of the public schools for the following fiscal year by more than its index, which for the 2021-2022 school year is 3.9%.

Mr. Winkle asked about the index and how high it was, compared to previous years. Mrs. Conrad will provide more information to the Board regarding the reason for the higher index.

**Personnel**: Dr. Erickson, Chair; Mrs. Oblak, Co-Chair

Recommendation to approve the following:

1. Resignation of Alex Nicholson, assistant boys basketball coach, effective January 1, 2021.
2. Change of status of Rob Hall to 3rd Assistant Boys Basketball Coach, at a stipend of $5,000.00.

Dr. Miller shared that Mr. Hall agreed to take on Mr. Nicholson’s 7th grade team. This is the reason for the increase in the proposed stipend.

At this time Carlos Correa, Director of Technology, presented options for the upgrades to the District’s PA systems and Wi-Fi access. Mr. Correa explained the current PA systems were installed during construction projects between 1997 and 2002. The current systems are no longer supported by the manufacturer. Two proposals were submitted. Costs associated with this project would come from the PPCD Grant, which Dr. Miller applied for in 2020. Funds must be used by December 31, 2021. Mr. Correa also explained that when students return full time, the existing wireless network does not have the capacity to effectively support network access. The goal would be to have a wireless access point in each classroom in each building. Both of these projects would be totally covered by the PPCD Grant.

VISITOR’S COMMENTS

Effective January 1, 2021, community members have the ability to sign up to be recognized during the Visitor’s Section of a live Zoom meeting.  The individual must also have a device that specifically states his/her name in order to be recognized. Written questions will no longer be accepted.  When recognized, the individual will need to state his/her name and address and will have 3 minutes to make a statement and/or ask a question to the Board.  The time will begin when the individual begins speaking.  This time limit will include a possible response by the Board.

A response may be given during the meeting, however, it is also possible that no response be provided during the virtual meeting. The Board will instruct the Superintendent, the Business Administrator and/or the Solicitor to either respond to the inquiry or do further research and report back to the Board and/or the resident.  For any question that requires a response, the District will contact the individual directly to respond or will share responses at the following Board meeting.

Additionally, if a community member wishes to speak during this additional time, the community member must request to speak in the chat box. The Board President will ask for comments in the order in which the community member requested to speak.  The individual must have a device that specifically states his/her name in order to be recognized. When recognized, the individual will have 3 minutes to make a statement and/or ask a question to the Board.  The time will begin when the individual begins speaking.  This time limit will include a possible response by the Board. A maximum of thirty minutes total will be reserved during the meeting for community members who request to speak in the chat room.

**Stacie Conley, 1026 Sweet Brier Drive**

Mrs. Conley does not support Monday as an all-District virtual day, once students return to the hybrid schedule. She questioned the reasons for this decision.

Mr. Newberry asked Dr. Miller why Mondays were chosen as the virtual day.

Dr. Miller stated that the Hopewell Education Association recommended it, as the teachers would be able to reach out to all students collectively. She also believed there was some confusion on the parents part as to what Mondays their child was supposed to go to school. Dr. Miller also said that it would give custodians time to deep clean.

**Bethany Pistorius, 2008 South Trillium Drive**

Mrs. Pistorius asked for an update on the HVAC system, as it was previously identified as at “end of life”. She also asked if the District had enough teachers in the substitute pool. Mrs. Pistorius was concerned with the reopening of school and asked that the District table the motion until new data is available.

Mr. Newberry stated that Mr. Pelino was in the process of changing all filters in the District and would meet with Mr. Pelino prior to the next Board meeting to discuss the status of each building.

**Vivian Lumbard, 2867 Brodhead Road**

Mrs. Lumbard is concerned about the District returning to the hybrid model of instruction. She would like to see the District continue virtual instruction, as the District continues to see positive Covid-19 cases. She asked if the District returns to hybrid, what are the circumstances that the District would return to virtual.

**Doug Conley, 1026 Sweet Brier Drive**

Mr. Conley asked to see the results of the teacher survey regarding virtual versus hybrid. He asked if parents would have the option for their child/children to remain virtual. This does not mean that students would transfer to the cyber program, but could remain virtual during hybrid instruction.

Dr. Miller said that she would look at individual cases to see if this was feasible.

**Sarah Fischer, 3016 North Trillium Drive**

Mrs. Fischer expressed her frustration that children had not returned to school, but that the District permitted sports to practice and compete. She believes that student grades continue to fall and that teachers were having a difficult time with the virtual learning model. Mrs. Fischer believes that schools should reopen. She suggested that in lieu of the Monday virtual model, custodians should deep clean on Saturdays so that students could fully return to class.

**Kristine McCloskey, 2895 Brodhead Road**

Mrs. McCloskey reported that her daughter was doing well with virtual learning. She said that the 6th grade teachers were doing an amazing job. She believes that class size and social distancing would impact the District’s decision to make a full return to in-person learning. She believes there are a large number of families that support virtual learning.

**Nicklous Gaughan, 1204 Ridgeway Avenue**

Mr. Gaughan reported that he has struggled with internet access and believes this will continue to be a problem moving forward. He believes that parents should decide when their child/children return to the classroom. He suggested that the better schedule would be students in school Monday/Tuesday and Thursday/Friday, with Wednesday as the virtual day.

Mr. Winkle thanked everyone for their questions and thoughts and said that the issues being raised are not easy to solve. Not everyone will agree, but that they are making the best decisions based on the information they have.

At this time, Mr. Winkle returned to Education/Curriculum/Instruction

**Education/Curriculum/Instruction by Dr. Erickson, Chair**

MOTION #1

By Matt Erickson, seconded by Lesia Dobo, to approve the K-6 return to the hybrid learning model on January 25, 2021 and a discussion about the return to the hybrid model for 7-12 during the February 8, 2021 Board meeting.

The Board discussed if this was the best plan moving forward. They discussed several different scenarios. After discussion, Dr. Erickson withdrew his motion.

MOTION #2

By Matt Erickson, seconded by Lesia Dobo, to approve the K-4 return to the hybrid learning model on January 19, 2021. Students in grades 5 and 6 will return to the hybrid model on January 25, 2021. Discussion will be held at the January 25, 2021 Board meeting as to when students in grades 7-12 will return to the hybrid learning model. MOTION was approved by a vote of six to two, with Ms. McKittrick and Mrs. Zupsic voting no.

MOTION #3

By Matt Erickson, seconded by Lesia Dobo, to approve the revision of hybrid and virtual instructional models as presented, to include the addition of Monday as a virtual learning day for all students when the district is in the hybrid model. MOTION was approved by a vote of six to two, with Mrs. Zupsic and Mr. Winkle voting no.

MOTION #4

By Matt Erickson, seconded by Kathryn Oblak, to approve free school privileges for Donnovan Arriola to attend Hopewell High School for the 2020-2021 school year. MOTION carried by a unanimous vote of all Directors in attendance.

**Athletics by Mrs. Dobo, Co-Chair**

MOTION #5

By Lesia Dobo, seconded by Dan Santia, to resume winter athletics, effective January 4, 2021. MOTION did not pass with a vote of four to four. Mr. Caton was absent. Ms. McKittrick, Mrs. Zupsic, Mrs. Oblak and Mr. Newberry voted no.

Some Board members expressed their opinion that it was not appropriate for students to participate in athletics, when school was not in session. Not being able to appropriately social distance is a major concern. Competition would not start until the week of January 19, 2021.

MOTION #6

By Lesia Dobo, seconded by Jeff Winkle, to continue winter sports practice through January 19, 2021 and begin games on January 19, 2021. MOTION carried by a vote of six to two, with Ms. McKittrick and Mr. Newberry voting no.

MOTION #7

By Lesia Dobo, seconded by Matt Erickson, to approve the resumption of community/athletic winter programs beginning January 19, 2021. MOTION carried on a vote of five to three, with Ms. McKittrick, Mr. Newberry and Mrs. Zupsic voting no.

MOTION #8

By Lesia Dobo, seconded by Kathryn Oblak, to approve the appointment of Chris Nee and Morgan Singletary as Unified Bocce coaches, effective January 11, 2021. Payment on completion of season. Stipend is provided to the District by Special Olympics. MOTION carried by a unanimous vote of all Directors in attendance.

**Personnel by Dr. Erickson, Chair**

MOTION #9

By Matthew Erickson, seconded by Dan Santia, to approve the employment of Gary Hutsler, Elementary Assistant Principal, on or around January 20, 2021, at a salary of $75,000.00. MOTION carried by a unanimous roll call vote of all Directors in attendance.

MOTION #10

By Matthew Erickson, seconded by Lesia Dobo, to approve the employment of Danielle Thompson as a long-term substitute English teacher at the Senior High School from January 8, 2021 through April 9, 2021. MOTION carried by a unanimous roll call vote of all Directors in attendance.

MOTION #10

By Matthew Erickson, seconded by Lesia Dobo, to approve the employment of Christie Davis as a long-term substitute cyber teacher effective January 5, 2021. MOTION carried by a unanimous roll call vote of all Directors in attendance.

Unfinished Business

Dr. Miller shared that the District would provide information to parents within the next day or two about the instructional model and how to plan for the coming weeks for their children’s education.

Upcoming School Board Meetings

January 25, 2021, Regular Business Meeting will be held virtually.

MOTION by Dan Santia, seconded by Lesia Dobo that the meeting be adjourned. MOTION carried unanimously by an affirmative vote of all Directors in attendance.

Mr. Winkle adjourned the meeting at 9:14 p.m.

HOPEWELL AREA SCHOOL BOARD

Jeff Winkle, Board President

Nancy Barber, Secretary