

ELMA SCHOOL DISTRICT #68

Regular Board Meeting

Meeting Minutes

via Zoom Meetings

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/87585732580>

Monday, October 5, 2020 06:00 PM

Call to Order

The Elma School District #68 Board of Directors met in a Special Board Meeting on October 5, 2020 via Zoom Meetings. Board Chairperson Bernadette Bower called the meeting to order at 6:00pm.

Flag Salute

Board Chairperson Bernadette Bower led the Board and audience in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Roll Call

BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT: Jamie Bailey, Bernadette Bower, Ryan Cristelli, Stephanie Smith, Jody Thompson, and Student Representative Ella Moore.

STAFF PRESENT: Marilyn Curl, Eric Smith, Kim Weld, Liz Farrar, Susan Vento, Barb Snyder, Erin Walker, Raquel Cruz, Wendy Beldin, Melinda Tuttle, Kim Vest, Jane Allaire, Shawnie Rakevich, Kerry Murphy, Bobbi Smith, Suzanne Thietje, Farralee Walseth-Burnett, Krista Odermann, Kim Bouchard, Maria Cruz, Cheyenne Roberts, Mary Roberts, Debi Ohashi, Darcy Potts, Kayli Hendricks, Brooke Seaberg, Rob Ohashi, Tim Livingston, Cindy Starks, Kaycee Oatman, Liz Tarman, Brandi Thomas, Caleb Bogar, Jeff Sowers, Kim Maners, Mark Keating, Jeff Monroe, Jenny Monroe, Julie Crawford, Denise Boling, Carrie Vessey, Deanne Woita, Angie Salvaggi, Ed Burgess, Aniel Hoke, Emily Bucy, Angela Ruth, Laura Nelson, Sunshine Perry, Alyssa Sutherby, Katie Dunn, Elizabeth Bouchard, Jenny Baxter, Karen VanNoy, Christi Kershaw, Miranda Conrad, Jeff Niemi, Melissa Crisp, Rebecca Johnson, Kim Acuff, Rich Rasanen, Chris Scofield, Debbie Woodruff, Stacey Rockey, Viva Cristelli, Kevin Acuff, and Kendis Goldsmith.

GUESTS: Corree Downing, Ryan Jump, Megan Parker, Angela Meadows, Katie Colette, Lynn Avery, Brad Olson, Matthew Perkinson, Katy Moore, Laura Herron, Jennifer O'Gorman, Julie Rupe, Charles Eberhard, Tim Smith, Natalie Windle, Christi Murray, Veronica Hatch, Lacey McMeekin, Kelly Monroe, Sarra Burnett, Shelley Carter, Grant Vessey, Jeff Leuschen, Marsha Hendrick, Stephanie Richardson, Ashley Sample, Kelly Alexander, Chelsie Vogel, Frank Andrus, Laura Vaughan, Kathy Miller, Steve Bridge, Laura Cristelli, Andrew Lightfoot, Kina Delimont, Meghan Porter, Renee Volz, Jennifer McKinney, Jessica Hardy, Rose Carter, Mary Wolfe, Kevin Hong, Teresa Hann, Nathan, Michelle, Matt, Mandie, Cory, Brooke, Shanie, David, Heather, Vallon, William, Tony, April, Hanson, Sean J., Cody S., Kaytee H., Tiffany, and other unnamed members of the community.

New Business

Board Chairperson Bernadette Bower let the audience know that if there were any that missed reporting their attendance, they would be added to our list. She then turned the time over to Superintendent Kevin Acuff.

Superintendent Kevin Acuff shared the following statement that was shared with parents last week in regards to YMCA childcare at the elementary school.

“Since last spring, the district has partnered with the YMCA to provide childcare during our school closures. In the spring, the Governor’s mandate was for schools to support as they best could child care being made available to essential workers.

This mandate has not changed, although limitations for who could be served has expanded. While we understand it is difficult to see why children could be at school for child care, but not for their regular educations, this is what the state is allowing, and expecting.

In August we resumed conversations with the YMCA and began the process for them to lease at no cost, a space that they could license for child care.

Last week, the YMCA put out notification that they were ready to begin enrolling students into this program, provided there would be enough students for a viable program. While we as a district understand the frustrations of parents who want their children back in school, and the financial burden of those parents who are paying for school age child care, allowing the YMCA to use our facility was one of the very limited ways we can support students in person currently."

As of this time. The district and the YMCA have decided not to proceed with offering any childcare. There were too many communication pieces that needed to be resolved and in the interest of moving us forward, we have chosen to withdraw the lease of any school spaces for child care. We apologize to those families who had been counting on this support and do hope you are able to find another option for your family."

The superintendent also read the letter that all Grays Harbor County schools received today from Dr. John Bausher, the Chief Health Officer for Grays Harbor County, on his current recommendation on reopening schools.

October 5, 2020

Grays Harbor School Leadership,

*In September, Grays Harbor County had around 248 new cases of COVID-19. The County's 14-day case rate has been as high as 227.9/100,000, which occurred during the second and third week of September (9/8/2020-9/21/2020). Most recent data is still pending; however, with the number of cases that we have had in the last week of September, our case rate will be around six times higher than the State goal, which is 25 cases /100,000 population over 14 days. Grays Harbor County's current case rate is well into the **high COVID-19 activity level** (over 75 cases /100,000 population over 14 days) as outlined in Washington Department of Health's Decision Tree for the Provision of in Person Learning among Public and Private K-12 Students during COVID-19 (Decision Tree).*

*I recommend all K-12 schools follow the guidance listed in Washington Department of Health's Decision Tree with regard to educational modality and extracurricular activities. Due to the magnitude of Grays Harbor County's current case rate all K-12 schools should prepare to implement the educational and extracurricular modalities associated with the 'high COVID-19 activity level' for an extended period of time. I recommend schools should consider implementing the educational and extracurricular modalities associated with a lower level of activity (as defined in the Decision Tree document) **only after Grays Harbor County's case rate shows a downward epidemiological trend for four consecutive weeks.***

The Grays Harbor Public Health's team and I will continue to provide information about County-level COVID-19 activity trends as it relates to the Decision Tree document. For case data, Grays Harbor Public Health will continue to update the local COVID-19 data webpage (<http://www.healthych.org/directory/covid19/casecount>). I encourage school leadership to utilize the Washington State COVID-19 risk assessment dashboard (<https://coronavirus.wa.gov/what-you-need-know/covid-19-risk-assessment-dashboard>) to monitor Grays Harbor County case rates and other key metrics as outlined in the Decision Tree document. Schools should review Grays Harbor County-level activity, rather than smaller geographic areas (ie. zip code), as County-level data better reflects the local disease activity levels and transmission. Further, utilization of Grays Harbor County data, rather than State-level data or neighboring county data, aligns with the frameworks established by the State of Washington (ie. Washington Safe Start plan and the Decision Tree for K-12 schools).

I understand that schools, families and individuals are facing very difficult decisions in these unprecedented times. As a community, each one of us can take action to reduce disease spread. Everyone should stay home when you are sick, wash your hands with soap and water often, stay at least 6 feet away from people you do not live with, and everyone who can should wear a cloth face covering at all times in public spaces. If we all follow these practices, we can disrupt the current community spread of COVID- 19, at which time schools may be able to increase in-person activities.

Superintendent Acuff shared that Frank Andrus, from Clear Risk, the district's insurance provider, and Charles Eberhardt, from Perkins Coie, the district's attorney, have been invited to the meeting to share their insight from legal and insurance aspects to reopening schools, with that, the time was turned back over to our Board Chairperson Bernadette Bower.

2. Frank Andrus, Co-Director Claims/Litigation Clear Risk Solutions

(Moved minutes for this item in front of item 1 as Frank spoke prior to Char.)

Frank Andrus from the United Schools Insurance Program gave the Board an overview of what coverage is and is not available. The district's insurance does provide coverage for Covid based tort claims, with some exclusions. His recommendation is to follow the local health department's recommendation regarding the options for return to school. His recommendation to make decisions with the long term in mind. He encourages that when school does reopen that there is a hybrid model, including the option for families to still have a distance learning.

Board Chairperson Bernadette Bower asked if we go back prior to the state and health department's recommendations, are there other guidelines that the district can bypass (i.e. social distancing, mixing cohorts).

Frank Andrus answered "that would have to be on a case by case basis. We are always going to, from an insurance risk management perspective, encourage following all guidelines from the health department."

1. Char Eberhardt from Perkins Coie LLP

Charles Eberhardt with Perkins Coie Law Firm recommended that we "strictly comply" with all State Department of Health and CDC guidelines to ensure a safe work and educational environment. In reference to the letter from Dr. Bauscher today, it seem "very compelling" and while it is the Board's decision it should be done working together with the county health department. The risk is increased if the district opens now with the current numbers in the high area.

3. Board Discussion

Board Chairperson Bernadette Bower read the following statement from the Board of Directors:

"One of the expectations we have for ourselves as board members is to collectively build trust and transparency with our constituents.

As a board, we have made the decision that in efforts to minimize any appearance a conflict of interest with her business, Boardmember Smith will abstain from any voting related to the opening or closing of school. For the time being, she has also chosen to opt out of discussions related to such matters.

She will continue to serve her district constituents. If you have questions or concerns to share with her, please feel free to contact anyone of us five board members."

Board Chairperson Bower shared that there is an information and feedback button on our website eagles.edu. She then began the discussion of reopening.

Board Member Ryan Cristelli pointed out that our numbers are well over 75/100k, but we do have a sharp decline. With the Decision Tree in mind and young learners with a hybrid model, what are the numbers for class sizes.

Elma Elementary Principal Mark Keating said that there would be 7-10 students in a hybrid class model in K-2 if the class was split in half.

Board Member Jody Thompson asked when does the four weeks of decline in cases start.

Superintendent Acuff did get clarification from the health department that the previous two weeks of decline could count toward the four weeks of decline, but the opinion of the representative at the health department was that we should be in the moderate level before the four weeks of decline. However, the letter does not state that. He asked for clarification from Dr. Bauscher.

Board Member Jamie Bailey asked "What would the preschool number be?"

Special Services Director Stacey Rockey said today's hybrid class size number would be 6, but numbers increase as screenings happen throughout the year.

Board Member Bailey shared that she is very concerned about the students in our district not being in school and wanted to know if there are any ways that the district can help families (ie. open outside facilities, small athletic groups).

Board Chairperson Bower asked if our outside facilities are open for students.

Superintendent Acuff said they are not open for students or community sports, but community members can use the track. He would like to look at opening facilities up in some form.

Board Chairperson Bower wanted to discuss our staffing.

Board Member Thompson wondered how many staff would come back, enough substitutes, and how that would effect the budget. She also thought our outside facilities were open for unorganized non-school sponsored sports.

Board Member Cristelli reminded the Board that facilities were completely closed in the spring, but are now open for some community use.

Superintendent Acuff clarified that the track is open for community use, but fields have not been allowed to be used to kick the ball around because it tends to turn into games and out of health department guidelines.

Technology Director Eric Smith informed the Board that in the meeting chat, there were questions about 3rd party liability usage.

Frank Andrus as long as there are not any school sanctioned or the district is not putting groups together the liability would be limited to the district.

Board Chairperson Bower wanted to know if we brought back young learners would we have enough staff in the buildings to teach them.

Board Member Cristelli is in favor of hybrids and young learners coming in as long as we have staffing and would be a good starting point and it would keep us within guidelines.

Board Member Bailey asked about the ETO MOU and if teachers would come back if we were within the recommended guidelines to reopen.

Superintendent Acuff said that based on the surveys they would come back if we are within the state guidelines.

ETO President Barb Snyder said that as long as we are following the K-12 Decision Tree and the case numbers are still coming down they would come back.

Superintendent Acuff wanted to address a chat question in regards to using the high school fields instead of using Montesano's fields.

Athletic Director Rob Ohashi stated that Montesano fields are also closed.

Superintendent Acuff recommends a timeline, as long as there are two more weeks of declining data, as to when you would look at coming back.

Board Member Cristelli is concerned that when the Board gives a projected return date, it is taken as we are coming back on that date, when it is just projected and does not take into account any case count rises.

Board Chairperson Bower agrees that she does not want any confusion by setting a potential return date.

Board Member Cristelli would like to bring back young learners as it is on the K-12 Decision Tree as acceptable.

He does not want to go against the recommendations and would start with preschool and kindergarten. He was concerned with the logistics (ie. lunches, transportation) of bringing back the different groups.

Elma Elementary Principal Mark Keating shared that he has been working with Transportation Director Caleb Bogar, Elementary Assistant Principal Greg Scroggins, and Counselor Heather Moore to break up kids into cohorts and limit crossover of groups as much as possible.

Board Member Cristelli recognizes the difficulty in the logistics of getting students back in school.

Board Member Thompson wants to know if we are talking about starting the hybrid as soon as we are in the moderate level.

Board Member Cristelli stated that yes. He is more comfortable reopening now that we are seeing significant decreases for case numbers. The district would still be following guidelines.

Board Member Bailey pointed out that Lewis County's Health Department has encouraged its schools to reopen even though their numbers are 118/100k. She is frustrated that there are differences between the guidance that is being given between the two counties, especially since, we are so similar in size.

Board Member Cristelli pointed out that there is a Lewis County school district that started school and then had to close a week later due to covid cases. He does not feel that that would be the best for our families.

Board Member Bailey is frustrated that what is happening now is not working for our families or teachers.

Board Member Cristelli wants to start back with the young leaders because that would still meet the recommendations according to the K12 Decision Tree and help figure out logistics in getting everyone back to school.

Board Chairperson Bower pointed out that we still have two more weeks of downward trending case numbers before a decision can be made.

Superintendent Acuff clarified the Lewis County letter's dates for students return starting with elementary students by October 19th, middle school student by November 16th, and high school students by December 14th.

Board Member Cristelli asked when the end of the first quarter is.

Elma Middle School Principal Sunshine Perry stated that it is November 6th.

Board Chairperson Bower wanted to know what everyone would like to do. She stated that our next board meeting is October 14th, October 28th is the following board meeting, and four weeks of decline would be October 19th.

The Board Members agreed that they all want kids back as soon and as safely as possible. At the next board meeting, October 14th, they would look at everything again and hopefully, provided the numbers are still decreasing, be able to make a decision.

Board Chairperson Bower thanked everyone for asking difficult questions, allowing the Board to think through this decision, and looked forward to the next meeting.

Superintendent Acuff wanted to address a chat question that has come up. Parents will be allowed to keep their student distance learning even if school goes back to in-person learning.

Board Member Cristelli stated that if numbers continue to decrease the Board will be making a decision as to who can begin to come back at the next board meeting.

Board Chairperson Bower asked for input from parents and families as to how the district can help them get through this. She again thanked all for being patient as this situation is worked through.

Adjournment

Meeting adjourned at 7:19pm.

Board Chairperson

Board Secretary

Date